

# Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

## Contradictions in Scripture: Time Reckoning Methods Part 1

Of the problems that trouble the student of Scripture, one of the more puzzling is the discrepancies sometimes seen in the way time is reckoned in the Scriptures. Dates do not seem to add up, time intervals do not seem to fit, and confusion is the result. Does the Bible contradict Itself when it comes to time? How can we explain these seeming “contradictions in Scripture”?

### Inclusive and Exclusive Reckoning

The first problem with time reckoning we will consider is that of the time that passed between certain statements of the Lord and the transfiguration. We see this time interval first in Matthew 16:28-17:1.

**28. “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”**

**17:1. Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;**

The same time gap is clear in Mark 9:1-2.

**1. And He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”**

**2. Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.**

Both Matthew and Mark agree that the time interval between His statement about some not tasting death and His journey up the mount of transfiguration was six days. And yet, Luke 9:27-28 gives the same story a little differently.

**27. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God.”**

**28. Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray.**

Here Luke records things a little differently. He claims that the interval between Christ’s statement that they would “not taste death” and the transfiguration was “about eight days after,” whereas Matthew and Mark claimed that it was “after six days.” This seems to be a contradiction. Which was the correct interval then, six days or eight? Were Matthew and Mark in error, or was Luke?

The answer, I believe, lies in inclusive versus exclusive reckoning of time. For example, how long is the time period from Monday evening to the following Monday morning? Is it eight days, as in “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday”? Is it seven days, as in a week later? Is it six-and-a-half days, as in 156 hours from 7:00 PM one Monday to 7:00 AM the next? Or is it six days, as in “Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday”? We can see that the answer can vary from eight days (the most inclusive reckoning) to

six days (the most exclusive.) The same interval can be called either six days or eight days, depending on whether you are including parts of days as a full day, or excluding parts of days since they are not full days. To include the parts of days as if they were full days is called inclusive reckoning. To exclude the parts of days is called exclusive reckoning.

So when we consider the interval between Christ's words that they would "not taste death" and the transfiguration, it is clear that it was six full 24-hour days, and then parts of two other days. Matthew and Mark call this "six days" using exclusive reckoning, whereas Luke calls this "about eight days," using inclusive reckoning. He even clues us in on this by using the word "about" (which could also be translated "nearly").

Therefore, we can clearly see that there is no contradiction here. The difference between the record of Matthew and Mark and the record in the book of Luke is the difference between exclusive and inclusive reckoning. There is no difference in fact, and the statements made in both records are true.

## **Gaps and Overlaps in the Kings**

A startling puzzle when we consider the reigns of the various kings of Israel and Judah is that sometimes the numbers in the years of their reigns simply does not work out. One who is familiar with the book(s) of Kings knows that the reigns of the kings of the one kingdom are dated by comparison to the reigns of the kings of the other kingdom. This should make everything plain and easily confirmable, and yet what often happens is that the numbers do not seem to add up. Are there historical errors in this record? Is the Biblical author simply guilty of bad math skills? Or is there another reason?

Let us consider an example of some of these badly overlapping reigns. One example is in the reigns of Elah, Zimri, Omri, and Ahab. This period is well marked out, since King Asa of Judah reigned for forty-one years, so his reign spanned that of Elah and Omri. In I Kings 16:8, we learn that Elah began to reign in the twenty-sixth year of Asa.

**8. In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah the son of Baasha became king over Israel, and reigned two years in Tirzah.**

So if Elah reigned two years, he would have reigned from Asa's twenty-sixth year to his twenty-eighth year. The next king after him is Zimri, who kills him and takes his place. We read when his reign started in I Kings 16:15.

**15. In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri had reigned in Tirzah seven days. And the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines.**

This seems rather strange, since Elah started reigning in Asa's twenty-sixth year, and we read he reigned for two years. Yet remember what we just learned about inclusive reckoning. If we use inclusive reckoning, we realize that Elah only reigned part of two years, and so his two-year reign started in Asa's twenty-sixth year and ended in his twenty-seventh.

King Zimri only reigned for a week. Then Omri and the army of Israel besieged the capital of Israel, Tirzah. Zimri killed himself by burning the palace down over his head. Next Omri reigned. Yet here the numbers get even more difficult. In I Kings 16:23 we read:

**23 In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel, and reigned twelve years. Six years he reigned in Tirzah.**

This last statement just has to do with the fact that he built the city of Samaria and made it his capital in his last six years. The really strange part of this is that it says he started to reign in Asa's thirty-first year. Yet Zimri started his week-long reign in Asa's twenty-seventh year, and his reign lasted only a week. Shouldn't Omri's reign have begun in Asa's twenty-seventh year as well, then?

I believe that the key to this lies in the record in between these two statements. In I Kings 16:21-22, we read:

**21. Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king, and half followed Omri. 22. But the people who followed Omri prevailed over the people who followed Tibni the son of Ginath. So Tibni died and Omri reigned.**

There was actually civil war for a time between Omri and a man named Tibni the son of Ginath. Omri eventually prevailed, but the throne was contested for four years. It seems that not until Asa's thirty-first year was Omri universally accepted as the king of the northern kingdom of Israel upon the death of Tibni. This accounts for the four year gap.

Yet our tale gets even stranger when we come to the reign of Omri's son Ahab. I Kings 16:29 records the start of his reign.

**29. In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel; and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years.**

Of course, by no stretch of the imagination can Omri's reign have lasted from the thirty-first year of Asa to his thirty-eighth year and still have been a twelve-year reign. Yet we already have the keys we need to solve this. The twelve years must refer to the totality of Omri's reign, including the four years when his reign was contested. If this is the case, his twelve years started in the twenty-seventh year of Asa. If we use inclusive reckoning, twelve years brings us to Asa's thirty-eighth year, which is just what the record says.

Let us continue to follow this out, as the problems do not end here. During Ahab's reign, King Jehoshaphat started his reign over Judah, as we read in I Kings 22:41.

**41. Jehoshaphat the son of Asa had become king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. 42. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi.**

Ahab's son Ahaziah became king in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat, according to I Kings 22:51.

**51. Ahaziah the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel.**

Four plus seventeen is twenty-one. I Kings 16:29 said Ahab reigned for twenty-two years, but this works out if we use inclusive reckoning. The next king's reign begins as is described in II Kings 1:17.

**17. So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. Because he had no son, Jehoram became king in his place, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.**

This says Jehoram son of Ahab became king in the second year of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat. Yet this clashes badly with II Kings 3:1, which states:

**1. Now Jehoram the son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years.**

This makes sense of Ahaziah's reign, since he began in Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year, and reigned two years. Of course, if we use inclusive reckoning, this works out. Yet we read above that Jehoshaphat reigned twenty-five years. How could Jehoram son of Ahab have begun reigning in his

eighteenth year AND in his son's second year? The only explanation we can work out is that his reign must again have been disputed, just as Omri's reign was. He became king over Israel at Samaria in Jehoshaphat's eighteenth year, but he did not reign uncontested in his brother Ahaziah's place until Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat's second year. Yet things get still more complicated. Consider II Kings 8:16.

**16. Now in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat *having been king of Judah*, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat began to reign as king of Judah. 17. He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.**

This does not fit at all. We have seen that Jehoram son of Ahab began to reign in Jehoshaphat's eighteenth year. We have seen that Jehoshaphat reigned twenty-five years. Yet now we see that Jehoram Jehoshaphat's son began to reign in the fifth year of Joram Ahab's son. Even if we use exclusive reckoning and eliminate the remaining part of Jehoshaphat's eighteenth year, his nineteenth year through his twenty-third year would be five years. We could then exclude part of his twenty-fourth year, but we still only have him reigning twenty-four years, not twenty five. How can this be? I think the answer here is not in inclusive and exclusive reckoning, but rather in the concept of co-regency.

If you are familiar with my teaching regarding sonship, you will know that in ancient Israel, families were not just people who lived together, but were ultimately people who worked together. Your family was also your family business. Your family and your family business were one, to the extent that when a woman married a man and started working for her husband's family business, she was considered no longer a part of the family of her birth since she no longer worked with them, but she was now part of the family she had married into. In this family structure, all-important was the patriarch, not just because he was the "head of the family," but mostly because he was head of the family business, whatever that might be.

Also of extreme importance in the family, then, was to answer the question as to who was to take over the family business after the father died or was too old to continue leading it. The way they answered this question was the firstborn son. This was usually literally the son who was born first, though this was not necessarily the case. I suppose you would take the first one because he could get trained the quickest, and you would hate to wait for a younger son, only to find the father did not live long enough to train him in properly. The firstborn boy would be trained in running the family business until the father considered him qualified and ready to take his place. At that point, he would adopt his chosen firstborn as his "son." That did not mean he adopted someone who was not part of the family to be part of the family. No, it meant he adopted his own boy as his son. Once the boy became the son, this meant that he now had all the authority the father had. He could make decisions like the father made, he could spend money like the father could spend it, he could interact with the business partners like the father could, and ultimately he could stand in for his father in everything.

We might wonder why a father would adopt his boy to this position before he died, or even before he retired himself? I believe the answer should be obvious. This would give him a chance to give his son on-the-job training while he was still around to help and advise him. He would not want to do this too early, as he really was giving his boy all the authority he himself had. You would not want to give your child access to your bank account unless you knew he was very trustworthy and responsible. Yet once a father believed his boy was ready, he would adopt him as his son and start to break him in on the responsibility of being in charge of the family and the family business.

Now the families of kings were the same way, except that their family business was being the king. The firstborn, usually the oldest boy, would be trained in on how to reign, and when the father king thought he was ready, he would adopt his boy as his son and place him also on the throne by his side. His son could then get on-the-job experience sitting on the throne while the father was still there to help him do it and to keep him from making any major mistakes.

This, then, seems to be what Jehoshaphat did with his son Jehoram. He placed him on the throne next to him, and they reigned together for about two years before Jehoshaphat's death. Therefore, Jehoram's reign actually overlapped with his father's reign for that period of time. This explains why Jehoram appears to have started to reign before his father's reign was over. He did start to reign before his father was done reigning, and for a time they sat on the throne (had control of the government) together.

Now II Kings 8:25 states the beginning of the reign of Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah.

**25. In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, began to reign.**

Since Jehoram of Judah began in Joram of Israel's fifth year and reigned eight years, whereas Ahaziah his son began in Joram's twelfth year, the "eight years" of Jehoram of Judah must have been inclusive years. Ahaziah begins to reign in Joram's twelfth year, and he reigns for a year. Both Joram and Ahaziah die at the same time in the rebellion of Jehu, and so either Ahaziah began to reign in co-regency with his father for a time (which is possible,) or else his year is somewhat inclusive, and was not a full year (which is also very possible.)

When Ahaziah died, his mother Athaliah killed all the rest of the royal family she could get her hands on, and started to reign over Judah herself. However, she missed one heir to the throne, Ahaziah's son Jehoash. She started to reign as usurper at the same time Jehu began over Israel, and she reigned for six years, as II Kings 11:3 states.

**3. So he was hidden with her in the house of the LORD for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land.**

Jehoash started to reign in Jehu's seventh year, and he reigned for forty years, as we read in II Kings 12:1.

**1. In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba.**

The period that Jehu reigned over Israel was twenty-eight years, as we learn from II Kings 10:36.

**36. And the period that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years.**

This brings us to Jehoash's twenty-second year (28-6). II Kings 13:1 tells us that Jehoahaz, Jehu's son, began to reign in Jehoash's twenty-third year.

**1. In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years.**

Twenty-three plus seventeen would have Jehoash and Jehoahaz ending their reigns in the same year. However, this does not appear to be the case, as Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz is said to have begun to reign in the thirty-seventh year of Jehoash (or Joash) king of Judah in II Kings 13:10.

**10. In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years.**

This must then be another case of co-regency, this time wherein Jehoash and Jehoahaz were reigning together from Jehoahaz's fourteenth year to his seventeenth year. Jehoash then reigned for thirteen years on his own up to the end of his reign.

The next king of Judah was Amaziah, and he too must have had a period of co-regency with his father as we can tell from II Kings 14:1.

**1. In the second year of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, became king.**

Since Jehoash of Judah and Jehoahaz of Israel ended their reigns in the same year, and since the next year was the fourth year of Joash of Israel, this means that Amaziah king of Judah must have started to reign in the second-to-last year of the reign of his father. He reigned for many years, as we can see in the next verse.

**2. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem.**

During this twenty-nine years then (during year fourteen) Jehoash of Israel ended his reign. The next king after him was Jereboam, who is often called Jereboam II, since he was the second king over Israel with that name. We read of his reign in II Kings 14:23.

**23. In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years.**

Forty-one years is a long time. Amaziah must have ended his twenty-nine year reign in fourteenth year of Jereboam, and we would expect the next king after Amaziah to be crowned in Jereboam's fourteenth or fifteenth year. This is not the case, however, as we read in II Kings 15:1.

**1. In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, became king.**

There is a thirteen year "gap," then, between the last year of the reign of King Amaziah and the first year of the reign of his son, Azariah. II Kings 14:21 explains it.

**21. And all the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah.**

It seems that Azariah was only three when his father died, which was much too young to take the throne. The nobles waited thirteen years, then, for the child to grow up before they set him up as king in the place of his father. The Bible does not make any big deal about this. In fact, it does not even mention the gap of missing years. Yet a careful comparison of the texts shows clearly that this gap must have taken place. There is no other explanation that makes sense.

We could go on, noting the twenty-four year gap between the reigns of Jereboam II and his son Zechariah in Israel, the one year gap between the reign of Azariah and the reign of Jotham in Judah, or the eight year gap from the reign of Pekah to the reign of Hoshea in Israel. We could mention the one-year co-regency of Ahaz the son of Jotham with his father, or the similar one-year co-regency of Hezekiah with Ahaz his father. Yet I believe that the point is made, and we have given our readers all they need to work out these things for themselves. The point is that the reckoning of the reigns of the kings in Israel and Judah are dependent upon each other. Sometimes they can only be explained by a gap between one king and the next, and sometimes only by the concept of co-regency. Either way, the numbers ultimately match up, if we are careful with them. God wrote accurately when He wrote about the reigns of these kings. There are no "contradictions in Scripture" here.

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