

APPENDIX

The Chronology of the Hebrew Kingdoms

THE chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah presents us with a very vexed problem, the subject of a great deal of argument and discussion. The length of the reign of each king of Judah is indicated in the Books of Kings by reference to his contemporary in Israel, and vice versa; but unfortunately the figures given do not always match up, and other difficulties also arise. For instance, 2 Kings 3:1 states that Jehoram became king of Israel in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat of Judah; but 2 Kings 1:17 places Jehoram's accession in the second year of Jehoshaphat's son and successor.

It is always possible that some of the figures became altered in transmission; this seems to have happened in the case of Jehoram of Judah, who is credited with an eight-year reign by the Hebrew text of 2 Kings 8:17 (and hence the English Versions), but with a forty-year reign in some important manuscripts of the ancient Greek (Septuagint) translation. In this case the Hebrew may be accepted, but elsewhere it is always a possibility that the Hebrew and the Greek are alike inaccurate, due to a very ancient scribal error or alteration.

The present-day investigator is obliged to make sense of the data so far as he can, and also to link the biblical chronology with events in the history of nations outside Palestine, especially Assyria and Babylonia. Thanks to ancient records from Mesopotamia, a few fixed dates can now be supplied for the chronology of the Hebrew monarchies. Assyrian invasions of the Levant coast in 853 and 841 B.C. enable us to date Ahab and Jehu with precision; and the capture of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. by Nebuchadrezzar is beyond doubt. Slightly less certain are the dates of the fall of Samaria (either

723, 722 or 721) and of the destruction of Jerusalem (either 587 or 586).

Numerous scholars have wrestled with the relevant data and have offered a variety of solutions. An early and praiseworthy effort was by Archbishop James Ussher in the seventeenth century, whose chronological scheme (slightly revised) has graced many editions of the Authorized Version since 1701; but later information has made many of his findings untenable. There are three systems which are particularly influential nowadays, deriving from J. Begrich (1929), W. F. Albright (1945) and E. R. Thiele (1951) respectively; other independent schemes often produce results only marginally different from one or other of these three. Thiele's scheme accepts and makes sense of the biblical data to a greater degree than the alternatives offered by Begrich and Albright; he concludes that the evidence suggests two facts about the Hebrew kingdoms, firstly that the regnal years were for most of the time calculated on different bases in Israel and in Judah respectively, and secondly that there must have been a number of co-regencies. (A co-regency will for example solve the problem noted above, i.e. that Jehoram of Israel is said to have begun his reign at a time when both Jehoshaphat and his son Jehoram were ruling in Jerusalem.)

The three systems (with revised dates where these have been more recently adjusted by Albright and Thiele) are set out below in tabular form. It may be observed, however, that the differences between the three are generally of little consequence. The most important disagreements, it will be seen, relate to the date of Solomon's death (i.e. the date of the division of the kingdom) and to the period of Hezekiah's reign. It is to be hoped that further information will before long elucidate the problems; meanwhile the present writer feels that Thiele's scheme is on the whole the most satisfactory, and his dates have usually been followed in this book.

As regards the dates of Saul, David and Solomon, little can be said with certainty. The Old Testament does not supply us with the length of Saul's reign (see 1 Samuel 13:1, RSV); both David and Solomon are credited with forty years (as is Saul in Acts 13:21), but the problem here is that the number forty was often used in the ancient Near East as a round number, roughly denoting a generation, and nobody can be sure that in either case the number is intended to be exact. On the other hand, there is no evidence at present available which would rule out the possibility that these figures are precise. In the case of David, the data of 1 Kings 2:11 may suggest that the figure forty is to be taken literally. It is reasonably safe to assume that he came to the throne between 1010 and 1000 B.C.; it is generally thought that Saul's reign began no earlier than 1035 B.C.

The Kings of Judah

	<i>Begrich</i>	<i>Albright</i>	<i>Thiele</i>
Rehoboam	926-910	922-915	931-913*
Abijah	910-908	915-913	913*-911
Asa	908-872	913-873	911-870
Jehoshaphat	872-852	873-849	873-848*
Jehoram	852-845	849-842	853*-841*
Ahaziah	845*-844*	842*	841*
(Athaliah)	845-839	842*-837	841*-835
Joash	839-800	837-800	835*-796*
Amaziah	800-785	800-783	796*767*
Uzziah	785-747	783-742	792-740
Jotham	758-743	750-735	750*-732
Ahaz	742-725*	735-715*	735*-716
Hezekiah	725-697	715*-687	716-687
Manasseh	696-642	687-642	697-643
Amon	641-640	642-640	643-641
Josiah	639-609*	640-609*	641-609*
Jehoahaz	609*	609*	609*
Jehoiakim	608-598	609*-598	609*-598*
Jehoiachin	598	598-597	598*-597*
Zedekiah	597-587*	598-587	597*-586*

The Kings of Israel

	<i>Begrich</i>	<i>Albright</i>	<i>Thiele</i>
Jeroboam I	926-907	922-901	931-910
Nadab	907-906	901-900	910-909
Baasha	906-883	900-877	909-886
Elah	883-882	877-876	886-885
Zimri	882	876	885
Tibni	(Interregnum 882-879) -		885-880*

The Kings of Israel (continued)

	<i>Begrich</i>	<i>Albright</i>	<i>Thiele</i>
Omri	878-871	876-869	885-874
Ahab	871-852	869-850	874*-853*
Ahaziah	852-851	850-849	853*-852*
Jehoram	851-845	849-842*	852*-841*
Jehu	845-818	842*-815	841*-814
Jehoahaz	818-802	815-801	814-798*
Jehoash	802-787	801-786	798*-782
Jeroboam II	787-747	786-746	793-753*
Zechariah	747*-746*	746-745	753*-752*
Shallum	747*-746*	745	752*
Menahem	746-737	745-736*	752*-742
Pekahiah	736-735	736*-735*	742-740
Pekah	734-733	735*-732*	752*-732
Hoshea	732-724	732*-724*	732-723

(All dates B.C.)

N.B. These tables have been simplified. Since the Hebrew year did not correspond exactly with our year, many of the figures permit adjustment to one year *later* — e.g., Thiele gives the date of Rehoboam's accession as 931/930. An asterisk beside a date denotes that it is regarded by the scholar concerned as established with reasonable certainty. Note that co-regencies (or contemporaneous reigns) may be deduced where the figures overlap: see for instance the dates given for Uzziah and Jotham by all three scholars.