

The Old Testament Reckoning of Regnal Years.

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IN the Books of Kings and Chronicles the lengths of the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel are given in even years, except in the case of reigns limited to a few days or months, and events are dated by regnal years. It is evident, then, that these years represent calendar years and not the precise length of reigns, for few if any kings can be thought of as actually reigning periods of exact years. The question then arises, how were the reigns reckoned? Was the first year of a king the calendar year of his accession, or the calendar year following? The former method of reckoning or numbering is called pre-dating, the latter post-dating. Pre-dating introduces confusion by making the last year and the first year of two successive monarchs identical, yet this has been widely regarded as the Hebrew method.¹ Post-dating gives regularity in a system of dates and was the usual Assyrian method.² It has also been claimed as the probable Hebrew method.³ The purpose of this paper is briefly to give the evidence which may be presented for each of these views.

¹ The following is a current form of statement: "By the Hebrews, regnal years appear to have been counted from the beginning of the year in which the king came to the throne, not from his accession. Thus, if a king came to the throne in the last month of one year, reigned through the next year, and died in the first month of the third year, we might have dates of his first, second, and third years. . . . Any dates in the year of his accession before that event would be assigned to the last year of his predecessor, and any in the year of his death after it, would be given to his successor's first year." — *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, ed. 2, London, 1893, i. 587, art. 'Chronology.' For a similar statement see also an article by Rev. George Douglas, in "The Thinker," Jan., 1895, p. 24.

² George Smith's *Assyrian Eponym Canon*, p. 21.

³ This is the view of Dillmann (*Monatsberichte der Berliner Akademie*, 1881, p. 920), Kamphausen (*Die Chronologie der hebräischen Könige*, p. 19), Stade (*Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, i. 99), Wellhausen (*Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie*, xx. 620 ff.), and others.

In favor of considering pre-dating as the Hebrew method the following facts may be mentioned :

(a) It is in accordance with the Hebrew usage of speech, which reckoned fractions of time as full units.⁴

(b) The Talmud declares this to have been the Jewish method.⁵

(c) Josephus also used this method.⁶

(d) It occurs in the synchronisms of 1 and 2 Kings.⁷

⁴ The siege of Samaria, which began in the fourth and ended in the sixth year of Hezekiah, is said to have lasted three years (2 K. xviii. 9, 10). Christ's *three* days in the grave is also an example.

⁵ I quote from Wieseler's *Chronological Synopsis*, Cambridge, 1864, p. 48, as follows: "*Gemara Bab. tract. ראש השנה*, c. 1, fol. 3, p. 1, ed. Amstel.: אין מניין להם למלכים אלא מנין ראש השנה למלכי ישראל, אמר ר' חסדא לא שני אלא למלכי ישראל 2, p. 2] 'dixit R. Chasda: hoc non docent nisi de regibus Israelitarum.' Ibid., fol. 2, p. 2: נסן ראש השנה למלכים, יום אחד בשנה חשוב שנה, 'Nisan initium anni regibus; ac dies quidem unus in anno instar anni computatur.' Ibid.: יום אחד בסוף שנה חשוב שנה, 'unus dies in anni fine pro anno numeratur.'" The first and second of these observations favor post-dating as well as pre-dating. The second, curiously enough (see references above, note 3), is quoted by Wellhausen and Stade as a witness of the Talmud for post-dating. The "one day at the end of the year" is decisive for pre-dating.

⁶ Examples are given in Wieseler, *Chronological Synopsis*, p. 48. Josephus, in giving the length of Herod's reign, includes the calendar years which are the termini.

⁷ The Synchronisms from the accession of Rehoboam and Jeroboam to that of Athaliah and Jehu are recorded as follows:

	Rehoboam	1	1	Jeroboam
		17		17
In 18th yr. of Jeroboam (1 K. xv. 1)				
Abijam	1			18
In 20th yr. of Jeroboam (1 K. xv. 9)				
Asa	3			20
	1			21
	2			22 (1) Nadab in 2d yr. of Asa (1 K. xv. 25)
	3			1 (2) Baasha in 3d yr. of Asa (1 K. xv. 28)
	26			24 (1) Elah in 26th yr. of Asa (1 K. xvi. 8)
				(2) Zimri in 27th yr. of Asa (1 K. xvi. 10)
	27			1 Omri in 27th yr. of Asa (1 K. xvi. 15, 16)
	38			12 (1) Ahab in 38th yr. of Asa (1 K. xvi. 29)
	39			2

In favor of post-dating we have :

- (a) The regularity and the general Assyrian use of this system.
- (b) Its use in the synchronisms of the books of Kings.
- (c) At the close of the Judean monarchy it appears as the current mode of reckoning.⁸

From these facts it is evident that a presumption might be established for the use by the Hebrews of either of these methods of reckoning, and that either one might be regarded as represented in the numbers giving the years of Israel and Judah.

By pre-dating the years of the last six kings of Judah, the Biblical lengths of the reigns of Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh can stand,

In 4th of Ahab (1 K. xxii. 41) Jehoshaphat	41	4	
	1	5	
	17	21	(1) Ahaziah in 17th of Jehoshaphat (1 K. xxii. 51)
	18	22	(2) (1) Joram in 18th of Jehoshaphat (2 K. iii. 1)
In 5th of Joram (2 K. viii. 16) Jehoram	(1) 22	5	
	(4) 25	8	
In 12th of Joram (2 K. viii. 25) Ahaziah	(1) 8	12	

In these synchronisms all of the kings of Israel are pre-dated; while of those of Judah, Abijam, Asa, and Jehoshaphat are post-dated; Ahaziah is pre-dated, and Jehoram is reckoned as having been four years a co-regent. In 2 K. ix. 29 Ahaziah is post-dated.

⁸ The following table of dates with the Biblical references illustrates this fact :

Josiah's 1st	638	
13th	626	1st of Jeremiah's ministry (Jer. i. 2)
Jehoahaz's 3 mos. reign and } Jehoiakim's accession (2 } K. xxiii. 31)	31st	608
Jehoiakim's 1st	607	
4th	604	{ 23d of Jeremiah 1st of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xxv. 1-3)
Jehoiachin's 3 mos. and } Zedekiah's accession (2 } K. xxiv. 8, 18)	11th	597
Zedekiah's 1st	596	
10th	587	18th of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xxxii. 1)
11th	586	19th of Nebuchadnezzar (2 K. xxv. 8)

Ezekiel uses the same system. The first year of his captivity is not the 11th of Jehoiakim in which he was carried away, but the following year, the 1st of Zedekiah. Cf. 2 K. xxv. 1 with Ezek. xxiv. 1, 2 ; xl. 1.

one of which, according to the Assyrian inscriptions, must be changed if these reigns are post-dated. The periods of the duration of both the northern and the southern kingdoms being shortened by pre-dating, are thus brought much nearer within their true historic limits than when the reigns are post-dated. In the reigns of the northern kingdom changes need be made only in the years given for Joram, Pekah, and Hoshea, and Ahab's death is brought down to 855.⁹ In the reigns of the southern kingdom it is necessary only to introduce two co-regencies, one of Uzziah with Amaziah, and one of Jotham with Uzziah.¹⁰

⁹ This is a year earlier than the battle of Karkar, at which, according to the Assyrian inscriptions, Ahab was present. On other grounds, however, Kamphausen (*Chronologie der Hebräer*, p. 80), Kittel (*Geschichte der Hebräer*, ii. §§ 59, 60), and others think that it was Joram and not Ahab who was present.

¹⁰ The following table, taken, with a few slight modifications, from *Assyrian and Hebrew Chronology*, by James Orr, D.D., in "The Presbyterian Review," 1889, gives the result of pre-dating:

Kings of Israel.

933	1	Jeroboam.
912	22	Jeroboam and 1 Nadab.
911	2	Nadab and 1 Baasha.
888	24	Baasha and 1 Elah.
887	2	Elah, Zimri and 1 Omri.
876	12	Omri and 1 Ahab.
855	22	Ahab and 1 Ahaziah.
854	2	Ahaziah and 1 Joram. (Battle of Karkar, 854.)
844	11	Joram and 1 Jehu.
817	28	Jehu and 1 Jehoahaz.
801	17	Jehoahaz and 1 Joash.
786	16	Joash and 1 Jeroboam.
746	41	Jeroboam, 7 mos. Zechariah and Shallum, and 1 Menahem.
737	10	Menahem and 1 Pekahiah. (Tribute by Menahem to Tiglath Pileser, 738.)
736	2.	Pekahiah and 1 Pekah.
734	3	Pekah and 1 Hoshea. (Pekah slain, 734.)
722	13	Hoshea (Samaria taken).

Kings of Judah.

933	1	Rehoboam.
917	17	Rehoboam and 1 Abijah.
915	3	Abijah and 1 Asa.
875	41	Asa and 1 Jehoshaphat.
851	25	Jehoshaphat and 1 Jehoram.
844	8	Jehoram, Ahaziah, and 1 Athaliah.
838	7	Athaliah and 1 Joash.
799	40	Joash and 1 Amaziah.
	787, 13	Amaziah and 1 Uzziah (co-regent).

The conclusion then might be drawn that originally, from an early inexact method of reckoning, the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah were pre-dated; that after wider culture and closer contact with Assyria, the more exact method of post-dating became current, and that the years of the kings were received by the Chronicler and others as though thus numbered. (Indeed, the Chronicler seems to have regarded Nisan as the first month not only of the regnal year but also of royal authority.¹¹) And furthermore since these years gave 480 years between the founding of the two temples, this number was then, it might be inferred, applied to the period from the Exodus to the founding of Solomon's temple, and thus became the basis of the series of numbers given in Judges, which are evidently designed to represent 480 years.¹²

Such an explanation appears plausible and at first blush might be adopted as a happy way of defending the integrity of the Biblical chronology of the royal period, but on further consideration this seems a specious argument. Clear and unmistakable evidences of pre-dating do not appear in the Old Testament except in the synchronisms of 1 and 2 Kings. These synchronisms are from the compiler, and were not in the original sources. They represent not a system of dating but an endeavor to adjust two unequal series of numbers. The sum of the years of the kings of Israel from Jeroboam to Jehu exceeding that of the years of the kings of Judah by three years for the same period, gives the motive for pre-dating the kings of Israel. There is evidence also of an original post-dating, by some one, of the kings of Israel. In 1 K. xvi. 23 Omri's accession is placed in the 31st year of Asa. This synchronism arises from post-dating the reigns of both kingdoms. In 2 K. i. 17 Joram's

771	29 Amaziah and 17 Uzziah.
	750, 38 Uzziah and 1 Jotham (co-regent).
736	52 Uzziah and 15 Jotham.
735	16 Jotham and 1 Ahaz. (Tribute to Tiglath Pileser by Ahaz, 734.)
720	16 Ahaz and 1 Hezekiah. (Invasion of Sennacherib, 701.)
692	29 Hezekiah and 1 Manasseh.
638	55 Manasseh and 1 Amon.
637	2 Amon and 1 Josiah.
607	31 Josiah, 8 mos. Jehoahaz, and 1 Jehoiakim
597	11 Jehoiakim, 3 mos. Jehoiachin.
596	1 Zedekiah.
586	11 Zedekiah. (Fall of Jerusalem.)

¹¹ 2 Chron. xxix. 3; xxx. 2 f.

¹² Nöldeke's *Untersuchungen sur Kritik des A. T.*, p. 191 ff.

accession is placed in the 2d year of Jehoram. This synchronism also is evidently reckoned in the same way, although it is inexact by a year. When we have clear historic dates given in the contemporaneous writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the regnal years are post-dated. The statements of the Talmud give really no historic testimony in regard to the mode of reckoning regnal years at the time of the Jewish monarchy. Whatever may have been Josephus's custom in regard to other reigns, he evidently post-dated the reigns of both the kings of Israel and Judah when he gave their sum.¹³

The conclusion of many scholars seems then fairly warranted that the Hebrew method of numbering regnal years was probably that of post-dating, and that the numbers of the Old Testament were designed to be thus received.

This further appears likely when one observes that the durations of both the northern and southern kingdoms, when no deductions are made, as would be necessary if years were pre-dated, are represented in round and significant numbers. The interval between the founding of the two temples was 480 years, and the duration of the northern kingdom 240 years.¹⁴ Neither of these numbers, it is true, is correct. They imply that exact lengths of all the reigns were not preserved, and that missing ones were supplied in such a way as to give a symmetrical result, which would be a convenience in recalling past history, and resembles in principle the arrangement of the genealogy of Jesus in three series of 14 generations each (Matt. i. 1-17).

¹³ *Antiquities*, Bk. ix. 14, 1; Bk. x. 8, 4.

¹⁴ Reckoning Baasha's reign at 22 yrs. or omitting Elah's two years. Reigns lasting only fractions of a year under six months are naturally not counted, since no calendar year would be called after them.