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SETTING THE REGNAL YEARS OF THE FIRST HEBREW KINGS

The biblical chronology of the early Hebrew monarchy is plagued by difficulties. Can they be resolved? Is it possible to reconcile the biblical data with Assyrian, Egyptian, and Phoenician chronology? Can we date, with any certainty, the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, despite the lack of inscriptions with such information from the 10th century B.C.?

The primary sources for the early Hebrew monarchy are the Books of Samuel and Kings, which are part of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH). The secondary sources, largely dependent on them, are the Books of Chronicles.

Some contemporary scholars consider the Hebrew Bible – including the Deuteronomistic History – to be a literary fiction made up in the Persian or even Hellenistic period, and therefore, of little historical value for the early history of Israel¹. Does the chronological data support, or refute, such a view?

1. Problems with biblical chronology of the Hebrew kings

The United Monarchy of Israel split into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah after the death of Solomon. From then on, the name “Israel” is associated with the North-

¹ N.P. Lemche, *The Old Testament – A Hellenistic Book?*, “Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament”, 7/1993, p. 163-193; G. Garbini, *Myth and History in the Bible*, London-New York 2003, p. 76-77; idem, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, New-York 1988, p. 132; N.P. Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition*, Louisville 1998, p. 25, 183; idem, *Solomon as Cultural Memory*, [in:] D.V. Edelman, E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods*, Oxford 2013, p. 168, 170; Th.L. Thompson, N.P. Lemche, [in:] H. Shanks, *Face to Face: Biblical Minimalists Meet Their Challengers*, “Biblical Archaeology Review” 1997, 23/4, p. 28, 32; K.W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*, New York 1997, p. 23, 119.

ern kingdom. Therefore, it is best to use the term “Hebrew” for the rulers of both kingdoms to avoid ambiguity.

The chronological difficulties of the monarchic period

The Books of Kings and Chronicles list all of the Hebrew kings. Their reigns however, cannot be directly tied to an absolute chronology. Moreover, the biblical chronology of the monarchic period seems confusing and the reigning years of the individual rulers are sometimes different from one text to another.

For example, one text in the Books of Kings states that King Ahasiah began his reign in the 11th year of the rule of Joram, while another one dates that reign to the 12th year of Joram². We also read that there were two kings between Ahab and Jehu: Ahasiah who ruled for 2 years and Joram who ruled for 12 years³. It seems therefore, that the time span between Ahab and Jehu was 14 years but Assyrian sources, confirmed by astronomical data,⁴ indicate only 12 years between these two kings.

The followers of the documentary hypothesis cited such discrepancies as a result of the late compilation and thus considered the biblical sources of little historical value⁵. For example, Theodore Robinson wrote in his *History of Israel*, “Wellhausen is surely right in believing that the synchronisms in Kings are worthless, being merely a late compilation...” Needless to say, problems with the chronology of the Hebrew kings shed doubts over the historical reliability of the Bible.

Edwin R. Thiele (1895-1986), the biblical scholar from Andrews University, contributed the most to solving the chronological enigmas of the monarchic period. He devoted his life to the study of this subject, including a doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, which was subsequently published in 1951 as *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. He was able to harmonize the regnal years of the Hebrew kings and correlate them with other ancient chronologies and, as a result, to resolve such discrepancies, as cited above.

Thiele’s work on chronology of the Hebrew monarchy is considered definite and no one has seriously challenged it⁶. The Assyriologist, Donald Wiseman wrote, “Today the most widely disseminated chronology is based on the scrupulous work of Thiele”⁷. Leslie McFall stated in 2010, “Thiele’s chronology is fast becoming the

² 2 Kgs 8:25; 9:29.

³ 1 Kgs 22:51; 2 Kgs 3:1.

⁴ M. Kudlek, E.H. Mincler, *Solar and Lunar Eclipses in the Near East from 3000 B.C. to O*, [in:] M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, K. Bergerhof (eds.), *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, vol. 1, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1971; H. Hunger, *Zur Datierung der neuassyrischen Eponymenliste*, “Altorientalische Forschungen”, 35/2, 2008, p. 323-325.

⁵ J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, New York 1957, p. 151; H. Ewald, *The History of Israel*, vol. 1, Ann Arbor 1878, p. 206, vol. 2, p. 20, 297.

⁶ W.C. Kaiser, P.H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, M.T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Downers Grove 1996, p. 55.

⁷ D.J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, Leicester 1993, p. 27.

consensus view among Old Testament scholars, if it has not already reached that point”⁸. Thiele’s work has been used as a foundation by many scholars who work on ancient Near Eastern chronology⁹.

Towards resolving the chronological difficulties

Edwin Thiele recognized and highlighted fundamental principles used in ancient kingdoms of Israel, and Judah, to calculate the reign of their kings. The application of these principles helped to resolve the difficulties of the confusing chronology of Hebrew monarchy, and clarified the apparent contradictions. The following observations are the most important in this regard:

- Each kingdom used a different calendar. In Judah, the year was counted from the autumn month of Etanim (Tishri), which began the Hebrew civil year¹⁰. In Israel, the year began in the spring month of Abib (Nisan), along with the ecclesiastical calendar¹¹, used alongside the civil one¹².
- In Israel and Judah the regnal years were numbered according to one of two systems functioning in the ancient Near East. One is called the accession-year and the other the nonaccession-year¹³. In each of the two kingdoms, their own system was also applied to the rulers of the neighbouring kingdoms.
- There were many coregencies, and rival rules, during the Hebrew monarchy. Such cases have to be accounted for when calculating the reigns of the individual kings, and trying to make sense of the biblical chronology¹⁴.

In antiquity, two methods of numbering the regnal years existed. In Assyria, Babylonia and Persia the last year of reign was credited to the deceased king. The remainder of that year was called the accession year of the new monarch, while his first official year began with the New Year. Therefore, this method is called the “accession-year” or “post-dating”¹⁵.

⁸ L. McFall, *The Chronology of Saul and David*, “Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society”, 53/2010, p. 215, n. 101.

⁹ W.H. Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel*, Atlanta 1991, p. 29-55; F.M. Cross, *An Interpretation of the Nora Stone*, “Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research”, 208/1972, p. 13-19; J. Liver, *The Chronology of Tyre at the Beginning of the First Millennium B.C.*, “Israel Exploration Journal”, 3/1953, p. 113-120; R.C. Young, *Three Verifications of Thiele’s Date for the Beginning of the Divided Kingdom*, “Andrews University Seminary Studies”, 45/2007, p. 179-187; S.H. Horn, *From Bishop Ussher to Edwin R. Thiele*, “Andrews University Seminary Studies”, 18/1980, p. 37-50.

¹⁰ Josephus Flavius, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 1, 3:3; F. Rienecker, G. Maier, *Leksykon biblijny*, Warszawa 2001, s.v. “Rok”, p. 697.

¹¹ Ex 12:2.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, Grand Rapids 1983, p. 44-49.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 43.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 44-49.

In Egypt, Greece, Rome, and other countries the remainder of the year after the previous king died was credited to the new monarch as his first year. Since, there was no accession year, this system is known as the “nonaccession-year” or “ante-dating”¹⁶. The diagram – Fig. 1 will help in the understanding of both schemes.

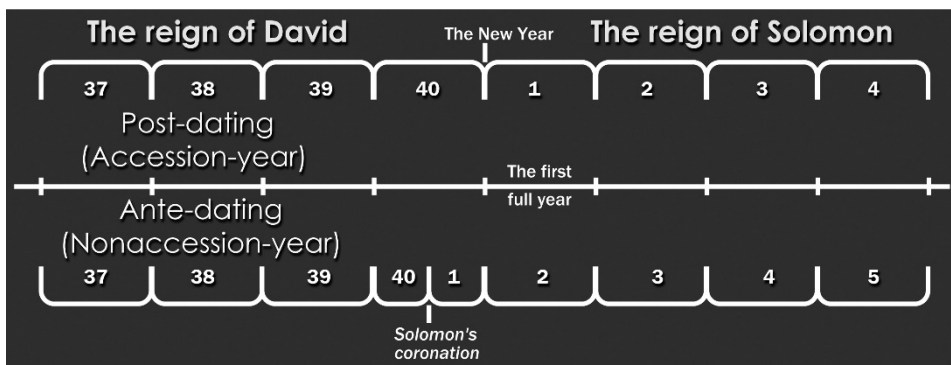


Fig. 1. Example of post-dating and ante-dating schemes

In the Books of Kings, both systems are present. In Judah, the accession-year (post-dating) system was employed. In Israel, from Jeroboam (930-909), the nonaccession-year (ante-dating) method was preferred. Jeroboam most likely learned it in Egypt during his exile there¹⁷, and introduced this system to Israel upon his enthronement as the first ruler of the Northern Kingdom¹⁸.

The Kingdom of Israel used the ante-dating system until the 8th century B.C., when the accession-year was adopted under King Joash (798-782)¹⁹. The change probably resulted from the strong influence exerted at that time by Assyria, which used the post-dating system. This method prevailed in the Northern Kingdom until its end.

The Kingdom of Judah used the accession-year system until the middle of the 9th century B.C. At that time King Ahab (874-853) and King Jehoshaphat (872-848) made a pact between their respective kingdoms, sealed by the marriage of their children Joram and Athaliah²⁰. This couple introduced Judah to the nonaccession-year system, which was used there until the Judean King Joash (835-796). The Southern Kingdom returned to the post-dating scheme during the reign of King Amasiah (796-767) and held on to it until its end in the 6th century B.C.²¹

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ 1 Kgs 11:40; 12:2.

¹⁸ K.A. Kitchen, *How We Know When Solomon Ruled: Synchronisms with Egyptian and Assyrian Rulers Hold the Key to Dates of Israelite Kings*, “Biblical Archaeology Review”, 27/5, 2001, p. 34.

¹⁹ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 60.

²⁰ 2 Kgs 8:18.

²¹ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 60.

The two systems of numbering the regnal years are responsible for some difficulties in the biblical text. For example, King Ahasiah (841), according to the post-dating system used in Judah, began his reign in the 11th year of Joram (852-841), while according to the ante-dating method used in Israel it was the 12th year of Joram²². The alleged contradiction had nothing to do with the biblical text. The blame goes instead to its critics for their ignorance of ancient methods of counting the regnal years.

Many apparent discrepancies in the chronology of the Hebrew kings are resolved by noticing the coregencies and overlapping rules²³. The major examples are: 1) the rule of Tibni and Omri, who fought with each other over the kingdom of Israel²⁴; 2) a similar situation during the rule of Menahem and Pekahiah²⁵; 3) the coregency of Joash and Jeroboam II in Israel²⁶, hence 16 years of the reign of Joash and 41 years of Jeroboam II do not constitute 57 years, but their reign lasted 45 years; 4) the coregency of Azariah with his father Amasiah when the latter became a prisoner in Israel²⁷; 5) the coregency of Jotham with his father Azariah, when the latter became a leper²⁸; 6) the coregency of Ahaz and Jotham in Judah, indicated by the attack of Pekah and Rezin against them both²⁹; 7) the coregency of Jehoram with his father Jehoshaphat³⁰; 8) the rule of Jehoshaphat with his father Asa, who in the 39th year of his rule, became sick, and made his son the coregent³¹; 9) the coregency of Manasseh with his father Hezekiah, when he became deathly ill³².

Edwin Thiele took into consideration the coregencies and overlapping years, the differences in calendars, and the two ancient methods of numbering the regnal years. As a result, he was able to reconcile the chronological data from the books of Kings and Chronicles. The exception were two minor problems related to kings Ahaz and Hezekiah. The first problem had to do with their coregency, and was resolved by archaeologist Siegfried H. Horn (1908-1993)³³, who, like Thiele, taught at Andrews University. The solution for the other difficulty has been suggested by K.A. Kitchen and T.C. Mitchell³⁴, who, like Horn, based their Old Testament chronology on Thiele's work.

The Table 1 shows the 86 regnal years of the kings of Israel, numbered by the nonaccession-year method used in Israel until King Jehoshaphat (872-848), since

²² 2 Kgs 8:25; 9:29.

²³ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 61-65.

²⁴ 1 Kgs 16:21-22.

²⁵ Hos 5:5.

²⁶ 2 Kgs 13:10-13; 14:23.

²⁷ 2 Chr 14:1-2.8-21; 15:2; 2 Chr 25:21-24.

²⁸ 2 Kgs 15:5; 2 Chr 26:21.

²⁹ 2 Kgs 16:5-9; 15:37; 16:7.

³⁰ 2 Kgs 1:17; 3:1; 8:16.

³¹ 1 Kgs 15:23; 2 Chr 16:12.

³² 2 Kgs 20:1-6; 2 Chr 32:34.

³³ S.H. Horn, *The Chronology of King Hezekiah's Reign*, "Andrews University Seminary Studies", 2/1964, p. 48-49.

³⁴ K.A. Kitchen, T.C. Mitchell, [in:] J.D. Douglas (ed.), *New Bible Dictionary*, Wheaton 1982, s.v. "Old Testament Chronology", p. 197.

they correspond with the 79 regnal years of the kings of Judah by the accession-year method. As can be seen, there are no discrepancies in the biblical data regarding the regnal years of the Hebrew kings, provided we understand and apply the ancient principles of counting time.

Table 1

Regnal years of the kings of Israel and of Judah

The Kingdom of Judah		The Kingdom of Israel		Actual years
King	Regnal years (post-dating)	King	Regnal years (ante-dating)	
Rehoboam	17	Jeroboam I	22	21
Abijah	3	Nadab	2	1
Asa	41	Baasha	24	23
Jehoshaphat	18	Elah	2	1
		Omri	12	11
		Ahab	22	21
		Ahaziah	2	1
	79		86	79

Source: E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 78

The regnal formulas

The Books of Kings contain the regnal formulas for all Hebrew rulers of the Divided Monarchy and for David and Solomon of the United Monarchy. The listed sources for them were: The Book of the Acts of Solomon³⁵, The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel³⁶, and The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah³⁷. Gerard Van Groningen noted: “The existence of these sources certainly implies that each royal palace (of Solomon, of Israel, and of Judah) had record keepers, annalists, and scribes”³⁸.

The regnal formulas contain the duration of each reign, the capital of the kingdom, data concerning the death of the king and the name of his successor. Sometimes there is also a short characterization of his rule, particularly from the religious point of view. In case of the kings of Judah the formula includes also mother’s name and his age at enthronement³⁹.

The following example contains an extensive regnal formula regarding the Judean King Jehoshaphat (872-848): “Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His

³⁵ 1 Kgs 11:41.

³⁶ 1 Kgs 14:19; 2 Kgs 15:31.

³⁷ 1 Kgs 14:29; 2 Kgs 24:5.

³⁸ G. Van Groningen, *1-2 Kings*, [in:] W.A. Elwell, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Grand Rapids 1989, p. 234.

³⁹ B.T. Arnold, B.E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids 1998, p. 223.

mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. He walked in all the way of Asa his father. He did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. Yet the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he showed, and how he warred, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? And from the land he exterminated the remnant of the male cult prostitutes who remained in the days of his father Asa. There was no king in Edom; a deputy was king. Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish to go to Ophir for gold, but they did not go, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion-geber. Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "Let my servants go with your servants in the ships," but Jehoshaphat was not willing. And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father, and Jehoram [Joram] his son reigned in his place. Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel"⁴⁰.

The Bible lists the regnal years of all Hebrew rulers to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah before the Babylonian captivity. However, it is a relative chronology, not an absolute one, since we have only the length of their rules in cross-reference to each other. We need points of congruence with an absolute chronology to convert this data into our system of counting time.

2. The correlations with Assyrian, Egyptian and Phoenician data

Edwin Thiele linked the biblical chronology of the Hebrew kings with Assyrian and Egyptian data. Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III and Pharaoh Shoshenq made it possible. As a result, he was able to fix the date of Solomon's death as well as the enthronement of Rehoboam to the year 931/930 B.C.⁴¹

The Assyrian data

The regnal years of the Hebrew kings can be harmonized with Assyrian and Babylonian chronology, and the latter is linked with an absolute chronology. This is possible, because of Assyrian lists of eponyms or names of the yearly elected high officials, called *limmu*. The Assyrian canon of eponyms is complete for 910-649 B.C.⁴² In its latter part it is concurrent with fragments of Ptolemy's Canon, reaching to 747 B.C., with names of the Assyrian kings who simultaneously ruled Babylonia.

The Assyrian eponym lists and Ptolemy's Canon mention some astronomical events. For example, there was a solar eclipse in the month of Simanu in the year dated by the eponym of Bur-Sagale of Gusana, when Assur-dan III (772-755) was

⁴⁰ 1 Kgs 22:41-51.

⁴¹ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 78-80.

⁴² K.A. Kitchen, *How We Know When...*, p. 34; F.H. Cryer, *Chronology: Issues and Problems*, [in:] J.M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1-2, Peabody 2005, p. 657.

King of Assyria⁴³. Astronomers date this event, according to proleptic Julian calendar, to 15 June 763 B.C.⁴⁴ The correctness of this date is corroborated by other astronomical phenomena as demonstrated by Hermann Hunger, a leading authority on the Mesopotamian astronomical cuneiform texts⁴⁵. As a result, we can correlate the Assyrian regnal years with our system of dating from the 10th to the 7th century B.C.⁴⁶, and even earlier⁴⁷.

Mesopotamian chronology provides several pegs for synchronizing the Assyrian and Babylonian dates with the chronology of the Divided Monarchy. The first one is the famous battle at Qarqar in 853 B.C.⁴⁸ Ahab, King of Israel, was the major player in this battle, as confirmed by the Kurkh Monolith. The king Shalmaneser III raised this stela in his 6th year. The second peg is the year 841 B.C. The inscription on the Black Obelisk reports that Israel's King Jehu paid tribute to the same Assyrian king. The Mesopotamian sources date this event to the 18th year of Shalmaneser III, which was 841 B.C.

King Ahab (874-843) died in the year of the battle at Qarqar, in the 6th year of King Shalmaneser III. King Jehu (841-814) paid the tribute to Assyria, in the 18th year of Shalmaneser III. These two events were 12 years apart, according to Assyrian data. However, according to the method of ante-dating used in Israel, it was 14 years⁴⁹. The Fig. 2 demonstrates that both numbers are correct but the outcome depends on the method of numbering regnal years.



Fig. 2. The regnal years of kings Shalmaneser III and of the corresponding Hebrew Kings

There were two kings of Israel who ruled between Ahab and Jehu: Ahaziah, for 2 years and Joram [Jehoram], for 12 years⁵⁰. At first glance, 14 years passed between Ahab (874-855) and Jehu (841-814). However, the Assyrian data indicates

⁴³ W.C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars*, Nashville 1998, p. 293.

⁴⁴ M. Kudlek, E.H. Mincler, *Solar and Lunar Eclipses...*

⁴⁵ H. Hunger, *Zur Datierung der neuassyrischen...*, p. 323-325.

⁴⁶ E.H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priest: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Grand Rapids 2008, p. 293; W.C. Kaiser, P.H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, M.T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible...*, p. 55.

⁴⁷ F. Rienecker, G. Maier, *Leksykon biblijny...*, s.v. "Asyria", p. 49.

⁴⁸ F.H. Cryer, *Chronology: Issues and Problems...*, p. 657.

⁴⁹ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 78.

⁵⁰ 1 Kgs 3:1; 22:51.

12 years. The explanation for this apparent discrepancy is evident when we note that Ahaziah ruled for just 1 full year and part of the year of his predecessor and Joram for 11 full years and part of a year of his predecessor. According to the post-dating method Ahaziah and Joram reigned for 12 full years but, according to the ante-dating system, they ruled for 14 years. As we can see, there is no discrepancy between the biblical and Assyrian data, only two different systems of counting the regnal years.

A similar correlation exists between the history of Judah and the Assyrian chronology in case of the third military campaign of Sennacherib against Hezekiah, King of Judah in 701 B.C.⁵¹ According to Assyrian data, 152 years passed to this event, from the 6th year of Shalmaneser III and the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. Due to the work of Thiele, we can calculate that exactly 152 years transpired, from the death of King Ahab (874-853), to the 14th year of King Hezekiah (715-686) in 701 B.C.

These two examples demonstrate that Assyrian data corroborates with the biblical chronology. Since the chronology of the Hebrew kings is a complete one, Thiele by knowing the regnal years of Ahab, Jehu, and Hezekiah, was able to pinpoint the year 931/930 B.C. as the beginning of Rehoboam's reign⁵². This date is now widely accepted as the end of the United Monarchy of Israel and the beginning of the Divided Monarchy⁵³.

A lesser-known facet of Thiele's work is that his methodology furnished a useful tool for settling some problems with Mesopotamian chronology⁵⁴. It helped to fix such important dates for Assyrian and Hebrew history as 853, 841, 723, and 701 B.C., as well as for Babylonian and Hebrew history in cases of 605, 597, and 586 B.C.⁵⁵ Almost all of these dates were in question, prior to Thiele's outstanding work.

For those who do not specialize in antiquity an explanation is due as to why we use such double dates as 931/930 B.C. This is because our year lasts from winter to winter (January 1 through December 31), while, in the ancient Near East, people usually counted the year from autumn to autumn. As a result, our year falls on parts of two ancient years. This causes the ambiguity reflected by the double dates, such as 931/930 B.C. However, for the sake of simplicity, many scholars use 931, for the death of Solomon (971-931), and 930, for the rule of Rehoboam (930-913) and Jeroboam I (930-909).

⁵¹ S.H. Horn, *The Chronology of King Hezekiah's...*, p. 48-49.

⁵² E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 79-80.

⁵³ E.H. Merrill, *Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology*, "Bibliotheca Sacra", 137/1980, p. 241-251; idem, *The 'Accession Year' and Davidic Chronology*, "Journal of Near Eastern Studies", 19/1987, p. 101-112; J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Peabody 1998, p. 249; G. Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah*, Leiden 1996, p. 14; I. Finkelstein, N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*, New York 2001, p. 131; W.C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel...*, p. 294-295; E.H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests...*, p. 210; R.K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times*, Grand Rapids 1970, p. 191; S.H. Horn (ed.), *SDA Bible Dictionary*, Washington 1960, s.v. "Chronology", p. 211.

⁵⁴ K.A. Strand, *Thiele's Biblical Chronology as a Corrective for Extrabiblical Dates*, "Andrews University Seminary Studies", 34/2, 1996, p. 295-317.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 295-314.

The Egyptian data

The Egyptian data also corroborates the biblical chronology⁵⁶. The chronology of ancient Egypt can be anchored to our year 664 B.C., which marks the beginning of the XXVIth dynasty⁵⁷. Prior to that, Pharaoh Taharqa (biblical Tirhaka⁵⁸), the last ruler of the XXVth Kushite dynasty, reigned for 26 years. His predecessors, Shebitku and Shabako ruled for 25 years, which takes us to 715 B.C.⁵⁹ The preceding ten pharaohs ruled for about 227-230 years, from 715 until 945 B.C.⁶⁰ The first of them was Shoshenq I (biblical Shishaq⁶¹).

Szoshenq founded the XXIInd Egyptian dynasty when he became a Pharaoh in about 945 B.C.⁶² He invaded Palestine, probably in the 20th year of his reign, as indicated by the stele from Gebel es-Silsilah. It informs us that in the 21st year, Shoshenq ordered a triumphal scene in the Karnak Temple of Amun to commemorate his recent military expedition⁶³. The date of 926/925 B.C. for this expedition is also implied by his sudden death, which left the building project at the Amun Temple unfinished⁶⁴. The Bible dates the military campaign of Shoshenq in Canaan to the 5th year of Rehoboam (930-913)⁶⁵. Therefore, we arrive at 931/930 B.C. from Egyptian sources for the beginning of Rehoboam's reign, as we did from Assyrian data.

An additional line of evidence in support of the biblical chronology comes from the marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter⁶⁶. It took place in the early years of Solomon's reign, circa 970-960 B.C.⁶⁷, which corresponds to the reign of Siamun (978-959)⁶⁸. He was the only Pharaoh of the XXIst dynasty who ventured to Canaan⁶⁹.

⁵⁶ K.A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 B.C.)*, Warminster 1973, p. 72-76, 174-183, 324-325, 372-376, 386-388, 544-586.

⁵⁷ Idem, *Egypt and East Africa*, [in:] L.H. Handy (ed.), *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, Leiden 1977, p. 111; idem, *How We Know When...*, p. 35.

⁵⁸ 2 Kgs 19:9; Is 37:9.

⁵⁹ K.A. Kitchen, *How We Know When...*, p. 35.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ 1 Kgs 14:25-26; 2 Kgs 12:1-9.

⁶² K.A. Kitchen, *Egypt and East Africa*, [in:] L.H. Handy (ed.), *The Age of Salomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millenium*, Leiden 1997; idem, *The Historical Chronology of Ancient Egypt, a Current Assessment*, "Acta Archaeologica", 67/1996, p. 1-13.

⁶³ R.A. Caminos, *Gebel es-Silsilah No. 100*, "Journal of Egyptian Archaeology", 38/1952, p. 46-61; K.A. Kitchen, *Egypt and East Africa...*, p. 120-125; idem, *Late-Egyptian Chronology...*, p. 231-233; idem, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids 1982, p. 33; E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 80; K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability...*, p. 33.

⁶⁴ K.A. Kitchen, *How We Know When...*, p. 35.

⁶⁵ 1 Kgs 14:25-26; 2 Chr 12:1-9.

⁶⁶ 1 Kgs 3:1.

⁶⁷ K.A. Kitchen, *How We Know When...*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ Idem, *The Third Intermediate Period...*, p. 273-274, 280-283.

⁶⁹ A.R. Green, *Solomon and Siamun: A Synchronism between Early Dynastic Israel and Twenty-First Dynasty of Egypt*, "Journal of Biblical Literature", 97/1987, p. 353-367; K.A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period...*, p. 279-283; K. Myśliwiec, *The Twilight of Ancient Egypt: First Millennium B.C.C.*, Ithaca 2000, p. 27-67.

The triumphal scene from the temple at Tanis bears the inscription “Siamun, beloved of Amun”⁷⁰. It depicts him smiting an enemy who is holding a double ax with crescent-shaped blades⁷¹. Such a weapon was probably Aegean in origin, which suggests that Siamun fought the Philistines.

Egyptian rulers often sealed by marriage their treaties with important powers such as Hatti, Mitanni or Babylonia. The pharaohs married foreign princesses, but did not give their daughters to foreigners⁷², which is confirmed by the Amarna letters⁷³. Such a policy was in place when Egypt was powerful, but not when it weakened. By the 10th century B.C., the Pharaohs gave their daughters in marriage to foreigners⁷⁴. For example, Pharaoh Psusennes II gave his daughter to the young Libyan prince Osorkon, son of Shoshenq. Later Shoshenq became a Pharaoh himself, but the Egyptians still considered him a foreigner, as indicated by an appropriate determinative⁷⁵. In the days of Herodotus (484-426) the pharaohs again did not let their daughters marry foreigners⁷⁶.

It seems that the pharaohs gave their daughters in marriage to foreign rulers only between the 10th and 8th centuries B.C. when Egypt was relatively weak⁷⁷. This fits very well with the biblical record of Solomon’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter⁷⁸ and of similar union between the Edomite prince and a sister of the Pharaoh’s wife⁷⁹. This poses a problem for scholars who date the biblical sources to V-II century B.C.⁸⁰ The historical reality of such a late period does not match the situation described by the sources, while the reality of the early monarchy matches the biblical record very well.

The Phoenician data

The reign of Solomon can be correlated with the rule of the Phoenician King Hiram (ca 979-947)⁸¹. This is possible due to the Phoenician data preserved by Flavius

⁷⁰ K.A. Kitchen, *How We Know When...*, p. 36.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² A. Malamat, *The Kingdom of David and Salomon in its Contact with Egypt and Aram Naharaim*, “The Biblical Archeologist”, 21/1958, p. 97; idem, *Aspects of the Foreign Policies of David and Solomon*, “Journal of Near Eastern Studies”, 22/1963, p. 10.

⁷³ Amarna Letters, 4.

⁷⁴ K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability...*, p. 111.

⁷⁵ Idem, *How We Know When Solomon...*, p. 36.

⁷⁶ Herodotus, *History*, 3:3.

⁷⁷ K.A. Kitchen, *How We Know When...*, p. 36.

⁷⁸ 1 Kgs 9:16; 11:1.

⁷⁹ 1 Kgs 11:19.

⁸⁰ N.P. Lemche, *The Old Testament...*, p. 163-193; G. Garbini, *Myth and History...*, p. 76-77; idem, *History and Ideology...*, p. 132; N.P. Lemche, *The Israelites in History...*, p. 25, 183; idem, *Solomon as Cultural Memory...*, p. 168, 170; T.L. Thompson, N.P. Lemche, [in:] H. Shanks, *Face to Face: Biblical...*, p. 28, 32; K.W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel...*, p. 23, 119.

⁸¹ A. Green, *David’s Relations with Hiram: Biblical and Josephan Evidence for Tyrian Chronology*, [in:] C. Meyers, M.P. O’Connor (eds.), *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in*

Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities* and *Against Apion*⁸². He cited Dios, the Phoenician historian, and the Greek historian Menander of Ephesus, who wrote in the 2nd century B.C.⁸³ The Phoenician data is helpful, since it is possible to synchronize the reigns of the Tyrian kings with the Assyrian chronology⁸⁴.

Flavius reported that the Phoenicians possessed until his days a complete list of their rulers from Hiram to Pygmalion of Tyre in the archive of that city⁸⁵. On this basis he wrote that the beginning of temple construction by Solomon coincided with the 11th or 12th year of Hiram of Tyre⁸⁶. This means, that King Hiram (ca 979-947) was a contemporary of David (1011-971) and of Solomon (971-931).

Josephus added that the temple of Jerusalem was built 143 years and eight months before the founding of Carthage⁸⁷. This city was planted by Elissa, known as Dido. She was a sister of King Pygmalion, who killed her husband in the seventh year of his reign. Soon after that tragic event, she escaped with some followers, by ship. Frank M. Cross confirmed the historicity of King Pygmalion of Tyre on the basis of his reading the Phoenician inscription from Nora in Sardinia, dated to the end of the 9th century B.C.⁸⁸

The Roman historian Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus noted that Carthage was built 72 years before Rome⁸⁹. The traditional date of the founding of Rome is 753 B.C. This indicates the year 825/824 B.C. for the founding of Carthage⁹⁰. Timaeus of Tauromenium (345-260), a historian from Sicily, dated Carthage to 814 B.C., but most likely meant the year in which the Phoenicians received permission from the local ruler to build a city on the coast. From 825/824 to 814 B.C. they only occupied the island near the coast⁹¹.

This conclusion is supported by the inscription of King Shalmaneser III, which names in 841 B.C. the tribute from King Baal-Eser II (846-841)⁹². This Phoenician

Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday, Winona Lake 1983, p. 373-397; H. Donner, *Israel und Tyrus im Zeitalter Davids und Salomos*, "Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages", 10/1982, p. 43-52; J.K. Kuan, *Third Kingdoms 5,1 and Israelite – Tyrian Relations during the Reign of Solomon*, "Journal for the Study of the Old Testament", 46/1990, p. 31-46.

⁸² Idem, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 7, 3:2; 8, 2:1; 8, 5:3, 6:4; 13:2; idem, *Against Apion*, 1:17-18.

⁸³ Idem, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 8, 5:3; idem, *Against Apion*, 1:18.

⁸⁴ J. Holladay, *The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron IIA-B (ca. 1000-750 B.C.E.)*, [in:] Th. Levy (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, London 1998, p. 371; W.G. Dever, *Archaeology and the 'Age of Solomon'*, [in:] L.K. Handy, *The Age of Solomon...*, p. 239.

⁸⁵ Josephus Flavius, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 8, 2:8.

⁸⁶ Idem, 8, 3:1; 13:2; idem, *Against Apion*, 1:18.

⁸⁷ Idem, *Against Apion*, 1:17.

⁸⁸ F.M. Cross, *An Interpretation of the Nora Stone...*, p. 16.

⁸⁹ M.J. Justinus, *Epitome Historiarum philippicarum Pompei Trogi: Accedunt Prologi in Pompeium Trogun*, Leipzig 1994, 23, 4:1-6.8

⁹⁰ J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology...*, p. 99.

⁹¹ J.M. Peñuela, *La Inscripción Asiria IM 55644 y la Cronología de los reyes de Tiro*, "Sefarad", 14/1954, p. 29, n. 167.

⁹² E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 76.

ruler was the grandfather of Dido (Elissa), according to the *Aeneid*⁹³. Baal-Eser II (Balazeros) was the son of Etbaal I (887-856), King of Tyre and Sidon, who gave his daughter Jezebel in marriage to King Ahab of Israel (874-853)⁹⁴. Menander of Ephesus recorded that, from his enthronement, 22 years had passed to the seventh year of his grandson Pygmalion of Tyre⁹⁵. This was the same year in which Elissa founded Carthage. Therefore, the tribute paid in 841 by Baal-Eser II, supports the date 825/824 B.C. for the founding of the city of Carthage⁹⁶.

According to the Phoenician sources cited by Flavius, the flight of Elissa from Tyre took place 143 years and eight months after King Hiram sent his builders to construct the temple in Jerusalem⁹⁷. By adding 143 years to 825/824 B.C. we arrive at 968/967 B.C.⁹⁸ This closely matches the biblical sources, which date the construction of the Jerusalem Temple in the 4th year of King Solomon, to around 967 B.C.⁹⁹ Michael Rowton, even though he lowered the regnal years of Hiram and Solomon by a few years, confirmed in his study the uncanny harmony between the biblical and Phoenician sources¹⁰⁰.

3. Dating the rules of Saul, David, and Solomon

By setting the year of Solomon's death, and by knowing the duration of David's and Solomon's rule, we can date their regnal years. Much more difficult and problematic is the dating of Saul's reign.

The reign of Saul

The difficulty in dating Saul's reign has to do with the corruption of the regnal formula in the Books of Samuel. There is a lacuna in the Masoretic Text in place where the age of Saul was originally given¹⁰¹. To make matters worse, the second part of this passus mentions a period of 2 years, which can be variously interpreted¹⁰².

The first part of this text reads: "Saul lived for ... years and then became king"¹⁰³. The Septuagint fills in with "30 years". However, this number seems to be

⁹³ Vergil, *Aeneid*, 1:338-368.

⁹⁴ 1 Kgs 16:31.

⁹⁵ Josephus Flavius, *Against Apion*, 1:17-18.

⁹⁶ W.H. Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology...*, p. 51-53; F.M. Cross, *An Interpretation of the Nora Stone...*, p. 13-19.

⁹⁷ Josephus Flavius, *Against Apion*, 1:17-18.

⁹⁸ M. Vogelstein, *Biblical Chronology*, vol. 1, Cincinnati 1944, p. 22; R.C. Young, *When Did Solomon Die?*, "Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society", 46/4, 2003, p. 601-602.

⁹⁹ 1 Kgs 6:1.

¹⁰⁰ M.B. Rowton, *The Date of the Founding of Solomon's Temple*, "Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research", 119/1950, p. 20-22.

¹⁰¹ E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, Minneapolis 2011, p. 10-11.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*.

¹⁰³ 1 Sm 13:1.

a guesswork based on David's age at his enthronement¹⁰⁴, and the minimal age in Israel for holding an office¹⁰⁵. The number 30 does not correspond with the ages of Saul's sons, as Jonathan was already in command of the army at the beginning of his father's reign¹⁰⁶. This could not have been the case had Saul become king at age 30.

Paul of Tarsus stated that Saul ruled "for 40 years"¹⁰⁷. This is supported by the age of Ish-baal, the son of Saul, born during his reign, who became a king at age 40, after his father's death¹⁰⁸. Flavius Josephus confirmed that Saul reigned for 40 years: 18 years when Samuel was alive and 22 years after the prophet's death¹⁰⁹. In another place he mentioned 20 years¹¹⁰, but it is likely a simple mistake. Therefore, it seems that Paul of Tarsus was correct in his statement that the first Hebrew king ruled "for 40 years"¹¹¹.

The second part of the regnal formula regarding Saul can be interpreted in various ways. It says: "and when he had reigned over Israel for two years"¹¹². This can hardly mean the rest of Saul's life, because all the events couldn't fit into two years, as demonstrated by V. Philips Long and others¹¹³. This would also be in conflict with the age of Ish-baal, who was 40 years old when Saul died¹¹⁴. There are two likely explanations for this passage.

The first one suggests a reading, that Saul was 40 years old when he became king and had already ruled Israel for two years. In this case, the 2 years refer to either the period between his anointment by Samuel and confirmation of his rule at Gilgal¹¹⁵, or the period from his anointment to the rejection of Saul at Gilgal by God after his unfinished campaign against the Amalekites¹¹⁶. From this perspective, Saul ceased being God's chosen king, and therefore, "reigned over Israel for two years"¹¹⁷.

The second possible explanation of this difficult text suggests that Saul had already "reigned over Israel for two years" when the battle with the Philistines at Michmash occurred¹¹⁸. These two years would have given Saul enough time to form an army for war with the Philistines. In this case, the text would indicate, that the battle at Michmash transpired two years after Saul became king.

¹⁰⁴ 2 Sm 5:4.

¹⁰⁵ Nm 4:3.23.30.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Sm 13:2-3.

¹⁰⁷ Acts 13:21.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Sm 2:10.

¹⁰⁹ Josephus Flavius, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 6, 14:9.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 10, 8:4.

¹¹¹ Acts 13:21.

¹¹² 1 Sm 13:1.

¹¹³ V.P. Long, *Reign and Rejection: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence*, Atlanta 1989, p. 72; D.T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, Grand Rapids 2007, p. 331.

¹¹⁴ 2 Sm 2:10.

¹¹⁵ M.J. Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Peabody 2000, p. 60.

¹¹⁶ D.T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel...*, p. 333.

¹¹⁷ 1 Sm 13:1.

¹¹⁸ L.J. Wood, *Israel's United Monarchy*, Grand Rapids 1979, p. 122-123.

The death of Saul allowed David to take the throne of Judah¹¹⁹, which likely occurred in 1011 B.C. This date can be deduced by the length of David's rule of 40 years, which ended around 971 B.C.¹²⁰ If the first Hebrew king ruled for 40 years, as stated by Paul of Tarsus¹²¹ and implied by the age of Saul's sons, his reign began in 1050 B.C. Therefore, many scholars date Saul's reign from 1050 to 1011 B.C.¹²²

Some doubt that Saul's rule lasted for 40 years, because of the similar duration of David's and Solomon's reigns¹²³. However, as stated by Eugene Merrill, "A careful examination of the biblical record leads to the conclusion that the figure of forty years is not a fabrication of Pauls' nor a historically worthless tradition that he merely parroted, but is required by the text itself"¹²⁴. There is no legitimate reason to disregard the 40 year of Saul's rule, since it fits the context and has support in reliable sources.

The rule of David

David reigned for 40 years: 7.5 years in Hebron over Judah, and 33 years over the whole Israel in Jerusalem¹²⁵. Towards the end of his life "when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel"¹²⁶. This verse indicates that his coregency with Solomon lasted for a part of his fortieth regnal year.

Some scholars assume that 40 years of David's and Solomon's rule has to be symbolic or rounded¹²⁷. This in turn leads them to conclude that the real length of each reign was unknown to the biblical authors due to the late origin of their compositions¹²⁸. Such an assumption is arbitrary and contrary to the sources. At least four points argue against it.

Firstly, sometimes in antiquity successive kings reigned for the same number of years which appears symbolic or rounded. For example, two successive kings of Babylon reigned for 20 years each: Shamash-shuma-ukin (668-648) and Kandalama (647-627), and two Assyrian kings reigned for 12 years each: Sharma-Adad I (1673-1662) and Iptar-sin (1661-1650).

¹¹⁹ 2 Sm 1:11; 5:5.

¹²⁰ 2 Sm 5:5.

¹²¹ Acts 13:21.

¹²² E.g.: W.C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel...*, p. 248-249, 294-296; E.H. Merrill, *Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology...*, p. 241-251; idem, *Kingdom of Priests...*, p. 210-212, 261; R.K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times...*, p. 191; S.H. Horn (ed.), *SDA Bible Dictionary...*, s.v. „Chronology”, p. 211; M.J. Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel...*, p. 60.

¹²³ A.J. Soggin, *A History of Israel: From the Beginnings to the Bod Kochba Revolt, AD 135*, London 1984, p. 50.

¹²⁴ E.H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priest...*, p. 211.

¹²⁵ 2 Sm 5:4-5; 1 Chr 3:4.

¹²⁶ 1 Chr 23:1.

¹²⁷ J.A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, Edinburgh 1951, p. 244, 267; J. Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, Philadelphia 1970, p. 298; J. Robinson, *The First Book of Kings...*, p. 147.

¹²⁸ E.g. J.A. Soggin, *A History of Israel...*, p. 50.

Secondly, the 40 years of David's reign was the sum of 7.5 and 33 years¹²⁹, including part of his 40th year shared with Solomon as coregent¹³⁰. Moreover, David appointed officers for the service in the government and in the future temple "in the fortieth year of his reign"¹³¹, which also indicates a true 40 years of ruling.

Thirdly, the numbers in the biblical record of David's and Solomon's rule do not seem rounded, since the years sometimes are accompanied by months. For example, David's reign in Hebron lasted for 7 years and 6 months, the beginning of the temple's construction was in the 4th year and 2nd month of Solomon, and its completion was in his 11th year and 8th month¹³². Such exact data points to the existence of royal archives available to biblical authors¹³³.

Fourthly, the presence of scribes in the courts of David and Solomon¹³⁴ strongly indicates that such important data as the regnal years of the dynasty founder and his son were carefully preserved in the royal annals. Authors of the Books of Samuel and Kings surely had access to such written sources, which is evident from numerous lists, documents and reliable information preserved in their writings¹³⁵.

The reign of Solomon

The correlation existing between the biblical, Assyrian and Egyptian chronology, allows us to link the regnal reigns of the Hebrew kings with an absolute chronology and to fix the date of Solomon's death to 931/930 B.C.¹³⁶ Since, according to the sources, King Solomon ruled for 40 years¹³⁷, his reign must have begun around 971 B.C.

¹²⁹ 2 Sm 5:5; 1 Chr 29:27.

¹³⁰ 1 Chr 23:1.

¹³¹ 1 Chr 26:31.

¹³² 2 Sm 5:5; 1 Kgs 6:1.38.

¹³³ A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible-10,000-586 B.C.E.*, New York 1990, p. 369; I. Provan, V.P. Long, T. Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, Louisville 2003, p. 55.

¹³⁴ 1 Kgs 4:3; 1 Chr 18:16.

¹³⁵ Bishop M. Moore, B.E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History*, Grand Rapids 2011, p. 160; A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land...*, p. 369; I. Provan, V.P. Long, T. Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel...*, p. 59; J.G. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel: An Introduction & Commentary*, Leicester 1988, p. 224; N. Na'aman, *Sources and Composition in the History of David*, [in:] idem, *Ancient Israel's History and Historiography: The First Temple Period*, Winona Lake 2006, p. 23-35; idem, *In Search of Reality behind the Account of David's Wars with Israel's Neighbors*, [in:] ibidem, p. 38-56; idem, *Solomon's District List (1Kings 4:7-19) and the Assyrian Province System*, [in:] ibidem, p. 79-101, 102-117.

¹³⁶ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 79; E.H. Merrill, *Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology...*, p. 241-251; E.H. Merrill, *The 'Accession Year' and Davidic Chronology...*, p. 101-112; J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology...*, p. 249; G. Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings...*, p. 14; I. Finkelstein, N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed...*, p. 131; W.C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel From...*, p. 294-295; E.H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests...*, p. 210; R.K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times...*, p. 191; S.H. Horn (ed.), *SDA Bible Dictionary...*, s.v. "Chronology", p. 211.

¹³⁷ 1 Kgs 11:42; 2 Chr 9:30.

Solomon began building the temple of Yahweh in the 4th year and 2nd month of his reign. The temple's construction required seven years¹³⁸, while the king's palace in Jerusalem an additional thirteen years¹³⁹. The Phoenician data cited by Flavius indicates that Solomon began building the temple in 968/967 B.C.¹⁴⁰ It matches fairly closely with the biblical chronology, which places his 4th year around 967 B.C.

The detailed description of the First Temple can be found in several ancient sources, mainly in the Books of Kings and the Chronicles¹⁴¹. The building material, style and decoration mentioned by its authors and tied with Phoenician masters¹⁴² was indeed used by the Phoenicians between 11th and 9th centuries B.C.¹⁴³ According to archaeologists, such temples as the one raised by Solomon were built in Levant only until 8th century B.C.¹⁴⁴ It poses a dilemma for scholars dating its biblical description to the postexilic era, since by then, there was no architectural analogues in Levant for such a temple¹⁴⁵, nor a personage of Solomon's statue in Palestine, who could raise it.

Valuable is the information pertaining to the building of the temple in seven years¹⁴⁶, because it confirms that the reigns of the first Hebrew kings were reckoned from autumn to autumn, the same as the civil year. The temple's construction began during the month of Ziv in the 4th year of Solomon and lasted until the month of Bul in the 11th year of his rule¹⁴⁷. The seven year span could fit only the autumn to autumn calendar year, which began in the month of Tishri (Etanim). This would mean five months of the 4th year + six years + seven months, altogether totaling seven years, exactly. If the year was counted from the spring month of Nisan (Abib), this would mean eleven months of the 4th year + six years + seven months, together totaling almost eight years. Thus, we can safely assume that the New Year commenced on the 1st of Tishri (Etanim), which even now remains the Jewish New Year (Hebrew: *Rosh Hashana*).

The Gezer Calendar, dated to around the 10th century B.C.¹⁴⁸, also begins the year in autumn. Flavius Josephus confirmed that Jews regarded the month of Marcheshvan, which followed Tishri (Etanim), as the second month of the year¹⁴⁹.

¹³⁸ 1 Kgs 6:1.38.

¹³⁹ 1 Kgs 9:10.

¹⁴⁰ Josephus Flavius, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 7, 3:2; 8, 2:1; 8, 5:3, 6:4; 13:2; idem, *Against Apion*, 1:17-18.

¹⁴¹ 1 Kgs 5-8; 2 Chr 3-5.

¹⁴² 1 Krl 5:18.

¹⁴³ A. Mazar, *The Search for David and Solomon: An Archaeological Perspective*, [in:] B.B. Schmidt (ed.), *The Quest For the Historical Israel*, p. 129.

¹⁴⁴ W.G. Dever, [in:] H. Shanks, *Face to Face: Biblical...*, p. 33; B.B. Schmidt (ed.), *The Quest For the Historical Israel*, p. 129.

¹⁴⁵ A. Mazar, *The Search for David and Solomon...*, p. 128; W. Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon of Human Achievement*, Columbia 2005, p. 89.

¹⁴⁶ 1 Kgs 6:1.38.

¹⁴⁷ 1 Kgs 6:1.37-38.

¹⁴⁸ C.E. Fant, M.G. Reddish, *Lost Treasures of the Bible*, Grand Rapids 2008, p. 95.

¹⁴⁹ Josephus Flavius, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 1, 3:3.

He wrote that Moses appointed the month of Nisan, as the first month of the ecclesiastical year in order to commemorate the Exodus, but in all other areas of life, Jews preserved the original order of the months, by which he meant counting years from autumn to autumn¹⁵⁰.

The Pentateuch testifies that early Israelites used a fall to fall calendar year. It is evident from this passage: “You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the first-fruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end”¹⁵¹. The Feast of Ingathering fell at the end of the civic year in the fall. The sabbatical and jubilee years began during autumn too, since the Day of Atonement (Hebrew: *Yom Kippur*) fell on the 10th day of Tishri: “Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement, you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan”¹⁵².

Jews in Judah continued the practice of numbering the regnal years from fall to fall. This is clear from the events during the rule of King Josiah (640-609). He commanded the repair of the temple in Jerusalem in the 18th year of his reign. During this work, the Book of the Law was found in the temple¹⁵³. Josiah ordered the book to be read in public and to renew the covenant with Yahweh¹⁵⁴. Then he commanded a cleansing of the temple and an abolishing of the high places (Hebrew: *bamoth*), where sacrifices to pagan deities took place¹⁵⁵. Finally, the Passover was celebrated in his 18th year¹⁵⁶. All these events could only take place during a year beginning with Tishri, since there would be about six months for them to take course. If, however, the 18th year of that king had begun on the 1st of Nisan, there wouldn't have been enough time to squeeze them in before the 14th of Nisan, the day of the Passover. This confirms that people of Judah counted years from autumn to autumn in the pre-exilic times, as do Jews even today¹⁵⁷.

Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, became King of Judah after his father's death¹⁵⁸. This occurred between Tishri of 931 and Tishri of 930 BC. Jeroboam I was proclaimed King of Israel between Nisan of 931 and Nisan of 930 BC. This narrows down the beginning of Rehoboam's reign and Solomon's death to the period between the autumn month of Tishri of 931 and the spring month of Nisan of 930 B.C. However, for the sake of simplicity, many scholars credit the year of 931 B.C. to Solomon and the year of 930 B.C. to Rehoboam¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁵¹ Ex 34:22.

¹⁵² Lev 29:9-10.

¹⁵³ 2 Kgs 22:8.

¹⁵⁴ 2 Kgs 23:1-3.

¹⁵⁵ 2 Kgs 23:4-14.

¹⁵⁶ 2 Kgs 21-23.

¹⁵⁷ F. Rienecker, G. Maier, *Leksykon biblijny...*, s.v. “Rok”, p. 697.

¹⁵⁸ 1 Kgs 12:20-21.

¹⁵⁹ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 80; K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability...*, p. 80.

4. Summary

Synchronisms between the biblical, Assyrian, Egyptian, and Phoenician data lend support to both the continuity and reliability of the chronological material regarding the Hebrew monarchy preserved in the Deuteronomistic History¹⁶⁰. Edwin R. Thiele has shown that these synchronisms provide links between the biblical chronology and an absolute one. As a result, he was able to fix the year 931/930 B.C. for the beginning of the Divided Monarchy of Israel. This allows to calculate and settle the regnal years of the first Hebrew rulers as follows: Solomon's to 971-931, David's to 1011-971 and Saul's, only tentatively, to 1050-1011 B.C.¹⁶¹

During the reigns of these three Hebrew kings, Egypt and Assyria went through a period of weakness. This allowed for strong and independent states, such as the United Monarchy of Israel, to emerge in Syria and Palestine. The possibility was even open for a marriage as between Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter. Earlier, in the Amarna period and, later, in the time of Herodotus (484-426), Egyptian rulers did not give their daughters to foreigners. Such details, along with biblical chronology, corroborated by extrabiblical sources, testify to the historical value of the Hebrew Bible.

These details, as noted by many scholars, fit very well the cultural-historical milieu of the early Hebrew monarchy¹⁶². The same cannot be said of the view that its history has been concocted in post-exilic period¹⁶³. Not only because of no tangible evidence for such a radical thesis, but also since it is contrary to the historical and social background of Persian and Hellenistic times. At that time, there was no room for a strong and independent state of Israel in Palestine, nor was there a ruler who could marry the Pharaoh's daughter, and build a grand temple in the style which ceased to exist after the 8th century B.C.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers...*, p. 217.

¹⁶¹ W. C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel...*, p. 248-249, 294-296; E.H. Merrill, *Fixed Dates in Patriarchal...*, p. 241-251; idem, *Kingdom of Priests...*, p. 210-212; 261; R.K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times...*, p. 191; S.H. Horn (ed.), *SDA Bible Dictionary...*, s.v. "Chronology", p. 211.

¹⁶² E.g.: K. Kitchen, *Assessing the Historical Status of the Israelite United Monarchy*, [in:] V.P. Long, D.W. Baker, G.J. Wenham (eds.), *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of 'Biblical Israel'*, Grand Rapids 2008, p. 102-127; K.A. Kitchen, *How We Know When...*, p. 58; G.N. Knoppers, *The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy from Recent Histories of Ancient Israel*, "Journal of Biblical Literature", 116/2007, p. 40; W.W. Hallo, *Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting*, [in:] V.P. Long (ed.), *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*, Winona Lake 1999, p. 80.

¹⁶³ N.P. Lemche, *The Old Testament...*, p. 163-193; G. Garbini, *Myth and History in the Bible...*, p. 76-77; idem, *History and Ideology...*, p. 132; N.P. Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition...*, p. 25, 183; idem, *Solomon as Cultural Memory...*, p. 168, 170; Th.L. Thompson, N.P. Lemche, [in:] H. Shanks, *Face to Face: Biblical...*, p. 28, 32; K.W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel...*, p. 23, 119.

¹⁶⁴ W.G. Dever, [in:] H. Shanks, *Face to Face: Biblical...*, p. 33; B.B. Schmidt, I. Finkelstein, A. Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, Atlanta 2007, p. 129.

Above all, in the post-exilic times there were no resources available for such precise chronological data as preserved in the Biblical stories about the early Hebrew monarchy. Therefore, while chronological, historical, and cultural context precludes treating the Deuteronomistic History as “fiction,” it makes this term substantially suitable for attempts to date the DtrH to the Persian or Hellenistic period.

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Summary

Setting the regnal years of the first Hebrew kings

There are difficulties in the biblical chronology of the Hebrew monarchy. However, most of them can be resolved by taking under consideration such factors as for example: coregencies, different calendars and systems of reckoning the regnal years used by the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah, respectively. The biblical chronology of the Hebrew kings can be anchored in secular history by links with Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian data, mostly, through the inscriptions left by Shalmaneser III and Shoshenq I. Helpful is also Phoenician chronological data preserved by Flavius Josephus. These synchronisms allow to fix the dates of the Hebrew monarchs from the time of the Babylonian exile all the way back to the enthronement of Rehoboam in 931/930 B.C. This in turn, makes it possible to calculate the regnal years of the first Hebrew kings: Solomon's, David's, and tentatively, Saul's.

