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TESTIMONIES OF TWO WITNESSES

by James B. Jordan

Deuteronomy 17:6 talk us that a matter is to be regarded as established if it is testified by two or three witnesses. One of the most important characteristics of Biblical chronology is that it is very often supported by more than one witness. A case in point is the fact that the book of Kings provides us an interlocking chronology of two different kingdoms: the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. In addition, the book of Chronicles, a separate book with a different theological bent, also provides us a chronology of Judah. Nowhere else in the ancient world is such a detailed and carefully cross-referenced chronology to be found.

Moreover, the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel is not found in a mere list, like the Assyrian king list upon which so much is based nowadays. Rather, the reigns of each king are summarized and significant events are recorded. Thus, we are given not only an interlocking chronology but a history to boot.

The fact that the Bible contains such a chronology and history for the period of the kings proves that chronology and history were very important to the Israelites, especially to those who kept records. No other nation in the ancient world shows anywhere near as much concern for historical accuracy or for chronological exactitude.

We have already discussed (in vol. 3, no. 9) the difference between the ways the years of Judah's and Israel's kings are recorded. In general, the reigns of Judah's kings are given in chronological numbers, so that you can add up the years and come up with the total. By way of contrast, the reigns of Israel's kings are given in historical numbers, so that the last year of a given king is also the first year of his successor. (If you don't have this issue of *Biblical Chronology*, back issues can be ordered from ICE.)

Rehoboam and Jeroboam I both began to reign the year after Solomon's death. That is, Rehoboam's official Year 1 is the year after Solomon's official Year 40. Since Jeroboam I did not revolt until shortly after Rehoboam came to power, his Year 1 is the same as Rehoboam's. This was the year 3030 A. M., 30 years after the completion of the Temple in the year 3000.

According to 1 Kings 14:20, Jeroboam I reigned 22 years, and his son Nadab succeeded him. God gave Jeroboam the kingdom of (northern) Israel, but Jeroboam immediately rejected the Lord. He set up calves and told the people that these images represented Yahweh, their God. This use of images in worship is strictly forbidden by the second commandment, which goes on to say that those who break it will be shown God's wrath down to the

years. The book of Kings tells us that after God gave Rehoboam the kingdom, he oppressed the people and caused the secession of the northern states from the confederacy. Then Kings says that Judah (the southern kingdom) provoked the Lord with idolatry, and the Lord brought in Shishak, king of Egypt, to punish them.

Chronicles gives us a different slant on these events. 2 Chronicles 11 tells us that after provoking the northern secession, Rehoboam began listening to the prophets and obeyed the Lord for three years, during which he prospered. 2 Chronicles 12:1, however, tells us that after he became strong, Rehoboam forsook the law of the Lord, and this is what provoked Him to send His unwitting servant Shishak against Judah.

Abijam succeeded Rehoboam. His first officially designated year of rule was the 16th of Jeroboam, the year 3047 A.M. (1 Kings 15:1-2; 2 Chronicles 13:2). Kings tells us that there was war between him and Jeroboam. Evidently Jeroboam I decided that with Rehoboam dead and a novice on the throne, it was time for him to strike. Kings only tells us that there was war, but 2 Chronicles 13 gives an account of it. Also, Kings tells us that Abijam did not devote himself to the Lord but walked in his father's sins. Chronicles tells us that the sin involved polygamy, something expressly forbidden to kings (2 Chronicles 13:21; Deuteronomy 17:17).

The Reign of Asa

Asa succeeded Abijam in the south. He came to power in the 20th year of Jeroboam, after Abijam had reigned three official years. Thus, as we demonstrated in BC 3:9 (which includes a chart of this period), the 20th year of Jeroboam was officially Asa's Year 0. Asa's Year 1 (Jeroboam's 21st) was the year 3050 A.M.

The first thing we are told about Asa in both Kings and Chronicles is that he did right in God's sight, and thus was blessed. The brief account of Asa's reign in 1 Kings 15 is supplemented by the larger account in 2 Chronicles 14-16.

Meanwhile, Jeroboam I died in his own 22nd year of rule, and was succeeded by his son Nadab, who reigned only 2 years. He began his reign in Asa's Year 2 (1 Kings 15:25), and was succeeded by Baasha in Asa's Year 3 (1 Kings 15:28). Baasha overthrew the dynasty of Jeroboam I and began his own, but he did not repent of the sin of idolatry, and so his line was also extinguished by the Lord.

In Asa's Year 26, Elah the son of Baasha came to the throne and reigned over Israel for two years (1 Kings 16:8).

Tibni, and the two fought it out for five years. Finally in Asa Year 31, Tibni died and Omri became sole king. Omri reigned 12 years in all, dying in Asa Year 38, in which year his son Ahab came to the throne (1 Kings 16).

It is interesting to pause and reflect on a theological image that comes to us from these facts. Asa, the good king, reigned in Jerusalem while a succession of wicked kings came and went in Israel. Asa's reign overlapped those of Jeroboam 1, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, and Ahab. Can we see in this a vague type of the rule of King Jesus, whose reign goes on and on in Jerusalem while earthly kingdoms rise and fall?

We notice that in Northern Israel there was no established royal line such as existed in Judah. When Elah was slain by Zimri, a 5-year period of civil war ensued. The historian gives these five years to Omri, evidently because he was strong enough to have been considered king during this period, Tibni being merely an unsuccessful competitor. Nevertheless, the fact that there was a period of chaos at this point in the history of Israel alerts us to the possibility of other such periods later on. In fact, traditional Biblical chronology finds interregna during times of civil war in later Israelite chronology, though some modern chronologists dispute this. It is a problem we shall have to address when we come to it.

The Asa-Baasha Problem

Meanwhile, we have a curious problem during the reign of Asa. 2 Chronicles 16:1 states that "in the 38th year of Asa's reign, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah." The problem with this verse is that Baasha died in the 26th year of Asa.

Traditional Biblical chronologists suggest that 2 Chronicles 15:19 and 16:1 should be translated as follows: "And there was no more war until the 35th year of Asa's kingdom. In the 36th year of Asa's kingdom, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah." (The Hebrew noun can mean either reign or kingdom.) They propose that these events are dated from the split between the northern and southern kingdoms, which would be the beginning of Asa's kingdom. That is, the kingdom of Judah would date from that event, and at the present time it was Asa's kingdom. Moreover, since Rehoboam and Abijah were bad kings, the kingdom of Judah did not really come into its own until Asa's reign. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, Asa had just led the nation in a covenant renewal, reestablishing it. Thus, Judah was in a special way Asa's kingdom at this time. The 35th and 36th years of Judah would be the 15th and 16th years of Asa's personal reign.

The criticism of this interpretation is that it involves special pleading. Nowhere else do we translate the Hebrew noun as "kingdom" instead of "reign." The chronicler nowhere else dates from the beginning of the kingdom of Judah. Why do so here?

In reply, traditional chronologists point to 2 Chronicles 22:2, which says that Ahaziah was a "son of 42 years when he began to reign," contradicting 2 Kings 8:26, which

came to the throne 42 years after his grandfather Omri, and so the chronicler at this point seems to be dating this event from the beginning of Omri's line.

C. F. Keil in his remarks on these two passages (in the Keil & Delitzsch Old Testament commentary series) maintains in both cases that the discrepancies are to be accounted for as scribal errors; i.e., errors in the transmission of the text of Chronicles. The 42 years of Ahaziah should be 22 years, because the Hebrew numbers 40 and 20 look somewhat alike. Similarly, the 35th and 36th years of Asa should really be the 15th and 16th, because the Hebrew numbers 10 and 30 look somewhat alike. This is of course a possible explanation, and we should not discount it completely. If, however, we can explain the text without resorting to charges of scribal error, we should do so.

I think that the traditional Biblical chronologists are probably correct. The chronicler wrote with a particular theological purpose, and he wrote for people who already had the book of Kings in their possession. Thus, when he takes seeming liberties, he does so with a reason.

It is not hard to figure out that Ahaziah's 42 years carry us back to the first year of Omri's kingdom, and there are indications in this text that the chronicler intends for us to do so. Ahaziah was king of Judah, but fully sympathetic to the line of Omri and Ahab. The text of 2 Chronicles 22 emphasizes that he was Omri's great-grandson through Athaliah. Three times the text states that he took counsel only from the house of Ahab, an expansion of the information about him in 2 Kings 8. Anstey points out that Ahaziah is dropped from the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1. (Martin Anstey, *Chronology of the Old Testament*, p. 182.) Thus, the chronicler wants to position Ahaziah not so much as a legitimate king of Judah but primarily as an extension of Omri's evil reign into Judah, and as a precursor of Athaliah.

And neither is it hard to believe that 2 Chronicles 15:19 and 16:1 refer to the 35th and 36th years of the kingdom of Judah as years of Asa's kingdom. The chronicler has just finished a long account (two chapters) of Asa's goodness and reforms. Now, however, Asa falls into sin and idolatry. He brings the kingdom into distress as a result, and receives the judgment of God. From this point on, his kingdom suffers wars (2 Chronicles 16:9).

The book of Kings tells us that in the last half of Solomon's reign, the united kingdom suffered wars because of Solomon's sin. He fell into sin shortly after he completed and dedicated the Temple. Similarly, right after Asa finished restoring the Temple and the people had renewed their covenant with the Lord (2 Chronicles 15), Asa fell into sin and brought tribulation upon the nation of Judah. Thus, it is not strange that the chronicler should date these events not in terms of Asa's personal reign but in terms of the kingdom over which Asa presided.

Regardless of how we interpret this particular problem, however, the overall chronology is clear: No matter when the war with Baasha took place, Asa reigned 41 years, from A.M. 3050-3090.