

A proposed solution to a chronological problem

Many years ago, scholars for the most part abandoned any hope of finding a basis for consistency in the Biblical figures for the reigns of the Hebrew kings. A notable step toward clarifying the seemingly irreconcilable data for the *early* kings was made by E. R. Thiele.¹ He showed that the apparent difficulties in correlating the reigns of the kings of Judah with those of Israel resulted from a failure to recognize that the two kingdoms used different methods for defining the accession year of its kings.

However, this elucidation did not lead to the expected harmony in the figures for the later era. The period from the death of Uzziah to the fall of Israel continues to pose problems for which no proposed solution eliminates the necessity for assuming errors in the Biblical data. This situation suggests the existence of one or more as yet unrecognized factors that have prevented attainment of complete harmony in these figures.

The critical difficulty rises from the apparent inconsistency in the statements of 2 Kings 16:1, 17:1, and 15:27, 30. These verses tell us that the seventeenth year of Pekah was the same as the accession year of Ahaz, that the twelfth year of Ahaz was the same as the accession year of Hoshea, and that the 20-year reign of Pekah ended with the accession of Hoshea. This latter synchronism is confirmed by an Assyrian source that tells us that Tiglath-pileser set Hoshea on the throne after the people had deposed Pekah.² The problems do not end with these difficulties. However, the fundamental problem can be visualized by means of the accompanying simple diagram (see Chart 1), which reveals a nine-year discrepancy for the accession of Ahaz.

A variety of methods have been proposed in attempts to secure consistency in the Biblical figures. Each of these in turn raises problems as large as the original, or larger. Most of these methods require recognition of highly improbable interregna (periods when no king was ruling) either in this late era or in the earlier period or both. Thiele properly rejected this concept of interregna and proposed a solution that moves the reign of Ahaz forward on the time scale from 744-728 B.C. to 735-715 B.C.,³ extending the reign from the stated 16 years to an unstated 20 years, during the last 14 of which Hezekiah served as coregent with his father.

The construction adopted in *The SDA Bible Commentary* follows closely that

proposed by Thiele. The construction is set forth as tentative and acknowledged to be incomplete, since it does not provide an explanation of 2 Kings 17:1 short of assuming a copyist error.⁴ This construction brings the accession of Ahaz into line with the seventeenth year of Pekah but at the expense of invalidating the synchronism between the twelfth year of Ahaz and the accession of Hoshea.

If this construction actually led to the expected harmony with Scripture by assuming *no more* than a single copyist error (as of 2 Kings 17:1), one might be able to live with such a solution with some minor discomfort. If this plain statement is in error, how are we to know how many and which other statements are in error?

Not the only difficulty

But this is not the only difficulty resulting from the acceptance of this proposed solution. There are several additional discrepancies of such magnitude that they cannot be ignored. There are also numerous additional discrepancies and un-

solved problems for the earlier period of antiquity that must be considered. It is the writer's contention that all of these are related to the same fundamental errors of interpretation and that hence the entire chronology of antiquity needs to be reconsidered. The incidents of the Exodus, the oppression, and the conquest under Joshua and others pose large problems for which the conventional chronological settings call for more and still more compromise of the dependability of the Scripture. A proposed reconstruction of this total chronology has been outlined in the writer's published volumes⁵ that eliminates these difficulties in virtual totality, as well as providing solutions to many problems inherent in the conventional structure. The discussions here must be limited to the problems in the era of the late kings of Israel. This necessary limitation is not to be construed as allowing that the total problem of Biblical chronology has been solved by a clarification of the apparent discrepancies in this late era.

My analysis of the problem, here as well as in the earlier period, is that we have followed popular opinion too slavishly in evaluating the data of archeology as compared with inspiration. To me, the proper approach to these problems is to start with the most secure points that archeology has to offer and work from there into areas of question and of lesser security, always maintaining a recognition of the authority of inspiration as standing above popular opinions relative to interpretations of obscure source materials.

This, I believe, has not been done in dealing with the problems relative to the Hebrew kings. Rather, an insecure interpretation of an earlier Assyrian inscription has been used as an anchor point,⁶ only to find that the developing structure does not link satisfactorily with the secure synchronism of the fall of Israel to the Assyrians in 722/721 B.C.

As an alternate approach in dealing with the present problem, we shall take as our anchor point the syn-

To a sundial

By PEARLE PEDEN ENGLAND

So short is life!

So few the days!

So jet-propelled our winging ways,

The moments pass, too soon emerge

As fluttering, flying, full-grown birds

Seconds, minutes

Hours and days,

All catapult to distant haze.

On migrant wings they circle wide

And fan the blue-cold sonic tide.

Thou, God, dost see

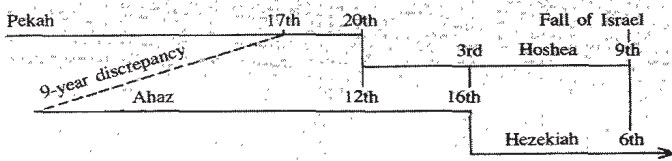
O'er span and space

The hours left a fallen face.

Help us to see through misty maze

How few the hours! How few the days!

Chart 1. The Accession of Ahaz.



chronism of the fall of Israel to the Assyrians in the ninth year of Hoshea of Israel and the sixth year of Hezekiah, king of Judah (2 Kings 19:10). This incident is mentioned in the Assyrian sources. The bases for the establishment of the date 722/721 B.C. have been presented in *The SDA Bible Commentary*.⁷ There were three kings in the era under consideration whose reigns are explicitly tied to this incident. These are Hoshea, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The stated reigns of these kings and their placement on the B.C. time scale are shown in **bold lines** on Chart 2. This unit is our starting point for arriving at an altered construction that is in agreement with both Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy and assumes no copyist errors.

By starting with this solid and fixed unit, two problems are immediately solved. If one proposes a coregency between Hezekiah and Ahaz, both Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy are contradicted. If such a coregency is assumed, we must recognize either that the reforms of Hezekiah were initiated and carried out when Hezekiah was coregent to his wicked father or that these reforms belong to the later reign of this king *after* the fall of Israel. Neither of these views is acceptable. In the sequence of events recorded in 2 Kings 18:1-10 and in 2 Chronicles 29:1, 2, these reforms are placed immediately after the accession of Hezekiah. This position is clearly confirmed in *Prophets and Kings*, page 331: "No sooner had he [Hezekiah] ascended the throne than he began to plan and to execute." That this *cannot* refer to an accession after the fall of Israel (and hence after a coregency with Ahaz) is indicated in the

subsequent statement "Soon Israel would fall completely into the hands of the Assyrians."—*Ibid.*, p. 332.

That these reforms could not have been carried out when Ahaz was still alive is recognized by *The SDA Bible Commentary*.⁸

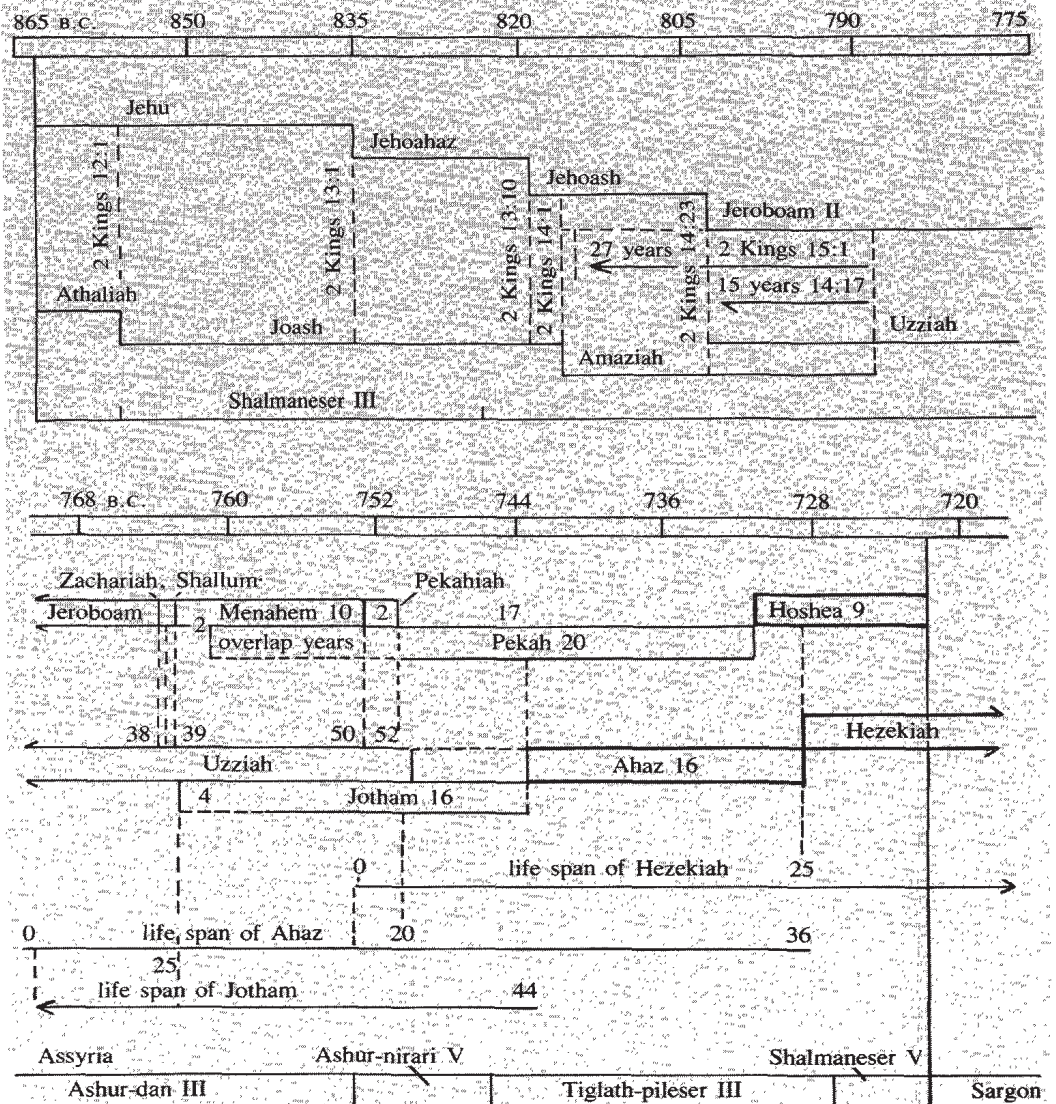
Anomalous also is the stated revolt of Hezekiah to the domination of the Assyrians, which incident also belongs prior to the fall of Israel (2 Kings 18:7). Such a bold political move by a coregent is incredible.

A further difficulty rises from the stated age of Ahaz as 20 (2 Kings 16:2) and of Hezekiah as 25 (2 Kings 18:2) when they began to reign. If Hezekiah was 25 in the sixth year before the fall of Israel (728 B.C.), and if Ahaz was 20 in the seventeenth year of Pekah in 735 B.C., then Hezekiah was born when his father was an infant. This absurdity is diminished, but not eliminated, by assuming the

statement to mean that he was 25 at the *end* of the assumed 15-year coregency with Ahaz. This still places Hezekiah's birth when his father was 14 years old. Furthermore, the assumption represents an inconsistent handling of Biblical data. Such statements of age at the beginning of reign otherwise are consistently in terms of the age at the beginning of coregency if there was a coregency (see 2 Kings 14:2; 15:2; 21:1). This applies also to Jotham, as will be shown shortly. The stated years of reign may or may not include the years of coregency.

Were it not for the uncertain meaning of the state-

Chart 2. Synchronization of Kings of Israel, Judah, and Assyria.



ment in 2 Kings 15:30 that seems to imply a reign of 20 years by Jotham, not 16 as stated in verse 33, and that these 20 years reach to the accession of Hoshea, we might add Pekah's 20-year reign to our *fixed unit*. Placement of the reigns of Hoshea and of Jotham are delayed until this point has been clarified. We proceed rather by setting up a tentative and "floating" unit not fixed to the B.C. time scale.

This unit is composed of the reigns of Zachariah (six months), Shallum (one month), Menahem (ten years), Pekahiah (two years), and Pekah (twenty years). These reigns are correlated with the reign of Uzziah by the stated synchronisms in 2 Kings 15:8, 13, 17, 23, and 27. Strangely, the reign of Jotham, son of Uzziah, is correlated with the second year of Pekah rather than a year in the reign of Uzziah (verse 32).

Single assumption

The entire problem may now be brought into focus by a single reasonable assumption, namely, that the years of Pekah that overlapped those of Pekahiah and Menahem⁹ were years in addition to the 20 years of verse 27. The stated correlations in the second and seventeenth years of Pekah (verse 32; 16:1) should then be related to this *total* reign, not to his 20-year reign. These extra years may not have been a true coregency. They may represent a rule from another site, possibly in Transjordan.¹⁰ These are examples of "double dating," a concept used by Thiele, correctly and to advantage, in ironing out the difficulties in the earlier era.¹¹ We may now calculate the date for the beginning of these overlapping years by moving back 17 years from the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, fixed by 2 Kings 16:1, to the year 745 B.C. These additional years of Pekah then began in 762 B.C., and his second year, which defines the beginning of the 16-year reign of Jotham, is 761 B.C. These 16 years reach just to the beginning of the *sole* reign of Ahaz. An unstated coregency evidently began with

the death of Uzziah and the accession of Jotham. The floating unit now is part of the fixed unit. Each king is set in a position in agreement with Scripture.

The meaning of the statement in 2 Kings 15:30 is now apparent. "The twentieth year of Jotham" should be read "The twentieth year from Jotham," as dated to the death of Uzziah. This interpretation has long been recognized.¹²

This structure now fits satisfactorily into the account of Uzziah's (Azariah) becoming a leper (2 Kings 15:5). Jotham was coregent with his father for four years. He then took over the major responsibility. The remaining years to the death of Uzziah are credited to both Uzziah and Jotham by the chronographer.

The ages of Jotham and Ahaz at the birth of their sons may now be calculated. Jotham was 18 at the birth of Ahaz, and Ahaz was 18 at the birth of Hezekiah. These ages seem surprisingly young for marriage, but not improbably so.

But someone asks, Are there not Assyrian inscriptions that do not allow recognition that the overlapping years of Pekah were in addition to the 20 years attributed to him? There are Assyrian inscriptions that have been so interpreted. The question is whether these inscriptions demand the interpretations placed on them. In a subsequent article these Assyrian inscriptions and the puzzling verse in 2 Kings 18:2 will be considered.

DONOVAN A. COURVILLE
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To be concluded

REFERENCES

- ¹ E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, chap. 2.
- ² D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria*, I, par. 816.
- ³ Thiele, *op. cit.*, Appendix B, p. 205.
- ⁴ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, p. 151.
- ⁵ D. A. Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*, 2 volumes. These volumes may be obtained through Adventist Book Centers or directly from Crest Challenge Books, Box 993, Loma Linda, California 92354 (\$9.95 per set postpaid).
- ⁶ *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 159. This inscription will be discussed in a subsequent article.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 151 ff. See also *SDA Bible Dictionary*, article "Chronology."
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 150.
- ¹⁰ See Chart 2, where these extra years are represented by a horizontal dotted line and the correlations by vertical dotted lines. See also *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 85.
- ¹¹ Thiele, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 64, 68-70.
- ¹² See margin reading of 2 Kings 15:30.

The Rock

By E. ROBERT REYNOLDS

Sailing through the Strait of Gibraltar, which joins the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean between Spain and Africa, I could dimly see the historic Rock—one of the Pillars of Hercules.

As a student of history I had learned that the Rock of Gibraltar passed to the British more than 240 years ago at the close of the War of Spanish Succession. As a visitor to the island some years ago, I had listened as tourists do to many of its legends.

One of the tales concerns Barbary apes, a species of tailless monkeys found in North Africa. How they came to live there, no one seems to know. One suggestion is that they came during the long Moslem rule of the area. As a tourist travels the less frequented roads on the Rock he sees monkeys scurrying over guardrails, across the hillside, or atop somebody's roof.

The legend of the apes concerns the British presence. As the saying goes, as long as the apes continue to live there the huge piece of granite that juts out of the sea will remain British property. So Gibraltar is unique in that it is the one place in the world where apes may play at least a legendary role in international politics.

The indigenous residents I saw during my visit there were mostly of Spanish and Italian descent, but they had become British in their dress, language, and loyalties. The British influence on the island can be seen, for example, in the automobile traffic pattern. If one travels to Gibraltar from Spain he will have to switch from a right-hand pattern, common throughout most of Europe today, to a left-hand pattern, common in many countries that Great Britain once ruled. A causeway connects the island to mainland Spain.

Pondering Gibraltar's Rock, I was reminded of another Rock. In the Old Testament, God is often referred to as the Rock. Thus, Moses, the earliest writer contributing to the Bible, says, "The Rock! His work is perfect. For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He" (Deut. 32:4, N.A.S.B.). Several more times in this song Moses refers to God by this same figure. For example, in verse 31 of the same passage, he says, "Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves judge this."

Using this same poetic language in 2 Samuel 22:2, 3, and again in verse 32, David composed these words and asks these questions (N.A.S.B.): "The Lord is my rock . . . My God, my rock." "For who is God, besides the Lord? And who is a rock, besides our God?" (In slightly altered form and words, this song of David appears as Psalm 18.) Over and over again, this figure for God is used in the Psalms. Parallel ideas appear also such as a shelter in a storm, a shade in the heat of the sun, a refuge, a place of strength. Note, for example, Psalm 91: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!'" (verses 1, 2, N.A.S.B.).

Isaiah speaks of this Rock also. In Isaiah 8:14 are these words: "Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over" (N.A.S.B.). Peter applies this verse as a prophecy of Christ (1 Peter 2:8). So does Paul (Rom. 9:32, 33).

Habakkuk employs the same figure. "Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? And Thou, O Rock, hast established them to correct" (Hab. 1:12, N.A.S.B.).

Truly there is no Rock like our God.

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“The mists and fogs cling to the earth; beyond the clouds God’s light is shining. Into the sunlight of His presence we may rise on the wings of faith.”--Education, pp. 118, 119.