

THE FATE OF JEHOIAKIM

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Attempts to determine the date of Jehoiakim's death have been based on the assumption that his successor, Jehoiachin, acceded to the throne of Judah immediately upon the death of his predecessor. Utilizing as a starting point the date of Jehoiachin's surrender to Nebuchadrezzar (2 Kgs 24:12), and figuring back the three months of his reign (2 Kgs 24:8), we are thereby able to arrive at the death date of Jehoiakim. Presumably, 2 Chr 36:9 gives us a more exact figure of three months and ten days for the length of Jehoiachin's reign, in contrast to the round number of three months given in 2 Kgs 24:8. According to the Babylonian Chronicle, Nebuchadrezzar seized the city of Judah (=Jerusalem) and captured its king (=Jehoiachin) on 2 Adar of his 7th regnal year, or March 16, 597 B.C.¹ Figuring three Hebrew-Babylonian months and ten days of Jehoiachin's reign back from March 16, 597, would place the dates of Jehoiakim's death and Jehoiachin's accession on December 9/10, 598 B.C.²

¹See BM 21946 in D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicle of the Chaldean Kings (626-556) in the British Museum* (London, 1956), pp. 72-73 (hereinafter cited as *CCK*); and A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Vol. 5, Texts from Cuneiform Sources (Locust Valley, N.Y., 1975), p. 103 (hereinafter cited as *ABC*). For more recent and extensive studies on the history and chronology of Judah under its last kings, see B. Oded, "The Last Days of Judah and the Destruction of Jerusalem (609-586 BCE)," in *Israelite and Judean History*, eds. John H. Hayes and Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 469-476; A. Malamat, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom," *VTSup* 28 (1975): 121-145; E. Stern, "Israel at the Close of the Period of the Monarchy: An Archaeological Survey," *BA* 38 (1975): 26-54; and E. Kutsch, "Das Jahr der Katastrophe: 587 v. Chr.," *Bib* 55 (1974): 520-545.

²See especially S. H. Horn, "The Babylonian Chronicle and the Ancient Calendar of the Kingdom of Judah," *AUSS* 5 (1967): 15; and now more recently,

Though mathematically worked out correctly, these very precise figures may be based on a scribal error, in the transmitted form of the MT. This will be noted below. My suggestion is that a more accurate estimate of the date of Jehoiakim's death may be ascertained, and that that date in turn may provide us with some insight into the yet obscure circumstances surrounding the death of this king. It may also reveal some additional insights on the following oracle on Jehoiakim in Jer 22:18-19:

And so this is what Yahweh has
said concerning Jehoiakim ben Josiah,
king of Judah: "Woe to this man!
They'll not lament him,
'Ah, my brother! Ah, sister!'
They'll not lament him,
'Ah, Lord! Ah, his majesty!'
They'll give him a donkey's funeral!
—Hauled out and dumped
Outside Jerusalem's gates."³

1. *The Chronological Data*

With regard to Jehoiakim's death and the subsequent accession of Jehoiachin, one of the evident discrepancies is in the chronological datum on Jehoiachin's age when he assumed the throne: 2 Kgs 24:8 gives his age as 18 years; however, 2 Chr 36:9 states that he was only 8 years old. It is generally agreed that the statement in 2 Kgs 24:8 on Jehoiachin's age is probably correct, and that this datum has been incorrectly given in the Chronicler's account.⁴

Malamat, pp. 132-133. Specific data on these calculations are also available in Hayes and Miller, pp. 682-683; E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1965), p. 168; and R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology, 626 B.C.-A.D. 75* (Providence, R.I., 1965), p. 27.

³John Bright, *Jeremiah*, AB 21 (Garden City, N.Y., 1965), pp. 137-138.

⁴The LXX also reads 18 years rather than 8. See additional discussion on this problem in W. F. Albright, "King Jehoiachin in Exile," *BA* 5 (1942): 53; H. G. May, "Jehoiachin," *IDB* 2: 811-813; and Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles*, AB 13 (Garden City, N.Y., 1965), p. 218.

Since Jehoiachin was already married to more than one wife when he was deported (2 Kgs 24:15), and since five of his sons are mentioned in a ration tablet written in Babylon five years after his deportation,⁵ it seems more likely that he was 18 rather than 8 years old when he assumed the throne.

A closer evaluation of 2 Chr 36:9 appears to indicate that this is not the only incorrect chronological statement bearing on the reign of this king. I would suggest that the addition of ten days to Jehoiachin's three-month reign in this verse may also be incorrect, and could have occurred through a scribal error during the course of transmission of the text prior to the Chronicler's time. This study proposes that these two scribal errors are related and probably developed through an inadvertent transposition of the word "ten" from the first to the second of the two chronological phrases in this verse. An illustration of this proposal can best be appreciated by a comparison between the Hebrew text of 2 Chr 36:9 with that of 2 Kgs 24:8. The word "ten" was transposed to its new location following "months," and the word "days" was then added to explain its presence there.

| 2 Kgs 24:8 | | 2 Chr 36:9 |
|---|--|--|
| בְּשָׁמֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה יְהוֹיָכִן בְּמָלְכוֹ וְשָׁלֹשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים מָלַךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם | | בְּשָׁמוֹנֶה שָׁנִים יְהוֹיָכִין בְּמָלְכוֹ וְשָׁלֹשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים וְעֶשְׂרֵת יָמִים מָלַךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם |

This proposed adjustment of the datum in 2 Chr 36:9 consequently leads to the conclusion that we should view the presumably *less specific* chronological datum in 2 Kgs 24:8 as the more accurate figure from which to estimate the date of Jehoiakim's death. This figure must remain, however, an estimate only, because the round figure of three months does not permit us to narrow the date down any more precisely than within the correct month. Even though our data do not permit a greater precision, it is, nevertheless, constructive to consider the range of possibly important political developments which may be involved here.

⁵A. L. Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," *ANET*, p. 308.

2. *Political Developments and Their Chronology*

Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadrezzar on 2 Adar, in the 12th month of the Hebrew and Babylonian calendars, thus ending his reign.⁶ The two days of Adar mentioned here count for the third of Jehoiachin's three months, given the method of inclusive reckoning utilized by the Hebrews and other ancient peoples.⁷ Thus, the second month of Jehoiachin's reign was Shebat, the 11th month of the calendar year; and his first month, the month of his accession to the throne, was Tebeth, the 10th month of the year. On the other hand, if his reign was 3 months and 10 days, his first month would have to be the last 9 days of Kislev, the 9th month, in order that his surrender could agree with the Babylonian datum of 2 Adar, the date of the capitulation of the city. This study, therefore, has concluded so far that Jehoiakim died sometime during the month of Tebeth, the 10th month of that year, rather than in Kislev, the 9th month.

The Babylonian Chronicle indicates that Nebuchadrezzar with his army left Babylon for Jerusalem in Kislev, the 9th month of that year.⁸ The precise day of the army's departure in the month of Kislev has not been given by the Babylonian Chronicler; hence, here again, we have a range of possibilities to consider. However, when this datum is compared with our earlier range of possibilities for the death date of Jehoiakim, our conclusion is that Nebuchadrezzar left Babylon sometime between the beginning and the end of the 9th month of the year 598/597 and that Jehoiakim died sometime between the beginning and the end of the 10th month of that same calendar year.

It is evident from the study of Nebuchadrezzar's Chronicle that the Babylonian king did not conduct a general campaign throughout the West in 598/597, for he did not leave Babylon until late that year, and when he did leave, the Chronicle indicates that he set out

⁶See n. 1.

⁷There are various biblical examples of this method of computing time which includes the first and last units of a period, whether these units are complete or not. So, e.g., in 2 Chr 10:5, 12, Rehoboam instructs the people to "come to me after three days," and later "all the people came to Rehoboam the third day as the king said." Note also 2 Kgs 18:9, 10.

⁸CCK, pp. 71-72; ABC, p. 102.

directly for Jerusalem to besiege and subdue the rebellious Jehoiakim.⁹ Since it is clear that Judah was his primary objective, we may allow a little more than a month for his troops to arrive at their destination.¹⁰

3. *Chronological Correlations and the Circumstances of Jehoiakim's Death*

There is a range of chronological correlations which may offer some interesting possibilities as to the circumstances leading to Jehoiakim's death. If Nebuchadrezzar's army did not leave Babylon until sometime towards the end of the 9th month, then Jehoiakim probably had died by the time the army reached Jerusalem, as it would have taken the Babylonian army over a month to reach Judah. In that case, the factors surrounding Jehoiakim's death remain obscure. If, on the other hand, the army left Babylon towards the beginning of the 9th month and there was only a three-month reign for Jehoiachin reckoned inclusively, then Jehoiakim did not die until sometime towards the end of the 10th month, and the possibility exists that Jehoiakim still occupied the throne of Judah when the Babylonian army took up their positions around the city.

If the latter of the two hypotheses is correct, it seems plausible to theorize that when the siege of the city began, there was deep concern among the residents of Jerusalem in general and among the pro-Babylonian faction in particular. This concern and fear

⁹He obviously became a vassal of the Babylonian king along with other kings of the region when Nebuchadrezzar decisively defeated the Egyptian army at Carchemish in 604. Cf. *CCK*, pp. 66-67; *ABC*, p. 99. The Hebrew writer notes that Jehoiakim had served Nebuchadrezzar for three years (2 Kgs 24:1) and subsequently rebelled. This rebellion can plausibly be connected with Nebuchadrezzar's impotence after the heavy losses he sustained in a subsequent battle against the Egyptians under Necho II, in 601. See *CCK*, pp. 71-72, and *ABC*, p. 101.

¹⁰Jehoiachin's accession was sometime in the 10th month, immediately upon the death of Jehoiakim. Nebuchadrezzar's departure from Babylon early in the 9th month would allow his army more than a month traveling time in order to capture Jerusalem on 2 Adar. The distance involved can be calibrated by the rate at which the Babylonian army traveled. On the calibration of these rates, see D. J. A. Clines, "Regnal Year Reckoning in the Last Years of the Kingdom of Judah," *AJBA* 5 (1972): 29-32; and Malamat, pp. 132-133.

precipitated blame upon Jehoiakim for the political problems which were moving the city toward destruction, and it could legitimately have been felt that if Jehoiakim had remained a loyal vassal to Nebuchadrezzar, the Babylonian army would not then be investing the city. As this sort of sentiment deepened and spread among the residents of the city, the next step could easily have been an attempt to remedy the situation by eliminating the cause of it, namely, Jehoiakim himself. Under such circumstances, if the king was still alive when the Babylonians arrived, he could have died in the ensuing coup at the hands of the pro-Babylonian faction in the city as that faction attempted to save Jerusalem from destruction. His body could, in that case, have been thrown out as a sop to appease Nebuchadrezzar and to induce the Babylonian king to change his mind about conquering the city.

This reconstruction would fit well with Jehoiakim's fate as described in Jer 22:19. Based on chronological data from the available sources, it provides a plausible explanation for Jehoiakim's fate which previously has gone unexplained. Evidently, if the plot I have envisaged was attempted, it is apparent that it was unsuccessful. The siege of Jerusalem continued for more than another month before the new king Jehoiachin decided that it was more expedient to surrender than to continue his resistance—an initiative on his part which may explain the special treatment he subsequently received in Babylon. Thus, assuming the correctness of the datum in 2 Kgs 24:8 as contrasted with 2 Chr 36:9, and taking into consideration the travel time of more than a month for the Babylonian army to arrive at Jerusalem and begin the investment of the city, it is possible to explain the circumstances surrounding the death of Jehoiakim and the disposal of his body.

It should be noted, in concluding, that Nebuchadrezzar's binding of Jehoiakim in bronze chains for deportation to Babylon (2 Chr 36:6) probably should be separated from this episode and attributed to a time earlier in his reign. This may have occurred in 605 or 604, prior to the three years when Jehoiakim served Nebuchadrezzar as a faithful vassal (2 Kgs 24:1). If Jehoiakim's capture is attributed to an earlier time in this way, it would indicate that Nebuchadrezzar apparently had a change of heart about deporting him, and instead, returned him to the throne. Under these circumstances, 601 would be the most likely year for

Jehoiakim's rebellion at the end of his three years of faithful service. In that year, according to the Babylonian Chronicle, the Babylonians fought an important battle against the Egyptians.¹¹ The result of this battle was either a draw or a defeat for the Babylonians, a factor which provided Jehoiakim with the opportune circumstance for rebellion. Due to the urgent need of revamping and strengthening his army, Nebuchadrezzar was unable to deal directly with the rebellious Judean king during the years 600 and 599.¹² If one were to attribute Nebuchadrezzar's capture of Jehoiakim to the latter king's last days, that interpretation would also fit well with the chronological correlations suggested above. Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that such an event fits better into a time earlier in Jehoiakim's reign.¹³

¹¹*CCK*, pp. 71-72; *ABC*, p. 101.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³See also W. F. Albright, "The Nebuchadrezzar and Neriglissar Chronicles," *BASOR*, no. 143 (1956), p. 31; *CCK*, pp. 28, 68-69; *ABC*, p. 100.