

CHAPTER III

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE FIRST TEMPLE PERIOD

A Presentation and Evaluation of the Sources

by H. Tadmor

A. THE SOURCES AND THEIR VALUE

I. CHRONOLOGY AND CHRONOGRAPHY

DATING EVENTS ACCORDING to the regnal years of the current monarch was accepted practice throughout the ancient Near East—in Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria¹—as well as in Judah and Israel. A unified counting system to be used by every city and county in the state is essential to centralized administration. One can therefore assume that from the very inception of the United Monarchy in Israel, especially under the rule of David and Solomon, the foundation was laid for a single reckoning system to be shared by both the civil and the military administration. The reckoning would naturally be made according to regnal years, inasmuch as the system of reckoning by era known in Greece or in Rome² was foreign to the peoples of the ancient Near East until the Hellenistic Age.

Ostraca of the monarchic period, such as those from Samaria and Lachish, refer simply to the regnal year, e.g., “in the ninth year,”³ without mentioning the king’s name, as do the Egyptian ostraca from the New Kingdom. In official documents written on parchment or papyrus—which have not survived—details were probably listed in full: the king’s name, the regnal year, the month, and the day. The ancient chronographers summarized chronological data in extensive chronographic composition such as “Chronicles of the Kings of Judah” or “Chronicles of the Kings of Israel,” which are referred to in the book of Kings. The exact nature of these works remains unclear, but they probably recorded not only the length of each king’s reign but also his age upon accession to the throne, the name of his father, and in Judah the name of the queen-mother.

After the division of the United Monarchy, the chronographers supplemented their extensive compositions with synchronisms. Thus the accession year of a king of Israel was juxtaposed to the regnal year of the contemporary Judean

monarch (henceforth, Judean synchronism), and the year of accession of a king of Judah was juxtaposed to the regnal year of the contemporary king of Israel (henceforth, Israelite synchronism). Because the chronographers considered the separate Hebrew kingdoms two divisions of a single people, whose histories intertwined, they recorded the chronological data synchronistically. Similarly, in Mesopotamia during the Neo-Assyrian period, the intricate connections between the Assyrian empire and Babylonia gave rise to synchronistic literature, the foremost example of which was the 'Babylonian Chronicle'.⁴ This work narrated the main events in Babylonia from the first half of the eighth century onward (dating them by the current Babylonian monarch) and integrated those Assyrian and Elamite kings directly or indirectly involved in Babylonian affairs. The narration takes the form of a synchronous chronicle.

At the end of the First Commonwealth and especially during the Babylonian Exile, chronographers composed extensive chronographic works in which they attempted to forge a full and continuous chronological scheme for the entire monarchic period. The exilic redactor of the book of Kings had at his disposal not only extensive chronographic works but apparently older documents, like chronicles and king-lists.⁵

Since the Northern Kingdom had disappeared a century and a half prior to the redaction of the book of Kings, the Israelite chronicles probably did not survive intact for such an extended period. The redactor was often unable to find required data in the available sources and was therefore compelled to add certain details—such as Israelite synchronisms—on the basis of his own calculations or approximations. Because these calculated dates did not always suit the heterogeneous evidence in the sources, they gave rise to some contradictions (fairly common in the Israelite synchronistic data, but relatively rare in the data about the Israelite regnal years). The Judean data in the hands of the redactor seem to have been more reliable, so that the number of errors in the transmission of the chronological data is relatively small.

Although it is still debated whether the ancient chronological material used by the redactor of the book of Kings was drawn from a "canonical" corpus, the details of which had already been harmonized, the numerous inconsistencies in the chronological data in Kings seem to indicate that the redactor drew upon divergent sources, often conflicting. Certain passages derive from ancient chronicles and are incorporated verbatim into the book of Kings. These preserve authentic chronological information with which the editor did not tamper. Finally, there is a certain validity to the conjecture that in a significant number of places there have been scribal errors in transmission. Changes in system of writing numerals, as evidenced in Hebrew epigraphic documents, might over long periods have readily given rise to errors.

2. THE HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The study of biblical chronology did not start with modern biblical scholarship: struggles with the contradictory dates in the book of Kings are ancient. Thus in several versions of the Septuagint to Kings—the Codex Vaticanus (= version B of the Septuagint) and the Lucianic recension—traces of a chronological system different from the one in the Masoretic Text (= MT) are distinguishable.

It has been suggested that this residue (in particular the synchronisms between Jehoshaphat and his son Jehoram and the Kings of the Omride Dynasty) reflects the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint, which is considered more reliable than the Masoretic Text in matters of chronology.⁶ This question, however, is still unsettled. The problems which arise from the Septuagint version are complex and it has been argued that the Masoretic Text is in fact original and to be preferred, the variants in the Septuagint being no more than later attempts to harmonize the contradictory dates in the Septuagint's Hebrew *Vorlage*.⁷ Josephus, in his attempt to settle the contradictory dates, suggested a system of his own, different in certain elements from MT.⁸ Furthermore, the authors of the rabbinic chronograph *Seder Olam Rabbah*, encountered difficulties in reconciling the contradictory biblical data of the MT⁹. So, too, the medieval exegetes Rashi, Ibn-Ezra, and Gersonides offered harmonistic attempts to reconcile the obvious contradictions.

From the middle of the 19th century on, biblical scholarship has repeatedly delved into the chronological questions of the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel.¹⁰ The early investigators preferred to use the regnal years rather than synchronisms; twentieth-century scholars tend to prefer synchronisms. Even here the problem has been tackled in several ways, with a general inclination toward the Judean synchronisms rather than the Israelite.

The fact is that none of the systems thus far suggested—even the most conservative textually—have succeeded in preserving simultaneously both the synchronisms and the regnal year data. Those who try to uphold the maximum number of biblical chronological data are usually forced into far-fetched assumptions about the possibility of long periods of co-regencies or into other conjectures often devoid of scriptural support.

Opinions also vary about how regnal years were reckoned (below, 4). The most extreme conjecture is that the reckoning system was subject to several changes even within the time-span of a single reign.¹¹ Such an approach is often motivated by a desire to verify and harmonize as many biblical dates as possible.

3. QUESTIONS OF METHODOLOGY

The point of departure for the present study is the assumption that the data concerning regnal years in Israel and Judah does not represent the official reckoning current during the king's reign, and here the present author differs from prevalent systems of Biblical Chronology. We are confronted instead with data that has already been edited—sometimes painstakingly—by the editors of the chronological framework of Kings. Consequently, assessment of this data for a modern chronologist is entirely dependent on a proper evaluation of the methods employed by those ancient chronologists who prepared that framework.

Before undertaking the analysis of the ancient chronologists' *modus operandi* (below, 6), one must clarify a number of questions inherent in any discussion of dating systems: What type of calendar was used in the biblical period? Was the year a solar year, as in Egypt, or was the calendar lunar-solar as in Mesopotamia (in which the solar year, with 365 days, was adjusted to the twelve-month lunar year by the intercalation of a thirteenth month every few years)? On the one hand the term for month, *yrh* (moon), or *hdš* (new), indicates that the basic unit of the biblical calendar was lunar. On the other hand there is no doubt that the major festivals of the year—the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the month of Abib, Pentecost at the time of the wheat harvest, and the Ingathering Festival “at the turn of the year” (Ex. 34:22)—were determined by the seasons and the agricultural cycle. One can conclude therefore that the calendar in biblical Israel was a lunar-solar one. Nonetheless, we do not know how these two elements—the 365-day solar year and 354-day lunar year—were harmonized. Was it by intercalating a month, as in Babylonia, or by adding ten days at the end of every twelve-month cycle, as in Egypt, or by some other method?¹²

4. THE RECKONING OF REGNAL YEARS

How were the regnal years reckoned and, in particular, how was the year of accession counted?

Let us first define the term ‘regnal year.’ Does it refer to an actual calendrical year, counted from the day of the king's ascension to the throne (or from the day of coronation) to the corresponding day in the following year? Or does it refer to the nearest calendrical year following accession or coronation, counted from one New Year's day to the next?

In Mesopotamia and Egypt the regnal year generally coincided with the calendar year. During the New Kingdom in Egypt (the eighteenth to twentieth Dynasties), however, regnal years were reckoned from the day of the Pharaoh's coronation.¹³ While there is no direct evidence as to which of these two methods

was used in Judah and Israel, there are clear, although indirect, indications that in the system used by the editors of Kings the regnal years of every king coincided with the calendar year. The advantage of this system was that both the royal chronographers and the king's officials in the various branches of state administration would have no difficulty in determining when a regnal year began, since New Year's Day—whether in the agricultural or cultic calendar—was simultaneously “the New Year for kings” in the official reckoning.

The question to be answered next is: How did the king count the year in which he ascended the throne?

The two methods of counting a king's initial year in the ancient Near East were “post-dating” and “ante-dating”.¹⁴ In the post-dating system the king's first year begins not with his accession to the throne, but with the following New Year. For purposes of chronological reckoning, the part of the year from the time the king was enthroned until the next New Year was not counted for the new king (i.e., it was a “zero year,” since it was reckoned as the remainder of the last year of the previous king).

In the ante-dating system the first year of the king was reckoned from the day the king ascended the throne or sometimes from the day of the official coronation. In this system it was possible for a king who actually reigned a very short time, e.g., only one month—half before the New Year and half after—to be credited with a reign of “two years”, since the first two weeks would be considered the “first year,” and the second two, from New Year's Day on, the “second year” of the reign. When setting up a continuous chronological scheme we must reduce by one year the total number of regnal years counted according to the ante-dating system, since the last incomplete year of the king's reign must be included in the regnal years of his successor.¹⁵ Otherwise the same calendar year would be credited to both the old and the new kings. In the post-dating system, however, the number of a king's official regnal years was identical with the number of years he actually ruled.

The ante-dating system was current in Egypt during the Old and Middle Kingdoms and reappeared at the time of the twenty-sixth Dynasty. The post-dating—or as some scholars designate it, “the accession year”—system was practiced only in Babylonia and fell out of use with the rise of the Hellenistic empires. It grew out of the custom of naming each year of a king's reign. In this system the king's accession year had a special term: “the year of the start of the reign” (in Akkadian, *šanat rēš šarrūti*), his year 1 beginning only with the following New Year, at Nisan.¹⁶ In Assyria, however, years were counted by the names of specially designated eponyms (*limmu*),¹⁷ and hence the question of counting the accession year separately did not usually arise. The Assyrian royal inscriptions, starting from the middle of the ninth century, counted regnal years according

to *palû*, “regnal period, term of office.” But this count, introduced under Babylonian influence, did not always coincide with the count according to regnal years.¹⁸

Post-dating enjoyed wide use in Syro-Palestine as a result of the spread of Babylonian administrative practices during the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. It is mentioned in II Kings 25:27 as the time when Evil-Merodach king of Babylon freed Jehoiachin from prison: *biš^enat molkō*, i.e., during his accession year or *šanat rēš šarrūti* in Babylonian terminology.¹⁹

For earlier periods, however, it can be assumed that Israel and Judah employed the ante-dating system, since it was both simpler and more natural than the unconventional post-dating. Nevertheless, the chronological data beginning with Manasseh or Amon, kings of Judah, can be suitably explained only by the post-dating system. The uncommon use of post-dating can be accounted for in one of two ways: (1) Amon, or his father Manasseh, introduced the Babylonian post-dating system into Judah, or (2) even though ante-dating was actually used in Judah throughout its history as a kingdom the exilic chronologist edited the data (below, 6), and adjusted the regnal years in the period between Manasseh or Amon and Zedekiah according to the post-dating system (below, B, 4).

5. THE “ROYAL NEW YEAR” IN THE BIBLICAL PERIOD

A tradition from the Second Temple period (Mishnah *Rosh ha-Shanah* 1:1) distinguished between “New Year for kings,” i.e., the royal New Year, and “New Year for years,” i.e., the calendrical New Year: the former in Nisan and the latter in Tishri. This tradition seems to have reflected the practice of the first century C.E. The Hasmoneans, King Herod, and the leaders of the First Revolt against Rome reckoned their years from Nisan, as had apparently been the case in Judah in the biblical period (see below). In the course of the first century C.E., however, and especially during the first half of the second century, counting the years from Tishri in matters of economy and religion, prevailed over that of Nisan. Since then 1 Tishri has been the only New Year in the Jewish tradition.²⁰

Modern scholarship ever since the end of the 19th century has been divided on the question of the start of the year in Judah and Israel in biblical times and the date of the royal New Year. Some hold that only one calendar was used in Israel and Judah, which ran from Nisan to Adar. Others maintain that the oldest calendar in Judah and Israel began in Tishri and that counting from the spring (Nisan) was the result of Assyrian or Babylonian influence. Many believe that the royal New Year in Judah and its counterpart in Israel were half a year apart, but even on this point opinion differs: according to some, the Judean kings

counted from Tishri, and the Israelite kings from Nisan; according to others, they counted from Nisan in Judah, from Tishri in Israel.

The evidence in our sources points to the fact that in ancient Israel there actually were two New Years, the one in the spring—in the first month—and the other in the fall—in the seventh month (in the northern kingdom perhaps in the eighth month; cf. I Kings 12:33). The Gezer calendar, which lists the farmer's yearly agricultural activities, opens with *yrhw 'sp*, "the season of ingathering"—the end of Elul or Tishri, or the beginning of Marheshvan. The terminology of Ex. 23:16, *v^ehag hā-'āsif b^esē't ha-šānā*, and of Ex. 34:22, *v^ehag hā-'āsif t^equfat ha-šānā*, presupposes an agricultural year which begins, or ends, with the Festival of the Ingathering in the fall. Other traditions in the Pentateuch (Ex. 12:2; Lev. 23–24; Num. 23:16, 33:35; Deut. 1:7) speak of the month of Abib as the first month. In fact, the months in the biblical period are always counted from the spring. The point can be illustrated from Jer. 36:22: in the ninth month the king sat in his winter palace in front of a blazing hearth.

At the same time, it can be conjectured that during and after the United Monarchy there were several reckoning systems used in different spheres of life; in commerce and agriculture it was customary to count from the fall, while in the cult—especially in the traditions of the Jerusalem priesthood—it was accepted that the year commenced in the spring. The practice of counting the New Year from the spring as in Mesopotamia has always been followed by the people of Israel, whereas the agricultural year, in the autumn, was taken over from the ancient local tradition of pre-conquest Canaan.

We can now return to the question posed at the outset: When did the kings of Judah and Israel reckon the beginning of their regnal years? Although explicit evidence is exceedingly rare, there are a few indications that in Judah the years were counted from the spring. Thus in Jer. 46:2, the battle of Carchemish, when the Egyptian army was defeated by the Babylonians, is dated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605 B.C.E., and see below, the table of fixed dates). One can deduce that at the end of the seventh century B.C.E. regnal years began in the first month of spring.²¹ Since reckoning customs tend to be extremely conservative, we can safely assume that even prior to Jehoiakim Judean kings counted from the spring. This would, in turn, correspond with the practice of the Jerusalem priesthood, mentioned above, whose year started in the month of Abib.

On the other hand, we have no data about the regnal New Year in the northern kingdom, and there is disagreement among scholars as to whether it was in the spring or the autumn. However, there is indirect evidence that New Year in Judah did not coincide with that in Ephraim; it is to be found in II Kings 15:8, 10: Zechariah, who reigned for six months, ascended the throne in the 38th year of Uzziah of Judah and died in Uzziah's 39th year. During these six months a

new regnal year had therefore commenced in Judah. At the same time, however, no new year had begun in Israel;²² if it had, Zechariah's six-month reign would have been counted as two years (cf. the brief reigns of Nadab son of Jeroboam I and Elah son of Baasha of Israel). May one conclude that this half-year discrepancy in matters connected with the regnal New Year existed not only in the days of Uzziah and Zechariah but throughout the period of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel? If indeed, as already noted, the kings of Judah counted their years from the spring and if there is a half-year discrepancy, we are forced to conclude that the Ephraimite kings reckoned their regnal years from the autumn (either from the seventh or the eighth month).²³

6. THE EDITORIAL METHOD OF THE ANCIENT CHRONOLOGIST

We turn to the main problem presented at the outset of our discussion (above, 3): What was the *modus operandi* of the ancient chronologist in constructing the chronological framework of the book of Kings? We believe that he must have used the standard procedures employed by Mesopotamian chronologists in respect to the rounding off of years.²⁴ Since a main interest of this editor was to synchronize the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel, he was naturally concerned only with the number of full regnal years. If his sources reported that a certain king of Judah reigned x years + y months (e.g., David in Hebron: seven years and six months, II Sam. 5:5), he would have had to delete the number of months in excess of full years (i.e., the last incomplete year), and count only the complete years. Exactly the same practice would be followed by a modern chronologist who sets out to arrange a synchronistic scheme on the basis of regnal data calculated by ante-dating.

The result is that all of the kings of Judah and Israel, whose regnal years have been rounded off by the editor, actually reigned (according to their own count) one year more than is attributed to them in Kings. Consequently, Rehoboam reigned 17 years and x months, and died in the 18th year of his reign; and since Rehoboam and Jeroboam ascended their respective thrones in the same year, Rehoboam died in Jeroboam's 18th, not his 17th, year. This is indeed recorded in the synchronism in I Kings 15:1: "Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah." Moreover, the assumption that the editor deleted the extra months, leaving the number of complete years, solves two major chronological problems: the ten regnal years of Menahem of Israel and the single year of Ahaziah. According to the synchronisms, Menahem began to reign in the 39th year of Uzziah, king of Judah, and died in Uzziah's 50th year (II Kings 15:17, 23). Hence, Menahem reigned not ten but eleven or even twelve years (counting by the ante-dating system).

The best way to preserve both the figure 'ten' and the synchronisms of II Kings would be to assume that Menahem reigned actually 10 years + x months (i.e., eleven years in his own official count) and that the ancient editor, faithful to his method, deleted the extra number of months fixing Menahem's total to ten full years.

The other difficulty solved by the present assumption involves the single regnal year of Ahaziah of Judah. According to the system of ante-dating, if his reign terminated before a New Year, it would have been considered a zero for synchronistic purposes, in which case the chronologist would have reported the exact number of months of that incomplete year. If his reign had extended beyond one New Year—i.e., into his second official year—he would have been credited with two years. We therefore assume that the editor found in his sources that Ahaziah had reigned one year and a few months, but, in keeping with his system of rounding off, he deleted the number of months and credited the king with one year (II Kings 8:26).

What were the sources used by our editor? It stands to reason that the major portion of the material from Judah consisted of official chronicles, or gleanings from them, which listed both full regnal years and additional months. By contrast, the Israelite material at his disposal was partly original, partly reworked. It would seem that for the period between Jeroboam and the end of the Omride dynasty, only data about complete regnal years reached him. That is to say, in his source the number of regnal years of the Israelite kings had already been rounded off and only whole years were listed. These numbers were somewhat similar: Jeroboam, 22 years, Nadab, 2 years, Baasha, 24 years, Elah, 2 years, Omri, 12 years, Ahab, 22 years, Ahaziah, 2 years, Joram, 12 years. Rounding off numbers according to cycles of 2 + 22 years and 12 years, which indeed was rather close to the actual number of regnal years, was resorted to, it seems, as a mnemonic device (or even may have resulted from contamination). Accordingly the editor did not tamper with these numbers, which had already been rounded off, even though each one of them was one year higher than the actual number of regnal years. The Judean synchronisms for this period fit this assumption. On the other hand, for the period after the rise of Jehu our editor's data seem to have been more exact. Here he consistently kept to his method of rounding off, so that Jehu's 28 years and Jehoash's 16 years were in fact 28 years + x months and 16 years + y months, which in the ante-dating system were counted officially as 29 years and 17 years respectively.

In contrast with his standard working procedure, our chronologist was precise when dealing with the kings who reigned for less than a year. Here his methods were those of the compilers of the Babylonian king lists:²⁵ he recorded the actual number of regnal years, months, or even days. Thus, he recorded for

Zimri—7 days, Zechariah—6 months, and Shallum—1 month, giving Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin of Judah 3 months each. These figures must certainly derive from chronicles or official records and bring us one step closer to the no longer extant original chronographic sources.

7. CO-REGENCIES

One other principle which guided our chronologist was the assumption that during the entire period of the Israelite Monarchy there were no co-regencies: i.e., the heir to the throne serving as regent during his father's lifetime counted this period as part of his own reign. Our sources do point, however, to periods of co-regency: Jotham "judged the 'people of the land'" during the lifetime of Uzziah his father (II Kings 15: 5)²⁶ and Uzziah apparently was regent for fifteen years during the lifetime of his father Amaziah (II Kings 14: 17).²⁷ Whether the chronologist knew about these and other co-regencies but decided to ignore them, or whether he did not know about them at all—as was more probably the case—it is clear that the method he chose has created serious discrepancies in the chronological scheme of the book of Kings.

The assumption that there actually were co-regencies in both Judah and Israel—in itself logical and clearly alluded to in the sources—does much to solve a few of the more serious contradictions.²⁸

B. DETERMINING THE CHRONOLOGICAL SCHEME

1. FIXED DATES

The chronological scheme of the Monarchic Age divides naturally into three periods: (a) From Jeroboam until the rebellion of Jehu; (b) from Jehu until the fall of Samaria; (c) From the fall of Samaria until the Destruction of the First Temple. Inasmuch as the chronological data from the last period are the most certain, our chronological considerations begin with the late period and then work backwards.²⁹

It is only natural that information from extra-biblical sources will provide absolute dates and serve as "anchor points." The following table lists twenty external synchronisms for the First Temple period³⁰, drawn on the whole from Assyrian and Babylonian sources. The dates are chronologically absolute (in the Julian calendar), since Assyrian and Babylonian chronologies of the first millennium B.C.E. are based on continuous listing of years down to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, verifiable by astronomical reckoning.³¹

TABLE OF DATES*

<i>Event</i>	<i>Synchronism*</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Biblical Reference</i>
1) Ahab the Israelite participates in the battle of Qarqar as one of twelve kings of Syria	6th year of Shalmaneser III	853 B.C.E.	—
2) Jehu "the son of Omri" pays tribute to Assyria	18th year of Shalmaneser III	841 B.C.E.	—
3) Jehoash, king of Israel, pays tribute to Adad-nirari III		796 B.C.E.	—
4) Menahem, king of Israel, pays tribute to Pul (Tiglath-pileser III), king of Assyria	8th year of Tiglath-pileser III	738 B.C.E.	II Kings 15:19-20
5) Campaign of Tiglath-pileser III to Philistia. Ahaz (Jehoahaz) pays tribute to Assyria		734 B.C.E.	—
6) Conquest and exile of the inhabitants of Galilee and Transjordan by Tiglath-pileser III, during the reign of Pekah		733-732 B.C.E.	II Kings 15:29
7) Death of Pekah; Hoshea ascends the throne		732 B.C.E.	—
8) Tiglath-pileser III receives tribute from Hoshea during his campaign in Chaldaea		731 B.C.E.	—
9) 9th year of Hoshea; Hoshea taken captive by Shalmaneser V; siege of Samaria begins		724 B.C.E.	II Kings 17:4-5
10) Capture of Samaria by Shalmaneser V		722 B.C.E.	{ II Kings 17:6; 18:10
11) Exile of Israelites by Sargon II	2nd year of Sargon	720 B.C.E.	
12) Sargon's campaigns to Ashdod	9th-10th years of Sargon	713-712 B.C.E.	Isa. 20:1-2
13) 14th year of Hezekiah; Sennacherib's campaign to Judah	4th year of Sennacherib (his 3rd campaign)	701 B.C.E.	II Kings 18:13; Isa. 36
14) 31st year of Josiah; campaign of Necho; the battle of Megiddo; the reign of Jehoahaz	18th year of Nabopolassar	609 B.C.E.	II Kings 23:29
15) 4th year of Jehoiakim; defeat of Egypt at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar	21st year of Nabopolassar	605 B.C.E.	II Chron. 35:20; Jer. 46 (between Nisan and Ab)

TABLE OF DATES

<i>Event</i>	<i>Synchronism</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Biblical Reference</i>
16) Capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar	7th year of Nebuchadnezzar II	598/7 B.C.E.	
17) Exile of Jehoiachin and of 10,000 men	8th year of Nebuchadnezzar II	597 B.C.E.	II Kings 24:12-14;
18) 10th year of Zedekiah	18th year of Nebuchadnezzar II	587 B.C.E.	Jer. 32:1
19) 11th year of Zedekiah; Destruction of the Temple	19th year of Nebuchadnezzar II	7th of Ab, 586 B.C.E.	II Kings 25:8
20) Release of Jehoiachin from prison in 37th year of his captivity	Accession year of Evil-merodach	25th or 27th of Adar 561 B.C.E.	Jer. 52:31

★ All dates are given in terms of the Assyro-Babylonian year, which began in Nisan (April-May) and ended in Adar (March-April).

2. FROM THE FALL OF SAMARIA UNTIL THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FIRST TEMPLE

This is a period of $134\frac{1}{2}$ years, according to the regnal year data for Judean kings which extends from the sixth year of Hezekiah (inclusive) until the eleventh year of Zedekiah. The half year—three months of Jehoahaz and three months of Jehoiachin—is taken up (in the post-dating system) in the reckoning of complete years, leaving only 134 years. This period is divided into 112 regnal years, from the conquest of Samaria (6th year of Hezekiah) until the death of Josiah, and 22 from the death of Josiah until the Destruction of the Temple in the 11th year of Zedekiah.

The dates of the last four kings of Judah—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—are determined by the synchronisms between Jehoiakim and Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (see the table above):

Death of Josiah	609
Reign of Jehoahaz and accession of Jehoiakim	609
Reign of Jehoiakim	608/7-598/7
Reign of Jehoiachin and accession of Zedekiah	597.

It is more difficult to determine the exact date of the Destruction of the Temple. The dates 587 and 586³² have been proposed. Since the corresponding passage in the Babylonian Chronicle which tells of the Conquest of Jerusalem and the Destruction of the Temple is not extant,³³ there is as yet no generally accepted conclusion. This question involves yet another, more difficult problem: When

was the exile of Jehoiachin and when exactly did Zedekiah start counting regnal years—from the spring of 597, the autumn of 597, or only from the spring of 596? The present writer, who adheres to the view that Judah counted the years from the spring, prefers to place the Destruction of Jerusalem in 586 in agreement with II Kings 25:8, which synchronizes the 11th and last year of Zedekiah with the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar (which began 1 Nisan 596). Zedekiah's first year would accordingly begin in Nisan 596, rather than in Nisan 597, immediately after Jehoiachin's exile. The explanation offered for this postponement of one year is that while people were being carried to exile (and no doubt the 10,000 people were carried off *after* 1 Nisan 597), Zedekiah would have refrained from celebrating his accession and hence reckoned his regnal years from the spring of 596. The shortcoming of this suggestion is that it postulated an extremely unusual accession year of $12+x$ months. Therefore one of the following alternatives might be considered: (a) that the equation of Zedekiah's 11th year with Nebuchadnezzar's 19th is not reliable (and there is not sufficient reason to assume that), or (b) it was the ancient chronographer who counted Zedekiah's regnal years from (spring) 596 rather than from (spring) 597. In any event, unless additional evidence is unearthed, 586 seems to be a preferable date for the Destruction of the Temple.

Since Josiah's death in his 31st regnal year has been reckoned at 609 B.C.E., his first regnal year must have been 639/8 B.C.E. Between 722 B.C.E., the date of the fall of Samaria, and 639/8 B.C.E., the start of Josiah's reign, 83 years elapsed. But the sum of years of Judean kings from the sixth year of Hezekiah (the year of the conquest of Samaria, according to II Kings 18:9–10) until the first year of Josiah is only 81 years: 24 years of Hezekiah (from his sixth until his 29th year), 55 years of Manasseh, 2 years of Amon, all according to post-dating system.

Several solutions to this discrepancy have been suggested:

(1) The total number of regnal years of Manasseh and/or of Amon as transmitted by MT is corrupt. Manasseh should be credited with 57 years and/or Amon with 4 years. All the ancient versions and translations, however, support the figures given in MT.

(2) Alternately it has been suggested³⁴ that Hezekiah was co-regent during the last two regnal years of his father Ahaz but these two years were not included in his 29 regnal years. The synchronisms which place the start of the siege of Samaria in Hezekiah's fourth year and its destruction in his sixth are numbered from his co-regency. This suggestion raises more difficulties than it solves, especially as it does not accord with placing the death of Ahaz in the year 727, the last year of Tiglath-pileser III (see below, 3).

We propose yet a third solution, in line with our assumption that the ancient

editor rounded off years (above, 6): The 29 years of Hezekiah, the 55 of Manasseh and the two of Amon represent only the complete regnal years of these kings. Each of them reigned a few additional months which amount, when added together, to two years. Our chronologist deleted, according to his practice, the extra months and recorded only full years.

Another point to be considered is that the regnal years of the last kings of Judah, beginning with Manasseh, were reckoned by post-dating. When was this method introduced? Was it actually employed during the reign of Manasseh (as a result of Mesopotamian influence?) or did the exilic chronologist apply the post-dating system to the last kings of Judah, starting with Manasseh or Amon? (If so, it would seem that our chronologist had already at his disposal a chronological framework—in the ante-dating system—for the pre-Manasseh period.) For the present, this problem must remain unsolved.

3. FROM THE REBELLION OF JEHU UNTIL THE FALL OF SAMARIA

If Hezekiah came to the throne in 727/6 B.C.E., then between this date and the rebellion of Jehu in 842, 115 years would have elapsed. But the total number of regnal years of the kings of Judah and Israel during this period exceeds 115. In Israel the total is 140, a 25-year discrepancy, and in Judah 159, a 44-year discrepancy.

To account for these discrepancies one must assume either that the numbers in MT are corrupt or that some of the kings were co-regents, sharing power and authority during their fathers' lifetime. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

Reckoning in both Israel and Judah was done by the antedating system (above, 4). According to our approach the number of regnal years recorded in Kings for this period includes only the number of years, without the additional months. Thus in a continuous reckoning of years each king has reigned beyond the number of years allocated to him in Kings (e.g., Jehu died in his 29th year, Jehoahaz—in his 18th, Jehoash—in his 17th, Menahem—in his 11th etc.)

The absolute date fixed by external synchronism for the end of this period is the fall of Samaria. Even here, however, scholarly opinion is divided. In the past it was customary to accept at face value Sargon's claim in the Khorsabad Annals that he had conquered Samaria and exiled its inhabitants at the beginning of his reign, during his *šanat rēs šarrūti*, i.e., between December 722 (or January 721) and April 721. This entry in the Annals is contradicted, however, by a more reliable inscription, according to which Sargon appears not to have undertaken a military campaign before his second year, i.e., not before April 720. The compilers of the royal Annals apparently transferred an event from 720 to 721

in order to open the narrative of Sargon's reign with a great military victory. The biblical reference to the king of Assyria who besieged and conquered Samaria (II Kings 17: 5-6) is therefore to Shalmaneser V and should be considered reliable. This tradition is further supported by the Babylonian Chronicle, which states that Shalmaneser V conquered Šamara'in (the Aramaic form of Šom^erōn/ Samaria).³⁵

Another vexing chronological problem concerns the date of the accession year of Hezekiah. According to II Kings 18: 10, Hezekiah was in his sixth year at the time of Samaria's fall. Confirming this datum is Isa. 14: 28: "In the year that King Ahaz died came this oracle: Rejoice not all Philistia, that the rod which smote you is broken." Breaking the rod which smote Philistia is probably a reference to the death of Tiglath-pileser III, the only Assyrian king from the days of Ahaz worthy of such an epithet. It appears therefore that Ahaz died and Hezekiah came to power in the same year that Tiglath-pileser died,³⁶ which according to the Babylonian Chronicle was 12 Tebet 727/6 B.C.E. (27 December 727 or 15 January 726).

On the other hand, the heading in II Kings 18: 13 (Isa. 36: 1) states that: "In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them." As this event, reported in detail in Sennacherib's Annals, is fixed beyond any doubt as the year 705 B.C.E., it follows that Hezekiah's accession took place in 716/5. This date, however, is contradicted both by Isa. 14: 28, as explained above, as well as by the series of synchronisms between Hezekiah and Hoshea in II Kings 18: 1, 9-10. A modern biblical chronologist, who prefers to rely upon the date in II Kings 18: 13, must reject the authenticity of the synchronisms in II Kings 18.³⁷ It has therefore been suggested³⁸ that the heading in II Kings 18: 13 (Isa. 36: 1) belonged originally to the tale about Hezekiah's illness and his miraculous recovery (II Kings 20: 1-11; Isa. 38: 1-8) and was placed in its present position by a later editor, who related all the prophetic stories concerning Isaiah and Hezekiah to the fateful year of Sennacherib's campaign and the miraculous salvation of Jerusalem.

4. FROM JEROBOAM UNTIL THE REBELLION OF JEHU

The total number of years of the kings of Israel (from Jeroboam I until Joram son of Ahab) is 98, and those of the kings of Judah (from Rehoboam until Ahaziah son of Jehoram), 95. Inasmuch as Jeroboam and Rehoboam ascended the throne at the same time and Joram and Ahaziah were both killed during Jehu's rebellion, the number of regnal years for the kings of both Judah and Israel must be equal.

We have assumed (above, 6) that the data about regnal years of the Judean

kings, even in this period, include only the complete years, without the months of the incomplete last year, whereas the data for Israelite kings include the incomplete final year. If so, in order to work out the chronological table one must decrease by one the regnal years of each Israelite king.

Two external synchronisms are available: (1) The battle of Qarqar, in which Ahab participated, took place in the sixth year of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (= 853 B.C.E.); (2) Jehu paid tribute to Assyria in the eighteenth year of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (= 841 B.C.E.)

The main crux in the chronology of this period concerns the years 853–841. If Ahab was killed in the battle against Aram (I Kings 22) after he participated in the battle of Qarqar,³⁹ then in the 13 years inclusive between 853 and 841 we must be able to account for the following data for the Northern kingdom:

- x = period of time that Ahab reigned from the battle of Qarqar until his death
- 2 regnal years of Ahaziah (actually one calendar year)
- 12 regnal years of Joram (actually 11 calendar years)
- y = period of time from Jehu's rise to power until delivery of tribute to Assyria

The x-figure should include at least a few months, for Ahab was Ben-hadad's ally at Qarqar and it is not likely that Ahab would have attacked his former ally at Ramoth-Gilead so soon after Qarqar. The y-figure should also extend over at least a few months. The tribute was certainly paid after Nisan 841 B.C.E., whereas the rebellion seems to have taken place the previous winter while the king was recuperating from his wounds in the Omride dynasty's winter residency, Jezreel.

In addition to the difficulty of accounting for $12 + x + y$ years in the short interval between 853 and 841 B.C.E., there are several contradictions between various synchronisms and the totals of the regnal years.⁴⁰

One might perhaps solve the chronological crux by an emendation: if Jehoram son of Ahab reigned not 12 but only 10 years (actually 9 full years and a few additional months) we are left with about two years for the period of Ahab's reign, between Qarqar and Ramoth-Gilead, and about a year for the period between Jehu's accession and the payment of tribute to Assyria. Add to this, nine or ten years of Jehoram's reign and we arrive at a total of thirteen years (at most) between 853–841 B.C.E.

However, no system in biblical chronology proposed so far offers a fully satisfactory solution to the conflicting data in this period, especially that which concerns the reign of Jehoshaphat. Here the Greek versions (above, A, 2) preserve somewhat different figures, which according to several scholars, should be preferred to those of the Masoretic Text.⁴¹

5. THE UNITED MONARCHY

The length of Saul's reign is unknown. The passage in I Sam. 13:1 ("Saul was one year old when he reigned and ruled over Israel two years,") is clearly defective. The original reading must have included a reasonable number in each case: Saul was *x* years old when he began to reign and he reigned *y* years and 2 years over Israel. Completion of the number in the tens column is a matter of conjecture.

The information in II Sam. 5:4; 11:42 about the reigns of David and Solomon is also very scanty:

David: 30 years old when he began to reign	
	7 years over Judah
	33 years over Israel
Total	40 years
Solomon:	40 years over Israel
Total	40 years

The 40-year reigns of David and Solomon seem to be approximate and typological figures. David is reported to have been thirty years old when he assumed power and is said to have reigned 40 years and 6 months (II Sam. 5:4), making him seventy years old when he died; this is, in all opinions, a typological number signifying an average life-span (Ps. 90:10).⁴² Nevertheless, the abundance of stories in Samuel about David's career forces us to assume that he had a lengthy reign of at least several decades. Solomon also reigned for an extended period and his successor reached the throne at the age of forty-one (I Kings 14:21). Therefore, just as the chronographer rounded off the 38/39-year reign of Jehoash king of Judah to 40 years,⁴³ so both David and Solomon were credited with forty years, a typological number commonly used in the Bible to indicate a full generation.⁴⁴ Likewise, units of eighty, forty or twenty years expressing two, one, or half generations (Jud. 3:11, 30; 8:28; 15:20; I Sam. 7:2), were employed by the chronographer who narrated the period that preceded the establishment of the monarchy.⁴⁵ However, by its very nature, such data originating in oral tradition and important as it may be for genealogical chronology, cannot be subjected to strict chronological enquiry.