**5 -- Historical Reliability -- Chronology of Hebrew Kings**

Script

[1] Historical Reliability. Seeming Discrepancies in the Biblical Numbers of the Hebrew Kings.

[2] God’s plan for the Hebrew nation did not include a king….

[3] …but as God predicted they would, the people asked for one.

[4] First God chose Saul, and later David to be king of Israel. When David died, his son Solomon became king and ruled for many years.

[5] After Solomon’s death, the people came to his son Rehoboam, asking that he lighten the heavy load Solomon had put on them.

[6] Rehoboam refused, saying he would make their load even heavier.

[7] That is how—after Solomon’s death—/ the kingdom became divided. / Rehoboam continued to rule in the south, / but Jeroboam led a revolt and became king in the north.

[8] The books of first and second Kings tell the story of the divided kingdom. As each new king comes to the throne, reference is made to the reigning ruler from the other kingdom as in these two examples: “So in the 20th year of Jeroboam the king of Israel, Asa began to reign as king in Judah.” “Now Nadab the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years.”

[9] But as these biblical numbers are examined they appear to be in almost constant contradiction with each other and other ancient historical records

[10] Sometimes there appear to be conflicts about how long a particular king reigned.

[11] For example, the Bible states that Nadab became king over Israel in the 2nd year of Asa king of Judah / and died in the 3rd year of Asa. / That would be a reign of 1 year. / But 1 Kings 15:25 says he reigned 2 years.

[12] According to the biblical record, Baasha became king of Israel in the 3rd year of Asa / and died in the 26th year of Asa, / which looks like a reign of 23 years. / But the Bible says he reigned for 24 years.

[13] The Bible says that Omri became king of Israel in the 31st year of Asa. / He reigned 12 years, 6 of them in Tirzah. / But just a few verses later it says that he was succeeded by his son in the 38th year of Asa, / which would be reign of only 7 years.

[14] Other times there appear to be conflicts about when a particular king began to reign

[15] …like Joram whose reign is described as beginning in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat and the 2nd year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat.

[16] In one verse it says that Ahaziah of Judah began to reign in the 12th year of Joram of Israel, while another verse says it was the 11th year of Joram.

[17] In one instance, the Bible says that two kings began to rule, each before the other! One verse says that Joram began to reign in the 2nd year of Jehoram, and another verse says that Jehoram began to reign in the 5th year of Joram!

[18] There are a number of times when the total years of Israel are not the same as the total number of years of Judah for the same period.

[19] One of these periods begins when Jehu became king in Israel and Athaliah became queen in Judah during the same year. / The period ends when reigns ended in both kingdoms during the same year. / Not only are the total years off from each other, but both are also off from contemporary years of Assyria.

[20] Difficulties such as these have brought some of the most outstanding Old Testament scholars to the conclusion that this part of the Bible is hopelessly in error, hopelessly muddled, untrustworthy, and impossible to ungarble

[21] The material in this presentation comes from the work of a biblical scholar who believed that “If we would understand the Bible, we must strive to understand its chronology, for from the opening of Genesis to the close of Revelation the Bible deals with time.”

[22] In his book he demonstrates that once we understand the methods used by the early Hebrew recorders, the Bible actually shows a pattern of internal harmony that matches other ancient records at every point where a precise contact occurs.

[23] To begin to unravel this mystery, we need to think about calendar years. Our calendar year begins in January and goes through December. But both Israel and Judah calculated their years differently. Their years were not just different from our years, but different from each other as well.

[24] Israel’s calendar year began in the month of Nisan in the spring, / while Judah’s began in the month of Tishri in the fall.

[25] Notice that one of Israel’s years or one of Judah’s year would overlap with two of our calendar years

[26] One of Israel’s calendar years would overlap with parts of two of Judah’s years

[27] One of Judah’s calendar years would overlap with parts of two of Israel’s years

[28] Let this bar represent the first year of a certain Judean king’s reign. / And this bar represents his second year as king. / A new king in Israel could be said to have begun to reign either in year 1, / or year 2 of the Judean king’s reign, / depending on what time of year it happened.

[29] Or a new king in Judah could have begun to reign during an Israelite king’s 35th year or his 36th year, / depending on what time of year he ascended to the throne.

[30] Understanding when each calendar year began and paying attention to how each one overlapped with the years in the other kingdom is the first important point to understand. / The second involves the difference between accession and nonaccession-year reckoning.

[31] Kings rarely began to reign right at the beginning of a new calendar year, and there were two different ways to count the partial year when they first became king. / In accession-year reckoning, that partial year was called the accession year, and they didn’t start counting their “first” year as king until the beginning of the next new year. Using our modern calendar as an example, let’s imagine that someone became king in September. / The months between September and December would be considered their accession year. / The next full year would be considered their “first” year. / The next full year would be considered their “second” year, and so on…

[32] In Nonaccession-year reckoning, / the partial year—September through December in our modern example—would be considered the king’s first year (even if it wasn’t a full year long! / The first full year would be considered the king’s second year; / the next year would be his third, and so on…

[33] In ancient times, some nations used accession-year reckoning and others used Nonaccession-year reckoning. / Since the accession year in one system is the first year in the other, / and the first year in one is the second year in the other, / the number of years in Nonaccession-year reckoning always appears higher than the number of years in accession-year reckoning.

[34] Also, since the Nonaccession-year reckoning counted partial years as full years, notice how the same year could be counted twice. / If one king died during his third year in power, that partial third year would be counted as a full year for him. / But it would also be counted as a full year for his successor. The combined years of all the kings in a kingdom would become inflated by an additional year each time there was a new king.

[35] Understanding these two points allowed Edwin Thiele to unravel the mystery that had baffled scholars for decades and allows us to see how the biblical record has been shown to be historically accurate.

[36] A careful study of the numbers in Kings reveals that in Judah the accession-year system was employed from Rehoboam to Jehoshaphat; / then the Nonaccession-year system was employed from Jehoram to Joash. Why would Judah change from one method to another?

[37] At the time of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, the two nations entered into a formal alliance, sealed by the marriage of Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, / to Jehoram. / When Jehoram became king, he “walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.”

[38] This included using the Nonaccession-year system, which lasted until the reign of Amaziah,

[39] … when Judah went back to accession-year dating and used it until the end of its history.

[40] We find evidence of this shift in the two seemingly conflicting statements we saw earlier about the beginning of the reign of Ahaziah in Judah. In one place it is described as in the 11th year of Joram in Israel; while in another place it calls it the 12th year of his reign. / This apparent conflict can be easily explained when we realize that the first one describes the year according to the previously used accession year method. / The second describes it according to the new Nonaccession year method. / Instead of being contradictory, both descriptions refer to the same year!

[41] How do we know that Israel was using the Nonaccession-year method during this time?

[42] Evidence for this is found when we compare the dates during this time period. Jeroboam and Rehoboam began to reign in Israel and Judah respectively in the same year.

[43] Both royal lines continued as listed here until the 18th year of Jehoshaphat’s reign / when Ahaziah died.

[44] The official years in Israel add up to 86—/ or 7 years more than the official years in Judah.

[45] But remember that in the Nonaccession-year model, the last year of the outgoing king counts as a whole year / and the same year also counts as a whole year for the new king. The combined years of all the kings in a kingdom would become inflated by an additional year each time there was a new king.

[46] To prevent those years from being counted twice, / we can subtract one year from each official total to find the actual number of years each king reigned.

[47] When we add up the actual totals, it is in exact agreement with the actual totals from Judah.

[48] Once we understand these two points, many of the potential discrepancies are easily explained…

[49] Let’s look back at the apparent conflict with Nadab, who came to the throne during the 2nd year of Asa and died in the 3rd year of Asa. That should be a reign of 1 year, but 1 Kings 15:25 says he reigned 2 years.

[50] Because Nadab came to the throne in Israel during the second year of Asa and died in the third year of Asa, / it would be correct to say he reigned one actual year. / But, since Israel used the Nonaccession-year reckoning, which counted partial years as whole years, it would also be correct to say that he reigned for two years.

[51] The question about whether Baasha ruled for 23 years or 24 years can be explained in the same way.

[52] His reign began in the 3rd year of Asa, and he died in the 26th year of Asa. / According to the Nonaccession year model being used in Israel, the 23 years between the 3rd year and the 26th year of Asa would have been reckoned as 24 years.

[53] Besides these, there is another important thing to understand.

[54] …the question of rival reigns and coregencies. There are 9 of these…

[55] More than once the kingdom of Israel was divided. At one point, half the people of Israel followed Tibni, and the other half followed Omri.

[56] Later, the northern kingdom was divided into Israel and Ephraim, each with a different ruler.

[57] A coregency is when a king appoints his successor to rule with him for a time.

[58] This happened in Israel when Jehoash and Jeroboam the second ruled together for 12 years. This means the combined time of their reigns totaled 45 years, instead of 57 years.

[59] It also happened when Amaziah and Azariah ruled together for 24 years in Judah. The combined total of their reigns was 57 years, rather than 81.

[60] Another coregency happened in Judah when Azariah became a leper and his son began to reign with him.

[61] The fact that the attack on Judah by Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria is recorded in the accounts of both Jotham and Ahaz alerts us to yet another coregency in Judah.

[62] Because Asa became ill, Jehoshaphat began a coregency with his father Asa during the 39th year of Asa’s reign.

[63] Clues about another coregency are found when we compare the information in the book of Kings with contemporary Assyrian and Babylonian records. When we add up the years of the kings of Judah from Hezekiah to Josiah, there are more years than are indicated by the other historical records. / But the problem is solved when we realize that Hezekiah—when told by the prophet to set his house in order—would have placed Manasseh on the throne. / 11 of Manasseh’s 55 years would have been spent in coregency with Hezekiah.

[64] Coregencies explain this problem where Joram is described as beginning to reign in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat and in the 2nd year of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat. / As it turns out, the 18th year of Jehoshaphat is the same year as the 2nd year of Jehoram’s coregency with his father. / Jehoshaphat must have put his son on the throne before he went to war against Syria with Ahab.

[65] Coregency also explains this problem, where the Bible says Joram began to rule in the 2nd year of Jehoram, but that Jehoram began to rule in the 5th year of Joram. / As it turns out, Joram of Israel began to reign in the 2nd year of the coregency of Jehoram of Judah. / This coregency terminated in the 5th year of Joram of Israel, making Jehoram the sole king of Judah.

[66] Along with understanding the different calendar years / and the different ways of reckoning the beginning of a new king’s reign, / understanding rival reigns and coregencies can help unravel many of the mysteries of the chronologies of the kings. As if all that weren’t enough, there is one more thing to understand.

[67] According to Dr. Thiele, the single greatest cause for misunderstandings is the way some of those overlapping reigns are described. He calls it “dual dating.”

[68] Let’s look at an example: In the 31st year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel / and reigned 12 years. / Doing the math, we would expect his reign to end in the 43rd year of Asa. / But instead we read that his successor became king in the 38th year of Asa. / How can the years between the 31st year and the 38th year be called 12 years?

[69] To figure it out, let’s back up a little in the story, which you can read in 1 Kings 16. / Sometime during Asa’s 26th year as king in Judah, / Elah became king in Israel and reigned two years. Remember that in Israel they used the Nonaccession-year model, which meant they counted the accession year as the first full year. / During Elah’s second year, which would have been Asa’s 27th years, / Elah was killed by his servant Zimri. / Now Zimri came to his own tragic end only 7 days later, and once again—/ still in the 27th year of Asa of Judah—Israel needed a new king.

[70] Follow the story on this chart. / In the 27th year of Asa, / the king of Israel was killed by his servant Zimri who took the throne / but Zimri himself died only 7 days later. The problem was that the people of Israel couldn’t decide who they wanted to be their next king. / Some of them followed Tibni, who ruled in one location, / and others followed Omri, who ruled in a different place—both at the same time. / This went on for several years until Tibni died and Omri became the only king in Israel, / which happened in the 31st year of Asa of Judah.

[71] Omri continued as king of Israel until he died, / which happened during the 38th year of Asa of Judah.

[72] So, when the verse says that Omni became king of Israel in the 31st year of Asa and reigned 12 years, / part of the verse refers to when he became the *only* king of Israel, / and the other part of the verse refers to the *entire time* he was king, including the time Tibni was also king in a different location

[73] We can easily see why Edwin Thiele calls this the single greatest cause for misunderstandings concerning the chronological data in the Book of Kings.

[74] Another example of dual dating is the verse that says Jehoshaphat became king over Judah in the 4th year of Ahab / and reigned 25 years. When we look at all the biblical data, / we see that the 4th year of Ahab was the same as the year Asa died, / but it was not the year when Jehoshaphat began his 25-year reign.

[75] Because his father Asa became ill, / Jehoshaphat began to rule with his father Asa in the 39th year of his reign. / The part of the verse that says he became king in Ahab’s 4th year, refers to the part of his reign where he was the *only* king of Judah after the death of his father. / But the part of the verse that says he reigned for 25 years includes the couple of extra years when he was coregent with his father.

[76] The biblical record contains several other examples of dual dating, where a portion of the description refers to when a king began to rule alone, / while another part of the description also includes the time when he was a coregent with someone else./

[77] Let’s review the important ideas that help us understand the otherwise confusing numbers from Kings. First, Israel’s calendar year began in the spring, and Judah’s calendar year began in the fall.

[78] Second, some kingdoms used accession-year reckoning while others used Nonaccession-year reckoning. / And to make matters even more confusing, / Israel changed systems once, / and Judah changed systems twice!

[79] Third, there are multiple examples of overlapping reigns—either rival rulers in different places at the same time, or coregencies. And some aren’t stated obviously but have to be figured out using clues from the text.

[80] …and in some cases, the description of a king’s reign can include dual dating.

[81] It’s no wonder that scholars were confused by the chronology of the Hebrew kings for so long! / Fortunately, it is no longer a hopeless muddle / thanks to the scholarship of Edwin Thiele.

[82] The mystery has been solved, and in the process, the reliability of the Bible has been reaffirmed.