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CONFUSION AMONG THE KINGS

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As we have seen in previous installments in this series, the Old Testament is quite concerned with **chronology**, and **carefully records chronological data for our use**. For this reason, we can assume when we come to the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel that the writers of the narrative intend for us to understand the data they provide in a fairly straightforward manner. It would be nice to settle once and for all whether the years are counted from the spring lunar new year (month Nisan) or from the autumnal solar new year (month Tishri), but we simply are not told **directly** one way or another, and there is much debate about the matter. And, as far as adding up the years is concerned, it does not make any difference.

There is no **summary** statement of years for the period of the kings, so we are forced to add up the separate reigns of the kings in order to come to a total. Here is where the problem comes in. There are a great many individual pieces of chronological data in the books of Kings and Chronicles, some of which are initially quite puzzling.

For instance, 2 Kings 8:26 says that **Ahaziah** was a son of 22 years old when he began to reign, while 2 Chronicles 22:2 says that **Ahaziah** was a son of 42 years when he began to reign. On the surface this is a plain contradiction. When we look at the chronology, however, we find that **Ahaziah** began to reign 42 years after the dynasty of Omri began, so that the Chronicler is calling attention to the fact that the **Judahite king Ahaziah** was from the house of Omri and **deserved the destruction** of that house that was shortly to take place. Anstey comments: "This is not the 'modern' way of 'writing history,' but it is the way of the Old Testament writers, and the way of the New Testament writers too, and if we want to understand their writings we must put **ourselves** at their point of view, and not force our meaning into their words." Anstey points to the genealogy of Matthew 1, which omits certain names for theological reasons, as New Testament evidence of this theological way of **writing history** (Martin Anstey, *Chronology of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, (1913) 1973], p. 182).

Interregna

The most significant chronological challenge comes with the **question** of interregna. On the face of it, there are several **places** in the chronology where there is a gap between the death of one king and the accession of his successor: an interregnum. If we eliminate these interregna, we come up with a shorter chronology.

The first we shall consider arises from 2 Kings 15:1, where we are told that **Uzziah (Azariah)** began to reign in Judah during the 27th year of the reign of the Israelite king

29 years (2 Kings 14:1). This means that **Amaziah** of Judah died around the 15th year of Jeroboam II of Israel, **and creates an interregnum of twelve or so years between the death of Amaziah and the accession of Uzziah**. (Anstey provides arguments to show that it was in fact eleven years, but in this essay we shall not go into all the fine points of discussion.)

Some **chronologers**, including Ussher and Thiele, have felt that interregna are untidy, and have sought to eliminate them when they occur in the chronology of the kings. One way to do this is to suppose that Jeroboam II actually began to reign as Co-Rex with his father Jehoash of Israel, and reigned as Co-Rex for twelve or so years. Thus, when 2 Kings 14:23 says that Jeroboam II became king of Israel in the 15th year of Amaziah of Judah, what it means is that Jeroboam II became **so/e** king in that year; while when 2 Kings 15:1 says that Uzziah became king of Judah in Jeroboam II's 27th year, it means the 27th year from the **beginning** of his **coregency** with his father.

Another way to eliminate the interregnum is to suppose that 2 Kings 15:1 means that Uzziah became king in the 27th year of Jeroboam II in the sense that he threw off Jeroboam II's domination of the nation of Judah. Thus, Uzziah became a king at the age of 16 upon the death of his father, but for twelve or so years was simply a vassal of Jeroboam II. This is the position Alfred Edersheim takes in his *Bible History*.

The party favoring the interregnum interpretation points OUT that both of these approaches to the matter are based on sheer supposition, and that the simplest and most grammatical reading of the text leads to the interregnum interpretation. Moreover, say that interregnum defenders, we are told that **Amaziah** was **assassinated** in a conspiracy, clearly a civil war, and that **Uzziah** was only 16 years old when he came to the throne twelve years later (2 Kings 14:19-21). Thus, we are to understand that there was a time of civil conflict for these twelve years. Judah had been defeated by (Northern) Israel and was in a state of **vassal**dom, and this would tend to destabilize the nation. Moreover, God was punishing Judah for idolatry, according to 2 Chronicles 25.

And after all, **continues** the pro-interregnum argument, we know that there was an interregnum in the Davidic line between **Ahaziah** and Jehoash of Judah, when **Athaliah** ruled the country (2 Kings 11). Jehoash was too young to be brought to the throne when **Athaliah** usurped it, so that those favoring the Davidic line waited several years **before** challenging **Athaliah**. So likewise Uzziah was too young to become king after the assassination of his father **Amaziah**.

num interpretation. I can understand "a short co-regency, when a dying king makes his son king with him in order to ensure succession, but I find a co-regency of twelve or so years hard to fathom. Also, the interregnum interpretation is simpler. At the same time, it is pretty hard to be absolutely dogmatic about the matter.

This is the only interregnum proposed for the chronology of Judah. In the history of Israel two interregna seem to be required by the text, one between Jeroboam II and his son and successor Zechariah (cp. 2 Kings 14:23; 15:1 & 8), and the other between Pekah and Hoshea (2 Kings 15:27, 32-33; 16:1-2; 17:1). In the latter case, Hoshea mounted a conspiracy against Pekah, and slew him. This seems to have led to eight years of strife before Hoshea was made king.

A greater mystery hangs over the interregnum between Jeroboam II and Zechariah, since Jeroboam was a strong king and it seems unlikely that there would be 22 or so years of strife before his son came to the throne. Perhaps another son was on the throne during these years, and the Bible does not mention him. Ozanne's explanation may be the best: "It would seem that so long as Jeroboam was alive he was able to hold the kingdom together, but that on his death it broke up into warring factions, headed up by such men as Zechariah, Shallum, and Menahem, each contending for the throne. After 23 years of civil war and strife Zechariah gained the upper hand, only, however, to meet his death six months later at the hand of Shallum" – who was himself killed a month later by Menahem. (C. G. Ozanne, *The First 7000 Years* [New York: Exposition Press, 1970], p. 74). The reign of Jeroboam II was characterized by continual distress in Israel (2 Kings 13:4;

... and strong moved, chaos ensued.

The only way to avoid these interregna is to assume some very long co-regencies, which the Bible does not support. The notion that there were times of civil strife after kings were murdered is more satisfactory. Remember that both Israel and Judah, especially Israel, were confederacies with strong tribal governments. The nations could continue to function without kings for a time. Because Kings is a theological history, we simply are not given all the month-by-month details of these crisis times.

For Now . . .

It is clear that the only way to acquire a chronology for the period of the Kings is to proceed king by king, weighing evidence and comparing interpretations. In previous issues of this newsletter, we have been able to devote an entire issue to a key passage and its interpretation. It would bog us down to start going through Kings in this manner, so that for now I shall simply record my preliminary finding, which is that the arguments found in Anstay's work are for the most part the most convincing. There are some places where I think better interpretations can be had, but in the main Anstay simply summarizes the work of the best and most sober chronologists of the past. Perhaps in the future, after following out the chronology of the Bible in broad strokes, we can come back and do a more rigorous job on the history of the kingdoms.

The Temple was completed in the year AM 3000 (see *Biblical Chronology* 2:8). Using Anstay's chronology of the kings, the fall of Samaria took place in the year AM 3293, and the fall of Jerusalem took place in AM 3426.