



The “Years” of the Kings in the Bible



In the Bible, it is not always clear exactly what length of time is meant by the term “year” when speaking of a monarch's period of rule. This is why most published chronological schemes differ from one another. Therefore, it is advisable to view the years set out in Bible chronology charts as a general guide, rather than being absolute and conclusive.

The following article, an extract from Tom Bradford’s Old Testament Studies (*1 Kings, Lesson 9: chs. 5 & 6*), explains more.

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Briefly: there are 5 different protocols used in antiquity (and no doubt in the Bible) to define the chronology of a monarch. They are called the **Regnal** year, the **Accession** Year, the **Postdating** system, the **Nonaccession** year, and **Co-regency**.

1. Regnal year. This was when the official “royal year” began at the start of the New Year. However, it was backdated to the previous New Year. For the Hebrews, the New Year was usually considered as Nissan (this was the same up in Mesopotamia). But it gets more complicated because it seems that after Solomon, the northern Kingdom of Israel used the month of Tishri (the 7th month) as the month of the New Year, while the southern Kingdom of Judah used the month of Nissan (the 1st month) as the month of the New Year.

2. Accession year. This determines that the King’s first year takes place in whatever time there is between the actual date of his coronation and the New Year. So, a king could take the throne 1 week before the New Year, and upon the New Year enter into the 2nd year of his reign. His first “year” of reign could be only a few days.

3. Postdating system. This system counts a king’s 1st year as the 1st full year AFTER New Year’s. Therefore, a king could assume the throne many months before New Year, and it is not counted towards period of his reign. Only after passing the New Year is that considered the 1st year of his reign. So, he could be on the throne for 11 months, and none of that time is counted because the clock doesn’t start until the first New Year after his coronation.

4. Nonaccession year. This method doesn't pay any attention to New Year's but rather only to the actual date the king assumes the office. So, one year from his actual date of coronation ends his first year and begins the 2nd year (and so on).

5. Co-regency. This refers to the designation of the royal heir during the lifetime of the sitting king. Thus, as with Solomon and David, David was still living (and still king) when he named Solomon as the royal heir and within hours Solomon assumed the throne. But it also appears that David did NOT give up the throne; rather there was a sort of senior king and junior king operating at once. So, the end of David's time as king doesn't coincide with Solomon becoming king, but instead ends at David's death. Solomon becoming king overlaps with David remaining king.

There is nothing right nor wrong, or better or worse, among these various systems. Often the choice of dating system seemed to be at the whim of the king himself; or it changed according to circumstance for one king, and then his successor was measured in a different way. Even more, it at times appears that the writer or editor of the book did the choosing. And frankly, we only rarely even know which method they used because it is usually not recorded. The bottom line is that all these nice neat Biblical timelines we see printed in beautiful colour fold-outs about the various kings of Israel and Judah, or about the Judges, or generally any other succession of national or regional leaders, are not absolute but rather are approximates and so we'll see significant variations among them.