

Chapter Three

The Problem of Chronology in II Kings 16-20

I. Introduction

As can now be seen from chapter two, regardless of what the proposed interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 is, there are a number of problems with each one. Yet while there are a host of exegetical objections to the views that either Immanuel was one of Isaiah's sons or that Immanuel referred to any child born in Judah at that time, the predominant objection to the view that Immanuel was a reference to Hezekiah is that the chronology put forth in II Kings seemingly does not allow for it. Scholars claim Hezekiah would have been between 6-11 years old at the time of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy of 7:13-25 and therefore could not be the Immanuel child in Isaiah 7:14. And so, even though virtually every scholar agrees that there are royal Davidic connotations within Isaiah 7:14 and that in its final form there are definite thematic connections between chapters 7, 9, and 11, the view that Isaiah 7:14 is a prophecy about Hezekiah is widely rejected on the grounds that the chronology of II Kings simply does not allow for it.

Yet what often goes seemingly unnoticed is the fact that the chronology found in II Kings is extremely problematic. Christopher Seitz notes this when he says, "...there appears to be confusion in the Books of Kings over the precise length of reign for Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz. Interpretation of Isaiah 7:1-9:7 fall squarely in this period and so does the problem of identifying the Immanuel child."¹⁵³ This is extremely important to note because it shows the reason scholars give as to why Immanuel could not be Hezekiah is,

¹⁵³ Christopher Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 62.

in and of itself, riddled with problems. We must seriously question scholars who acknowledge that virtually everything about Immanuel found in Isaiah 7-12 points to Hezekiah, yet then rejects it based on a highly problematic chronology found in II Kings.

Trying to analyze and reconstruct the historical events found within the Old Testament can be a tricky, and some would argue fruitless, endeavor. After all, it is the job of the biblical exegete to attempt to understand the point of view and meaning of a text as it is presented to us, not to try and reconstruct a different historical scenario than that of the biblical witness. Nevertheless, it is imperative that this thesis attempt to answer the “chronological problem” that is time and time again thrown up by scholars to dispute the legitimacy of identifying Immanuel with Hezekiah. Given the fact that the only real objection to identifying Immanuel with Hezekiah is that the chronology put forth in II Kings 16-20 seemingly does not allow such an identification, and given the obvious fact that there are severe chronological difficulties within II Kings itself, this chapter will analyze these diachronic concerns and argue that it is historically *possible* that Hezekiah was not yet born at the time of Isaiah’s prophecy, was born shortly after the prophecy, and therefore was very likely the prophesied Immanuel of 7:14. If it can be shown that such an identification is historically *possible*—that Isaiah very well could have uttered his prophecy of 7:13-25 shortly before Hezekiah was born—then legs will be cut out from underneath the major argument against the identification of Immanuel with Hezekiah. The diachronic argument and historical possibility, together with the synchronic argument and literary reading of Isaiah 7:14 within Proto-Isaiah, will further strengthen the view that in its original historical and literary contexts, Isaiah 7:14 was first and foremost a prophecy about the birth of Hezekiah.

In this chapter we will look at the chronological problems in II Kings surrounding the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah and argue that if these problems can be resolved, one is then able to reconstruct a revised chronology that allows for the possibility that Isaiah uttered his prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 before the birth of Hezekiah. The first thing that needs to be done, though, is to make sure that we have a good grasp of the relevant biblical texts that tell us about Ahaz and Hezekiah. The biblical texts that give us significant information about Ahaz are Isaiah 7, II Kings 16, and II Chronicles 28, with the main focus in Ahaz's reign being the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis. The biblical texts that give us significant information about Hezekiah are Isaiah 36-39, II Kings 18-20, and II Chronicles 29-32. Although the main focus in Hezekiah's reign is clearly Sennacherib's invasion, there is also the mention of the fall of Samaria, Hezekiah's attempt to reach out to the northern tribes to come and join Judah for Passover, Hezekiah's sickness, and the visit from the envoys of Babylon. There are also a number of Assyrian texts that tells us a little about both kings. These texts will be alluded to in the process of our analysis, but a few remarks must be made concerning the issue of using these sources (as well as our biblical sources) as a basis for our knowledge of history.

As was mentioned in chapter one, we must remember that neither the Assyrian records, nor the relevant biblical texts themselves, are written as "objective histories" in our modern sense of the term. For that matter, though, there really is no such thing as "objective history." All history writing, be it Israelite, Assyrian, French or American, is written *from* a certain point of view and *for* a certain purpose. As Provan, Long, and Longman state, "There is no account of the past anywhere that is not ideological in

nature, and therefore in principle to be trusted more than other accounts.”¹⁵⁴ Because of this fact, it is ultimately foolish to assume that attaining “objective history” is possible, for there is no such thing. What we have are ancient texts that are attempting to interpret and make sense of certain events and facts in history. The Assyrian texts are primarily royal annals that are, “more concerned about the *image* of the king and his activity as a warrior than about merely recording the facts of his reign...”¹⁵⁵ The biblical narratives, on the other hand, are stories about certain events in the history of Israel that attempt to prophetically explain who God is and how God’s hand was at work throughout the history of Israel.

Given the fact that Isaiah, II Kings, and II Chronicles, all came into their final form either during or after the exile, it is obvious that the exilic/post-exilic lens through which these stories were told inevitably shaped their theological perspective on these very stories. The overwhelming question, “Why did we end up in exile?” undoubtedly shaped their theological perspective on their history to the point that we can see that the final forms of these works act as an answer to that question. But to claim that an exilic/post-exilic historical narrative regarding past events in the history of Israel is by *de facto* unreliable is to overstate the case. As Provan, Long, and Longman have pointed out, mere chronological distance from a historical event does not automatically mean a less historically reliable text. In fact, “No good reason at all exists to believe that those claiming to be eyewitnesses are not (like the later reporters of events) interpreters of those events, nor is there any reason to assume on principle that their testimony is going to be more or less trustworthy. There is, indeed, no reason to believe that earlier accounts

¹⁵⁴ Provan, Long, Longman. *A Biblical History of Israel*, 68.

¹⁵⁵ Provan, Long, Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 67.

are generally more reliable than later accounts.”¹⁵⁶ In fact, often times it takes time to fully understand and appreciate the importance, implications, and magnitude of certain historical events. The passage of time more often than not brings a *clearer* perspective on the general messiness of history.

II. Overview of the Relevant Texts Regarding Ahaz and Hezekiah

Although there is general consensus on the overall picture of Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, getting a firm grasp on the historical “facts” of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis is quite a tricky business. Not only do we have Isaiah’s version of this crisis, but we also have accounts of it in II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28—and they all differ in some way or another. It is generally understood that the reason for this is that each “author” shaped his account in some way to reflect his understanding of God’s purpose and to fit in with the overall message to in his book. It would be a futile endeavor to attempt to reconstruct the actual events of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, for all we have are interpretations of those events. We should rather attempt to understand and exegete Isaiah’s account of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis. Nevertheless, in order to understand Isaiah’s account of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, it is extremely helpful to consider both II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28 in order to get a general sense of how the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis was understood within the collective memory of the Hebrew Scriptures. Our aim, therefore, is not so much to attempt a historical reconstruction of the events of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, as it is to come to a general biblical understanding of that event by recognizing the basic points upon which Isaiah, II Kings, and II Chronicles all agree.

¹⁵⁶ Provan, Long, Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 57.

The general historical picture surrounding Isaiah 7:14 is fairly well-agreed upon: Isaiah uttered his prophecy about the Immanuel child at some point during the reign of King Ahaz of Judah, at the time of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, when Judah was being threatened by King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel, presumably around 740-734 BCE, who were trying to oust Ahaz and set up “the son of Tabeel” as king in Ahaz’s place. The biblical passages that tell us about the reign of King Ahaz are that of Isaiah 7-12, which combines a brief narrative of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis with an extended prophecy that lasts through chapter 12, and the two narrative sections of II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28. When one looks at these three passages, one is able to make some initial observations regarding not only the events surrounding the reign of King Ahaz, but also the events surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis. On the surface, the overall picture of Ahaz in these two other accounts is fairly consistent with Isaiah. Ahaz is presented as a king whose faithlessness to YHWH opened the door to Assyrian oppression.

Although Isaiah does not elaborate on many details regarding the reign of Ahaz, both II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28 do.¹⁵⁷ They state that he became king at twenty, reigned for sixteen years, and did not do what was right in the eyes of YHWH. The particular sins of Ahaz mentioned in both II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28 are: (a) making his sons pass through the fire, (b) sacrificing and making offerings on the high places and hills and under every green tree, (c) appealing to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria for help when threatened by Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel, as well as the Edomites, (d) taking silver and gold from both the house of YHWH and the house of the king, and giving it as tribute to Assyria, and (e) worshipping the gods of Damascus in some way.

¹⁵⁷ II Kings 16:1-18; II Chronicles 28:1-27

II Kings gives more detail concerning this last point by saying that when Ahaz went to meet Tiglath-pileser in Damascus after Tiglath-pileser had conquered Damascus and had killed Rezin, he was so impressed with the great altar in Damascus that he had ordered Uriah the high priest to construct a similar altar in the temple of YHWH, and to move the bronze altar of YHWH off to the side. II Chronicles contains some additional details as well. There is the mention of captives being taken by both Rezin and Pekah, and the surprisingly kind treatment that Israel showed to its Judean captives. We are told that Zichri, a great warrior of Ephraim (Israel) killed Ahaz's son Maaseiah, Azrikam the commander of the palace, and Elkanah, the one next in authority to Ahaz. We are also told that instead of strengthening Ahaz, Tiglath-pileser ended up oppressing him. Finally, we are told that Ahaz was not buried in the tombs of the kings of Israel.

Instead of giving us details surrounding the reign of Ahaz, Isaiah focuses on what apparently was for him the single most defining moment of the reign of Ahaz: the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis. This is not to say that II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28 do not condemn Ahaz for his actions during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, for they certainly do. The point is that in Isaiah, the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis is the focus, not Ahaz's other sins.¹⁵⁸ For Isaiah, Ahaz's faithless actions at that time provoked YHWH's judgment at the hands of Assyria; at the same time, though, in the midst of that prophetic judgment, Isaiah points toward a sign of hope: the birth of Immanuel, the one through whom YHWH would act to judge Assyria, and who would help establish YHWH's salvation for the surviving remnant of YHWH's judgment that was brought on by Ahaz.

¹⁵⁸ This focus in Isaiah on Ahaz's actions during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis clearly reflects the theological perspective of the later scribal exegetes who put the book of Isaiah in its final form. The perspective, ideology, and circumstances of these later scribal exegetes of the exilic/post-exilic period will be discussed in more detail in the later chapters. For now we will simply acknowledge that for whatever reason the writer of Isaiah clearly has chosen to focus on Ahaz's actions during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis.

In any case, we are told that Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel planned to attack Jerusalem, but were not successful.¹⁵⁹ Their intention was to get rid of Ahaz and to set up “the son of Tabeel” as king in Jerusalem,¹⁶⁰ presumably to be a puppet ruler who would do their bidding. The most obvious difference between Isaiah 7 and II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28 is the confrontation between Ahaz and Isaiah. This confrontation is clearly the sole focus in Isaiah 7. The specific sins of Ahaz mentioned in II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28 are set aside in Isaiah 7 so that one can focus on the root cause of all the sins of Ahaz: his failure to put his faith in YHWH. In the face of the threat from the Syro-Ephraimite alliance, the prophet Isaiah went to Ahaz with a message from YHWH that both enemy kingdoms would be shortly destroyed, and that Ahaz should trust YHWH’s message, or else the royal house of David would not stand either. Yet Ahaz, true to his form, refused to trust YHWH.¹⁶¹ According to Isaiah, it was precisely Ahaz’s decision not to put his faith in YHWH during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis that opened the door to a far more powerful and oppressive overlord, the king of Assyria.¹⁶²

Without reconstructing every fact surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, we can be confident about a few historical points that all three accounts agree upon: (1) Ahaz was threatened by Pekah and Rezin; (2) Pekah and Rezin were unsuccessful; (3) Ahaz received help from Assyria, who crushed both Aram and Israel. In addition to these three points, we can also say that Ahaz is consistently portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as: (4) a completely godless king who displayed no faith in YHWH, and (5) the one responsible for bringing upon Judah the horrible oppression of Assyria.

¹⁵⁹ Isaiah 7:1

¹⁶⁰ Isaiah 7:6

¹⁶¹ Isaiah 7:4-12

¹⁶² Isaiah 7:17-18

The story of Hezekiah's reign is also recorded in three separate biblical accounts: Isaiah 36-39, II Kings 18-20, and II Chronicles 29-32. II Kings 18:1-2 tells us that Hezekiah (a) became king of Judah at the age of twenty-five, (b) became king during the third year of Hoshea, who was king of the northern kingdom of Israel, and (c) reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-nine years. Although II Chronicles 29:1 also tells us that Hezekiah became king of Judah at the age of twenty-five and that he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem, it does not relate the reign of Hezekiah to the corresponding reign of Hoshea in Israel. In contrast to both II Kings and II Chronicles, Isaiah does not give any specifics regarding the early years of Hezekiah's reign. Isaiah 36:1 does, though, along with II Kings 18:13, tell us that King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah during the fourteenth year of Hezekiah. Although II Chronicles 32 also tells us about Sennacherib's invasion, it does not attempt to give the date of the invasion. By far, the most significant difference between these three accounts of Hezekiah's reign is II Chronicles 29-31, which tells about the temple reform of Hezekiah and his attempt to reach out to the northern tribes of Israel to come and celebrate Passover together in Jerusalem. Neither Isaiah nor II Kings include this story in their accounts. Nevertheless, beginning with Sennacherib's invasion, all three accounts follow the same general outline.

The Sennacherib account is found in Isaiah 36-37, II Kings 18-19, and II Chronicles 32:1-23. Isaiah's narrative, beginning in Hezekiah's "fourteenth year" with the invasion of Sennacherib, does not relate the reasons for Sennacherib's actions, but rather chooses to jump right to the siege of Jerusalem and the Rabshakeh's taunting speech, which occupies the bulk of chapter 36. Chapter 37 is comprised of essentially five scenes: (1) Hezekiah's reaction to the Rabshakeh, his appeal to Isaiah, and Isaiah's

initial prophecy (37:1-7), (2) the king of Assyria's message to Hezekiah (37:8-13), (3) Hezekiah's prayer to YHWH in the temple (37:14-20), (4) Isaiah's prophecy against Sennacherib (37:21-35), and (5) the destruction of Sennacherib (37:36-38).

But for two sections, II Kings 18-19 is almost identical to Isaiah 36-37. II Kings 18:1-12, which is not found in Isaiah, tells that Hezekiah became king at the age of twenty-five, in the third year of Hoshea of Israel, and that he reigned for twenty-nine years. We are also told that Hezekiah "did what was right in the eyes of YHWH": he removed the high places, broke down the pillars, cut down the Asherah poles, and even broke into pieces the bronze serpent of Moses because it was being worshipped by the people (18:1-4). According to II Kings, there was no one like Hezekiah among all the kings of Judah, either before or after him (18:5-6). In addition, we are told that Hezekiah attacked the Philistines and rebelled against the king of Assyria (18:7-8). After 18:9-12, in which the fall of Samaria is recorded, II Kings 18 begins to correlate with Isaiah 36.

The second section in II Kings 18-19 that is not found in Isaiah 36-39 is that of 18:14-16, which relates Hezekiah's attempted appeasement of the king of Assyria by admitting that he had done wrong in rebelling against Assyria, and by stripping the gold off the doors and doorposts of the temple of YHWH and using them as payment for the king of Assyria. Aside from these three verses though, II Kings 18:13-19:37 is virtually identical to Isaiah 36-37. II Chronicles 32:1-23 can be best considered as a condensed version of Isaiah 36-37 and II Kings 18-19, with the only difference found in verses 1-8, which include Hezekiah's preparations to withstand a siege by Sennacherib and his encouragement of the people of Jerusalem that YHWH would fight for them.

After the Sennacherib account, all three passages continue with the account of Hezekiah's illness, which can be found in Isaiah 38, II Kings 20:1-11, and II Chronicles 32:24-26.¹⁶³ In comparing Isaiah 38 and II Kings 20:1-11, one finds a curious textual issue: although Isaiah 38:1-6 corresponds to II Kings 20:1-6 and Isaiah 38:7-8 corresponds to II Kings 20:9-11, the verses in Isaiah 38 that correspond to II Kings 20:7-8 are not found until 38:21-22 and seem dreadfully out of place. It seems obvious, therefore, that Isaiah 38:21-22 should be placed between 38:6 and 38:7. When this is done, Isaiah 38:1-8, with verses 21-22 in their proper place, and II Kings 20:1-11 once again are virtually identical in their report: (1) Hezekiah becomes sick unto death, is told that he will not recover, and then weeps and prays to YHWH; (2) Isaiah is sent by YHWH to Hezekiah to tell him that YHWH had heard his prayer and would not only add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life, but also deliver him from the hand of Assyria; (3) Isaiah orders that a lump of figs be placed on Hezekiah's boil so he could recover; and (4) when Hezekiah asks for a sign for him to go up to the house of YHWH, Isaiah prophesies that the shadow cast by the dial of Ahaz would turn back ten steps. The story regarding the visit of envoys from Babylon can be found in Isaiah 39 and II Kings 20:12-19. In both accounts, envoys from Merodach-baladan of Babylon come to visit Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah was sick but had recovered. Hezekiah welcomes them and displays all of his riches. There was nothing that Hezekiah did not show them. When Isaiah finds out about what Hezekiah had done, Isaiah prophesies that Babylon would come one day and take away everything, even the royal sons of Judah, and bring them to Babylon. Hezekiah then expresses thanks that it would not happen during his reign.

¹⁶³ II Chronicles 32:24-32 really cannot be as easily separated, for the Chronicler has essentially blended together the story of Hezekiah's illness with the visit of the envoys from Babylon.

II Chronicles 32:24-31 essentially overlaps the account of Hezekiah's illness with the account concerning envoys from Babylon. We are first told that Hezekiah was sick to the point of death, that he prayed to YHWH, that YHWH answered and gave him a sign, but that Hezekiah was proud and did not respond accordingly. Because of this, wrath came upon Hezekiah and Judah and Jerusalem. Yet Hezekiah then humbled himself and both he and Jerusalem was spared of YHWH's wrath during the days of Hezekiah. Then, after a brief mention of Hezekiah's great riches, we are told that envoys from Babylon came to inquire about "the sign" that had been done in the land. The Chronicler tells us that God left Hezekiah to himself in order to test him. Presumably this "test" relates back to 32:25-26, to the failure of Hezekiah to respond accordingly and his subsequent humbling of himself so that destruction would not come upon Judah during his days.

III. Chronological Problems in II Kings 16-20

Scholars have discounted the identification of Immanuel with Hezekiah because the chronology of II Kings seems to make such an identification impossible. It is imperative, therefore, that we analyze the relevant biblical texts regarding the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah and point out that the chronology itself in II Kings 16-20 as it stands is historically impossible. The follow data from II Kings is relevant to our task:

<i>Hezekiah</i>	<i>Ahaz</i>	<i>Pekah</i>	<i>Hoshea</i>
1. Began reign when 25 years old (18:2)	1. Began reign when 20 years old (16:2)	1. Began reign in the 52 nd year of Uzziah (15:27)	1. Killed Pekah; began reign in the 20 th year of Jotham (15:30)
2. Reigned 29 years (18:2)	2. Reigned 16 years (16:2)	2. Reigned 20 years (15:27)	2. Reigned 9 years (17:1)
3. 4 th year was 7 th year of Hoshea (18:9)	3. 1 st year was 17 th year of Pekah (16:1)	3. 2 nd year was 1 st year of Jotham (15:32)	3. 3 rd year was 1 st year of Hezekiah (18:1)
4. His 6 th year was 9 th year of Hoshea (18:10)	4. His 12 th year was 1 st year of Hoshea (17:1)	4. His 17 th year was 1 st year of Ahaz (16:1)	4. During 7 th year, Shalmaneser sieged Samaria (18:9)
5. Sennacherib invaded Judah in his 14 th year (18:13)			5. Samaria fell in Hoshea's 9 th year (18:10)
6. "In those days..." Hezekiah became ill (20:1-11)			
7. "At that time..." Hezekiah and envoys of Merodach-baladan (20:12-19)			

The problem with the chronology of II Kings is the numbers do not add up. If we anchor our timeline to the historical dates of 721 BCE as the fall of Samaria and 701 BCE as the invasion of Sennacherib, we see numerous problems, the most glaring of which lies in the fact that Hezekiah could not have been in his sixth year as king when Samaria fell in 721 BCE, yet in only his fourteenth year as king when Sennacherib invaded in 701 BCE. If we assume that at least one of these dates are correct, we must construct and analyze two different possible timelines, each one using either 721 BCE or 701 BCE as its starting point.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ These days can be verified and considered trustworthy, for these events are also mentioned in the Assyrian annals, and therefore can be dated with a great amount of certainty.

IV. Note on the Lunar and Solar Calendars

In light of the fact that there seems to be such chronological incompatibility in II Kings, many have suggested that the answer to this problem lies in the fact that we need to take into account that ancient Israel used the lunar calendar (354 day per year) whereas our modern solar calendars are comprised of 365 days per year. Given this difference, many have warned against attempting to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel in terms of modern dating. Although it is true that, as seen in the books of Enoch and Jubilees, the switch from the lunar calendar to the solar calendar was a serious theological issue, when it comes to plotting out the chronology set forth in I and II Kings, the differences between the lunar and solar calendars pose no real problem.

The Hebrew lunar calendar contains twelve months of 30 days; yet since the lunar cycle consists of $29 \frac{1}{2}$ days, the Hebrew lunar year ends up being 354 days per year. In order to keep the lunar calendar coordinated with the cycles of the seasons, a thirteenth month known as “Second Adar” was added to the lunar calendar after the final month of the year known as “Adar” seven out of every nineteen years. Because of the addition of this thirteenth month, the days lost by the lunar calendar to the solar calendar are made up every two to three years. The end result of this recalibration on the part of the lunar calendar is that nineteen lunar years would equal nineteen solar years. In fact, after every three years the lunar recalibration would make the difference between the solar year and lunar year miniscule. Furthermore, even without the addition of “Second Adar,” the yearly difference between the lunar and solar calendars would be only eleven days. This would mean a difference of 33 days every three years, 66 days every six years, 132 days every twelve years, 265 days every 24 years, and 363 days every 33 years. Simply put, it

would take 33 solar years to account for one year's worth of difference between the lunar and solar calendars. Yet the fact is that there *is* a "Second Adar" in the lunar calendar that serves to recalibrate the lunar calendar with the solar calendar every two to three years. Therefore, when we are told that Samaria fell during Hezekiah's sixth year, and when we know that the fall of Samaria happened roughly in 721 BCE of the solar calendar, we can say with a fair amount of certainty that Hezekiah became king of Judah around 727 BCE, regardless if it is according to the lunar or solar calendar. Six years in the solar calendar equals 2190 days; six years in the lunar calendar equals roughly 2180 days, depending on which years received the thirteenth month of "Second Adar."

One final note must be mentioned regarding attempting to make sense of the chronology of II Kings. Because the smallest chronological unit mentioned in II Kings is that of years, and not that of months or days, we must realize that our reconstruction of the dates of certain events will inevitably be somewhat fuzzy. Using the above example, even though we are told that the fall of Samaria happened "in Hezekiah's sixth year," we do not know if it happened *early* in his sixth year or *late* in his sixth year. We are also told later that Hezekiah ruled for 29 years. Again, we simply do not know if he ruled for a full 29 years, partially into his 29th year, or only just into his 29th year. Hence, when we are then told that Manasseh ruled for 55 years, the total number of years he and Hezekiah together reigned could be anywhere between 84 years (if they both reigned a full 29 and 55 years respectively) and a little over 82 years (if they both reigned just into their 29th and 55th years respectively). The fact of the inevitable ambiguity of reckoning kingly reigns in terms of only years, and not months or days, coupled with the possibility of times of co-regency, means that absolute precision in reconstructing the specific events

within the chronology of II Kings is an impossibility. Our reconstructions must allow for various possibilities regarding the “when” of specific events within the reigns of the various Judean and Israelite kings. Because of this, one can easily see that those scholars who object to the identification of Immanuel with Hezekiah on the basis of perceived chronological difficulties are overstating their case. The fact is, when one studies the chronology of II Kings closely, one must come to the conclusion that it is entirely *possible* that Isaiah’s prophecy of Isaiah 7:13-25 was uttered to Ahaz *before* the birth of Hezekiah. One can obviously argue that the material was presented after the birth of Hezekiah, but the point here is that neither position can be substantiated by the material in II Kings *alone*; it is simply too problematic. It is only when one analyzes each possibility against the other information about Hezekiah in the Bible that one possibility becomes more convincing than the other. This thesis asserts that the chronological *possibility* that Isaiah 7:13-25 was uttered *before* the birth of Hezekiah, along with the previously discussed royal imagery and themes surrounding the Immanuel child in Isaiah 7-12, along with the overall literary structure of Proto-Isaiah that will be discussed in chapter four, helps make a convincing argument that Isaiah 7:14 should be seen as a prophecy about the birth of Hezekiah.

V. Possible Answers to the Chronological Problems in II Kings

Once one recognizes the inherent chronological problems within II Kings itself, and once one realizes that the differences between the lunar and solar calendars cannot possibly account for the vast chronological discrepancies in II Kings 16-20, one must come to this basic conclusion: no matter how one slices it, there must be some errors within the text. Hezekiah simply could not have been in his sixth year in 721 BCE *and* in

his fourteenth year in 701 BCE. We must assume then that one of those dates is wrong. The only question is, “Which one?” The answer to this question is vital for this thesis because, given the sum of chronological information found within II Kings 16-20, it will help make a well-reasoned argument as to when Hezekiah was born, which in turn will help make the argument that II Kings does indeed allow for the possibility of an Immanuel-Hezekiah connection within Isaiah. The place to start, then, is to look at each of the certain dates: 721 BCE and 701 BCE.¹⁶⁵

V. 1. Scenario I: 721 BCE as Hezekiah’s Sixth Year as King

The first option we will try out is that of the fall of Samaria in 721 BCE. In II Kings 18:10 we are told that the fall of Samaria happened during Hezekiah’s sixth year. If we use this as a fixed date within the chronology of II Kings, we are able to see a host of problems, as shown in the timeline found at the end of this chapter. The problem with this scenario is if the fall of Samaria happened in Hezekiah’s sixth year, the invasion of Sennacherib would have happened in Hezekiah’s 26th year, not his fourteenth, for Hezekiah’s fourteenth year would have been 713 BCE.¹⁶⁶ Secondly, if Hoshea’s reign was 730-721 BCE, then according to II Kings 18:1-2, and 9-10, Hezekiah’s reign would roughly be 727-698 BCE, and he would have been born in 752 BCE.¹⁶⁷ If he was born in 752 BCE and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis happened throughout the 730’s, then Hezekiah

¹⁶⁵ In Appendix A, one can find the accompanying charts that illustrate *Scenario 1, Scenario 2, Further Problems with the Chronology of II Kings 16-20, and The Proposed Revisions to II Kings 16-20.*

¹⁶⁶ Scholars who have noted this: J. Barton Payne in “The Relationship of the Reign of Ahaz to the Accession of Hezekiah,” *BSac* 126 (1969): 40-52; H. H. Rowley, “Hezekiah’s Reform and Rebellion,” in *Men of God* (ed. H.H. Rowley. London: Thomas Nelson: 1963): 98-132; A.K. Jenkins in “Hezekiah’s Fourteenth Year,” *VT* 26:3 (1976): 284-298

¹⁶⁷ Scholars who have noted this: John McHugh in “The Date of Hezekiah’s Birth,” *VT* 14:4 (1964): 446-453;

would seem to have been close to 20 years old at the time of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, and therefore could not be the child about whom Isaiah was talking.

V. 2. Scenario II: 701 BCE as Hezekiah's Fourteenth Year as King

Our second option would be to assume that II Kings 18:13 and Isaiah 36:1 give the correct date when they say that Sennacherib's invasion in 701 BCE happened in Hezekiah's fourteenth year. If Sennacherib invaded in 701 BCE during Hezekiah's 14th year, this would make Hezekiah's reign roughly 715-686 BCE, and he would have been born around 740 BCE. These dates, though, run into more problems than the first scenario. First of all, if one dated Hezekiah's reign from 715-686 BCE and then computed the reigns of the rest of the kings of Judah up to the time of the Babylonian exile, one would have the fall of Jerusalem take place in 574 BCE. Yet we know for certain that the fall of Jerusalem happened in 587 BCE. Therefore, Hezekiah's death had to have been in 698 BCE. Secondly, if Hezekiah's reign started in 715 BCE, then there is absolutely no way II Kings 18:9-10 could be true, for Hezekiah simply was not king of Judah at any point in the 720's BCE. Thirdly, this timeline would have Hezekiah's birth in 740 BCE, still seemingly too early to make the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy apply to Hezekiah. Finally, if Hezekiah began his reign in 715 BCE, and if we are to believe II Kings 17:1 when it tells us that Hoshea became king of Israel in Ahaz's twelfth year, this would make Hoshea's reign from 730-721 BCE and Ahaz's reign from 742-726 BCE, leaving almost a full ten year gap between the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah. In other words, if II Kings 18:13 and Isaiah 36:1 are correct, then there was no king reigning in Judah from 726-715 BCE. Although there are problems with both scenarios, the chronological problems in scenario II are too substantial for it to be seriously considered.

Therefore for the time being, leaving aside the problem regarding 701 BCE in scenario I, we will tentatively conclude that scenario I is more reliable.

V. 3. Further Problems with the Chronology of II Kings

In addition to this problem concerning Hezekiah's reign itself, there are further problems regarding the biblical data concerning the kings of Judah and Israel who reigned just before Ahaz and Hezekiah. First, according to the given timeline in II Kings, Ahaz would have fathered Hezekiah at the age of ten in 752 BCE. Secondly, if one considers the information given about Pekah in II Kings 15:27, 30, 32, and 16:1, one runs into the problem of Pekah's reign. If we are to believe II Kings 15:27, 32, and 16:1, that would mean Pekah reigned in Israel from 759-739 BCE; but II Kings 15:30 tells us that Hoshea killed Pekah and became king in Pekah's place. If Hoshea reigned from 730-721 BCE, how could Pekah have been killed by Hoshea in both 739 BCE and 730 BCE? Once again, there is an almost ten year discrepancy in the chronology. Thirdly, II Kings 15:30 also tells us that Hoshea's murder of Pekah happened in the 20th year of Jotham's reign, but then three verses later, in 15:33, it states that Jotham reigned for only 16 years. Things are further complicated when one considers the fact that, according to the chronology of the kings of Judah, Jotham seems to have reigned from 758-742 BCE.¹⁶⁸

Quite obviously, either something is dreadfully wrong with the chronological data in II Kings, or else the author of II Kings is doing something very different with the chronologies of the kings than just providing a straight chronology. Given this fact, it is extremely puzzling why so many scholars seem to so casually dismiss the possibility of

¹⁶⁸ It is almost impossible to come to any kind of conclusive answer regarding Jotham's reign, due to the fact that we are told he reigned in Uzziah's place because of Uzziah's leprosy. There are elements of co-regency that can only be speculated upon.

Hezekiah being the prophesied Immanuel child of Isaiah 7:14 on the grounds that the chronology of II Kings does not allow for it. Using that kind of reasoning, one could use the same argument to say that the chronology of II Kings does not allow for *any significant event* in the life of Hezekiah, for no matter how one may work the dates, the numbers simply do not add up. Various scholars, though, have wrestled extensively with the different chronological problems found within II Kings. It is to these attempts to make sense of the chronological data we now turn.

VI. Making Sense of the Chronology of II Kings

When examining the attempts by various scholars to figure out the chronology of II Kings, one quickly sees that scholars have vied for either 727 BCE or 715 BCE as the starting date for Hezekiah's reign. Scholars like H.H. Rowley and Oded Borowski date Hezekiah's reign from 727 BCE to 698 BCE, whereas scholars like Edwin Thiele, W.F. Albright, John Bright, Barton Payne, and John McHugh date Hezekiah's reign from 715 BCE to 686 BCE, or in McHugh's case, 699 BCE. Leslie McFall, unlike these other scholars, attempts to date the beginning Hezekiah's reign at 728 BCE and the end of his reign at 686 BCE. As will be seen shortly, each scholar has his own reasons and rationale for coming to his particular conclusion, and each scholar attempts to resolve the chronological problems in II Kings that have been just discussed. As will now be shown, though, many of these proposed solutions end up creating more problems than they answer. Provan comments on such proposed solutions when he states, "One wonders whether some of the attempts to resolve the enormous problems connected with the chronology of the MT Kings...would have been quite so tortuous if the scholars concerned had paused to ask how the various numbers concerned were *meant* to be

taken.”¹⁶⁹ Provan, pointing to the alternating reigns of the last four kings of Judah (3 months/11 years/3 months/11 years) believes that numbers surrounding the chronologies of the kings of Israel and Judah have been stylistically structured for a literary purpose, and should not, therefore, be forced to fit into an exact historical chronology.¹⁷⁰ Although his comments are warranted in some specific cases, no one has as of yet shown the literary significance of either Hezekiah’s sixth year or fourteenth year.

VI. 1. The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings: Edwin Thiele

Edwin Thiele, in his book entitled *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*,¹⁷¹ put forth an extensive study of the chronologies of all the kings of both Israel and Judah, beginning with Rehoboam of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. Thiele readily saw the many chronological difficulties in I and II Kings, and believed that he was able to come up with a way to make sense of these chronological conundrums. He claimed that these chronological errors could be explained if one understood three characteristics about the divided kingdom: (1) Israel and Judah used different systems for counting the length of the reigns of their kings (Judah counted the first year of a new king as the next year after the final year of the preceding king; Israel counted the first year of a new king as the same year as the final year of the preceding king); (2) Israel and Judah used different calendars; and (3) both Israel and Judah experienced numerous co-regencies.¹⁷²

In his attempt to properly date the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah, Thiele admits the troubling fact that no absolute dates are actually given in the Old Testament.

¹⁶⁹ Iain Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995), 19.

¹⁷⁰ Iain Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995), 19.

¹⁷¹ Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

¹⁷² Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 21.

Therefore, the place to begin this task would be to see if one were able to establish any fixed date(s), based on the other chronologies of other nations around that time. Fortunately, both for Thiele and for us, there are such dates. For example, it is able to be deduced from Assyrian chronology that the battle of Qarqar took place in 853 BCE, and it was in this year that king Ahab of Israel died. Based on this fixed date, Thiele impressively dates the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah from the time when the united monarchy was divided between Rehoboam and Jeroboam in 931 BCE to the accession of Jehu of Judah in 841 BCE.

When one looks at mid-eighth century B.C. Israel and Judah, the time period that concerns this study, one is able to note a number of other fixed dates relating to the history of ancient Israel: (a) 586 BCE is the date of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple; (b) 701 BCE is the date of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah; and (c) 721 BCE is the date of the fall of Samaria and the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel. Given these fixed dates, Thiele argues that one should be able to accurately calculate the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah from Jehu's accession in 841 BCE, the fall of Samaria in 721 BCE (although Thiele places the fall of Samaria at 723/722 BCE), and to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. Before we look at Thiele's rationale for his calculations, though, it would be best to first look at his proposed dates for the kings that are immediately relevant to this thesis:¹⁷³

¹⁷³ For the sake of simplicity, the dates where Thiele records a reign beginning or ending in an over-lapping year (i.e. Josiah's accession: 641/640 BCE), I will simply record the later year (i.e. Josiah's accession: 640 BCE.)

Kings of Israel		Kings of Judah	
		Uzziah	(791-767 BCE) <i>co-regent</i> (767-750 BCE) <i>sole reign</i> (750-739 BCE) <i>co-regent</i>
Menahem	(752-741 BCE) <i>rival reign</i>	Jotham	(750-739 BCE) <i>co-regent</i> (739-735 BCE) <i>sole reign</i> (735-731 BCE) <i>co-regent</i>
Pekahiah	(741-739 BCE) <i>rival reign</i>		
Pekah	(752-739 BCE) <i>rival reign</i> (739-731 BCE) <i>sole reign</i>		
Hoshea	(731-722 BCE)	Ahaz	(735-731 BCE) <i>co-regent</i> (731-715 BCE) <i>sole reign</i>
		Hezekiah	(715-696 BCE) <i>sole reign</i> (696-686 BCE) <i>co-regent</i>
		Manasseh	(696-686 BCE) <i>co-regent</i> (686-642 BCE) <i>sole reign</i>
		Amon	(642-640 BCE)
		Josiah	(640-609 BCE)
		Jehoahaz	(609 BCE)
		Jehoiakim	(609-598 BCE)
		Jehoiachin	(598-597 BCE)
		Zedekiah	(597-586 BCE)

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyze the entirety of Thiele's arguments regarding (a) Pekah and Menahem's supposed rival reigns of the northern kingdom of Israel, and (b) the co-regencies of Uzziah and Jotham. What concerns us is Thiele's proposed dates for the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah. It is to this we will now turn.

In his attempt to put forth the chronology of the later kings of Israel and Judah, Thiele begins his reconstruction with the fixed date of 701 BCE, the date of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah: "The date of 701 for the attack of Sennacherib in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah is a key point in my chronological pattern for the Hebrew rulers."¹⁷⁴ Therefore, Thiele's specific theory places Hezekiah's accession to the throne of Judah in 715 BCE and his death in 686 BCE. Although Thiele does not mention the proposed date of Hezekiah's birth, his proposed dates for Hezekiah's reign would place

¹⁷⁴ Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 174.

Hezekiah's birth at 740 BCE. Yet this dating, as previously stated, brings up a number of problems concerning the chronological data given to us in II Kings. Not only does this seemingly conflict with the reigns of Judah's subsequent kings and place the fall of Jerusalem at around 575 BCE, but it conflicts with II Kings 18:1, 9-10, which tells us that (a) Hezekiah accession took place during Hoshea's third year (18:1), (b) in Hezekiah's fourth year, which was Hoshea's seventh year as king of Israel, King Shalmaneser of Assyria besieged Samaria (18:9), and (c) in Hezekiah's sixth year, which was Hoshea's ninth year, Samaria was taken by the king of Assyria (18:10).

In reference to II Kings 18:1, 9-10, Thiele argues that later editors, because they did not understand the dual dating for Hoshea's predecessor Pekah and his rival reign of Israel with Menahem and Pekahiah, not only thrust the accession of Pekah twelve years ahead, but also thrust the beginning of Hoshea's reign twelve years ahead, thus making Hoshea's reign 720-711 BCE. But this, as we know, is an impossibility, for Samaria fell in 721 BCE, not 711 BCE.¹⁷⁵ Simply put, Thiele argues, "There was no overlap between Hoshea and Hezekiah. Hoshea was dead and the kingdom of Israel was no longer in existence when Hezekiah took the throne."¹⁷⁶ To bolster his argument, Thiele makes a number of points. He first points to II Chronicles 29-30. II Chronicles 29 tells us about how, in his first year as king, Hezekiah cleansed of the temple that his father Ahaz defiled (II Chronicles 29:3-11); II Chronicles 30 tells us about how Hezekiah wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh and invited the Israelites to keep Passover in Jerusalem.¹⁷⁷ Using these chapters as evidence, Thiele argues that this appeal to tribes in the northern kingdom would have been unthinkable if Israel would have still been in existence.

¹⁷⁵ Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 174-175.

¹⁷⁶ Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 175.

¹⁷⁷ Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 169.

“While the northern kingdom was still in existence, it would not, of course, have been possible for the envoys of Judah to pass through the territory of Israel; so we have here a clear indication that it was no longer in existence.”¹⁷⁸ II Chronicles 30:6-9 particularly, Thiele argues, suggests that the northern kingdom had already been destroyed by Assyria.¹⁷⁹

Secondly, Thiele points to II Kings 20 and Isaiah 38-39, the accounts which tell of Hezekiah’s illness and miraculous recovery and the visit of Merodach-Baladan of Babylon. Thiele argues that these events are given in strict chronological order, and therefore Hezekiah’s illness, recovery, and YHWH’s adding fifteen years to his life must have happened shortly after 701 BCE. Merodach-Baladan’s visit, Thiele argues, was in response to hearing of Hezekiah’s successful stand against Sennacherib.¹⁸⁰

In regards to the chronological problem of the subsequent kings of Judah, particularly that of having the fall of Jerusalem happen in 575 BCE, Thiele readily acknowledges this problem. What he puts forth as a solution to this problem, though, is speculative at best: that Manasseh was co-regent with Hezekiah from 696-686 BCE.¹⁸¹

Thiele’s proposed chronology ultimately fails to convince us regarding the proposed dates of Hezekiah. First, Thiele simply asks too much for us to believe that the later editors of II Kings had such a poor understanding of their history that they wrongfully made Hezekiah and Hoshea’s reigns coincide at three different points. Let’s

¹⁷⁸ Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 169.

¹⁷⁹ “Hezekiah’s admonitions were expressly addressed to a nation that was in deep distress and desolation and whose people had already gone into captivity, for the ones who would now receive his letters were spoken of as those who had escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. Their forbearers had been made objects of horror. If they now turned to the Lord and came to the sanctuary at Jerusalem, their brothers might obtain mercy from the ones who had taken them captive.” Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 170.

¹⁸⁰ Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 64, 176.

¹⁸¹ Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 174.

assume, for the sake of argument that this supposed “error” was made during the exilic period, roughly 200 years after fall of Samaria. That would be the equivalent of saying that a historian writing a book on the history of the United States made the mistake of dating the presidency of Rutherford B. Hays (1877-1881) during the time of the Civil War (1861-1865). Everyone, even schoolchildren, knows Abraham Lincoln was president during the Civil War. It was such a major event in United States history that people simply know the major figures associated with it. Similarly, the fall of Samaria was such a major event in the history of both Israel and Judah that it is unbelievable to think that historians of Judah and Israel would have mistakenly placed Hezekiah on the throne of Judah during that time if he was not, in fact, on the throne of Judah.

Some might object to such an analogy on the grounds that we cannot compare contemporary history writing to ancient “history writing” because the latter kind of writing never intended to present “history,” but was rather trying to teach theological truths using historical references and information. Such an objection lies at the heart of the fundamental issue discussed in chapter one concerning “biblical history.” It is the view of this thesis that those who claim that the biblical writers were *only* concerned with teaching theological truths and *never* intended to present history are simply overstating their case. Teaching theological truths and presenting history are not mutually exclusive. To say that the biblical writers were not concerned with presenting “history” is to flatly ignore the fact that they obviously take the time to place certain historical events within specific years of various kings. They might get specific dates wrong from time to time, but unless there is solid historical evidence to doubt that Hezekiah was king during both the fall of Samaria and Sennacherib’s invasion, we must respect the biblical writers

enough assume that they could properly identify which kings were ruling during the major historical events of their nation. To further use the previous analogy, people, having heard various stories about the Civil War, might mistakenly think that it happened during the years 1860-1863 or 1863-1866, or that Abraham Lincoln was president for three, six, or eight years, but one would be hard pressed to find any American who mistakenly thought Rutherford B. Hays freed the slaves during the Civil War. It is simply too unbelievable to assume that biblical writers, writing a mere 150-200 years after the events in question, would either intentionally or unintentionally associate the wrong king with such major events as the fall of Samaria or Sennacherib's invasion.

Secondly, Thiele overstates his case when he argues that Hezekiah could not have invited the northern tribes to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem if the northern kingdom was still in existence. The fact is, although the northern kingdom was still in existence in 727 BCE, it was a severely crippled kingdom. Provan points out that, in II Kings 15:29-31 and II Chronicles 5:26, Assyria annexed much of Israel's northern and eastern territory and deported a large portion of the population to Assyria during the reign of Pekah.¹⁸² We know from the annals of Tiglath-Pileser that he boasted of overthrowing Pekah as king of Israel and replacing him with Hoshea.¹⁸³ Given these facts, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that II Chronicles 30:6-9 is referring to Tiglath-Pileser's overthrowing of Pekah. If we consider that Hezekiah came to the throne in Judah in 727 BCE, he would have been all too aware of the devastation Tiglath-Pileser brought upon Aram and Israel. His actions during his first year as king of Judah would be the actions of a king who was not only concerned with restoring and purifying the temple in Jerusalem,

¹⁸² Provan, Long, Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 270.

¹⁸³ James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, 1969), 283-284.

but also with restoring and uniting the kingdom in some form in the true worship of YHWH.

As far as Hoshea's power was concerned, the mere fact he was essentially a puppet king of Tiglath-Pileser should give us an indication that he might not have had as much power as we would expect most kings to have. We must remember that these were the last days of the northern kingdom; we would be wrong to assume that after Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea (at Tiglath-Pileser's bidding) that the northern kingdom enjoyed peace and stability during Hoshea's nine year reign. He might not have had the ability to completely prevent Hezekiah's envoys from coming into Israel and extending the invitation to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, despite Hoshea's inability to stop this from happening, the mere fact that we are told in II Chronicles 30:10-11 that most of those in Manasseh and Ephraim "laughed them to scorn and mocked them" shows that for the most part Hezekiah's invitations were, in fact, rejected, and that those in the northern kingdom, despite the devastation wrought by Tiglath-Pileser, still refused to return to YHWH. Perhaps this is the very thing about which Isaiah 9:8-21 prophesied. Their rejection of Hezekiah's offers in II Chronicles 30:8-9, therefore, would have been seen by Isaiah, as well as the writers of II Kings and II Chronicles, as the reason that led to Samaria's fall in 721 BCE.

Thirdly, Thiele is wrong to assume the accounts of Hezekiah's illness/miraculous recovery and the visit of Merodach-Baladan's envoys are in chronological order. He takes no consideration of the possibility that the final redactor of Isaiah placed these two accounts at the end of Proto-Isaiah to serve as a literary bridge to Deutero-Isaiah, which begins with the calling out of the Jews from the Babylonian Exile. Simply put, Thiele is

wrong to assume that II Kings is presenting history as we understand it today. This, though, is not contradicting what was stated earlier. We must, as biblical scholars, strive to balance the three-fold nature of books like II Kings. It is history, literature, and prophecy all rolled into one. Now, if II Kings 20 and Isaiah 39 said, “A year after Sennacherib withdrew from Jerusalem, envoys from Merodach-Baladan came to visit Hezekiah,” we would certainly have to agree with Thiele’s assumption that these events did, in fact, happen after Sennacherib’s invasion. But the fact is that no definitive historical context is given, other than “In those days....” Therefore, when one considers both the overall chronological schema put forth in II Kings and the literary structure of Isaiah, one can clearly see that the placement of this story is based on the literary concerns of Isaiah. This idea, closely related to the issue of priority of either Proto-Isaiah or II Kings, will be developed more fully later on. At this point, though, all that needs to be emphasized is that the story about the envoys from Merodach-baladan, both in II Kings 20 and Isaiah 39, is not definitively associated with any specific historical date. The historical ambiguity of “in those days” calls into question anyone who might attempt to place this story in the year immediately after Sennacherib’s invasion.

The final point to make regarding Thiele’s reconstructed chronology concerns his speculation that Manasseh was co-regent with Hezekiah from 698-686 BCE. There are a many reasons why this should be doubted. First, the biblical text itself never gives any indication or mention of co-regency between Hezekiah and Manasseh. Second, if Hezekiah was miraculously healed by Isaiah shortly after Sennacherib’s failed invasion, it would seem rather strange to claim that Hezekiah would name Manasseh co-regent in case of his untimely death. Isaiah just healed Hezekiah and had prophesied that he would

live for another fifteen years. In light of that, not to mention YHWH's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib, it would have been an outrageous act of unfaithfulness, eerily similar to that of Ahaz during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, if Hezekiah chose to doubt that Isaiah really healed him and then turned around to name Manasseh his co-regent. Third, according to the biblical texts, both II Kings 20 and Isaiah 39, the reason why Merodach-Baladan sent his envoys to Hezekiah was *not* because he was impressed at how Hezekiah stood up to Sennacherib, but rather because he had heard of his miraculous healing. Thiele's argument that Merodach-Baladan's envoys came in response to the fallout of Sennacherib's invasion simply is not faithful to the biblical text. All this goes to show that although Thiele's work has been considered the definitive work on the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah, it is not without some serious problems. To date Hezekiah's reign from 715-686 BCE not only ignores the biblical texts that say he was king of Judah during Hoshea's reign and during the fall of Samaria, but it does severe damage to the dates of the subsequent kings of Judah as well. In short, it creates more problems that it claims to solve.

VI. 2. Did Thiele Overlook Hezekiah's Co-Regency?: Leslie McFall

Another scholar who takes issue with Thiele's work is Leslie McFall. In response to Thiele's work, McFall claimed that Thiele overlooked Hezekiah's co-regency with Ahaz and misunderstood the two chronological pieces of information in 2 Kings 17:1. First, he claimed that the editor of 2 Kings 17-18 assumed that "Hoshea's accession began in the 12th year of Ahaz's reign and that Hoshea's nine-year reign is to be calculated from that point."¹⁸⁴ Second, he assumed that the "12th year of Ahaz's reign"

¹⁸⁴ Leslie McFall, "Did Thiele Overlook Hezekiah's Coregency?," *BSac* (Oct-Dec 1989): 395.

meant the 12th year of his sole reign (720 BCE.). This would mean that the fall of Samaria would have happened in 710 BCE, hence another chronological error. McFall suggests, rather, that 2 Kings 15:30, which states that Hoshea killed Pekah and ruled in his place in the 20th year of Jotham of Judah, marks the accession of Hoshea, whereas 2 Kings 17:1, which states that Hoshea became king in the 12th year of Ahaz,¹⁸⁵ marks his termination. With this alteration, McFall suggests the following dates for the kings of Israel and Judah.

<i>Israel</i>	<i>Judah</i>
Pekah: 751-731 BCE (Sole ruler of Israel)	Jotham: 750-739 BCE (Co-regent: Uzziah) 739-734 BCE (Sole-ruler of Judah) 734-731 BCE (Co-regent: Ahaz)
Hoshea 731-722 BCE (Sole ruler of Israel)	Ahaz: 734-731 BCE (Co-regent: Jotham) 731-728 BCE (Sole ruler of Judah) 728-715 BCE (Co-regent: Hezekiah)
	Hezekiah: 728-715 BCE (Co-regent: Ahaz) 715-686 BCE (Sole ruler of Judah)

What this chart shows is the following: (a) Jotham reigned for twenty years, had two different periods of co-regency (750-739 BCE with Uzziah and 734-731 BCE with Ahaz), and was only sole ruler of Judah from 739-734 BCE; (b) Ahaz also reigned for twenty years, also had two different periods of co-regency (734-731 BCE with Jotham and 728-715 BCE with Hezekiah), and was only sole ruler of Judah from 731-728 BCE; (c) Hezekiah reigned for forty-three years, was co-regent with Ahaz from 728-715 BCE, and was sole ruler from 715-686 BCE.

Concerning Hezekiah's reign, McFall notes the three synchronisms mentioned earlier: (a) 2 Kings 18:1; (b) 2 Kings 18: 9-10; and (c) 2 Kings 18:10. Whereas Thiele believed these dates to be the work of a later reviser who had a very poor knowledge of

¹⁸⁵ McFall, "Did Thiele Overlook?" 396.

the history of Judah,¹⁸⁶ McFall points out that Thiele never once entertained the possibility of Hezekiah being a co-regent with Ahaz for any length of time. Therefore, when II Kings 18 tells us that Hezekiah was the king of Judah during the last years of the northern kingdom, McFall argues that it was a reference to his first years a co-regent with Ahaz. Yet when II Kings 18:13 tells us that Sennacherib invaded Judah during Hezekiah's fourteenth year, he argues that date was based on Hezekiah's years as the sole ruler of Judah. Nevertheless, when one steps back and looks at the implications McFall's argument has on the portrait of Hezekiah as a whole, one sees a number of problems. McFall's chronology of Hezekiah includes the following: (a) Hezekiah would have been born in 739 BCE, when Ahaz was either fifteen or eleven; (b) Hezekiah would have become co-regent with Ahaz in 728 BCE at the age of eleven; (c) Hezekiah would have died in 686 BCE at the age of 54, having ruled for forty-three years, sole ruler of Judah for 29 years, co-regent with Ahaz for fourteen years.

In addition to many of the same problems we found with Thiele, McFall's chronology adds yet another problem: the biblical text says nothing about Hezekiah reigning for 43 years. If anything, the years given in the text *include* co-regent years with the sole years. We must assume, therefore, that Hezekiah's *total* years as king total 29 years, not 43 years. As with Thiele's liberal use of co-regencies in his chronology, we must wonder why II Kings does not inform us of the extensive instances of co-regency that both Thiele and McFall claim. Simply put, it is just too hard to believe that Jotham's sole reign was only five years, Ahaz's sole reign was only three years, and that Ahaz and Hezekiah shared the throne as co-regents for an astounding 13 years.

¹⁸⁶ "To Thiele, it was clear that the false synchronisms were not the product of an official court recorder living contemporaneously with the kings involved, but that they came from a much later period when the exact historical details of the period were forgotten." McFall, "Did Thiele Overlook?" 401.

VI. 3. *The Date of Hezekiah's Birth:* John McHugh

The next scholar, John McHugh, has tried to determine the date of Hezekiah's birth in order to prove that Isaiah 7:14 was indeed a prophecy about Hezekiah. He begins his article with a brief discussion of Isaiah 7:14, and states that one "very attractive interpretation" of this prophecy is that it is referring to the wife of Ahaz, and that "the boy Immanuel is certainly the son of Ahaz"—i.e. Hezekiah. Hughes further speculates that Isaiah 9:1-6 then could be taken as "an oracle on the birth of Hezekiah," yet along with numerous other scholars, McHugh points to the difficulties with this interpretation based on the chronological data presented in II Kings 15-18. Nevertheless, he believes that it is possible to make the chronology work in order to have Immanuel be Hezekiah.

After suggesting that the dates regarding the reigns of Ahaz, Pekah, and Hoshea were the result of faulty scribal revision,¹⁸⁷ McHugh suggests that Hezekiah ascended the throne in Jerusalem around 715 BCE, based on II Kings 18:13 that states Sennacherib's invasion (which was 701 BCE) took place in Hezekiah's 14th year. Therefore, Hezekiah's reign was 715-686 BCE, and Ahaz's reign was 731-715 BCE. Yet McHugh argues that Hezekiah could not have been 25 years old at his ascension, but rather was 15 years old, and therefore must have been born around 730 BCE.

¹⁸⁷ He suggests "in the 17th year of Pekah" (II Kings 16:1) should be "in the 7th year of Pekah" and "in the 12th year of Ahaz" (II Kings 17:1) should be "in the 2nd year of Ahaz" and claims a copyist who knew about the Isaiah 7 prophecy intentionally changed "7th" to "17th." Stating it would be "absurd" to believe that Pekah declared war on Jotham during his 7th year only to carry out the attack almost ten years later against Ahaz, McHugh suggests the copyist of "The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah" made this change to "tidy up" the chronology of the kings of Judah. He further speculates that a copyist of "The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel" might have seen that Hoshea became king in the 2nd year of Ahaz, but would have thought that was impossible because the archives of Judah had Ahaz becoming king in the 7th year of Pekah. Therefore, Ahaz's 2nd year would be Pekah's 9th year; if Pekah reigned for 20 years, then Hoshea could not have ascended the throne in Ahaz's 2nd year. Therefore, the copyist of "The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel" changed "2nd" to "12th" to "tidy up" the chronology for the kings of the northern kingdom. Essentially, McHugh's argument is that the final redactor of II Kings based his work on faulty copies of both "The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah" and "The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel." John McHugh, "The Date of Hezekiah's Birth," *VT* 17:2 (1967): 446-453.

With these changes, McHugh states that “This chronological pattern seems to account for the present text of II Kings, and to remove the chronological difficulties against the identification of Immanuel with Hezekiah.”¹⁸⁸ Yet his reconstruction leaves much to be desired. Not only must one recognize that McHugh’s attempted revision fails to put together a believable historical picture, one must also question any proposal that alters so much of the biblical data. In order to accept McHugh’s argument, one must: (a) ignore the chronological problem of having Hezekiah’s reign extending to 686 BCE, (b) believe that the final redactor of II Kings just happened to be using faulty copies from both Israel *and* Judah, and (c) completely ignore the claim in II Kings 18:9-10 that Hezekiah was king during the fall of Samaria, which we know to be 721 BCE. Furthermore, one must be convinced of the rationale McHugh uses to change Hezekiah’s age from 25 to 15 at his ascension. Although this thesis will provide such rationale later on, McHugh offers no such thing. In short, McHugh’s attempt to make the chronology work so that it is possible to equate Hezekiah with “Immanuel” in Isaiah 7:14 simply is not convincing.

VI. 4. The Relationship of the Reign of Ahaz to the Accession of Hezekiah:
J. Barton Payne

The final scholar we will look at who has wrestled with the chronology surrounding Hezekiah’s reign is J. Barton Payne. In his article, Payne outlines the three most common proposed dates for Ahaz’s reign: (a) 743-728 BCE, (b) 735-719 BCE, and (c) 731-715 BCE. While stating that the first option seems the most attractive, Payne still

¹⁸⁸ McHugh, “Hezekiah’s Birth,” 452.

lists six criticisms against it,¹⁸⁹ and admits that on a purely historical-critical level he cannot account for all six criticisms. Given this realization of the limits of historical-critical methods, Payne suggests, “A more fruitful approach to the whole problem would appear to lie in the investigation of Isaiah’s overall literary structure.”¹⁹⁰ For example, he notes, along with other scholars, that the accounts of Hezekiah’s illness (Isaiah 38) and the visit from the emissaries of Merodach-baladan (Isaiah 39) could not have happened during the events of Sennacherib’s invasion of 701 BCE.¹⁹¹ He cites two basic reasons. First, YHWH extended Hezekiah’s life for fifteen more years (therefore this “illness” must have been closer to 713 BCE); and second, Merodach-baladan was on the throne in Babylon from 720-709 BCE. Payne states that despite his later uprising at the beginning of Sennacherib’s reign, it was more likely that this visit happened earlier.

As one can see, Payne was not so much interested in trying to prove the correct dates for the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, as he was pointing out the need for proper consideration of literary concerns within the text. “Prudence would... seem to dictate a

¹⁸⁹ Payne’s criticisms: (1) If Ahaz came to the throne in 743 BCE, that would mean both his father Jotham and his grandfather Uzziah would have still been alive. Yet we know that Uzziah’s reign was from 800-748 BCE, and so he would have been dead by 743 BCE. As for Jotham, Payne puts for the possibility of co-regency, inspired by the events of Tiglath-pileser’s attack upon the states of western Syria. Jotham might have named Ahaz co-regent, in light of a possible impending defeat. (2) Payne states that Manasseh began his reign in 697 BCE; this would make Hezekiah’s reign 727-698 BCE, and would leave a one year gap in which Judah would not have had a king. He suggests this might be answered in the “chaos that surrounded Ahaz’s last days (II Chron. 28-23).” Yet another possibility is that Manasseh’s date is wrong. (3) No mention of contact between Hezekiah and Hoshea. (4) Hezekiah’s appeal to the Ephraimite “remnant that are escaped out of the hands of the king of Assyria” (II Chron. 30:1,6) does not fit if Hezekiah made this appeal early in his reign. If he began his reign in 727 BCE, the fall of Samaria had not happened yet, and therefore there would be no “remnant” yet. (5) Low ages for paternity. Payne says this is not an impossibility. (6) A final weakness is that if Hezekiah’s reign was around 726-697 BCE, Sennacherib’s invasion could not have been in his fourteenth year. J. Barton Payne, “The Relationship of the Reign of Ahaz to the Accession of Hezekiah.” *BSac* 126 (January-March 1969): 42-44.

¹⁹⁰ Payne, “The Reign of Ahaz to Hezekiah,” 46.

¹⁹¹ Scholars who have noted this: P.R. Ackroyd, “Isaiah 36-39: Structure and Function,” in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala* (ed. W.C. Delsman et al.; Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 3-21; Richard Hess, “Hezekiah and Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18-20,” in *Zion, City of our God* (ed. Richard Hess and Gordon Wenham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 23-42.

more careful re-examination into Isaiah’s possible literary intent in this passage...before abandoning [the view that Ahaz reigned from 743-728 BCE] and proceeding to rewrite eighth-century chronology on the basis of this single statement.”¹⁹² In light of past historical-critical attempts to reconcile the problematic chronology of II Kings, Payne’s realization of the limits to the historical-critical method rings true. Resolving these chronological problems on purely historical-critical grounds has proved to be a failure. Instead of clarifying the troubling chronological issues surrounding the reign of Hezekiah, historical-critical scholars have managed to turn these confusing chronological problems into frustrating conundrums devoid of any hope of answers. As said in chapter one, proper biblical exegesis needs to come to the text in its final form with one eye toward historical concerns and the other eye toward literary concerns. Both are necessary to see the biblical text clearly.

VII. Proposed Revisions to the Chronologies of Ahaz and Hezekiah

It is abundantly clear that there is something wrong with the chronology of II Kings, particularly regarding the dates of Hezekiah’s reign. At the very least, one can say with certainty that the “history” surrounding the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah is ambiguous and unclear. The question, therefore becomes, “How can this problem be best resolved?” Most scholars have favored II Kings 18:13 as correct, and have thus chosen to explain away or dismiss II Kings 18:1, 9-10. Yet to do this not only creates even more problems, it indirectly calls into the question the “historical reliability” of the Bible. Other scholars have based their revised chronologies on supposed co-regencies of various

¹⁹² Payne, “The Reign of Ahaz to Hezekiah,” 52.

kings. Yet this also runs into serious problems, and imposes on the biblical texts extended periods of co-regency that the texts themselves give no indication of whatsoever.

This thesis asserts that the answer to the chronological problems of II Kings lies not only with historical-critical methods and literary analysis, but also with the realization that there are scribal errors in the text. If any scholar is to revise what he sees as a textual error, that scholar must attempt to make sure that his revision not only helps clarify the historical context of the text in question, but that his revision also helps accentuate the perceived literary structure of that given text. Granted, one should, if at all possible, try to accept the text as it is presented to us; one must consider the possibility that the chronological numbers in II Kings are there for more than just chronological reasons, and that they have been stylized in a literary fashion for a certain literary reasons. The case of the last four kings of Judah may be an example of this. Yet in the case of the sixth year and fourteenth year of Hezekiah, no clear literary reason for these numbers has yet been put forth. Given that as the case, we must entertain the possibility that at least one of these numbers is a historical error; and when that historical error has direct implications for correctly understanding a text as controversial as Isaiah 7:14, one is obligated to try to correct the historical error. Let it be repeated: the fundamental argument against identifying Hezekiah as the promised Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 is based on what is clearly a flawed chronology in II Kings. Since (a) it is clearly flawed, and since (b) the biblical writer of I and II Kings was not simply “writing literature,” but was also giving a *prophetic* interpretation of *historical events*, one is obligated to at least look at this issue more closely to see whether or not there is a simple resolution to this problem. The biblical writers of II Kings and Isaiah probably did not have access to the Assyrian annals

to double-check their chronologies, and therefore the chronological errors in the account of Hezekiah's reign went unnoticed. And, as far as understanding the theological and prophetic teachings found in II Kings and Isaiah goes, it is not essential or even necessary to "get the chronology *exactly* right." It was enough to know that Hezekiah was king during the fall of Samaria and during Sennacherib's invasion and to learn from the theological and prophetic teachings the biblical writers put forth in their works. For the modern historian, though, the chronological error is a problem just begging to be figured out. And indeed, when scholars hold up this flawed chronology to dismiss what is by all other accounts a clear identification of Hezekiah with Immanuel in Isaiah 7, it is imperative that one tries to figure out this thorny chronological problem.

The question of how the chronology of Hezekiah fits into the literary structure of Proto-Isaiah will be addressed in the next few chapters. At present, though, we will address the apparent historical-critical error in II Kings and put forth a well-reasoned revision to that error that clarifies the chronological confusion of Hezekiah's reign in II Kings, and opens the door for the chronological possibility that Isaiah 7:14 was in fact a prophecy concerning the birth of Hezekiah.

The solution that this thesis will put forth contains the least amount of maneuvering and alteration of all the other proposed solutions put forth by other scholars. This thesis asserts that the cause for all the confusion surrounding the chronology of Hezekiah can be traced back to two scribal errors. The first is found in Isaiah 36:1 and II Kings 18:13. H.H. Rowley suggests that the text that says, "It was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah" (וַיְהִי בְּאַרְבַּע עָשָׂר שָׁנָה לְמֶלֶךְ חִזְקִיָּהוּ) should read, "in the twenty-fourth year," (בְּאַרְבַּע עָשָׂרִים), on the grounds that a scribal error was made that rendered

the final ם- as a ן-.¹⁹³ Some might object to this on the grounds that this correction would place Sennacherib’s campaign in 703 B.C., and not in 701 B.C. Rowley, though, points out that Hezekiah’s rebellion and Sennacherib’s campaign did not necessarily have to happen in the same year. After all, “some time must have been spent in forcing Ekron to join in the revolt, and at that time Sennacherib’s hands were full in other directions,”¹⁹⁴ namely in confronting Merodach-Baladan of Babylon. Simply put, it takes time to start a revolt, and it takes even more time to send armies to attempt to put down a revolt. Rowley speculates that Hezekiah could have very well seen that Sennacherib was occupied with putting down the Babylonian threat, and therefore seized the opportunity to revolt and prepare defenses before Sennacherib could deal with it. He concludes, “There is nothing in the least improbable, therefore, in dating the revolt in 703 B.C., which would be in the twenty-fourth year of Hezekiah’s reign, if he ascended to the throne six years before the fall of Samaria. Hence, it seems to me to be much easier to alter a single feature in a duplicated passage than to reject the repeated synchronisms.”¹⁹⁵ Rowley’s suggestion is very believable. One could argue though, that it is unnecessary. It is good enough to know that “around that time” (703-701 BCE) Hezekiah’s confrontation with Sennacherib came to a head.¹⁹⁶

The second scribal error is found in II Kings 18:2, which tells us that Hezekiah was twenty-five years old (בֶּן-עֶשְׂרִים וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנָה) when he began to reign. In contrast to

¹⁹³ H.H. Rowley, “Hezekiah’s Reform and Rebellion,” in *Men of God* (ed. H.H. Rowley; London: Thomas Nelson and Sons: 1963), 113.

¹⁹⁴ Rowley, “Hezekiah’s Reform and Rebellion,” 113.

¹⁹⁵ Rowley, “Hezekiah’s Reform and Rebellion,” 114-115.

¹⁹⁶ Although this thesis agrees with Rowley’s suggestion of a scribal error in Isaiah 36:1/II Kings 18:13, it will, in the next chapter, take issue with Rowley’s suggestion that the writer of Isaiah borrowed the Sennacherib account from II Kings.

the first scribal error, this error involves rendering the final 7- as a final 2-. Therefore, instead of being twenty-five years old at the start of his reign, Hezekiah would have been fifteen years old. This would place his year of birth around 742 BCE, the year that Ahaz probably ascended the throne. The result of considering these two scribal errors can be illustrated in “Option B” found in the chart in the appendix entitled *Proposed Revisions to the Chronology of Ahaz and Hezekiah*.

This revision, based on two very believable scribal errors, would not only do justice to II Kings 18:1, 9-10, and 13, it would place the year of Hezekiah’s birth at 742 BCE, the year Ahaz ascended the throne at twenty years of age. One might still object to this possibility on the grounds that even if Hezekiah was born in 742 BCE, the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis did not happen until around 735 BCE, and therefore Hezekiah would have been seven years old at the time of Isaiah’s prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. This objection, though, fails to consider the larger picture that both II Kings 15 and Isaiah 7 gives regarding this time in the history of Judah. Although scholars correctly point out that the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis essentially ended roughly in 732 BCE, when King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria destroyed Aram and severely crippled Israel (which later was destroyed when Samaria fell in 721 BCE), they make two faulty assumptions: (a) that the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis lasted only from 735-732 BCE and (b) that Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy had to have been made shortly before 732 BCE, perhaps 735-733 BCE.

First of all, what most scholars fail to consider, though, is II Kings 15:37, which tells us that Rezin and Pekah had been harassing Judah ever since the later years of Ahaz’s father, king Jotham. This would date the beginning of their harassment some time shortly before 742 BCE, before Jotham died, and before Ahaz became king. Therefore, according

to the biblical texts, the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis must have been an ongoing crisis for at least ten years or so. The point here is that the alliance between Ephraim and Aram, and their subsequent attacks on Judah, did not all happen with one march to Jerusalem in 735 BCE. II Kings 16:6 records other conquests by Rezin, and II Chronicles 28:5-15 records further raids by Rezin and Pekah, and also gives a detailed account of what Israel did with the captives it took from Judah. In other words, the *threat* and many *warning signs* preceded the final showdown of 735 BCE, and these threats could have easily been going on in the years leading up to 735 BCE.

Secondly, if the proposed chronology is accepted, this would more than adequately paint a believable picture of the historical setting of Isaiah 7. Given the fact that Isaiah 7:6 tells us that Rezin and Pekah were planning to take Jerusalem and set up the son of Tabeel as its ruler, it would be logical to assume that this threat happened very early in Ahaz's reign, probably at the beginning, before Ahaz was firmly established as the king of Judah. It is much easier to oust a young, inexperienced ruler at the beginning of his reign, than it is when he is more firmly entrenched in his position. Therefore, this thesis proposes that it was this threat at the beginning of Ahaz's reign in 742 BCE that Isaiah was addressing in Isaiah 7. Consequently, the prophetic oracles of Isaiah 7-12 should be dated, not in 735 BCE, but right around 742 BCE and shortly afterwards. We must remember that Isaiah 7:2 states that the House of David (i.e. Ahaz and his royal court) were terrified, and "trembled as trees of the forest sway before a wind," when they heard that Ephraim had allied itself with Aram, *not* when Rezin and Pekah made their march on Jerusalem. Therefore, if this is the case, then Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy of 7:14 would have been made right around the time Hezekiah would have been born, thus

making it a strong possibility that Hezekiah was the prophesied Immanuel child to whom Isaiah was referring in 7:14. After all, Isaiah prophesied that by the time the “Immanuel” child was old enough to reject evil and chose the good (i.e. grow into a young boy), that this threat from Rezin and Pekah would be gone (Isaiah 7:15-16). If this prophecy was made shortly before Hezekiah’s birth, and if Hezekiah was born around 742 BCE, then he would have been around 10 years old when Tiglath-Pileser crushed Rezin, crippled Israel, and when Hoshea killed Pekah and became king in his place. Indeed, the threat of both Rezin and Pekah would have been done away with by the time Hezekiah was old enough to “reject evil” and “chose the good.”

In light of all the failed attempts made to make sense of the confusing chronological data in II Kings, the proposal made in this chapter that the problems can be traced back to two scribal errors in II Kings 18:2 and II Kings 18:13/Isaiah 36:1 is both logically coherent and historically believable. First, not only does it require the least amount of textual maneuvering, but the possibility of these scribal errors is very understandable, given the close resemblance of the two words. Without the vowel points that were later added to the text by the Masoretes, the two words look virtually identical: עשרה, עשרם. Secondly, the proposed revision to the chronology remains faithful to the overall historical picture that II Kings puts forth regarding the reign of Hezekiah, namely that Hezekiah became the king of Judah during the last years of the northern kingdom of Israel and was still the king of Judah in 701 BCE, at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah. Thirdly, the proposed revision gives a more than adequate explanation for the Syro-Ephraimite threat to the throne of Ahaz: Rezin and Pekah, who had already been harassing Judah during Jotham’s reign, attempted to seize control of Judah as soon as

Jotham died and before Ahaz could firmly establish his kingship. Finally, the proposed chronological revision is also able to place the birth of Hezekiah around the year 742 BCE, the exact time when Ahaz, the newly crowned king of Judah, not only would have been faced with the very real threat of Rezin and Pekah, but would also have been challenged by Isaiah to put his trust in YHWH.

By contrast, all other attempts to solve the chronological puzzle of II Kings involve highly suspicious manipulations of the texts and flat out rejections of the historical reliability of various parts of the biblical record. Furthermore, instead of being able to account for the various other factors that come into play when dealing with the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, these other attempts have simply created more chronological problems than they have solved. Now that both the immediate context of Isaiah 7 and the greater context of Isaiah 7-12 has been analyzed, and the chronological problems of II Kings have been addressed, we now turn our attention to Isaiah 36-39 to address further issues of the historical reliability of the Sennacherib accounts, the primacy of either Proto-Isaiah or II Kings, and the literary coherence and structure of Proto-Isaiah.