

Has the Chronology of the Hebrew Kings been finally settled?

Leslie McFall

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.

It may come as a surprise (to those new to the subject) to discover that behind any system of chronology for the Hebrew kings there is reflected the practical outworking of the chronologist's theology or at least his view of the inspiration and integrity of the Hebrew scriptures.

Is there an infallible Hebrew Text?

Those who cannot accept the integrity or complete 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 Massorettes. 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 the Massoretic Text.

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 Massoretic Text their starting point and attempt to construct an hypothesis that will (a) permit 38 synchronisms and 37 reign lengths in Kings (plus 3 synchronisms¹ and 18 reign lengths in Chronicles) to harmonise 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.² But even he judged that the data in 2 Kings 17-18 was in error.³ Apart from this one large 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. 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 harmonise 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 the MT as it stands is a corrupt text and in need of scholarly correction.

The Restoration school is characterised 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 in 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,⁴ others have preferred Josephus' system, and still others the MT as their basic text and chronological system.

Then there is the approach of the Reconstructionist. This school takes the view that the Hebrew text has been so extensively corrupted in transmission (either deliberately or accidentally or both), 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 cock-tail

chronology is then presented to the scholarly world for their consideration.

This is by far the most popular school today and has many pupils.⁵ There is the Overt approach and the Surrogate approach. Those adopting the Overt approach quite openly take it upon themselves to make the mix.⁶ The scholar who belongs to the Surrogate approach adopts a more subtle approach. S/he has the confidence (sometimes bordering on arrogance) in his/her own skills to be the supreme arbiter of what is a corrupt numeral and what is not. 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 disciple of the Reconstruction approach to the chronology of the Hebrew Kings is Jeremy Hughes.⁷ He adopts the Surrogate approach. 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 carelessly and hopelessly 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 what he prefers to think are 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 that the Hebrew text had got itself into. He notes that sometimes the right figure has been preserved only in Josephus (p. 148, 122) or in the Ethiopic version (p. 153).

The picture we get from Hughes’ assessment of the various editors who are responsible for the present chronologies in the MT and the LXX is that they were an incompetent lot whose main failing was their inability to see the implications of their short-sighted 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 changeover 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 have set for him. 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 6-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" (p. 264f.) In other words, thought the Priestly writer, it would look good if I made 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 disciples of the Restoration School are Hayes and Hooker⁸ 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.⁹ We are presented with the novel suggestion that Jehoram of Israel and Jehoram of Judah were the same person (p. 33). They rejected the hypothesis of coregencies which Thiele and other Harmonists had employed with such devastatingly 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 premise 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. Some scholars exhibit a marvellous facility for discovering and choking over Thiele's gnats and then proceed to swallow a whole shoal of hypothetical emendations in one gulp!

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 (liberal or conservative) 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 had 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."¹⁰

Four controlling factors

Behind the Harmonist's approach lie four factors that enable him 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.¹¹

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.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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 Kgs 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 writer¹⁵ 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 back date 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.

The lesson of history

Using these four controlling factors the modern day first-year theological student can solve every single difficulty in the data of Kings that once baffled the best brains in the Church. The Harmonist's hypothesis is also the simplest of all the hypotheses and approaches that have ever been put forward. In the end the solution was quite simple but it took nearly 2000 years to discover it! 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.¹⁶ Where others aborted their quest they succumbed to emendation which is just a scholarly way of saying that they ran out of ingenuity and cheated. 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.¹⁷

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.

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 inter-married and Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, became Queen in Judah. She was probably responsible for introducing the non-accession 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.

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	
Nonaccession		Accession
Accession		Non-accession
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)

Israel's Systems
Judah's Systems

Third, with respect to point (4) above, the table below 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
AA	AAAA												
						BBBB	BBBB						
AA						AAAA							
	BBBB									BBBB			

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 above patterns (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 [nonaccession] year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel, and reigned for twelve [nonaccession] years [as rival and sole king]; six [nonaccession] years he reigned in Tirzah. **2 Kings 8:25-26**, In the twelfth [nonaccession] year 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 [nonaccession] year as coregent and king in Jerusalem. **2 Kings 14:23**, In the fifteenth [accession] year 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 [accession] years as coregent and king. **2 Kings 15:27**, In the fifty-second [accession] year from the coregency of Azariah king of Judah Pekah the son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned twenty [accession] years 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 [nonaccession] year of Joash king of Judah Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became coregent over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned sixteen [accession] years as king. **2 Kings 16:1-2**, In the seventeenth [accession] year 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 [accession] year 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 [accession] years 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 [accession] year of Ahab king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became coregent and he reigned twenty-five [accession] years as coregent and king in Jerusalem. **2 Kings 15:1-2**, In the twenty-seventh [accession] year 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 [accession] years as coregent and king in Jerusalem. **2 Kings 15:32-33**, In the second [accession] year 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 [accession] years 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).¹⁸

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 17th to the 20th 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.¹⁹ 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 21-year rule of the Egyptian king Shishak/Shoshenq I to c. 945-924 BC independently of the biblical data.²⁰ Rehoboam's fifth-year ran from Sept 926 to Sept 925, which

means that Shishak's invasion of Judah occurred toward the end of his 21-year rule.²¹ 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 backward 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 1279.²² Second, the accession of Takelot II. Parker had noted that an eclipse occurred in the 15th year of his reign.²³ Klaus Baer dated this eclipse to 846/5 BC and his accession to 860 BC.²⁴ Wentz accepted this date as 'the first "fixed" date after the accession of Ramesses II, as determined by a lunar date in his reign'.²⁵ Wentz suggested dating Shishak's accession to c. 946 BCE, this is only one year higher than Kitchen and Hornung²⁶ had placed it. It appears that Wentz worked backwards from the astronomical date of 846/5 BC (=15th 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 chronology²⁷) 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, predictably, right once again. Thus three independent lines of research, Egyptian, Tyrian, and Hebrew, converge on 968 BC (± 1 year) for the foundation of Solomon's Temple and 932 BC (± 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.²⁸

The four major modifications are four coregencies which Thiele overlooked, namely, a coregency for Hezekiah from 729/8 - 715 BC;²⁹ a two-year coregency for Jehoash king of Israel from 799 - 798; Ahaziah king of Judah probably became coregent in the 11th [nonaccession] year of Joram and in the 12th year became king; and Jehoiachin had a coregency from Sept. 608 - Dec. 597 BC.

The nine minor alterations include (1) Jehoshaphat became coregent in Sept³⁰ 873 not 872/1; (2) Jehoram [J] became coregent in Sept 854 not 853; (3) Jehoahaz died between Sept 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 Sept 791 not 792/1³¹; (6) Hoshea died between April and Sept 723: Thiele gives 723/22; (7) Uzziah/Azariah died between April and Sept 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 Sept 697 not 697/6.

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

Revised Chronology for Israel and Judah

Biblical sequence	h Israel	Juda and	Coregent (commen cement)	King (sole reign)	Died
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* 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 emend the data in order to achieve harmony on the basic assumption that the biblical writers (or copyists) got it wrong. Complete Harmonists, on the other hand, adopt a purely 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.

Behind these two approaches lie two competing theologies about the nature of the biblical data. For one it is a human composition, for the other it is the very Oracles of God and to be handled with due reverence. It is not a pleasant sight to see reputable scholars head-butting other competitors in this field and strutting around in the scholarly world as though the Church had been waiting for centuries for their magnum opus to appear in print, but such is the nature of Christian scholarship that no area of study is exempt from conflict. One can only hope that the competitors will take time out to read each other's works in a careful and sympathetic manner and adopt a less antagonistic and aggressive posture in their replies in the future.

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 an hypothesis. Where, however, his dates agree with established NE 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 remotest possibility that it may have operated more times than Thiele has allowed for it. Adjustments of a 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!

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Footnotes

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

² Arising from a doctoral thesis Thiele published his first results in JNES, 3 (1944) 137-186. This work was later expanded and published in book form in 1951,²1965, and ³1985 as The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³ This error was ably rectified by S.H. Horn, “The Chronology of King Hezekiah’s Reign,” AUSS 2 (1964) 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).

⁴ 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 utilises coregencies in his scheme.

⁵ To the 14 chronological solutions proposed from 1884 to 1961 (see H. Tadmor, Encyclopedia Migra’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) 88-119; J.M. Miller, ‘Another Look at the Chronology of the Early Divided Monarchy’, JBL 86 (1967) 276-88; W.R. Wifall, ‘The Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel’, ZAW 80 (1968) 319-37; K.T. Andersen, ‘Die Chronologie der Könige von Israel und Juda’, Studia Theologica 23 (1969) 69-114; W.H. Barnes, op. cit. (1986), and Jeremy R.A. Hughes, op. cit. (1990).

⁶ J.M. Miller, ‘Another Look at the Chronology of the Early Divided Monarchy’, JBL 86 (1967) 276-88, 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) 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 3d ed. London: SCM Press, 1981) and American exegesis generally. Wm. H. Barnes, op. cit., proposed altering 6 reign lengths.

⁷ Op. cit.

⁸ J.H. Hayes & P.K. Hooker, A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988.

⁹ The idea goes back to Max Vogelstein, Biblical Chronology. (Cincinnati, 1944), p. 17.

¹⁰ JTS 4 (1953) 305.

11 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).

12 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.

13 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) 44-76, 171.

14 The idea goes back to Max Vogelstein, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

15 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.

16 Cf. the reviews of L.L. Honor, *JQR* 43 (1952/3) 285-86; S.H. Horn, *AUSS* 2 (1964) 40-52 and *AUSS* 5(1967) 213; R. North, *CBQ* 29 (1967) 181; H.H. Rowley, *VT* 4 (1953) 446; K.A. Strand, *AUSS* 17(1979) 227; W.R. Wifall, *JBL* 98 (1979) 118-19 who lists major works which have adopted Thiele's dates; M.F. Unger, *BibSac* 108 (1951) 377-78; J.L. McKenzie, *CBQ* 14 (1952) 298-303, which is the most incisive review to date along with that of D.N. Freedman, *JRel* 33 (1953) 311-12.

17 F.D. Kidner, *Churchman* 8 (1967) 68.

18 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 & M. O'Connor (eds.), *The Word of the Lord shall go forth* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 427-435.

19 *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-89.

20 K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt [1100-650 BC]* Second Edition with Supplement [Warminster, England, 1986], pp. 544, 575.

21 This is the view of Kitchen (*op. cit.*) and A. G. Green, *JBL* 97 (1978) 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) 46-61.

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

23 *JNES* 12 (1953) 50.

24 *JNES* 32 (1973) 2-25, espec. p. 107.

25 See Edward F. Wente, (Review of Kitchen's book) *JNES* 35 (1978) 278. Cf. also

E.F. Wente & 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.

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

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

²⁸ 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) 3-45.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ 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.

³¹ 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.

Leslie McFall
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