

THE INTERPHASED CHRONOLOGY OF JOTHAM, AHAZ, HEZEKIAH AND HOSHEA¹

HAROLD G. STIGERS, Ph.D.

Up until the appearance of *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*² by Edwin Thiele in 1951, the possibility of the harmonization of the dates for the Hebrew kings as given in the Book of Kings seemed impossibly remote, if not actually irreconcilable. The apparent conflict of data is seemingly due to the fact that an eye-witness account takes things as they are with no attempt being made to harmonize apparently contradictory data, nor to state outright the clues as to the relationships which would make it possible in an easy manner to coordinate the reigns of the kings. Living in the times of the kings of Israel and Judah, and understanding completely the circumstances, and writing a message, the significance of which is not dependent on the dates being harmonized, the authors of the records used in Kings felt no need of explaining coordinating data.

However, if the dating were to be harmonized, the viewpoint that the present text of the Old Testament represents a careful transmission of the Hebrew text through the centuries³, would receive a great testimony to its accuracy. Now, with the work of Thiele, that testimony has, in a great measure, been given, but not without one real lack, in that for him, the chronology of the period of Jotham through Hezekiah is twelve years out of phase.⁴ In this point for him the chronology is contradictory and requires the belief that the synchronisms of 2 Ki. 18:9, 10 and 18:1 are the work of a later harmonizing hand, not in the autograph written by the inspired prophet.⁵

The method correlating the synchronizations between the Judean and Israelite kings of the time of 753/52 B.C. to 685 B.C. will be basically the same as that used by Thiele: the use of absolute correspondences

1. This paper was first read at the Midwest Section of the Evangelical Theological Society at Marion, Ind., Apr., 1965. Its final edition waited for the revised edition of Dr. Thiele's *Mysterious Numbers*.
2. *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. New York: Macmillan, 1951 (Designated MN¹). Revised edition: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965 (Designated MN²).
3. See the discussion in Albright, W. F., "New Light on Early Recensions of the Hebrew Bible," BASOR, 140, pp. 27 ff. The roots of the Masoretic text are now traced back to the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., this being close to the autographs of some of the O.T. books, thus leaving scant room for corruption of the text, particularly of Kings or Chronicles. Cf. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 307, re: the date of Kings between 562 and 536 B.C.
4. MN², p. 136.
5. *Ibid*, p. 135.

between Biblical events and Assyrian chronology, working both ways therefrom and supporting the chronology by interpretation of Biblical data. By charting them on a spine of years B.C., as seen in the accompanying chart, the correspondences and problems are more easily seen and solution found.

The Problems

There are three problems in this period: one relating to the length of the reign of Ahaz, one relating to the reign of Pekah of Israel and the third concerning the synchronization of the dates of Hezekiah, the latter involving Sennacherib in his western campaigns.

1. *Ahaz*. According to 2 Ki. 16:1, Ahaz began to reign in the seventeenth year of Pekah (cf. 2 Ki. 16:30), but by 2 Ki. 17:1 the twelfth year of Ahaz is the *first* year of Hoshea. This means that the *twelfth* year of Ahaz was only *four years after his first year* (see chart). This obviously is an impossibility. Either the text is in error, or some other solution must be ascertained.

2. *Pekah*. The dates 753/52 B.C. for the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Azariah of Judah and the fall of Samaria in 723/22 B.C. do not allow enough time in years for the reigns of Zachariah (6 mos; 2 Ki. 15:8), Shallum (1 mo.; 2 Ki. 15:13-14), Menahem (10 yrs.; 2 Ki. 15:17), Pekahiah (2 yrs.; 2 Ki. 15:23), Pekah (20 yrs.; 2 Ki. 15:27) and Hoshea (9 yrs.; 2 Ki. 17:1). An allowable minimum is 41-7/12th years, the total maximum length of these reigns, where actual elapsed time is but 30 years, giving an excess of 11-7/12th years. How are these years to be accounted for or distributed: as coregencies or did some other condition obtain?

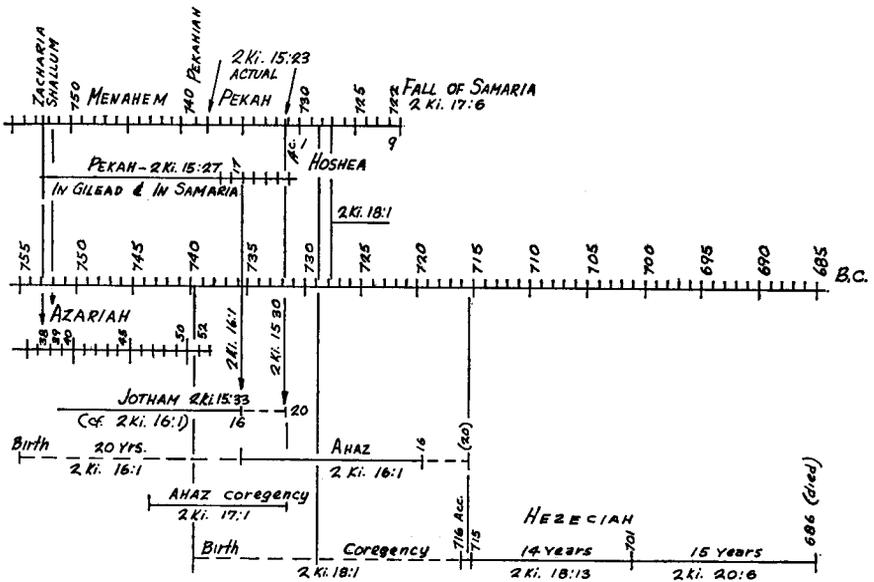
3. *Hezekiah*. The consideration of Hezekiah's fourteenth year involves a number of possibilities. If it is to be established as 711 B.C. due to a supposed embassy of Merodach-Baladan in the west to raise up a coalition in that area in league with Babylon against Assyria, then it does not coincide with 701 B.C., the date of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. This latter date is established beyond question.⁶ Likewise, the king of Assyria in 711 B.C. is not Sennacherib but Sargon II. Nor will a first year of Hezekiah in 725/724 B.C. according to 2 Ki. 18:1 fall in 729/28 B.C., the third year of Hoshea. Another date for the embassy must be found, but this, when properly related according to 2 Ki. 20:12 (cf. v. 6), must come shortly *after* 702 and right before 701 B.C.

The first edition of *Mysterious Numbers* proposes that the text is in error and needs emendation; the second declares⁷ that the original autograph was done by a late hand. But this violates the principles enunciated as the author's guiding principle of using the dating data of the reigns

6. So *MN*¹, *MN*².

7. *MN*², p. 135.

of the kings as they are.⁸ Either the principle is a good one so that the text needs no revision and the chronology of Hezekiah's reign is susceptible of solution, or it is not, and even Thiele's solution stands in danger of being rejected. It is the purpose of this paper to show that his method is right and to work out the solution to the seeming inconsistencies in the datings.



The solution may be reached by starting with the date of 722 B.C., the fall of Samaria to Shalmaneser V⁹, at the lower end of a block of years of time and the thirty-eighth year of Azariah, 753/52 B.C., at the upper end, working both ways from these points.

The date of the thirty-eighth year of Azariah has been established as 753/52 B.C.¹⁰ This is also the year of accession of Zachariah, son of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, and on the basis both kingdoms were using accession-year dating systems, Israel beginning her civil year in Nisan (spring) and Judah in Tishri (fall), six months earlier, the six months of Zacharia must be the last six months of Azariah, allowing for Shallum's one month reign in the thirty-ninth year of Azariah, 752/51 B.C.¹¹ Thus the advance of six months in Judean chronology over Israelite chronology.

THE EXCESS OF YEARS¹²

In 2 Kings 15:30 and 2 Kings 17:1 there is established the fact that the *last* year of Pekah, the *first* of Hoshea, the *twelfth* of Ahaz and the *twentieth* of Jotham fall together. Since Hoshea reigned until the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., his ninth year, and counting back these nine years plus his accession year, and his ninth year terminating before Nisan, 722 B.C., places his accession year in 733/32 B.C., his first year then being 732/31 B.C. The date of 733/32 B.C. is the year of correspondence of the four kings noted above and furnishes an unassailable datum for our solution. When counting back from this point, we may determine the source of the troublesome excess of years in the reign of Pekah noted above.

When the 20 years of Pekah (2 Ki. 15:27) are imposed on the chart, it will be seen that they reach back to the year 752/51 B.C. and his accession year being 753/52 B.C. When the 6 months of Zachariah (2 Ki. 15:8), the 30 days of Shallum (2 Ki. 15:13) and the ten years of Menahem (2 Ki. 15:17) are added to the diagram, allowing that the accession year of the following king is the last part of the last numbered year of the previous king, the tenth year of Menahem is the year 741/40 B.C. and falls in the fiftieth year of Azariah, when Menahem died, and Pekahiah, his son, became king. Pekahiah's accession year would terminate in Nisan, 741/40 B.C. and his second year would terminate in 740/39 B.C., the fifty-second year of Azariah, when Pekahiah was assassinated by Pekah (2 Ki. 15:27). Thus the synchronisms check out for all the reigns of Israelite kings other than Pekah's twenty years. From 740/39 B.C. to 733/32 B.C., however, is only seven years, the actual length of *Pekah's reign over all Israel*. More on the matter of his twenty years later.

8. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 141-43; cf. p. 146.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-81.

11. Cf. *MN*², p. 87.

12. See para. 2. *Pekah*, above.

Deducting seven from the twenty year reign of Pekah leaves 13 years. If one adds the ten of Menahem, the two of Pekahia, the six months of Zachariah, the one month of Shallum and the six months' time lag of Israel after Judah, a total of 13 years and one month is secured, close enough to confirm the above reckoning of seven years of actual reign of Pekah over all Israel.¹³ It would appear, then, that Pekah had appropriated the years of the reigns of Zachariah, Shallum and Menahem. But more later.

PEKAH, THE RIVAL IN GILEAD

The troublesome point is the reference in 2 Ki. 15:27 in which Pekah is said to begin his reign over Israel in Samaria in the fifty-second year of Azariah of Judah and that this reign continued 20 years. As noted above, Pekah had only an eight year reign if his accession year be included.¹⁴ In *Mysterious Numbers*², pp. 130ff., there is presented the probability that Pekah had already been ruling in Gilead at the death of Pekahiah. It has been shown above that his reign began about the same time as the accession of Zachariah in Samaria. This being so, is it not possible that Pekah had set himself up in Gilead as king at the death of Jeroboam II, yet was unable to move across the Jordan Valley to Samaria and take the power from Zachariah? Would not distance again, at the death of Shallum, prevent his taking over the throne, as well as the swift accession of power of Menahem under the protection of Tiglath-Pileser III?¹⁵

But inasmuch as Menahem did not seem to have the strength to move against Pekah, it appears that Pekah bided his time, made a league with Rezin of Damascus¹⁶ or was probably pressed into it, and then at the appointed time, moved across the Jordan, assassinated Pekahiah and became ruler over all Israel. The text, 2 Ki. 15:27, is then to be explained as stating correctly the time of his accession over all Israel but his length of reign in terms of his accession in Gilead, in which he was rival king to Zachariah, Shallum and Menahem.

In support of this conclusion note that *Mysterious Numbers*², p. 130, describes the alliance of Rezin and Pekah against Judah (cf. Isa. 7:1ff.). Rezin as the antagonist against Assyria would seek every means possible to raise allies. A willing vassal is better than a subject people with a dead king; hence Pekah, being small but desirous of being king over Israel, is supported in his ambitions and pushed along toward that end.¹⁷ Succeeding in overcoming Pekahiah, and threatened by Tiglath's expedition to the west in 739,¹⁸ Rezin and Pekah seek mutual strength. Once having brought Israel under his power and enlarged his military base and

13. The one month can easily be absorbed if we remember that this would be his accession year, included actually in the total years of Zachariah to Menahem.

14. Cf. *MN*², chart p. 129.

15. Cf. 2 Ki. 15:19-20. Cf. also *MN*², p. 124.

16. Cf. *Biblical Archaeologist*, XXIII (1960, 2), p. 49.

17. Cf. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Phila.: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 254.

moved that much closer to Judah, Pekah, with Rezin, who actually seems to have been the dominant power, could seek to compel Ahaz to join the coalition of the West against Tiglath. The 20 years of reign attributed to Pekah are not, then, sequestered years but actual years: 20 over Gilead with 8 years included in which he reigned over all Israel. When Ahaz is coordinated with the seventeenth year of Pekah, (2 Ki. 16:1), he had already been king in Samaria for 5 years, but recognition of his 20-year reign beginning in Gilead had been long accepted as a rival to kings in Samaria. This is further supported from the coordination of Jotham's accession in Pekah's second year (2 Ki. 15:32)¹⁹

THE TELESCOPED DATING OF AHAZ

We come now to the peculiarity of the dating of the reign of Ahaz. Notice, as has been said, his *twelfth* year (2 Ki. 17:1) comes along only 4 years after his *first* year (2 Ki. 16:1). This is found by noting that his twelfth year was the year of the death of Pekah and his first year was the seventeenth of Pekah. This is, of course, impossible. A look at the chart shows the incongruity at once. This year—the first of Ahaz (2 Ki. 16:1)—is 736/35 B.C. See below for the beginning of the 16-year reign of Ahaz.

The explanation²⁰ in *Mysterious Numbers*² does not recognize this fact, and the insistence that the 20 years of Pekah must run from 740/39 B.C. to 720/19 B.C. shows itself to be a *tour-de-force*. The lack of coordination on this basis with Assyrian dates pointed out in *MN*² shows this to be false and therefore a *tour-de-force*. Such can never be made to work out. It is only as this peculiar arrangement—the overlap of Pekah with Zachariah, Shallum and Menahem—is acknowledged as true that the meaning becomes clear and the *tour-de-force* is eliminated as a means of solution. The text will then be preserved inviolate!

*Mysterious Numbers*² sees a twelve-year overlap of the reign of Ahaz with Jotham and does away with it, when instead, it is to be accepted as factual according to the coordination of the twelfth year of Ahaz, the twentieth year of Jotham, the last of Pekah, and the first of Hoshea.²¹ In both editions of *Mysterious Numbers* coregencies are shown to have existed and why at this point such should be disallowed to Ahaz, as a solution to the "overlap," is difficult to understand.

Going back to the reign of Jotham, it is inferred from the chart that Jotham had only a three or four year reign at most after the death of his father.²² The twelve years coregency of Ahaz with Jotham would have begun in 743/42 B.C., overlapping with his grandfather Azariah. During

18. See *MN*², p. 105.

19. See *MN*², p. 125.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 120ff.

22. i.e., apart from a coregency with Uzziah his father. Even in this period he had a coregency with Ahaz his son. He should therefore be entitled now (739 B.C.) as *Chief King* and Ahaz as *Co-King*.

this period, Ahaz was not active in the government, but his coregency was possibly due to the expeditions of Tiglath-Pileser III to the West in 743 B.C. which aroused apprehensions and caused Jotham to associate Ahaz with him on the throne.

Note that 2 Ki. 17:1 is a synchronization of an Israelite king in terms of Ahaz's coregency. The king is Hoshea. This is a true synchronization on the following grounds. Since Hoshea's accession is placed also in the twentieth year of Jotham, it is clear that the twelfth year here is that of a coregency.

However, by 2 Ki. 15:30 Jotham is given twenty years, while in 2 Ki. 15:33 only 16 years. Jotham's twentieth year is the year 733/32 B.C. In 2 Ki. 16:1 Ahaz's first year is stated to have begun in the seventeenth year of Pekah, 736/35 B.C. Then follows a resume of his reign, indicating that here (2 Ki. 16:1) his sole reign is under consideration, lasting till 720/19 B.C. What could have caused Ahaz to seize power in 736/35 B.C. rather than to wait till Jotham his father died in 733 or 732 B.C.? In 736/35 B.C. his father's policy of opposition to Assyria filled Ahaz with fright. No doubt he was supported by the nobles in Jerusalem in his seizure of power, for they would suffer more if Tiglath-Pileser destroyed the city than if they paid tribute. The appeasers won the day, and Ahaz removed his father from the throne and took over in 736/35 B.C. according to the synchronization of 2 Ki. 16:1. Ahaz did not, however, put away Jotham by violent means, for Jotham continued to his twentieth year according to 2 Ki. 15:30. In addition the current alliance of Pekah and Rezin of Damascus added fuel to his fears. Thus the motive is supplied for the shift in rulers. The sixteen-year reign of Ahaz (2 Ki. 16:1) begins at this time, 736/35 B.C.

If it be urged that this sixteen-year reign began at 733/32 B.C., it would require that there be inserted a third method of reckoning of the reign of the chronology of Ahaz which would require a first year of Ahaz in 733/32 B.C.²³ and this would imply a coregency beginning in 736/35 B.C. for which there is no data in the text. Thus there would be two coregencies for Ahaz with Jotham, which idea is contracted by the data respecting his first year in the seventeenth of Pekah and the following resume of his reign (2 Ki. 16:1 ff). In support of this contention, let it be remembered that Azariah was made king over Judah by the people when Amaziah was taken captive by Jehoash of Israel (cf. 2 Ki. 21; see also *MN*², pp. 84-86, where Azariah's accession is computed to the date of the capture of Amaziah by Jehoash.) Azariah's total of 52 years of reign began when the people made him king, though Amaziah his father lived till his twenty-fourth year (See *MN*², Tables VII, VIII, IX, pp. 74-80).

23. See for an alternate opinion, Horn S. H., "The Chronology of King Hezekiah's Reign," in *Andrew's University Seminary Studies*, II (1964), p. 40 ff. This writer places the start of Ahaz's sixteen years of sole reign in 733/32 B.C. which, of course, is impossible in the light of 2 Ki. 16:1.

The sole reign of Ahaz then begins in 736/35 B.C. and continues for seven years to 729/28 B.C. to the beginning of a coregency with Hezekiah ending in 720/19 B.C.

THE DOUBLE-DATING SYSTEM FOR HEZEKIAH

It has been shown in *Mysterious Numbers*^{1,2} and the foregoing that all the dates in the Bible, excepting those of Hezekiah, have been shown to be correct. Only the dates of Hezekiah need be verified to demonstrate the entire validity of all the dates of the Bible concerning the Hebrew kings.

The solution to the problem of Hezekiah's dates is found in a way similar to the above manner of Pekah's dates. Let attention be called to the certainty of the date of 722 B.C. as the date of the fall of Samaria. This is the earlier terminus of a dating period. Let it also be recalled that 701 B.C. is the year Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem for the first time. This is the fourteenth year of Hezekiah. Counting backward, then, to his first year yields 715 B.C. and 716 B.C. for his accession year. If, actually, this 715 was his first year, and 728 was the sixteenth year of Ahaz (2 Ki. 16:2) there would be a 13 year interregnum with no king over Judah, which is impossible by 2 Ki. 16:20.

Again, if the 16 years of sole reign of Ahaz are computed from 736/35 B.C., this reign would terminate in 720/19 B.C., leaving an interregnum of 3 to 4 years, which cannot be supported by the available Biblical and Assyrian data.²⁴ Thiele points out²⁵ the impossibility of *interregna* in the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah, that the kingdom would thereby have ceased! But the 16 years of Ahaz are his sole reign, terminating in 720/19 B.C., as shown above. What is the explanation?

But there is another beginning determinable for the beginning of the reign of Hezekiah. In 2 Ki. 18:1 we are told that Hezekiah began to reign in the third year of Hoshea of Israel, this being 729/28 B.C. What is the explanation?

Ahaz made an alliance with Assyria against the Syro-Israelite league against him. With the complete subservience of Hoshea (2 Ki. 17:2) to Assyria, it brought the latter's power too near to Judah, and this brought about a change in the thinking of the nobility and a desire for a change of policy in the government of Judah. This brought Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, to the throne, and he conducted the government, though Ahaz

24. See *MN*², p. 122. Note "Pattern Two-Seventeen."

25. *MN*², p. 32, 33.

continued to be reckoned as king, but as "emeritus." Thus a reason for the coregency in the third year of Hoshea. Since the dates of Hoshea are fixed, and since the correspondences of 2 Ki. 18:9, 10 of the reigns of Hezekiah and Hoshea are so definitely cited, it must be concluded that Hezekiah was associated on the throne with Ahaz his father, and 729/28 B.C. was the first year of this coregency. This is the meaning of 2 Ki. 18:1.

Thus Hezekiah had a coregency with his father of approximately 12 years and then a sole reign of 29 years starting in 715 B.C. And this is the explanation of the chronology of the reign of Hezekiah. But not of the terminus of the reign of Ahaz in 720/19 B.C.

When Hezekiah assumed power in 720/19 B.C.²⁶ from his father, this action must be on the same grounds as Ahaz removed his father, and the dating of 720/19 B.C. must be the earliest date by which it was done. The policy of subjection to Assyria had become intolerable to Hezekiah and to the independence party in Judea by this time, which party had been listening to Egypt's appeals to ally with her against Assyria.²⁷ Hezekiah listens to them and removes Ahaz from active control in the government and conducts it himself. That Ahaz lives 4 more years till 716 B.C. must be obvious since it has been shown that Hezekiah's first year (computed back from his fourteenth year of 2 Ki. 8:13, 701 B.C.) was 715 B.C. Ahaz also became "emeritus" as he had made his own father. When Ahaz died, Hezekiah began his sole reign.

As to the first year of 2 Chr. 29:3, the first year of Hezekiah, and the year in which he sent an invitation into the lands of Israel to the north, it would be 715 B.C. and there would be no problem of sending couriers into Israel with the invitation to the Passover. However, it would have been a different matter if it was the first year of the coregency with Ahaz, in 729/28 B.C., the third year of Hoshea, king of Israel, who would not have looked with favor on the invitation. Hezekiah desired in 715 B.C. to call a beaten people back to their God and to give them the comfort that was available to all.

The birth of Hezekiah would be placed at 741/40 B.C., secured by adding his age of 25 to his accession year (2 Ki. 18:1). The age of Ahaz at the birth of Hezekiah is easy enough to determine. His reign began in 736/35 B.C., the coregency of Hezekiah at 729/28 B.C. If

26. The reign of Ahaz terminating in 720/19 B.C. as the end of his 16 years, requires his removal, and the assumption of full authority by Hezekiah. When the first year of Hezekiah must fall in 715 B.C., it indicates Ahaz did not debase till then, but was so completely tripped of power no further mention of his years is made.

27. Isaiah has already been preaching against this: Cf. Isa. 30:2.

Ahaz was twenty at his accession in 736/35 B.C. he would have been 25 at the beginning of the coregency, at age 11 for Hezekiah, leaving Ahaz to be about 15 at the birth of Hezekiah. This is on the young side, by our standards but with due consideration given to data of youthful marriages in the Middle East, it is not impossible.²⁸ If the first year of Ahaz be placed in 733/32 B.C., then he is only 11 at the birth of Hezekiah and this is too young and the date of 736/35 and age 20 must be adopted.

28. See *MN*², p. 119, n. 16, 17.

Visiting Professor
Wheaton Graduate School
Wheaton, Illinois