

THE CHRONOLOGY OF SAUL AND DAVID

LESLIE MCFALL*

I. INTRODUCTION

The lives of David and Saul hold a fascination for human beings of all ages. The story of David and Goliath and of Saul's spear embedded in the wall as David ducked to avoid it on two occasions has inspired painters, musicians, and artists of all kinds down through the centuries and is part of our childhood memories. But just how old was David when he slew Goliath? Sometimes he is presented as a lad of 15 or 16 years of age, sometimes even younger (Josephus says he was "still a boy in age"), to give greater glory to God. Is it possible to draw up a chronology of Saul and David, so that we can get a clearer, historical perspective on the lives of these two influential men? I think we can, and surprisingly, the pivotal clue is contained in the enigmatic statement in 1 Sam 13:1, the only chronological statement relating to Saul's life in the OT.

1. *The enigma of 1 Samuel 13:1.* The *New Revised Standard Version* (1995) reads: "Saul was . . . ^b years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for . . . and two ^c years over Israel." The footnote ^b reads: "The number is lacking in the Heb text (the verse is lacking in the Septuagint)." Footnote ^c reads: "Two is not the entire number; something has dropped out."¹ The *English Standard Version* (2001) reads much the same. Some put the entire verse (with lacunae dots) in square brackets, such as *The New American Bible* (1970) and *The Moffatt Translation of the Bible* (1964). Some leave out the verse altogether, by replacing it with lacunae dots, such as *The Jerusalem Bible* (1968). Others try to make sense of the verse, such as the *RV* (1884), "Saul was [*thirty*] years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years over Israel." The footnote reads: "The Hebrew text has Saul was a year old. The whole verse is omitted in the unrevised Sept., but in a later recension the number thirty is inserted."² The *New International Version* (1979) reads: "Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over

* Leslie McFall resides at 25 Hillfield Road, Cumberton, Cambridgeshire, England CB23 7DB.

¹ As far back as 1734, W. Wall noted: "but the numerical figures or words are lost or miswritten." He says Ussher has made a mess of his chronology over this blank (William Wall, *Critical Notes on the Old Testament* . . . (3 vols.; London: Wm Innys, 1734) I. 188.

² What this footnote fails to reveal is that its "later recension" (which is the Proto-Lucianic [PL] recension comprising four mss, boc₂e₂) quite arbitrarily alters many numbers relating to the chronology of the kings of Israel, and is unworthy of notice in this context. See note 40 below.

Israel for forty-two years.” The NIV’s first footnote supports this reading with the justification: “A few late manuscripts of the Septuagint; Hebrew does not have *thirty*.”³ Another footnote reads: “See the round number in Acts 13:21; Hebrew does not have *forty*.” A third footnote reads: “Or *and when he had reigned over Israel two years*.” The AV (KJV, 1611) reads, “Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose. . . .” The *American Standard Version* (1901) reads: “Saul was [*forty*] years old when he began to reign; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose. . . .” The footnote reads: “The number is lacking in the Heb. text, and is supplied conjecturally.” The NASB (1971) has: “Saul was *forty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned *thirty-two* years over Israel.” The words in italics supply words not in the Hebrew text.

Two impressions are conveyed by these translations. First, they convey the impression that the Hebrew Scriptures have not been transmitted in a perfect condition, and if imperfect here, may they not be so in other places of Scripture? Second, they suggest that the only information given about king Saul has been lost for all time, and this loss creates uncertainty about when Saul was rejected as God’s king over Israel. A solution to this enigmatic statement would throw light on the lives of both Saul and David.

2. *Did Saul reign forty or twenty years?* According to Acts 13:21, Saul reigned for forty years.⁴ This information was not taken directly from the canonical Scriptures, but, like the names of the two magicians—Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses and Aaron (2 Tim 3:8)—this information was transmitted faithfully through the nation’s other literature. Josephus in one place confirms that Saul reigned forty years (*Ant.* 6.378), but in another place gives him just twenty years (*Ant.* 10.143). In Josephus’s statement, Saul’s forty years are made up as follows: “He reigned eighteen years during the lifetime of Samuel and for twenty-two years more after the latter’s death” (*Ant.* 6.378). Josephus’s statement that Samuel died twenty-two years *before* the death of Saul is clearly unhistorical. David fled to Samuel *after* he killed Goliath. This would mean that David killed Goliath before he was eight years

³ The Hebrew (13:1): “Saul was a son of a year, and two years he reigned in Israel,” is supported by MSS bcmxxc₂. All the other LXX MSS omit 13:1 (i.e. MSS BMNadeinpqstvwy). A few LXX MSS read “a son of thirty years,” in place of “a son of a year.” They are: b(mg)goe₂, and f reads “thirty-one years.” Conclusion: the Old Greek and the Old Greek Revised never translated 1 Sam 13:1. It was only added later, and only in a handful of MSS. The original LXX translators were clearly embarrassed by the Hebrew text and decided to omit it altogether.

⁴ Some chronologists cannot fit 40 years for Saul into their scheme so they have assumed this figure included the time that Samuel was Saul’s contemporary, and reduce Saul’s actual reign to two years, or twenty-two (cf. Christopher Wordsworth, *The Holy Bible, in the Authorized Version; with Notes and Introduction* [6 vols.; London: Rivington, 1864–66] II. 26). In the modern era, some give Saul thirty-two years, so *The New Bible Commentary* (ed. F. Davidson; London: InterVarsity, 1953) 269, which, with the seven and a half years of Ishbosheth and Abner (who was Saul’s cousin) gives 40 for Saul’s *dynasty*. J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (Tübingen, 1742) thought that the forty years in Acts 13:21 covered the administration of Samuel as well as the reign of Saul.

of age! The Loeb edition of Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* at 6.378 (cf. 10.143) offers the solution that a Christian scribe added "twenty" before "two" in order to make the total agree with Acts 13:21, and this appears to have the support of the Latin version of Josephus which reads "two." This is a neat solution and it would mean that Josephus was consistent in giving just twenty years for the reign of Saul. But it also means that if Josephus's transmitted figures have been interfered with here, then this could place some of his other figures under suspicion of Christian interference.

Can Josephus's chronological data be trusted? Josephus gives a number of overarching totals between biblical events. Of those which can be firmly dated, none is historically accurate.⁵ Consequently, even if we could establish with some certainty that Josephus gave just twenty years for Saul's reign, this would not be any more credible than his other unhistorical figures.

If we assume, for the sake of argument, that Saul reigned twenty years, there appears to be very little hard evidence in the rest of 1 Samuel 9–31 which would make this unlikely. For instance, David was thirty years of age when Saul died, which means that he was ten years of age when Saul began to reign. David killed Goliath some time after Saul's third year, so that David could have been anointed king by Samuel at eighteen years of age (eight years into his reign) and have killed Goliath when he was just over twenty years of age. The earliest possible age of David when he killed Goliath would have been when he was thirteen years of age (three years into Saul's reign, according to 13:1). At that tender age, and given that Saul was taller than any man in Israel, David could not possibly have tried to put on Saul's coat of mail, his long robe, his helmet, and strapped Saul's sword on top of the long robe. It would have been like sending a child out to certain death. Instead of sober history, we would have comedy and farce.

However, there is one piece of evidence that points to a large gap in time between the anointing of Saul as king and the battle recorded in 1 Samuel 13. There are two possible dates for this battle. It must have taken place either in Saul's 4th year if he reigned 20 years (1030–1011 BC), or in his 14th year if he reigned 40 years (1050–1011 BC). It makes better sense to allow a

⁵ E.g. Josephus states that there were 1,130 years from the foundation of Solomon's temple to the destruction of Herod's temple in AD 70 (*War* 6§268). The correct figure is 1,036 years. He gives 514 years from Saul to Zedekiah, of which 20 belonged to Saul, which leaves 494 years (*Ant.* 10§143). The correct total is 424 years. He gives the existence of Solomon's temple as 466 years. The correct time was 382 years (967–586 BC). He gives 592 from the exodus to the 4th year of Solomon (8§3.1), and also 612 years for the same period (*Ant.* 20.230 and *Apion* 2.19). The correct total is 479 complete years according to 1 Kgs 6:1. Josephus has the wrong data for Omri (8§12), Jehu (9§159), Jehoahaz (9§173), Amaziah (9§186), Jeroboam II (9§205, 216), Pekah (9§233), Ahaz (9§257), Hoshea (9§260), Hezekiah/Manasseh (10§25), and Baltasar (Belshazzar), who is given 17 years (10§247). He has confused Baltasar with Nabonidus. These errors may have been in the sources Josephus used (esp. the Proto-Lucian version of the LXX), but in the case of 1 Kgs 6:1 Josephus obviously regarded his extra-biblical sources as more trustworthy than the Hebrew text. If Josephus's works have been interfered with by Christian transcribers, did they also bring the events relating to the chronology of Jesus and Acts into line with their Christian traditions? If so, reliance on Josephus's works is seriously undermined as an independent source.

longer period of time for the Philistines to disarm Israel so that only Saul and Jonathan had swords in the battle recorded in 1 Samuel 13 (13:19–22). It should be remembered that Saul inherited the weapons of the Philistines whom Samuel defeated in the first year of his sole judgeship (1 Sam 6:11).

It would appear that there was a gap of twelve to fourteen years between the rescue of Jabesh-gilead—when Saul had an army of 330,000 *armed* men—and the battle recorded in 1 Samuel 13, when Saul had a standing army of 3000 men, which quickly dwindled to 600 *unarmed* men and just two swords. It is difficult to see how 330,000 men could be disarmed in just three years.

After Jonathan's success at the battle of Michmash, Israel rearmed itself and with these armaments fought the battles mentioned in 1 Sam 14:47–48. Before the battle with Goliath's army, Saul was able to muster an army of 210,000 armed men to fight the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:4). If we allow a gap of fourteen years at the beginning of Saul's 40-year reign to account for the decline in his armaments, then Jonathan's spectacular defeat of the Philistines at Michmash should be fitted into a new chapter in Saul's rule. It was this signal victory that energized Saul to attack all his hostile neighbors and finally establish Israel as a nation like all the nations around him. This was the image and goal that the elders of Israel were aiming for when they clamored for a king. That a new chapter began with Jonathan's victory may be surmised from the statement that followed that victory, "And Saul captured the kingdom over Israel" (1 Sam 14:47). This victory may have constituted a major turning-point in Saul's rule. If so, it was worthy of being dated by the life of another man of faith—David (for which, see below).

The twenty years that Josephus appears to have allocated to Saul may have arisen from the observation that after the destruction of Shiloh (on the death of Eli) the ark remained in Kiriath-jearim for twenty years (1 Sam 7:1; cf. 2 Sam 6:3). We are told that David brought the ark up from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem. It was an understandable mistake to assume that the twenty years the ark was in Kiriath-jearim until David took it to Jerusalem, was the *total* number of years between these two events, and therefore Saul could not have reigned more than twenty years.

There are two problems with this assumption. First, the twenty years must include the seven years that David was king of Hebron, because the ark was brought to Jerusalem only after David captured the city. When we subtract these seven years this leaves just thirteen years for Saul and Samuel. The LXX addition in the Proto-Lucian MSS to 1 Sam 13:1 states that Saul reigned two years in total. *Seder Olam Rabbah* (chap. 13) gives him three years, and has David secretly anointed by Samuel when he was 29 years of age, and presumably this was his age when he fought Goliath.⁶ Rabbinic tradition attributes twelve years to Samuel. This would leave just one year for Saul's

⁶ See Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005 [1998]) 129.

reign, which is clearly unhistorical. For reasons given below I have credited Samuel with a 20-year judgeship in which the ark was not moved about.

Second, Josephus states that after the death of Eli, Samuel was “ruler and leader of the people . . . for twelve years alone, and together with King Saul for eighteen more” (*Ant.* 6.378). If, however, the first two years of Saul’s appointment as king were transition years and these were added to Samuel’s twenty years, this would take his total to twenty-two years. It has been surmised that Saul did not enter fully into his kingship until his second coronation in Gilgal (1 Sam 11:15), after which Saul was contemporary with Samuel for the next sixteen years (according to Josephus’s arithmetic). This would mean that Samuel died two years before Saul’s death, which is internally consistent with Josephus’s other data, and consistent with either a 20-year reign, or a 40-year reign.

I would suggest that Josephus has confused the duration of events in his two statements. The twenty-two years should refer to the judgeship of Samuel. He very likely judged Israel for twenty years alone, and was contemporary with Saul for eighteen years, and died two years before Saul did. This would make sense of all of Josephus’s confusing data, and confirm Saul’s forty-year reign.

When the ark was captured, Eli was very old, and traditionally Samuel is pictured as a young child, but Samuel had already gained a national reputation (“from Dan to Beersheba,” 1 Sam 3:20) that he was God’s prophet during the lifetime of Eli. So he was already a national figure before Eli died. He immediately assumed leadership of the nation on Eli’s death (1 Sam 4:1), and, more importantly, he became the leading, officiating priest after the death of Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, which suggests that he was at least thirty years of age at this time. At the time the elders came to Samuel to demand a king, Samuel is said to be old and gray-headed and he had two adult sons whom he made judges in Israel. This suggests that Samuel must have been around fifty years of age (at least) when the demand for a king took place. Now if Samuel was thirty years of age when Eli died at 98 years of age, then he was born when Eli was 68 years of age. Eli’s sight had begun to deteriorate (1 Sam 3:2) by the time God passed judgment on his family, using Samuel, who was probably a teenager at the time. Then we have the statement that “Samuel grew and the Lord was with him” (3:19), and all Israel knew that Samuel was established as Yahweh’s prophet (3:20). Eli’s sight had gone completely by the time of his death (4:15). This sequence suggests that the prophecy condemning Eli and his sons may have been given to Samuel as much as fifteen years before it came history, if we assume Samuel to be a small boy (as tradition has it) when he received the prophecy of Eli’s disgrace.

Scripture is silent on the length of Samuel’s judgeship except to say that he was judge all the days of his life. However, it would appear that he had a substantial period as sole judge in Israel and through this office he became a national figure and leader. After the dateline in 1 Sam 13:1, the priest who accompanied Saul on his battles was not Samuel, but Ahiah. Now Ahiah

was the son of Ahitub, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli (1 Sam 14:3). So Samuel saw three generations of Eli's descendants by the time Saul had reigned two years (if we take 1 Sam 13:1 to refer to the absolute beginning of his reign). It is difficult to see how these three generations can be fit into twelve years—the time allotted by Josephus for the sole judgeship of Samuel.

If, as I suspect, Samuel was judge for the twenty years mentioned in 1 Sam 7:2 (viewed in conjunction with 14:18 and 7:13), then Samuel may have been thirty years of age when he assumed the role of chief priest (which was the legally required age) on the death of Eli. (We would have to assume that Samuel, a Levite, had been adopted into Eli's family to qualify to perform priestly functions.) If Samuel was thirty on the death of Eli, and he judged Israel for the next twenty years, when he is described as "old and gray-headed," then his sons could have been about thirty when they were appointed judges in Beersheba (1 Sam 8:1–2). If to Samuel's twenty years as sole judge in Israel we add the first fourteen years of Saul's 40-year reign (the 14th year—in his 40-year rule—is the year in my chronology when Saul was rejected as king), this would give thirty-four years from the death of Phinehas to the appointment of Ahiah—son of Ahitub, son of Phinehas—to be Saul's priest. A curse lay on all of Eli's male descendants that they would all die young ("in the flower of their age," 1 Sam 2:33). Saul killed Ahimelech, the high-priest, who was also the son of Ahitub (1 Sam 22:11), and all his house, except for Abiathar the son of Ahimelech, and Abiathar was old enough to wear the ephod (1 Sam 23:6). So Abiathar must have been David's age when he joined him.⁷ This gives five generations between Eli and Abiathar (Eli, Phinehas, Ahitub, Ahimelech, and Abiathar).⁸ This suggests that Samuel judged Israel alone for at least twenty years because the ark remained stationary in Kiriath-jearim while Samuel was sole leader. He ended the Philistine threat in his first year (1 Sam 7:13), so there was no need to move the ark around during his sole judgeship of Israel. It is for this reason that I credit Samuel with these twenty years of immobility of the ark.

The actual time from the death of Eli to the deposition of the ark in Jerusalem by David was 68 years (1070–1003 BC). The 68 years are made up as follows: (a) 20 years for the ark's permanent stay in Kiriath-jearim; this coincided with Samuel's judgeship; (b) 40 years for Saul's reign; and (c) 8 years after the death of Saul when David moved the ark into Jerusalem. In the light of these events, the most likely solution is that after the destruction of Shiloh the ark remained stationary in Kiriath-jearim for the *first*

⁷ An observation made by William L. Osborne, *The Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9* (Ph.D. diss., The Dropsie University, Philadelphia, PA, 1979) 265. This Abiathar had a son, Ahimelech, who was joint high-priest with Zadok in David's time (2 Sam 8:17; 1 Chr 24:6). And this Ahimelech (we deduce) named his son Abiathar, who appears to be the same person who was high-priest at the close of David's 40-year reign (1 Kgs 2:26).

⁸ For a discussion of the high-priests of Israel see Gilbert Burrington, *An Arrangement of the Genealogies of the Old Testament* (London, 1836) 101–24. He lists the high-priests as Ahimaaz, Azariah, Amariah, Jehoiada (= Johanan, according to some, he notes); and Osborne, *The Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9* 262–73, who lists the priests as: Eli, Phinehas, Ahitub, Abiathar (left out at 1 Sam 22:11, and retained only at 2 Sam 8:17), Ahimelech, Abiathar, and Jonathan (1 Kgs 1:42). See J. R. Bartlett, "Zadok and His Successors at Jerusalem," *JTS* n.s. 19 (1968) 1–8.

twenty years, which was all of Samuel's sole judgeship. It was only when Saul became king that the ark once again (as in Eli's time) began to be moved about by Saul as a talisman against his enemies (cf. 1 Sam 14:18). David followed Samuel's faith in God to win his battles, and so the ark was never used as a talisman again by any Davidic king. The ark remained permanently in Jerusalem for the rest of Israel's history.

I have accepted forty years for the reign of Saul because no Greek manuscript of Acts gives any other figure. *The figure is uncontested.* To reduce Saul's total to some other figure, or to read forty in some other sense would require special pleading, which introduces an unstable foundation. The rest of this article shows that it is possible to make sense of the biblical text as it stands once the conventions of Hebrew culture are understood and appreciated.

3. *The formula in 1 Samuel 13:1.* The formula used in 1 Sam 13:1 is identical to the standard one used to summarize the details of the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel. The formula (see 2 Kgs 8:25) is: "In the Nth year of NN, king of Israel, X became king of Judah. *X was Y years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for Z years.*" In the case of Saul the first part was not applicable to him, so that we have only the second, italicized part retained in 1 Sam 13:1. On the face of it, the Hebrew text reads: "Saul was one year old when he became king, and he reigned two years over Israel." Because this translation does not make sense—certainly not in any Western culture—the reaction had/had been that the text has suffered some damage in the course of transmission. Others translate the Hebrew as: "Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign, and he reigned . . . and two years." It is suggested that the blank spaces were in the original text; that the writer did not know the actual figures at the time of writing and intended to fill in the gaps later, but forgot to do so.⁹ Others suggested that the omission was deliberate on the part of God.¹⁰ Both interpretations defend the text as it stands, believing that nothing has dropped out in transmission. "The beginning is clearly marked with an accession formula (13:1)—ironically incomplete, as if to signal the outcome of Saul's reign—of the kind frequently used in the books of Kings."¹¹

The majority of English translations imply that Saul was rejected as king just two years into his reign.¹² This creates two problems. First, Samuel told

⁹ See *The New Bible Commentary* 269.

¹⁰ Johannes Thaddeus and T. Man, *The Reconciler of the Bible enlarged: wherein above three thousand seeming contradictions throughout the Old and New Testament, are fully and plainly reconciled* (London: Simon Miller, 1662) 56.

¹¹ Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984) 53.

¹² NASB reads, "Saul was forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-two years over Israel." The 32 years contradicts the 40 in Acts 13:21, which is surprisingly omitted among its cross-references. Ussher accepted that Saul reigned 40 years but believed his rejection occurred in his second year, see James Ussher's *The Annals of the World*, revised and updated by Larry and Marion Pierce (Forest Green, AR: Master Books, 2003), cf. p. 58 (§392–93) with p. 59 (§410), as did Martin Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology* (2 vols.; London: Marshall Brothers, 1913) I. 164.

Saul that God had already selected another leader (*nāgīd*) to replace him (1 Sam 13:14), but David was not born until eight years after Saul's second year.¹³ Secondly, if Jonathan was second-in-command at the commencement of Saul's reign then Saul must have been at least forty years old when he began to reign.¹⁴ Now, if Saul was 40 years old when he became king, and he reigned 40 years, this would mean he was 80 years of age when he was killed in battle. What would an 80-year old man be doing on the battlefield in full regalia, crown and all? These two problems suggest that Saul was younger than forty years when he was crowned king of Israel, and that his rejection must have occurred at a time after David was born.

Now the people of Israel did not have a hand in choosing who their first king would be. Israel was not a democracy, but a theocracy. God chose him (1 Sam 10:24) whom they wanted (1 Sam 12:13). It is interesting that he set thirty years of age as the age for his priests to begin their priestly duties.¹⁵ This seems to suggest that thirty is the optimum age to hold office. God surrounded his presence in the Temple with men who were all over thirty years of age. Immature men were kept at arm's length from him. Jesus was thirty years of age before he became King of Israel. He was baptized at thirty years of age, the age at which priests were anointed with oil, and his baptism is considered the point of his anointing to enter into his high-priestly duties (Acts 4:27; 10:38; Matt 3:16). It would not surprise us, therefore, to discover that Saul was thirty years of age when God selected him to be leader over his people.

We have a clue to the age of Saul when he was chosen. Saul had a son called Ishbosheth (Ishbaal) who was forty years of age when Saul died (2 Sam 2:10), which means that he was born the year Saul became king. First Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39 give the order of Saul's sons: "And Saul begat Jonathan, and Malcishua, and Abinadab, and Ishbaal [= Ishbosheth]." The three oldest sons died with Saul, leaving Ishbosheth to inherit his throne. Saul's two daughters, Merab and Michal, were born later because they were eligible for marriage when David was about twenty years of age. This would mean that Jonathan was born at least ten years before Saul became king. Consequently, it is a plausible scenario to think of Saul as being thirty years of age when he was chosen by Yahweh to rule his people, and he was the father of four small boys at that time.

¹³ When David was told that his future son would build the temple, Solomon is never mentioned by name, cf. 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17; 2 Chronicles 6; and 1 Kings 18, because he was not yet born. But 1 Sam 13:14 implies that David has been born.

¹⁴ This difficulty was pointed out by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament. Volume II. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1949]), *The Books of Samuel* 123.

¹⁵ There is evidence from the Qumran community (*Damascus Document* 17.5.6) that one had to be thirty in order to serve in a position of leadership (see Ben Zion Wacholder, *The New Damascus Document: The Midrash on the Eschatological Torah of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Reconstruction, Translation and Commentary* [Leiden: Brill, 2007] 97). Where God has a free hand, this appears to be his preference. Most Davidic kings, however, were well below thirty years of age when they held the highest office in the land.

Now Jonathan was second-in-command when Samuel conveyed God's message of rejection to Saul (1 Sam 13:3). Jonathan could not have been less than twenty years of age, because this was the age at which all young men became registered for battle duty (Num 1:3; 26:2). Yet Jonathan was second-in-command to Saul. If we assume him to be about 25 years of age at the time of Saul's rejection, then Saul would have been rejected about one third of the way through his 40-year reign, and not two years into his reign as most translations have it. If it was just two years into his reign then Jonathan would have been second-in-command when he was about twelve years of age, if he was born ten years before Saul became king.

It is much more probable that Saul was rejected well into his reign. This would allow Jonathan time to mature into a formidable warrior, and it would also allow time for David to be born. We know for a fact that David was born in 1040 BC, and God could have chosen him from birth to be his replacement king. Jeremiah had such a calling: "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Before you were born I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations'" (Jer 1:4–5; cf. Isa 49:1, 5; Luke 1:15; 1 Sam 13:14). David died at seventy years of age, and Saul reigned forty years, at which time David was exactly thirty years of age, so it was not difficult to work out exactly in which year of Saul's reign David was born. Saul commenced his 40-year reign in 1050 BC, David was born in the eleventh year of Saul's reign, in 1040, and David died in 970 BC, when Solomon commenced his rule. Solomon laid the foundation of the Temple in 967 BC, which was at the *start*—not the end—of the 480th year from the exodus (April/Nisan 1446 BC).¹⁶

From this data, we can rule out the rejection of Saul in his second year of rule because of the age of Jonathan. An exact translation of 1 Sam 13:1 reads: "A son of a year [*is*] Saul in his reigning, and two years he ruled over Israel. And Saul chose for himself three thousand [*men*] out of Israel; and

¹⁶ It is a very common error to deduct 480 or add 480 *complete* years when, in fact the figure is 479 complete years from the exodus (consequently wrongly dated by some to 1447 BC instead of 1446 BC) to the foundation of the Temple in 967 BC. See, for example, the article by K. Kitchen on "Chronology" in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Leicester: InterVarsity, 2005) 181–88. It is a pity that there is not joined-up thinking in this article linking the 479 years and Jephthah's 300 years. *They are treated in isolation so that their combined witness is lost.* The former is dismissed as twelve generations (12 × 40); the latter is put aside by K. Kitchen with the comment: "And what of the 300 years spoken of by Jephthah (Judg 11:26)? He came from an extremely poor and deprived background, with plenty of bravery but no education. His boast to the king of Ammon is simply a round figure, a bluster—'We've been here donkey's years!'—and not a learned calculation." Is this wishful thinking in order to undermine Jephthah's unacceptable data? Was Jephthah (and the inspired writer) passing on an untruthful statement? Jephthah is held up to Christ's church as a man of faith in Heb 11:32, and he is followed immediately by David's name. The 479 and the 300 years *taken together* undermine a 13th cent. date for the exodus. The absence of archaeological evidence for a 15th cent. date for the exodus can be met with the axiom, "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." K. Kitchen regarded the exodus as "an actual event (but with several thousand, not two million people!) in the thirteenth century BCE," see *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (eds. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 90.

two thousand are with Saul in Michmash, and in the hill-country of Bethel, and a thousand have been with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin; and the remnant of the people he sent each to his tents."

The opening formula was clearly intended to date the event that immediately follows. But what does "a son of a year" mean in this context? It cannot mean that Saul himself was one year old!

II. THE PHRASE: "SON OF A YEAR"

The key to understanding 1 Sam 13:1 lies in the phrase "a son of a year." The phrase, "the son of . . ." is an era statement in its own right. The moment of birth is the fixed point from which the numbering is made. This then means that "a son of a year" is counted from a person's birth, or the birth of someone else, or the birth of an event.¹⁷ The most common use of this exact phrase in the Bible is to denote a one-year old lamb or goat in the rites governing the suitability of animals for sacrifice. The rarer, longer form, "a son of his year" (Lev 23:12; Num 6:12; Ezek 46:13), means "son of his [first] year." In time, this full form was reduced to its barest essentials, "son of a year" because the era was well-known, and so redundant,¹⁸ but it is worth remembering that the phrase "son of a year," stands for "son of his first year," as we shall see later on.

The term "son" is used for a child of the male gender. It is said of Adam that he begat a son "in his likeness, according to his image" (Gen 5:3). The idea that a son partakes of his father's likeness helps us to understand the following biblical expressions: "son of God," "son of a devil" (Acts 13:10), which means having the likeness of a devil, as much as being the offspring of evil personified; "son of Gehenna" (Matt 23:15), meaning a product (deserving or worthy) of gehenna; "son of destruction" (John 17:12); "son of peace" (Luke 10:6); "son of perverseness" (Ps 89:22); "son of the dawn" (Isa 14:12); "son of my threshing-floor" (Isa 21:10), meaning the product that results from threshing; "son of comfort" (Acts 4:36), or Barnabas, meaning one who is the product of comfort, not necessarily one who provides comfort. The terms "son of worthlessness" (1 Sam 25:44) and "son of death" (1 Sam 20:31; 2 Sam 12:5), are very expressive, meaning the figurative fathers are "worthlessness" and "death" and they give birth to the same. Death gives birth to death. A "son of valor" (1 Sam 18:17) has "valor" as his figurative father, and so he takes after his father.¹⁹ In all these expressions we are to see the "son" as the product, issue, or offspring of the named quality or person.

Apart from the term "son" being used for a child of the male gender, Hebrew also uses the same term to denote a person's relationship to an epoch,

¹⁷ Anstey noted, "The expression 'son of' is used with a great deal of latitude, and is made to cover almost any genitive relation or reference to a point of origin or commencement" (*The Romance of Bible Chronology* I.223).

¹⁸ All languages show a tendency to discard redundancies; see John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

¹⁹ Cf. Jesus' statement about his opponents, "you are of a father—the devil" (John 8:44), because the Jews were doing the works of the devil (1 John 3:10; who was their father, John 8:38), yet they claimed, "one father we have—God" (John 8:41).

or an era of time. Here English culture parts company with Hebrew, and this is the root cause of the misunderstanding of the term “son” in 1 Sam 13:1. Man’s life is measured by the years of an era. That era could be his own birth-years, or another era. Each person commonly uses two eras. First, a life span, “I am seventy years,” meaning, seventy years from my birth year. Second, the same period is set in relation to the era of Christ’s birth, when we say his years were “1900–1970,” we mean he lived from the 1900th to the 1970th year after the birth of Jesus Christ (*anno Domini*). The “son of year X” means that the son is contemporary with the numbered year. English has no equivalent to this use of “son.”

The Hebrews were at home using many eras at the same time. The Hebrew child starts off as a “son of a year,” then a “son of two years” (in an English culture he is “two years old”), then a son (or product) of seventy years. From this it was easy to transfer to an era not connected to their personal history, such as the Division of the Kingdom on the death of Solomon. Thus a man who was a son of seventy years could also describe himself as a “son of the two hundredth year after the Division of the Kingdom.” The next year he would be the “son of the two hundred and first year after the Division of the Kingdom,” and so on. It became unnecessary to identify the era every time, as that was taken for granted, in much the same way that modern man does not need to repeat *anno Domini* (AD) every time he mentions the modern year number, though it is implicit. Indeed, the year’s full form “AD 2010” can be abbreviated further to ’10, because it is unnecessary to state the obvious every time. If we found ’10 in a manuscript, only the context would enable us to determine whether the author meant 1810, 1910, or 2010. On its own, ’10 is ambiguous, *but not in the mind of the original author*. Consequently, to return to the Hebrew chronicler, in the next year he would be a “son of two hundred and two years,” and he would omit to add “after the Division of the Kingdom,” because his contemporaries would know what the era was called. This omission could create confusion once the oral knowledge was lost, and that is what has happened in some cases in the Bible. The statements in 1 Chr 9:1 and 27:24 place the existence of national record books beyond all doubt. At one time, readers living in the Chronicler’s time could have consulted these records, but they are now lost forever.

It should be noted that the formula dating the *age* of a king on his succession and the formula dating the *era* of his succession are identical, and this is a potential cause of confusion. There is a parallel in the formula dating the start of a coregency and the start of a sole reign. The formulas are identical and this, too, is a potential cause of confusion.

1. *Asa, king of Judah, dated according to Omri’s dynasty.* The Chronicler is familiar with using short-term and long-term eras. He noted that, “There was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the kingdom of Asa” (2 Chr 15:19).²⁰ Given that the Chronicler studiously avoided all synchronisms with the de-

²⁰ The LXX as a whole retains thirty-five here. See A. E. Brooke and N. McLean (eds.), *The Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932) at 2 Chr 15:19.

based northern kingdom (Israel),²¹ he had to find another era by which to date events between Judah and Israel, and he hit upon the idea of using the years since the Division of the Kingdom.²² In 2 Chr 14:1, he noted that the land was quiet for the first ten years of the *personal* reign of Asa (from 910 to 900 BC). This was followed by the invasion of the Cushites and the Lubim (but no war with Israel as yet) just before the third month of Asa's fifteenth year (cf. 2 Chr 15:10), which marked the victory celebration in Judah over Zerah. After this signal victory Israelites in the north began deserting Baasha, who tried unsuccessfully to stem the flow by attacking Judah. Now the fact that Baasha's war commenced in the fifteenth year of Asa, and this year was also the thirty-fifth year from the Division of the Kingdom settles the issue that the Chronicler was using the years since the Division as an era in its own right. The fact that he omitted to mention the era explicitly by name left the text open to misunderstanding by those who did not possess the oral knowledge that once accompanied the biblical record.

Many budding chronologists of the Bible, taking the high ground of reading Scripture literally,²³ and despising those who have not taken 2 Chr 15:19 in its literal sense, have crashed against this chronological rock and dashed their chances of recovering the biblical chronology for this period. W. F. Albright, for example, understood "until the thirty-fifth year of the kingdom of Asa," to mean the thirty-fifth *personal* year of Asa's reign, and so obtained 922 BC for the Division of the Kingdom.²⁴ The mistake is perfectly understandable,

²¹ The only exception he makes is to synchronize Abijah, king of Judah, with Jeroboam, the first northern king, see 2 Chr 13:1 (Leslie McFall, "A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles," *BSac* 148 [1991] 3-45, esp. p. 13.)

²² See *Seder Olam*, ch. 16. For this work, I have followed the translation by Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005 [1998]). This Jewish work was used by Ussher, *Annals of the World* §§493, 496; Theodore Haak, *The Dutch annotations upon the whole Bible. . . . Now faithfully communicated to the use of Great Britain, in English* (2 vols.; London: Henry Hills, 1657) Vol. 1, Gen-Song of Songs; Vol. 2, Isaiah-Revelation, also, W. Gouge and Th. Gataker et al., *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* (2d ed., 2 vols.; London: John Legatt, 1651); Thaddaeus and Man, *The Reconciler of the Bible enlarged* 56. Simon [Symon] Patrick (Bp of Ely), also Lowth, Arnald, Whitby, and Lowman, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* (3d ed. corrected; 2 vols.; London, 1727) II. 595, gives a substantial list of contemporaries who supported this solution. He also notes Josephus's alteration of 36 to 26, which was accepted by William Dodd, *A Commentary on the Books of the Old and New Testament. In which are inserted the Notes and Collections of John Locke, Daniel Waterland. . . . Edwards, Earl of Clarendon. . .* (3 vols.; London: Printed for R. Davis, 1770), see under 2 Chr 15:19. I have used the Division as the starting-point, but the Chronicler may have been counting the years of the elect, messianic kingdom, namely, the Kingdom of Judah. In which case, the years relate to the existence of the kingdom of Judah, which coincide with the Division. The difference relates only to nomenclature, not to chronology.

²³ This sometimes takes the form of, "Ask a child what these verses mean." This is a dangerous criterion to use and can easily backfire. See its use in Larry and Marion Pierce, *Annals of the World* 922.

²⁴ W. F. Albright, "The Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 100 (December 1945) 20. Thiele noted, "there is evidence indicating that Albright's date of 922 for the disruption of the monarchy is not historically sound [footnote to sources]. Widely accepted though this date has been [continued Thiele], it should be recognized

but the Jews had already solved the problem in their *Seder Olam Rabbah*²⁵ as I have outlined it above, and this solution was well known to Protestant commentators at the time of the Reformation and onwards.²⁶

To avoid future misunderstanding of 2 Chr 15:19 it should be translated as follows: "There was no war until the thirty-fifth year [*from the division*] of the kingdom [*belonging*] to Asa."²⁷ And 2 Chr 16:1 should be translated as: "In the thirty-sixth year [*from the division*] of the kingdom [*belonging*] to Asa, Baasha, king of Israel, went up against Judah and built Ramah."²⁸ These are just two of many texts to do with chronology where a policy to take the literal reading (on the basis of, "Ask a child . . .") could lead to error.

Unfortunately, the Word of God did not come with a companion volume explaining its cultural background. The text comes isolated from its cultural context, and only diligent and laser-focus attention to detail will lead to a resolution of its apparent contradictions. Those who come after, lacking this eye for detail, will revert to reading the text against a different, cultural context—one of their own making or choice (and mainly Western). As one noted divine once put it: "Knowledge has not an enemy, but the ignorant."²⁹ This is why God has set teachers in the church alongside pastors and evangelists.

2. *Jehoiada as the son of an era.* An example of the Hebrew use of "son" in connection with an era, rather than a *personal* age, is the age of the high-priest Jehoiada, of whom it is said, "And Jehoiada is aged and satisfied with days, and he died—a son of a hundred and thirty years in his death" (2 Chr 24:15). Of David it is said that "he died in a good old age, satisfied with days, riches, and honor" (*Young's Literal Translation*, 1 Chr 29:28), and in another

as an aberration. Although coming from a scholar who was truly great, the date of 922 is not valid" (Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983 (1st ed. 1951; 2d ed. 1965)] 86.) Thiele included a critique of Albright's chronology in his 1st edition (1951, pp. 244–67), which was left out in the 3d edition. It is unfortunate that the *NRSV* (1995) has chosen to give priority to Albright's faulty chronology in an appendix (pp. 262–64).

²⁵ This work was reviewed and utilized by Hugh Broughton, *A seder olam, that is: order of the worlde: or yeeres from the fall to the restoring* (Cambridge, 1594). The *Seder Olam Rabba(h)* is regarded as a second century AD work. See Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology*, and Chaim Joseph Milikowsky, "Seder Olam A Rabbinic Chronography" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981).

²⁶ See John Lightfoot, *A Chronicle of the Times, and the Order of the Texts of the Old Testament* (London: T. Badger, 1642; 108 pp.). This work was consulted in Cambridge University Library (shelf no. 8.37.14). This work covers Genesis to Judges. The companion volume is *The first Book of Samuel* (bound in the same volume; no pub. details). This covers 1 Samuel to Malachi (206 pp.). A third work (also bound in the same volume) is, *An Handfull of Gleanings out of the Book of Exodus* (London: R. Coates, 1643; 58 pp.).

²⁷ Thiele wrote: "It is my view that the original annalistic recording concerning the thirty-fifth year mentioned in 2 Chronicles 15:19 had only a reference to that year. The phrase 'of Asa' was a late editorial addition introduced when the Book of Chronicles was brought into being" (*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* 84).

²⁸ The LXX MSS are split between reading 36 (MSS dmpqtyze₂) and 38 (MSS ABNcefgjnc₂) years here.

²⁹ Broughton, *A seder olam*, Epistle to the Reader (seventh unnumbered page).

place he is described as “old and satisfied with days” (1 Chr 23:1) when he died at 70 years of age. In the light of this comparison, Jehoiada would have been a throwback to the age of the patriarchs if he died at 130 years of age. It is not impossible that he was 130 years of age, because the same expression “aged and satisfied with days” is used of Abraham (Gen 25:8), Isaac (Gen 35:29), and Job (Job 42:17) who lived to 175, 180, and about 210 years of age respectively, but then, so did their contemporaries in all likelihood. Samuel was “aged and gray-headed” (1 Sam 8:1, 5; 12:2) before Saul began his 40-year reign. Now if he was “aged” when he made Saul king, we know that Samuel was a mature man, because his sons were at that time judges in Israel (2 Sam 8:1–3). He cannot have been less than 50 years of age at the time the demand for a king was made to him, and if he lived another 35 years alongside Saul (as seems the case), then he died nearer to 85 years of age.

In the case of Jehoiada, if one counts the years from the Division of the Kingdom, then he held office during the reign of Joash, king of Judah. These two overlapped between the years 119 and 135 of the Era of the Division of the Kingdom, and since Jehoiada died before Joash, it may not be coincidental that Jehoiada died in year 130 of the Era of the Division of the Kingdom. If he was 130 years old, then he was born the year that Solomon died, and there were many firstborn high-priests during the next 130 years. Zadok was high-priest at the start of Solomon’s reign and he was succeeded by Ahimaaz, Azariah, Joahaz, Jehoiarib, Jehoshaphat, and Jehoiada in the time of Joash, according to *Seder Olam Zuta* (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 10§8). This sequence of six high-priests between Solomon and Joash rules out the possibility that Jehoiada was 130 years of age.

If the phrase “a son of a hundred and thirty years” is to be understood as: “a son of a hundred and thirty years [*from the Division of the Kingdom*],” then we see the epochal use of “son” to indicate the passage of time from a fixed point in the past. It would be the equivalent of saying that a modern man is a “son of AD 2010,” to indicate that he was alive in that year, and that that year is the 2010th after the birth of the Lord Jesus. By omitting to mention the era (AD), no one is likely to make the mistake of reading the abbreviated form “son of 2010” to mean that the person was 2010 years old! But the reason why the English reader rejects 2010 years as a personal age is (1) it is an impossible age; and (2) everyone knows that 2010 is counted from the birth of Jesus. So the solution lies in (2). But what if the number was a “son of 209 years”? The English reader cannot use (2) as the solution, and (1) seems an impossible age. But what if the number was a “son of 29 years”? The reader cannot use (2), and (1) does not apply. So the English reader takes a “son of 29 years” to be the personal age of the person. *But this is not necessarily so in Hebrew culture.* The phrase a “son of 29 years” could be (1) personal, or (2) epochal. Because (2) is lacking in English culture, there is immediate suspicion when it is brought forward to solve puzzling texts as the following examples demonstrate. Unless the English reader is prepared to accept that Hebrew can use small figures for personal *and* epochal ages, then what follows will not make sense.

3. *Ahaziah king of Judah as the son of an era.* Another example of the Hebrew use of “son” in connection with an era, rather than a *personal* age, is the age of Ahaziah king of Judah when he became king. Second Kings 8:26 informs us that he was “a son of twenty and two years when he became king, and he ruled one year in Jerusalem.” But 2 Chr 22:2 apparently contradicts this when it states that Ahaziah was “a son of forty and two years”³⁰ when he became king, and he ruled one year in Jerusalem.³¹ The solution is simple. His place in history has been reckoned according to two different eras. In 2 Kings 8, the era is his own personal age; in 2 Chronicles 22, it is the era of Omri’s dynasty that he is being measured against.³² There is no contradiction here; there is politics.

The Chronicler is making a political and religious statement when he deliberately locked the reign of a Judahite king into the dynasty of the debased northern kingdom. Instead of Ahaziah walking in the ways of David, his ancestor, he walked in the ways of Jeroboam. What a shame, what a disgrace. He behaves more like a northern king than a southern, Davidic king. So by saying that Ahaziah is the product (the “son”) of the forty-second year of Omri’s dynasty, this was an insult and a judgment on the reign of this king. This is a clear case where the phrase “a son of . . .” does not indicate personal age. It can have a dynastic reference, as here.

How was the forty-two year dynasty calculated? Omri came to the throne in the 27th year of Asa (April [Nisan] 885 BC) and counting forty-two years on from there, means that the 42d year on Judah’s calendar, runs from Tishri (Sept.) 844 BC to Tishri 843 BC. This was the year that Ahaziah became coregent for three full years with his father Jehoram.³³ In his fourth year as coregent, he became king and reigned alone for just one year.

Ahaziah of Judah was like his northern counterpart in two respects. First, he abandoned Judah’s method of counting regnal years and adopted Omri’s non-accession year system for counting regnal years. Second, he was named after a northern king, because the two royal houses had intermarried, much to the disgust of the Chronicler, who strongly disapproved of this merger

³⁰ The LXX MSS are split here. Some read 20 years (ABN acefgjzc₂) and some read 22 years (bdhmnopqte₂). None read 42 years with the Hebrew. A careless error in the Hebrew text was the conclusion of Larry Pierce, see Appendix C, in Ussher’s *The Annals of the World*, revised and updated by Larry and Marion Pierce (Forest Green, AR: Master Books, 2003) 900.

³¹ Thiele made no comment on, and offered no solution to, this apparent contradiction (*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*).

³² See Haak, *The Dutch annotations upon the whole Bible* under 2 Chr 22:2; also, Gouge and Gataker, *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament*; Thaddeus and Man, *The Reconciler of the Bible enlarged* 70; Dodd, *A Commentary on the Books of the Old and New Testament* who relied on John Locke; see under 2 Chr 22:2; Broughton, *A seder olam* 12; and Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology* I.181. But some suggested that a 20-year coregency between Ahaziah and Jehoram solved the problem, see Patrick, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* II. 473; but Patrick concluded that 42 was a mistake in the Hebrew text. (Unless otherwise stated all references are to his 1727 edition.)

³³ Thiele overlooked this coregency in his work (*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*).

with Omri's throne. This accounts for the insult of declaring Ahaziah of Judah a son of Omri's dynasty, by registering him as a product of that regime. The insult was deserved.

If Ahaziah had been *personally* forty-two years of age, then he would have been two years older than his father, Jehoram, who was thirty-two years old when he became king, and ruled for just eight years. He died when he was forty years of age, and Ahaziah succeeded him in the year of his death, so Ahaziah could not have been forty-two years of age. If he was, then Jehoshaphat, born in 907 BC, was a grandfather at twenty-five years of age (if Ahaziah, his grandson, was born in Tishri 883 BC).

4. *Jehoram king of Judah as the son of an era.* Having established that the Chronicler has dealt an insult to the Davidic king, Ahaziah, by presenting him as a product of ("the son of . . .") the forty-second year of Omri's evil dynasty, has he done the same for Ahaziah's father, Jehoram? There is a coincidence that Jehoram is said to be thirty-two years of age when he began to reign, but if we transfer this number to Omri's dynasty, then a good case can be made out that in the thirty-second year of Omri's dynasty Jehoram became coregent with his father Jehoshaphat. The verdict of the biblical historian is that Jehoram, king of Judah, was an evil king. He wrote, "He [*Jehoram*] walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, because he married the daughter of Ahab [*Athaliah*]" (2 Kgs 8:18; 2 Chr 21:6). Now Athaliah is described as "the daughter of Omri" (really his granddaughter, 2 Kgs 8:26). The insult here is that the Judean king is transferred into, and identified with, his *wife's* genealogy. She was the descendant of an evil king, Omri's son, Ahab, and the Judean king walked in the evil ways of Omri's dynasty. "He [*Ahaziah*] walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, . . . because he was related by marriage to Ahab's family" (NIV, 2 Kgs 8:27). Ahaziah of Judah was Ahab's son-in-law.

The intermarriage of the two royal houses of Judah and Israel was seen as an evil thing by the Chronicler. While he credits Jehoshaphat with having walked in the ways of his father Asa, and of doing what is right in the eyes of Yahweh (2 Chr 20:32), he pointed out that he was reprimanded by God for making a political alliance with Ahaziah of Israel (not to be confused with Ahaziah of Judah), and their joint naval force was destroyed by God (2 Chr 21:37). The rot started with Jehoshaphat and was intensified under his son and grandson.

An insult may have been intended for Jehoshaphat, who was the king of Judah, when the Chronicler referred to him as "the king of Israel" (2 Chr 21:2³⁴), because he married his son (Jehoram) to the daughter of Jezebel

³⁴ The LXX, unaware of the intended insult, corrected the text to "king of Judah." The NIV footnote wrongly states that "Israel" means "Judah" here, "as frequently in 2 Chronicles." Of the twenty kings of Judah, Jehoshaphat and Ahab (2 Chr 28:19; cf. 28:2 because "he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel") are the *only* Judean kings misnamed as the "king of Israel," and that not without spiritual deliberation.

(2 Chr 18:1; 21:6), and so he cared more for the welfare of the House of Omri (Israel), than he did for the House of Judah in the latter end of his reign (cf. 2 Chr 17:3, “the early years”; 19:2; 20:35).

The conclusion is that the phrase, “a son of forty-two years,” and “a son of thirty-two years,” are not to be taken as the *personal* age of Ahaziah and Jehoram, respectively, but rather as the years since the birth of Omri’s dynasty. Omri “begat” them (as it were) in the thirty-second and forty-second years of his on-going dynasty. He lives on in them; they are his sons, because they bear his image and likeness. They walk in *his* ways, not David’s.³⁵

Those who are on the Chronicler’s wave-length will appreciate the insult implied in giving dynasty years when he might have been expected to give personal years of age. Indeed, the formula for both is the same, which suited the Chronicler’s purpose. Not discerning the Chronicler’s subtle insult, many chronologists have gone the other way and assumed he was referring to personal ages. Fortunately, in doing so, no damage is caused to their resulting chronology, *in this instance*. The damage is caused when they see a contradiction between Ahaziah’s 22 years in 2 Kings 8, and the parallel in 2 Chronicles 22, which gives 42 years for his age. Convinced that there is a glaring contradiction here, this destroys any further trust that they might have had in the accuracy of Scripture, and they feel they have a license to correct Scripture in many other places where there is no extant data showing an apparent contradiction.

Biblical chronology is surely one topic where it is not advisable to pre-judge the interpretation of any chronological data in the *Hebrew Scriptures* on some principle of Scripture which permits *only* a literal reading of the text (such as: “Ask a child . . .”). Such straight-jacketed principles will not allow the *Hebrew Scriptures* to convey their own subtle, unexpected truths on occasions. While extrabiblical sources may throw light on the Hebrew Scriptures, and even guide one toward a correct interpretation of them, they should never be permitted to supplant, correct, or contradict them. *Sola Hebraica scriptura*.³⁶

5. *Nehemiah dated according to a Persian dynasty.* A dynasty reckoning lies behind the statement in Neh 5:14, “Also, from the day that he appointed me to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the thirty and second year of Artaxerxes the king—twelve years—I,

³⁵ Cf. Gal 3:7, “know you, then, that those of faith—these are sons of Abraham.” Gentiles can be sons of Abraham if they have the same faith as Abraham, and do the same works: “They answered and said to him, ‘Our father is Abraham,’ Jesus says to them, ‘If children of Abraham you were, the works of Abraham you were doing’” (John 8:39).

³⁶ Anstey noted, “If we adhere to the facts as given in the Hebrew Text, and never so much as attempt to ‘emend,’ to ‘correct,’ or to ‘restore’ a single one of them, we shall find that we are here presented with a Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah which is at once both self-consistent, self-sufficient and correct in every detail” (*The Romance of Bible Chronology* I. 176). Unfortunately, Anstey did not follow his own counsel, see pp. 128 and 155.

and my brothers, the bread of the governor have not eaten.” The words “from the twentieth year . . . of Artaxerxes” mean, “of *the dynasty of Artaxerxes*,” because the dynasty started with Xerxes (486–465 BC), the greatest Persian king (according to Dan 11:2), and continued through his son, Artaxerxes I (465–424 BC). On the other hand, the same words in Neh 2:1 refer to the *personal* rule of Artaxerxes (that is, it refers to the year beginning Nisan 445 BC).³⁷

6. *Was Jehoiachin 8 or 18 years of age?* We have an apparent contradiction over the age of Jehoiachin when he became king. 2 Kgs 24:8 reads: “A son of eighteen years is Jehoiachin in his reigning, and three months he reigned in Jerusalem.” But 2 Chr 36:9 reads: “A son of eight years is Jehoiachin in his reigning, and three months and ten days he reigned in Jerusalem.” Predictably, scholars jumped to the conclusion that “ten” had dropped out through carelessness, because the LXX MSS have 18 years in both places.³⁸ Only Vaticanus agrees with the MT.

An alternative solution was that “a son of eight years” did not refer to the personal age of Jehoiachin but, like the case of Ahaziah, should be connected to another era, namely, the years of the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. It so happened that “the king of Babylon took him [*Jehoiachin*] prisoner in the eighth year of his reign” (2 Kgs 24:10). It is thought that the Chronicler has used Nebuchadnezzar’s reign as his era for working out the last years of the chaotic state in Judah. On the analogy of Ahaziah’s linkage to Omri’s dynasty, Jehoiachin has been linked to Nebuchadnezzar’s era. The Hebrew (some argue) should be translated as “a son of eight years [*according to Nebuchadnezzar’s reign*] was Jehoiachin in his reigning.” This would allow the “eighteen” to stand without any contradiction, because both chronological notices would then be just two ways of referring to the same year, namely, 597 BC.³⁹

I have argued elsewhere⁴⁰ that the eight years and the eighteen years both refer to Jehoiachin’s own personal age, because then Jehoiakim, his

³⁷ For a fuller discussion of this debatable point see Leslie McFall, “Was Nehemiah Contemporary with Ezra in 458 BC?” *WTJ* 53 (1991) 263–93, esp. pp. 272–75. However, since writing that article I would commence Nehemiah’s Governorship one year earlier, in 466 BC. His 12 years ran from Nisan 466 to Adar 454 BC, when he returned to Susa to become Artaxerxes’s cup-bearer. For the implications of this one-year change see Leslie McFall, “Do the Sixty-Nine Weeks of Daniel Date the Messianic Mission of Nehemiah or Jesus?” *JETS* 52 (2009) 673–718, esp. pp. 673–74.

³⁸ This was the conclusion of Larry and Marion Pierce, *Annals of the World* 907.

³⁹ See Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology* I. 223; and Floyd Nolen Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament* (16th ed.; Forest Green, AR: Master Books, 2007 [1993]) 192–93.

⁴⁰ I submitted a Ph.D. thesis in 1993 on “Jesus’ Genealogies: A Critical Survey of Ideas and Solutions,” to Glasgow University. The thesis was awarded a MA (Research) degree. On appeal, the Glasgow Senate Appeals Committee permitted a resubmission under the new title of, “Matthew’s Genealogy: The Omission of King Jehoiakim Viewed against the Background of Five Septuagint Chronologies,” in 1997. On resubmission this research was deemed useless, and the offer of the MA degree for the 1993 thesis withdrawn. On appeal, the Glasgow Senate Appeals Committee reinstated and awarded the MA (Research) degree in 1997. The contents pages of both theses can

father, could be removed from the kingly list in Matthew 1:11⁴¹ and so fulfil Jeremiah's curse that he was childless as regards the *written* paternity of Jehoiachin (Jer 36:30), and there would be no gap in the Davidic kingship, because father and son were joint kings. If Jehoiachin and his father, Jehoiakim, were both anointed as legitimate rulers *at the same time*, then Jehoiachin was eight years of age when he was made coregent and, like his grandfather Josiah, he began to reign at eight years of age.⁴² When Jehoiachin's father Jehoiakim died, Jehoiachin became sole king when he was eighteen years of age. So there is no contradiction in the chronological notices in these references. Rather, they complement each other. The Chronicler is writing in the light of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the legal (or prophetic) paternity of Jehoiachin, and this influenced the royal genealogy by the time it reached Matthew, who registers Jehoiachin as the "son" of Josiah, and not Jehoiakim. God insults Jehoiakim through Matthew's register of Jehoiachin's paternity, because he (Jehoiakim) tore up and burned Jeremiah's prophecies (Jer 36:21–23).

7. *Darius the Mede as the son of an era.* Another era reckoning is the unexpected notice in Dan 5:31, "and Darius the Mede received the kingdom, as a son of sixty and two years." Using the principle, "Ask a child what this verse means," would mean that it refers to Darius's personal age. If so, it is unique in the Bible to give the age of a foreign ruler, or a non-Israelite. So what was the point in giving this apparently extraneous piece of information? If it refers to Darius's age, then it is of passing interest, but if it is an era date, then it takes on a significance that transcends its words.

Daniel used three eras, each of seventy years duration.⁴³ There are two mentions of "sixty-two weeks" in Dan 9:25 and 9:26. These do not refer to the same chronological period, which has been the traditional, "ask a child" approach, despite the article being with the second occurrence of "weeks." However, in Dan 9:25, the 62 years are added to the preceding 7 "weeks" (that is, years), making 69 years to the coming of the messiah. This 62-year period is counted from the end of the Third Deportation. Consequently, the solution is simple. The 62 years of Dan 9:25 are counted from the end of the Second Deportation; the 62 years of 9:26 are counted from the end of the Third Deportation. The 62 "weeks" in 9:25 run from 528 to 466 BC, whereas the 62 "weeks" in 9:26 run from 516 to 454 BC.

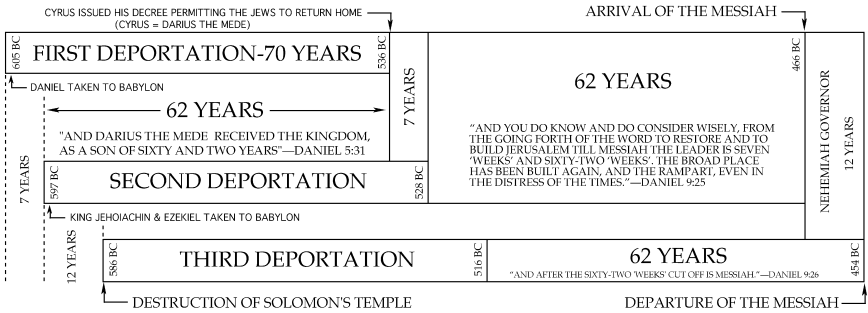
be viewed at www.btinternet.com/~lmf12. The 1993 thesis is available on Inter-Library loan. See the section 5.6 "Jehoiachin's Coregency" (pp. 162–67). The 1997 thesis can be consulted only at Tyndale House Library (Cambridge).

⁴¹ Jeremiah was told to write down Jehoiakim as childless (Jer 22:30; 36:30–31). It is for this reason that his name was removed from the record and Jehoiachin moved back one generation to be registered as the *direct* son of Josiah in Matthew's genealogy (Matt 1:11), on the analogy of Ephraim and Manasseh who were also created *direct* sons of Jacob.

⁴² See Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament* 192–94.

⁴³ For a fuller presentation of this interpretation, see McFall, "Do the Sixty-Nine Weeks of Daniel Date the Messianic Mission of Nehemiah or Jesus?" 694–702.

DANIEL'S THREE ERAS OF DATING



Now, besides these two references to the number “sixty-two,” we have a third one, apparently referring to the age of Darius the Mede.⁴⁴ It so happens that the year in which Darius “received the kingdom” from God, was the 62d year from the start of the Second Deportation, which coincided with the seventieth—and last—year of the First Deportation. Ezekiel used two of these eras *simultaneously* to date his Temple Vision in Ezek 40:1.

Instead of Dan 5:31 having a passing reference to the age of a foreign king, it may well be a vital piece of chronological data which numbered the years of the Second Deportation and noted that Darius the Mede came to the throne of Babylon in the 62d year of the Second Deportation. To call him “a son of the sixty-second year” is, as we have seen, a recognized way of referring to an era, or a dynasty, as well as to a personal age. Darius the Mede (who is Cyrus) was the product (“son”) of year 62 since the Second Deportation. Incidentally, this confirms that 536 BC, not 539 or 538, was the year in which Cyrus issued his decree granting the Jews their freedom to return to Judah.

8. *Absalom’s revolt dated according to an era.* There is yet another example of an era reckoning. This concerns the rebellion of Absalom. 2 Sam 15:7 reads: “And it happened, at the end of forty years, that Absalom said to the king [*David*], ‘Let me go, please, and I complete my vow that I vowed to Yahweh in Hebron.’” Now commentators have rightly pointed out that this event could not have happened in the fortieth year of David’s kingship because this was his last year. They also pointed out that all the events related

⁴⁴ If the text does give the age of Cyrus, then a male was born the year the Second Deportation commenced who would be their rescuer in 62 years time. *Seder Olam* reads: “What does the verse intend with the information that he was 62 years old? That on the day that Nebuchadnezzar entered the Temple in the days of Jehoiachin, his adversary Darius was born” (p. 241). Cf. also Broughton, *A seder olam* 17. Gouge and Gataker noted that Darius the Mede was born in the 8th year of Nebuchadnezzar, which was also the captivity year. He noted that “the Medes and Persians had a Prince born at this time; and to this purpose Daniel seems to tell the king’s age, to show how God provided a remedy when he struck them” (*Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* under Dan 5:31).

in 2 Samuel 15 to 2 Kgs 2:11 could not possibly be fit into one year. To get around the problem the forty was reduced to four.⁴⁵ This implied that the Hebrew text was in error. Yet the Hebrew has the support of all the Old Greek (ABCxa₂) and the Old Greek Revised (MNaghijnvb₂dpqzefmsw) manuscripts. The only group to support “four years” is the late Lucianic group, boc₂e₂ and MS u, which is an OGR manuscript influenced by the Lucianic group. The Lucianic group is a very late revision of the OG/OGR text, but pre-Josephus. This shows that the Hebrew number ‘forty’ predates the LXX translation.

William Dodd noted (in 1770):

The Syriac and Arabic, whom Houbigant follows, read ‘*After four years.*’ As there is no event from which the forty years can be dated with any shadow of argument, very great has been the distress of the advocates for that reading [that is, 40 years]. In support of ‘four’ are: Josephus, Theodoret; the mss mentioned in the benedictine edition of Jerome’s version; the canon of the Hebrew verity, (supposed to be made about the ninth century, and altered by some correcting hand); the reading of the famous Latin Bible of Sextus; the Latin manuscript in Exeter College library, marked C. ii. 13.; and the ancient Latin manuscript written in Gothic characters, and the variations of which are published in Blanchini’s [*sic*] *Vindiciae*, all have it *four*: so that Grotius, and after him Patrick,⁴⁶ were well supported in having pronounced so decisively, that it would admit of no doubt that an error had crept into the text, and that instead of $\mu\upsilon$ [*bra arboim*, *forty*, should be read [*bra arbo*, *four*. See Kennicott’s Dissertations, vol. ii. p. 358 and Houbigant’s note.⁴⁷

The main justification for reducing the forty to four was that there was no anchor date from which the forty could be counted from, while, on the other hand, the “four” could refer back to Absalom’s return from self-imposed exile in Geshur. However, some older commentators had correctly suggested that the forty might be counted from Samuel’s secret anointing of David to be the next king of Israel.⁴⁸ John Lightfoot, for example, suggested that Absalom’s

⁴⁵ NIV reads: “At the end of four years, . . .” The footnote justifies the removal of the Hebrew number with the comment: “Some Septuagint manuscripts, Syriac and Josephus; Hebrew *forty*.” It is misleading to use “some” here when, in fact, the footnote should have used the LXX evidence to support the Hebrew reading, as the ASV (1901) and the NASB (1977) have done. The ESV is more misleading in that its justification footnote is: “Septuagint, Syriac; . . .” This implies that the whole LXX tradition supports its text of “four years.”

⁴⁶ But Patrick rejected “four” and held that the 40 was from the secret anointing of David (A *Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* I.320). In this Patrick says he followed Archbishop Ussher’s explanation, for which see, Larry and Marion Pierce, *Annals of the World* 58.

⁴⁷ Dodd, *A Commentary on the Books of the Old and New Testament* under 2 Sam 15:7. Wall, *Critical Notes on the Old Testament* I. 211, suggested that the LXX was corrected from 4 to read 40, and the Hebrew scribes read 40 for 4. He rejected the private epoch of the secret anointing as an era. The embedded reference is probably to Guiseppa Bianchini (of Verona), who flourished between 1749 and 1754. He produced the influential work, *Evangeliarium quadruplex Latinae versionis antiquae seu veteris italicae nunc primum editum*. 2 vols. (4 bks), Romae, 1749.

⁴⁸ See Ussher, *Annals of the World*, §396; and Wall, *Critical Notes on the Old Testament* I.211.

rebellion occurred when David had ruled 35 years.⁴⁹ This left five years for all the events of 2 Samuel 15–2 Kgs 2:11. The solution of the second-century Jewish work, *Seder Olam Rabbah*, was that the 40 years were reckoned from the beginning of the Kingdom, or from the inauguration of Saul.⁵⁰ But a few clung doggedly to the fortieth year of David's reign,⁵¹ or the fortieth anniversary of the killing of Goliath.⁵²

9. *Hebronite records dated according to an era.* A second reference to the era of David's secret anointing is 1 Chr 26:31. Before David fled from Absalom to the Transjordanian part of his kingdom, he had examined his administration there *during* his fortieth year.⁵³ He looked up the records of men who would be suitable to oversee that part of his neglected kingdom and found a record of faithful men among the Hebronites, so he put them in charge of the Transjordanian territories. The text reads: "Of the Hebronite: Yeriyah is the head of the Hebronite, according to his toledoth, according to the fathers. In the fortieth year of the kingdom of David they searched and found among them prime men of valour in Yazer-Gilad. And his [Yeriyah's] brothers, sons of valour, are two thousand and seven hundred heads of the fathers. And David the king, made them inspectors over the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of the Manassites for every matter of God and matter of the king."

Since it is unlikely that David revamped his administration in the last year of his life, which was characterized by weakness and confinement to his bed, the only other fortieth year is the one from his secret anointing by Samuel. By placing his own family stock in charge of his Transjordanian territories this ensured that he would always have a secure bolt-hole to flee to should he, or any one of his successors, need one.

10. *Evidence for other eras in the Old Testament.* In the absence of a single era by which to date events, the years of a king's reign were the norm. However, national events, especially catastrophes, were used throughout the ancient Near East to mark the passage of time. Two years after the end

⁴⁹ See John Lightfoot, *The first Book of Samuel* (London, T. Badger, 1642; 206 pp.) 28. Others holding this view were Dodd, *A Commentary on the Books of the Old and New Testament* under 2 Sam 15:7; and Patrick, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* I.320.

⁵⁰ Reported by Patrick, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* II. 595. The majority of 17th and 18th century commentators accepted that the 40 years was taken from David's secret anointing. See Haak, *The Dutch annotations upon the whole Bible* under 2 Sam 15:7; and Gouge and Gataker, *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* under 2 Sam 15:7.

⁵¹ Gouge and Gataker, *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* under 1 Chr 26:31.

⁵² Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament* 101–02

⁵³ Following a major war between Israel and Ammon (capital Rabbah), which began in Nisan, David may have taken this opportunity to consolidate his hold over this territory by putting members of his own family in control. This would support the scenario that these things happened in David's 40th year from his secret anointing.

of Noah's flood Shem begat Arphaxad (Gen 11:10). A notable earthquake occurred "in the days of Uzziah" (Zech 14:5), and this became such a datum point. Amos dated his call to two years before this notable earthquake (Amos 1:1). We may be able to date the start of Amos's ministry if Isaiah's prophecy that the destruction of the northern kingdom (Ephraim) would occur "while still *in* the sixty-five year [from the earthquake]"⁵⁴ (Isa 7:8). The sixty-fifth year would date the end of Israel, as a nation, according to the Era of the Earthquake. Samaria was destroyed in 723 BC. Sixty-five years before this event would be 787 BC, when the earthquake occurred. Two years before this would be 789 BC, and the start of the ministry of Amos.⁵⁵ Given that Isaiah was given this prophecy while Pekah and Ahaz were contemporaries, the destruction of Samaria was no more than nine years in the future, and may have been much less than that. This makes it fairly certain that Isaiah's sixty-five years are an era reckoning, and that God did not prophesy the destruction of Samaria 65 years in advance of it happening.⁵⁶ Rather, he predicted it would happen in the sixty-fifth year (as I presume) of the Era of the Earthquake. The earthquake in Amos's day was so momentous that many may have seen it as a portent of a greater destruction still to come. It was a warning shot across the bows of Samaria, but it had no effect. Yahweh had called Amos two years previous to it, to warn Samaria to turn from her wicked ways. Consequently, since the number sixty-five is from the lips of Yahweh, he may have used this Era to remind Samaria of the "shaking" that he gave her in the past.

Ezekiel, apparently, dated the start of his ministry from the discovery of the book of the Law, which was made just before Nisan in a Jubilee year (beginning in Tishri, 623 BC).⁵⁷ The exodus from Egypt was also used as an era (Exod 19:1; 40:17; Num 1:1; 9:1; 33:38; Deut 1:3; 1 Kgs 6:1).⁵⁸ Enough has been brought forward in this section to establish the point that the Hebrews employed all kinds of datum points from which to locate their relative position in history.

⁵⁴ The word כְּעֵד "in yet," "in still (being)," is very precise, and means "while it is the sixty-fifth year." Cf. Gen 40:13, 19, 20, where it "came to pass on the third day"; Josh 1:11; Isa 21:16; Amos 4:7.

⁵⁵ Amos 1:1 should be translated, "which he saw in the days of Uzziah coregent of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Jehoash, coregent of Israel, two years before the earthquake." Where synchronisms are given in 1–2 Kings, it is usual to give the coregency figures, rather than the regnal years. Here, in 789 BC, Uzziah and Jeroboam were not kings but coregents.

⁵⁶ It is surprising to find this error in a modern work on chronology, see Larry and Marion Pierce, *Annals of the World* 905.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Seder Olam* ch. 26.

⁵⁸ The number sixty plays an important role in Israel's history.

$60 \times 4 \times 1 =$ From the birth of Abraham to the birth of Judah (ancestor of the Messiah; 2166–1926 BC)

$60 \times 4 \times 2 =$ From the exodus to the foundation of the First Temple (1446–967 BC)

$60 \times 4 \times 3 =$ From the birth of Abraham to the exodus (2166–1446 BC)

$60 \times 4 \times 4 =$ From the foundation of the First Temple to the birth of Jesus (967–6 BC)

$60 \times 4 \times 5 =$ From the birth of Abraham to the foundation of the First Temple (2166–967 BC)

$60 \times 4 \times 6 =$ From the exodus to the birth of Jesus (1446–6 BC)

$60 \times 4 \times 9 =$ From the birth of Abraham to the birth of Jesus (2166–6 BC)

Jesus commenced his messianic ministry at the start of the 30th Jubilee from the exodus in AD 25.

In Part II, I have established that the expression “a son of X years” normally refers to the physical age of an animal or man. But alongside this all-purpose usage, I have shown that the same expression can refer to an era or a dynasty. When used in this way it means that the person so designated is the product—the son—of that specific year. It is a means of identifying him with a specific year in the life of an era or dynasty.

The Davidic dynasty, which was destined to exist until the Messiah arrived to sit on David’s throne forever, began with the secret anointing of David as the first king of this everlasting dynasty. As such, the year of David’s anointing would become one of the pivotal dates in Israel’s history.⁵⁹ I have shown that two dates have been dated from this pivotal year.

But alongside all these competing and contemporary eras and epochs, a man’s own age was also a measure of the passage of time. In the case of a national hero, events could be tied in with his age. Since the physical age of king David was well known and each year of his reign was well documented, it would be easy to use his age and his reign as eras in their own right.

In Part III, I shall explore the idea that David’s physical age is the era being used to date the turning-point in Saul’s reign, namely, his rejection. If David was one year old when something happened in Saul’s reign, how would the historian link that event to David’s age? How would he word it? If Saul was rejected from being king three years after the birth of David, how would the historian link that event to the era of David’s birth? How would he word it? The Hebrew answer is 1 Sam 13:1.

III. DOES 1 SAMUEL 13:1 REFER TO SAUL’S AGE OR TO AN ERA?

1. *David’s life constituted a new era in its own right.* The whole of Saul’s 40-year reign is contained in 1 Samuel 9–31. The chart below is an overview of those forty years. We can fix with absolute certainty the first and last years of Saul’s reign, because he is followed by David, who is followed by Solomon.

Is it possible to decode the enigmatic dateline in 1 Sam 13:1? The answer is a cautious “yes.” If we take the second part of the statement in 13:1, it informs us that two years on from a fixed point Saul had entered the third year of an era, and what happened next—the battle of Michmash—occurred in the fourth year of this era, *not the fourth year of his reign*. So far there is no problem. The problem lies in knowing what was the fixed point from which the two years were counted. The ancient reader has already read the preceding chapters of 1 Samuel, and he knows that Saul has been described as a *bachur*, which refers to a man in the prime of manhood, a choice individual (1 Sam 9:2). He was taller than any Israelite, being head and shoulders

⁵⁹ The Chronicler regarded it as the start of the Davidic dynasty. David was anointed at Hebron “according to the word of the Lord through Samuel” (1 Chr 11:3), which is a direct reference to the secret anointing by Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 13:14).

over everyone. He was an impressive man. He had all the attributes of what a king should look like. He was no “son of a year,” but a fully, mature warrior.

Although the natural (that is, literal) interpretation is impossible here, it does have the merit that this is the standard way of referring to the age of a king on his accession. Compare the case of Rehoboam in 1 Kgs 14:21, “A son of forty-one years is Rehoboam in his reigning, . . .” and 1 Sam 13:1, “A son of a year is Saul in his reigning, . . .” The Hebrew texts read:

1 Kgs 14:21 בְּרֵאשִׁית שָׁנָה יְחַבֵּץ בְּמָלְכוֹ

1 Sam 13:1 שָׁנָה שְׂאוּל בְּמָלְכוֹ בֶּן־

Those who have opted to extract some kind of literal interpretation do so by using 1 Sam 10:6. Here Saul is regarded as “another man” when the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily upon him. This (they say) is the start of the numbering. His reign only lasted two years because the Philistines quickly re-established control over Israel so that only two swords were left in the entire country (1 Sam 13:22).⁶⁰ Others have used 1 Sam 15:35 as a turning-point. “Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again.” It was immediately after this that he secretly anointed David as king. Another suggestion was: “As for his being called the son of one year in Hebrew, it is well translated by us *reigned one year*; because he was *born*, when he was made King, and changed into another Man: For thus (as Bochartus hath observed) the Day of an Emperor’s Inauguration, among the Gentiles, was called his *Birthday*, viz. *Natalis Regni*, the Day when he began his Reign.”⁶¹

Pseudo-Philo mentions that after Saul’s anointing he fought with the Philistines for one year (*Bib. Ant.* 57.5). This could be a reference to Saul being a son of a year. If so, then the next two years were peaceful years, which would explain the statement that he reigned *peacefully* for two years and then he fought the Philistines *again* in the battle of Michmash.

The obvious alternative is that ‘the son of a year’ is the first year of Saul’s kingship. But verse 2 presents Saul’s son, Jonathan, as a fully grown man, and Saul’s second-in-command, which, as we have seen above, must place him in his early twenties at least. Due to the age of Jonathan, and the 40-year rule of Saul, it is not profitable to pursue this unlikely interpretation. A case can be made for the first year of Saul provided his length of reign is reduced to twenty years. But due to the uncontested forty years given in Acts 13:21 for the length of his reign it is not profitable to pursue this interpretation.

A second suggestion is that if we assume that the fixed point from which the two years are counted is the year in which Samuel anointed David to succeed Saul, then this would solve the problem regarding Jonathan’s age,

⁶⁰ *The Student’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (London: Chas. J. Thynne & Jarvis, Ltd., N.D.) 148. The anonymous author gives himself the pseudonym, in Hebrew characters, “A servant of Jesus the Messiah.”

⁶¹ Patrick, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* 2.223. Patrick supported a 40-year reign.

because if David was about eighteen years when he was anointed, and very shortly after this he killed Goliath, then, at 20–21 years of age,⁶² Jonathan could have been second-in-command. The traditional picture of David and Jonathan presents them about the same age. This would solve the problem of Saul's age because he could have been 20–25 years of age when he killed Goliath and would have been 60–65 years of age when he died, which seems a reasonable chronology.⁶³

Another advantage of this scenario is that the battle of 1 Sam 13:2–23 could be dated two years after the anointing of David, when he (David) would have been about 20 years of age. We would then need to leave time for the events of chaps. 14 and 15 to take place. The only snag with this solution is that the anointing of David took place *after* the events of chaps. 14 and 15. This conclusively rules out the solution that the two years are dated from David's anointing.

A third suggestion is that the fixed point is the birth of David in 1040 BC. From this point onwards David is contemporary with Saul for the next thirty years. Could David's years be the starting point for tracking events in Saul's life?

Now 1040 BC, David's birth year, was the eleventh year of Saul's reign. At the end of Saul's eleventh year, two more complete years follow, and then comes the battle of Michmash in Saul's fourteenth year.⁶⁴ Can the fixed point of David's birth accommodate all the data? It appears to do so.

If Jonathan was second-in-command at the start of the fourteenth year of Saul's reign, and he was about twenty-three years of age, then Saul could have been about thirty years of age when he became king,⁶⁵ at which time Jonathan would have been about ten years of age. So there is no problem with Jonathan's age.

Now if Saul's fourteenth year (1037 BC) was the year he usurped Samuel's role as God's priest, then we are given the exact year in which God rejected Saul as king. Chapters 14 and 15 would then fit between Saul's rejection and David's anointing to be his successor.

On this scenario, 1 Sam 13:1 would need to be translated as, "Son of a year [*in David's life*] is Saul in his reigning, and two years he reigned [*from the end of David's first year*]." We noted above that "son of a year" means a full year of twelve months. So when David was a full year, we must add two more full years to arrive at the date of the battle of the Michmash, which must have occurred in David's fourth year. This synchronism with David's age, if

⁶² Wordsworth, *The Holy Bible* 2.36, calculated that David was anointed at 18 and fought Goliath at 20 years of age.

⁶³ If Saul was 40 years of age when he became king and ruled for twenty years, then Jonathan would have been old enough to be second-in-command. This possibility would satisfy most of the biblical data, except for Acts 13:21.

⁶⁴ Saul's successor was chosen in his fourteenth year. Matthew's genealogy is structured on the numerical value of David's name, which is fourteen.

⁶⁵ This was suggested by Dodd, *A Commentary on the Books of the Old and New Testament* who followed Houbigant; see under 1 Sam 13:1.

correct, would give us an absolute date for Saul's rejection, namely, 1037 BC. By trial and error, it appears that the best fit for the unspecified datum point for identifying specific years in Saul's reign is David's age. Although the bedrock of Saul's chronology is David's age, it is clear that the new chapter in Saul's reign began when David was one full year of age. It is not clear what the event was that marked off this new chapter in Saul's reign (but see below for a possible event).

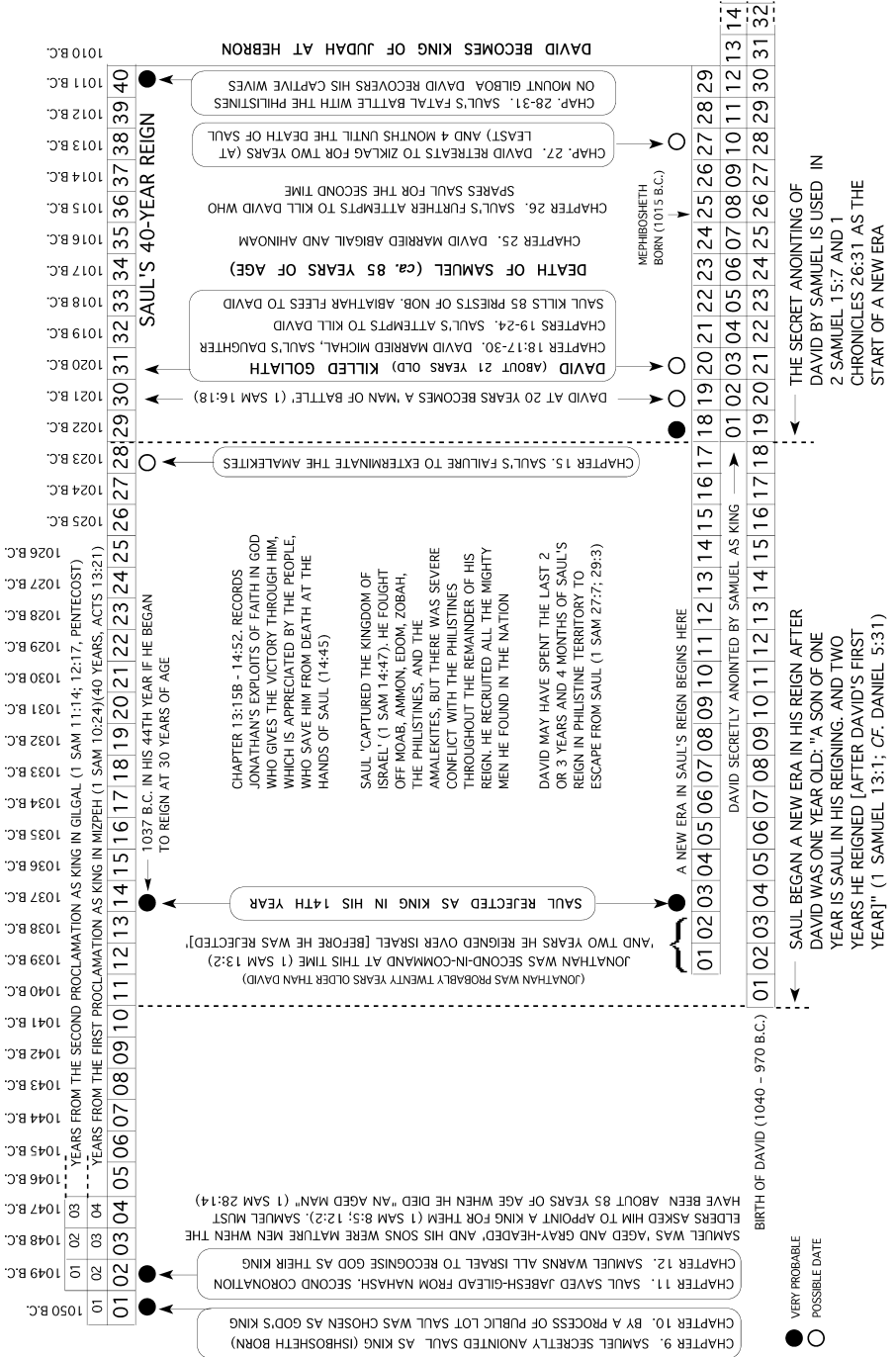
To conclude this section, on the one hand, we have to take the total in Acts 13:21 seriously—that Saul reigned 40 years in total. On the other hand, the formula in 1 Sam 13:1 is the one used for the start of a king's reign. These two facts can be resolved on the supposition that Saul had two distinct periods of rule, and that the second period has/had been linked to the era of David's personal age. It is at the start of this second period of rule that Saul takes it upon himself to build his first altar (1 Sam 14:35). Did Samuel hand over some of his priestly functions to Saul at this time? Or is this act a sign of Saul's new-found freedom to be totally independent of the aging Samuel? Samuel, the man of God, occupied the pivotal position of being the last and greatest of the judges (Acts 13:20) and the first of the prophets (Acts 3:24). At what point did Samuel hand over the military functions of being judge to Saul? When Samuel was sole leader, God communicated directly to him how his battles were to be fought. One presumes that this line of communication was retained after Saul became king, so that Samuel became mediator between God and Saul. Saul, however, arrogates to himself the power to decide the strategy of battle, until he is reminded by Ahiah the priest to consult God. Saul reluctantly enquires of God what strategy to use, but God ignores him (14:36–37).

A change in Saul's personality meant that even Samuel, a national figure, became frightened that Saul could kill him (1 Sam 16:2). The people are terrified to oppose him (14:39). He attempts to kill his own son, Jonathan, on two occasions (14:39; 20:33), and he has no hesitation in killing 85 priests of Nob (22:18). Whereas God blessed Samuel's rule with no war against the Philistines all the days of his judgeship (7:13), God plagued Saul with tough wars against the Philistines all the days of his rule (14:52). A change in God's relationship to Saul occurred very early in the second period of his rule. God no longer answers him by his usual methods (14:37). His Spirit leaves Saul and settles on David (16:14). Samuel is forced into the background, while Saul takes center-stage. I can only hazard a guess that there was some handover of Samuel's position and powers to Saul when David was one year old, and the biblical historian has used that official act of transition to count Saul's years from that time forward.

At this point, we can present the combined history of Saul and David.

The purpose of the dateline in 1 Sam 13:1 was to mark the termination of Saul's relationship with Yahweh (and Samuel), and to draw attention to the commencement of a new era with the birth of David. Although David was only three years of age, Yahweh set him apart to be the future king of Israel. The prophet-historian, with hindsight, used David's birth as the dateline on which, and along which, Saul and David would live out their lives.

THE FORTY-YEAR REIGN OF KING SAUL AS SET OUT IN 1 SAMUEL 9 - 31



David's birth year was an anchorage point from which ran a line stretching out into eternity. Saul's line, by contrast, was broken and petered out in a series of dots. It was fitting that the chronicler of Samuel chose to use David's dateline to mark his rising star and to mark the dimming of Saul's star from the birthday of David: "two years he reigned [*from David's first birthday*]" and then was irreversibly rejected and cast out of God's plan for Israel. A new chronological era began at 1 Sam 13:1 which has continued to the present day in the unbroken reign of Jesus Christ, the son of David, sitting on David's throne for all time to come.

1 Samuel 13:1 could be translated as: "A son of year *one* is Saul in his reigning, and two years he reigned over Israel" (1 Sam 13:1), provided that the "year *one*" here is understood as year one in the life of David, not in the life of Saul. David's life constituted the era used by the chronicler for Saul's reign at this point in time. To avoid possible confusion, 1 Sam 13:1 should be translated as: "A son of [*David's*] first year is Saul in his reigning, and two years he reigned [*from David's first birthday*]" when he was rejected. The additions in square brackets might raise some eyebrows, but we are back to the '10 problem. Contemporary notices, ancient and modern, do not always state the obvious, which, incidentally, might be evidence for 1 Sam 13:1 having been written close to the time of the events recorded in the books of Samuel.

2. *Saul's rejection has been accurately and deliberately dated.* The appointed sacrifices before each battle were performed by Samuel, and he made this clear at the outset to Saul in 1 Sam 10:8, which set the pattern he was to follow throughout his rule. Some commentators assume that 13:8 is a direct sequel to 10:8. It is not. Thirteen years had passed since Samuel laid down the pattern that Saul was to follow. First Samuel 13:8 represents the first time in the first thirteen years of Saul's rule where Saul felt he could dispense with Samuel, God's mouthpiece. Just as Moses displayed one act of stepping-out-of-line and was shut out of the Promised Land, so Saul's one act shut him out of God's plan for kingship in Israel. His Spirit departed from him, and came upon David.

If Saul's rejection took place at the beginning of David's fourth birth-year, then we have the earliest concrete date in Saul's biography, namely, 1037 BC. King Saul was a lame-duck king for the next fifteen years—up to the anointing of David. Even his son Jonathan lost faith in him. After one inappropriate military order Jonathan remarked, "My father has troubled the land" (1 Sam 14:29). Worse was to come. Saul was given a chance to redeem himself when he was set the task of exterminating the Amalekites, which he signally failed to do. The judgment of God dropped like the blade of a guillotine: "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king" (1 Sam 15:23). The finality of his rejection is conveyed to him by Samuel, "The Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind" (15:29), and, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbour who is better than you" (15:28). A black curtain of despair descended on Saul, and from this point onwards he behaves like a natural, unregenerate, Spirit-less man.

We have seen that wherever the phrase “son of X years” was used in the context of an era, the name of the era is always omitted, and 1 Sam 13:1 is no exception. From a Western point of view, we would have preferred if the name of the era had always been included to settle the matter once and for all. But in assessing the opinions of dozens of commentators from the seventeenth century to the present day on the problems associated with the eras uncovered in this article, it is surprising how little trust exists that the Hebrew text has been transmitted without some glaring and disfiguring errors, which they feel they are in a position to correct. The existence of these so-called glaring errors will dictate and shape one’s doctrine of the inspiration and infallibility of God’s Word. Where it is possible to remove the suspicion of carelessness in the transmission of God’s Word, this will embolden others to investigate other claims of carelessness in God’s Word in the hope that these, too, can receive a satisfactory solution and increase faith in the trustworthiness of the Word of God.

Now that we have the linchpin date for Saul’s rejection, 1037 BC, what light can this throw on the rest of the Saul–David chronology?

IV. THE CHRONOLOGY OF DAVID

1. *The date of the secret anointing of David by Samuel.* Can we date the exact year in which David was secretly anointed as the future king of Israel? There are two leads that give us a date, which were touched upon above. The first is 2 Sam 15:7 where we have the statement: “And it came to pass at the end of forty years, that Absalom said to the king.” The second lead is 1 Chr 26:31 where, “In the fortieth year of the kingdom of David they searched and found among them prime men of valour in Yazer-Gilad.” In the case of 2 Sam 15:7, most of the older commentators are agreed that the forty years must be dated from David’s secret anointing by Samuel.⁶⁶

The purpose of this section is to narrow down the date for the secret anointing of David by bringing together a number of undated events and to work out their relative sequence.

2. *How old was Solomon when he began to reign?* Two facts need to be taken into account. First, Solomon was married and had a one-year old son, Rehoboam, before he became king. Yet he describes himself as a “little child” when he contemplated the enormity of governing the entire nation. He must

⁶⁶ See Patrick, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* I.320, 560, who probably followed Ussher (*Annals of the World* 62, §443; cf. §396). *Seder Olam* (chap. 11) places the destruction of Shiloh 13 years before David became king, which, by coincidence, was when David was secretly anointed as Israel’s future king after Yahweh totally rejected Saul. Shiloh was also rejected at this time because it is placed 69 years after Jephthah’s claim (in his second year) to have ruled Transjordan for exactly 300 years. By coincidence, in my scheme, Jephthah’s dates are 1092–1086 BC. Sixty-nine years from 1091 is 1022 BC, which is the date that David was secretly anointed. *Seder Olam* (ch. 13) states that David was 29 years old when Samuel secretly anointed him. By coincidence, it was in the 29th year of Saul’s reign that David was anointed.

have been at least nineteen or twenty years of age in David's fortieth year.⁶⁷ This would place his birth about 989 BC.

Second, Solomon was born probably two full years after David committed adultery with Bathsheba to allow for the birth of the illegitimate child and the birth of Solomon. Now, because the siege of Rabbah took place "at the revolution of the year" (2 Sam 11:1), this would put the conception in the spring (Nisan). The illegitimate child would have been born in the winter and died soon after.

The chart above shows that David was about fifty years of age when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, when he was in the twentieth year of his reign. The adultery with Bathsheba was followed immediately, according to 2 Sam 12:24, by the birth of Solomon. Going by 1 Chr 3:5 (cf. 14:4–7) it might appear that Solomon was her fourth child: "And these were born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon—four, of Bathshua daughter of Ammiel." David had nineteen wives and concubines. Some suspect that Solomon's older brothers were the sons of Uriah whom David adopted. Another suggestion is that David had a number of concubines. If some of these were given by Bathsheba to David to raise up children on her behalf, such as Zilpah and Bilhah did for Jacob, then these could be accounted as Bathsheba's sons without being born from her. This would allow Solomon to be special if he was her only natural son by David, and this would explain why Solomon was promoted over his three older brothers. This would resolve the statements in 2 Sam 5:13–16 and 1 Chr 3:5.

However, there is another solution. David was at least twelve years in Jerusalem before he committed adultery with Bathsheba.⁶⁸ We read, "And David took for himself more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David" (2 Sam 5:13). It is highly unlikely that all his new wives and concubines were barren, so where are the names of these sons? I suggest we should read 1 Chr 3:5 as, "And these were born to him in Jerusalem [*of his first wives*]: Shimea, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon—four; *Solomon of Bath-Shua* daughter of Ammiel."⁶⁹ By inserting the name "Bath-Shua," followed by her identification as the "daughter of Ammiel," great care appears to be given to removing any doubt about the legitimate successor to David's

⁶⁷ According to Patrick, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* I.369, Rashi thought Solomon was 12 years old. Abarabinel thought he was 20 years old but might have been on the throne a few years with David. Moses called Joshua a "child" (Exod 32:10) when he was above 30 years of age.

⁶⁸ The twelve years are reckoned by subtracting the events between the adultery with Bathsheba and the death of Absalom (which comes to about 9 years) from the 40th year (983 BC) of David's secret anointing.

⁶⁹ It is likely that the Chronicler added "of Bath-Shua, of Bath-Ammiel" after the total, in an attempt to clarify beyond dispute who this "Solomon" was, because he has brought all of David's offspring together for the first time, presumably using lists which detailed the mothers of each son and daughter. The six Hebron wives are named but only one of David's many Jerusalem wives—the mother of Solomon, the future king of Israel—is named. If, as some believe, the name "Solomon" means "his replacement," then the word was open to confusion (see *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; 2 vols.; Leicester: InterVarsity, 2005) I.215.

throne. The reader is being left in no doubt that this Solomon was not a second Solomon, born to another wife who happened to have the same name as Bathshua. The full name "Bathshua daughter of Ammiel" is not accidental, but deliberate, and Solomon was her only son. The first three named sons were not sons of Bathsheba, but sons of David's wives prior to Bathsheba. After naming these four sons, nine more sons are mentioned, and the total is given as "nine" (3:6–8), without any names of mothers, which would suggest that the "four" in verse 5 was also a total without specifying any mothers originally. It may well be that the original text of 1 Chr 3:5 read: "And these were born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon—four," because of the parallel with the total "nine." Then, in order to secure Solomon's identification and right to succeed David the words "of Bath-Shua daughter of Ammiel," were added after "four," which were intended only to apply to the last-named "Solomon," and did not apply to all four named sons.

3. *Events between the birth of Solomon and the revolt of Absalom.* Note that David's adultery, the birth of the boy, his death, and the marriage to Bathsheba, all took place while Abner was besieging Rabbah, which siege ran from Nisan to the death of the boy in the winter months. A number of events have to be fit in between the birth of Solomon and the revolt of Absalom.

The first of these events was the rape of Tamar, sister of Absalom, by Amnon (2 Sam 13:1–22). This occurred *after* David returned from capturing Rabbah. The rape is introduced with the words, "And it came to pass after so, . . ." which suggests that it followed soon after David's victory, and most probably before the birth of Solomon.

The next event is Absalom's revenge, which is introduced with the words, "And it came to pass, after two years of days, . . ." The expression "two years of days" means two *full* years. The time of the murder took place while Absalom was shearing his sheep (2 Sam 13:23). This took place twice a year, in the spring (after lambing) and in the autumn.⁷⁰ After the murder, Absalom escaped to his wife's royal family in Geshur, and he remained there for three years (2 Sam 13:38). Joab schemed to reconcile Absalom to David and he succeeded. Absalom lived in Jerusalem "two years of days" (that is, two full years, cf. 2 Sam 14:28), after which Absalom met David his father face to face for the first time since he fled to Geshur five years earlier.

Following on from this ("And it came to pass, [*some time*] after so, . . .") Absalom went out of his way to become popular with the masses. This must have taken a year or two to achieve. His planned rebellion began to take shape when "he stole the heart of the men of Israel" (1 Sam 15:6) and sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel (15:10). The rebellion is introduced with the words, "And it came to pass at the end of forty years, that Absalom

⁷⁰ Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, *Harper's Encyclopedia of Bible Life* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1978) 130. Ussher, *Annals of the World* §438, placed the death of Amnon at the end of the spring, before the grain harvest (2 Sam 13:23).

spoke to the king” to let him visit Hebron.⁷¹ The request was granted and the rebellion burst into flame, probably in Nisan, 982 BC, at the start of David’s 29th year of rule, and the 59th year of his age. David fled to his Transjordanian territories and laid low there. The rebellion was very quickly brought to an end but not before the prophecies relating to the defilement of David’s wives was fulfilled (2 Sam 12:11; 16:20–23). Providentially, before David escaped to Transjordan he had revamped its administration “in the fortieth year” (1 Chr 26:31), and set over it men from Hebron, from his own tribe. Absalom died when he could only have been about twenty-four years of age in David’s forty-first year from his anointing by Samuel.

Now if we add together the spans of time mentioned from David’s adultery to the death of Absalom these are (a) a few months (possibly) between the end of the Rabbah war and the rape of Tamar; then (b), two years to the murder of Amnon; (c) three years for Absalom in exile; (d) two years back in Jerusalem before he met his father David; (e) allow eighteen months to two years to set up his network of spies and win over the masses (if this activity was not already included under (d)). The total comes to about nine years, or seven years if (d) is the same as (e). If we allow seven years minimum, then this would make Solomon nineteen years of age when he became king. If we allow nine or ten years for all these events, then Solomon would have been twenty-one or twenty-two years of age.⁷²

4. *From the end of Absalom’s rebellion to the death of David.* The Absalom/Sheba rebellion could not have occurred in the forty-first, or last, year of David’s reign because of the events which are recorded following his restoration to the throne.⁷³ These included a famine which ran for three consecutive years (2 Sam 21:1). When David enquired of Yahweh why this had happened he was informed that it was because Saul had unfairly put some Gibeonites to death.⁷⁴ This drew David into talks with the Gibeonites over compensation, but they demanded the death of seven of Saul’s descendants. David granted this and all was well again, or so it appeared.⁷⁵ However, David offended

⁷¹ Note that this event took place at the *end* of the 40th year, whereas the revamping of the administration of Transjordan took place *in* the 40th year. So the revamping preceded Absalom’s rebellion.

⁷² The *Seder Olam* (ch. 14) makes it eleven years and so Solomon was 12 years old when he became king, because it assumed that Absalom died in the 40th year of David’s reign, which means that the census also took place in David’s last year. The *Seder Olam* (ch. 14) makes the 40th year, the 37th year of David’s rule to allow for the 3 years of famine.

⁷³ John Richardson (Bp of Armagh), *Choice Observations and explanations upon the Old Testament . . . to which are added . . . observations . . . upon the whole Book of Genesis, perused and attested by the Rev. Bishop of Armagh and Mr Gataker.* (London: G. Stafford, 1655) 86, lists the events.

⁷⁴ There is no record of this injustice in Scripture.

⁷⁵ Given the ease with which Israel rejected David, it is not surprising that it took nearly 32 years before David was strong enough to take control of Saul’s bones (and those of his dead relatives) and rebury them in Saul’s family burial plot. By showing this respect to Saul and Jonathan he may have defused the resentment harbored by the northern tribes. In any case, the timing was determined by God, not David. God may put off exacting justice for a long time, but he has a way of tying up the ends in a manner and at a time of his choosing.

Yahweh when he forced Joab to take a census of the nation. This took 9.5 months to complete. Since the first of the harvests commenced at Passover, and the Gibeonites had exacted their revenge at that time, it is likely that the seed sown in the previous autumn, during a three-year period of drought, would not have yielded much grain in the fourth year. It seems certain that it was at the beginning of the fourth year that David ordered Joab to carry out a census of the people. It so happened that the fourth year from the revolt was a Sabbatical year (980/79 BC), so that there would not have been any harvest that year anyway, and being a rest year, it would have been ideal for carrying out a census.⁷⁶

At the end of the census-taking, Yahweh punished David by making him choose from three options: three days of punishment at the hand of Yahweh; three months fleeing before his enemies; or three years of famine (1 Chr 21:12). There is just one snag with these options. In the parallel passage in 2 Sam 24:13, instead of three years of famine it reads seven⁷⁷ years. Which is correct? Was there room between the forty-first year of David's anointing, and the fortieth year of his reign to fit seven years into? The answer is "yes," if Ezekiel's 390 years begins with the 29th year of David's official reign, which is 982 BC (see the next section). However, how are we to reconcile the length of the famine option: Did the prophet Gad say "three" or "seven" years? Apart from the standard comment that the Hebrew numeral letters three and seven were probably very much alike in the paleo-Hebrew script era, one way was to note that the number "seven" in Scripture can express intensity. Nebuchadnezzar "ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual" (Dan 3:19), "therefore, what the prophet threatened was a seven years' famine to last for three years. That is, the three-year famine was not to be a partial or light affliction, but a very dreadful and intense one."⁷⁸ It is a sad comment on modern commentaries that few investigate the discrepancy between the three and seven years of famine.⁷⁹

One of the oldest solutions is probably still the best. This solution suggested that after the Gibeonite three-year famine was over, David initiated the census in the very next year, in the fourth year, which triggered the

⁷⁶ The fourth year after the revolt was a Sabbatical year, according to J. Richardson, *Choice Observations and explanations upon the Old Testament* 86, and Ussher, *Annals of the World* 63 (§452). This is confirmed in the chart above and in the appendix to this article.

⁷⁷ Not a single LXX MS agrees with the Hebrew here. They all read three years, to harmonize with 1 Chr 21:13. However, Josephus, agrees with the Hebrew in having seven years. Patrick noted that most commentators in his day (that is, 1727) agreed with the LXX (*A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* I. 354).

⁷⁸ *The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (London: Chas. J. Thynne & Jarvis, Ltd., N.D.) 176.

⁷⁹ See P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel* (AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984) 505, where the sum total of the commentary is: "three So LXX, as in I Chr 21:12. MT has 'seven'." The same brief comment (sometimes not even that) and preference for the LXX 'three' appears in A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas: Word, 1989); Dale Ralph Davis, *Expositions of the Book of 2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1999); John Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971; Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel* (TOTC; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1988); and Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986) 319.

punishment options. If David had chosen the three years of famine and they were set in motion immediately, then there would have been six years of famine over a seven-year period. The middle, or fourth, year, may not have yielded very much if the farmers had no seed left over to sow after the Gibeonite three-year famine was over, making the fourth year almost a famine year in itself.⁸⁰

Now the author of the book of Samuel had included the story of the three-year Gibeonite famine, which Yahweh had initiated to bring about justice for the Gibeonites, so when Gad put the punishment options to David, he was doing so in the light that there had just been three years of famine and did David want three *more* years of famine on top of them? Hence Samuel gives us the original wording of Gad's offer to David, and it included the words "seven years of famine," meaning there would then be seven continuous years of poor harvests. He was not suggesting that Yahweh was presenting him with seven *more* years, on top of the three he had already endured, but seven *in total*. The Chronicler, on the other hand, deliberately left out the three-year Gibeonite famine in his account, and so, when he came to the punishment options, he rightly understood Yahweh was offering three years of famine, as a stand-alone offer. So both biblical authors were saying the same thing from two different historical perspectives.

What this means for the chronology of the last years of David's life is that he ruled at least seven more years after the Absalom/Sheba rebellion, otherwise if David had chosen the option of three more years of famine, and then died before they started, this would not have been a punishment that impinged on *him* but on the nation. Because of this Absalom's rebellion could not have occurred in David's last year, which was marked by some weakness confining him to his bed (1 Kgs 1:1). Indeed, details of the rebellion itself would exclude it. David is there presented as being fit and able to walk barefooted to the top of the Mount of Olives and then to cross the Jordan into safety.

In addition to this demonstration of fitness, after David was restored to his throne, he fought a battle against the Philistines, and nearly lost his life in the heat of it. His field-general, Abishi, had to rescue him. He told him, "Never again will you go out with us to battle" (2 Sam 21:17), for fear that David, who was now in his early sixties, might be killed. There followed three more battles with the Philistines. While these are placed before the taking of the census (chap. 24), their present position could be due to the author's desire to bring similar material together and move on to the enumeration of David's mighty men, which he touched upon at the end of chapter 21.⁸¹

⁸⁰ See Gouge and Gataker, *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* under 2 Sam 24:12 wrote: "The solution is we are to reckon in this number the three years of famine, ch. 1:21 inflicted for Saul's bloody sin, now already past, and the present year wherein God had sent seasonable rain, and some plenty; unto which, three years of famine being added, they do altogether make up these seven here mentioned." See also their comments under 1 Chr 21:12.

⁸¹ We see a similar dislocation in Ezra's account of the building of the Second Temple. At Ezra 4:5a the account is interrupted to bring together evidence of continual harassment from the

Some good resulted from the punishment options. The angel of death was stopped by Yahweh when he reached the threshing-floor of Arunah the Jebusite. The prophet Gad directed David to build an altar to Yahweh on that spot, which then became the site of Solomon's temple, because David bought it with his own money. It is likely that this happened at least a year or two before the end of David's life, because he set great store on amassing huge quantities of materials in preparation for the temple. Yahweh also showed him the plans of the temple, and this would have included the ground on which it was to be erected.

Certainly, in the last year of David's life, we have the attempted coup by Adonijah, which forced David to anoint Solomon prematurely. Later on, Solomon went through a more lavish and decorous coronation ceremony, but it would appear that if he was coregent with David, he declined to include that short period in his total of years reigned.⁸²

If we take the view that we must allow for at least seven years, plus another two for four battles against the Philistines, and another two in amassing materials and costly metals and jewels in preparation for the construction of Solomon's temple, this comes to about eleven years. There are twelve years between the end of Absalom's revolt and the death of David, *if* we use the dynasty reading of 2 Sam 15:7 and 1 Chr 26:31, and *if* we use the 390 years of Ezekiel 4:5 to guide us.

5. *The significance of Ezekiel 4:5.* Ezekiel 4:5 reads, "And I—I have laid on you [*Ezekiel*] the years of their iniquity, the number of days, three hundred and ninety days, and you have borne the iniquity of the House of Israel, . . . and you have borne the iniquity of the House of Judah forty days—a day for a year—a day for a year."⁸³ A debate, which we cannot go into here, surrounds the term "iniquity." Suffice to say here that E. W. Hengstenberg has argued that, "In this symbolic action the prophet takes the place of Israel. To take iniquity upon him (not bear: this the word never means), means always to answer for it, to suffer punishment for it."⁸⁴ This task was given to Ezekiel in the fifth month of the fifth year when he was in exile with King

days of Cyrus (536–530), Xerxes (486–465), Artaxerxes I (465–424), up to the 2d year of Darius Nothus II (424–405). This is contained in 4:5b–24 and covers a period of 112 years. At Ezra 5:1 we are taken back to 4:5a, to the building of the Second Temple, and the account comes forward in chronological order to the end of Ezra (10:44). In Ezra 1–4, "Darius" is Darius II; in Ezra 5–10, "Darius" is Darius the Mede (aka, Cyrus; see McFall, "Do the Sixty-Nine Weeks of Daniel Date the Messianic Mission of Nehemiah or Jesus?" 688 n. 38).

⁸² Ussher, *Annals of the World* 63 (§460), put the coregency at six months, which is about right, because David is credited with 40.5 years, which has been rounded down to 40 due to failing health at the end.

⁸³ Samaria was situated on the left of Judah, and Sodom on his right, showing that the speaker is orientated toward the east (cf. Ezek 16:46). In Western civilization the speaker is orientated toward the north pole.

⁸⁴ E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1869) 45.

Jehoiachin (Ezek 1:2). This was late in the summer of 593 BC. Many make the mistake of counting 430 (390 + 40) days from Ezekiel 1:1 to 8:1,⁸⁵ but it must be counted from a week later than the date in 1:2, that is, from 3:16.⁸⁶

While it is possible to use the number 390 to settle a strategic date in David's history, it is not at all clear what the iniquity of Judah was that Ezekiel was expected to bear.

6. *Solutions to the enigma of Ezekiel 4:5.* Ezekiel 4:5–6 has remained an enigma almost from the day it was penned: "The interpretation of these verses is problematic, and the number [390 days] has puzzled interpreters since antiquity. . . . The period of 390 years is not susceptible to any satisfactory interpretation. The LXX contains entirely different figures. Their significance is easier to understand, but they are suspect for that very reason, and it is likely that the numbers in the MT are original, whatever their meaning."⁸⁷

The LXX translators altered 390 to 190 years and this total included the 40 years that applied to Judah. This was an attempt to apply the numbers to the time that both Israel and Judah were in exile from Canaan. For this reason, many commentators rejected the Hebrew numbers and praised the LXX translators for having preserved the true, original numbers.⁸⁸ Most commentators prefer the LXX to the Hebrew. William H. Brownlee settled for the LXX text and noted that there are 150 years from Jotham to Jehoiachin,

⁸⁵ Cf. Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20* (Concordia Commentary; ed. by Dean O. Wenhe; St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2005) 159.

⁸⁶ Patrick noted the objection that there is not enough time for 430 days between Ezek 1:2 and the next date in 8:1, but that may be answered (he said) by supposing this to be an intercalary year, and pointed to Prideaux, *Scripture History*, par. i. p. 281 (*A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* (1822, IV. 8). An intercalated year in Judah's calendar, it is true, would have provided 404 + 30 = 434 days from 1:2 (really from 3:16) to 8:1. Without an intercalated month, there are fourteen full months and parts of two months (about 404 days in total) between the first dated vision (Ezek 1:1) and the second (8:1). The year Nisan 593 to Nisan 592 BC was preceded by an intercalated month (Addaru) according to the Babylonian calendar (see Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.–A.D. 75* [Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1956] 28). However, the Babylonian intercalation is irrelevant because Ezek 1:1 dates the start of Ezekiel's fast from the fourth month (Tammuz) following this intercalation. There are two solutions. First, if Judah followed a Tishri-Tishri year (which is unlikely), and accepted the Babylonian intercalation, then the intercalation would provide an extra month. Second, if Judah's intercalation was a year later than Babylon's, then this would give an extra month. Either of these solutions would mean that Ezekiel's 430-day fast was over by 8:1, which reveals Ezekiel sitting in his own house, free of his bonds. The reference to Prideaux, *Scripture History*, could be to Humphrey Prideaux, *The Old and New Testament connected in the history of the Jews and neighbouring nations, from the declension of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah to the time of Christ* (Dublin, 1719; 9th ed.; 4 vols.; London, 1725; 4 vols.; Oxford, 1820; 25th ed.; 2 vols.; London, 1858). In the 1719 edition (p. 35) and in the 1820 edition (1.121–22), there is a section dealing with the 390 days but no reference to an intercalary year. He accepted the 390 day-years to run from Jeroboam to the destruction of the Temple, and Judah's 40 days to run from the 18th year of Josiah and represents Jeremiah's 40 years of unfruitful labors, which he likens to the 120 years of Noah's fruitless preaching.

⁸⁷ *Harper's Bible Commentary* (Gen. ed. James L. Mays; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) 665.

⁸⁸ See *The New Bible Commentary* 649. See also John Skinner, *The Book of Ezekiel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909) 62.

provided that 12 years are deducted for the synchronism at 2 Kgs 17:1.⁸⁹ He calculated that the year 558–557 BC was to mark the unified kingdom under a new David (37:15–24).⁹⁰

Some suggested that the 150 years started with Ezekiel's deportation in 597, some with the date of the prophecy itself, namely, 593 BC, and were to be counted backwards from this date toward the fall of Samaria in 722⁹¹, or better still, to the start of the Syro-Ephraimite war in 734.⁹² In this way, they got close to the 150 years. They did the same for the 40 years of Judah, applying it to the period Judah was in exile. Some counted forwards from 597, or better still from 586, to end in 538, the year of Judah's release from exile.⁹³ But all these attempts to follow the LXX were admitted to be forced and contrived, because there did not appear to be any other avenue open to them to solve the enigma. But others were deeply suspicious of the LXX for the very reason that the MT numbers appeared to be altered to fit the facts on the ground.

Those who reverted to, or stuck by, the Hebrew numbers did not know what to make of them. Most of them suggested that the 390 years began with the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon, but their dates for that split differed widely among themselves.⁹⁴ Others suggested that the 390 years began somewhere in the Judges period but they could not agree among themselves what years should be included and what excluded to arrive at a total close to 390 years. Theodore Haak suggested that,

⁸⁹ A frequently mistranslated chronological notice is 2 Kings 17:1, which should be translated as: "In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah HAD REIGNED in Samaria over Israel nine years." See McFall, "A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles," 33. Most English versions make the 12th year the *starting-point* ("began to reign"), when, in fact, it is the *terminus-point* of Hoshea's reign. Some OG MSS (including Vaticanus) and PL correctly used the aorist tense here (the Greek perfect tense would have been even more precise).

⁹⁰ William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19* (WBC 28; Waco, TX: Word, 1986) 68. See also John T. Bunn who remarked: "One of the many unresolved enigmas in the book of Ezekiel has to do with the 390-year period of punishment for Israel" (Broadman Biblical Commentary; Nashville: Broadman, 1971) 6.245.

⁹¹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20* 155.

⁹² See *The New Bible Commentary* 649, which takes the 148 years to be close enough to the 150 years of the LXX.

⁹³ See *The New Bible Commentary* 649, which considers the 50 years to be close enough to the 40 years allocated for Judah's exile. Anstey calculated the 40 years from the 13th year of Josiah (626 BC) to 10th year of Zedekiah (587 BC), which, he noted, is all of Jeremiah's ministry (*The Romance of Bible Chronology* I.225). If so, what was Judah's *unique* iniquity in this period?

⁹⁴ Cf. *Seder Olam* ch. 26. G. A. Cooke, *Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936) calculated the time to be 394 1/2 years (wrongly, as it turns out; it is 346 years). Likewise Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament* 132–35, who used 390 to determine the period from the death of Solomon to the death of Zedekiah, but he has no solution for Judah's 40 years. Patrick concluded that the 390 years started with Jeroboam setting up the golden calves, and ended with the captivity of the Jews in the 23d year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 52:30). He also suggested that the 40 years of Judah are from the 18th year of Josiah when they renewed the Covenant of which later they were in breach. He gives Scaliger's view that the 40 years commence with Jeremiah's mission, which was the 13th year of Josiah, and went on to the last year of Zedekiah, which (he claimed) was just 40 years. It is, in fact, 42 years (*A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha* [1822] 4.8).

The 390 are from the defection of the ten tribes under Jeroboam, 1 Kgs 12:26; 2 Chr 10:16, whereupon also immediately followed the defection of the Jews [= Judah], 1 Kgs 14:22; 2 Chr 12:1., and ended with the siege and taking of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple by Nebuch . . . with this proviso, that among the 390 years are also comprehended the 40 years mentioned in the former verse. Some begin to count the years from the 27th year of Solomon when he and the land began to fall into open idolatry, 1 Kgs 11:4.⁹⁵

William Gouge collected a number of suggestions: "Some begin the 390 years from the 27th year of Solomon when he and all Israel fell away into idolatry, and end them in the 5th year of Zedekiah's [*sic.* Jehoiachin's] captivity (Jer 52:30), having burnt the Temple 4 years before (Jer 52:12, 13, 30). Others begin from the 4th year of Rehoboam when he and Judah forsook the Law, 2 Chr 11:17; 12:1–2. Others from the division of the kingdom and end in the 11th year of Zedekiah."⁹⁶

Some added the 390 years to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC to yield 976, which, it was thought, was close to the transfer of the "glory of Yahweh" from the Tabernacle to the Temple. The "iniquity" is dated from Solomon's apostasy.⁹⁷ Others calculated that the 390 years covered the period from the golden calves of Jeroboam to the Babylonian captivity, that is, 975 to 585 BC,⁹⁸ and that the 40 years included part of Manasseh's 55-year evil reign. The use of Num 14:34 with its repetition of "a day for a year, a day for a year," was deliberately taken up (said some) by Ezekiel to picture the future under the image of the past.⁹⁹ The frustration to find an anchor date from which to count the 390 day-years of punishment has been summed up as follows: "Thus the whole history of the north would have to be seen as a period of punishment, a proposition that makes no sense. If the 390 years are calculated from the fall of Samaria in 722/21 BC, then the prophet would be indicating a period of punishment that would end much later than the one projected for Judah."¹⁰⁰ It is suggested in *The Interpreter's Bible* that the 40 years were from 596 to 538 "in round numbers," and that 390 years before 538 would be in the middle of the schism, "but this makes little sense," it was rightly concluded. It noted that there are 393 years from Rehoboam to Zedekiah in 1–2 Kings.¹⁰¹ Also, that the 190 of the LXX is from the Syro-

⁹⁵ Haak, *The Dutch annotations upon the whole Bible* under Ezek 4:5.

⁹⁶ Gouge and Gataker, *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* under Ezek 4:5; and Hengstenberg, *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated* 46.

⁹⁷ So Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 178.

⁹⁸ Cf. Ussher, *Annals of the World* §§481, 743, 867. Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament* 326, who forced the duration of the Northern Kingdom to fit into these 390 years.

⁹⁹ R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical of the Old and New Testaments* (6 vols.; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, and Company, [n.d.]) 4.214.

¹⁰⁰ *Harper's Bible Commentary* 665.

¹⁰¹ The correct figure is 346 years. Virtually all studies and commentaries pre-dating Thiele's 1951 work are useless for precise dating of events during the monarchy period. This applies especially to the chronologies of Ussher (1650), Kamphausen (1883), Rühl (1894), Anstey (1913),

Ephraimite war of 734 BC to 538 BC.¹⁰² It is quite common to find many commentators including Judah's 40 years as part of the total of 390 or 190 years. This is a surprising error given that Ezekiel was to lie on his right side for 40 days, to represent Judah, and on his left side to represent Israel. This faulty exegesis is the legacy of the LXX interpretation.

Some tried to link the days with the days of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem on the assumption that it lasted about eighteen months.¹⁰³ The suggestion is that there were 390 days before the Egyptians caused the Babylonians to break off the siege,¹⁰⁴ and when the siege was resumed, it lasted a further forty days. This interpretation was an attempt to relate the numbers to the context of the siege of Jerusalem, which most interpreters have ignored. Ezekiel's punishment took place in front of his model of the city of Jerusalem. What was the connection, they asked, between his days of punishment and the model siege?

Some looked for a 40-year period of iniquity, while others looked for a 40-year period of punishment for iniquity.¹⁰⁵ For some, the 40 years of iniquity began in the 13th year of Josiah (627 BC).¹⁰⁶ Others regarded the 40 years as the duration of the Babylonian exile.¹⁰⁷ This is a surprising error given that 70 full years were predicted and fulfilled. *Seder Olam* took the 40 years to be "from the time the Ten Tribes were exiled to the destruction of Jerusalem,"

Kugler (1922), Coucke (1925), Lewy (1927), Begrich (1929), Mowinckel (1931), W. F. Albright (1945), G. Larsson (1973), E. W. Faulstich (1986), J. H. Hayes and P. K. Hooker (1988), J. Hughes (1990), W. H. Barnes (1991), Gershon Galil (1996), M. Christine Tetley (2005), and Charles Ozanne (2009). Thiele's chronology is fast becoming the consensus view among Old Testament scholars, if it has not already reached that point. "The chronology most widely accepted today is one based on the meticulous study by Thiele"; so wrote D. J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings* (TOTC; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1993) 27. Some commentators are caught out using pre-Thiele chronologies because they have relied on older works while composing their 'modern' commentaries. It is very common to find the return from exile dated to 538 (or even 539), when the correct date is 536 BC. See McFall, "Do the Sixty-Nine Weeks of Daniel Date the Messianic Mission of Nehemiah or Jesus?" 688–89.

¹⁰² *The Interpreter's Bible* (gen. ed. George Arthur Buttrick; 12 vols.; New York: Abingdon, 1956) 4.87.

¹⁰³ So Josephus (*Antiq.* 10. §§116, 131) who made the mistake of assuming Zedekiah's regnal years ran from Nisan to Nisan. In fact they ran from Tishri to Tishri. The mistake has misled all who followed his chronology. Cf. Charles Gore, H. L. Goudge, and A. Guillaume, *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture including the Apocrypha* (London: SPCK, 1928) 526. The siege did not last 18 but about 32 months (Dec 18, 589 to July 20, 586 BC); see McFall, "Do the Sixty-Nine Weeks of Daniel Date the Messianic Mission of Nehemiah or Jesus?" 689.

¹⁰⁴ So Gore, Goudge, and Guillaume, *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture including the Apocrypha* 528. The number 390 is derived from the numerical value of *ymy mtsr*, "days of siege" (4:8; 5:2); see Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* 177 n.

¹⁰⁵ *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (Gen. ed. of OT, Edmund F. Sutcliffe; London/New York: Thomas Nelson, 1953) 606. This work denied that the numbers could have anything to do with the siege of Jerusalem. There was only one solution; they referred to periods of exile; Israel's 190 years [LXX] from 721–538, and Judah's 40 years from 587 to 538 BC.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Hengstenberg, *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated* 47. Larry and Marion Pierce, *Annals of the World* 904-05 took 586 BC to mark the end of both the 40-year and the 390-year periods. This overlap contradicts the Hebrew text.

¹⁰⁷ *Harper's Bible Commentary* 665.

which is very odd since Samaria was destroyed in 723 and the Temple in 586 BC, which is 137 years.¹⁰⁸

Having exhausted the possibilities using the Greek and the Hebrew numbers, many gave up and looked for a symbolical solution.¹⁰⁹ The numbers 40 and 430 (adding 390 to 40) lent themselves to all sorts of symbolical meanings. They explored what 40 meant in symbolical negative language and how it might apply to Judah. These ranged from the 40 days of torrential rain in Noah's flood, to the wilderness period, to Moses' 40 years in exile, and to anything else that had a negative connotation. They did the same for the symbolical meaning of the 430 years, mainly latching on to the 430 years in Egypt, but also in the mistaken belief that "from the foundation of Solomon's temple to the destruction of the state under Zedekiah was 430 years and 6 months."¹¹⁰ There was a set-back when it was pointed out that whereas the 430 years in Egypt was not due to sin on the part of the patriarchs, Ezekiel's 430 years were definitely seen as punishment for iniquity. Charles John Ellicott opted for the 40 years in the wilderness to explain Judah's 40 years. Judah was to endure "sufferings corresponding to the Egyptian bondage, but in another locality." He linked this to Deut 28:68 and Hos 8:13; 9:3; 11:5. He suggested that the numbers become mere catch-words to carry the mind back to the period God would indicate. Ellicott argued that no precise period whatever is intended by the mention of the numbers (430, 390 and 40), but only a vivid comparison of the future woes to the past.¹¹¹

All were agreed that there was no symbolical significance for the number 390 in Scripture. However, J. P. Lange gave the view of Kliefoth who, by comparing Deut 25:3 with 2 Cor 11:24, and noting that "Israel" constituted ten tribes, arrived at 10×39 years of punishment as just so many strokes of divine chastisement; and for Judah, on the other hand, as Ezekiel does not treat it as two tribes, by a fair adjustment he arrives at the highest legal number of 40 strokes.¹¹² That Judah had to receive the full 40 lashes, rather

¹⁰⁸ Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* 224. The *Seder Olam* is a mixture of fantasy and purported fact. Occasionally it contains a mite of truth in a confused context, but not in this instance, because it states that Rebecca was three years of age when Isaac married her (15); that Jacob begat ten sons and one daughter in seven years, each child after seven months' pregnancy, and all were born as twins (except Joseph), and Joseph married Asenath the daughter of Dinah (p. 23); his brothers married their own sisters (p. 27); that the house of Obed Edom consisted of 68 males which meant that Obed Edom's wife and daughters-in-law all had sextuplets, and had live births after pregnancies of two weeks each (p. 26), or a new baby every month (p. 131); etc. Incidentally, Anstey omitted the years of Judah's three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah, and started his calculations with Perez! This resulted in a loss of about 20 years (see p. 123).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Hummel, "I frankly find a cautious typological hermeneutic for these enigmatic numbers very attractive, although I am not willing to commit myself to specific chronological applications" (*Ezekiel 1-20* 157).

¹¹⁰ So Hengstenberg, *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated* 47, who relied on Vitringa's chronology (Campegius Vitringa, *Hyptoyposis Historiae et Chronologiae Sacrae*. Leeuwarden, Netherlands: n.p. 1698). The actual time is 382 years (967-586 BC).

¹¹¹ Charles John Ellicott, *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers* (5 vols.; London: Cassell and Company, 1897) 5.349.

¹¹² John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical*, . . . (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, [1876]) 79.

spoiled the neatness of the theory, not to mention the missing eleventh tribe! Wordsworth may have been aware of this interpretation, for he remarked: “the numbers were symbolical. 390 = 10 × 39, and 39 is short of 40, which 40 is a symbol of *trial ending* at length in some great issue, in victory to the good, and ruin to the evil. See Gen 7:4; Mt 4:2, Acts 1:3.”¹¹³

Alongside the above, and having explored the Greek and Hebrew numbers, and their symbolical meaning, and having given up all hope of finding any historical event as a *terminus a quo* or *ad quem*, it was suggested that the numbers did not apply to the past, but to the future.¹¹⁴ This sparked off a new round of debate, especially when it was discovered that the Qumran community interpreted it this way in the document known as the Damascus Community, which states (after announcing the coming eschatology), “God hid His face from Israel and His temple and put them to the sword. He will leave a remnant for Israel and will not hand them over to complete destruction. And towards the end of the epoch of anger—three hundred and ninety years following God’s handing them over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—He will remember them.”¹¹⁵ New attempts to anchor the *termini* in important events in the Maccabean period were put forward, the favorite being 167 BC, the start of the Maccabean revolt.

Having approached Ezek 4:5 from every possible angle, literally, historically and symbolically, and applied human ingenuity to its limit to solve the puzzle, the modern consensus is that the enigma is here to stay; the key to its interpretation has been irretrievably lost. C. J. Ellicott spoke for most commentators when he observed: “So much space has been given to these different interpretations in order to show that there is no definite term of years, either before or after the date of the prophecy, which the ingenuity of the commentators has been able to discover, satisfying the conditions of the prophecy itself.”¹¹⁶

7. *A new solution to the enigma of Ezekiel 4:5.* The suggestion being put forward in this place is that Ezek 4:5 relates to kingship and specifically to kingship not *initiated* by Yahweh for his people. The setting for the symbolic act of Ezekiel lying on his side, bound with cords, unable to move for 390 days, and then turning over, and lying a further 40 days on his right side, was not

¹¹³ Wordsworth, *The Holy Bible* 5.166.

¹¹⁴ Dodd, *A Commentary on the Books of the Old and New Testament* who relied on Calmet’s *Dissertations*. See also Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel* (NAC 17; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 95. Cooper 94–95 concluded: “Attempts to work out a literal timetable for placement of 390 years and forty years prior to the destruction of either Israel or Judah have never succeeded in producing a workable chronology. . . . Although no workable solution to the problem of a literal chronology of the day-years has come to light, a literal interpretation in principle is still preferable to a symbolic one.” This was also the conclusion of H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 33. See also Ellicott, *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers* Appendix B (5.348–49). He noted that the rabbis, and some early Christian leaders, interpreted the 430 years to extend into the future from the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70, in the second year of the Emperor Vespasian, but he wryly concluded, history has shown this to be false.

¹¹⁵ Ben Zion Wacholder, *The New Damascus Document* 27.

¹¹⁶ Ellicott, *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers* 5.349.

the idea of Ezekiel.¹¹⁷ The idea, the words, and the calculations came from Yahweh.¹¹⁸ The controller of history was about to terminate *defective*, human kingship among his people. It had been a failure.

Ezekiel was to create a model of Jerusalem using a brick, sit in front of it, roll up his sleeve and, as it were, imitate Yahweh shaking his fist in extreme anger at Judah and Jerusalem. In this model city was the last king of Judah—cornered and powerless. With his death, the lamp of kingship would be extinguished forever in Judah, until the Messiah arrived. Through Ezekiel, Yahweh took the long view of kingship among his people. In Samuel's day he did not want it. He was against it *at that point in time*. He, and he alone was the King of Israel, his chosen nation. It is now possible to see a connection between the siege and the years of worldly kingship among God's people.

a. *Legitimate kingship located in the tribe of Judah.* Yahweh honored Abraham by informing him that out of his seed would come rulers of his people (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11; cf. 36:31). Through the Blessing of Jacob, the future rulers of his people were identified as coming through Judah and only through Judah (Gen 49:10; 1 Sam 2:1–10, 35; Num 24:17; Rev 5:5–10). Legislation was drawn up in advance anticipating the emergence of divine kingship in Israel. The king's powers were given to him by God (Deut 17:14–20; 1 Sam 8:9–22). They would be his vice-regents on earth, and in Jerusalem, in particular, where the throne of God was set up.

Yahweh honored Judah with the gift of leadership. Judah showed early promise of this, sometimes badly, as in the case of selling Joseph into Egypt (Gen 37:26), sometimes with honor, as when Jacob chose him to prepare the way before him to settle in Egypt for the next 430 years (Gen 46:28; cf. 43:3, 8; 44:14, 16, 18). Jacob knew early on the significance of Judah's role as the leading tribe in Israel. Jacob predicted that his brothers would bow themselves to him (Gen 49:8; cf. 1 Chr 5:2; 28:4). When Israel came out of Egypt and the tabernacle was set up, it was Judah who offered the first sacrifices (Num 7:12). Judah was placed in the prime position, east of the tabernacle, and his tribe led the army of Israel on its conquest of the Promised Land (Num 2:3, 9; 10:14). After Israel entered the Promised Land and after the death of Joshua and his elders, they asked God who should lead them, he directed them to the tribe of Judah (Judg 1:2). When they asked him again over the incident of the decimation of the tribe of Benjamin, who should lead them, he again directed them toward Judah (Judg 20:18).

¹¹⁷ It has become fashionable to deny that Ezekiel actually went through with the command because of the implausibility that he could lie still for 190 days. It is passed off "as a poetical way of expressing [his] message in parabolic or pictorial form." So Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (London: SCM Press, 1970) 83.

¹¹⁸ That the days do not relate to the quantity of sins is clear from Ezek 16:51, where Yahweh said that Samaria did not commit half the sins of Judah, and that Samaria was more righteous than Judah (Ezek 16:52; 23:11). We appear to be dealing with some kind of low-level, persistent deviation from God's will for his people, which is not to go unpunished, even if it is vicarious.

b. *Human kingship reluctantly granted to Israel.* Eventually, Israel clamored for a human king, to be like all the nations around them. Yahweh was angry and disappointed at this request. He informed Samuel that the nation was not rejecting him but God (1 Sam 8:7; cf. Ezek 3:7). The hankering after kingship had a recent history. Gideon (1198–1158 BC) was asked to be king but he refused it (Judg 8:22–23), and Abimelech (1158–1155 BC) proclaimed himself king, but was rejected (Judges 9). What must have disappointed Yahweh most was the silence of Judah, the tribe he chose, and from whom his rulers were to come. They joined in the clamor for a human king and they forgot their birthright. They allowed the other eleven tribes to take over their rightful role as leader of God's people. *This was their iniquity.* The people recognized it as a sin (1 Sam 12:19). We can appreciate the hurt felt by God with their collective demand, "Give us a *human* king to judge us" (1 Sam 8:6). The request displeased Samuel and it displeased God. It was a deeply hurtful thing to say to God. They were fed up with his method of governing them. They wanted change.

God gave in to the evil request of the tribes, and to show his disapproval of Judah's betrayal, he chose the smallest and most insignificant of Jacob's twelve sons to bring out a king specifically chosen to appeal to the eye of man. That man was Saul, a Benjaminite. He stood head and shoulders over every other man in Israel. He looked the part, and he acted the part, but he was not a man after God's own heart. For forty years Yahweh permitted this non-Judahite man to rule his people. The shame of the highest office in the land going to the runt of Jacob's family should have been felt by the elders of Judah, who were aware that out of their tribe should come kings and rulers over God's household. The difference in God's reaction to the rule of Saul and the rule of David is summed up in two of his own statements. Of Saul God said, "I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath" (Hos 13:11). Of David God said, "I have found David my servant, with my holy oil I have anointed him" (Ps 89:20).¹¹⁹

It is most likely that it is this forty years of misrule that God has in mind when he commanded Ezekiel to lie bound for forty days.¹²⁰ Ezekiel knew that

¹¹⁹ The verb 'anointed' and the noun 'messiah' (*meshiach*) come from the same root. David, not Saul, was God's messiah.

¹²⁰ The forty days represented forty years (Ezek 4:6; cf. Num 14:34). Since this represents the length of Saul's rule, it may confirm the statement of Paul in Acts 13:21 that Saul reigned for 40 years, a figure which few modern commentators accept at face value. Many believe it includes Samuel's 20-year judgeship. The Jewish work, *Seder Olam Rabbah*, gives Saul just two years in total, which led others to believe that Saul began to reign in the 38th year of Samuel, and reigned two years, which makes up the 40 years in Acts 13:21, so Thaddeus & Man, *The Reconciler of the Bible enlarged* 56. This work offers another solution, namely, "Or as others, Saul reigned more than two years, but he reigned onely [*sic*] two years unblameably, in which he represented his child-like candor; and upon this account Saul begun his reign in the twenty three of Samuel" (p. 56). Commenting on 1 Sam 16:21, the same work records another interpretation: "Saul was rejected by God, that he should no longer reign over Israel above ten years. Acts 13:21, He gave them Saul the son of Cis a King for forty years. [Interpretation] Saul after he was anointed raignd [*sic*] ten years. Paul joynd the government of Saul and Samuel together" (p. 57). A two-year reign for Saul was held by Patrick, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament*

Judah's right to supply human kingship was about to be removed forever from the earth. Judah had supplied an unbroken line of rulers up to the day that Ezekiel sat in front of his model of the king's capital and the seat of his power and authority, and shook his fist in anger at the last resident king, who would be gone within a week of years. The only time that Judah's right to supply rulers was not dominant was during the reign of Saul, whose tribe usurped Judah's God-appointed role.

The promise of kings given to Abraham and revealed prophetically to Jacob on his deathbed was brought about in God's own time when he chose, according to prophecy, Judah, and out of the families of Judah, David, to begin a dynasty that would continue in existence until Shiloh, the Messiah, would come, who would take over the government of the true Israel of God. After the death of Saul, the nation split. Eleven tribes united under Saul's son Ishbosheth (2 Sam 2:10; also called Esh-baal, 1 Chr 8:33; 9:39), and only one tribe accepted God's choice of king. The nation was no longer one people, but two.¹²¹ At this point, Judah comes back into line with his divinely appointed leadership role in the person of David.¹²² Eventually, after seven and one half years, Israel accepted (reluctantly, and for the moment, as history was to reveal¹²³) that Judah should provide the rulers of God's people (2 Sam 3:10; 2 Chr 10:19; 13:5–8). It would appear that Ishbosheth ruled the first two years and Abner the next five years and six months, though some think that it was the other way round, which would mean that Ishbosheth was born five years after Saul began his reign. Both Ishbosheth and Abner died in the same year (1003 BC).

c. The beginning of Israel's rejection of divine kingship. The eleven tribes were easily lured away by Absalom who may have taken advantage of the disaffection of the eleven tribes toward David's claim to be the rightful heir to sit on God's throne, judging God's people, and so, aided by Absalom's private ambitions, they hoped to cast off David's rule of them. Note that Absalom was appointed only by Israel to be their king, not by Judah (2 Sam 19:10). But Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, a Benjamite, saw an opportunity in the revolt. He hoped that, "Today the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom" (2 Sam 16:3).

and the Apocrypha 2.223. The link with Saul's childlike candor for two years after which he became depraved and forsaken by God is also mentioned by Patrick and Wordsworth, who noted: "The Aramaic Targum: 'he was as the son of a year (a child only a year old), in whom is no guile, when he began to reign; and so many Rabbis, and Theodoret' (*The Holy Bible* 2.26).

¹²¹ This is reflected in the separate census lists, military numbers, reactions and decisions, for Israel and Judah. The first reference to the two nations is 1 Sam 11:8, where Saul, in his second year, musters the entire military strength of the nation but the numbers for each part are given separately. This pattern was maintained right through to the establishment of the northern kingdom (cf. 1 Sam 15:4; 17:52; 18:16; 2 Sam 11:11; 12:8, etc.).

¹²² At this point the forty years of Judah's iniquity came to an end.

¹²³ On the continued support for the house of Saul even under David and Solomon, see S. Shalom Brooks, *Saul and the Monarchy: A New Look* (SOTS; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

This usurpation was an insult to Yahweh as much as to Judah and David. But David did not help matters when he killed Uriah in order to marry his wife. It was as punishment for this sin that God permitted Absalom to exploit the latent disenchantment harbored by the eleven tribes (and Mephibosheth). The rebellion did not last long. It was quickly snuffed out by Abner who darted Absalom through the heart as he hung suspended by his long hair. But immediately after the death of Absalom, Sheba took his place and appeared for a while to unite the eleven tribes behind him (2 Sam 20:1), but when his head was thrown over the battlements of his stronghold the rebellion was subdued, but the resentment toward the house of David did not go away. It lay smouldering, waiting for another spark of rebellion to set it going again. And it was not long in coming.

As far as Yahweh was concerned, Israel's rejection of his anointed king, and the anointing of a rival king, could not be justified. *This was their iniquity.* When kingship was on the eve of extinction, Yahweh remembered the iniquity of Israel which began back in that fateful year and dominated their whole existence on his land.

After the death of Sheba the eleven tribes made a claim on David, which Judah strongly resented (2 Sam 19:40–42). There were bitter words spoken between Israel and Judah (2 Sam 19:43), and this bitter confrontation was to sour their relations for all time to come. This open dislike for each other occurred in the forty-first year after the secret anointing of David according to our understanding of 2 Chr 15:7 and 26:31. It is from this year (beginning in 982 BC) that Ezekiel's 390 years are to be counted.

Upon the death of Solomon, the ten tribes broke away from Judah's rulership of them, and they elected kings from among their own tribes until God brought their rebellious kingdom to an inglorious end by thrusting them off his land and into exile, never to return as a kingdom again, but only as citizens of the kingdom of Judah, under a Davidic descendant who was devoid of all kingly power.

d. *After 390 years Israel's kingship is terminated.* As Ezekiel lay dumb in front of his model of kingly power which was about to be demolished in every sense of the word, God recalled the insult that the existence of the break-away northern kingdom posed *for him* for 390 years—to that moment in time, the year being 593 BC (Ezek 2:3, “unto this selfsame day”). The ease with which the tribes fell in behind Absalom is proof indeed that they never really accepted the rule of David and his son Solomon, and they bolted as soon as they saw an opening to get out from under Davidic rule. All this Yahweh recalls in 593 BC, and he brings the entire messy dispensation of monarchical rule to an end in a daring, attention-grabbing, symbolic piece of theatre, which Ezekiel carried out with genuine feeling and reality. The memory of Israel's rejection of divine kingship has a parallel in the ordering of the extermination of the Amalekites 423 years after their evil deed (cf. Exod 17:6–18). Yahweh recalled his threat against Amalek (prophesied in Deut 24:19), and recalled the insult of Israel in rejecting his choice of Judahite

kingship. Nothing escapes his notice, and every sin is accounted for, sooner or later.

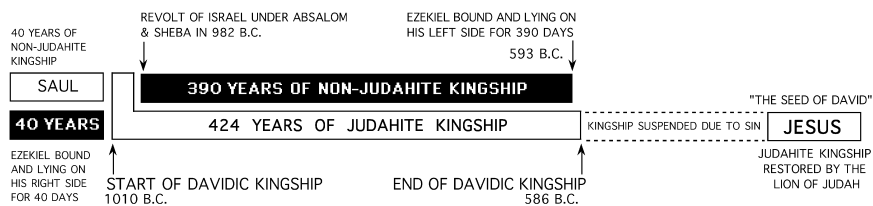
e. *Divine kingship in Judah is terminated.* The dispensation recording the experiment with divine kingship is brought to an abrupt close at this time in the history of God's people. A new chapter is about to be written which would make no mention of a single Jewish king for the next 580 years. The fate of the last surviving member of his gift of kingship to Israel has been sealed in, and sealed up, with the siege works and model battering-rams, and camps, that Ezekiel was to construct around his model. Ezekiel was to take an iron pan and make it into an iron wall between him (representing Yahweh) and the city of Jerusalem. He was to mimic a citizen of Jerusalem living under extreme siege rations for the whole 390 plus 40 days. His meals were to be spaced out at fixed intervals to allow the rations to be eked out as long as possible. The same went for his intake of water. But all of this was to take place away from public view. He was to shut himself up in his own house, where, incidentally, Israelites would bind him with thick cords, and Yahweh would make him dumb (3:26) until the day that the messenger arrived from Jerusalem to announce the destruction of the city and the temple of God (24:27).¹²⁴ Ezekiel was to be a type (12:6, 11; 24:24, 27) for the benefit of all of God's people in exile in Babylon, especially those in Tel-Aviv, where his house was located (3:15). The fact that Ezekiel acted out the siege four and a half years before it began is remarkable. But on God's timetable the disaster was imminent, "Now, shortly I will pour out my fury on you" (Ezek 7:8; cf. 13:25–27). The four and a half years gave every Jew in exile the chance to hear about Ezekiel's strange goings-on, and to ponder the *unique* (5:9) disaster about to overtake Jerusalem. When Yahweh has expended his fierce anger against Jerusalem (and her last king) he will be comforted (5:13, 15).

8. *Summary.* Mentally, the northern tribes never adjusted to, or accepted, the divine right of Judah to rule the twelve tribes, even though Yahweh had always indicated that leadership was vested in Judah from the very beginning. It was set in stone, as it were, in Jacob's Blessing: "A lion's whelp is Judah. . . . And as a lioness, who causes him to stir? The sceptre turns not aside from Judah, and a lawgiver¹²⁵ from between his feet, till the Seed come; and his is the obedience of peoples" (Gen 49:8–10). Israel's mental break with Judah manifested itself in the revolt of Sheba, and although it was quickly suppressed the mental state remained unbowed and vibrant,

¹²⁴ The siege began on December 18, 589 BC, and ended on July 20, 586 BC. It lasted just over 32 months (which included one intercalated month after Adar, 588 BC), or about 968 days. The four and a half years, in which Ezekiel was a type, began on the thirteenth day (1:1 and 3:16), of the fourth month, of the fifth year of the Second Deportation (1:1–2), which was July 22, 593 BC. The next intercalation occurred after Adar, 591 BC. So the 390 days began on July 22, 593 and ended about August 22, 592 BC.

¹²⁵ Ps 108:8, "Judah is my lawgiver."

"THE SEPTRE WILL NOT DEPART FROM JUDAH . . . UNTIL HIS SEED COME"



waiting for an opportunity to break out again. This was noted by Yahweh, and it is to this 390 years of non-acceptance of his anointed rulers “out of Judah” that finally comes out in the stunning, visual aid that Ezekiel was called upon to act out for 390 days—a day for a year.

The scepter turned aside to Benjamin when Saul became king of the twelve tribes. Judah, like an individual, must have been going through a period of low self-esteem at the time, and allowed himself to be robbed of his birth-right to provide leadership in Israel. For forty years, Judah was bound (like Ezekiel) and powerless to do anything about it. For three hundred and ninety years, the Ten Tribes bound themselves together against the Lord and against his anointed ones, and this binding is mirrored in Ezekiel’s binding. Yahweh does not bind Ezekiel; it is the action of the people (Ezek 3:25), so they, inadvertently, become an integral part of the whole symbolic act that Ezekiel maintained for over a year. The people bind one of their own kind (Ezekiel), and so the act is self-inflicted, not Babylonian-afflicted, and certainly not Yahweh-inflicted, though he will confirm their actions (“I will tie you up,” Ezek 4:8).¹²⁶ They tied themselves up in knots, both Judah and Israel, through their own strong-willed determination to have their own way.

It is instructive that the symbolic action is not outside but inside Ezekiel’s house (“Go, shut yourself inside your house,” Ezek 3:24). It is as if he represents the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the walls of his house represent the walls in his model of Jerusalem. He is imprisoned within walls, as they are. He is restricted in movement (“you cannot go out among the people,” Ezek 3:25), as they are to be. He eats the same restricted, and carefully monitored, monotonous food, as they are to do very soon. The end was near—very near (Ezek 12:25–28; 22:4). The end of kingship; the end of Solomon’s temple; the end of life on Yahweh’s ground, was just seven years away.

Ezekiel did, however, have a message about the complete integration of the twelve tribes under a Judahite king, but this lay in the future. After the

¹²⁶ Compare with this the statement that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exod 8:15), and the Lord hardened his heart (Exod 4:21). Hardening, as an acceptance of the decision of the will of man, is a key feature in God’s dealings with men, see Deut 2:30 and Josh 11:20. He can change hearts, but sometimes he refuses to do so, in order that his own plan can be advanced. Here, Yahweh does not interfere with the binding of the people, and so, in this sense, he ties up Ezekiel, because it suits his purpose and enhances the symbolic act. As the people bind Ezekiel, so the Babylonians bind Jerusalem. God is behind *both* bindings, working out his plan for both.

deportation of the bulk of the ten tribes into exile, the remnant of these tribes became one under Hezekiah, but both entities maintained their separate identity. Hezekiah sent word to “all Israel and Judah” (2 Chr 30:1; 31:6). Israel *and* Judah (not just Judah) would be brought back from exile (Jer 30:3; 33:7; 50:33; 51:5; Hos 1:11; Ezek 37:15–21). The healing of the rift between Israel and Judah is beautifully captured when Ezekiel holds out in front of him a *single* rod. But the single rod turns out to be two rods which are held together in the grip of his hand, which represents Yahweh’s hand (Ezek 37:16–19). “I will make them one nation in the land, . . . There will be one king over all of them, and they will never again be two nations, or be divided into two kingdoms. . . . My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd” (Ezek 37:22–24).

From the death of King Zedekiah in 586 BC (prophesied in Ezek 21:25; 17:12–21) there would be no king over Yahweh’s people, until the birth of Jesus of Nazareth in 6 BC,¹²⁷ yet the line of David would continue unbroken throughout that period. They constituted a succession of kings without a kingdom (Ezek 19:12–14), without power—just private citizens, the first of whom was Jehoiachin, languishing in a Babylonian prison at the very moment that Ezekiel was carrying out his symbolic acts.¹²⁸

We have identified four pivotal dates in David’s life. We know the year that David was born in, because he was thirty years of age when Saul died (2 Sam 5:4). We know when the Absalom/Sheba rebellion occurred, because of the 390 years in Ezek 4:5. We know the year when David was secretly anointed, because of the 40 years in 2 Sam 15:7 and 1 Chr 26:31. And finally, we know that Saul was rejected from being king when he had reigned two years after the first year of David’s age.

V. CONCLUSION

1. *A realistic picture of David and Jonathan.* The first major insight, I would suggest, is that our perception of David as a boy who felled the giant should be altered to one of a young man, about twenty or twenty-one years of age, who had single-handedly killed a lion and a bear before he killed Goliath. This older age for David may take the gloss off the story for some, but it is better to convey the truth to our children rather than a myth which cannot be extracted from Scripture, or from the chronology of David’s life as presented in this paper. It has also emerged that Jonathan was twice the age of David when he killed Goliath. With this more realistic picture of

¹²⁷ Prophesied in 2 Sam 7:4–29; Ps 89:3–4, 19–37; Ezek 21:27; 34:22–24; Jer 23:5; Mic 5:2 referred to in Matt 2:5; cf. John 7:42; Num 24:17–19; Mal 3:1, 6; Luke 1:30–33.

¹²⁸ Jehoiachin is to be counted twice in Matthew’s scheme of 3×14 , which lists only 41 persons, not 42 as the three sub-totals in Matt 1:17 might imply. Jehoiachin is listed *last* among the kings in the second fourteen, and *first* among the third fourteen *as a private citizen*, which ends with Joseph the carpenter (not a prince). The Babylonian exile is the dividing line—the end of the line of kings, and the end of the line for human kingship. Before the Babylonian removal there are kings, after it there are no kings, as Matthew’s list confirms.

Jonathan and David's physical development, future Christian artists can build on it, as can the arts in general. The incongruous picture of David, the teenager, swamped in a giant's suit of armor—for Saul was head and shoulders above every man in Israel—and attempting to sally forth to fight Goliath, is a thing of the past. David must have been a tall, young man, to even have attempted to put on Saul's clothing. He may have been fresh-faced and looked younger than his years, but he had reached his maximum height by the time he fought Goliath.

2. *A greater appreciation of the integrity of the Hebrew text.* The impression conveyed by most modern translations is that the Hebrew Scriptures have not been transmitted in a perfect condition, and certainly not in the case of 1 Sam 13:1. This impression has been challenged. Also the impression that information about King Saul has been lost for all time has also been challenged. In the light of new insights into the way Hebrew historians availed themselves of all kinds of eras, epochs, and dispensations, long and short, by which to mark the passage of time, and that these became anchors for dating events by, we can confidently suggest that 1 Sam 13:1 should, in future translations, be translated as: "A son of [David's] first year was Saul in his reigning, and two years he reigned over Israel." This does not exclude the idea that Saul had been reigning for ten years before the birth of David. The date-line that the Chronicler has chosen to use—to date Saul's rejection—had far-reaching theological and political implications, and it was a good choice. An everlasting kingdom was set up on the earth with the birth of David, who was a type of the Messiah-King to come. This Messiah would sit on David's throne and transform it into an everlasting spiritual kingdom (cf. Dan 2:34–35).

3. *The chronological significance of Ezekiel 4:5.* The second major insight is that Ezek 4:5–6 gives us the pivotal information to work out the exact year when the Absalom/Sheba revolt took place, which was in the forty-first year (982 BC) from David's secret anointing by Samuel in 1022 BC, or twelve years from the end of David's 40-year reign. This one date has unlocked the chronology of Saul and David and will give future commentators a solid platform on which they can build. It will also provide greater insight into the life and times of these first kings of Israel. The forty day-years in Ezekiel 4:5 can now be used—alongside the explicit statement in Acts 13:21—as evidence that Saul reigned for forty years.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 6.378, also gives 40 years. This is made up of 18 years with Samuel and 22 years (variant 20 at 10.143) after his death. Josephus gives a grand total of 514 years 6 months and 10 days for kingship in Judah, but this included Saul's reign. However, if we count the actual figures for each Judean king given by Josephus in his *Antiquities* the total comes to 471 years 6 months 10 days from David to Zedekiah. This is identical to the Hebrew total. This leaves 42.5 years to cover Saul's reign and the interregnum of Athaliah (6 yrs). I suspect that Josephus's total of 514 years has been copied by him (or his work corrected) from another work, which was based on the LXX figures. The LXX reads 6 years for Abijam, whereas the MT and Josephus read 3 years. This is the only difference in *reign* totals between the MT and LXX, but it means the LXX

4. *Clearing up the enigmas of 1 Samuel 13:1 and Ezekiel 4:5–6.* The enigmas of 1 Sam 13:1 and Ezek 4:5–6 are no longer the enigmas they once were. We have moved a lot closer to an understanding of what was intended to be conveyed by the Hebrew *as it stands*. It is to the credit of the Hebrew transcribers that they did not attempt to alter the text as it was handed down to them—though their Greek translators did. By leaving the Hebrew text *as it was*, it has been possible to find a solution that makes perfectly good sense of the present text. There is no need to emend the text. We just need to emend our perceptions of Hebrew conventions.

This paper will give hope to Christian Hebraists to persevere with the text *as it stands* in the hope that further insights into the way the mind of Hebrew historians and writers worked will open up the way to solving other alleged contradictions and confusions in the Hebrew scriptures.

The knowledge that David had reached his full stature to be able to try on Saul's armor, and that Jonathan (about 20 years older than David) had handed him his own royal armor and accoutrements, adds weight to the finding of this paper that David was no immature teenager, but, as one of Saul's staff put it, "a mighty virtuous man, and a man of battle, and intelligent in word, and a man of form, and Yahweh is with him" (1 Sam 16:18). What a C.V. to have at twenty years of age!

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF THE LIFE OF SAUL AND DAVID

Sigla used: Bold = factual; bold* (with asterisk) = factual according to McFall; plain text = approximate date; plain text in parentheses = approximate, but conjectural; plain text with a question mark (?) = uncertain/guesswork, but based on relative dating.

- (1080?) Saul born to Kish of the tribe of Benjamin, based on the assumption that he was 30 years of age when God selected him to be Israel's first king
- (1060?) Saul married Ahinoam
- (1062?) Jonathan born to Saul. Second-in-command in 1037 BC (*ca.* 24 years of age)
- (1063–1050?) Two more sons born to Saul (very likely before he became king)
- 1050** **Ishbosheth born to Saul (youngest son)**
- 1050*** **Samuel secretly anointed Saul as king**
- 1051 Saul saved Jabesh-gilead from Nahash, king of Ammon
- 1051 Second (which was the first *public*) anointing of Saul as king in Gilgal

has a total of 474 years, and if we subtract this total from the 514 it leaves exactly 40 years for Saul's reign. The 6-year rule of queen Athaliah is treated as an interregnum. The true total of kingship in Judah is 424 years from David (1010 BC) to Zedekiah (586 BC), which means that Josephus's chronology is 50 years too long. He was unaware of coregencies in Judah.

- Saul was probably 30 years of age when he became king
- 1051 The sons of Samuel were judges in Israel. Samuel was “aged and gray-headed” at this time**
- 1040 Birth of David to Jesse. The youngest of Jesse’s eight sons**
- 1040* Start of the era of David (1 Sam 13:1) based on his physical age**
- 1037* Saul rejected by God as king three years into the Era of David, in the 14th year of Saul’s reign**
- 1037–1022 Saul consolidated the territory of Israel. Jonathan noted for his military exploits
- 1023* Failure of Saul to exterminate the Amalekites. God rejected Saul as his king so Samuel turned his back on him**
- 1022* David secretly anointed king by Samuel in Bethlehem**
- (1020) David at 20 years becomes a “man of battle” (becomes eligible for call-up)
- (1019) David killed Goliath and becomes Saul’s armor-bearer at about 21 years of age
- (1019) David married Michal, younger daughter of Saul
- (1019–1010) David on the run from Saul for the next 8 or 9 years. Slaughter of priests of Nob
- 1015 Mephibosheth born, son of Jonathan**
- (1014?) Death of Samuel (about 85 years of age). David was about 26 years of age
- 1010 Death of King Saul (at 70 years?) and his three sons, including Jonathan (ca. 48 years?)**
- 1010 David King of Judah (Hebron) for 7.5 years**
- 1010 Ishbosheth [Ishbaal], Saul’s son, King of Israel, for two years**
- 1008 Abner (Saul’s cousin) *de facto* king of Israel for the next 5.5 years**
- (1006) Birth of Absalom, third son of David, born in Hebron
- 1003 Abner planned to hand Israel over to David. King Ishbosheth killed at 47 years of age**
- 1003 David King of Judah and Israel for 33 years**
- (991?) David’s adultery with Bathsheba and death of Uriah the Hittite
- (990?) Marriage of David to Bathsheba; death of their infant son
- (989?) Birth of Solomon to Bathsheba and David
- (989?) Rape of Tamar (Absalom’s sister) by Amnon, older half-brother of Absalom
- (987) Amnon killed by Absalom in revenge for the rape of his sister (after two years)
- (987–984) Absalom in exile in Geshur for three years
- (984–982) Absalom returned to Jerusalem and planned his revolt against David over two years
- 982* Absalom and Sheba’s revolt ended. Death of Absalom at ca. 24 years of age**
- (981–978?) Three years of famine due to Saul’s injustice to the Gibeonites

(979?) Fourth year: military census taken by Joab which lasted about 9.5 months (probably in the sabbatical year 980–979 BC)

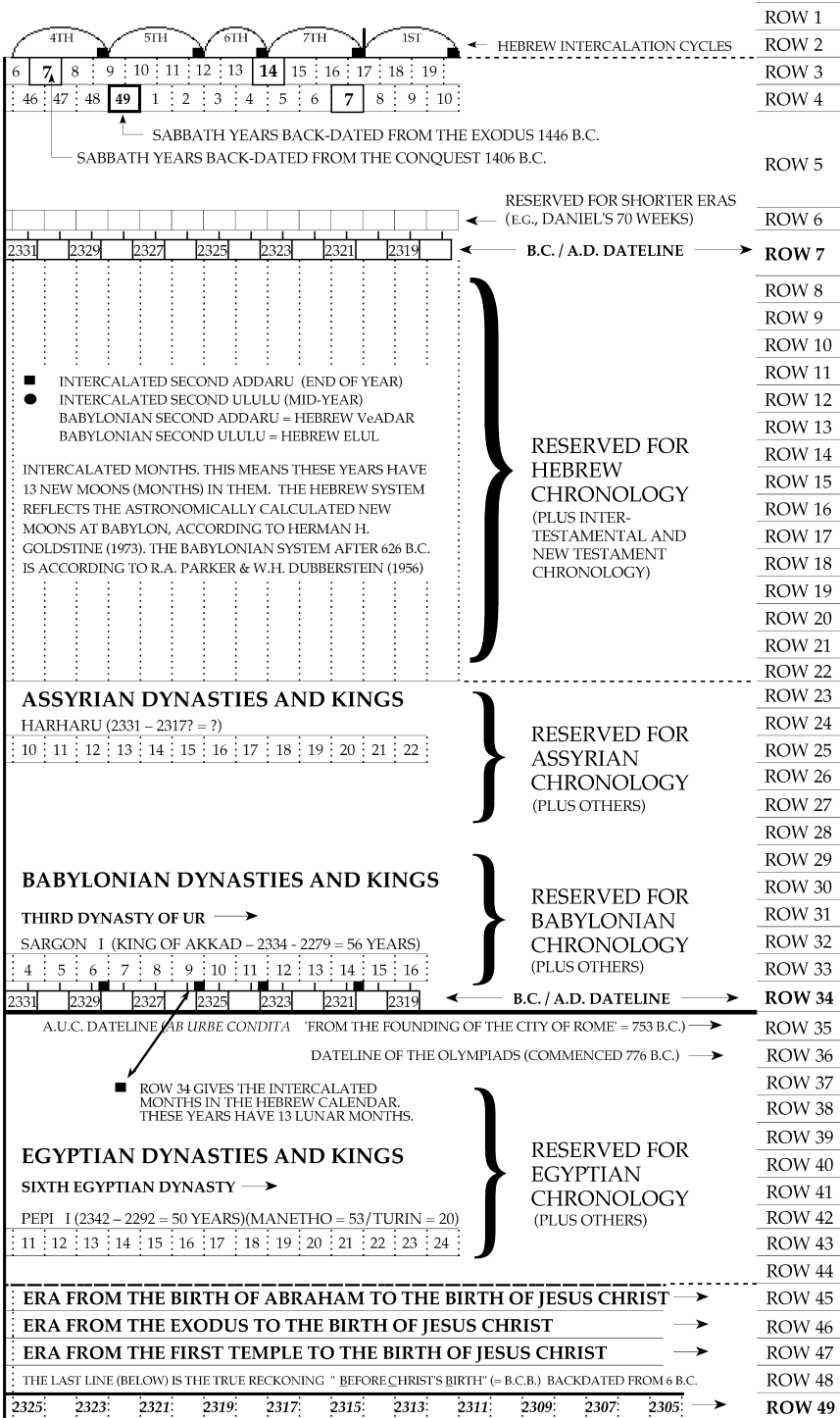
(977–975?) Punishment options: e.g. three *more* years of famine (making seven *in total*)

(977–969?) Four battles against the Philistines

970 Death of David at 70 years of age. Solomon succeeds him as king of Israel

The following appendix sets the reigns of Saul and David in the context of Near Eastern history.

FORMAT OF CHARTS



ROW 1

ROW 2

ROW 3

ROW 4

ROW 5

ROW 6

ROW 7

ROW 8

ROW 9

ROW 10

ROW 11

ROW 12

ROW 13

ROW 14

ROW 15

ROW 16

ROW 17

ROW 18

ROW 19

ROW 20

ROW 21

ROW 22

ROW 23

ROW 24

ROW 25

ROW 26

ROW 27

ROW 28

ROW 29

ROW 30

ROW 31

ROW 32

ROW 33

ROW 34

ROW 35

ROW 36

ROW 37

ROW 38

ROW 39

ROW 40

ROW 41

ROW 42

ROW 43

ROW 44

ROW 45

ROW 46

ROW 47

ROW 48

ROW 49

CHART 1. 1055 — 1031 B.C.

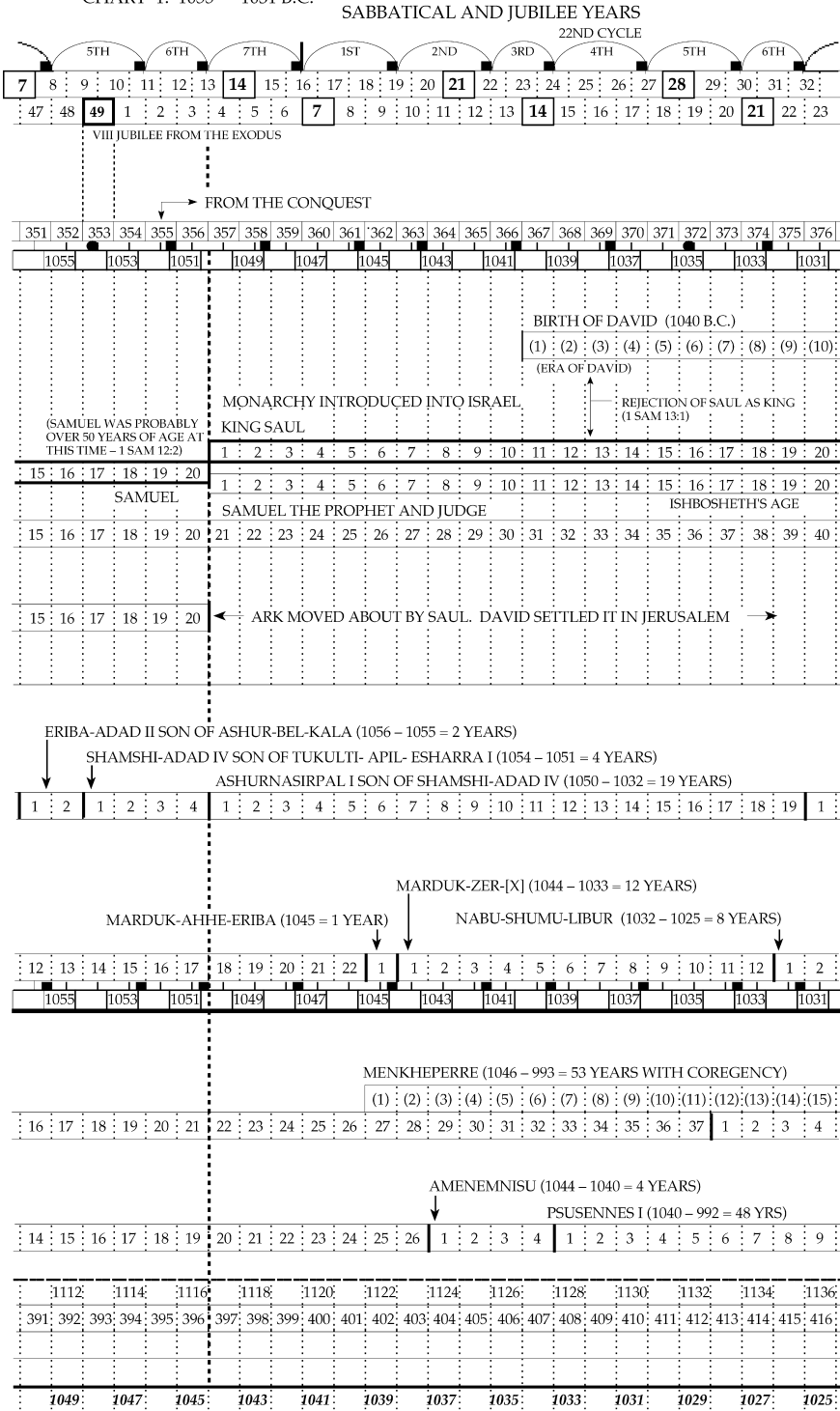


CHART 2. 1031 — 1006 B.C.

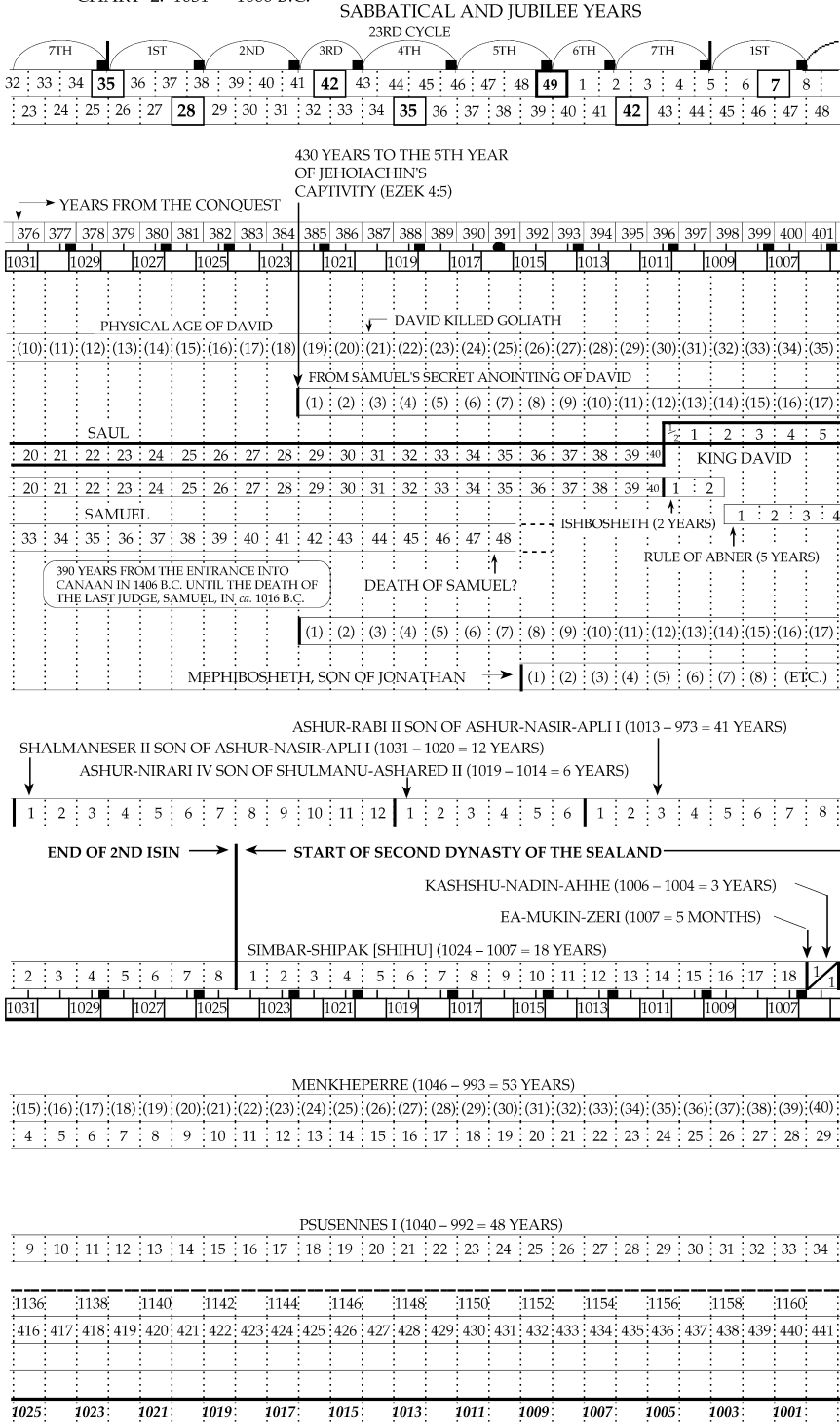


CHART 3. 1005 — 981 B.C.

SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS

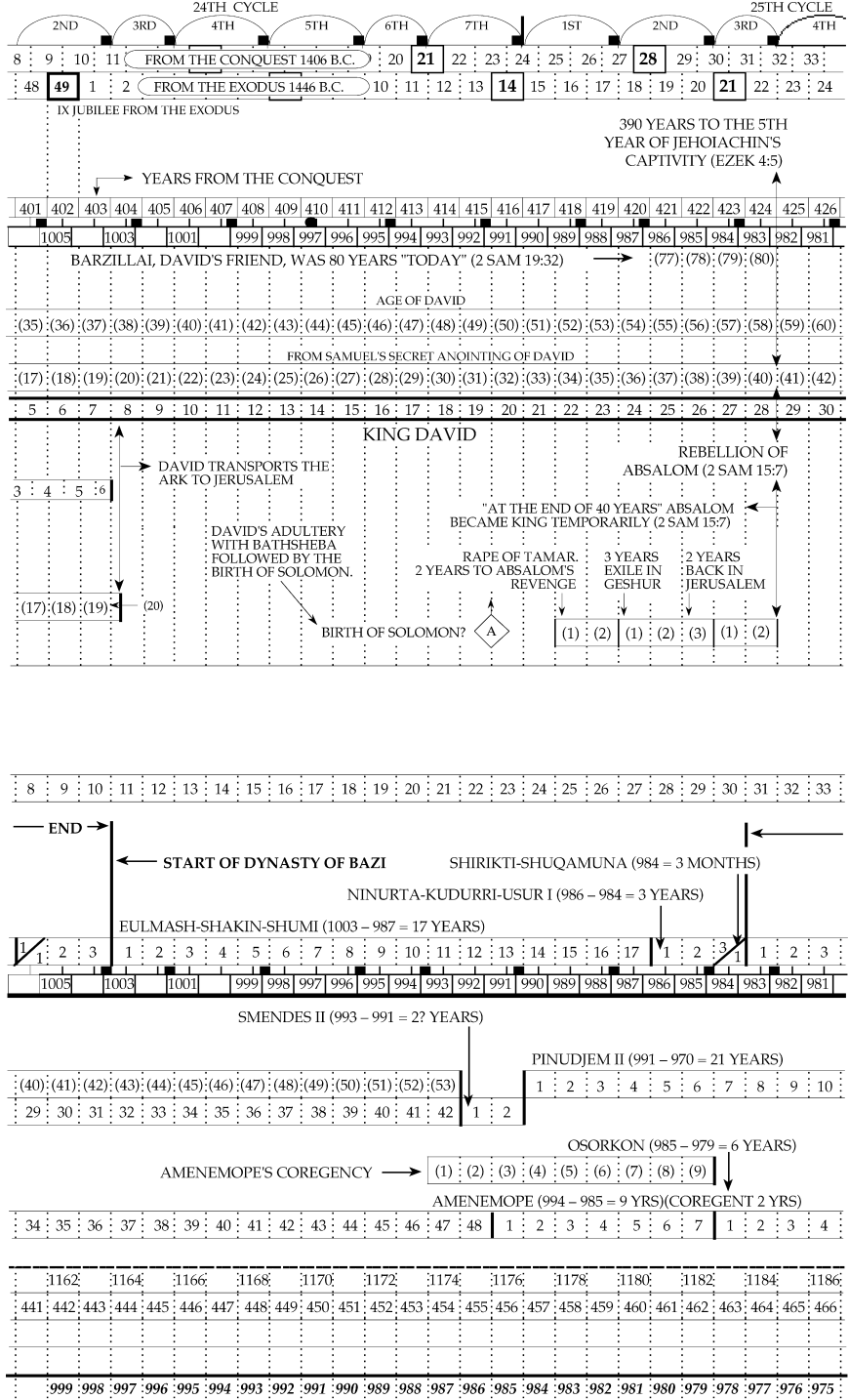


CHART 4. 981 — 931 B.C.

SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS

