HEZEKIAH'S FOURTEENTH YEAR

A new interpretation of 2 Kings xviii 13-xix 37 1)

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There can be no date as tantalizing to the Old Testament historian as "the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah" in 2 K. xviii 13 // Is. xxxvi 1. In Kings the date introduces an account of a payment of tribute by Hezekiah to Sennacherib, king of Assyria (vv. 14-16). This corresponds closely to Sennacherib’s own account of his campaign against Hezekiah in 701 B.C. 2), so that the date in 2 K. xviii 13 would seem to provide an assured fixed point for the chronology of the period. Yet a date of 715 B.C. for the accession of Hezekiah, although widely adopted, is difficult to reconcile with the synchronisms of 2 K. xviii 1, 9, 10 according to which Hezekian was already on the throne when Samaria fell in 722 B.C. In Isaiah on the other hand "the fourteenth year" (Is. xxxvi 1) introduces an account of Jerusalem’s deliverance from Assyria (Is. xxxvi 2 ff // 2 K. xviii 17 ff.). To complicate matters it is not clear whether or not the payment of tribute took place during the same Assyrian campaign as the deliverance of Jerusalem. J. Bright, following W. F. Albright, holds the view that the deliverance took place during an otherwise unrecorded second campaign by Sennacherib against Hezekiah about 688 B.C., and adopts 715-687/6 B.C. as the dates for Hezekiah’s reign 3). Other scholars find no evidence for such a second campaign or for dating the end of Hezekiah’s reign later than c. 698 B.C. and attempt to relate both incidents to the Assyrian invasion of 701 B.C. H. H.


3) Bright, Excursus I, pp. 296-308.

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Rowley is typical of those who explain the tribute payment and the deliverance as separate events during the one campaign 4), while others see the deliverance narrative as a legendary Judean version of the sparing of Jerusalem bought by Hezekiah’s tribute payment 5).

In view of such divergent interpretations B. S. Childs concludes that “it seems unlikely that a satisfactory historical solution will be forthcoming without fresh extra-biblical evidence” 6), a conclusion at which L. L. Honor had arrived in 1926 7). Childs’ study has shown the complex nature of the material involved, and while his conclusion is too negative to be acceptable to the historian, it serves as a warning that caution is necessary in drawing historical conclusions from material which is the result of a long and complex process of growth. The purpose of this paper is to make a fresh attempt to reconstruct the events of Hezekiah’s fourteenth year in the light of Child’s findings concerning the nature of the material in 2 K. xviii 13-xix 37.

I

The date of 715 B.C. for the accession of Hezekiah adopted by Albright and others is derived from 2 K. xviii 13 on the assumption that “the fourteenth year” originally introduced the account of Hezekiah’s payment of tribute in 701 B.C. which follows in 2 K. xviii 14-16 8). In Is. xxxvi 1 however the same date introduces the deliverance account and there is no reference to Hezekiah’s payment of tribute. The reason for the absence of the tribute account is uncertain 9), but while such uncertainty remains it seems hazardous to prefer a date of 715 B.C. for Hezekiah’s accession on the basis of 2 K. xviii 13-16 alone, especially when it conflicts with other data.

The synchronism given in 2 K. xviii 1 (cf. vv. 9, 10) on the other hand is consistent with related information given for Ahaz and Hoshea (2 K. xvii 1, cf. xvi 2), and the chronology of Hoshea in Kings is in harmony with the Assyrian evidence which places his accession not

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4) Rowley, pp. 118-126.
6) P. 120.
7) P. xiv.
8) W. F. Albright, *BASOR* 100 (1945), 16-22, followed by Bright.
9) For a full discussion of the relationship between the two texts see Childs, pp. 69 ff., 137 ff. Childs’ suggestion of omission from Isaiah by haplography is unconvincing.