

# Problems in Chronology and Their Solution:

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

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The chronological data for the Hebrew kings provide a fascinating and provocative subject for study by the serious Bible student. In the mass and variety of material, the year each king of Israel began his reign is synchronized with that of a neighboring ruler of Judah, and the length of reign is given.

Thus, the account of Abijam in Judah begins with the statement that he started his reign in the 18th year of Jeroboam of Israel and that he reigned 3 years (1 Kings 15:1-2). In Jeroboam's 20th year, Abijam was succeeded by Asa, who reigned 41 years (15:9-10). The next reign recorded is that of Nadab of Israel, who began in the 2nd year of Asa and reigned 2 years (15:25). Next came Baasha, who began his reign over Israel in the 3rd year of Asa and ruled 24 years (15:33). Then follow the accounts of five more rulers of Israel, who also began their reigns during the reign of Asa. The last of these was Ahab, who commenced his reign in the 38th year of Asa and reigned 22 years (16:29). Asa's successor was Jehoshaphat, who began in the 4th year of Ahab and ruled 25 years (22:41-42). Reigns are recorded in strict chronological sequence.

In addition to the synchronisms and lengths of reigns, at times there is information as to the number of years from one point to another. For example, Amaziah of Judah lived 15 years after the death of Jehoash of Israel (2 Kings 14:17); and from the 13th year of Josiah to the 4th year of Jehoia-kim was 23 years (Jeremiah 25:1, 3).

Of particular historical importance are the synchronisms of the Hebrew kings' reigns with those of neighboring nations. Shishak of Egypt came against Jerusalem in the 5th year of Rehoboam of Judah (2 Chronicles 12:2), and Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah in the 14th year of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13, Isaiah 36:1). The 4th year of Jehoiakim of Judah was the 1st year of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Jeremiah 25:1), and the 10th year of Zedekiah was the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 32:1).

Many difficulties and seeming contradictions are found in the data. For instance, 2 Kings 8:25 says that Ahaziah of Judah began in the 12th year of Joram of Israel; but 9:29 says that it was the 11th year. And 2 Kings 1:17 says that Jehoram of Israel began in the 2nd year of Jehoram of Judah; whereas 3:1 says it was the 18th year of Jehoshaphat. According to 2 Kings 15:30, Hoshea began in the 20th year of Jotham of Judah (who ruled only 16 years according to verse 33); but according to 17:1 he began in the 12th year of Ahaz, son and successor of Jotham.

In one instance each of two kings began to rule before the other. Thus in 2 Kings 1:17 Jehoram of Israel (who followed Ahaziah, who had no sons) commenced in the 2nd year of Jehoram of Judah, whereas in 8:16 Jehoram of Judah began in the 5th year of Jehoram [Joram] of Israel.

Another difficulty is the variant possibilities for the length of a ruler's reign. In 1 Kings 16:23 Omri is said to have reigned 12 years. The synchronism for the beginning of his reign is the 31st year of Asa, though his death occurred in the 38th year of Asa (16:28-29), which would give him a reign of only 7 years. But Omri slew and succeeded Zimri, who had begun in the 27th year of Asa, after Zimri had reigned only 7 days (16:15-16). So Omri must also have begun his reign in the 27th year of Asa. If his death took place in the 38th year of Asa's reign, his reign would have been 11 years. So how long did Omri reign — 7, 11, or 12 years?

Yet another difficulty is that the total years of reign for Judah from one fixed point to another often do not agree with the total years for Israel for the same period, and the totals for both nations are far out of line with the number of years recorded for a contemporary nation. This happens in the century following the simultaneous accessions of Athaliah in Judah and Jehu in Israel, which took place in 841 B.C., the 18th year of Shalmaneser III of Assyria. The terminal point of this period is the death of Pekahiah in Israel in the 52nd year of Azariah of Judah (2 Kings 15:25-27), which was within a year or two of 740 B.C., the 5th year of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria. The totals involved are as follows:

TABLE 1

JUDAH		ISRAEL		ASSYRIA	
	YRS		YRS / MOS		YRS
Athaliah	7	Jehu	28	Shalmaneser III	17 (18th - 35th)
Joash	40	Jehoahaz	17	Shamsi Adad V	13
Amaziah	29	Jehoash	16	Adad-nirari III	28
Azariah	52	Jeroboam II	41	Shalmaneser IV	10
		Zachariah	/ 6	Assur-dan III	18
		Shallum	/ 1	Assur-nirari V	10
		Menahem	10	Tiglath-pileser III	c 5
		Pekahiah	2		
<hr/>		<hr/>		<hr/>	
TOTAL	128		114 / 7		c 101

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Seeming inconsistencies such as the foregoing have given rise to many comments criticizing the biblical data of the Hebrew kings. With reference to the period covered by TABLE 1, Albright has said:

It is incredible that all these numbers can have been handed down through so many editors and copyists, without often becoming corrupt. . . . If we examine the chronological material for the century following Jehu's rebellion (which is fixed to within a year or two by Assyrian data), we note that the century between 842 and 742 B.C. is occupied in Kings by four Judahite reigns, totalling 128 years, from which 3-4 years must be deduced [sic] in accordance with antedating practice. The excess of some 24 years can be eliminated entirely by disregarding the total reigns attributed to the kings of Judah and basing our revised estimates of their reigns solely on the synchronisms with Israel (which throughout contradict the regnal totals of the kings of Judah). . . . In this period, however, most of the synchronisms were calculated by some later editor, so they cannot be used as primary material, though they do enable us to correct the regnal totals for the rulers of the Omride Dynasty.<sup>1</sup>

So Albright attempts to establish his own chronology for this period by deducting 1 year from the reign of Athaliah, 2 from Jehoash, 11 from Amaziah, and 10 from Azariah of Judah; for Israel he deducts 2 years each from Jehoahaz and Menahem.

Also, as to this period, Oppert says:

The twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam II, King of Israel, is mentioned as the first year of Uzziah, in flagrant contradiction to all the statements of the previous chapter. . . . Intentional mutilation of the text and suppression of all notice of the temporary suspension of the independence of the kingdom of Israel by the Syrians are the real cause of the larger number. . . . The subsequent passages have been ruthlessly altered. . . . A similar mutilation has been practised at the end of ch. xv.<sup>2</sup>

Other more general indictments can be cited:

Thus almost along the whole line, the discrepancy between synchronisms and years of reign is incurable. . . . The individual numbers of years of reign, as well as the totals, are untrustworthy and useless for the purposes of a certain chronology.<sup>3</sup>

In details there is much uncertainty and difficulty. . . . Errors which have vitiated more or less the entire chronology have crept in. The existence of these errors can be doubly demonstrated. . . . The length of the reigns of the various kings is not the same according to the traditional and the synchronistic figures. Since, however, it is clear on various grounds that these synchronisms are not original, any attempt to base a chronological scheme on them may be disregarded.<sup>4</sup>

The chronology of the exilic editor in Judges and Kings is purely fictitious. . . . The chronology based on the synchronisms is of course less reliable than the one based on the regnal periods, since the synchronisms were figured from the regnal periods. Neither chronology is wholly accurate.<sup>5</sup>

The numerical errors in the Books of Kings have defied every attempt to ungarble them. Those errors are largely the creation of the editors who set out to write a synchronistic history of Judah and Israel, using as sources two sets of unrelated court chronicles. . . . The editors did not execute the synchronisms skillfully.<sup>6</sup>

Although such criticisms have been widespread and their acceptance almost universal among Bible scholars, it can be shown that they are without foundation. The biblical data are reliable if correctly understood. Once the chronological methods employed by the ancient Hebrew recorders are known and once the existence of certain coregencies and overlapping reigns is recognized (together with the complications introduced into the data of one particular period), there is internal harmony within the data, and there is harmony with the chronology of contemporary nations. I will set forth the chronological principles used by the Hebrew chroniclers, whose recording of events was extremely accurate.

## I

Two distinct methods of reckoning the years of reign were employed in the ancient East. According to one system, the year in which a king ascended the throne was termed his accession year; his 1st regnal year did not begin until the commencement of the next full year following his accession. This "accession-year system" was used by such nations as Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Certain other nations, however, used the "nonaccession-year method," in which the year that a king began to reign was termed the 1st year of his reign; his 2nd year began with the next year following his accession. The 1st year calculated by this system was the accession year of the other system; and the 2nd year of this system was the 1st year of the other.

One should note that according to the nonaccession-year method there was a duplication of 1 year for every reign, with the last year of an old king

also being the 1st year of a new king. Reigns calculated by this system increased by 1 year for every reign when compared with reigns calculated by the accession-year system; they also increased by 1 year per reign when compared with absolute time.

A glance at the chronological date (FIGURE A) for Israel and Judah during the early period of the divided monarchies shows that at this time Judah employed the accession-year system of reckoning, whereas Israel used the nonaccession-year method.

FIGURE A

JUDAH Totals:	20	22	23	46	47	58	61	78	79	
Rehoboam 17	Abijam 3	Asa	2nd	3rd	26th	27th	38th	41	Jehoshaphat 17th	18th
Jeroboam		22	Nadab 2	Baasha 24	Elah 2	Zimri Omri 12	Ahab 4th	22	Ahaziah 2	Jehoram
ISRAEL Totals:		22	24	48	50	62	66	84	86	
Excess years:		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

At first glance it may seem that the data for Israel and Judah hopelessly contradict each other. The total for Judah from the disruption to the 18th year of Jehoshaphat is 79 years, whereas for Israel the total is 86 years. Discrepancies in totals seem to be everywhere along the line, but careful comparison shows that the totals for Israel increase by 1 year for every reign over the totals of Judah. This is evidence that during this period Israel used the nonaccession-year system, whereas Judah used accession-year reckoning.

The synchronisms give clear evidence of what was happening: Nadab began his reign in the 2nd year of Asa and died in the 3rd year. Thus he reigned only 1 year, although his official length is given as 2 years. Likewise, Baasha, who began in the 3rd year of Asa and died in the 26th year, reigned 23 years, although he is said to have reigned 24 years. And Elah, who began in the 26th year of Asa and died in the 27th year, reigned 1 year; but the record says he reigned 2 years.

The synchronisms of Zimri and Omri are of interest and importance. Zimri came to the throne in Asa's 27th year, but after reigning only 7 days he was slain and was succeeded by Omri (1 Kings 16:15-16). Therefore, Omri also must have begun to reign in Asa's 27th year. Since Omri was succeeded by Ahab in Asa's 38th year (16:29), he actually reigned 11 years, al-

TABLE 2

JUDAH			ISRAEL		
	OFFICIAL YEARS	ACTUAL YEARS		OFFICIAL YEARS	ACTUAL YEARS
Rehoboam	17	17	Jeroboam	22	22
Abijam	3	3	Nadab	2	1
Asa	41	41	Baasha	24	23
Jehoshaphat	18	18	Elah	2	1
			Omri	12	11
			Ahab	22	21
			Ahaziah	2	1
	—	—		—	—
TOTAL	79	79	TOTAL	86	79

It is evident from the chronological data just examined that from Rehoboam to Jehoshaphat the accession-year system was employed in Judah, the nonaccession-year system in Israel. But the data for the rulers following Jehoshaphat show that for the next four rulers — Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Joash — the nonaccession-year system was also employed in Judah, as it continued to be in Israel. Then, from Amaziah in Judah and Jehoash in Israel, both nations shifted to accession-year reckoning — which they continued to use until the close of their histories.

The question may be asked if any reason can be found for Judah's adoption of the nonaccession-year method. The answer is found in the rapprochement that existed during the reigns of Jehoshaphat in Judah and Ahab in Israel. At the time of Ahab's war with Syria, Jehoshaphat visited

Ahab, giving him the assurance, "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses." Jehoshaphat also participated in the conflict, almost losing his life in battle (1 Kings 22:4, 29-32). The alliance between the two nations was sealed by the marriage of Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat and the next ruler of Judah (2 Kings 8:16). Of Jehoram it is said, "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife" (8:18). It was at this time that Judah adopted many of the ways of Israel, including the nonaccession-year system of reckoning.

Cooperation between the two nations continued in the ensuing reigns. Specific evidence that Judah adopted a new method of reckoning is found in the two synchronisms for the accession of Ahaziah, son of Jehoram and Athaliah: one, the 11th year of Jehoram [Joram] of Israel (2 Kings 9:29) accords with the former accession-year system; the other, the 12th year of Jehoram [Joram] (8:25) accords with the newly adopted nonaccession-year method.

The chronological problems of the Hebrew kings' reigns cannot be solved without a knowledge of the specific chronological system employed by each nation. But other factors must be considered, too. One is the method that was used by each nation in giving the synchronism with its neighbor, when the neighbor used a different system. For instance, when Judah employed the accession-year system and Israel the nonaccession-year system, would Judah's synchronism for the year of Israel's king be expressed in terms of Israel's method or Judah's method? A careful study of the data shows that each nation always employed the same system for the synchronism as it did for the length of reign, regardless of the system used by the neighboring nation.

Another item of importance is the time of the calendar year when the regnal year began. The Hebrews had two new years, one beginning with the month of Nisan in the spring, the other with the month of Tishri in the fall. Not until we know the month in which Israel and Judah began their regnal years can harmony be brought into the chronological data. In brief, Israel began the regnal year with Nisan, whereas Judah began with Tishri. Biblical evidence for a Tishri regnal year is found by combining the details about the construction of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:1, 37-38) with those of Josiah's cleansing of the temple (2 Kings 22:3; 23:23). The only evidence that Israel used the Nisan regnal year is that the chronological data fit into the Nisan scheme; whereas there would be conflicts throughout if another scheme were used.

Because of the fact that a Nisan year for Israel or a Tishri year for Judah overlaps two of our January years, the only exact method for expressing the year of a Hebrew king in terms of modern reckoning is to use a dual system such as 931/30 B.C. At times such symbols have been employed, but usually a simpler, although less accurate, symbol has been used (for example, 931 or 930 B.C.).<sup>7</sup>

## II

Three principles employed by the ancient Hebrew recorders have been discussed: (a) the method of reckoning employed by each nation, whether the accession-year or the nonaccession-year system; (b) the method of reckoning synchronisms with a neighboring kingdom when the neighbor's system was different from one's own; (c) the month, Nisan or Tishri, that began the regnal year.

The application of these principles to the chronological data of the Hebrew kings is shown in FIGURE B. Only by the use of these principles can harmony within the data be secured.

In addition to these principles, another factor must be kept in mind: the possibility of joint or rival reigns, as already mentioned in the case of Omri and Tibni. At times these reigns may be mentioned specifically, but at other times their existence may be deduced only from complications presented by the data. I will not discuss the details of the various coregencies here,<sup>8</sup> but I will deal with two that have raised problems referred to earlier.

I have noted that the synchronisms of Jehoram [Joram] in Israel and Jehoram in Judah indicated that each king began to rule before the other, with Jehoram of Israel commencing his reign in the 2nd year of Jehoram of Judah (2 Kings 1:17) and Jehoram of Judah beginning in the 5th year of Jehoram of Israel (8:16). Another synchronism (3:1) gives the 18th year of Judah's Jehoshaphat, father of Jehoram, as the year when Jehoram, son of Ahab, began to reign in Israel. These dual synchronisms point to a coregency between Jehoram of Judah and his father Jehoshaphat — the 18th year of Jehoshaphat being the 2nd year of his son's coregency.

The reason for this coregency is readily secured from the available data. If Jehoshaphat's 18th year was the 2nd year of his son's coregency, then that coregency began in the 17th year of Jehoshaphat's reign. And it was in Jehoshaphat's 17th year that Ahaziah succeeded Ahab on the throne of Israel (1 Kings 22:51), after Ahab had been slain in the battle against Syria (22:34-37). Jehoshaphat was with Ahab in that battle, and his own life was seriously threatened (22:29-33). It would have been only a matter of pru-



FIGURE B

## ISRAELITE RECORD

Nonaccession-year system for both nations

## JUDAHITE RECORD

Accession-year system for both nations

Biblical data	ISRAEL Nisan years	JUDAH Tishri years	JUDAH Tishri years	ISRAEL Nisan years	Biblical data
Jeroboam 22 years 1 Kings 14:20	Jeroboam 18			Jeroboam 17	
	19	Abijam 1	Abijam ac	18th	Abijam 18th of Jeroboam 3 years 1 Kings 15:1, 2
	20	2	1	19	
	21	3	2		
	22	4 Asa 1	3 Asa ac	20th	Asa 20th of Jeroboam 41 years 1 Kings 15:9, 10
Nadab 2nd of Asa 2 years 1 Kings 15:25	Nadab 1	2nd	1	21 Nadab ac	
	2			1	
Baasha 3rd of Asa 24 years 1 Kings 15:33	Baasha 1	3rd	2	Baasha ac	
	2			1	
	3	4	3	2	

dence for Jehoshaphat, before entering an engagement that might place his life in danger, to make his son Jehoram coregent, which he did. The synchronism of Jehoram's accession in the 5th year of Jehoram [Joram] of Israel simply denotes the commencement of his sole reign.

This period is of great importance from the standpoint of absolute chronology, for there are correlations with the astronomically fixed years of Assyria that secure exact dates for the kings of Israel and Judah. Ahab is mentioned as a participant in the battle of Karkar, which took place in the 6th year of Shalmaneser III (853 B.C.). Therefore, it is clear that Ahab was still alive at that date. There is also a record of Jehu's paying tribute to Assyria in the 18th year of Shalmaneser (841 B.C.); therefore, it is clear that Jehu was ruling at that time. Since there are 12 years between the death of Ahab and the beginning of Jehu's reign, 853 B.C. thus becomes the year of Ahab's death and 841 B.C. becomes the year of the accessions of Jehu in Israel and Athaliah in Judah. From there one can go forward and backward, supplying absolute dates to the Hebrew kings, and can check the accuracy of the re-

construction at any other points where exact verifications are possible. These correlations give evidence that the reconstruction is correct and that the chronological data of the Hebrew kings are sound.

It is interesting that the Assyrian records of this time confirm the use of the nonaccession-year system of reckoning in Israel for the period just discussed. The 2 official years of Ahaziah would be 1 actual year, and the 12 official years of Jehoram would be 11 actual years, making a total of 12 years. This coincides with the 12 years between the 6th and 18th years of Shalmaneser III — the interval between Ahab and Jehu, when Ahaziah and Jehoram reigned.

### III

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Next I will discuss the century following 841 B.C., which was the year that Jehu and Athaliah began their reigns. This is the period for which Albright proposed the elimination of an “excess of some 24 years” by “disregarding the total reigns attributed to the kings of Judah,” and for which Oppert employs such terms as “flagrant contradiction” and “intentional mutilation.” Sanders declares, “The exact chronology of this century is beyond any historian’s powers to determine. . . . What to do with the extra twenty-five years is uncertain.”<sup>9</sup>

I will show how an exact reconstruction of the chronology of this century is made possible by recognizing (a) a 12-year coregency between Jehoash and Jeroboam II in Israel and (b) an overlap of 24 years between Amaziah and Azariah in Judah. The comparison (FIGURE C) between the years of Israel and Judah for this period will be helpful in pinpointing the difficulty. Note that at the termination of Athaliah’s 7 years and Joash’s 40 years, the total for Judah is 47 years. This total is identical with that of Israel at this point — the 2nd year of Jehoash, which follows the 28 years of Jehu and

FIGURE C

<i>JUDAH</i> compared with Israel:				same	same	-12	+12
Totals:	7			47	61 ← --- 15 --- →	76	114
Athaliah	7	Joash		40	Amaziah	29	Azariah 38th
Jehu		28	Jehoahaz 17	Jehoash 2nd	16	Jeroboam 27th	41 Zachariah
Totals:		28	45	47	61	88	102
<i>ISRAEL</i> compared with Judah:				same	same	+12	-12

the 17 years of Jehoahaz. At the next point of comparison — the death of Jehoash after 16 years of reign — the total for Israel is 61 years. Judah's total for this period is also 61, because the death of Amaziah (after his reign of 29 years) took place 15 years after the death of Jehoash of Israel (2 Kings 14:17).

But at the point where the total for Judah is 76 years, the total for Israel is 88 years, since Azariah came to the throne in the 27th year of Jeroboam (2 Kings 15:1). Thus Israel's total at this point is 12 years more than Judah's. Then Jeroboam reigned 41 years, which makes Israel's total 102 years. Jeroboam's successor, Zachariah, began to reign in the 38th year of Azariah, giving Judah a total of 114 years, which is 12 years more than Israel's total.

The discrepancies of these totals point to the fact that the chronological difficulties center around the reigns of Amaziah and Azariah in Judah, and the reigns of Jehoash, Jeroboam, and Zachariah in Israel. The chronological data of these kings are as follows:

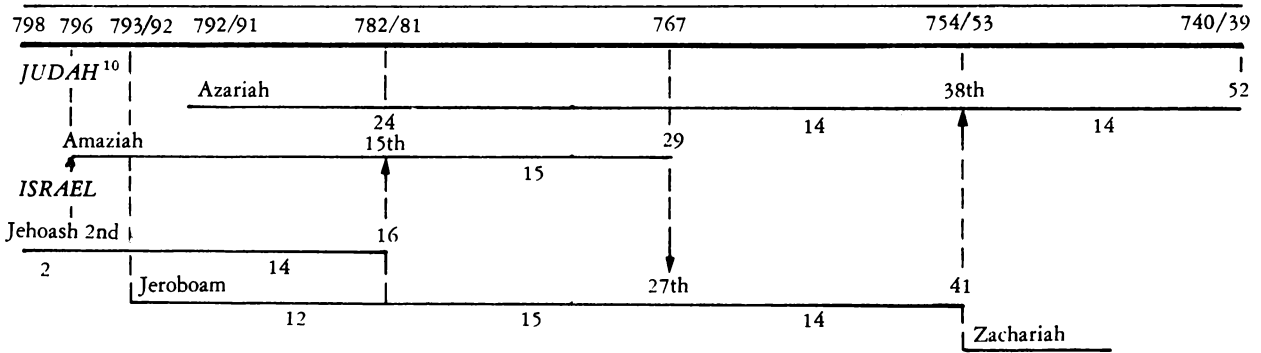
TABLE 3

JUDAH	Amaziah	accession	2nd of Jehoash	2 Kings 14:1
		length of reign	29 years	2 Kings 14:2
	Azariah	accession	27th of Jeroboam	2 Kings 15:1
		length of reign	52 years	2 Kings 15:2
ISRAEL	Jehoash	accession	37th of Joash	2 Kings 13:10
		length of reign	16 years	2 Kings 13:10
	Jeroboam	accession	15th of Amaziah	2 Kings 14:23
		length of reign	41 years	2 Kings 14:23
	Zachariah	accession	38th of Azariah	2 Kings 15:8
		length of reign	6 months	2 Kings 15:8

The relevant data of the kings appear in FIGURE D together with the various dates involved.<sup>10</sup>

I will begin the analysis of this rather involved period with the year 798 B.C., when Jehoash began to reign in Israel. In Jehoash's 2nd year, 796, Amaziah came to the throne in Judah. Jehoash ruled 16 years to 782/81 B.C. Amaziah ruled 29 years from 796 to 767, dying 15 years after Jehoash's death in 782/81 (2 Kings 14:17).

FIGURE D



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The synchronism for the accession of Azariah, son and successor of Amaziah, is the 27th year of Jeroboam. This synchronism for the accession of a king of Judah has caused many perplexities for Bible scholars, but it provides highly important historical information, for it shows that at this time — 15 years after his father's death — Jeroboam had already ruled 27 years. This means that there had been a coregency of 12 years between Jeroboam and his father, Jehoash. The length of Jeroboam's reign was 41 years, which would take him 14 years beyond his 27th year in 767, to 754/53 B.C. In that year, which was also the 38th year of Azariah, he was succeeded by his son Zachariah.

This synchronism of the accession of a ruler of Israel also provides almost endless difficulties for students of the Old Testament, but it provides important information about the history of Judah at this time. With the date 754/53 as the 38th year of Azariah, the date 792/91 is secured as his accession year, which was 24 years before the death of his father, Amaziah, in 767. So there was an overlap of 24 years between Azariah and Amaziah. The length of Azariah's reign was 52 years, which establishes the date of his death as 740/39.

The foregoing, brief explanation is the solution of the chronology problem that has been so perplexing for many years. This chronological inconsistency has been a favorite target of attack by scholars who failed to recognize the remarkable accuracy of the biblical data. The solution of the problem was not found by discarding or ignoring data. It was not necessary to disregard "the total reigns attributed to the kings of Judah," as was done by Albright.<sup>11</sup> Nor was it necessary to accuse the Hebrew recorders of "intentional mutilation of the text" or of ruthless alterations, as was done by Oppert. The text can be accepted with confidence and respect rather than dis-

belief and derision. The main difficulty was that, although the data for the lengths of reign of Azariah and Jeroboam covered their full totals of years, their synchronisms of accessions were given in terms of the beginnings of sole reigns. This combination that made so formidable a problem also made possible the restoration of details of Hebrew history that otherwise might have remained unknown.

A brief survey of the reason for these overlapping reigns in Israel and Judah is in order. The report of Amaziah's campaign against Edom, and its aftermath, is given in 2 Chronicles 25:5-24. To assist him in this campaign, Amaziah hired a contingent of Israelites — who, however, were dismissed in accordance with the counsel of a prophet, and returned home in anger. On their way, they pillaged parts of Judah and slew people. When Amaziah returned after a great victory and discovered what had taken place, he sent a challenge of war to Jehoash. This Jehoash rejected with an insulting reply, suggesting that the king of Judah remain home and not seek further trouble. But Amaziah insisted on war.

Having no other choice, Jehoash responded with an invasion of Judah in which he defeated and captured Amaziah; he then took Jerusalem, breaking down part of the wall and looting the temple. Before beginning this engagement, Jehoash no doubt made his son Jeroboam coregent. When Amaziah was taken prisoner by Israel, the people of Judah made young Azariah ruler in the place of his foolhardy captive father. Thus Azariah's long reign of 52 years included 24 years in which his father was still alive. Although Amaziah was a prisoner in Israel, probably until the death of Jehoash at least, his reign was credited with the full quota of years until his death.

The specific dates involved in this troublesome period are as follows:

TABLE 4

	B.C.
Beginning of Jehoash	798
Beginning of Amaziah	796
Campaign of Amaziah against Edom	793
Amaziah's challenge to Jehoash	793
Commencement of Jeroboam's coregency	793 / 792
Invasion of Judah by Jehoash	792
Capture of Amaziah and accession of Azariah	792
Death of Jehoash and probable release of Amaziah	782
Commencement of Jeroboam's sole reign	782
Death of Amaziah and beginning of Azariah's sole reign	767
Death of Azariah after 52 years of reign	740

IV

The chronology problems presented by the Hebrew reigns have long engaged the attention of biblical scholars. In the fourth century A.D. Church Father Jerome said:

Read all the books of the Old and New Testament, and you will find such a discord as to the number of the years, such a confusion as to the duration of the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel, that to attempt to clear up this question will appear rather the occupation of a man of leisure than of a scholar.<sup>12</sup>

In the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (made in the early pre-Christian period), variations found in the chronological data of the books of Kings in the Septuagint give evidence that scholars of that time were already dealing with these problems and were attempting to solve them by presenting what they considered to be more acceptable figures.<sup>13</sup> Shortly after the time of Christ, efforts were also being made to correct what were regarded as errors in the Hebrew text. In the writings of Josephus, evidence for this is found in the variant figures for the Hebrew kings.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the chronology difficulties go back to the compilation of the Old Testament, for there is evidence that the details of the chronologies were by then no longer fully understood. One such difficulty is found in 2 Kings 8:16: "In the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign." Although it is true that there was a coregency between Jehoram and his father, Jehoshaphat, the 5th year of Joram was not the year when that coregency began, but was the year that it ended and that Joram began his sole reign.

Another difficulty is found in 2 Kings 14:21: "All the people of Judah took Azariah, which was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah." That statement is correct, but it follows a statement in the preceding verse concerning the death and burial of Amaziah. Azariah was not made king at the death of Amaziah, but 24 years before, when Amaziah was captured by Jehoash.

The arrangement of the reigns in 2 Kings 15 also presents difficulties.

TABLE 5

REIGN IN KINGS	SYNCHRONISM		YEARS OF ACTUAL REIGN	
Menahem 2 Kings 15:16-22	39th of Azariah	752/51	10 years	752/51 - 742/41
Pekahiah 2 Kings 15:23-26	50th of Azariah	742/41	2 years	742/41 - 740/39
Pekah 2 Kings 15:27-31	52nd of Azariah	740/39	20 years	752/51 - 732/31
Jotham 2 Kings 15:32-38	2nd of Pekah	738	16 years	750/49 - 735/34

The sequence in which these reigns is recorded gives evidence that this is the order that the editors believed to be correct. They thought that Pekah began his reign of 20 years in the 52nd year of Azariah, 740/39 B.C.; and they thought that Jotham also began a reign of 20 years when Azariah died. But such beginning dates are not correct.

In one sense it is true that both Pekah and Jotham had reigns that began in 740, but in another sense both began before 740. Pekah began to reign in Gilead in 752 as a rival of Menahem — 12 years before he began his sole reign in Samaria in 740. Jotham began in 750, the 2nd year of Pekah, as coregent with Azariah. A 20-year reign for Pekah that began in 740 would terminate in 720. But the year 720 is 3 years after the nation of Israel had ceased to exist. Hoshea, the slayer of Pekah and last king of Israel, began his 9-year reign in 732 and terminated in 723, when Samaria fell to Shalmaneser V. According to contemporary Assyrian records, Pekah's reign ended in 732, and Hoshea replaced him. So, if Pekah had a reign of 20

But 752/51 was the year when Menahem began his reign of 10 years in Samaria. He was followed by Pekahiah, who reigned 2 years, from 742 to 740. When all the evidence of this period is pieced together, it points to a rival reign of Pekah in Gilead that is not expressly mentioned in the biblical record, but that began the same year as did Menahem's in Samaria.<sup>15</sup>

The arrangement that accords with the above dates is as follows:

TABLE 6

Menahem	752/51 - 742/41	2 Kings 15:16-22
Pekah	752/51 - 732/31	Beginning with 2 Kings 15:23, following Menahem
Jotham	750/49 - 735/34	After the reign of Pekah
Pekahiah	742/41 - 740/39	After the reign of Jotham; last reign in 2 Kings 15
Ahaz	735/34 - 716/15	2 Kings 16
Hoshea	732/31 - 723/22	2 Kings 17
Hezekiah	716/15 - 687/86	2 Kings 18-20

All reigns are given in their correct sequential order as recorded in 2 Kings, with the exception of Pekahiah, whose record precedes those of Pekah and Jotham, whereas it should follow them.

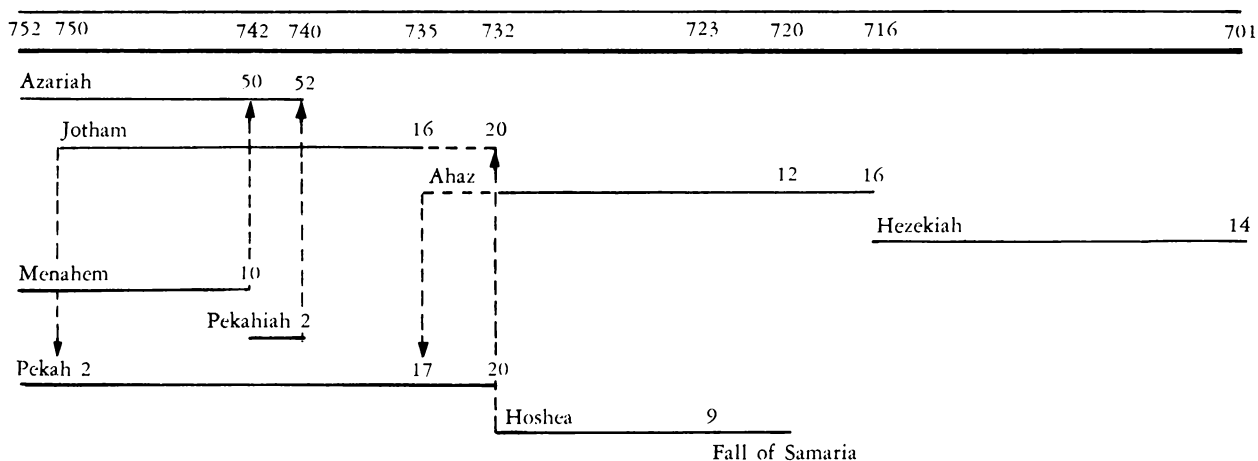
Contemporary Assyrian evidence shows that in 732 Pekah's reign ended and Hoshea's began. Thus, Pekah's 20 years began in 752. In Pekah's 2nd year, 750, Jotham's reign began (2 Kings 15:32). This year was the first year of a coregency between Jotham and his father, Azariah, who was strick-

en with leprosy and was unable to carry on the affairs of state. This coregency is expressly mentioned in 2 Kings 15:5. Although the Bible does not tell when it began or how many years it lasted, one is able, with the aid of Assyrian chronological evidence, to determine the year of its beginning.

The 52nd and last year of Azariah's reign was 740/39, which is the synchronism given for Pekah's accession (2 Kings 15:27). But as shown, 740/39 could not have been the beginning of a 20-year reign for Pekah. Rather, it was the year that Pekah slew Pekahiah and began his reign over all Israel in Samaria (15:25, 27). Nor could the year 740/39 mark the commencement of Jotham's reign, for he began in Pekah's 2nd year (15:32). If 740/39 is taken as Pekah's beginning year (as the synchronism suggests), and if Pekah's 2nd year is taken to be Jotham's beginning year, then Jotham began in 738/37, which was 2 years after his father, Azariah, died in 740/39. Not only was there no gap between the death of the aged, leprous Azariah and the commencement of Jotham; there was a coregency that began some time before Azariah's death. Jotham's reign of 16 years (15:33) began in 750 and terminated in 735/34, with the accession of Ahaz in the 17th year of Pekah (16:1). (For details see FIGURE E.)

FIGURE E

Original correct positions of Jotham, Pekah, and Hoshea



Jotham, Pekah, and Hoshea are here in their true relationships to Ahaz and Hezekiah.



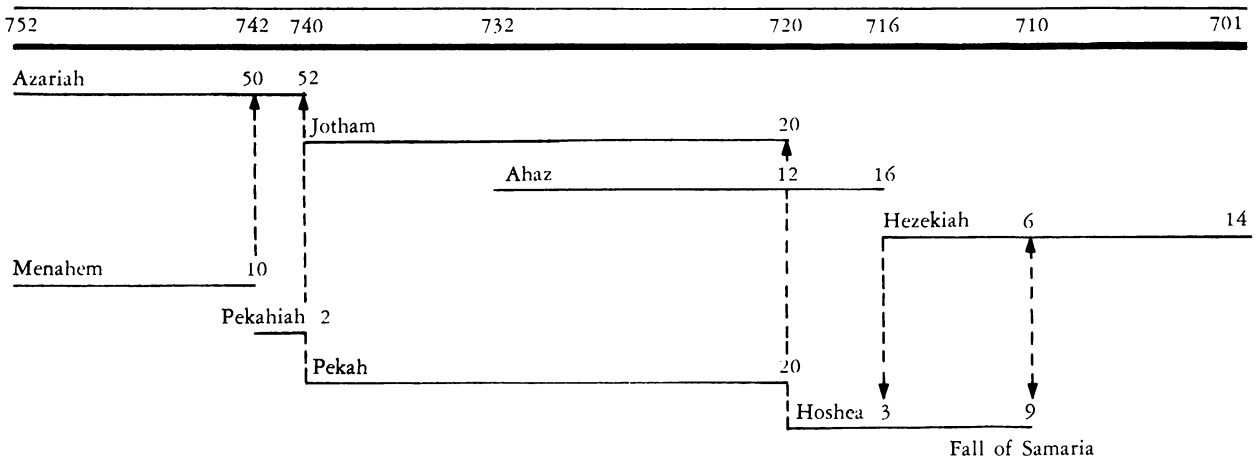
Of all the periods of the Hebrew kings, the period just discussed is the most complex and difficult to reconstruct. One reason is that its details were not understood by the final editors of the books of Kings. The sequence in which the editors placed the reigns in 2 Kings 15, with Pekahiah preceding rather than following Pekah and Jotham, shows what they believed to be correct. The 20-year reign of Pekah was treated as having begun in 740/39, rather than 12 years before. Jotham's reign was considered to have begun at the death of his father, Azariah, whereas in reality it began with a coregency in Pekah's 2nd year. (See FIGURE F.) Although I will not deal with all the intricacies of this problem, I will mention the main points.<sup>16</sup>

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Briefly, the reigns, as they are recorded in the books of Kings, fit into two distinct chronological patterns — with Pekah and Hoshea of Israel and Jotham of Judah being thrust 12 years ahead of their true relationships with Ahaz and Hezekiah, on the one hand, while at the same time they stand in their true positions, on the other hand. (See FIGURES E and F.) Once this chronology is understood, the reigns of Pekah, Hoshea, and Jotham may be moved back 12 years to their correct historical beginnings. I will mention several items of evidence that show what has taken place.

FIGURE F

Late advanced positions of Jotham, Pekah, and Hoshea



Jotham, Pekah, and Hoshea are here 12 years in advance of their true relationships to Ahaz and Hezekiah.

First, the data of 2 Kings 15:27 state that Pekah began his reign in Azariah's 52nd year, 740, and reigned 20 years. According to this information, Pekah's dates are 740 to 720. But, as we have seen, these dates are 12 years beyond their correct positions. And if Hoshea began in 720, then his reign terminated in 711/10, which likewise is 12 years ahead of its correct position. Without an extremely careful examination of all the data, one would be forced, on the basis of 2 Kings 15:27, to give Pekah the dates 740-720, and Hoshea the dates 720-711. This is exactly what was done by the final editors of Kings. The fact that they placed the reign of Pekahiah (15:23-26) before that of Pekah (15:27-31) shows that they regarded Pekahiah's reign as having begun in 742 and Pekah's in 740. (Note that there is nothing incorrect about the data of 2 Kings 15:27, once they are understood.)

Second, in 2 Kings 15:30, it is stated that Hoshea slew Pekah in the 20th year of Jotham and reigned in his stead. These three kings — Jotham, Pekah, and Hoshea — are the rulers whose reigns appear 12 years ahead of their true positions. Here is why. Azariah died in 740; if he was then succeeded by Jotham, the 20th year of Jotham would be 720, which would also be the year of Pekah's death and of Hoshea's accession. These dates are the same as those secured for Pekah and Hoshea from the information in 2 Kings 15:27. And 740 is the year that the editors of Kings regarded Jotham as having begun his reign, as evidenced by the fact that they placed his reign (15:32-38) after that of Pekah (15:27-31). Actually, Pekah preceded Jotham, because Pekah began his reign in the 52nd and last year of the reign of his father, Azariah, whereas Jotham did not begin until his father was dead. (The data of 2 Kings 15:30 are also correct when understood.)

Assyrian evidence from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727) gave 732 as the year of Pekah's death and of Hoshea's commencement, which was 12 years before 720. Therefore Pekah's 20-year reign began in 752; 750 is his 2nd year and is also the year that Jotham began his coregency. This sequence — 752 for Pekah, 750 for Jotham, and 742 for Pekahiah — is the sequence in which these reigns would have appeared in 2 Kings 15 had the final editors of Kings been aware of this original historical arrangement. What they did not take into consideration was that Pekah's 20-year reign began with a rival reign in Gilead that commenced in the same year that Menahem began in Samaria (752), and that the 52nd year of Azariah (740) given as the synchronism of his accession was the commencement of his undisputed reign in Samaria when he did away with Pekahiah. The editors also began the 20 years of Jotham's reign at Azariah's death in 740, rather than in 750 when Jotham became coregent with his father.

A third point of importance is the synchronism of 2 Kings 17:1, which places the accession of Hoshea in the 12th year of Ahaz. According to 2 Kings 15:30, Hoshea came to the throne in the 20th year of Jotham, which, combined with the synchronism of 17:1, would give Ahaz 12 years of reign with Jotham by the time Jotham reached his 20th year. I will show that such a coregency could not have been possible.

According to 2 Kings 15:33, Jotham reigned 16 years. With 750 as the first year of his coregency with Azariah, 735/34 would be his 16th year, when he was replaced by Ahaz in Pekah's 17th year (16:1).

Evidence that Ahaz was already on the throne in 735/34 is found in the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7 and 8. Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria had joined forces in an attack on Ahaz, but Isaiah foretold that within two years they would be out of the way — before the promised child Immanuel would “know to refuse the evil and choose the good” and before he would be able to say, “My father, and my mother” (Isaiah 7:14-16; 8:4-10). That prediction was made in either 735 or 734, because it was fulfilled in 732, when, according to Assyrian evidence, both Rezin and Pekah died.

What happened in Jotham's 16th year, 735/34, was that Ahaz took the throne from him and ruled in his stead. Jotham was not put to death, but continued to live, if not to reign, until his 20th year, 732/31, when Ahaz began his own 16-year reign, which terminated in 716/15 when Hezekiah began. Evidence that 716/15 is correct for the end of Ahaz and the beginning of Hezekiah is found in the fact that in 701, the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib came against Judah (2 Kings 18:13). This date can be secured, not only from the biblical pattern reconstructed here, but also from Sennacherib's own account of his attack on Hezekiah.

It should be noted that Jotham did not terminate his coregency with Azariah or begin his sole reign until Azariah died in 740, and that it was 735 when he was replaced by Ahaz. Therefore, it would be impossible to place a 12-year coregency between Ahaz and Jotham into those 5 years (740-735) that 2 Kings 17:1 seems to suggest by placing the accession of Hoshea in the 12th year of Ahaz. It should also be noticed that although 720 is Ahaz's 12th year, it is 12 years too late for Hoshea's accession, which took place in 732. So 2 Kings 17:1 provides clear evidence of the existence of a dual pattern in which the reigns of Jotham, Pekah, and Hoshea are advanced 12 years in comparison with the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Fourth, another item of evidence is found in the synchronism of 2 Kings 18, which calls for the accession of Hezekiah in the 3rd year of Hoshea, and for the death of Hoshea and the fall of Samaria at the end of Hoshea's 9-

year rule, which was in Hezekiah's 6th year (18:1, 10). This would make 711/10 the 6th year of Hezekiah and the year of Samaria's fall. This date is correct for Hezekiah, but it is 12 years too late for the death of Hoshea and the fall of Samaria. That Samaria fell in 723 in the reign of Shalmaneser V (rather than Sargon II) is attested to by a careful examination of relevant Assyrian records.<sup>17</sup>

Once the exact nature of the data in this most difficult area of the Hebrew kings chronology is understood, their years can be established with certainty. The data for Pekah included his total of years from the beginning of his rival reign, but the synchronism of his accession was the commencement of his sole reign. The synchronism of Jotham was that of the beginning of his coregency — not in terms of the years of Menahem in Samaria, but in terms of the years of Pekah reckoned from the commencement of his rival reign in Gilead. The synchronism of Hoshea's accession was in terms of the total years of Jotham, which included Jotham's coregency, his sole reign, and also the years he was dethroned while Ahaz ruled. Ahaz's synchronism was based on two things: (*a*) the year of Pekah's reign reckoned from the commencement of his rival reign in Gilead and (*b*) the year that Ahaz himself took the throne from Jotham. The years of Ahaz's reign did not include the years he stole from Jotham, but only those of his sole reign.

Even where the years of Jotham, Pekah, and Hoshea have been thrust forward 12 years when compared with Ahaz and Hezekiah, the years of all rulers involved may be successfully restored, once what took place is known. The beginning of Hoshea must be moved back 12 years from the synchronism given for his accession in 2 Kings 17:1; and the years of Hoshea's reign and the date of Samaria's fall must be thrust back 12 years from the synchronisms given in 2 Kings 18:1, 9-10.

## VI

It would be difficult to imagine a more complicated array of chronological data than is found in this short but important period of Hebrew history that covers the reigns of the last two kings of Israel. If we find the data seem complicated today, part of the reason is that the editors who struggled with the books of Kings also found the data confusing. Much of the difficulty was due, no doubt, to the chaotic state of Israel's final years of history.

Up to within 9 years of the time Israel crumpled under the relentless blows of Assyrian arms, the records continued accurate and adequate. This is known, for the last item in the account of Pekah's reign is that he was slain by Hoshea in the 20th year of Jotham (2 Kings 15:30), which was

732 B.C. This is correct, but as we have seen, is capable of misinterpretation. However, something must have happened to the records of Hoshea's reign — either in their original preparation or in later preservation — for it is here that there is evidence of miscalculations in the advanced synchronisms of 2 Kings 17 and 18, all of which have to do with Hoshea's years.

Today it seems clear that the final editors of Kings — who, engaged in the task of preparing a combined history of Israel and Judah, complete with adequate chronological information for each ruler — were forced by the lack of certain late data to undertake the task of discovering such data by restoring the history of that period. With such information as is found in 2 Kings 15:27, 30, we can imagine what such a reconstruction might have been. What it actually turned out to be we find in the advanced synchronisms of 2 Kings 17 and 18.

But when all this is known, when we understand the methods of reckoning the reigns of the earlier kings, and when we know what coregencies and rival reigns took place, it is possible to set forth a complete record for all the years of Israel, beginning with the disruption of the monarchy in 931/30 and extending to the fall of Samaria in 723. For Judah, the record extends past the fall of Jerusalem in 586 to the termination of Jehoiachin's captivity in his 37th year and the accession of Amel Marduk [Evil-merodach] to the throne of Babylon in 561 (2 Kings 25:27). All the dates for the biblical rulers following the pattern thus produced are in harmony with the events of contemporary history at such points where exact contacts can be made.

In the words of William A. Irwin, the sincere and careful student of the Bible will find that "it is a matter of first-rate importance to learn now that the Books of Kings are reliable in precisely that feature which formerly excited only derision."

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