The most involved of the many perennial and perplexing chronological problems of the Hebrew kings is that connected with Hezekiah’s reign. Did this reign commence in 727 B.C., as certain Biblical testimony seems to indicate that it did, or in 715, as the contemporary historical evidence indicates that it must, or at still some other date, as scores of scholars have proposed?

Rowley, in discussing certain problems of Hezekiah’s reign, gives a lengthy list of dates that have been proposed for Hezekiah and expresses himself as follows regarding the chronological uncertainties: “This is one of the most tangled problems of the chronology of the monarchy, and an extraordinary variety of dates for the reign of Hezekiah will be found amongst scholars. . . . It is disputed whether he began his reign in 727 B.C., 720 B.C., or 715 B.C., though the evidence seems to me to point strongly to 727” ②. McHugh, in a recent discussion of the year of Hezekiah’s birth, referred to “the incredible confusion of the chronological data” ③.

Schrader in setting forth the many baffling intricacies of this period of Hebrew chronology, said: “Every Old Testament inquirer is aware that this Biblical scheme is by no means without its difficulties. Not a few discrepancies yawn within it. And unfortunately we cease to feel confidence in the scriptural computation just at the point where a comparison with another chronological system is rendered possible, namely in the period succeeding 722. . . . We must acknowledge the artificial character of the Biblical chronological data both for the time succeeding as well as for the time preceding the year 722” ④.

① This paper was presented at a joint meeting of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research and the American Academy of Religion, at the University of Chicago, February 20, 1965.


This is a rather sweeping indictment of the highly detailed chronological system of the book of Kings, and is typical of the thinking of leading Old Testament authorities for many decades in this respect. But is it justified? Must the entire system be condemned simply because certain problems involved therein have not been solved? Could there be values here, hidden by our own imperfections of knowledge, that further study might reveal? As problems in almost all fields of human endeavor are being brought to solution, is it not possible that careful study of the Old Testament chronological data might throw light upon aspects of the question that have so far eluded us? Highly involved though the synchronistical data of the Hezekiah period admittedly are, could it be that they contain elements of truth vital to the reconstruction of this important period of Hebrew history? We believe that satisfactory answers to these questions may be discovered in a careful survey of the various factors involved.

The dates assigned to the commencement of Hezekiah’s reign are usually in the vicinity of 727 B.C. or 715, with some of the most competent Old Testament scholars holding strongly to 727 and others arguing just as strongly for 715. This difference of twelve years is a salient factor in the difficulties involved and becomes a key toward their final solution.

As the data of this period are carefully examined, it will be discovered that they reveal an ancient misunderstanding of twelve years as to the dates when Pekah and Jotham began their reigns, and it is this misunderstanding that has given rise to the many problems with which this period of Hebrew history has become involved. When, however, we become aware of the exact nature of the problems with which the ancient compilers of Kings were struggling and with their only partially successful efforts to solve them, we will find ourselves in a position to provide a full solution and to set forth with accuracy and confidence the dates not only of Hezekiah, but those also of Pekah and Jotham, and of Hoshea and Ahaz as well.

Coming directly to the focal point, careful scrutiny reveals the fact that there is today no direct scriptural testimony as to the exact year when Pekah first began to reign or when Jotham commenced his coregency. It further appears that there was no such testimony available in the sources consulted by the final editors of Kings. Thus their problem has come to be our problem, and not until we understand that problem and the methods they took to solve it,