

## WHEN WAS SAMARIA CAPTURED? THE NEED FOR PRECISION IN BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGIES

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### I. FACTORS THAT PRODUCE WRONG CHRONOLOGIES

The major factors that continue to produce confusion in the field of OT chronology are (1) the scholar imposes his schemes and presuppositions on the information available from the Scripture texts rather than first determining the methods used by the authors of Scripture and then accommodating his ideas to the methods of those authors; (2) even when the methods of Scripture are determined, the scholar fails to consider all the possibilities inherent in the scriptural texts; and (3) the scholar's methodology lacks precision and accuracy in the expression of dates and in the calculations based on those dates.

The first factor results in the largest amount of confusion, because the chronologies produced are generally very free in discarding the scriptural data that does not agree with the theories of the investigator, and those theories and their resultant chronologies are only acceptable to the narrow group that shares the same presuppositions about which data should be rejected.

For the second factor, the scholar may have determined the methods of the scriptural author and then adapted his presuppositions to those methods, but he still can overlook possibilities that are in keeping with his approach simply because he did not think of them. This was discussed in my two previous articles.<sup>1</sup> In those articles, examples were given of the consequences when a combination of factors was overlooked, and it was demonstrated that these overlooked possibilities can resolve problems that the original author could not adequately explain. The best-known example of this is Edwin Thiele's failure to consider a coregency between Ahaz and Hezekiah,<sup>2</sup> even though Thiele argued for a coregency to solve problems with other reign lengths—this will be discussed further below. Another example was the failure of most scholars to explore non-accession reckoning for the reign of Zedekiah, which is the main reason that many chronologies place the capture

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<sup>1</sup> Rodger Young, "When Did Solomon Die?" *JETS* 46 (2003) 589–603; "When Did Jerusalem Fall?" *JETS* 47 (2004) 21–38.

<sup>2</sup> Thiele's conclusions are presented in *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, which appeared in three editions: New York: Macmillan, 1951; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965; Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Kregel, 1983. Unless otherwise specified, page numbers cited are from the third edition.

of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar one year too late.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the first factor, this kind of oversight may not be due to any willful desire to advance a theory at the expense of the data, but because chronologists have not had the proper methodology which allows them to state all their presuppositions and then to lay out all the possibilities that are inherent in the combination of those presuppositions. My previous papers explained that there exists such a methodology and showed how it can be used to produce fruitful results in the chronological and historical disciplines.

The third factor, imprecise expressions and inaccurate arithmetic, is the subject of the present paper. Much of the advancement in science comes as a result of the development of more precise means of measurement. It is therefore surprising that when the greatest biblical chronologist of the twentieth century produced the third and final edition of his classic work on the subject, his figures were generally less precise, and the calculations by which he arrived at his results were more obscured, than was the case in his second edition. In the third edition, a single BC date was sometimes given instead of a notation that would indicate that the time span being discussed began in the autumn of a BC year and ended in the spring (or autumn) of the next year. Despite Thiele's explanation that this single BC figure was used "to simplify the discussion,"<sup>4</sup> anyone who tries to use these inexact dates, and to check Thiele's calculations by which he arrived at the dates, will find that the more precise figures of the second edition are easier to use. Imprecision fosters confusion, not simplicity.

## II. THE CONFUSION CAUSED BY INEXACTNESS

As an example of the confusion that can be caused by this kind of inexactness, consider Thiele's treatment of the reign of Athaliah. His dates for

<sup>3</sup> In Young, "Jerusalem," it was shown that the years for Zedekiah are given by the non-accession method in both 2 Kings and Jeremiah. This was not recognized earlier because the switch to non-accession counting came right at the end of the Judean kingdom and no simple clues are given to indicate that the change was taking place. By applying a proper methodology that first asks how Jeremiah and 2 Kings 25 treat the reign of Zedekiah, we can determine that the authors used non-accession reckoning, but this still does not provide the reason for the change in the method of counting. The reason, indeed, can be as arbitrary as the whim of the reigning king. Zedekiah could have said, "This is the way we're going to count my years. Don't ask any more questions." Although we do not know why the change took place, if we refused to consider anything but accession years for Zedekiah we would be guilty of a Factor One error (forcing our presuppositions on the data).

One scholar who explored non-accession counting for Zedekiah was Alberto Green ("The Chronology of the Last Days of Judah: Two Apparent Discrepancies," *JBL* 101/1 [1982] 70). Green rejected this hypothesis when he showed that non-accession reckoning would not work for the reign length given to Jehoiakim in 2 Kings 23:36. He then assumed that because non-accession years were not possible for Jehoiakim in 2 Kings 23, neither were they possible for Zedekiah in Jeremiah or 2 Kings 25. Green was correct in saying that non-accession reckoning is not used for Jehoiakim in 2 Kings, but both Jeremiah and 2 Kings use non-accession reckoning for Zedekiah. It is unfortunate that Green missed this, because his article exhibits one of the best examples of attempting to examine all the possibilities before settling on a solution to a chronological problem.

<sup>4</sup> Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers* 87, footnote.

her are given in BC terms as 841 to 835.<sup>5</sup> At first glance, this seems consistent with the statement on the same page giving her reign as “seven years, non-accession reckoning, or six actual years,” because it is indeed six years from 841 BC to 835 BC. However, the date for the death of Athaliah was also specified more exactly as “some time between Nisan and Tishri of 835.” This means her last official year by Judean (Tishri) reckoning was between Tishri 1 of 836 BC and Tishri 1 of 835 BC, and her six-year (accession) reign began in Tishri of 842, in contradiction to the last year of Ahaziah and beginning year of Athaliah which Thiele calculated on a previous page as starting in Tishri of 841 BC.<sup>6</sup> When the dates are written like this in the necessarily inexact BC form, a problem can be hidden and the necessary corrective steps will not be taken. It is like de-focusing a microscope, with the result that hidden flaws in the material being investigated are not revealed.

To avoid confusion caused by such inexact dating, scholars would do well to adopt a notation that expresses the kind of year that was actually used by the nation being studied. For the history of Judah, this would be a year beginning in the month of Tishri (the autumn), whereas dates from Israel, Babylon, or Assyria would be expressed in years beginning in Nisan (the spring). Many writers have already done this, of course, but no uniform method of representing Nisan-years or Tishri-years has been agreed upon.

This lack of a common nomenclature for the basic building blocks of the trade is rather strange. It is a hindrance to the unambiguous expression of ideas and an impediment to progress in the field. Compare this with the situation in other areas of research, for example in the field of chemistry. Once chemists had formulated the basic concept of an element, symbols were agreed upon to represent the various elements. Then a convention for formulas was developed in order to express the interaction between elements to form compounds. In chronology, these basic steps have not been taken; there is no standard way to express those two fundamental building blocks of the biblical chronologist, the Tishri year and the Nisan year. Another fundamental building block is the six-month time period representing the overlap of a Nisan year from Israel (or Babylon) and a Tishri year from Judah. Along with a common nomenclature for these basic concepts, there should be a standard method of writing elapsed-time formulas, one that demonstrates clearly whether the time is measured in an accession or non-accession sense.

Perhaps at some meeting of an archaeological or historical society there will be a sufficient number of scholars present who want to bring uniformity to this field, and they will be able to establish a standard. Until that is done, it would be a benefit to all readers if the writer of a technical article would first declare a simple method of expressing both Tishri and Nisan years, and then adhere to that symbolism through the development parts of the paper, *in particular those parts dealing with synchronisms*. At the end, after all

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 104.

<sup>6</sup> The resolution of this difficulty is explained in my “Solomon” paper. Thiele’s ending date for Athaliah is correct, but the regnal years of Ahaziah and the previous kings of Judah must be moved back one year.

the “chronology arithmetic” has been worked out, the resultant dates could be displayed in a BC format, if that is desirable.

In the present paper the expression “931n” will be used to represent the year beginning on Nisan 1, 931 BC and ending the day before Nisan 1, 930 BC. “931t” will represent the year beginning Tishri 1, 931 BC and ending the day before Tishri 1, 930 BC. The six-month overlap of these two dates will be written as 931t/930n. The overlap of 932t and 931n will be written as 931n/931t. When an elapsed-time figure is given in non-accession terms, then the accession equivalent will be used in formulas with “(acc)” following; thus a king who began in 931t and reigned for eleven years by non-accession reckoning would have his terminal date calculated as  $931t - 10 \text{ (acc)} = 921t$ . All this may be called the “Nisan/Tishri” notation.

In the three sections following, these conventions will be applied to the chronological data in the Scriptures for the eighth century BC. This will not affect the precise dates given in Thiele’s second edition for the last kings of Israel, except that it will narrow the end of Hoshea’s reign to the first half of 723n. The regnal dates of Judean kings will then be calculated based on the dates from Israel and the Scripture texts. For these Judean kings, it will be shown that there is a general consensus among several writers who have attempted to set straight the confusion introduced when Thiele rejected the scriptural synchronisms between Hezekiah of Judah and Hoshea of Israel.

Thiele’s rejection of the Hezekiah/Hoshea synchronisms has puzzled many commentators. The synchronisms are explained readily enough by positing a coregency between Ahaz and Hezekiah. Thiele assumed that Hezekiah’s predecessors in the eighth century—Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz—had coregencies with their fathers, so why not Hezekiah? Several authors put forth this rather obvious solution, among whom were Kenneth Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, Siegfried Horn, Harold Stigers, R. K. Harrison, Leslie McFall, and Eugene Merrill.<sup>7</sup> All of these authors except McFall and Merrill published before Thiele’s third edition was printed, and the *NBD* article (Kitchen and Mitchell) appeared before Thiele’s second edition, as did the Horn article. Yet in neither the second edition nor the third did Thiele address the solution—even to refute it—that all of these authors offered, namely an Ahaz/Hezekiah coregency that ended with the death of Ahaz in approximately 716 BC. This is especially puzzling since Thiele knew Horn personally, and both men were on the faculty of Andrews University at the same time. In various places in *Mysterious Numbers*, Thiele chides those who do not accept the principle of “dual dating,” that is, counting regnal years from the beginning of a coregency, which explains so many otherwise contradictory reign lengths and synchronisms. Yet the Ahaz/Hezekiah coregency, which makes

<sup>7</sup> K. A. Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell in *NBD* 217; S. H. Horn, “The Chronology of King Hezekiah’s Reign,” *AUSS* 2 (1964) 48–52; Harold Stigers, “The Interphased Chronology of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Hoshea,” *BETS* 9/2 (1966) 88–90; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 734; Leslie McFall, “Did Thiele Overlook Hezekiah’s Coregency?” *BSac* 146/584 (Oct–Dec 1989) 400–402; Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 410.

sense out of the one area where he rejected biblical inerrancy, was apparently never treated as an option.<sup>8</sup>

In order to undo the confusion that this introduced into the chronology of the eighth century BC, we must carefully review the Scriptures that allow us to reconstruct regnal dates for this period for both Israel and Judah.

### III. DATES FOR THE LAST KINGS OF ISRAEL

Our starting point will be the fall of Samaria. Thiele's argument<sup>9</sup> that this occurred in 723n during the reign of Shalmaneser V will not be repeated. From this date, the reigns of the six last kings of Israel will be derived. In the text of the third edition of *Mysterious Numbers*, the calculation of precise dates for these kings is omitted; only the years (BC) are given. The following discussion will reconstruct the precise dates in a fashion similar to that of Thiele's second edition, but will add information from the Hoshea/Hezekiah synchronisms (rejected by Thiele) so that the terminal date for Hoshea can be specified more precisely.

The year 723n when Samaria fell was Hoshea's 9th year (2 Kgs 18:10), so his first year was 732n, when he slew his predecessor, Pekah. All these last kings of Israel used accession reckoning.<sup>10</sup> The contention of Cook and Thiele that Pekah, in Gilead, began a rival reign to Menahem's rule in Samaria after Shallum's death will be accepted here as the only solution that has explained adequately the chronological data associated with Pekah.<sup>11</sup> Pekah's

<sup>8</sup> "Thiele's omission of Hezekiah's coregency in the third edition of his book is inexcusable, given the number of reviews that were published following the appearance of his work in 1951 and 1965 challenging his treatment of 2 Kings 17–18. Several reviewers pointed Thiele in the right direction by suggesting a coregency for Hezekiah, which made perfectly good sense of the text as it stood . . . and which conformed to Thiele's own principles of interpreting similar data. Horn noted the fact that such a coregency was suggested as long ago as 1905 and 1911." Leslie McFall, "A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles," *BSac* 148/589 (1991) 33, 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Mysterious Numbers* chapter 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 105.

<sup>11</sup> The interested reader is referred to H. J. Cook, "Pekah," *VT* 14/2 (1964) 121–35, and to Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers* 129–32. However, Thiele and Cook could have said more about one verse in Hosea that clearly distinguishes Israel and Ephraim as different entities at the time that Hosea wrote, and which therefore provides a definitive biblical support for the brief existence of two rival kingdoms in the north. That verse is Hosea 5:5, which appears as follows in the MT:

וְעֵנָה גֵּאֵן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָנָיו  
 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶפְרַיִם יִכְשְׁלוּ בְעֵינָם  
 כִּשְׁל גַּם יְהוּדָה עִמָּם:

for which a literal translation is

And the pride of Israel testifies against him (to his face).

Both Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their sin;

Judah also stumbled with them.

Thiele and Cook noticed the plural "them" in the third line, showing that Israel and Ephraim were considered separate entities in the second line. But neither of these commentators remarked on the construction of the second line, where "Israel" and "Ephraim" are both preceded by a *vav*. This is the normal mode of expressing "both . . . and" in Hebrew, and it shows that the construction "Israel, even Ephraim" taken by many translations is not warranted. The LXX translates this literally, using *καί* . . . *καί*, which is the Greek way of expressing "both . . . and." This verse then

twenty-year reign and the rivalry with Menahem began in  $732n + 20 = 752n$ . This year is called the thirty-ninth of Uzziah in 2 Kings 15:17. The year-figure for Uzziah must be reckoned from a coregency with his father Amaziah, and so this will be taken as a non-accession number, as with other coregencies.<sup>12</sup> But the question arises: did Menahem begin in the first half of the year ( $752n/752t$ ) or in the latter half ( $752t/751n$ )? If the former, then Uzziah's thirty-ninth year by Judean (Tishri) reckoning was 753t and his starting year was  $753t + 38$  (acc) = 791t. If the latter, then Uzziah's starting year was  $752t + 38$  (acc) = 790t.

790t is not possible as a starting date for Uzziah for the following reason. His fiftieth year, in which Menahem died (2 Kgs 15:23), would then be 790t - 49 (acc) = 741t, which has no overlap with the end of Menahem's ten-year reign in  $752n - 10 = 742n$ . A 791t starting date for Uzziah puts his fiftieth year in 742t, which overlaps 742n in 742t/741n. This marks the end of Menahem's reign and the beginning of Pekahiah's.

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is a direct substantiation of the existence of two distinct kingdoms in the north when Hosea wrote, and the verses related to Pekah, Menahem, and Pekahiah in 2 Kings show the identity of the rival rulers.

The objections to Pekah being a rival to Menahem usually center on Pekah's position as an officer in the army of Pekahiah, Menahem's son and successor (2 Kgs 15:25). But there is nothing inherently unreasonable about two rivals reaching a *détente* under which one contender accepts a subordinate position, and he then bides his time until the opportunity comes to slay his rival (or his rival's son) in a coup. Once the rivalry had begun, the external threat (Assyria) provided compelling reasons for a *détente*.

Events in the life of Thutmose III of Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty have several resemblances to the career of Pekah. On the death of Thutmose II, there was some confusion about the succession to the throne. Thutmose III, the heir apparent, was the son of a minor wife of the deceased monarch and was still a child. The chief wife, Hatshepsut, had no male offspring. Within a few years after the death of her husband, Hatshepsut had become more than just a guardian regent for her stepson. She assumed the full pharaonic regalia and had herself crowned as pharaoh. Like Pekah, Thutmose III found that he had a rival for the throne, and he was subjugated under a more powerful personage, in this case his stepmother. Like Pekah, Thutmose after a few years was given a position as commander in the army. Like Pekah, he strengthened his hand in this position until one day there came a chance to seize the throne. It is possible that Thutmose killed his stepmother. There is no direct evidence of this, but the circumstantial evidence is that Hatshepsut's mummy has never been found, and the new pharaoh defaced her monuments, erasing her image from them. Like Pekah, Thutmose also dated his years from the beginning of the time when the rivalry began. Thus the campaign in his first year of full possession of the kingdom is dated in his monuments to his twenty-second year, whereas anyone who recognized Hatshepsut as a legitimate pharaoh would have called it his first year. Further, as in the case of Pekah, the full story of this rivalry and why Thutmose's first year is also his twenty-second year is not spelled out in the extant records of the time, but must be inferred as a reasonable deduction from the records we do have.

Do those who reject the Menahem/Pekah rivalry as improbable also reject as improbable this reconstruction from Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty that Egyptologists use to explain the regnal dates of Thutmose III? How do they explain Hosea 5:5?

<sup>12</sup> Thiele (*Mysterious Numbers* 109, 111) desired to bring the beginning of the Amaziah/Uzziah coregency as close as possible to the beginning of the Jehoash/Jeroboam II coregency in Israel, and so he used accession reckoning when calculating the beginning of Uzziah's coregency, contrary to his practice for coregencies elsewhere. Although this is possible, there is nothing that requires it, and for the sake of consistency we shall treat synchronisms to the reign of Uzziah as non-accession numbers. Thus Thiele would reckon the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah, when Menahem began, by subtracting 39 from 792t, whereas we shall reckon it in a non-accession sense by subtracting 38 from 791t.

Zechariah's reign began in the thirty-eighth year of Uzziah (2 Kgs 15:8), that is in 791t - 37 (acc) = 754t. He reigned six months, which must have crossed the 753-Tishri boundary, since his successor Shallum started in the thirty-ninth of Uzziah (2 Kgs 15:13); so we start Zechariah's reign in 753n/753t and end it in 753t/752n.

**Zechariah****Elul 753 - Adar 752****Shallum****Adar 752 - Nisan 752**

Shallum killed Zechariah and reigned one month, at the end of which he was assassinated by Menahem. Previously we had determined that Menahem began in 752n. This means that Shallum, beginning in 753t/752n and therefore before Nisan of 752, must have started his one-month reign in Adar (the month before Nisan) of 752, ending in Nisan of 752. The starting date for Menahem and his rival Pekah was therefore Nisan 752. The dates for Zechariah, starting six months before Shallum, were Elul (the month before Tishri, approximately September) of 753 to Adar of 752.

**Menahem****Nisan 752 - 742t/741n****Pekahiah****742t/741n - 740t/739n**

Menahem's reign was shown to end in 742t/741n. His son Pekahiah's two-year reign ended in the fifty-second of Uzziah (2 Kgs 15:23, 27), which was 791t - 51 (acc) = 740t. By Nisan reckoning the two years ended in 742n - 2 = 740n, so the overlap is 740t/739n for the death of Pekahiah by the hand of Pekah.

The synchronisms between Hezekiah and Hoshea, given in 2 Kings 18, will now be used to establish the years for Hezekiah and then to specify more exactly the dates for Hoshea.

Hezekiah's coregency with Ahaz began in the third year of Hoshea, which was 732n - 3 = 729n (2 Kgs 18:1). If it was in the first half of the year, then by Judean reckoning Hezekiah began in 730t; if it was in the second half of Hoshea's third year, then it was 729t. But 730t is not possible, since it makes Hezekiah's fourth year to be 730t - 3 (acc) = 727t, which has no overlap with Hoshea's seventh year, 732n - 7 = 725n, as required by 2 Kings 18:9. Starting Hezekiah in 729t gives his fourth year as 729t - 3 (acc) = 726t, which overlaps 725n in 725n/725t. Therefore the Ahaz/Hezekiah coregency began in 729t, or more exactly, 729t/728n.

Samaria was captured in Hezekiah's sixth year, 729t - 5 (acc) = 724t (2 Kgs 18:10). This overlaps with the date that Thiele had established, 723n, in 723n/723t, showing that Samaria fell and Hoshea was killed in the first half of the year. This interesting conclusion reinforces the well-reasoned claim of Olmstead, Thiele, and Tadmor that it was Shalmaneser and not Sargon who captured Samaria.<sup>13</sup> Since Samaria fell before Tishri 1 of 723 BC, Sargon's accession in Tebeth of 722n (December 722 BC or January 721 BC) was at least fifteen months later.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. chapter 8. Using the same reasoning regarding the sixth year of Hezekiah, Leslie McFall ("Translation Guide" 35) also concluded that the date of Hoshea's death could be restricted to 723n/723t.

**Pekah****740t/739n – 732t/731n****Rival to Menahem, Nisan 752****Hoshea****732t/731n – 723n/723t**

Hoshea's accession is placed in the twentieth year of Jotham by 2 Kings 15:30. Twenty years before 732n is well before the death of Uzziah (see 2 Kgs 15:23, 27), so we are justified in assuming that Jotham's twentieth year is measured from the beginning of a coregency with Uzziah and is therefore a non-accession figure. The Uzziah/Jotham coregency thus began in either 733t + 19 (acc) = 752t or 732t + 19 (acc) = 751t. The first alternative is not possible, since there is no overlap of 752t with the second year of Pekah in which Jotham began to reign (2 Kgs 15:32), which was 752n - 2 = 750n. The second alternative, 751t, overlaps 750n in 750n/750t, which must therefore define the start of the Uzziah/Jotham coregency. A further consequence is that Jotham's twentieth year, in which Hoshea began, must be 751t - 19 (acc) = 732t. Overlap of this figure with the 732n time frame that was established earlier for Hoshea's accession restricts that date to the six-month interval 732t/731n. This marks also the death of Pekah, whose beginning date of Nisan 752n was derived earlier, as was the date of his assassination of Pekahiah in 740t/739n.

The table for the last six kings of Israel may now be filled in as below. These dates are in agreement with those of Thiele's second edition except that the date of Hoshea's death is narrowed from 723n to 723n/723t. The text and table in Thiele's third edition give dates in terms of BC years, which was a step backward in exactness and in providing testability of the figures.

Table 1. *Dates for last six kings of Israel*

<i>King</i>	<i>Began rivalry</i>	<i>Began sole reign</i>	<i>Ended</i>
Zechariah		753 Elul (Sept.)	752 Adar (March)
Shallum		752 Adar	752 Nisan (April)
Menahem		752 Nisan	742t/741n
Pekahiah		742t/741n	740t/739n
Pekah	752 Nisan	740t/739n	732t/731n
Hoshea		732t/731n	723n/723t

## IV. KINGS OF JUDAH IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY BC

Dates for the last six kings of Israel may now be used to establish beginning and ending dates for the kings of Judah in the eighth century BC.

**Amaziah****796n/796t – 767n/767t**

1. *Amaziah*. Amaziah began in the second year of Jehoash (2 Kgs 14:1), which was 798n - 2 = 796n (Thiele's dates will be used for Jehoash and Jeroboam II). His accession year, by Judean reckoning, could have been either

797t or 796t. 796t is ruled out because Amaziah's fifteenth year, in which Jeroboam II began (2 Kgs 14:23), would then be 796t - 15 = 781t,<sup>14</sup> which has no overlap with the established date of 782n for the beginning of Jeroboam's sole reign. Starting Amaziah in 797t makes his fifteenth year to be 782t, which overlaps Jeroboam's starting year in 782t/781n. Amaziah thus began his reign in 796n/796t. Since he ruled for twenty-nine years, his last year must have been 797t - 29 = 768t. This can be refined further by placing it in the twenty-seventh year from the beginning of the Jehoash/Jeroboam II coregency (2 Kgs 15:1), which was 793n - 26 (acc) = 767n. The overlap is 767n/767t for the death of Amaziah.

### **Uzziah**

**767n/767t - 740t**

**Coregent 791t**

2. *Uzziah*. The beginning of his coregency with Amaziah was established in Section III as 791t. His fifty-two year reign ended in 791t - 51 (acc) = 740t. His sole reign began on the death of his father in 767n/767t.

3. *Jotham*. Jotham began as coregent with Uzziah in 750n/750t, as was determined in the discussion of Hoshea. His son Ahaz was installed in the seventeenth year of Pekah (2 Kgs 16:1), which was 752n - 17 = 735n. In some sense it must have been considered that this date marked the termination of the effective rule of Jotham, because Jotham is only given sixteen years by the reference in 2 Kings 15:33, which would end his reign in 751t - 15 (acc) = 736t. The overlap with the seventeenth of Pekah, 735n, is 735n/735t for the termination of Jotham's sixteen years. However, Jotham did not die at that time, because a twentieth year is ascribed to him by the synchronism to Hoshea in 2 Kings 15:30.

Thus, according to one record, Jotham reigned only sixteen years, ending when Ahaz came to the throne, while according to another record he was alive and was considered the king at least four years beyond that date. This suggests that 735n/735t did not mark the start of a normal coregency, but the events of that year were more in the nature of a coup, brought about by a faction which feared the growing power of Assyria. In this regard, Thiele wrote that "[i]n 735 it is altogether likely that a pro-Assyrian group felt itself strong enough to force Jotham into retirement and to place Ahaz on the throne. Although Jotham continued to live to his twentieth year (II Kings 15:30), 732/31, it was Ahaz who directed affairs from 735."<sup>15</sup> Ahaz and his court represented a pro-Assyrian policy that was in contrast to the anti-Assyrian policies of Jotham who preceded him and of Hezekiah who followed.

<sup>14</sup> It can be shown by synchronisms between Judah and Israel that the reign of Amaziah must be measured in an accession sense. My "Jerusalem" article showed that the thirty-one years of Josiah (2 Kgs 22:1) were also by accession reckoning. As a consequence, it will be assumed that the regnal years for the intervening kings of Judah whose reign lengths are measured from their sole reign (Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Amon) are expressed in the same way.

<sup>15</sup> Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers* 2d ed. 127.

The reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were marked by this bitter factionalism over the policy toward Assyria, and also over the accommodations that were made to foreign customs and religion during the time of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16; 2 Chr 28). Although Thiele saw that such factionalism explains why one record gave Jotham sixteen years and another record gave him twenty years of reign, he did not see that it also explains why in one place the reign of Hoshea is synchronized with Ahaz (2 Kgs 17:1), whereas other records synchronize Hoshea with the anti-Assyrian kings, Jotham (2 Kgs 15:30) and Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:1, 9, 10). The court records made during the days while Ahaz was in control are responsible for the synchronism of Hoshea to Ahaz and the granting of only sixteen years to Jotham. With the religious and political reform that took place after Hezekiah took full control, however, the viewpoint prevailed that Jotham was still a legitimate ruler until his twentieth year. This same viewpoint recognized Hezekiah as a legitimate ruler during the Ahaz/Hezekiah coregency and synchronized events in the reign of Hoshea of Israel with the years of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:9, 10), even though Ahaz was the senior partner in the coregency during those years.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas Thiele discarded the Hoshea/Hezekiah synchronisms as an error and the invention of a later redactor, the proper understanding of these records shows that they reflect the political situation of the time. The fact that the pro-Ahaz synchronisms have been preserved at all after the ultimate triumph of the anti-Assyrian policy under Hezekiah indicates strongly that the final editor of Kings was preserving official court records from the days of Ahaz as well as the later records from the days of Hezekiah.

Thiele provided the insight that the sources of the Books of Kings were the annals kept by the schools of the prophets, with one or more schools active in Judah and one or more in Israel.<sup>17</sup> This is certainly consistent with the general idea that the principal authors, and certainly the final editors, of the various books of the Bible were holy men of God who were led by the Holy Spirit. At the same time, these prophets who gave us the Books of Kings must have been careful in their writings to reflect the official policy in their days regarding who was the legitimate ruler and when he began to reign. The “book of the annals of the kings of Judah” and the “book of the annals of the kings of Israel,” to which repeated references are made in

<sup>16</sup> In AD 15, the Romans deposed Annas from the office of high priest and installed in his place his son-in-law Caiaphas. Many Jews, however, continued to consider Annas as the legitimate holder of the office. This difference in viewpoint regarding who was the high priest is reflected in the Gospels and Acts, and is one of the many evidences that these accounts were not written in a later generation when people had no direct knowledge of the times. It would be a very shallow criticism to maintain that the divergence over who was to be called high priest in the Gospels and Acts was due to mistakes by the authors. In the same way, the difference in viewpoint regarding who was the legitimate king in the days of Ahaz reflects accurately the turmoil of the period. It would defy reason to maintain that the tension inherent in these records and reflecting the two opposing factions of the times could have been contrived by a later editor. More specifically, it is most unlikely that the pro-Ahaz and anti-Jotham synchronisms could have originated at any time later than the death of Ahaz and the reforms of Hezekiah in 716t.

<sup>17</sup> *Mysterious Numbers* chapter 10.

Kings, sound like the titles of official court records rather than the titles of records kept by the prophets themselves.<sup>18</sup> The phrase used to describe these sources, (יהודה) ספר דברי הימים למלכי ישראל, is similar to that used for court records from the days of David (1 Chr 27:24) as well as the court records of Persia (Esth 2:23, 6:1, 10:2). The prophets who wrote the Books of Kings, then, had access to the official court records of Israel and Judah, but they kept their own records which included a moral evaluation of each king's reign, as Thiele maintained. The vacillation regarding "who's on first" was inherent in the court records, explaining why one set of synchronisms in Judah favored Jotham and Hezekiah while another favored Ahaz.

A similar situation held for references to rulers of the northern kingdom. Some synchronisms recognized Pekah as the legitimate ruler while others recognized Menahem and Pekahiah. According to Thiele, "While Pekah ruled in Gilead, Menahem was on the throne in Samaria, and Jotham's accession could have been synchronized with him. The reason why Pekah was recognized in the synchronism of Jotham's accession was probably because of his strong anti-Assyrian stand, as against the conciliatory attitude of Menahem. Judah at this time was strongly anti-Assyrian."<sup>19</sup> It is again the factionalism preserved from the official court records that explains the conflict over who was recognized as legitimate ruler during the Pekah/Menahem rivalry.

### **Jotham**

**740t – 735n/735t**

**Coregent 750n/750t**

**Deposed 735n/735t, died 732t**

To conclude Jotham's dates, we notice that his sole reign must have begun when Uzziah died, in 740t. For now, we shall assume that the last year mentioned for Jotham, his twentieth, was also the year of his death (732t). This assumption will be shown to be reasonable in the discussion for Ahaz.

### **Ahaz**

**732t – 716t/715n**

**Coregent 735n/735t**

4. *Ahaz*. The date when Jotham was deposed and Ahaz took the throne was established above as 735n/735t. Ahaz's death may be established as occurring fourteen years before the invasion of Sennacherib in the first half of 701n (2 Kgs 18:13), that is in 702t + 14 = 716t. This date may be further restricted to the first half of 716t, because Hezekiah's reforms started at the beginning of Nisan 715 (2 Chr 29:3, 17–19), at which time Ahaz is spoken of as if he were no longer alive (2 Chr 29:19).<sup>20</sup> His sixteen years of sole reign

<sup>18</sup> Siegfried Horn came to a similar conclusion. "The compilers of the books of Kings and Chronicles used official sources containing chronological data. Except in a few cases (see below Group I and II) these data were taken over and incorporated into Kings and Chronicles without changes and without any attempts to harmonize them with each other." Horn, *Hezekiah's Reign* 42.

<sup>19</sup> Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers* 132.

<sup>20</sup> McFall, "Translation Guide" 36.

(2 Kgs 16:2) started in 716t + 16 = 732t. This establishes the fact that 732t was indeed the year that Jotham died and gives legitimacy to his kingship during the last four years of his life. By the “documentary hypothesis” we have advocated above, any record such as 2 Kings 16:2 that recognized these last four years for Jotham must have come from the annals of the anti-Assyrian and anti-Ahaz court that prevailed after the death of Ahaz. Ahaz is given sixteen years in these annals, measuring from the start of his sole reign, instead of the twenty or twenty-one years that he would be credited with if the counting started from 736t, when he deposed Jotham. Whether the alternate starting date of 736t was ever used to measure the years of Ahaz’s reign will be discussed below, in the section dealing with 2 Kings 17:1.

### Hezekiah

**716t/715n – 687t**

**Coregent 729t/728n**

5. *Hezekiah.* Hezekiah’s sole reign began at the death of Ahaz in 716t/715n. His coregency with Ahaz started in 729t/728n, as was shown in the discussion of Hoshea. His reign was twenty-nine years long; this does not give sufficient time if measured from 729t, so it must measure from the start of his sole reign.<sup>21</sup> His death occurred in 716t – 29 = 687t.

Dates for the eighth-century kings of Judah are shown in Table 2. The ending date in parentheses for Jotham is the date he was deposed, as discussed above—it was the date the court recorders under Ahaz considered that his effective kingship ended.

Table 2. *Dates for the kings of Judah, Amaziah through Hezekiah*

<i>King</i>	<i>Began coregency</i>	<i>Began sole reign</i>	<i>Ended</i>
Amaziah		796n/796t	767n/767t
Uzziah	791t	767n/767t	740t
Jotham	750n/750t	740t	(735n/735t) 732t
Ahaz	735n/735t	732t	716t/715n
Hezekiah	729t/728n	716t/715n	687t

#### V. THE TROUBLESOME PASSAGE 2 KINGS 17:1

For the six kings of Israel and the five kings of Judah in the discussion above, a complete chronology was developed without making use of a syn-

<sup>21</sup> Hezekiah’s age of twenty-five years cannot refer to the time when he became coregent with his father, because Ahaz would not have been old enough to have a twenty-five-year-old son at that time. The age of twenty-five for Hezekiah must refer to the start of his sole reign in 716t, as does the twenty-nine year figure for the length of reign. This means that Hezekiah was twelve years old in 729t, the year he became coregent. Later, Hezekiah was to choose his own successor and coregent “at the earliest opportunity . . . when Manasseh was twelve (2 Kings 21:1), when he had become *gadol*” (Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers* 177).

chronism in 2 Kings 17:1 that relates the reign of Hoshea of Israel to the twelfth year of Ahaz. Thiele wrote regarding this verse that it erroneously placed the accession of Hoshea twelve years beyond its proper time,<sup>22</sup> and he then used it as a key to explain what he regarded as a series of blunders performed by the final editor of the Books of Kings. It would have been better if Thiele had accepted it as a text that needed emending because of a copyist's error, instead of using it as a reason to reject the plainly stated synchronisms between Hezekiah and Hoshea in 2 Kings 18.

A more cautious approach was taken by Siegfried Horn. Horn has been mentioned above as one of the authors who accepted the Ahaz/Hezekiah coregency implied by the synchronisms of 2 Kings 18. But regarding 2 Kings 17:1, Horn wrote that "[o]ne text of my former Group II, 2 Ki 17:1, remains unsolved as far as the chronological data it contains are concerned . . . the figure given in 2 Ki 17:1, stating that Hoshea became king in Ahaz' 12th year, does not agree with the chronological scheme proposed here, and I have no better solution at the present time than to suggest that the figure 12 is a scribal error for three or four."<sup>23</sup> Later events were to show the wisdom of Horn's caution.

In most English translations, 2 Kings 17:1 associates the beginning of the reign of Hoshea with the twelfth year of Ahaz. The problem with this is that other verses, as we have developed above, begin the Jotham/Ahaz coregency in 736t. If 732t/731n, when Hoshea began, was the twelfth year of Ahaz, then his starting year for a coregency should have been  $732t + 11 (\text{acc}) = 743t$ . Ahaz would then have three starting years: 732t for his sole reign based on the death of Jotham; 735n/735t based on the beginning of a coregency with Jotham in the seventeenth of Pekah (2 Kgs 16:1); and this new date, 743t, twelve years before Hoshea's first year.

Measuring twelve years back from 732t at least made sense out of the anomalous synchronism, and so the year 743t was posited as the real beginning of the Jotham/Ahaz coregency and 735n/735t was regarded as another stage in the coregency when Ahaz took full control. Given the strife between the pro-Assyrian and anti-Assyrian factions at the time, this solution seemed reasonable. It was proposed by Kitchen and Mitchell (Ahaz coregent from 744/43 BC, senior partner from 735), and adopted by R. K. Harrison (same dates and explanation as Kitchen and Mitchell), by Harold Stigers, and by Eugene Merrill.<sup>24</sup> These authors thus agreed that the first phase of the coregency between Ahaz and Hezekiah was to be dated twelve years before the accession of Hoshea.

Four years after the publication of Siegfried Horn's article in which he expressed his perplexity with 2 Kings 17:1, Horn as editor published an

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>23</sup> Horn, *Hezekiah's Reign* 51, 52.

<sup>24</sup> Kitchen and Mitchell, *NBD* 220; Harrison, *Introduction* 734, 736; Stigers, "Interphased Chronology" 86, 87; Merrill, *Kingdom* 403. Stigers measured Ahaz's sixteen years from 736/35 BC rather than from the death of Jotham in 732t, so he introduced another date, 720/719 BC, to end those sixteen years, at which time Stigers said he became king "emeritus."

article in the *AUSS* by Edmund Parker which dealt specifically with this text.<sup>25</sup> Parker's idea was simple and seemingly audacious: the synchronism to Ahaz's twelfth year referred not to the beginning of the reign of Hoshea, but to its end.

Before investigating the reason for Parker's claim, let us see how the numbers come out. We have already established from other texts that the Jotham/Ahaz coregency began (at least in one sense) in 735n/735t. If we treat this like any other coregency, then the twelve years should be taken as a non-accession figure, so that the twelfth year of Ahaz was 736t - 11 (acc) = 725t. Since this has no overlap with the last year of Hoshea, 723n, should we reject Parker's interpretation without further investigation?

Recall that, according to our "documentary hypothesis" about the factionalism of the time and its influence on the court records, there were two competing ways of reckoning who was the legitimate authority in Judah during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The pro-Jotham and pro-Hezekiah faction synchronized the reign of Hoshea with Jotham (2 Kgs 15:30) and also with Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:1, 9, 10). On the other hand, the pro-Ahaz court synchronized the reign of Hoshea with Ahaz (2 Kgs 17:1), and did not recognize Jotham as regent during the last four years of his life (2 Kgs 15:33; compare 15:30). For these court recorders of Ahaz, 735n/735t did not mark the beginning of a coregency—it marked the beginning of a "sole reign," even though Jotham was still alive. The year 724t, in which the court of Ahaz learned of Hoshea's death, was for them not the thirteenth year of Ahaz, as it would be by the non-accession reckoning for a coregency, but his twelfth, by accession reckoning for a sole reign. In short, the same court recorders who did not recognize Jotham as a legitimate king after 735n/735t also started counting Ahaz's years in an accession sense from that time, making his twelfth year to be 724t, which overlaps Hoshea's last year in 723n/723t and again indicates that Hoshea died, and Samaria was destroyed, in the first half of 723n. (Parker came to the same conclusion that Samaria fell in the first half of 723n, although he did not enter into any discussion of accession versus non-accession counting.)

Parker's argument that 2 Kings 17:1 refers to the end of Hoshea's reign, not its beginning, is based on a careful look at the Hebrew text for the verse, and requires some understanding of the tense system of Hebrew verbs. Let us consider this last issue first.

The beginning student of NT Greek or modern Russian quickly learns that these languages have a system of tenses that is more specific or precise than the system of verbal tenses in English. A consequence of this is that sometimes there is a loss in precision in translating from Greek or Russian into English. Usually the student has little difficulty in grasping the concept of a more specific tense system, however much trouble he or she may have in learning the actual paradigms of the tenses. When it comes to biblical Hebrew, an opposite phenomenon occurs: the Hebrew tense system is far less specific than we are accustomed to in Indo-European languages. To express

<sup>25</sup> Edmund A. Parker, "A Note on the Chronology of 2 Kings 17:1," *AUSS* 6/2 (1968) 129–33.

action-in-time, the Hebrew verb has basically two modes, perfect and imperfect, plus a participial form that can be used to express action in the present. As a general rule, the perfect tense expresses an action in the past and the imperfect an action in the future, and this means that the Hebrew perfect may be translated by any of the English past tenses, with the context determining the appropriate translation. For example,  $\text{לָלַךְ}$  can mean either “walked,” “had walked,” “was walking,” or even “began to walk.” The paradigm shift to this lack of specificity is harder to understand for someone whose native language is an Indo-European tongue than is the shift to a language which has a more precise tense system, such as Greek or Russian.

With this background, let us consider the Hebrew verb  $\text{לָמַד}$ , which is in the perfect form. The identical form of the verb, in both written appearance and pronunciation, is commonly translated into English as “reigned” or “began to reign,” depending on the context. It may also be rendered as “had reigned,” which is a reasonable translation in places like Genesis 36:31 and Joshua 13:10, 12. Thus the NIV of Joshua 13:12 reads as follows: “. . . Og in Bashan, who had reigned in Ashtoroth and Edrei . . .”

In 2 Kings 17:1 there is only one verb, despite various English translations that supply a second verb that is not in the Hebrew. Writing out a literal rendering into English that leaves untranslated the single verb in the sentence, and ignoring any questions of punctuation, we would have, “In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah  $\text{לָמַד}$  Hoshea son of Elah in Samaria over Israel nine years.” Parker’s contribution was to suggest that  $\text{לָמַד}$  here should be translated “had reigned,” making this a comment referring to the end of Hoshea’s reign rather than to its beginning. He was followed in this interpretation by Leslie McFall, who had written his doctoral dissertation on the Hebrew verbal system.<sup>26</sup> We have already observed that this solution is consistent with a beginning of the reign of Ahaz in 736t. It also avoids the problem of Jotham having a coregency with both Uzziah and Ahaz between 743t and 740t. Since it is always context that determines whether  $\text{לָמַד}$  should be translated “began to reign,” “reigned,” or “had reigned,” the broader context here favors “had reigned,” which is entirely allowed by the rules of Hebrew grammar and the ambiguity of Hebrew tenses.

The solution of Parker and McFall therefore does not require two stages in the transfer of power from Jotham to Ahaz, as is required by the solution of Kitchen and Mitchell *et al.* It is the interpretation that has been adopted in the present paper (Table 2), but those who are more comfortable with translating the ambiguous  $\text{לָמַד}$  as “began to reign” should not have any problem with the idea that all this implies is an extra starting date for Ahaz in 743t. Both viewpoints preserve the coregency (in some sense) of Jotham and Ahaz from 735n/735t to 732t, and allow the sole reign of Ahaz to begin in 732t and his death to occur in 716t. This essential agreement should not be obscured by a difference in opinion on the proper translation of  $\text{לָמַד}$  in 2 Kings 17:1.

If a comparison is made among the chronologies of the various authors cited above who accept the Ahaz/Hezekiah coregency and the Pekah/Menahem

<sup>26</sup> McFall, “Hezekiah’s Coregency” 398; “Translation Guide” 33.

rivalry, it will be seen that the divergence on the interpretation of 2 Kings 17:1 represents the only major difference in their regnal dates for the eighth century BC. This uniformity does not result from a thoughtless copying of each other's ideas; it results because the Scriptures provide the necessary information so that these dates may be derived by anyone who accepts their testimony.

#### VI. REASONS FOR PRECISION IN CHRONOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS

The derivation of starting and ending dates for the various kings discussed above has given as an example of how precise dates may be derived from the scriptural data. Following are the reasons for carrying out this kind of careful analysis, seeking always to maximize the precision that can legitimately be derived from the data.

1. *For clarity.* The treatment of Athaliah's reign cited at the beginning of this paper shows the difficulties and errors that can arise or be hidden when our language and symbols are not precise.

2. *For cross-checking of numbers.* The reasoning that established that Menahem began in Nisan of 752 BC was only possible because the reign lengths of each of the kings whose reigns affected Menahem's were written out in as precise a manner as the data permitted. Writing out the dates precisely allows us to follow the reasoning. It is also necessary for the kind of logic that eliminates wrong conjectures—see the discussion above that ruled out 790t as a possible starting date for Uzziah, in favor of 791t.

3. *For vulnerability.* If we feel confident that our theories are correct, we ought to express them in a way that affords maximum vulnerability—that is, that makes them easiest to disprove if they are not correct. One way to do this is to provide all the precision to which our theories lead. It then becomes easy to disprove the theory if it is wrong—just demonstrate that its numbers are in error. By way of comparison, in the early part of the twentieth century the theories of quantum mechanics predicted the fine structure of some hundreds of emission lines from the hydrogen atom with very specific numbers. These predictions were eminently vulnerable: showing that if any of the emission lines was missing or not where it was predicted to be would have meant that there was something wrong with the basic presuppositions of quantum mechanics.

Vulnerable in this sense does not mean weak. The proper kind of vulnerability will produce confidence and strength when the idea being tested is true. Thus Paul declares Christianity to be "vulnerable" by his great statement that "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor 15:14, κJV). Christianity can be disproved by disproving the resurrection of Christ. The vulnerability of this doctrine is really its strength—it should be easy to disprove it if it is not true. But the validity of the case for the bodily resurrection of Christ is shown not only by the failure of all attempts to explain away the historicity of the event, but by the trans-

formed lives of many who set out to disprove this central doctrine of Christianity but instead became convinced that it was true. The skeptic should beware of approaching the “vulnerable” (or falsifiable) doctrine of Christ’s resurrection with an open mind lest he, like many before him, turn into a flaming evangelist for the truth.

4. *For confidence in our chronological scheme.* The quantum mechanical model of the hydrogen atom, mentioned above, led to predictions for the emission spectrum that were verified to the finest detail by the most sensitive spectrometers available. Thus the “vulnerability” of these predictions, and their subsequent verification, produced great confidence in quantum mechanics as an explanation of physical reality. Similarly, if our chronological scheme is as precise as we can reasonably make it, and if the dates it gives are both internally consistent and consistent with well-established external dates, then we have much more confidence that our theories are correct than if we had given only a general range of dates. An example of the usefulness of such precision was Thiele’s conclusion that according to his chronology, the Battle of Qarqar must have been fought in 853 BC and not 854 BC, a conclusion in which he was vindicated and which greatly strengthened his (and others’) confidence in his chronological ideas.

5. *For using the biblical chronology to settle extra-biblical dates.* Kenneth Strand warns against the misconception that Thiele, in order to derive his chronological system, started with extra-biblical dates from Assyria and elsewhere and then attempted by trial-and-error to fit the chronological references in Scripture to these external dates.<sup>27</sup> Thiele’s actual procedure was quite different: first he tried to establish the methods of dating used in the Scriptures, and from this he determined how the scriptural reign-lengths fit together among themselves. According to Thiele, “Only when my arrangement was completed would I insert dates that would give me information concerning the overall passage of time.”<sup>28</sup> Feeling confident that he had constructed a viable chronology based on the Hebrew text, Thiele discovered that his chronology required that the Battle of Qarqar was fought in 853 BC, as mentioned above. Also, the Fall of Samaria was required to take place under Shalmaneser V and not under Sargon II, as was believed by most Assyriologists. The fact that Thiele’s dates for these events are now generally accepted shows the respect that his work has gained among historians. More than that, it has shown that his figures were not artificial and contrived (as those who do not understand his methods have maintained), but represented a well-disciplined approach to determining the principles used by the biblical writers and then developing a chronology based on those principles.

Thiele, then, concentrated on developing the internal consistency of his chronological system, and only after it was developed were checks made against extra-biblical data. Strand mentions three other extra-biblical events

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, “Thiele’s Biblical Chronology As a Corrective for Extrabiblical Dates,” *AUSS* 34/2 (1996) 295–317.

<sup>28</sup> Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers* 122.

for which Thiele's chronology provided dates that became widely accepted by historians: Nebuchadnezzar's first attack on Jerusalem in 605 BC, Jehoiachin's captivity in 597 BC, and the destruction of Jerusalem, which Thiele (incorrectly) dated to 586 BC.<sup>29</sup>

Once a biblical chronology is established so that we may have confidence in it, and we have done a credible enough job so that historians from outside the biblical field have confidence in it, then that biblical chronology can be used to establish dates in the histories of the surrounding kingdoms, or it can be used to decide between alternate dates when there is disagreement among scholars in the field of Near Eastern antiquities. This is all the more reason to have dates that are precise and a chronology that can be demonstrated to be internally consistent.

## VII. CONCLUSION

(1) Using precise dates and exact formulas sometimes provides insights that would otherwise be missed. An example is the observation that if we accept Parker's and McFall's interpretation of 2 Kings 17:1, then the twelve years for Ahaz in that verse must have been measured in an accession sense, as would be done by the court recorders in the days of Ahaz who did not recognize Jotham as coregent after 736t. This, in turn, reinforces the theory that there were two different viewpoints represented in the synchronisms of 2 Kings 15–18, and these viewpoints were inherent in the original court records and were preserved by the final editor of Kings. Another example of the value of precision is the restricting of the date for the fall of Samaria to the first half of 723n.

(2) The factionalism of the time explains why one set of records emphasizes Ahaz and minimizes Jotham and Hezekiah in synchronisms to Israel, while another set does just the opposite. The pro-Assyrian faction was also more likely to recognize Menahem and Pekahiah in Samaria, while the other faction was more likely to recognize their anti-Assyrian rival, Pekah. These insights lend credibility to the idea that the figure of twenty years for Pekah is not an error or a later false claim on Pekah's part, but represents a legitimate rivalry that was recognized by one of the record-keeping factions. This difference in viewpoint was not glossed over by any later harmonizing editor. Indeed, the clash of opinions represented by these various texts argues in favor of their derivation from the official court records of the time, rather than their being the erroneous interpolations of a later redactor.

(3) Perhaps the most important contribution of the present paper is in showing that there is a general agreement about the chronology of Judah

<sup>29</sup> Strand, "Corrective" 310–13. See my "Jerusalem" article for the correct date of 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem. Although the primary reason for Thiele's wrong date probably was his failure to consider non-accession reckoning for Zedekiah, he would have seen that the 586 date could not possibly be maintained if he had been more accurate and explicit in his treatment of Ezekiel 40:1. The only date that this text allows when precision is used is 587 BC. This affords another example of the need for explicit, precise formulas in the development of chronologies for a culture that uses a calendar system different from our own.

and Israel for the eighth century BC among those scholars who recognize the Ahaz/Hezekiah coregency and the Menahem/Pekah rivalry, and who have accepted fully the received text in building their chronologies. The small differences in their dates, it is suggested, can usually be resolved by adopting more precise methods of expressing time units and synchronisms. It is further suggested that most of these chronologies are converging to the figures represented in Tables 1 and 2. Indeed, those for Table 1 have been stable for over half a century.<sup>30</sup> There has been no such convergence of opinion among scholars who begin their studies with presuppositions that the scriptural data is not allowed to be correct, and who then declare that the Scripture is in error and needs emending to make it consistent with their scheme.<sup>31</sup> Along with the lack of agreement among these artificial schemes, it should be noted that none of them has had the success that Thiele's chronology for Israel has had in correcting erroneous dates in the history of Assyria.

(4) All the tedious chronology arithmetic of the present paper, plus the necessary consideration of various viewpoints, should not obscure one essential fact: that it is possible to construct a chronology of the nations of Judah and Israel in the eighth century BC which is not in irreconcilable conflict with any of the scores of scriptural texts that refer to this period. More than that, these texts are given in such a way that the dates for each king—the beginning date of his coregency (if any), the beginning date for his sole reign, and the date of his death—may be determined to within six months in most cases, and in some cases to the actual month. There is an ambiguity in many of the texts, to be sure; it is only by painstaking work that we can determine whether a given synchronism, for instance, refers to the start of a sole reign or a coregency. But all the information is there that allows us to resolve the ambiguities, as long as we have the patience to persevere and we use a proper methodology that extracts all the precision that is inherent in these “mysterious numbers.” It is indeed amazing that if we do not resort to the short-cut of correcting the relevant texts to fit our schemes, then a precise chronology for the kings of Judah and Israel can be constructed without the necessity of declaring that any of the underlying texts are in error or that they represent a statement that cannot be reconciled with the history of the time.

<sup>30</sup> Thiele's table of dates for the kings of Israel in his third edition (1983) shows no change from the same table published in his first edition (1951). These are dates for which Thiele accepted all the biblical synchronisms and reign lengths as authentic, and fifty years of examination have not required that his dates for the northern kingdom need changing except by making them slightly more precise, as was demonstrated for Hoshea in this article, or by the contention that Thiele was not justified in restricting the start of the reign of Jeroboam I to the second half of 931n, as was shown in my “Solomon” article.

<sup>31</sup> Strand (“Corrective” 317) displays a table of eight scholars who published their chronologies before Thiele published his. All these eight altered the biblical data to fit their schemes. Summarizing what the table shows, Strand wrote, “. . . there is no basic agreement among the eight scholars themselves . . . not even one of them has a preponderance of correct information.” If the disagreements are less among more recent scholars who hold to the various radical documentary hypotheses, it is largely because the successes of Thiele and those who followed him have greatly restrained the tendency to declare the scriptural texts in error.