

A NOTE ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF 2 KINGS 17:1

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The more one studies the Bible the more one is forced to agree with W. F. Albright that "biblical historical data are accurate to an extent far surpassing the ideas of any modern critical students, who have consistently tended to err on the side of hypercriticism."¹ In the field of Biblical chronology the tendency towards a hypercritical approach has been all too evident. Many find mistakes in certain chronological statements merely because they cannot understand them. E. R. Thiele in his work on the chronology of the Divided Kingdoms has done much to show the intrinsic accuracy of Biblical synchronisms and also of the historical data concerned.² In fact, it can be said that he has solved in general the problems connected with the chronology of the Hebrew kings, leaving only a few texts that need further elucidation.

S. H. Horn has attempted to shed light on some of these obscure texts in a recent article in this journal³ in which he makes the following statement:

One text of my former Group II, 2 Ki 17:1, remains unsolved as far as the chronological data it contains are concerned. . . . However, the figure given in 2 Ki 17:1, stating that Hoshea became king in Ahaz' 12th year, does not agree with the chronological scheme proposed here, and I have no better solution at the present time than to suggest that the figure 12 is a scribal error for three or four.⁴

¹ W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (rev. ed.; Harmondsworth, 1960), p. 229.

² Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich., 1965); see also his articles in *AUSS*, I (1963), 121-138, and II (1964), 120-136.

³ Siegfried H. Horn, "The Chronology of King Hezekiah's Reign," *AUSS*, II (1964), 40-52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 52.

The present writer contends that Horn has virtually solved the problem of the questionable text in his work, although he was not aware of it.

The reader should consult Horn's article, along with the diagram presented there, to refresh his memory on his work with regard to the chronology of this difficult period. The important point for this short note on 2 Ki 17:1 is that King Ahaz had both a *short* and a *long* chronology: the short one of a length of sixteen years covering the years of his reign after his father's death, whereas the long one of twenty years included his co-regency with his father.⁵

2 Ki 17:1, Horn's remaining problem text, is rendered in the KJV in the following way: "In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years." But this is not the only rendering that can be given to our text, as a brief look at the Masoretic text will show:

בשנת שתים עשרה לאחז מלך יהודה מלך הושע בן-אלה בשמרק על-ישראל
:תשע שנים

The writer contends that from a grammatical point of view the text could be rendered: "In the twelfth year of Ahaz, king of Judah, Hoshea, the son of Elah, *had reigned* in Samaria over Israel nine years."

This proposed translation can easily be defended from a grammatical point of view. It should be remembered that the so-called Hebrew perfect tense has a wide range of meanings. In his *Introductory Hebrew Grammar*, Davidson says, "The use of the perfect form covers all *perfect tenses* of other languages, such as perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect, as well as the narrative aorist."⁶ In short, the Hebrew "tenses" with their wide range of meanings must be rendered in such a way that passages in which they occur make sense

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43, n. 5; see also Horn's chart.

⁶ A. B. Davidson, *An Introductory Hebrew Grammar* (25th ed.; Edinburgh, 1962), p. 81.

in their context, and are historically as well as contextually defensible.

If we accept the rendering proposed here what conclusion do we then reach? Looking again at Horn's chart we find that Hoshea's reign terminated either in the 12th or 13th year of Ahaz. If Hoshea's ninth year of reign was fully completed (*i.e.*, he ruled the whole ninth year through), then we would have to say that his ninth year corresponded with the 13th of Ahaz. However, if Hoshea came to his end as king somewhere during the first six months of his ninth year, this event could have fallen within the 12th year of Ahaz, according to his *long* chronology. This also would line up with a 723 B.C. date for the fall of Samaria as required by other historical and chronological data which Thiele has discussed at length.⁷

Some Objections Answered

1. *Similar texts are never translated in this way.* The law of uniformity is often pressed to the place where there is no room for the genuine exception. Generally, the synchronisms in the Book of Kings follow a uniform pattern, for which several examples will be given. In each one of them the word מָלַךְ has the meaning "began to reign."

"In the seventh year of Jehu Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem" (2 Ki 12:1 [Hebrew v. 2] KJV).

"In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years" (2 Ki 13:1, KJV).

"In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah. He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem" (2 Ki 14:1, 2, KJV).⁸

All versions have followed this general pattern of translation with regard to the synchronisms presented in our text

⁷ See Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 141-154.

⁸ See further Thiele, *op. cit.*, Appendix A, pp. 203, 204.

under discussion, 2 Ki 17:1. However, with regard to this text the general pattern of translation does not agree with the facts as presented in Horn's article. The suggestion made by the present writer is grammatically defensible. All we need to do further is to determine if it is both historically and contextually correct.

It is well to remember that the kingdom of Israel came to an end at about the time when this synchronism, as translated according to this writer's understanding of the text, went into effect—namely in 723 B.C. (see Objection 2). Historically the occasion was unique, no longer would there be two divisions of the Hebrews, and for this reason, along with those presented above, it is postulated that 2 Ki 17:1 was used as a chronological tie point, for the history of both Israel and Judah.

2. *The 9th year of Hoshea corresponds to the 13th of Ahaz.* A passing reference has already been made to this problem in the discussion above. Our answer to this problem hinges on the question as to whether Samaria was overthrown in 723 or in 723/22 B.C. Since there is evidence that Samaria's conquest took place before Sargon's accession to the throne, which occurred in January or February, 722 B.C.,⁹ the earlier date for the end of Hoshea's reign gains in weight. Even if Samaria's fall did not take place until Sargon was on the throne, the possibility remains that Hoshea's reign was effectively terminated earlier. 2 Ki 17:4 seems to indicate that because of his rebellion against Assyria Hoshea was imprisoned before the fall of Samaria. Yet it remains unknown whether his reign effectively came to an end a few days, weeks or even months before Samaria was captured.

3. *The solution is based on the long chronology of Ahaz.* The answer to this objection is found in Thiele's and Horn's demonstration of the existence of several co-regencies among the

⁹ Sargon's accession to the throne took place Tebet 22, 722, according to the Babylonian Chronicle. R. W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* (New York, 1926), p. 210.

kings of Judah and Israel.¹⁰ No other explanation can provide a harmony between the Biblical chronological data concerning the Hebrew kings and the well-established Assyrian chronology of this period. The fact that this system of chronology works is the proof for its accuracy.

¹⁰ See the works quoted in footnotes 2 and 3. Further, see Appendix B in Thiele, *op. cit.*, p. 205. Also, it should be noted that Horn sees a coregency for Hezekiah from 729/28-716/15 (*AUSS*, II [1964], chart).