Chronology of King Hezekiah of Judah
by Dan Bruce

Hezekiah (r. 727-698 BCE) succeeded his father Ahaz as king of Judah and reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-nine years (2 Kings 18:1-2). The Bible describes the chronological details of his reign in the Books of 2 Kings, chapters 18-20; 2 Chronicles, chapters 29-32; and Isaiah, chapters 36-39. The reign of Hezekiah is displayed diagrammatically as a timeline by the diagram below:
The Bible says that fifteen extra years were added to the life of King Hezekiah by God. In Isaiah, chapter 26, verse 6a, the Lord says: “And I will add unto thy days fifteen years” (KJV). Traditional interpretations of the reign of Hezekiah often assume that the biblical details about his reign, and specifically the part about the God-given extra fifteen years, are chronologically flawed. Many modern Bible scholars even dismiss outright the extra fifteen years as myth that should not be included in any serious chronological discussion. This article takes the opposite approach. It demonstrates that the details of Hezekiah’s reign can be understood and will fit together chronologically only if those fifteen extra supernaturally-given years are included.

Since the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib in Hezekiah’s fourteenth year can be pinpointed to the year 701 BCE, Hezekiah seemingly had to begin his reign fourteen years earlier in 715 BCE according to the traditional interpretation. However, the Bible states in 2 Kings, chapter 18, verse 1, that Hezekiah began his reign in the third regnal year of Hoshea of Israel (r. 731-721 BCE), which can be identified by the harmonized chronology of the Hebrew kings in my book Sacred Chronology of the Hebrew Kings as occurring in 727 BCE (see diagram below showing the relationship between the reigns of Hoshea of Israel and Hezekiah of Judah). Obviously, that contradiction about the starting year of Hezekiah’s reign means that something is wrong with the traditional interpretation, but that is not its only problem.

In addition to the extra fifteen years given to Hezekiah, the king is promised a sign about the deliverance of Jerusalem from the king of Assyria. That sign is described in Isaiah, chapter 37, verse 30, as follows: “And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof” (KJV). Traditional interpretation assumes that the two years without crops were a sabbath year followed by a jubilee year during which no crops could be planted or harvested for each of those years, followed by a third year in which crops were planted and harvested. It also assumes that the observance of that two-year-long sabbath-jubilee cycle coincided with the invasion of

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1 Some expositors propose that Hezekiah began a long co-reign with his father Ahaz circa 727 BCE, with some proposing a co-reign lasting as long as twelve or thirteen years, but there is no justification for the assumption of a co-reign of any length.
2 If you want to examine the complete harmonization of the kings, see Harmonized Chronology of the Hebrew Kings.
Judah by Sennacherib in 701 BCE. Fortunately, having a correct understanding of how planting and harvesting were done in sabbath and jubilee years can help to sort out the chronology of Hezekiah’s reign. As the diagram below indicates, no harvesting could be done for two years in either a sabbath-only year or a sabbath-jubilee year combination. The sabbath-jubilee tables show that the year of Sennacherib’s invasion, 701 BCE, was a sabbath-only year (see Calendar of Sabbath and Jubilee Years). So, the sabbath-jubilee year combination required by the traditional interpretation is not necessary as an explanation for the two years without crops predicted by Isaiah as part of the 3rd-year sign. A sabbath-only year fits the biblical description precisely.

![Diagram showing sabbath and jubilee years]

Jewish months are shown as numbers, with Nisan = 1; corresponding Gregorian months shown above.

Since the year 701 BCE was the start of a sabbath-only year, beginning in April in the twenty-sixth regnal year of Hezekiah (see diagram on next page), that must be considered as the first year in the two-year period when no crops were harvested. Soon thereafter, Sennacherib invaded and devastated Judah and began his siege of Jerusalem. The account of his campaign is given in the Scriptures and a secular account is recorded on the Taylor Prism (also called Sennacherib’s Prism, circa 691 BCE) as follows:

“Because Hezekiah, king of Judah, would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms and by the might of my power I took 46 of his strong fenced cities; and of the smaller towns which were scattered about, I took and plundered a countless number. From these places I took and carried off 200,156 persons, old and young, male and female, together with horses and mules, asses and camels, oxen and sheep, a countless multitude; and Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city to hem him in, and raising banks of earth against the gates, so as to prevent escape... Then upon Hezekiah there fell the fear of the power of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs and the elders of Jerusalem with 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver, and diverse treasures, a rich and immense booty... All these things were brought to me at Nineveh, the seat of my government.”


3
Hezekiah’s Regnal Years and 3rd-Year Sign

(years shown in left column are proleptic Gregorian years, with sabbath years shown in bold type; \(A\) = accession or partial year; sabbath and jubilee observances shown below are not mentioned in the Bible)

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**Hezekiah begins 29-year reign**
(727–698 BCE)

- **FIFTEEN EXTRA YEARS**
  - 1st
  - 2nd
  - 3rd
  - 4th
  - 5th
  - 6th
  - 7th
  - 8th
  - 9th
  - 10th
  - 11th
  - 12th
  - 13th
  - 14th
  - 15th

**EXPANDED VIEW**

- **Hezekiah has fatal illness, given fifteen extra years of life**
  - b. Manasseh

- **Sabbath Year begins Jubilee Year begins**

- **Hezekiah’s 3rd-Year Sign**
  - (see expanded view to the right)
  - Sennacherib invades in Hezekiah’s 14th extra year
    - 701 BCE: 1st year (no crops)
    - 700 BCE: 2nd year (no crops)
    - 699 BCE: 3rd year (crops planted and harvested)
    - d. Hezekiah

1. A “get well” letter was sent by the king of Babylon, Merodachbaladan (r. 721-710).
2. The extra fifteen years given to Hezekiah ended with the deliverance of Jerusalem and the completion of the 3rd-year Sign, after which Hezekiah lived the remainder of his previously allotted days, not knowing the exact time of his death beforehand.
3. In ancient Israel, barley and wheat were planted in November-January, barley was harvested in March-April, wheat harvested in May-June.
4. The commander (and future pharaoh) Taharqa leads Shebitiku’s army out of Egypt to oppose Sennacherib.

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From the diagram on the previous page, it is obvious that the sabbath year, plus Sennacherib’s invasion in the spring of 701 BCE, prevented planting of barley and wheat from being done in the fall and winter of 701 BCE, making those crops unavailable for harvest in the spring of 700 BCE, which means that both planting and harvesting would not have been carried out normally in Hezekiah’s twenty-seventh regnal year, the second year with no crops. The Bible records that Sennacherib’s army was later devastated by an angel of death that overnight killed 185,000 Assyrians, requiring Sennacherib to withdraw back to Assyria, all of that taking place during Passover week in the year 700 BCE according to Jewish records. So, after two seasons with no crops harvested, the land was at peace again in the third year, late in 700 BCE, and barley and wheat were planted that fall and harvested the following spring in 699 BCE. The 3rd-year sign given by God to Hezekiah was fulfilled exactly as foretold.

As shown on the diagram on the previous page, no crops could be planted or harvested in Hezekiah’s twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh regnal years (the first and second years in the prophecy). In his twenty-eighth regnal year (the third year), crops were both planted and harvested. That scenario reveals another chronological paradox, though. If Hezekiah began his reign in the year 727 BCE and was invaded by Sennacherib in 701 BCE, how could the invasion have taken place in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, as stated in 2 Kings, chapter 18, verse 13, and Isaiah, chapter 36, verse 1? That apparent inconsistency is actually quite easy to explain. The Hebrew text does not say fourteenth year of reign. It says only that Sennacherib invaded Judah in Hezekiah's fourteenth year. Since God had extended Hezekiah’s life by fifteen years, the invasion was referenced to the extended-years period. Sennacherib invaded in the fourteenth year of the fifteen-year extension, which would have been Hezekiah's twenty-sixth regnal year, not in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah’s total reign of twenty-nine years. That the deliverance of Jerusalem would signal the end of the extra fifteen years is indicated in 2 Kings, chapter 20, verse 6, which says: “And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and [at the end of the years] I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake” (KJV). The extra fifteen years given to Hezekiah ended with the deliverance of Jerusalem, marking the completion of the third-year of the 3rd-year sign, after which Hezekiah lived out the remainder of his previously allotted days, not knowing the exact time of his death beforehand.

The chronology of Hezekiah’s reign is admittedly complicated, but, as shown above, it can be reconciled to incorporate all of the details given in the biblical text, specifically:

- a reign beginning in the third regnal year of Hoshea of Israel
- no long co-regency with Ahaz (as proposed by Edwin Thiele et al)
- a siege of Samaria beginning in Hezekiah’s fourth regnal year
- Hezekiah being given fifteen extra years of life by God
- the fall of Samaria occurring in his sixth regnal year
- the extra fifteen years and 3rd-year sign ending with the deliverance of Jerusalem

All of those details fit together perfectly without having to assume scribal emendation, as Thiele did concerning the text of 2 Kings, chapters 17 and 18, or myth-making on the part of the ancient Hebrew scribes as many modern expositors are all too eager to assume.

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