

# Has the chronology of the Hebrew kings been finally settled?

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The answer to the question in the title must be a qualified yes. Qualified, in the sense that scholarly research has narrowed the limits to within a year either side of a tolerably fixed set of dates for the forty rulers of Israel and Judah. Many of the dates are absolute and agree with Near Eastern chronology and the remainder fit comfortably around these. The rest of this article is a vindication of these statements.

Behind any system of chronology for the Hebrew kings there is reflected the practical outworking of the chronologist's view of the integrity of the Hebrew scriptures.

## Is the Hebrew text trustworthy?

Those who question the integrity or trustworthiness of the Hebrew text in the area of its chronology do so on the basis of two factors. First, from experience with texts having nothing to do with chronology they are convinced that many errors have crept into the Hebrew text in spite of the vigilance of the Massoretes. If errors have crept into the non-chronological portions of the OT, why should a special case — an exemption in fact — be made out for the chronological portions? In any case, they would argue, why should the Massoretic Text (MT) be singled out as the standard by which integrity must be measured? The discussion then moves on into the area of the relationship between the Hebrew text(s) behind the Greek translation(s) of the OT (Septuagint or LXX), the Hebrew text(s) of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, the Samaritan version, and MT.

Second, from experience with the chronological texts themselves they discover that the numbers, totals and synchronisms simply do not make sense on many occasions.

Those who do accept the trustworthiness of the Hebrew scriptures, and its chronological data in particular, make the MT their starting point and attempt to construct a hypothesis that will (a) permit 38 synchronisms and 37 reign lengths in Kings (plus three synchronisms<sup>1</sup> and 18 reign lengths in Chronicles) to harmonize perfectly without emending a single numeral, and (b) demonstrate that the resultant chronology is in harmony with Near Eastern chronology. To date no chronological scheme has been compiled which can accommodate all the biblical data without altering at least one numeral. The nearest that any scholar has arrived at such a complete system is that produced by Edwin R. Thiele.<sup>2</sup> But even he judged that the data in 2 Kings 17–18 was in error.<sup>3</sup> Apart from this one concession his system is a model of how to approach the Hebrew text in a harmonistic manner.

## Three approaches to Hebrew chronology

Biblical chronologists can be divided into three 'schools': Harmonists, Restorationists, and Reconstructionists. These labels, of course, are not official self-designations of any actual group of scholars! They are used here as categories for the purposes of the article. What divides them is the measure of their trust or distrust in the integrity of the Hebrew figures.

Harmonists proceed on the assumption that every Hebrew figure is factually correct and accurately transmitted. This school seeks to harmonize the Hebrew chronology internally (between Kings and Chronicles) and externally (with well established absolute dates in Near Eastern chronology) without altering the text one iota.

The adherents of the Harmonistic approach divide themselves into Complete Harmonists (full integrity) and Incomplete

Harmonists (open to the possibility of an uncharacteristic slip in the original and/or a rare transmission error). Thiele is the most well-known member of this latter group.

Those who reject the Harmonistic approach may be divided into the Restoration and the Reconstruction schools. Though they differ from the Harmonists in their approach to the biblical data they are united in their premise that MT as it stands is a corrupt text and in need of scholarly correction.

The Restoration school is characterized by the belief that the main problem is one of bad transmission of the Hebrew text. This school is convinced that in the course of copying and recopying the text many numbers have been accidentally altered, or scribes have altered figures which they thought were transmission errors. By a careful study of the variants in the Hebrew versions (MT, Qumran and those behind the LXX and Josephus) these scholars are able to repair the text.

The result, of necessity, is an eclectic chronology with bits and pieces taken from all the source materials. The task then facing the resultant chronology of this school is how to persuade biblical scholarship to accept their results. The inability of this school to agree among themselves on any individual's published results constitutes the perennial weakness of this approach. In any case, few within this school are consistent in the application of the main principles of textual criticism and resort to some reconstruction of the text to effect the right result.

One major characteristic that differentiates this school from the Reconstruction school is that a scholar of the former school first picks the version that he thinks contains more of the correct chronology than the others and then proceeds to repair it using the other versions. Some have chosen the LXX,<sup>4</sup> others have preferred Josephus' system, and still others the MT as their basic text and chronological system.

Then there is the approach of the Reconstructionists. This school takes the view that the Hebrew text has been so extensively corrupted in transmission, or, if accurately transmitted, the original was factually incorrect, that the only solution is to make a fresh start and reconstruct the text and its chronology. Consequently, in this school everything is up for discussion and appropriation. A scholar may pick and choose whatever he requires and the resulting chronology is then presented to the scholarly world for their consideration.

This is by far the most popular school today and has many practitioners.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars quite openly take it upon themselves to make the mix.<sup>6</sup> Others adopt a more subtle approach. Here the mix is attributed to the biblical editor and the scholar then claims to have simply uncovered what the biblical editor(s) did with an original, pure text and system of chronology.

## The latest Reconstruction chronology

The latest example of the Reconstruction approach to the chronology of the Hebrew kings is Jeremy Hughes.<sup>7</sup> According to him neither the MT nor the LXX contains the correct chronology (p. 123, cf. p. 155), and within the Hebrew data itself he discerns at least two main systems of chronology which have been intermixed in the course of editorial activity. Reconstructing the original chronology 'is dependent on our ability to penetrate behind successive stages of schematization and re-editing' (p. 122). The successive stages were the pre-schematic (or pre-Priestly) followed by Priestly, followed by the post-Priestly (or revised Priestly). Unfortunately some of the stages were conflated which only complicated an already confused picture. As if that was not confusing enough he claims that he has discovered a schematic

chronology which a later Deuteronomistic editor had imposed on the whole chronology of Israel from Genesis through to the exile. This schematic chronology involved the alteration of numerous chronological figures which he claims he has successfully peeled away and by a careful comparison of the data available to him in the other versions he has been able to isolate the right figure that ought to have been in the original, pre-schematic Hebrew text. He makes many bold claims for his 'strong arguments' (cf. the language on pp. 173, 187, 212) in support of the pre-Deuteronomistic chronology which he has carefully stitched together from the confused state of the Hebrew text. He notes that sometimes the right figure has been preserved only in Josephus (pp. 148, 122) or in the Ethiopic version (p. 153).

The picture we get from Hughes' assessment of the various editors who were responsible for the present chronologies in the MT and the LXX is their inability to see the implications of their manipulation of the figures to produce an artificial — or as Hughes would prefer to call it a mythical — scheme. They were also very forgetful as they proceeded with their revisions (cf. pp. 130, 136, 152), some of which they did not complete (p. 136). The editors occasionally invented history (pp. 101, 164, 186) if the context required something 'extra' to make their point.

He postulates that on one occasion (in Josiah's reign) the calendar year was shortened to six months to facilitate a change-over in Judah from a Tishri New Year to a Nisan New Year. Among the repairs to the Hebrew text that he wishes his readership to consider are the reduction of Joash's 40 years' reign to 38 years; Pekah's 20 to 4; Jehu's 28 to 27; Amaziah's 29 to 28; Azariah's 52 to 26; and Jotham's 16 to 11 years. He proposed to increase Jeroboam's 22 years to 25; Ahab's 22 to 24; Abijam's 3 to 6 years; and Jehoram's 8 to 11 years (p. 275).

He dismisses coregencies with the argument that it is 'extremely doubtful that coregencies ever existed as a possible form of government in Israel or Judah' (p. 105).

He has little respect for the dates given by Egyptologists (such as K.A. Kitchen and Erik Hornung) for the reign of Shishak (Shoshenq). He considers their dates invalid due to their reliance upon Thiele's figures for Shishak's invasion of Judah in the fifth year of Rehoboam (p. 191). Although Hughes cannot claim to be an Egyptologist he does claim to have established the dates for Shishak's reign, which he places six years earlier than reputable Egyptologists. So confident is he in his results that he can write: 'if my reconstruction of Israelite and Judean chronology is correct... Egyptian chronologists will have to revise their calculations to take account of a six-year increase in the dates of Shoshenq's reign' (p. 192).

Behind Hughes' work stands his idea of what the biblical (Priestly and Deuteronomistic) writers were attempting to do when they inserted historical data into their religious compositions. He writes: 'the chronology of Kings is historically inaccurate, but it is not corrupt. The reason it is inaccurate is that the Biblical writers were more interested in chronological schematism than in historical accuracy. Biblical chronology is essentially mythical... The mythical purpose of chronological schematism is that it serves to express a belief that history is governed by a divine plan' (pp. 264f.). In other words, the Priestly writer wished to make the period from the exodus to the foundation of the first temple *exactly* 480 years and from that point to the foundation of the second temple *exactly* 480 years, and with that scheme in mind he set about manipulating the reigns of the Hebrew kings to bring about the required result. But other editors came along and undid some of his work by restoring some of the pre-schematic chronology, or what they thought was the original chronology. The essence of Hughes' thesis is to show how an original, historical chronology was converted into a schematic chronology and how he managed to retrieve and restore the original, pre-schematic chronology in virtually its pristine condition.

## The latest Restoration chronology

The latest advocates of the Restoration school are Hayes and Hooker,<sup>8</sup> whose joint work picks on the MT system of chronology and then proceeds to repair its damaged transmission. Hayes and Hooker set out fifteen statements on pp. 12-15 which distinguish their system from those that have preceded them. Among the repairs to the Hebrew text that they wish their readership to consider are the reduction of Baasha's 24 years' reign to 22 years; Asa's 41 years to 29 years; Omri's 12 to 11 years; Ahab's 22 to 15 years; Jehu's 28 to 18 years; and other similar emendations.

They postulate that on one occasion the calendar year was extended to eighteen months to facilitate a changeover from one system to another in Josiah's reign.<sup>9</sup> We are presented with the novel suggestion that Jehoram of Israel and Jehoram of Judah were the same person (p. 33). They reject the hypothesis of coregencies which Thiele and other Harmonists had employed with such good results, with the argument: 'The weakness of this assumption is the fact that the hypothesis of coregencies is without biblical warrant' (p. 11). They then go on to postulate that instead of coregencies there were abdications. In effect this is just a change of terminology because the years that the king lived after his abdication are credited both to him and to the son who took over from him. If the coregencies are 'without biblical warrant' and if that is held to be a knock-down argument for rejecting them then abdications have no warrant either.

Often one discerns in the arguments of the Reconstruction and Restoration approaches an unreasonable antagonism toward Thiele's solution in particular which tends to disparage his results in an unscholarly manner. His central premiss that the Hebrew kings appointed their successor in their own lifetime to some form of joint rule with them is not a big problem nor improbable. Solomon certainly overlapped David and that cannot be denied without emending the text.

## Why emendations should be avoided

The main objection that biblical scholarship finds with the results of the non-Harmonistic schools is the ad hoc nature of the resulting chronologies that issue from them. No matter how ingenious, scholarly, or brilliant the emendation might be that suddenly clears up an intractable problem that has been the bane of every chronologist's life, it remains an emendation just the same, and it is this stark fact that constitutes an inherent weakness in the argument and an obstacle to its acceptance. An emendation always introduces a weakness into the discussion, never a strength or a confirmation of truth.

There is an innate instinct in the majority of biblical scholars that prefers a solution which does not involve any tampering with the text. The same instinct tends to push ad hoc solutions of the Restoration type to the side-lines until extra-biblical evidence is found to enhance or promote their credibility. It is because Thiele's solution resorted to less emendations than any other system that preceded his that his hypothesis (for it must be borne in mind that it is still only a hypothesis) has been slowly becoming the dominant chronology for the period of the Divided Monarchy (certainly in the English-speaking world) since it was published in 1951. G.R. Driver had this compliment to make of Thiele's chronology: 'it is an important work, which comes very near to, if it does not actually reach, a final solution of the problem of the dates of the kings of Israel and Judah'.<sup>10</sup>

## Four controlling factors

Behind the Harmonists' approach lie four factors that enable them to solve every apparent difficulty in the Hebrew data.

*First*, Israel and Judah did not use the same calendar. The New Year began in September (Tishri) in Judah, but in Nisan (March/April) in Israel. Because their New Year's days were six months apart this will often account for the synchronisms between them being one year out.<sup>11</sup>

*Second*, they did not use the same method for counting the years their kings reigned. In Judah the new king's years were counted from the New Year's day *after* the old king died. In Israel the new king's years were counted from the New Year's day *before* the old king died. Judah's system is called the accession-year or the post-dating system. Israel's is called the nonaccession-year or ante-dating system.<sup>12</sup> Because the point from which the kings of Judah and Israel reckoned their reigns to have commenced is one year apart this will often account for the synchronisms between them being one year out or occasionally two years.<sup>13</sup>

*Third*, a written account was kept of the kings of the two kingdoms using their own distinctive calendars and method of calculating the length of their reigns. These records are repeatedly referred to as the 'Chronicles of the Kings of Israel' and the 'Chronicles of the Kings of Judah'. Since both kingdoms thought that their calendar and system of counting regnal years was correct they proceeded to write down the other's history (where it impinged on their own, e.g. synchronisms) using their own

calendar and regnal reckoning. Because the compiler of the books of Kings incorporated extracts from these two works *directly into his own composition* we have to be aware that he has left the extracts as they were. When the canonical writer is talking about a Judean king and he includes a synchronism with Israel's king in his extract, that synchronism is going to be in terms of *Judah's* calendar and *Judah's* method of numbering regnal years as they imposed it on the history of the northern kings; and *vice versa*, when the writer is talking about an Israelite king and he includes a synchronism with Judah's king in his extract that synchronism is going to be in terms of *Israel's* calendar and *Israel's* method of numbering regnal years as they imposed it on the history of the Judean kings.<sup>14</sup> One might have expected the writer/editor to do the conversion in his head each time and give us the result, thereby enabling us to follow the passage of time using one calendar and one method of reckoning regnal reigns. The fact that he did not do so will often account for the synchronisms between Judah and Israel being one and sometimes even two years out. A typical example of this is the statement in 1 Kings 15:1, 'Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah.' Note that the subject of the passage is a Judean king. He is using the accession-year system. The synchronism is with an Israelite king who numbers his own years according to the nonaccession-year system. The synchronism, because it is in terms of the Judean system of reckoning, means that the 'eighteenth year of Jeroboam' is the same as the nineteenth year according to Israel's nonaccession-year system.

Fourth, the criterion for calculating a king's reign when he also had a period as joint-ruler (or coregent) is never stated in the record. Sometimes the writer<sup>15</sup> will add the number of years a king had as coregent to the number of years he reigned as sole king (as in the A-B and B-B patterns below) but sometimes he will not (as in the A-A and B-A patterns below)! The writer may have been influenced by the perception he gained of each coregent from reading the 'Chronicles' he is so fond of referring his readers to. If the coregent played a prominent part then maybe this influenced him to backdate the beginning of his rule to the point when he was made coregent. If the coregent did not play a prominent part then he credited him only with his sole reign years, and ignored the years he ruled as coregent. This is true in the case of Hezekiah who was coregent with his father for fourteen years and was sole ruler for twenty-nine years. The official record of his rule gives only his sole reign total. Hezekiah clearly disapproved of his father's style of governing the Lord's people and he appears to have had no influence on the life of the nation until he became sole ruler.

Using these four controlling factors, it is possible to solve every single difficulty in the data of Kings. The Harmonists' hypothesis is also the simplest of all the hypotheses and approaches that have ever been put forward. Reviewers of Thiele's work attributed the success he achieved to his unshakable faith in the basic fidelity and accuracy of the Hebrew numbers and this enabled him to travel further along the road in his quest for order than any who preceded him.<sup>16</sup> Where others aborted their quest they succumbed to emendation. Derek Kidner said of Thiele's achievement:

This quest is an object lesson in the value of giving intractable scriptural data the benefit of the doubt, in the conviction that these difficulties are chiefly signs of our imperfect understanding. It also brings out the fact that a true solution of a technical problem will usually dovetail in an unforeseen way with some less noticeable features of the context.<sup>17</sup>

## Two flexible factors

We need at this point to qualify two of the four factors outlined above. All is never plain sailing in things biblical! First, with regard to points (1) and (3) above, these factors stayed constant throughout the history of the two kingdoms so far as we can judge. So no problem there.

Second, with regard to point (2), this factor did not stay constant (oh that it had!). The diagram below shows how Israel and Judah switched back and forth between the two methods of counting regnal years.

Kings of Israel		
Jeroboam Nadab Baasha Elah Zimri Omri Ahab	Ahaziah Jehoram Jehu Jehohaz Jehoash (coregent)	Jehoash (king) Jeroboam II Zechariah Shallum Menahem Pekahiah Pekah Hoshea
<b>Nonaccession</b>		<b>Accession</b>
	<b>Non-accession</b>	<b>Accession</b>
Rehoboam Abijam Asa	Jehoshaphat Jehoram Ahaziah Jehoash	Amaziah Azariah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah
Kings of Judah		
Period A (931-848 BC)	Period B (848-798 BC)	Period C (798-723 BC)

It should be noted that the only point in Judah's history when she abandoned her native accession-year system was the period when the two royal families intermarried and Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, became Queen in Judah. She was probably responsible for introducing the nonaccession-year system into Judah. It is probably significant that her son, grandson, and great grandson were struck out of the register of legitimate kings of Judah in Matthew's genealogy.

Third, with respect to point (4) above, the table sets out the four possible ways that were open to the compiler of Kings (or the original court scribe) to decide how many years he was prepared to attribute to those kings who had a period of coregency before they became sole rulers. Remember that it was in his power to add or ignore the coregency years when it came to writing up the final total that each king reigned.

Table showing all known coregencies and overlapping reigns for the kings of Judah and Israel

Jehoram Jehoiachin	Omri Ahaziah (I) Jeroboam II Pekah	Jehoash (I) Ahaz Hezekiah Jehoiachin	Jehoshaphat Jotham Azariah Manasseh
A A	A A A A	B B B B	B B B B
A A	B B B B	A A A A	B B B B

### Point from which each king's reign is calculated

Option A: From the first year of his sole reign

Option B: From the first year of his coregency

### Total years recorded for each king's reign

Option A: The total excludes coregency years

Option B: The total includes coregency years

All of the patterns on page 8 (except the A-A pattern) need to be carefully translated if we are to avoid confusion. We propose the following new translations based on the RSV (modifications are in italic script).

## Texts using the A-B pattern: coregency years included in the total

**1 Kings 16:23** In the thirty-first year (nonaccession) of Asa king of Judah, Omri *became king* over Israel, and reigned for twelve years (nonaccession) (as rival and sole king); six years (nonaccession) he reigned in Tirzah.

**2 Kings 8:25-26** In the twelfth year (nonaccession) of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, *became king*. Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he *became king*, and he reigned one year (nonaccession) *as coregent and king* in Jerusalem.

**2 Kings 14:23** In the fifteenth year (accession) *from the kingship* of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, *became king* in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years (accession) *as coregent and king*.

**2 Kings 15:27** In the fifty-second year (accession) *from the coregency* of Azariah, king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah *became king* over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned twenty years (accession) *from his breakaway from Menahem*.

## Texts using the B-A pattern: coregency years not included in the total

**2 Kings 13:10** In the thirty-seventh year (nonaccession) of Joash, king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz *became coregent* over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned sixteen years (accession) *as king*.

**2 Kings 16:1-2** In the seventeenth year (accession) *of the breakaway kingdom* of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, *became coregent*. Ahaz was twenty years old when he *became coregent*, and he reigned sixteen years *as king* in Jerusalem.

**2 Kings 18:1-2** In the third year (accession) of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, *became coregent*. He was twenty-five years old when he *became king*, and he reigned twenty-nine years (accession) *as king* in Jerusalem.

**2 Chronicles 36:9** Jehoiachin was eight years old when he *became coregent*, and he reigned three months and ten days *as king* in Jerusalem.

## Texts using the B-B pattern: coregency years included in the total

**1 Kings 22:41-42** Jehoshaphat the son of Asa *became king* over Judah in the fourth year (accession) of Ahab king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he *became coregent* and he reigned twenty-five years (accession) *as coregent and king* in Jerusalem.

**2 Kings 15:1-2** In the twenty-seventh year (accession) *from the coregency* of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, *became king*. He was sixteen years old when he *became coregent* and he reigned fifty-two years (accession) *as coregent and king* in Jerusalem.

**2 Kings 15:32-33** In the second year (accession) *of the breakaway kingdom* of Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, *became coregent*. He was twenty-five years old when he *became coregent* and he reigned sixteen years *as coregent and king* (until Ahaz his son was made coregent with him).

**2 Kings 21:1** Manasseh was twelve years old when he *became coregent*, and he reigned fifty-five years (accession) *as coregent and king* in Jerusalem.

## The importance of absolute dates

The absolute dates the modern chronologist works with are:

(1) 853 BC, when the Battle of Qarqar was fought (possibly in July/August of that year (Thiele, 1983:95 n.13)), which was the sixth year of Shalmaneser III — the year in which Ahab died;

(2) 841 BC, the eighteenth of Shalmaneser III when Jehu paid tribute to him at the commencement of his reign;

(3) 723 BC, the last year of Shalmaneser V and Hoshea when Samaria fell;

(4) 701 BC, the fourteenth year of Hezekiah when Sennacherib came against Judah (1983:122);

(5) 2 Adar (15/16 March), 597 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and took Jehoiachin prisoner to Babylon (1983:173);

(6) 9 Tammuz (18 July), 586 BC, the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem fell (1983:189).<sup>18</sup>

Without these external synchronisms it would have been impossible to reconcile the reigns and synchronisms of the MT, as a perusal of commentaries from the seventeenth and twentieth centuries would demonstrate. It was the existence of these fixed points that enabled scholars to work out the principles that lay behind the Hebrew system of synchronisms.

A seventh absolute date is virtually certain now for the foundation of the first temple in 968 BC and the corollary date of 932 BC for the disruption of the kingdom. If these dates should prove to be correct then for the first time we would have the upper (i.e. 968) and lower (i.e. 586) limits within which all future discussion of the chronology of the Hebrew kings must take place. The evidence for 968 BC comes from three lines of research: W.H. Barnes arrived at this date through a study of the Tyrian King List;<sup>19</sup> K.A. Kitchen arrived at the same date through the Egyptian evidence independently of the Tyrian evidence; and Thiele arrived at the same date independently of the other two through a careful study of the Hebrew evidence.

Kitchen claims that he has been able to date the twenty-one-year rule of the Egyptian king Shishak/Shoshenq I to c. 945-924 BC *independently of the biblical data*.<sup>20</sup> Rehoboam's fifth year ran from September 926 to September 925, which means that Shishak's invasion of Judah occurred toward the end of his twenty-one-year rule.<sup>21</sup> If so, this would rule out Albright's date of 922 BC for the division of the kingdom and his date of 918/7 BC for the invasion of Shishak. His dates for Shishak are 935-914 BC.

Thiele obtained his date of 931/30 BC for the division of the kingdom by calculating *backwards* from the six absolute dates given above (but especially no. 1).

Barnes has argued the dates for Shishak's reign from his reconstruction of Tyrian chronology which is based on two astronomically dated events in Egyptian history. First, the accession of Ramesses II. He noted that Parker had calculated three astronomical dates for the accession of Ramesses II: 1301, 1290 or 1279.<sup>22</sup> Second, the accession of Takelot II. Parker had noted that an eclipse occurred in the fifteenth year of his reign.<sup>23</sup> Klaus Baer dated this eclipse to 846/5 BC and his accession to 860 BC.<sup>24</sup> Wente accepted this date as 'the first "fixed" date after the accession of Ramesses II, as determined by a lunar date in his reign'.<sup>25</sup> Wente suggested dating Shishak's accession to c. 946 BCE, only one year higher than Kitchen and Hornung<sup>26</sup> had placed it. It appears that Wente worked *backwards* from the astronomical date of 846/5 BC (= fifteenth year of Takelot II) to arrive at 946 BC, while others worked *forwards* from the other astronomical date of 1279 to arrive at the same date.

Whatever may be the assessment of future work on Barnes' Tyrian chronology (which the present writer regards as far from being settled, though Green's work seems to give some credence to the commencement of Solomon's reign in 971 BC according to Tyrian chronology<sup>27</sup>), there can be no doubt that 926/5 BC is the most likely year in which Shishak fought against Rehoboam.

Six other biblical events coincide exactly with similar external synchronisms *without the alteration of a single numeral to achieve this result*. With such an impressive record of six out of six it would not surprise the Harmonist to discover that the MT was right in this seventh case. Thus three independent lines of research, Egyptian, Tyrian, and Hebrew, converge on 968 BC ( $\pm 1$  year) for the foundation of Solomon's temple and 932 BC ( $\pm 1$  year) for the division of the kingdom.

## Revision of Thiele's chronology

It has been necessary to make a number of modifications to Thiele's chronology which are marked with asterisks in the table below. The following is a summary of the main modifications being proposed.<sup>28</sup>

The four major modifications are four coregencies which Thiele overlooked, namely, a coregency for Hezekiah from 729/8-715 BC;\* a two-year coregency for Jehoash king of Israel from 799-798; Ahaziah king of Judah probably became coregent in the eleventh year (nonaccession) of Joram and in the twelfth year became king; and Jehoiachin had a coregency from September 608-December 597 BC.

The nine minor alterations include:

- (1) Jehoshaphat became coregent in September<sup>o</sup> 873 not 872/1;
- (2) Jehoram (J) became coregent in September 854 not 853;
- (3) Jehoahaz died between September 798 and April 797 and Jehoash became king during this period: Thiele gives 798;

(4) Jeroboam II became coregent in April 793 not 793/2 or 792 (p. 96);

(5) Azariah became coregent in September 791 not 792/1;\*

(6) Hoshea died between April and September 723: Thiele gives 723/22;

(7) Uzziah/Azariah died between April and September 739 and Jotham became king during this period, not 740/39;

(8) Ahaz died before Nisan 715 (probably in March) and Hezekiah succeeded him at this time, not in 716/5; and

(9) Manasseh became coregent in September 697 not 697/6.

These modifications do not interfere with Thiele's basic chronology: they are merely a fine-tuning of his system.

### Revised chronology for Israel and Judah

Biblical sequence	Judah and Israel (in italics)	Coregent (commencement)	King (sole reign)	Dted
1 Ki. 12:1-14:20	Solomon		Sept 931-Apr 930	Sept 931-Apr 930
1 Ki. 14:21-31	Jeroboam		Sept 931-Apr 930	Sept 910-Apr 909
1 Ki. 15:1-8	Rehoboam		Apr-Sept 913	Apr-Sept 913
1 Ki. 15:9-24	Abijam		Sept 911-Apr 910	Sept 911-Apr 910
1 Ki. 15:25-32	Asa		Sept 910-Apr 909	Sept 870-Apr 869
1 Ki. 15:33-16:7	Nadab		Sept 909-Apr 908	Sept 909-Apr 908
1 Ki. 16:8-14	Baasha		Sept 886-Apr 885	Sept 886-Apr 885
1 Ki. 16:15-20	Elah		Sept 885-Apr 884	Sept 885-Apr 884
1 Ki. 16:21-22	Zimri		Sept 885-Apr 884	Sept 885-Apr 884
1 Ki. 16:23-28	Tibni	Sept 885-Apr 884		Apr 880-Sept 880
	Omri	Sept 885-Apr 884		
1 Ki. 16:29-22:40	Omri		Apr 880-Sept 880	Sept 874-Apr 873
*1 Ki. 22:41-51	Ahab		Sept 874-Apr 873	Apr-Sept 853
1 Ki. 22:52-2 Ki. 2:25	Jehoshaphat	Sept 873-	Sept 870-Apr 869	Apr-Sept 848
2 Ki. 3:1-8:15	Ahaziah		Apr-Sept 853	Apr-Sept 852
*2 Ki. 8:16-24	Joram	Sept 854-	Apr-Sept 852	Apr-Sept 841
**2 Ki. 8:25-9:29	Jehoram	Sept 854-	Apr-Sept 848	Apr-Sept 841
2 Ki. 9:30-10:36	Ahaziah	Sept 842-	Apr-Sept 841	Apr-Sept 841
2 Ki. 11:1-21	Jehu		Apr-Sept 841	Sept 814-Apr 813
2 Ki. 12:1-21	Athaliah		Apr-Sept 841	Apr-Sept 835
*2 Ki. 13:1-10	Joash		Apr-Sept 835	Apr-Sept 796
**2 Ki. 13:11-25	Jehoahaz		Sept 814-Apr 813	Sept 798-Apr 797
2 Ki. 14:1-22	Jehoash	Apr 799-	Sept 798-Apr 797	Sept 782-Apr 781
*2 Ki. 14:23-29	Amaziah		Apr-Sept 796	Apr-Sept 767
*2 Ki. 15:1-7	Jeroboam II	Apr 793-	Sept 782-Apr 781	Aug/Sept-753
2 Ki. 15:8-12	Azariah	Sept 791-	Apr-Sept 767	Apr-Sept 739
2 Ki. 15:13-15	Zechariah		Aug/Sept 753	March 752
2 Ki. 15:16-22	Shallum		March 752	late Apr 752
2 Ki. 15:23-26	Menahem	late Apr 752-		Sept 742-Apr 741
2 Ki. 15:27-31	Pekahiah		Sept 742-Apr 741	Sept 740-Apr 739
*2 Ki. 15:32-38	Pekah	late Apr 752-	Sept 740-Apr 739	Sept 732-Apr 731
	Jotham	Apr-Sept 750-	Apr-Sept 739-	Sept 732-Sept 731
	Jotham	Sept 753-Sept 731	Sept 735	
*2 Ki. 16:1-20	Ahaz	Sept 735-	Sept 732-Sept 731	c. March 715
*2 Ki. 17:1-41	Hoshea		Sept 732-Apr 731	Apr-Sept 723
**2 Ki. 18:1-20:21	Hezekiah	Sept 729-	c. March 715	Sept 687-Sept 686
*2 Ki. 21:1-18	Manasseh	Sept 697-	Sept-Sept 686	Sept 643-Sept 642
2 Ki. 21:19-26	Amon		Sept 643-Sept 642	Sept 641-Sept 640
2 Ki. 22:1-23:30	Josiah		Sept 641-Sept 640	c. July 609
2 Ki. 23:31-35	Jehoahaz		July 609	c. Oct 609
2 Ki. 23:36-24:7	Jehoiakim		Oct 609	9 Dec 598
**2 Ki. 24:8-17	Jehoiachin	Sept 608-	Dec 598-Apr 597	after Apr 561
2 Ki. 24:18-25:7	Zedekiah		Apr 597-Aug 586	c. Aug 586

\* Minor alterations to Thiele's chronology  
 \*\* Coregencies omitted in Thiele's chronology

### Conclusion

All biblical chronologists are inherently harmonists (with a small 'h'). The different non-Harmonistic approaches adopt a 'cut-and-paste' approach to the Hebrew chronology, testing various ways to amend the data in order to achieve harmony on the basic

assumption that the biblical writers (or copyists) got it wrong. Harmonists, on the other hand, adopt an interpretive approach to the biblical material, testing various ways of reinterpreting the data in order to achieve harmony on the basic assumption that the biblical writers got it right.

Has the chronology of the Hebrew kings been finally settled? It would appear so as far as the approach of the Harmonist is concerned. In only a few places is it susceptible of being adjusted (i.e. reinterpreted) a single year this way or that. Nevertheless it should always be borne in mind that Thiele's chronology is still only an hypothesis; the best, maybe, in the field, but still only an hypothesis. Where, however, his dates agree with established Near Eastern chronology and by absolute dating (the Julian calendar), there we can be sure that he is correct for that segment of Israel's history. Because he is correct in that area does not necessarily mean that every other date in his scheme is incontrovertibly correct. Archaeology has a way of confounding 'the assured results of science', and it would be prudent not to close the door to further minor revisions of Thiele's chronology. Admittedly, the room for adjustment has been narrowed down to a year either way of Thiele's figures because of factor (2) above which Thiele has assumed operated only once in Israel and twice in Judah. There is still the possibility that it may have operated more times than Thiele has allowed for. Adjustments of the year either way are also remotely possible due to factor (1). This factor may not have remained constant throughout the period of the Divided Monarchy. Thiele's assumption is that it did. Archaeology may yet have the last word to say about that!

The Chronicler makes one concession to his strict practice of never mentioning any northern king in a synchronism with a Davidic king, see 2 Ch. 13:1-2. His other two synchronisms are the 36th year from the division of the kingdom (2 Ch. 16:1) and the notice that 'Ahaziah became king [of Judah] forty-two years from the time Omri became king over Israel' (2 Ch. 22:2). The RSV reads, 'Ahaziah was forty-two years old', but this contradicts 2 Ki. 8:26 where Ahaziah is said to be twenty-two years old.

Thiele published his first results (the product of a doctoral thesis) in JNES 3 (1944), pp. 137-186. This work was later expanded and published in book form in 1951, '1965, and '1985 as *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

This error was ably rectified by S.H. Horn, 'The Chronology of King Hezekiah's Reign', *AUSS* 2 (1964), pp. 40-52. Such a coregency for Hezekiah was suggested as long ago as 1905 by O.C. Whitehouse, *Isaiah I-XXXIX* (New Century Bible, New York), p. 23. J.R.A. Hughes incorrectly stated that Thiele postulated a coregency for Hezekiah (*The Secret of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, JSOT Supplement Series 66, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990, p. 112).

E.g. J.D. Shenkel, *Chronology and Recensional Development in the Greek Text of Kings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), and W.H. Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel* (Unpub. D.Th. thesis, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard Univ., Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986). He utilizes coregencies in his scheme.

To the 14 chronological solutions proposed from 1884 to 1961 (see H. Tadmor, *Encyclopedia Miqra'it*, 4:245-310) we can add those of Claus Schedl, *Textkritische Bemerkungen zu den Synchronismen der Könige von Israel und Juda*, VT 12 (1962), pp. 88-119; J.M. Miller, 'Another Look at the Chronology of the Early Divided Monarchy', *JBL* 86 (1967), pp. 276-288; W.R. Wifall, 'The Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel', *ZAW* 80 (1968), pp. 319-337; K.T. Andersen, 'Die Chronologie der Könige von Israel und Juda', *Studia Theologica* 23 (1969), pp. 69-114; W.H. Barnes, *op. cit.* (1986), and Jeremy R.A. Hughes, *op. cit.* (1990).

J.M. Miller, 'Another Look at the Chronology of the Early Divided Monarchy', *JBL* 86 (1967), pp. 276-288, suggested reducing Baasha's reign from 24 years to 18, Asa's reign from 41 to 31, and Jehoram's from 10 to 8 on the basis of the Lucianic text of the LXX. W.F. Albright, 'The Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel', *BASOR* 100 (1945), pp. 16-22, emended 8 out of 20 regnal totals for Judah and 6 for Israel. E.g. he proposed reducing Rehoboam's reign from 17 years to 8 or 9; Omri's from 12 to 8; Joram's from 12 to 8; Amaziah's from 29 to 18. For a critique of Albright's scheme see Wm. H. Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-16. Albright virtually repudiated coregencies. He accepted only the one between Jotham and Azariah. Albright's dates have dominated John Bright's *A History of Israel* (cf. his 3rd edn, London: SCM Press, 1981) and American exegesis generally. Wm. H. Barnes, *op. cit.*, proposed altering 6 reign lengths.

<sup>7</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>J.H. Hayes and P.K. Hooker, *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup>The idea goes back to Max Vogelstein, *Biblical Chronology* (Cincinnati, 1944), p. 17.

<sup>10</sup>JTS 4 (1953), p. 305.

<sup>11</sup>There is unanimity among scholars for the existence of two New Year dates, but no unanimity on which of these dates Judah and Israel began their respective New Years (see J. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 166 for discussion and bibliography). See also D.J.A. Clines, 'The Evidence for an Autumnal New Year in Pre-exilic Israel Reconsidered', *JBL* 93 (1974), pp. 22-30.

<sup>12</sup>The terms accession- and nonaccession-years are not immediately related to the problem of counting regnal years. To refer directly to this difference in the method of counting (which in any case has to do with the starting point for numbering the first year of a king's reign) we would need to use terms such as 'single-counting' and 'double-counting' years, or a 'non-overlapping' and 'overlapping' first year.

<sup>13</sup>F. Rühl appears to have been the first to make the discovery that there were these two methods for counting regnal years in his work, 'Chronologie der Könige von Israel und Juda', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 12 (1894/5), pp. 44-76, 171.

<sup>14</sup>The idea goes back to Max Vogelstein, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup>It is not certain who determined how a king's years were to be reckoned, hence the term 'writer' here and in what follows may refer to the original court scribes of Israel and Judah who wrote the 'Book of the Chronicles of Israel' and the 'Book of the Chronicles of Judah' respectively, or it may refer to the canonical writers of Kings and Chronicles.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. the reviews of L.L. Honor, *JQR* 43 (1952/3), pp. 285-286; S.H. Horn, *AUSS* 2 (1964), pp. 40-52, and *AUSS* 5 (1967), p. 213; R. North, *CBQ* 29 (1967), p. 181; H.H. Rowley, *VT* 4 (1953), p. 446; K.A. Strand, *AUSS* 17 (1979), p. 227; W.R. Wifall, *JBL* 98 (1979), pp. 118-119, who lists major works which have adopted Thiele's dates; M.F. Unger, *BibSac* 108 (1951), pp. 377-378; J.L. McKenzie, *CBQ* 14 (1952), pp. 298-303, which is the most incisive review to date along with that of D.N. Freedman, *JRel* 33 (1953), pp. 311-312.

<sup>17</sup>F.D. Kidner, *Churchman* 8 (1967), p. 68.

<sup>18</sup>A number of scholars date the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Zedekiah's 11th and last year ran from Sept. 587 to Sept. 586 BC. Cf. H. Cazelles, '587 ou 586?', in C.L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (eds.), *The Word of the Lord shall go forth* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 427-435.

<sup>19</sup>Op. cit., pp. 40-89.

<sup>20</sup>K.A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 BC)* (Second Edition with Supplement, Warminster, England, 1986), pp. 544, 575.

<sup>21</sup>This is the view of Kitchen (*op. cit.*) and A.G. Green, *JBL* 97 (1978), p. 358, on the basis that the relief was never completed. The Silsilis Stela is dated to the 21st year of Shishak and it was set up to commemorate the opening of the quarry which was to produce the triumphal relief depicting his invasion of Judah (among other countries). Cf. R.A. Caminos, 'Gebel Es-Silsilah No 100', *JEA* 38 (1952), pp. 46-61.

<sup>22</sup>The Lunar Dates of Thutmose III and Ramesses II', *JNES* 16 (1957), pp. 42-43.

<sup>23</sup>JNES 12 (1953), p. 50.

<sup>24</sup>JNES 32 (1973), pp. 2-25, esp. p. 107.

<sup>25</sup>See Edward F. Wente (review of Kitchen's book), *JNES* 35 (1978), p. 278. Cf. also E.F. Wente and Charles C. Van Siclen III, 'A Chronology of the New Kingdom', in *Studies in Honor of George R. Hughes* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1976), who based their dates on Egyptian data itself.

<sup>26</sup>K.A. Kitchen, *op. cit.*; Erik Hornung, *Untersuchungen zur Chronologie und Geschichte des Neuen Reiches* (Wiesbaden, 1964).

<sup>27</sup>Alberto R. Green, 'David's Relations with Hiram: Biblical and Josephan Evidence for Tyrian Chronology', in C.L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (eds.), *The Word of the Lord shall go forth* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 373-391 (esp. p. 382).

<sup>28</sup>For a fuller treatment and revision of Thiele's chronology see the author's article, 'A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles', *BibSac* 148 (1991), pp. 3-45.

<sup>29</sup>This and the following coregency were proposed by John Gray in his commentary on *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 73 and 64 respectively.

<sup>30</sup>Tishri was the beginning of the regnal year in Judah; here 'Sept' stands for Tishri. Nisan was the beginning of the regnal year in Israel; here 'April' stands for Nisan.

<sup>31</sup>Thiele (1983:109) gives an accession-year to Azariah's coregency (see p. 97), which was a lapse on his part for he noted earlier that 'The year that begins a coregency is the first official year of that coregency' (p. 85). Hence coregencies do not have an accession-year. Fortunately accession-years do not count for strict chronological purposes and so there is no difference between the chronology being offered here and that of Thiele.