As every student of the Old Testament knows only too well, the book of Ezekiel is fraught with problems. Indeed, one has only to begin reading the book to encounter the first difficulty: what is the relation of verse 1 to verse 2? or more specifically, what are the terminus a quo and the terminus ad quem of the “thirtieth year” of i 1? This “thirtieth year” simply cannot refer to the same period of time called “the fifth year of the captivity of King Jehoiachin” in i 2 without subjecting the passage to an unnatural exegesis.

We now know, from the Babylonian Chronicles, that the captivity mentioned in verse 2 began in 597 B.C. This fifth year mentioned


2) Pace G. A. Cooke who based his interpretation on J. Begrich, Die Chronologie der Könige von Israel und Juda (1929), who had discovered a difference of twenty-five years in the chronological systems of Kings and Chronicles. This then would correspond to the difference between verses one and two. But even if this chronological gap were admitted (and Edwin Thiele, Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings, does not admit such a gap), one would still have to give a reason for Ezekiel’s use of conflicting chronological systems. Incidentally, throughout this paper I have cited the commentaries on Ezekiel by author’s name only, except in the case of direct quotation. The following is a list of commentaries and translations referred to in this study: P. Auvray, Ézéchiel, La Sainte Bible (second edition, 1957); A. Bertholet, Das Buch Hesekiel, Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament (1897); G. A. Cooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, International Critical Commentary (1936); S. Fisch, Ezekiel, The Soncino Books of the Bible (1950); J. Herrmann, Ezéchiel-studien, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom alten Testament 2 (1908); R. Kraetzschmar, Das Buch Ezéchiel, Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (1900); J. W. Rothstein, Ezéchiel, Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments (1922); J. Ziegler, Ezéchiel, Die Heilige Schrift in Deutscher Übersetzung (1948).

in verse 2, therefore, was 592. Important in this is that both the terminus a quo and the terminus ad quem are known, at first only relatively, but now absolutely. The “thirtieth year” of i 1, however, seems to stand alone, with no indication of either the terminus a quo or the terminus ad quem. It is this fact which has caused so much discussion on the passage. Although the very best modern scholarship has examined this ancient crux interpretum, there is still no agreement among scholars as to its meaning, and this, in light of the great significance attached to the passage 4), is remarkable. In view of the admitted difficulty and the importance of the verse, perhaps it is worth-while to review the various solutions and their weaknesses before venturing to add still another interpretation.

Georg Fohrer has provided a convenient survey of the many treatments of the “thirtieth year” 5), but because of the gaps in his treatment I have chosen to present a new survey of the previous studies of this problem.

Among the more popular explanations of this passage are the emendations. Among these, there are several who try to retain some form of the radicals šš. Volkmar Herntrich, for example, proposed that the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile (so i 2) was actually the third year of Zedekiah’s reign (so i 1), and thereby introduced an overlapping that is otherwise unknown 6). Furthermore, his reconstruction waye bišliši šanah is not good Hebrew 7).

4) Shalom Spiegel, “Ezekiel or Pseudo-Ezekiel”, HTR 24 (1931), p. 283, thought that Torrey’s entire hypothesis of viewing Ezekiel as third century B.C. pseudepigraphon rested on his interpretation of i 1 and specifically on his treatment of the “thirtieth year”. Lest one think that Spiegel overstated his case, Torrey himself said that this verse was “a crux of the very first magnitude, one in fact on which the fate of the whole book depends.” Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy Yale Oriental Series Researches 18, (1930), p. 17.


6) Ezechielprobleme, BZAW 61 (1933), pp. 62-63; also see p. 74. The exact length of Jehoiachin’s reign is given in 2 Chron. xxxvi 9 as three months and ten days. Since Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem on March 16, 597 according to the Babylonian Chronicles (see fn. 3) this means that Jehoiachin would have ascended the throne about Dec. 9, 598. This is in accord with Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning his predecessor Jeoiakim (xxxvi 30 “his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night”). Since Zedekiah reigned eleven years (2 K. xxiv 18), he would have had to assume the throne in 597 because the city was sacked in 586, and this allows for no overlapping.

7) There are, of course, several ways of writing “in the third year” in Biblical Hebrew, but Herntrich’s is not among them. One could write baššanah baššelišith or bišnath haššelišith. Cf. even bišnath šalol (Cf. 2 K. xviii 1). Even Hugo Winckler, who had earlier suggested this particular emendation, did not have a grammati-