

The “Accession Year” and Davidic Chronology

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Introduction

It is well-nigh the consensus of Bible scholars—no matter their view of the overall historical credibility of the biblical record—that the account of the reign of David over Jerusalem marks an apogee in Old Testament historiography.¹ Whether regarded generically as history writing, political propaganda, wisdom literature, or story,² the so-called “Succession Document”³ (2 Sam. 9–20; 1 Kgs. 1–2) and its associated texts (2 Sam. 2–8; 21–24) enjoy considerable favor as source material for the period of David’s rise to power at Jerusalem, his tenure, and his succession.

This is in spite of the widely recognized problems in the use of this literature as historical documentation.⁴ Besides its non-historiographical character, the very order and arrangement of the events is beset with difficulty, not least of which is the lack of a clearly perceived chronological structure. In line with other biblical historical literature, especially prior to the divided monarchy, the interest of the authors and compilers is perceived to be manifestly thematic or associative rather than chronological.⁵

Notwithstanding this assessment of the history of David as a whole, it has become almost a commonplace that the account of his reign prior to the “Succession Document” (i.e., 2 Sam. 2–8) is related in a chronological sequence.⁶ Thus, the narrative suggests that following David’s anointing in Hebron (2 Sam. 2:4) he reigned there for seven and a half years (2 Sam. 5:4). During this time both Ish-Bosheth (2 Sam. 4:7) and Abner died (2 Sam. 3:30), making David’s accession to the throne of Saul and all Israel possible. Having secured himself over a united kingdom David set out to acquire a capital city in a neutral site where he could combine cult and crown in one

1 John Van Seters, *In Search of History* (New Haven, 1983), 277.

2 D. M. Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*, JSOT Supp. 6 (Sheffield, 1978), 20–30.

3 For objections to this generally accepted term, coined by Leonhard Rost in *Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids*, BWANT 3/6 (Stuttgart, 1926), see especially Peter R. Ackroyd, “The Succession Narrative (so-called),” *Int.* 35 (1981), 383–96.

4 For many of these, such as the highly embellished poetic form and the private scenes and conversations, see R. N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative* (Naperville, 1968), 11–19.

5 B. Mazar, “David’s Reign in Hebron and the Conquest of Jerusalem,” in D. J. Silver, ed., *In the Time of Harvest. Essays in Honor of Abba Hillel Silver* (New York, 1963), 235–44.

6 So John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, 1981), 195–207. Bright does recognize that there are some deviations from strict chronological order but these are exceptional. (See 198, n. 30).

location. Jerusalem proved to be the ideal choice so David took the city (2 Sam. 5:7), fortified it (5:9), and proceeded to build a royal palace (5:11). He next put down at least two Philistine invasions and then undertook to bring the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, housing it in a tabernacle he had prepared for it (6:17).

When this had been achieved David expressed his desire to build a temple for YHWH, a request that was denied but that resulted in a covenant arrangement whereby his own house (i.e., dynasty) would be established forever (7:16). The catalogue of military conquests outlined in 2 Samuel 8 is clearly parenthetical to the narrative that is otherwise considered chronological, but the "Succession Document" then commences and appears to be in chronological succession to chapters 2-7 and also in generally chronological order within itself.

Careful scrutiny of the account reveals, however, that the apparently chronological ordering of the material in 2 Samuel 2-7 (and 9-20) is in fact only apparent. While a case can be made for such a sequence in the pre-Jerusalem phase (chs. 2-4),⁷ this is not the case at all for the remainder of David's reign. The purposes of this paper are (1) to identify those clues that suggest a non-chronological arrangement and to propose a literary and theological rationale for its reconstruction; and (2) to offer a hypothetical reconstruction of events based on the chronological pattern to be adduced.

1. *The Hiram problem*

Following the narrative of the capture of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6-7) the historian relates that "Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar logs and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David" (5:11). This same Phoenician ruler is described as one who "had always been on friendly terms with David" (1 Kgs. 5:15), a technical phrase suggesting a treaty relationship that had embraced at least a number of years.⁸

Though the name Hiram in its several forms (such as Ahiram) was common throughout the first millennium of Phoenician history, there is only one attested to at Tyre anywhere near the time of David and Solomon, Hiram son of Abibaal.⁹ Virtually all scholars agree that he is the Hiram of 2 Sam. 5:11 and the one associated with the building projects of Solomon (1 Kgs. 5, 9, 10). At this point, however, a major chronological crux emerges.

The work of Edwin Thiele has required an almost unassailable date of 971 B.C.E. for the accession of Solomon, a date that in turn presupposes the commencement of David's reign at Jerusalem ca. 1004 B.C.E.¹⁰ The assumption that Hiram's overtures

⁷ Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 67.

⁸ As Moran has shown, the description of the relationship—*kī ʾōhēb hāyāh hīrām lʾdāvid*—is that of a covenant nature. W. L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 23 (1963), 80-81.

⁹ For the era of Hiram I in general see H. Jacob Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre* (Jerusalem, 1973), 77-115. The next known Hiram reigned ca. 739-730 B.C.E.

¹⁰ Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, 1965), 53-54. Even those scholars who view the 40-year reigns of David and Solomon as conventional rather than strictly literal time periods admit that they must, on other grounds, be at least approximations. So, e.g., H. Tadmor, "The Chronology of the First Temple Period: A Presentation and Evaluation of the Sources," apud J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, 1984), 383. The "Albright chronology" advocated by many historians lowers the date of the division of the kingdom to ca. 924 but, as we shall see, this does not affect the argument to be advanced presently.

toward David and his construction on David's behalf followed closely upon the conquest of Jerusalem necessitates that Hiram's own accession of Tyre precede 1004. This is not the case at all, however, for even the most liberal dating of Hiram will allow his accession to be no earlier than 980.¹¹ Many scholars, in fact, prefer a date nearly a decade later, perhaps as late as 970.¹² In any case, if the account of Hiram's building in Jerusalem has any historical value at all, it suggests that it was undertaken not in David's first years in Jerusalem but in his last!

Internal support for this may be seen in the immediate context of 2 Sam. 5:11 where it is related that Hiram's assistance was part of a process in which David "became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty was with him" (5:10). This implied passing of time is reinforced by the observation that the Lord "had exalted his kingdom" (5:12). The building of the palace, then, was the culmination of a period of time lasting many years during which David's sovereignty became firmly entrenched and universally recognized. Then and only then did Hiram build for Israel's king a habitation worthy of his exalted position among the rulers of the earth.¹³

A more objective and decisive support for this interpretation of the chronology is found in reference to the building projects of Solomon. David had been precluded from building a temple but his son Solomon was granted that privilege. Having firmly established himself as David's successor (1 Kgs. 2:46), Solomon commenced the construction of the temple in his fourth year (1 Kgs. 6:1) or 967/66 B.C.E. This project was also pursued with the assistance of Hiram who supplied men, materials, and expertise (1 Kings 5). Of special interest is the fact that Hiram's participation, according to Josephus, occurred in Hiram's eleventh (or twelfth) year.¹⁴ This pinpoints Hiram's year of accession at 977 at the latest, thus allowing him to overlap David by at least six years.

Further precision may be gained from the information of 1 Kgs. 9:10-14. There the historian points out that Solomon's building projects—the temple and other public structures—occupied a period of twenty years in all, and that Hiram was a participant throughout. This requires Hiram to have been in power as late as 947 and probably a little later. Since the sources are unanimous in assigning him 34 years,¹⁵ his reign could have commenced as early as 981. As we have already suggested the date was probably closer to 977.

If, again, the references to Hiram in the David and Solomon stories have any historical validity at all (and there is no reason to think otherwise at this point), it is obvious that the standard ways of viewing the life and career of David require radical

11 F. M. Cross, "An Interpretation of the Nora Stone," *BASOR* 208 (1972), 17, n. 11.

12 Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre*, 81-82. For the extremely complicated issue of Tyrian chronology under Hiram's successors, a chronology based almost exclusively on Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I, 121-25, see Katzenstein, 116-28. The basis for Josephus' chronology is the date of the founding of Carthage, an event Timaeus places 38 years before the first Olympiad (776 B.C.) or 814. This would require the reign of Hiram to commence at 969. Liver has shown conclusively, however, that Carthage was actually founded in 825 and that Hiram therefore began to reign in 979/978, close to Cross' 980. See J. Liver, "The Chronology of Tyre at the Beginning of the First Millennium B.C.," *IEJ* 3 (1953), 119-20.

13 P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel*, AB (Garden City, 1984), 145-46.

14 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, VIII, 62, says "eleventh" whereas *Contra Apionem*, I, 126, says "twelfth." The latter is likely a conventional figure.

15 Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, I, 117.

revision, certainly chronologically. Nowhere is this more evident than in the account of the building of David's palace and the subsequent removal of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, which is predicated upon it.

2. *The implications of the Hiram chronology*

The desire of David to build a temple flowed from his conviction that the dwelling-place of YHWH ought to be more substantial than a mere tabernacle; in fact, it was inconceivable to him that he should dwell in a cedar palace while YHWH had no such lavish accommodations (2 Sam. 7:2). This presupposes the projects of Hiram already addressed, and thus requires the interest in the temple and the subsequent covenant promise to be late in David's reign as well. David's concern for a temple need not in itself require a late date for the removal of the ark, of course, but the Chronicler makes clear that the tabernacle erected to house the ark was not constructed until after David provided buildings for himself in Jerusalem (1 Chr. 15:1). There can be little doubt that these buildings are the same as those referred to in 1 Sam. 5:11 and 1 Chr. 14:1.¹⁶ Moreover, it would be psychologically unlikely that David's determination to build a temple would follow the construction of a tabernacle by more than twenty years. More reasonably, one may assume that the building of the royal palace, the construction of the tabernacle, and the removal of the ark followed hard upon one another and that the desire for a temple was the climax to it all.

The problem raised here is the apparent contraction to one year of the anointing of David at Hebron, his conquest of Jerusalem, his construction of a palace and other public buildings, his victories over the Philistines, his erection of a tabernacle, his removal of the ark to Zion, and his request for a temple—all in the year of his accession to the throne of all Israel. The only clues to the contrary might be the implications of the statement concerning David's increased power (2 Sam. 5:10) and the list of the wives and children he acquired after moving to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:13–16). The two explicit references to the passing of time are the three-month interval between the two attempts to transport the ark from Baale-judah to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:11) and the statement that it was after the king was settled in his palace and YHWH had given him respite from his enemies that he expressed his wish to build a temple (2 Sam. 7:1–2). Clearly, all of these required many years so that what appears to have taken place in a short time simply could not have done so.

According to modern western historiographical procedure this way of writing history is highly irregular. That fact should not prejudice the historicity of the accounts, however. At the most, all it requires is a recognition of the principle involved and a careful reconstruction based on the available data. The suggestion to be made here is that the biblical historian was following a literary (and perhaps political) convention by which the major events of a king's reign were closely juxtaposed in the record and placed in or near his first year so that what appears to have transpired in that time frame may actually have occupied his entire tenure.

¹⁶ It is likely that the narrative sequence of 1 Chr. 15:1 takes the form of protasis-apodosis in which the first preterite (*wayya'as*) is dependent and the second (*wayyāken*) introduces the main clause. Thus, "After he had made buildings for himself . . . he prepared a place," etc. This interpretation is supported by the *JPS, NIV*; cf. *GKC*, §164b.

3. *Rēš šarrūti in Assyrian royal inscriptions*

For many years scholars have made note of the unusual importance of the accession year or first year of the reigns of Assyrian kings.¹⁷ In many instances it seems that far more activity was squeezed into those relatively brief periods of time than could possibly have been the case.¹⁸ Moreover, study of parallel and complementary texts reveals that events that unequivocally must be assigned to later years of a king's reign according to chronicles and eponym lists were lumped together so as to imply that they occurred in that king's first year or so according to the annals and similar royal inscriptions.¹⁹ The conclusion is obvious: Assyrian scribes, for literary and propagandistic purposes, attributed to their kings' first years all the glorious achievements and accomplishments that marked their reigns throughout the ensuing years. The reason appears not to have been to mislead but to express the devotion of the king to his gods and to outline his intentions toward them.²⁰

Tadmor was the first scholar to suggest that this emphasis upon the accession-year of the king—the *rēš šarrūti*—as the encapsulation of all the king's successive accomplishments has implications for biblical historiography.²¹ He, followed especially by M. Cogan,²² has suggested several examples from the Old Testament, including the account of David. The full implications of this suggestion for the Davidic narratives have not been developed by them or anyone else, however. Their hesitation perhaps may be explained by the lack of an explicit formula introducing David's first year at Jerusalem as a *rēš šarrūti*.

The Hebrew equivalent to this Akkadian phrase is *rēšūt mamleket* (Jer. 27:1; 28:1), *rēšūt mamlekūt* (Jer. 26:1), or *rēšūt malkūt* (Jer. 49:34), all of which may be translated "the beginning of the reign of, etc."²³ It is worth noting that this formula is found only in Jeremiah, a prophet who was closely in touch with Neo-Babylonian language and literature, the very literature in which the specific formula *rēš šarrūti*

17 The history of the discussion up to his time and a thorough analysis of all the relevant formulae may be found in H. Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur: A Chronological-Historical Study," *JCS* 12 (1958), 22–40.

18 For a host of examples from Shalmaneser I to Nabuna'id see Tadmor, "The Inscriptions of Nabuna'id: Historical Arrangement," *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger, AS 16* (Chicago, 1965), 351–63; J. E. Reade, "Assyrian Campaigns, 840–811 B.C., and the Babylonian Frontier," *ZA* 68 (1978), 254–55; Tadmor, "History and Ideology in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in F. M. Fales, ed., *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis* (Rome, 1981), 14–25; Mordechai Cogan, "Omens and Ideology in the Babylonian Inscription of Esarhaddon," in H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld, eds., *History, Historiography, and Interpretation* (Jerusalem, 1983), 85–87; Cogan, "The Chronicler's Use of Chronology as Illuminated by Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in J. H. Tigay, ed., *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (Philadelphia, 1985), 199–201.

19 A striking example of this is the record of Nabuna'id in his Sippar dream inscription to the effect that he completed the restoration of the Eḫulḫul temple in Harran in his first year or so (I, 13–35) whereas the Harran stela, texts of a "chronicling" genre, state that the work was done in his latter years, after his return from a ten-year sojourn at Teima. The latter is undoubtedly chronologically correct. See Tadmor, "History and Ideology," 23–24.

20 Cogan, "Omens and Ideology," 86–87.

21 Tadmor, "The Inscriptions of Nabuna'id," 353, n. 13.

22 M. Cogan, "Tendentious Chronology in the Book of Chronicles," *Tsion* 45 (1980), 165–72 [Hebrew]; "The Chronicler's Use of Chronology," 201–7.

23 Tadmor, "The Inscriptions of Nabuna'id," 353.

developed.²⁴ Of greater interest is the fact that *rēš šarrūti*, though originally suggesting "accession year," came to be a stereotype for the early years in general.²⁵ This can be shown as well in the examples of the equivalent Hebrew expressions in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 28:1 reads *baššānāh hahī²⁶ b^erē²⁷šit mamleket šidqiyāh . . . baššānāh hār^ebi^cit*, "in that [same] year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah . . . , in the fourth year. . . ." It is clear here that the fourth year is identical to "the beginning of the reign."²⁶ Similarly, in Jer. 49:34 *b^erē²⁷šit malkūt šidqiyāh*, "in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah," may refer to the accession year but much more likely the first full year of the king.²⁷ Even *b^erē²⁷šit maml^ekūt y^ehōyāqim*, "at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim" (26:1), cannot be taken to refer to the accession year since the trial of the prophet referred to in this passage must be dated later.²⁸

By the exilic period, in fact, the term used to describe the accession year was *bišnat molkō*, "when he began to reign" (cf. 2 Kgs. 25:27). This corresponded to the earliest meanings of the Babylonian *ina rēš šarrūti* or Assyrian *ina šurru/šurrat šarrūti*, meanings which later lost their precision chronologically and came to refer only to the early years in general.²⁹

Other examples without the formula are cited by Cogan, who limits his investigation to the Chronicler. He proposes that the reform of Hezekiah, dated by the Chronicler (2 Chr. 29:3) to Hezekiah's first year (*baššānāh hārī³⁰šōnāh l^emolkō*), did not in fact commence in his first year. The date here, then, is a "pseudo-date" whose purpose is to show that the "pious Hezekiah concerned himself with Temple affairs from his very first day on the throne."³⁰

A second example concerns the reform of Josiah. The account in 2 Kgs. 22–23 suggests that it commenced only after Josiah had reigned for eighteen years (22:3) and that the temple repairs and purging of idolatry took place in immediate sequence. The Chronicler, however, states that Josiah sought the Lord after eight years (2 Chr. 34:3), undertook the reform of the cult four years later (34:3), and began the temple repairs six years after that (34:8). As Cogan suggests, Chronicles added the word about Josiah's piety at age sixteen, reversed the order of the temple restorations and cultic

24 Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II," 27, n. 39.

25 Tadmor, "The Inscriptions of Nabunaid," 352.

26 Bright understands *b^erē²⁷šit mamleket* as "accession year," a technically correct translation, but his failure to see the phrase as a *terminus technicus* to refer to the early reign in general leads him to the erroneous conclusion that "accession year" and "fourth year" are "self-contradictory." John Bright, *Jeremiah*, AB (Garden City, 1965), 200.

27 The reason for this suggestion is that the "accession year" of Zedekiah lasted for less than one month as is clear from the fact that Jehoiakin, his predecessor, was replaced by him on the second day of Adar in 597 B.C.E., the last month of the year. See D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626–556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London, 1961), 33.

28 This is evident from the reference to Uriah the prophet (26:20–23) who prophesied against Jehoiakim, fled to Egypt, was retrieved from there, and was executed before the king—all before Jeremiah prophesied and was placed on trial in Jehoiakim's "accession year." Bright again takes the formula *rē²⁷šit maml^ekūt* (with Akk. *rēš šarrūti*) to be here "a technical term for the period between a king's accession and the following New Year" (*Jeremiah*, 169). This forces him to conclude that the Uriah pericope cannot belong to the narrative of Jeremiah since there is too little time (172). Recognition of the fact that the formula had lost its significance as "accession year" by then would, of course, alleviate the tension entirely.

29 J. A. Brinkman, "Merodach-Baladan II," *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* (Chicago, 1964), 23.

30 Cogan, "The Chronicler's Use of Chronology," 203.

reform, and antedated the latter by six years. His conclusion is that the Chronicler's chronology is schematic and his historiographic underpinnings are designed to show the "earliness and self-motivation of the king's piety."³¹

A third example is that of the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem by King David, the very focus of this study. Cogan here is satisfied merely to show that the Chronicler, for his own historiographic purposes, has rearranged his version of the account by moving the ill-fated first attempt to transfer the ark from its position in 2 Samuel, where it follows the construction of David's palace, to a position after the episode of the capture of Jerusalem. This, Cogan argues, was an effort by the Chronicler to show David's piety by having him attend to the ark before he looked to his own well-being.³²

While this motive may or may not be the case it does demonstrate the lack of concern for chronological sequence that can be seen in synoptic accounts, an indifference that should not be attributed to a confusion of sources or even to historiographical imprecision. It simply reflects different concerns and priorities, a rendering of history on associative rather than chronological grounds.

4. *2 Samuel 5-8 and rēšīt mamleket . . .*

It is commonly held by scholars that 2 Samuel 5-8 is a literary block set between the accounts of David's accession to power (chs. 2-4) and the so-called "Succession Narrative" (2 Sam. 9-20; 1 Kgs. 1-2). D. M. Gunn correctly connects the issue of Saulide succession in the person of the assassinated Ishbosheth (4:12) with that of surviving heirs of the Saulide dynasty (9:1).³³ Chapters 5-8 are somewhat intrusive, therefore, from a literary standpoint and also, I suggest, from a chronological and historical standpoint.

Within this presently constituted unit there are three sub-units, namely, the conquest of Jerusalem and victory over the Philistines (ch. 5); the ark narrative and the Davidic covenant predicated upon it (chs. 6-7);³⁴ and the catalogue of victories (ch. 8). These all, except the latter, appear to have taken place at the very beginning of David's reign from Jerusalem, but, as has been pointed out with reference to the involvement of Hiram in David's building activities, that element of his reign at least cannot possibly be connected to his first year or even his early years. Anything subsequent to that obviously cannot be dated to the early years either.

It remains now to attempt to reconstruct the actual chronological sequence of events in 2 Samuel 5-8 and to demonstrate thereby that the compiler is operating according to a literary and/or theological convention similar if not identical to the Assyrian *rēš šarrūti*. This will not only afford insight into certain principles of ancient Israelite historiography but will yield other hermeneutical benefits as well.

It is clear that the accession of David to the throne of all Israel and his conquest of Jerusalem did indeed take place in his accession year and shortly thereafter for the narrative provides the datum that David reigned for 40 years in all, seven and a half

31 *Ibid.*, 205.

32 *Ibid.*, 206.

33 Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 68-69.

34 R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King* (Stockholm, 1964), 99.

years in Hebron and 33 in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:4–5).³⁵ 2 Sam. 5:1–9a can therefore be confidently assigned to that year. The commencement of building activities (9b) must also have taken place then, but it is inconceivable that they were completed within the year (5:11–12) and that David's becoming "more and more powerful" (5:10) and his accumulation of a large family all transpired in that brief time (5:13–16).

The Philistine wars (5:17–25), on the other hand, almost certainly preceded the conquest of the city and yet, as the historian emphasizes, followed David's accession to the Saulide throne (5:17).³⁶ The reason for the inclusion of the Philistine campaigns here no doubt lies in the fact that the ark—the subject of chapter 6—was in Philistine territory at Kiriath-jearim and the defeat of the Philistines would explain how the ark could be safely removed from there to Jerusalem.³⁷

We have already argued that the removal of the ark was not attempted until David's own palace was completed, something that occupied his last decade. This was suggested by the fact that the ark came to a tabernacle which itself was completed after the erection of the royal palace, a point clearly made by the Chronicler (1 Chr. 15:1). The establishment of the Davidic covenant also followed his having taken up residence in his palace because it was the contrast between that splendid place and the tent-like shrine that prompted him to build a temple (2 Sam. 7:2). Moreover, the narrator indicates that the urge to undertake the temple came after the Lord had given David rest from all his surrounding enemies, a rest that was impossible until the very last years of his reign.

The catalogue of victories and list of David's principal officials in 2 Samuel 8 is unrelated in the context to any chronological moorings. The various campaigns described there may, however, find specific chronological settings by means of careful attention to the succession narrative. I shall consider this in the following section.

5. *The chronology of the Succession Narrative*³⁸

Crucial to a reconstruction of the Davidic era is an understanding of the role of Solomon. First of all, though Solomon's age at his accession cannot be determined precisely, he was obviously quite young. In his prayer at Gibeon he calls himself "a little child" and even allowing for hyperbole this must preclude an age much over twenty (1 Kgs. 3:7).³⁹ David also had referred to his son as "young and inexperienced"

35 The phrase *b⁶molkō* in 2 Sam. 5:4 cannot be used to prove the point that "accession year" in the Assyrian inscriptional sense is meant, though it is an exact translation of *ina rēš šarrūti*, for that is the common formula in the Old Testament to speak of royal accession. On the other hand, the technical term for accession year in the strict sense is *š⁶nat molkō* (= Akk. *šanat rēš šarrūti*), as Cogan shows ("The Chronicler's Use of Chronology," 200, n. 10). See 2 Kgs. 25:27 for such a use.

36 Siegfried Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times* (Philadelphia, 1975), 153–54.

37 Carlson, *David, the Chosen King*, 56–57.

38 It is likely that this section may be construed as special pleading or manipulation of data toward desired conclusions but the adducing of precise dates is only to suggest a possible and not even necessarily probable reconstruction in detail. It is argued, however, that the broad chronological pattern is defensible and likely.

39 The phrase *na^car qāṭōn* is otherwise used to describe the lad who gathered Jonathan's arrows (1 Sam. 20:35), the skin of Naaman following his miraculous cure (2 Kgs. 5:14), the child of the eschatological kingdom who will lead the wild beasts (Isa. 11:6), the Edomite prince Hadad (1 Kgs. 11:17), and the youths

(1 Chr. 29:1; cf. 22:5) in the days when he was making plans for construction of the temple. Granting twenty as a minimum age for Solomon's accession, he could hardly have been more than eighteen or so when David discussed the temple construction with him (1 Chr. 22:6-16; cf. 23:1). He was, moreover, born no earlier than ca. 991 or thirteen years after David had taken Jerusalem.

Solomon's birth, of course, followed David's adulterous relationship with Bath-sheba by a year or so. That in turn occurred at the time Joab was leading Israel's armies into battle with the Ammonites at Rabbah. A date for this campaign of ca. 993 is quite reasonable. The Ammonite hostilities were provoked by the shameful treatment of David's ambassadors by the Ammonite king Hanun (2 Sam. 10:1-14). This must have taken place before David was very powerful because Hanun, with his advisors, seems unimpressed with David's ability to retaliate.⁴⁰ In addition, Hanun was the son of Nahash, the Ammonite king who had besieged Jabesh-gilead in the earliest years of Saul (1 Sam. 11:1-5). The fact that Nahash had just died necessitates either an extremely long reign for Nahash or his death and succession by Hanun fairly early in David's reign.

It was this fracas with Ammon that led to further escalation of the conflict. The Ammonites, fearing reprisal, hired mercenaries from Beth-rehob, Zobah, Maacah, and Tob and with them tried to stave off Israel's assault on Rabbah. Joab and Abishai, David's generals, won the day, however, and though they did not take the city they forced the Arameans and Ammonites to retreat (2 Sam. 10:6-14 = 1 Chr. 19:6-15). This only inspired the Arameans to regroup and augment their forces for a return engagement. This time Hadadezer of Zobah joined Israel in battle at Helam (°Alma), in the desert east of the Sea of Chinnereth, but again the Arameans were defeated (2 Sam. 10:15-19 = 1 Chr. 19:16-19). This ended their assistance to the Ammonites.⁴¹

The siege of Rabbah then followed at the turn of the new year as did David's affair with Bath-sheba (2 Sam. 11:1). Thus the Aramean conflict and the attack on Rabbah must have taken place between 1004 and 993, likely toward the end of that period.

Another avenue to be explored concerns the rebellion of Absalom and related events. Absalom, son of David's wife Maacah, was born in Hebron and so would have been old enough to lead such a movement against his father almost anytime after the birth of Solomon. How long he waited is not clear, but since David participated in the completion of the Ammonite campaign after Solomon was born and before the rape of Tamar occurred, one must allow for the passing of at least the two years mentioned in the narrative and probably a few years more before Absalom killed Amnon (2 Sam. 13:23). This would date the Amnon-Tamar affair no earlier than 985 or so. After this Absalom went into exile for three years (985-982; 13:39) and when he finally returned to Jerusalem he remained alienated from his father for two years (982-980; 14:28).

who taunted Elisha (2 Kgs. 2:23). Without exception these strongly imply children or adolescents. See *BDB*, s.v. *na'ar*, 654-55.

40 H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel* (Philadelphia, 1964), 303. On the other hand, since the Ammonite provocation incited the war that led to the siege of Rabbah, a siege undertaken at ca. 993, that initial encounter cannot have occurred much earlier than 993. A date of 995 or so is plausible.

41 For this series of encounters, see Merrill F. Unger, *Israel and the Aramaeans of Damascus* (Grand Rapids, 1957), 49-50.

Then he spent four more years⁴² winning the confidence of the people (980–976) until at last he made the open break with David (15:7, 13).

We have already argued that since the Davidic tabernacle, built to accommodate the ark, was not constructed until after David's own palace was erected, the story of the procession of the ark must reflect a period late in his reign. It is now important to note that there is not one reference to either the ark or tabernacle being in Jerusalem in all the years of David's reign until the time of Absalom's rebellion with the exception of the "ark narrative" which, we are suggesting on other grounds, was late. In the story of David's exile to the Transjordan occasioned by that rebellion, the Samuel narrator points out that Zadok and the Levites were with David, bearing the ark of the covenant (15:24). Moreover, David asks them to return the ark to Jerusalem (implying that it had been there), expressing the fervent hope that he might see both it and the *dwelling place* of Yahweh once more (15:25). This obviously presupposes the existence of the tabernacle in Jerusalem. In light of the line of argument adduced above in respect to the dates of Absalom's rebellion, the reference to the ark and tabernacle must be dated to some time after 976. This is remarkably close to the 977 date proposed for Hiram's accession.

It is important at this point to recognize that the dates under consideration cannot be considered fixed and inflexible since both Hiram's chronology and that of Absalom are debated. However (and this is most important), no scholar is willing to date Hiram earlier than 980 nor can Absalom's rebellion be earlier by any reasonable reading of the evidence. In fact, the firm and mature leadership which Absalom exhibited in nearly every respect would point to an age of 30–35 much more readily than anything younger. Perhaps, then, a rebellion date of 976 would not be out of the way at all.

This radical way of interpreting the whole spectrum of evidence concerning the transfer of the ark is of profound significance. It first of all explains why the record prior to Absalom's rebellion is so strangely silent regarding Jerusalem as a central sanctuary. Secondly, it comports well with the notion that religious tradition is not easily broken and that David could not therefore have taken steps immediately to unify cult and government in one place. Michal's reaction, in fact, may not be so much a matter of pettiness, as is usually alleged, as a representative reaction to the novelty of David's undertaking.⁴³ He had attempted to bring the ark in only to be frustrated by the insensitivity of Uzzah. Then, after a three month delay, he finally succeeded and, dressed as a priest and functioning in that capacity, he led the procession himself. This must have caused a great deal of consternation not only to Michal but to the population as a whole. It is possible that dissatisfaction with David's action reached such proportions that Absalom used it as a means of effecting his own revolution.

Thirdly, the viewpoint defended here fits much better the history of the cult as outlined by the Chronicler especially. He begins his account of the ark, as does Samuel, by describing the abortive attempt to bring it to Jerusalem. The attempt failed not only because of Uzzah, but fundamentally because the religious personnel involved did not subscribe to proper protocol in the handling of the ark—they put it on a cart

42 The 40 of MT should be rejected in favor of the 4 of LXX, Syr., Valg., and Josephus. See McCarter, 2 *Samuel*, 355.

43 So David F. Payne, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Philadelphia, 1982), 185.

rather than carrying it on poles. After a three month hiatus David again prepared to move the ark, but this time he took care to call together the priests and Levites and to instruct them as to proper procedure (1 Chr. 15:13–15). What must be noted (and seldom if ever is in connection with the ark narrative) is that Zadok and Abiathar are both named, the former for the first time in a narrative context (v. 11). Since shortly after this incident Zadok began to serve as co-high priest with Ahimelech the son of Abiathar (2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Chr. 18:16),⁴⁴ it is likely that he was much younger than Abiathar, too young perhaps to have been a priest by 1004, the usual date of the ark transfer, especially since he continued as priest into the time of Solomon (1 Chr. 29:22).

Of greater interest still is the appointment of Heman, Asaph, Ethan, and other Levitical musicians and religious personnel, all within the context of the removal of the ark. These same officials remained in charge of the ark (16:4–6) while others, including Zadok, were appointed by David to attend to the tabernacle of Moses which still remained at Gibeon (16:39–42). This responsibility continued at the respective tabernacles until Solomon's temple was finished at ca. 959 (1 Chr. 6:31–32). The difficulty of assuming that their tenure began as early as 1004 and continued on to 959 or 45 years later is, of course, very great. If, however, the tabernacle ministry commenced at 977 or so this problem is greatly alleviated.

Both Samuel and Chronicles indicate that the relocation of the ark to Jerusalem was followed immediately by David's desire to build a more permanent structure in which to worship Yahweh. This is often misunderstood with reference to the data of Samuel since the historian introduces David's intention by saying it came after Yahweh had given him rest from his surrounding enemies (7:1).⁴⁵ But this is precisely the point. David was occupied by military affairs throughout his early years and not until after the subjugation of Rabbah did he move the ark and make any plans for a temple. The Chronicler makes it most evident that the desire for a temple came upon the heels of the location of the ark in Jerusalem. After describing the arrangements David had made for the care of the sanctuary (1 Chr. 16:39–42), he goes on to relate that David returned to his palace and, having contemplated its permanence in contrast to the temporality of the tabernacle, conceived the plan for a temple (1 Chr. 17:1).

YHWH rejected David's overture, to be sure, but after an indeterminate period of time during which the Absalom rebellion and the ill-advised census occurred he allowed David to draw up the temple plans, appoint the temple personnel, and collect the materials necessary for construction. The rebellion, we have proposed, ended at ca. 976, just five years before David's death. The census likely followed that revolution and was undertaken for the purpose of ascertaining the degree of loyalty and strength David could count on in the event of similar uprisings or external attacks.

⁴⁴ McCarter, *2 Samuel*, 253–54, suggests, with many scholars, that 2 Sam. 8:17 is corrupt and that Abiathar is son of Abimelech and not vice-versa. This is unlikely since otherwise Zadok and Abimelech are co-priests (1 Chr. 24:3, 31) and Abimelech is identified as a son of Abiathar (1 Chr. 24:6). For a convincing argument in support of the view that Abiathar was replaced for a time by his son and then reappeared see C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, 1960), 355–67.

⁴⁵ Carlson, *David, the Chosen King*, 106. Carlson locates the temple plans in David's early years and limits the "rest from all his enemies" to his Philistine victories. The text clearly suggests, however, a much broader compass than the Philistines alone.

In any event, the end of the plague which YHWH sent because of the census coincided with David's renewed desire to build a temple (1 Chr. 21:18-30). He had offered sacrifice at the threshing floor of Araunah, just north of Jerusalem, and when YHWH answered him there David took it as a sign that that should be the site of YHWH's dwelling-place. He therefore began to gather all the materials needed for construction and shared with his young son Solomon all that God would do. Because David was a warrior and preoccupied with the things of war, the work of temple-building must be left to Solomon, a man of peace. To guarantee Israel's recognition of this arrangement David at once appointed his son as co-regent (1 Chr. 23:1). Together they then appointed the priests and Levites who would serve in the temple in their various capacities as singers, gatekeepers, and treasurers.

The last years, therefore, may be reconstructed and summarized as follows: David brought the ark into Jerusalem at ca. 976, Absalom rebelled the same year, the census was undertaken in 974, Solomon was made co-regent in 973, and David died in 971. Thus the tabernacle of David was in use only for five years in David's administration and eleven years in Solomon's (1 Kgs. 6:1; 37-38). The Mosaic tabernacle at Gibeon presumably also came to an end at the same time, ca. 959.

6. *Implications of an accession-year hypothesis*

From the preceding historical reconstruction it should be obvious that the narrative contains enough chronological clues to enable the account to be (re)written to conform to "normal" historiographical procedure. If this is the case, then it is logical to ask why both Samuel and Chronicles record the accession, rise, and succession of David in a manner that is inconsistent with such a procedure.

The answer, I suggest, is to be found in the use by the historian of the literary device of association. Specifically, he associates together the fundamental goals and achievements of the king of Israel and reports their accomplishment as having occurred in this very year of accession or at least at the beginning years of his reign. Thus David had (1) asserted his rule over all Israel (2 Sam. 5:3-5); (2) conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital (5:6-9); (3) built himself a suitable palace (5:11); (4) increased his harem and offspring (5:13-16); (5) defeated his enemies (5:17-25; 8:1-14); (6) established Jerusalem as his cult center (6:1-15); and (7) expressed his desire to build YHWH a temple, a desire that resulted in his own covenant blessing (7). All this came about almost simultaneously from the viewpoint of "accession-year" historical method. From a chronological standpoint, however, most of these events not only did not take place early in David's reign, but in fact took place late, in his declining years. Understanding this will assist students of the Bible to read it as its canonical shape requires and not as the modern western mindset might desire. The benefits are self-evident.