

## THE DATE OF THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

TODD BOLEN\*

**Abstract:** *The current consensus among evangelical scholars dates the Davidic covenant to the end of David's life. This article challenges that theory by presenting evidence from the biblical text demonstrating that the Davidic covenant was made in the first half of David's reign. This proposal is supported by a reference in the covenant to Solomon's birth being in the future and by the comment on Michal's childlessness. Arguments for dating the covenant late in David's life are considered and rejected. The primary reason for placing the covenant in David's final decade is the dates given by Josephus for Hiram's reign, but this evidence is not as strong as is usually assumed. Ultimately, an earlier date for the Davidic covenant is not only required by the biblical evidence, but it also provides David with extended time to reflect upon the covenant's significance in writing psalms that foretold the Messiah's suffering and glory.*

**Key words:** *Davidic covenant, chronology, palace, Hiram, Solomon, Josephus, messianic psalms*

According to Jesus and the apostles, David wrote psalms about the Messiah. In Jesus's dispute with the Pharisees, he claimed that Psalm 110 was written by David about his greater Son (Matt 22:41–46). When the apostles were praying in Acts 4, they credited David with the description in Psalm 2 of the Messiah's opposition. Other psalms attributed to David in the superscriptions speak of what is best understood as a future king who suffers at the hands of his enemies but who ultimately experiences great victory and worldwide rule. Some Davidic psalms considered to contain a significant messianic component include Psalms 2, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 69, 109, and 110. Though scholars disagree on exactly which psalms are messianic, most would agree that the messianic psalms penned by David were written after the Lord promised him an eternal dynasty. David's expectations of a greater Son who would subdue the nations and establish God's kingdom on earth are clearly a reflection of his knowledge of what we call the Davidic covenant.

Most evangelical scholars today, however, date the Davidic covenant to around the year 976 BC, shortly before David's death in 971.<sup>1</sup> This does not give David much time for reflection upon the messianic promise, particularly when the difficulties of these final years are considered. This dating, in fact, requires David to

---

\* Todd Bolen is Professor of Biblical Studies at The Master's University, 21726 Placerita Canyon Rd., Santa Clarita, CA 91321. He may be contacted at [tbolen@masters.edu](mailto:tbolen@masters.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Merrill dates the Davidic covenant to about 977–976. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 261. Steinmann dates the covenant to 975 and puts David's death in 969 on the assumption that Solomon's 40-year reign included a two-year coregency with his father. Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 122–23.

have written the messianic psalms during the years he was contending with Absalom's rebellion, Sheba's rebellion, the census and its aftermath, and the illness that confined him to bed.<sup>2</sup> While this is theoretically possible, locating the messianic psalms at an earlier period of David's life, before his adultery and murder set off a cascade of assault and death, would seem more suitable. In any case, an earlier date for the Davidic covenant would give him more time for reflection and writing than a later date.

Additionally, an early date is supported by the narratives of 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, which suggest a time soon after David established Jerusalem as his capital. The sequence of each of these accounts places God's promise to David before his major military operations, before his sin with Bathsheba, and before Absalom's rebellion. The presentation of 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles indicates that David lived for at least a couple of decades after receiving the Davidic covenant, giving him plenty of time to meditate on the promise of a coming king who would rule forever.

How, then, did the Davidic covenant get shifted by historians to the end of David's life? The answer is found in Josephus. According to this first-century writer, Hiram of Tyre began building Solomon's temple in Hiram's eleventh or twelfth year.<sup>3</sup> Since Solomon began temple construction in his fourth year (1 Kgs 6:1), David and Hiram's reigns only overlapped by seven or eight years. Since Hiram built David's palace, he could only have done so in David's final seven or eight years (2 Sam 5:11). It was only after this palace was constructed that David moved the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:1–19). And it was only after the ark was in a tent in Jerusalem that David sought to build a house for the Lord (2 Sam 7:1–2). This request resulted in the Lord's promise to build a dynastic house for David.

This chronological sequence of (1) palace construction, (2) ark transfer, and (3) Davidic covenant is widely recognized, so Josephus's dating of Hiram's reign has led nearly all conservative scholars in recent years to date these events to the final decade of David's life. Eugene Merrill made the most extended case for this view in an article he wrote for the *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* in 1989, and he fleshed out a full chronology for David's life in his masterful *Kingdom of Priests* (1987; 2nd ed. in 2008).<sup>4</sup> Andrew Steinmann credits Merrill's work as the basis for his own Davidic chronology in his outstanding *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*.<sup>5</sup> Other evangelicals writing histories and commentaries follow this view, including Ronald Youngblood, Bill Arnold, Walter Kaiser, Harry Hoffner, and David Tsumura.<sup>6</sup> Apparent dissenters include Leslie McFall and Robert Bergen, but neither explains his position.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Merrill dates Absalom's rebellion to ca. 976 and the census to ca. 975. Steinmann dates these events to 974 and later.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus gives the eleventh-year synchronism in *Ant.* 8.61 and the twelfth-year synchronism in *Ag. Ap.* 1.126.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "The 'Accession Year' and Davidic Chronology," *JANESCU* 19.1 (1989): 101–12; Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 117n171.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 858; Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids:

The thesis of this article is that the biblical text requires an early date for the Davidic covenant. The attempt to rearrange the chronology of David's life to resolve the conflict with Josephus's record of Hiram's reign is precluded by significant details in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. This article will not provide a new solution to reconcile the dating of Hiram's reign, but it will reveal the tenuous nature of our knowledge. In short, the reader will be asked to weigh the strength of the biblical witness for an early date over against the weakness of the extrabiblical data for a late date. Perhaps once scholars accept that the biblical text requires an early date, more effort will be made toward a satisfactory solution of the Hiram synchronism.

## I. THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR AN EARLY DATE

1. *A prima facie reading of the text.* The arrangement of the narratives of both 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles indicates that the palace was built and the ark transferred early in David's reign in Jerusalem. This is acknowledged by late-view proponents who observe that their reading is "contrary to the traditional interpretation" and requires a "radical revision," such that the account must be "(re)written."<sup>8</sup> This recognition is not new, for Keil and Delitzsch long ago observed that accepting Josephus's dates for Hiram would require a biblical chronology that seems "hardly credible."<sup>9</sup>

The book of Samuel is most naturally read as a sequential narrative, from the time of Samuel and Saul and into the early years of David's life. There is a chronological flow connecting the events leading up to David's conquest of Jerusalem (1 Sam 16–2 Sam 4) to the conquest itself, after which David takes up residence and constructs the Millo (2 Sam 5:6–9). When it is written that Hiram sent workers to build a palace for David, it makes sense on the face of it that this occurred soon after David's conquest of the city (2 Sam 5:11).

The following verses, 2 Samuel 5:12–16, are often used to claim that the account in this chapter is topical, not chronological, so these bear further consideration. The statement that "David knew that Yahweh had established him as king over Israel and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel" has been understood to apply only at the end of David's reign, but it actually makes perfect sense in the flow of the narrative with regard to the many years of struggle

---

Zondervan, 2003), 455; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 247–49; Harry A. Hoffner Jr., *1 and 2 Samuel*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), at discussion of 2 Samuel 6–7; David Toshio Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 101.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie McFall, "The Chronology of Saul and David," *JETS* 53.3 (2010): 503; Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, NAC 7 (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 323n32.

<sup>8</sup> Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 256n30; Merrill, "Accession Year," 103–4, 112. The notice of Hiram's reign early in the narrative is "misleading," according to Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles*, WBC 14 (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 178. Cogan considers it "diplomatic exaggeration." Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 226.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866–1891; repr, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 2:582n7.

with Saul's house (2 Sam 5:12).<sup>10</sup> Though anointed by Samuel when a youth, it was only now, after years of fleeing from Saul and contesting with Ish-bosheth, that David was ruling over all twelve tribes in Jerusalem, finally seeing the fulfillment of God's promise to make him king.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the inclusion of David's wives and children in verses 13–16 fits naturally in the context of David's new residence in Jerusalem and does not imply that the whole of verses 9–16 provide a general summary of David's reign with no regard for chronological sequence. In fact, the grammar indicates that the events of verses 9–12 occurred in sequential order, with a *wayyiqtol* chain concluded by a disjunctive clause in verse 12b. Verses 13–16 are outside this narrative sequence, which makes sense given its summary nature. The author of Samuel knew how to signify chronological sequence as well as how to interrupt it, and temporal markers throughout the Davidic narrative are valuable clues in reconstructing the chronology.

The Philistine attacks on David reported in verses 17–25 also occurred at the beginning of David's reign in Jerusalem, though it is difficult to know precisely when.<sup>12</sup> At the close of chapter 5, the natural sense is that David has a new home in Jerusalem, and he has successfully fended off the Philistine invasion. Chapter 6 follows the events of chapter 5, beginning with David "again gathering" (וַיִּסְּף עוֹד) all the men of Israel. This looks back to David's army defeating the Philistines.

The transfer of the ark to Jerusalem is most naturally read as a new king, zealous for righteous worship of the Lord, bringing the ark from a place where it had effectively been in exile since it was captured by the Philistines. This is what we expect, given David's passion for seeking the Lord while being pursued by Saul (e.g., Pss 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 142). Psalm 132 is probably the clearest in this regard, quoting David's vow not even to enter his house until he found a place for the Lord, and recording his transfer of the ark from Kiriath Jearim to the chosen Zion. It is more difficult to understand the meaning of this psalm if David only sought out the ark after he had been king for thirty years. His vigorous dancing and his state of undress also are suggestive of a younger man. Furthermore, David's rationale for bringing the ark—"for we did not inquire of it during the days of Saul"—suggests a date early in his reign (1 Chr 13:3). Such a statement would sound strange coming from David's mouth near the end of his reign, but it makes good sense as an initial act intended to rectify the failings of the previous king.

Returning to the narrative of 2 Samuel, all agree that chapter 7 continues the sequence from chapter 6, yet the chronological reference that begins chapter 8 is

<sup>10</sup> Translations of Scripture are the author's.

<sup>11</sup> David need not be on the throne for decades before he knew that God had established him as Israel's king (e.g., Merrill, "Accession Year," 103). Morrison rightly observes that David never offered a response to declarations by Jonathan, Saul, and Abigail that David would be the king (1 Sam 23:17; 24:20; 25:30), and it is only now that David recognizes what God has done. Craig E. Morrison, *2 Samuel*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 76–77.

<sup>12</sup> Since a new *wayyiqtol* sequence begins in verse 17, it is not clear how it relates chronologically to the preceding account. The relevant chronological notice is that "the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel" (2 Sam 5:17).

usually ignored. The author writes that it was “after this” (אַחֲרֵי־כֵן) that David subdued the Philistines (8:1). This is a common phrase for the writer of Samuel, intended to “give the impression of sequential ordering.”<sup>13</sup> In every case where this phrase is used, the narrative advances to an event that occurs subsequent to the one described previously (2:1; 10:1; 13:1; 15:1; 21:18). The chronological significance of 8:1, however, is generally denied by those seeking to shift the palace-ark-covenant events to the end of David’s life, on the grounds that chapter 8 is providing a general summary of military victories throughout David’s reign. Indeed, chapter 8 does provide a summary of David’s victories over foreign powers, but there is no reason why these could not follow the giving of the Davidic covenant. In fact, the divine promise surely would have emboldened David in fighting the Lord’s battles in order to provide a place for Israel and rest from the nation’s enemies (7:10–11).

Among advocates for a late dating of the palace-ark-covenant sequence, Steinmann is alone in affirming the significance of the chronological marker in 8:1, but his commitment to a late date for Hiram’s palace construction requires him to argue that the battles described in chapter 8 were all fought in the final five years of David’s life.<sup>14</sup> That leads to the improbable scenario of David fighting few battles in the first thirty-five years of his reign, but many major offensives when he was old and his rule was weakened by the revolts of Absalom and Sheba. An easier approach for many interpreters is to deny the chronological value of the reference in 8:1.

The author of 2 Samuel, however, uses the phrase “after this” repeatedly in the narrative, and nowhere else is its chronological significance denied. In chapter 9, David makes provision for Mephibosheth, and “after this,” he fights against the Ammonites (10:1). In chapters 11–12, David sins with Bathsheba, and it is “after this” that Amnon rapes Tamar (13:1). Similarly, Absalom’s conspiracy follows his ostensible reconciliation with his father (15:1). The author did not need to include such notices, and indeed they are lacking in the final chapters of 2 Samuel, where a group of various items are not arranged in chronological order.<sup>15</sup> But by including these notices where he did, the author intended to communicate sequence. In other words, the phrase “after this” in 8:1 requires that the palace-ark-covenant events

<sup>13</sup> Randall C. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10–12*, JSOTSup 75 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 56.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, ConcC (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2017), 131–32, 154, 173. Steinmann maintains the chronological sequence of 2 Samuel 5–20, with the exception of shifting the palace-ark-covenant events to the end of David’s reign. He takes chapters 5–8 as proceeding in chronological order and sees chapter 9 as returning to an earlier point in David’s rule and then continuing chronologically through chapter 20. In this reconstruction, the only recorded battles that David fought before 975 BC were against the Philistines (2 Sam 5:17–25; 21:15–22) and Ammonites (2 Sam 10–12). But this contrasts sharply with indications in the text that David’s later years were characterized by absence from battle, including his staying home during the Ammonite campaign (ca. 993 BC) and his lack of engagement during the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba (ca. 975 BC; 2 Sam 11:1; 18:1–18; 20:1–22; cf. 21:17).

<sup>15</sup> The use of “after this” in 21:18 is an exception, but it signifies only sequence of the Philistine battles within this chapter. The material of 2 Samuel 21–24 is widely considered to be grouped thematically; see Tsumura, *Second Book of Samuel*, 289–90; Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 75–79, 401.

occurred prior to David's offensive campaigns described in chapter 8 and therefore early in David's reign.

2. *Solomon's birth oracle.* Two references to Solomon's birth also require that the Davidic covenant was made in the first half of David's reign. What is surprising is that nowhere in the recent discussion of the Davidic chronology are these references considered.<sup>16</sup> In making the covenant, the Lord declared to David, "I will raise up your seed after you who will come forth from you" (2 Sam 7:12). The wording "who will come forth from your body" (אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּשֶׁךְ) indicates a future son, one not yet born to David. It is the same phrase used in Genesis 15:4 when the Lord told Abram that it would not be Eleazar who would inherit but one "who will come forth from your body." In these two cases, both spoken in covenant contexts, the Lord was promising to give these men sons who had not yet been born.<sup>17</sup> Clearly then, Solomon was born after the Davidic covenant was made, and the palace-ark-covenant sequence must be dated to the first half of David's reign.<sup>18</sup>

This interpretation is confirmed by 1 Chronicles 22:6–10 when David told Solomon of his desire to build the temple. In this recounting of the Davidic covenant, David said that the Lord told him, "Behold, a son will be born to you. He will be a man of peace, and I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies, for Solomon will be his name" (הִנֵּה-בֶן נוֹלָד לָךְ הוּא יְהִי אִישׁ מְנוּחָה וְהַנְחוּתִי לוֹ; מְכַל-אוֹיְבָיו מִסָּבִיב כִּי שְׁלָמָה יְהִי שְׁמוֹ; 1 Chr 22:9). This birth oracle begins with *hinneh* plus a present participle, indicating future certainty.<sup>19</sup> The point is that God promised David that he would surely have a son in the future and that this son would build the temple. The same phrase is used in the birth oracle of King Josiah: "Behold, a son will be born to the house of David, Josiah by name" (הִנֵּה-בֶן נוֹלָד; לְבֵית-דָּוִד יֵאֲשִׁיחֵהוּ שְׁמוֹ; 1 Kgs 13:2). In both cases, the future birth of a king is foretold. In David's telling, then, the Davidic covenant preceded the birth of Solomon.

3. *The curse on Michal.* The confrontation between David and Michal provides further support for an early date. It occurred when David brought the ark to Jerusalem, so it is inseparably bound to the chronology of the palace-ark-covenant sequence. Exactly how David dressed or disrobed is debated, but all agree that the resulting encounter signified the end of Saul's house. Michal is twice called the "daughter of Saul" (2 Sam 6:20, 23), and the punishment upon her meant that there would be no heir in the line of the former king. This was appropriate because Da-

<sup>16</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, however, observed the bearing of these references on this issue long ago. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 2:582n7.

<sup>17</sup> This point is recognized, though without regard for its implications, by several who date the covenant late, including Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel," 387, and Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 125. This point is also recognized by Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 2:599; Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 340n69; Tony W. Cartledge, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 453. No one I am aware of argues that the child had already been born. Solomon confirms this interpretation in his words at the temple dedication (1 Kgs 8:19).

<sup>18</sup> All agree that Solomon's birth must have been near the midpoint of David's forty-year reign, given that he seems to have been fifteen to twenty years old when he became king.

<sup>19</sup> This grammatical construction is sometimes called the "participle of the imminent future," but the focus is not so much imminency as certainty. The following example from 1 Kings 13 provides evidence against imminency. In any case, this construction always speaks of a future event.

vid prized the things of God whereas Saul (and his daughter) did not. This judgment on Saul's house makes best sense if it occurred close to the time of transition from one dynasty to the next.

Furthermore, the author states that Michal was unable to have children because of her disdain for David. This accords with a date early in David's reign, for if the ark was transferred five years after David moved to Jerusalem, Michal would have been thirty to thirty-five years old at the time.<sup>20</sup> A woman at this age would have had hope of bearing children. Yet if the ark was transferred in 975, Michal would have been about fifty-five to sixty years old, past the usual age of childbearing. In that case, such a notice would hardly seem to be meaningful. This apparently incidental detail thus provides a strong confirmation that the Davidic narrative generally follows a chronological order.

4. *The presence of the palace.* Later references in 2 Samuel to David's palace also support an early date for its construction. In the initial report of Hiram's delegation, specific attention is given to the "cedar trees" used for building the palace (5:11). When David contemplated the situation of the ark residing in a tent, he noted that he was living "in a house of cedar" (7:2). The author's intended reference is to the palace built by Hiram.<sup>21</sup> Subsequent mentions of David's house provide further support. In 2 Samuel 11:2, David was walking on the roof of his palace when he spied Bathsheba. When Uriah returned from battle, he slept at the entrance to David's palace instead of returning home (2 Sam 11:9). In 2 Samuel 12:20, there is a contrast between the house of the Lord and David's "own house." The reader would expect that these references pertain to the previously mentioned palace that Hiram built. In 2 Samuel 13:7–8, David sent word to Tamar at the palace, directing her to go to the house of her brother Amnon. The narrative informs us that Amnon had his own house, Absalom had his own house (13:20), but, if the revised chronology is correct, David did not yet have his own house.

If Hiram built David's palace near the end of David's life, we have to suppose that David inhabited a Jebusite dwelling for several decades. In this case, Hiram finished building the palace shortly before Absalom revolted and slept with David's concubines on the roof (2 Sam 16:21–22).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, David would have had little time to enjoy this palace before he died, and the palace would have been relatively new when Solomon began to build another one for himself.

---

<sup>20</sup> This assumes that when David married Michal (the first time), in about 1015, she was between fifteen and twenty years old.

<sup>21</sup> This connection is widely recognized, but in personal correspondence Rodger Young has suggested that David could have been living in a Jebusite palace made of cedar. This would allow for a late construction of Hiram's palace, thus preserving the synchronism given in Josephus. Against this proposal, three objections may be raised: (1) the natural reading of the narrative is that the house of cedars mentioned here is one already described; (2) there is no evidence that the small city-state of Jebus, surrounded by the Israelite tribes, would have had the standing or wealth to secure such logs from Lebanon; and, most importantly, (3) Hiram's palace construction cannot be separated chronologically from the *wayyiqtol* sequence in 2 Samuel 5:9–12.

<sup>22</sup> The roof would necessarily be a different one than where David spied Bathsheba, thus breaking a textual link that scholars have often observed.

An additional detail in connection with Uriah's visit to David further strengthens the argument. Uriah's response to David, when urged to go home to sleep with Bathsheba, was that he could do no such thing while "the ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my master's servants are camping in the open field" (2 Sam 11:11). Uriah's reference to the ark is interesting. It could mean that the ark had been carried out to battle with the army, as had been the case in the past (1 Sam 4). Another possibility is that Uriah is referring to the ark in the tent in the City of David.<sup>23</sup> In either case, however, it seems clear that the ark was no longer in the house of Abinadab in Kiriath Jearim (1 Sam 7:1; 2 Sam 6:3). It is unlikely that Uriah would have thought to mention the ark had it not already been transferred from Kiriath Jearim. Since the Uriah encounter occurred sometime in the middle of David's reign, the ark must have been moved in the first half.

## II. ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

So far, it has been demonstrated that the biblical narrative consistently points to an early date for the Davidic covenant. Before responding to objections to this view, a few additional points may be considered. First, a late reconstruction requires an improbable number of major events to occur within a brief time. Constrained by Hiram's accession and a presumed two years of palace-building, there is not more than six years to fit the transfer of the ark, the Davidic covenant, Absalom's rebellion, Sheba's rebellion, the census and its resulting plague, preparations for building the temple, Solomon's coronation, Adonijah's attempted coup, and David's old age. While it may not be technically impossible for this all to occur in short order, it does not fit the tenor of the text, nor does it seem likely.

Second, a late date requires that David was an old man when he initiated his plan to build the temple. Yet the sense one gets from 2 Samuel 7 is that David intended not only to begin construction but also to finish it. But if David was 65 at the time, it is not clear how he would have been confident that he would live long enough to see its completion.

Third, Chronicles presents David as the chief architect of the temple, devoting many chapters to his extensive preparations (1 Chr 22–26, 28–29). The late chronology allows little more than the final two or three years of David's life for all this work.

Fourth, David collected gold, silver, bronze, and large quantities of precious stones in his military campaigns that he dedicated to the Lord, presumably for use in the temple. Indeed, at least some of it was used in the construction of the temple and its vessels (2 Sam 8:7–12; 1 Chr 18:7–11; 29:1–5). This is more difficult to

---

<sup>23</sup> The word used here is *sukkal* (סֻכָּה), which is different from the word *'ohel* (אֹהֶל) used previously (2 Sam 6:17).



square with a chronology in which David initiated the plan to build the temple only after he had completed all of his military conquests.<sup>24</sup>

Fifth, 2 Samuel 9–20 has often been considered a single piece known as the Succession Narrative or Court History. If there is any validity to this theory, it is strange that major events that allegedly occurred during this time period show no trace in this unit.<sup>25</sup>

Sixth, a late dating requires the Lord to make the promise of an everlasting dynasty to a man who has committed adultery and murder, and whose sons committed rape, fratricide, and treason. In reading the text, it is easier to understand the Lord as adhering to his previously made promise and forgiving David's transgressions than it is to see the Lord initiating an eternal covenant with a failed king. The sense of the text is that the Lord will raise up a seed from David who will be like David. This makes best sense in the years before David's grave sin.<sup>26</sup>

### III. RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

The catalyst for the revised chronology of David's reign is Josephus's dating of Hiram's reign, a matter to be discussed shortly. But scholars who have adopted this chronology have attempted to provide some evidence from the biblical text to support moving the palace-ark-covenant events to the end of David's life. Their arguments must now be considered.

1. *David's rest.* First, it is sometimes suggested that the Davidic covenant must be late in David's reign because it occurred when "Yahweh had given him rest from all his enemies around him" (2 Sam 7:1). Surely David did not have such rest early in his rule, it is reasoned, and so this could only apply to the final decade after David had subdued all of the surrounding nations.<sup>27</sup> This thesis fails, however, upon closer inspection. The final decade of David's life does not seem characterized by rest, given the multiple internal rebellions, even within his own house. The revised chronology, in fact, has Absalom standing at the gate fomenting conspiracy at

---

<sup>24</sup> As noted above, Steinmann avoids this problem by dating the campaigns of 2 Samuel 8 to the final years of David's reign, but this creates its own difficulties. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 154. Among other things, 1 Chronicles 22:8 indicates that David fought many battles before Solomon was born.

<sup>25</sup> Alberto R. Green, "David's Relations with Hiram: Biblical and Josephan Evidence for Tyrian Chronology," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and Michael Patrick O'Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 389.

<sup>26</sup> Though elsewhere he seems to adopt Merrill's chronology, Hoffner captures the dissonance of this view well: "But if, as Merrill thinks, this event is to be placed near the end of David's reign, the significance of almost every aspect of both Yahweh's promise in 2 Sam 7 and David's reaction to it is different from what it would be if the promise was made before the events of 2 Sam 8–24. The promise of a son to succeed him peacefully and righteously, who will be allowed to build a temple for Yahweh, and whose successors will continue to rule permanently, would have seemed highly unlikely in light of what transpired with the murder of Amnon (2 Sam 13), the rebellion and death of Absalom (2 Sam 14–19), the revolt of Sheba (2 Sam 20), and the violent competition between the partisans of Adonijah and Solomon for the succession to the throne (1 Kgs 1)." Hoffner, *1 and 2 Samuel*, at discussion of 2 Samuel 6–7.

<sup>27</sup> Merrill, "Accession Year," 108.

the time when David is allegedly enjoying this rest. In addition, it should be noted that Pharaoh Siamun's attack on Gezer, in about 978, occurred around this same time as well.<sup>28</sup>

A better view is that this "rest" of 2 Samuel 7 is relative to the context, and it is intended here to mean that David enjoyed a time of peace. In Tsumura's words, this rest "could refer to a *temporary* warless situation, not necessarily complete victory over all his enemies."<sup>29</sup> David had rest in the sense that he was no longer defending Israel's tribes from foreign invasions.<sup>30</sup> He had removed the Philistine threat from Israel's heartland (2 Sam 5:17–25). Later he would venture out to expand his holdings and tributaries, a distinct status that does not negate the rest described here. The text supports this interpretation in two ways. First, in 2 Samuel 7:11, the Lord promises that he will give David rest from all his enemies. This indicates that the rest of verse 1 is not a final rest. Second, 2 Samuel 8:1 records that "after this," David fought the Philistines and others. The author clearly had no difficulty reconciling the rest that David enjoyed in chapter 7 with the battles that David would later wage in the territories of his neighbors.

2. *Religious tradition.* A second argument used to support a late date is the suggestion that David would have been hesitant to break religious tradition, so he would not have moved the ark to Jerusalem early in his reign. The thinking is that the people of Israel would have objected to such a radical move to consolidate the political and religious centers, and thus David patiently waited several decades for the people to be receptive to this innovation. Michal's reaction is considered to reflect a broader national hesitation over David's move.<sup>31</sup>

For several reasons, this objection is unconvincing. First, David was an innovator in many ways, unafraid to break with the past. He founded a new dynasty, from a different tribe, centered in a new city. Moving the ark was a detail by comparison. Second, there does not seem to be any relevant "religious tradition" of consequence to hinder moving the ark. For decades, the ark had been stored at the house of Abinadab, a place it ended up almost by accident following the tragic disaster at Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 7:1). Saul had ignored the ark, but now David was rectifying this inappropriate situation by bringing the ark to a properly prepared place in the capital that the Lord had chosen (1 Chr 13:3; Ps 132:2–9, 13–18).

Third, the Israelites do not seem to have been overly concerned with breaking religious tradition throughout their history. In the preceding period of the judges,

<sup>28</sup> Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 267–68. Gezer is located about twenty miles west of Jerusalem, well within the territory that David ostensibly controlled. Merrill dated Siamun's campaign after 978 on the basis that the pharaoh's first year was 978. More recently, scholars are dating the beginning of his reign to about 986; see Erik Hornung, Rolf Krauss, and David Warburton, eds., *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, Handbook of Oriental Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 474. A seal recently discovered at Gezer provides support for the theory that Siamun was the pharaoh mentioned in 1 Kings 9:16. An article on this seal is in preparation by Stephan Munger, Steven Ortiz, and Samuel Wolff.

<sup>29</sup> Tsumura, *Second Book of Samuel*, 127, italics his. Cf. Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 and 2 Samuel*, Teach the Text (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 219.

<sup>30</sup> Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 131–32.

<sup>31</sup> Merrill, "Accession Year," 110.

no one objected when Micah set up a household shrine or when the Danites carried it off to serve their own tribe (Judg 17–18). In the following reigns of Solomon, Jeroboam, and the Davidic kings, high places were set up east of Jerusalem, in Dan and Bethel, and throughout the land of Israel; the only ones who seem concerned were the prophets and a few kings. It is hard to imagine that the people would have objected to David's transfer of the ark to Jerusalem.

Fourth, the biblical presentation of David is that he was a man passionate about honoring the Lord. When everyone else stood back, David marched out with courage against Goliath to defend the Lord's name (1 Sam 17:45–47). When pursued by Saul, David resisted his men's entreaties to retaliate because of his desire to obey the Lord (1 Sam 24:4–7; 26:8–11). The psalms also reflect David's commitment to please God over men (Pss 26:4–7; 40:4; 101:3–8). Hoffner correctly perceived that the ark transfer “was not some cynical strategy of *Realpolitik* to glue the northern tribes to his southern base in Judah, but a desire to honor Yahweh and to show by ‘enthroning’ him in Jerusalem that he—not David—was Israel's true and only rightful ruler.”<sup>32</sup>

Fifth, from a political perspective, it seems that the best time for such a significant act was at the beginning of David's rule and not at the end. Kings and presidents know that they have a “honeymoon” period before opposition starts to harden and disillusionment sets in. The recent coronation by all twelve tribes would have been a strong inducement to take immediate action. By contrast, at the end of David's rule, his own sons and advisers were conspiring against him. The late reconstruction, in fact, has David moving the ark within about one year of Absalom setting his rebellion in motion. In sum, the idea of religious tradition impeding David's transfer of the ark seems unlikely.

3. *The priesthood of Zadok.* A third argument given to support the late date comes from the priesthood of Zadok. According to 1 Kings 4:4, Zadok was a high priest in the reign of Solomon. Yet he was also present at the transfer of the ark. Under an early-date scenario, Zadok would have been priest under David for about thirty years, plus whatever time he served during Solomon's reign. If we assume that he lived until the completion of the temple, eleven years into Solomon's reign, Zadok could have been about seventy years of age.<sup>33</sup> This is not improbable.

But there is another matter with Zadok that is difficult to square with a late chronology. In this view, when the ark was brought to Jerusalem circa 977, David appointed Zadok to serve at the tabernacle in Gibeon (1 Chr 16:39). Yet only one year later, when Absalom initiated his coup against David, Zadok was serving in Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:24). While it is certainly possible that Zadok could have transferred from Gibeon to Jerusalem within that brief time frame, the presence of the notice about Zadok's service in Gibeon seems to suggest that he had a significant tenure there. More likely, the 1 Chronicles 16 notice indicates that David was concerned with worship at the tabernacle in Gibeon early in his reign, and his ap-

<sup>32</sup> Hoffner, *1 and 2 Samuel*, at discussion of 2 Sam 6.

<sup>33</sup> This assumes that he was about thirty when the ark was transferred early in David's reign.

pointment of Zadok was intended to ensure that worship was carried out there according to the Mosaic law.

4. *Lack of reference to the ark.* Another objection to an early transfer of the ark is the lack of reference to the ark or its tent prior to Absalom's rebellion. Merrill has suggested that this is exactly what one would expect if the ark had only been moved to Jerusalem in the recent past.<sup>34</sup> In response, it can be observed that the ark was mentioned at length in the ark transfer, which falls early in the narrative. Furthermore, it must be asked, where exactly in the following narrative would one expect to find mention of the ark in Jerusalem? We would not expect to find it in a summary of David's foreign military exploits (2 Sam 8), in the recounting of David's restoration of Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9), or in an account of a battle against the Ammonites in the land of Ammon (2 Sam 10). The story of Bathsheba and Uriah does mention the ark, as noted above, and it seems best to identify either a Jerusalem location or a Jerusalem origin (if in battle). Finally, the stories of Tamar's rape and Absalom's revenge do not naturally lend themselves to mention of the ark. This argument from (partial) silence is therefore not significant.

5. *Rēš šarrūti in Assyrian royal inscriptions.* A final argument for the revised chronology is that the author of 2 Samuel placed major achievements of David at the beginning of his rule in keeping with the Assyrian scribal practice that emphasized the king's accession year, his *rēš šarrūti*.<sup>35</sup> Some evidence is given of a similar phrase used in Jeremiah, but there is no reason to believe that this Mesopotamian practice was active earlier in Israel's monarchy. In addition, as Merrill acknowledges, there is no "explicit formula introducing David's first year at Jerusalem as a *rēš šarrūti*."<sup>36</sup> What we have then is a practice distant in time and place that has left no explicit textual marker and yet is used to deny what is explicit in the text (cf. 2 Sam 8:1). In this case, it seems preferable to assume that the author of 2 Samuel placed the palace-ark-covenant events at the beginning of David's reign in Jerusalem because that is when they occurred.

#### IV. THE DATING OF HIRAM'S REIGN

The purpose of this article is to show that the biblical text will not allow for moving the date of the palace construction, ark transfer, and covenant grant to the final decade of David's life. This then creates a conflict with the extrabiblical evidence for Hiram's reign. The obvious purpose of revising the Davidic chronology was to eliminate this conflict, thus removing one critical objection to the historicity of 2 Samuel's account of David's reign. Having shown the difficulties with this reconstruction, where do we now stand? While offering a solution is beyond the intention of this study, a contribution can be made by showing that the evidence for dating Hiram's accession to 979 or 978 is not as compelling as many believe. This should be a helpful observation, because in almost every presentation of this

<sup>34</sup> Merrill, "Accession Year," 110; Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 262.

<sup>35</sup> Merrill, "Accession Year," 105–7.

<sup>36</sup> Merrill, "Accession Year," 105.

matter by conservative scholars in the last thirty years, the dating of Hiram's accession late in David's reign is presented as an incontestable fact.

In reality, our knowledge of Hiram's reign comes entirely from the biblical texts and one other source. No records from ancient Tyre have been preserved. No archaeological discoveries shed light on Hiram or Tyrian chronology of the tenth century BC. There are no inscriptions of relevance from ancient Phoenicia, Israel, or the surrounding nations. Apart from the Bible, our only source for Hiram's reign dates to a thousand years after the time of Hiram. Josephus wrote in *Against Apion* and *Antiquities* that he had records from Dios and Menander, two historians from the second century BC (*Ag. Ap.* 106–26; *Ant.* 8.144–49). Dios recorded the name of Hiram's father, Abibaal. Menander of Ephesus provided a series of dates as well as a list of Tyrian kings. This is very valuable information, because without it, we would know nothing of Tyre's royal family in the tenth century beyond the Bible's mention of Hiram. The question then turns to how reliable this information is. Generally speaking, scholars consider Josephus to be accurate on many points. This is partly because some of Josephus's data corresponds with other known facts, and it is also because in some places there are no other known sources available for comparison.<sup>37</sup>

Josephus recorded four pieces of data of particular relevance to the chronology of David and Solomon's reigns. From Menander, he reported that Hiram reigned 34 years and lived 53 years. Solomon's temple, he says, was built 143 years and 8 months before Carthage was founded by Tyre. He also claimed that Hiram built Solomon's temple in Hiram's 11th (or 12th) year. Since Solomon began the temple in his 4th year, Hiram's reign overlapped with David's final 7 (or 8) years (1 Kgs 6:1). Hiram also overlapped with Solomon for about 25 years, which fits with biblical notices about Solomon's gifts to Hiram after construction of the temple and palace (1 Kgs 9:10–14). It is on the basis of these chronological references that it has been deemed necessary to rewrite the chronology of David's reign.

But is Josephus trustworthy? In some matters, he surely is. For instance, scholars are in general agreement that his date of 143 years from Solomon's temple to the founding of Carthage is correct. Yet even here, Josephus conflated two events, and it was not really the founding of Carthage that provides the terminus point for the 143 years, but rather the departure of Dido (Elissa) from Tyre, 11 years before she founded Carthage.<sup>38</sup> The Tyrian king list in Josephus's account is generally deemed accurate, after critical analysis has determined which numbers are original and which are not. For instance, Hiram's successor Baalbazer is said to

---

<sup>37</sup> Rollston's assessment of the value of classical sources regarding the Phoenicians is relevant: "During recent decades, scholars have become particularly cautious about embracing as historical some (or even many) of the statements in the classical authors about the Phoenicians. This hermeneutic of suspicion is important and justified." Christopher Rollston, "Phoenicia and the Phoenicians," in *The World Around the Old Testament: The People and Places of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 276; cf. 298.

<sup>38</sup> William Hamilton Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel*, HSM 48 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 51–52; Rodger C. Young, "Three Verifications of Thiele's Date for the Beginning of the Divided Kingdom," *AUSS* 45.2 (2007): 18n42.

have ruled 7 years, but most scholars believe that should be corrected to 17 years.<sup>39</sup> In fact, when adding up the total numbers of regnal years, none of the preserved lists add up to the total that Josephus gives.<sup>40</sup> It is not surprising that Katzenstein wrote that “one of the most difficult problems in the history of Tyre is to determine the absolute chronology of the reigns of the kings of Tyre from Hiram I until Pygmalion.”<sup>41</sup> The relevant question for biblical scholars is how much weight should be given to this difficult Tyrian chronology when it apparently conflicts with other data.<sup>42</sup>

Josephus does not provide only one synchronism for the time of David and Solomon, but gives at least six. Alberto R. Green identified these discrepancies in an article published in 1983, but few scholars writing on the Davidic chronology cite his work.<sup>43</sup> Josephus’s relevant synchronisms for David and Solomon are as follows:

- David died 1,300 years before Antiochus VII’s siege of Jerusalem (*Ant.* 7.393). This would date David’s death to 1435 BC.
- Solomon reigned for 80 years and died 240 years before the fall of Samaria (*Ant.* 8.211; 9.280–82). This would date Solomon’s accession to 1050 BC.
- Solomon’s temple was constructed 240 years after Tyre’s founding (*Ant.* 8.62). Depending on the date of Tyre’s founding, this yields dates between 981 and 956 BC.
- Solomon’s temple was built 143 years before Carthage’s founding (*Ag. Ap.* 1.126). After separating Carthage’s founding from Dido’s departure 11 years earlier, this gives the correct date of about 968 BC.
- The temple was constructed 592 or 612 years after the exodus (*Ant.* 8.61; 20.230). This conflicts with the 480 years given in 1 Kings 6:1.
- The temple was constructed 1,020 years after Abraham’s migration (*Ant.* 8.61). This conflicts with the biblical chronology whether one takes Exodus 12:40 as a long sojourn (1,125 years) or a short one (910 years).

Though not a chronological statement per se, Josephus’s claim that Hiram inherited his affection for Solomon from his father (Abibaal) means that Hiram did

<sup>39</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 2:582n7.

<sup>40</sup> Green, “David’s Relations,” 388.

<sup>41</sup> H. Jacob Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre: From the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E.* (Jerusalem: Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, 1973), 80.

<sup>42</sup> A study of Manetho’s chronology is a helpful and contemporary parallel, for like Josephus’s sources for the Tyrian chronology, his work was only preserved in later authors, in fragmentary form, and with questionable accuracy. See K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 B.C.)* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1973), 448–54. Manetho’s work is easier to evaluate and correct because of the abundance of other source material, whereas such source material is lacking for tenth-century Phoenicia.

<sup>43</sup> Green, “David’s Relations,” 373–97. Though much of the biblical evidence discussed in this article is not part of Green’s study, the ultimate question really has not changed since he wrote in 1983, “Which source does the weight of historical probability favor, *Against Apion* 1.116–26 or 2 Sam 5:11?” (389–90).

not overlap with David at all.<sup>44</sup> Specifically with regard to Solomon and the Tyrian king list, Josephus is guilty of preserving or creating a number of other chronological errors:

- Josephus claims that Solomon reigned for 80 years, not 40, and died when he was 94 (*Ant.* 8.211).
- The lengths of reigns he gives for Baal-Mazzer I and Mattan are generally regarded as incorrect.<sup>45</sup>
- He omits one Tyrian king and his regnal length.<sup>46</sup>
- Josephus incorrectly handles the 8 months attached to the 143 years before Carthage's founding.<sup>47</sup>
- In one place, he dates the beginning of Solomon's construction of the temple to Hiram's 11th year, but in another he dates it to Hiram's 12th year (*Ant.* 8.61; *Ag. Ap.* 1.126).

Of course, in matters further afield, Josephus is well-known for inaccuracy in his use of numbers.<sup>48</sup> Even so, Josephus's numbers should not be dismissed *a priori*. Young and Steinmann have done excellent work in showing how the 143-year synchronism provides an independent line of evidence confirming the biblical chronology for the date of Solomon's temple.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, where we have strong biblical evidence that conflicts with Josephus, it is not inappropriate to question Josephus's reliability. In Green's more extensive discussion of this matter, he concludes that his analysis has demonstrated "how difficult it is to use Josephus' statements to develop a precise chronology."<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Kitchen's words are even stronger:

It is worth pointing out here that the Tyrian list is known only in imperfect copies via Josephus almost a millennium after its span (c. 980–800 BC globally), in Greek, in an indifferent textual tradition and subject to two rival dates for the founding of Carthage (814 or 825 BC). This is a very poor starting-point to presume to adjust the far more detailed, far longer, better-connected, and basically more reliable chronological schema in Kings, transmitted in its own language.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ag. Ap.* 109; Katzenstein, *History of Tyre*, 84n32.

<sup>45</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 582n7; Green, "David's Relations," 383–88.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Moore Cross, "An Interpretation of the Nora Stone," *BAIOR* 208 (1972): 17n11; Katzenstein, *History of Tyre*, 118–20; Green, "David's Relations," 385.

<sup>47</sup> Young, "Three Verifications," 23n50.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Magen Broshi, "The Credibility of Josephus," *JJS* 33.1–2 (1982): 383–84; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 38, 233–34.

<sup>49</sup> Young, "Three Verifications," 17–25; Rodger C. Young and Andrew E. Steinmann, "Correlation of Select Classical Sources Related to the Trojan War with Assyrian and Biblical Chronologies," *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 1.2 (2012): 225–28.

<sup>50</sup> Green, "David's Relations," 379.

<sup>51</sup> K. A. Kitchen, review of W. H. Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel*, *ETQ* 65.3 (1993): 249. This quotation was noted by Young, who disagrees with Kitchen but states that Kitchen's observation is not motivated by a desired conclusion. Young, "Three Verifications," 22–23.

A number of solutions have been proposed to solve the problem:

- Hiram's relations with Solomon are erroneously attributed to David in 2 Samuel (G. Kittel).
- David's treaty was made with Abibaal instead of Hiram (J. Bright).
- The biblical sources were confused (J. A. Soggin).
- Hiram was a dynastic name, and there were two Hiram in succession (J. Lumby).

To these may be added the following:

- Hiram constructed David's palace while his father Abibaal was king.
- Hiram served as co-regent with his father.
- Hiram was used as a title, similar to Pharaoh.

A solution is not easy, and this problem has been discussed for more than one hundred fifty years. Looking at Josephus's numbers, there are three that appear to be incorrect in light of the biblical data. The first is the synchronism to Hiram's 12th year (*Ag. Ap.* 1.126). As noted above, this allows an overlap of only 8 years with David. But, as several scholars have observed apart from the concern of this study, this chronological reference is unlikely to be original for three reasons. First, scholars have long recognized that Josephus never attributes the 12th-year synchronism to Menander, though he has plenty of opportunity to do so and it would have served his purpose well.<sup>52</sup> This raises the question of the source of this synchronism. Second, it may be observed that no dates are given in Menander for the construction of Tyrian temples. It must be asked whether Tyrian records would preserve the date for an Israelite temple without recording dates for their own temples.<sup>53</sup> Third, Gutschmid has suggested that the 12-year synchronism actually applied to the temple of Hiram-Melqart that was reconstructed by Hiram, and that Josephus transferred the date to Solomon's temple.<sup>54</sup> Gutschmid's proposal has been endorsed by Katzenstein, Green, and Lipiński.<sup>55</sup> Though Katzenstein believes that "great weight" should generally be given to Josephus's sources, he concludes that "there is no historical value" to the 11th/12th-year synchronism.<sup>56</sup> It should be noted here as well that the 155-year synchronism that Josephus gives to Hiram's accession is almost certainly his own calculation, based upon the 143 years from Solomon's temple to Carthage's founding, plus the 12 years of Hiram's reign before the temple.<sup>57</sup> The reliability of this chronological synchronism may thus be doubted.

<sup>52</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 582n7; Green, "David's Relations," 389.

<sup>53</sup> Green, "David's Relations," 389.

<sup>54</sup> Alfred von Gutschmid, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Franz Rühl, 5 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1889–1893), 4:488–89.

<sup>55</sup> Katzenstein, *History of Tyre*, 83; Green, "David's Relations," 389; Edward Lipiński, "Hiram of Tyre and Solomon," in *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception*, ed. André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern, VTSup 129 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 254.

<sup>56</sup> Katzenstein, *History of Tyre*, 80, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Green, "David's Relations," 380, 387–88.



Two more numbers of Josephus that appear to be in error are the length of Hiram's reign and the length of his life.<sup>58</sup> Citing Menander, Josephus claims that Hiram reigned for 34 years and lived for 53 years. In some ways, these numbers sound reasonable. In comparison with the lives of the following kings of Tyre, Hiram enjoyed an average lifespan. Abdastratus lived 39 years, Methusastartus lived 54 years, Astharymus lived 58 years, Phelles lived 50 years, Ithobal lived 48 years, Balezor lived 45 years, Metten lived 32 years, and Pygmalion lived 58 years.<sup>59</sup> Yet three of these kings were assassinated, cutting short their lives. Metten reigned for 29 years but only lived for 32 years, indicating that unless he came to the throne at the age of 3, at least one of these numbers is inaccurate. And there is nothing that makes it improbable that Hiram could have lived to be 70 or older. David lived to be 70, and some of his contemporaries seem to have lived as long.<sup>60</sup>

Hiram's accession at the age of 19 seems reasonable, but if Josephus or his source had an inaccurate number for his lifespan, then his length of rule would be incorrect as well. The biblical writer surely knew what is obvious from a casual reading of Samuel-Kings—that Hiram reigned a long time. He credited Hiram with collaborating with David early in David's rule, and he recorded Hiram's relations with Solomon shortly after the midpoint of Solomon's rule (1 Kgs 9:10–14). On the face of it, that amounts to about 50 years. There is no indication that the biblical writer doubted this. In fact, he makes a telling statement at the beginning of Solomon's reign that Hiram had "always been on friendly terms with David" (1 Kgs 5:1). This is entirely compatible with the biblical presentation of a relationship that lasted through much of David's rule, but it does not make as much sense if there was only an 8-year overlap between them.

As for an ancient king reigning for a half-century, we have a number of examples. Nahash was a contemporary Ammonite king, and he reigned about 50 years, given his presence at the beginning of Saul's reign and into David's rule (1 Sam 11:1; 2 Sam 10:2).<sup>61</sup> Achish was the king of Gath from the time of Saul to the time of Solomon, unless this was a dynastic name (1 Sam 21:10; 27:2; 1 Kgs 2:39). Amenemope of Egypt's 21st dynasty (1076–944) reigned for 52 years. A few centuries earlier, Thutmose III reigned for 53 years and Ramses II for 67 years. In later centuries, Uzziah and Sheshonq III reigned for 52 years and Manasseh for 55 years. The point here is that the biblical account does not require anything unparalleled for its chronology to work. But we do have to discard some of Josephus's numbers. Or perhaps only one of them: could it be that the 53 years that Josephus attributed to Hiram's life originally denoted the length of his reign?<sup>62</sup> In any case, the biblical account makes no effort to obscure what is manifestly a long reign of Hiram.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. the negative assessment by Lowell K. Handy, "Phoenicians in the Tenth Century BCE: A Sketch of an Outline," in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy, *Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East* 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 163.

<sup>59</sup> *Ag. Ap.* 1.121–26.

<sup>60</sup> Abiathar and Joab were with David from before he began to rule until his death (1 Sam 22:20; 26:6; 2 Sam 2:13; 1 Kgs 2:26–35; 1 Chr 11:6). Barzillai lived to be at least 80 years old (2 Sam 19:32).

<sup>61</sup> Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 76.

<sup>62</sup> So also Green, "David's Relations," 391.

## V. CONCLUSION

The biblical text presents a consistent account of the chronology of David's reign. Not a single point in Samuel, Kings, or Chronicles is incompatible with an early date for David's palace construction, ark transfer, and covenant grant. On the other hand, several texts eliminate the option of placing these events in the final decade of David's reign. The only inconsistency is in harmonizing the biblical text with three numbers given by Josephus. The intention of this article has been to show that a decision must be made between the biblical text and Josephus, since they are not compatible. One advantage of returning to the biblical sequence is that everything in the text flows harmoniously, and it avoids the need for extensive and problematic revisions.

This chronology also has the benefit of providing several decades during which David reflected on the most spectacular promise made to him by God. His initial amazement expressed in 2 Samuel 7:18–29 developed in time as he understood the relationship of God's promises to him with those previously given in the Garden of Eden, to Abraham, and through Moses. David's recognition that his own son would be the eternal king signified that he would be the one to crush the head of the serpent. And yet this serpent would crush the king's heel. David's own sufferings and struggle to achieve the throne likely increased his understanding of the hostility his greater son would face. The revelation of David's lord reigning in Jerusalem as priest-king and crushing the head of the whole earth made sense in light of the Davidic covenant. The chronology given in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles provides David with many years of reflection upon the Davidic covenant, years in which he wrote bold, glorious psalms intended to instruct, persuade, and excite the nation about their coming Messiah.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> The author expresses his gratitude for assistance and insights on various parts of this research to Abner Chou, Benjamin Foreman, Chris McKinny, Kaelyn Peay, Kris Udd, and Mathew Wronski.