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The Chronology of First and Second Kings



Even a casual reading of **First** and **Second Kings** produces some apparent chronological questions. For example, the author lists how long **the kings** of **Isra'el** and **Judah** reigned and synchronized **the monarchs** with one another. Oddly, however, when those numbers are added up, one kingdom seems to have more years than the other. Just as strangely, **Second Kings 9:29** says **Ahaziah** became **king of Judah during Joram's eleventh year** as **king of Isra'el**, while **Second Kings 8:25** places **Ahaziah's** reign in **Joram's twelfth year**. Similar statements are made about **Ahab's son Joram** in **Second Kings 1:17, 3:1** and **8:16**. The length of **Omri's** reign does not seem to coincide with the author's synchronization of **Omri** with **Asa (First Kings 16:28-29)**, nor does the biblical account of **Hezekiah's** deeds match Assyrian records at first glance. These and other difficulties have led some scholars to take a dim view of the book's accuracy, which sheds doubt on the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

Fortunately, these difficulties can be explained by consulting other ancient chronologies and by examining how **Judah and Isra'el** counted the length of a monarch's reign. Assyrian records set the date for the battle of Qarqar at 853 BC, which is the same year **King Ahab** died. This fixed date has helped scholars figure

the years before and after 853 BC. In fact, other Assyrian texts preserve the names of three **kings of Isra'el: Menahen, Pekah, Hoshea,** and one of **king of Judah: Ahaz.** They also add that Assyrian inscriptions and Babylonian documents clarify events surrounding the last years of both **Isra'el** and **Judah** and help set dates for the destruction of **Samaria** and **Jerusalem**. Studies like these have the dual effect of establishing the basic veracity of the biblical texts and of identifying fixed dates that help synchronize the biblical data.

Perhaps the most significant analysis of the chronological methodology employed in **First** and **Second Kings** is E. R. Thiele's *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings,* Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983. Certainly, other studies have made significant contributions to this issue, but Thiele's work examines the most problems, deals with the issues fairly, and presents answers with great clarity. He claimed most of the problems with synchronization can be solved when readers realize that **Judah** and **Isra'el** counted the beginning of reigns differently. Normally, **Judah** used the accession-year system, which began counting a king's first year at the first of the calendar year. **Isra'el**, on the other hand, began counting the regnal years from when the reign began. Thus, a year's difference could exist even when the two kings began to rule on the same day. During one period both nations used the same system. Further, the nations began their calendar year six months apart, which also would affect the counting of years. Finally, kings acted as co-regents with their fathers before the older man's death. Again, this factor, if unknown to the reader, would seemingly make some synchronisms impossible to accept.

Because of the information offered by the Assyrian and Babylonian records and by studies like Thiele's, it is possible to affirm the historical reliability of the chronologies of **First** and **Second Kings**. It has also become possible for scholars to present an accurate table of when kings ruled. Minor disagreements remain, but usually do not entail a significant number of years for any important date.[14]