

Lesson 2

An Objection

It is at this point in our study that we are most likely to hear a loud objection from a modern scholar of the Bible.

Why? Because their entire approach to the Old Testament is premised on the “fundamental presupposition” that nothing written in the New Testament can ever be used to shed any light on what is meant by a verse in the Old Testament. Here is how one critic describes the situation:

The goal of historical criticism is to uncover the original meaning of a document in its original historical setting. A fundamental presupposition is that nothing from a subsequent era can be used to help explain a text. Documents need to be read entirely within their own historical contexts. This means the NT cannot be used to illuminate the OT; there must be a firewall between the two.

Well, how can we tell if a commentary has or has not adopted that approach? That’s easy. Just pick an Old Testament passage that you know is explained in the New Testament, and then see what that commentary does with it.

For example, consider the great prophecy of Joel 2 that Peter quotes in the first gospel sermon in Acts 2 on the day the church was established. I can point you to a commentary on Joel that, in its comments on Joel 2, says not a single word

about Peter or about Acts 2, not even in a footnote!

Such a commentary is virtually worthless! (I say “virtually” only because sometimes a blind pig will in fact find an acorn!) How can we or anyone else ever hope to understand Joel 2 if we ignore Acts 2?

That modern “firewall” approach to the Old Testament is a wrong approach. It denies two major doctrines about the word of God – the divine inspiration of the Bible and the unity of the Bible.

The Bible is a unified whole that we have been given by God, and if we ignore the New Testament when we study the Old Testament then we are ignoring the very best commentary – a commentary from God himself!

And, of course, we cannot believe the New Testament and, at the same time, believe it has nothing to tell us about the proper interpretation of the Old Testament. Why? Because Jesus himself tells us that the Old Testament is all about him!

Luke 24:27 – And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

John 5:39 – You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.

John 5:46 – For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.

Acts 3:18 – But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.

Acts 3:24 – And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.

Acts 10:43 – To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Acts 13:27 – For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.

Acts 13:29 – And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

Acts 18:28 – For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

The New Testament tells us over and over again that the Old Testament is all about Christ, about the church of Christ, and about the gospel of Christ.

Under the modern liberal view, Christ vanishes from the Old Testament. We know that view is false for the simple reason that the New Testament tells us repeatedly to look for Jesus in the Old Testament, and when we do, we find Jesus on every page of the Old Testament!

Who was Hosea?

In one sense, that is a simple question for the reason that there isn't much we can say about it. We know very little about Hosea's background beyond the name of his father, which verse 1 tells us was Beeri.

But, of course, in one respect, we know more about Hosea than we know about most of the other prophets – we know the names of his wife and the names of his children!

From his book, we also know that Hosea was well educated and thoroughly knowledgeable of the Scriptures as they existed in his day.

But there is much we do not know about Hosea. We don't know when or where he was born or when or where he died. We don't know if he was plugged into the circles of power like Isaiah was.

We have evidence that Hosea was a young man at the beginning of his ministry. First, that he was not yet married suggests he was a young man. And second, that Hosea's ministry lasted from Jeroboam II (in the north) to Hezekiah (in the south), as we see in verse 1, also likely suggests that Hosea was a young man when his ministry began due to the length of that time period.

Well, how long was that time period? How long was it between the end of Jeroboam II's reign and the beginning of Hezekiah's reign? If we can figure out that number, then that will be the **minimum**

period of Hosea's ministry based on what we read in verse 1.

That sounds like a simple question, but it is not. In fact, in asking that question we are nibbling at the edges of one of the most difficult and contentious areas in the study of the Old Testament – the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel.

What makes it all so difficult? Well, let's see! Let's see if we can figure out when Jeroboam II's reign came to an end.

One of the fixed and well-attested dates in Hebrew history is the year 841 BC. That was the year when Jehu (whom we will meet before we get out of the first chapter of Hosea!) assassinated two kings – King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah.

We know the exact year due to a very famous archaeological discovery – the black obelisk of Shalmaneser III, which is on display at the British museum and is shown on the handout for Lesson 2. That obelisk shows King Jehu bowing down and giving tribute to the Assyrian king, and it is perhaps the only image of an Israelite or Judaeon king that we have.

So let's start with Jehu in 841 and move forward through the Israelite kings. Jehu reigned 28 years (2 Kings 10:36) and his son Jehoahaz reigned 17 years (2 Kings 13:10). That brings us to 798 BC, which is when Jehoash (the grandson of Jehu) began to reign.

Starting with Jehoash, we have eight kings of Israel remaining until the Assyrian invasion in 723/722 BC, which is another fixed date in Jewish history. Here are the lengths of their reigns:

- Jehoash reigned 16 years (2 Kings 13:10)
- Jeroboam II reigned 41 years (2 Kings 14:23)
- Zechariah reigned 6 months (2 Kings 15:8)
- Shallum reigned 1 month (2 Kings 15:13)
- Menahem reigned 10 years (2 Kings 15:17)
- Pekahiah reigned 2 years (2 Kings 15:23)
- Pekah reigned 20 years (2 Kings 15:27)
- Hoshea reigned 9 years (2 Kings 17:1)

So, let's start with Jehoash in 798, and then let's subtract the sum of the lengths of those 8 reigns (which is 99 years). When we do that, we move from 798 BC to 699 BC, and we immediately recognize that we have a big problem. Why?

Because we know that Hoshea's reign ended when the Assyrians conquered Israel, and we know that happened in 723/722 BC. We have overshoot the end of Israel by 24 years!

How do we solve that problem? The first thing to look for is a co-regency, in which both a father and his son reigned as king for some period of time. Can we find that anywhere in our list? And the answer is yes.

In 2 Kings 14:11-14, we see that King Jehoash of Israel invaded Judah and broke down the wall in Jerusalem. This all happened in 792 BC. How do we know that? Because it the same year that

Uzziah began to reign in the south after his father Amaziah was taken hostage by Jehoash (2 Kings 14:13).

It is very likely that Jeroboam was made co-regent with his father Jehoash shortly before Jehoash left Israel to invade Judah (just in case he never returned!). If so, then the 41 year reign of Jeroboam would begin in 793 BC rather than at the death of Jehoash, and Jeroboam's 41 year reign would include an overlap of 12 years with his father Jehoash.

Remember our problem – we have overshot the date of the Assyrian invasion by 24 years. But we have now explained half of that overshoot because we need to move the beginning of Jeroboam's 41 year reign back in time by 12 years.

That still leaves us with 12 extra years in our attempt to explain the entire 24 year overshoot.

Can we find another co-regency?

Typically we would expect a co-regency to involve a father and a son. Why? Because when someone becomes king who is not the son of the previous king, then what we typically find is that the death of the prior king and the installation of the next king happen on the same day!

So was there an overlap between Jeroboam and his son? We don't even need to look for that because Jeroboam's son, Zechariah, reigned for only 6 months! So there is no way we could explain a 12 year overshoot by looking to Zechariah's reign.

So how do we explain our remaining 12 year overshoot?

Well, let's look at where we are. So far we have made it to the end of Jeroboam II's reign in 753 BC. We also know the end of Hoshea's reign because that happened when the Assyrians invaded in 723/722 BC. And let's ignore Zechariah and Shallum for now because the combined lengths of their reigns was only 7 months.

Who is left? Menahem (10 years), Pekahiah (2 years), Pekah (20 years), and Hoshea (9 years). That means we have to somehow fit 41 years (10+2+20+9) into a period of about 30 years (from the end of Jeroboam's reign to the Assyrian invasion). So, again, we see our extra 12 years.

There is a big clue to the problem in that list I just gave you. It began with Menahem (10 years) and Pekahiah (2 years) – which is 12 years! That clue gives us the most likely solution to our problem.

What if Pekah (20 year reign) was reigning at the same time as Menahem and Pekahiah (combined 12 year reign)? If that were the case, then our problem would be solved by that second 12 year overlap.

Is there any evidence that Pekah's reign started, not at the end of Pekahiah's reign, but rather at the beginning of the reign of Menahem? And the answer is yes, and some of that evidence comes from the book of Hosea that we are now studying!

The first piece of evidence is the evidence we just looked at. We know that we have an extra 12 years, and we know where we need to look to explain it. And a co-regency of Pekah does explain it. There is no way to fit a 20 year reign of Pekah into the timeline unless there is an overlap of some sort.

The second piece of evidence comes from what we know about Pekah and Menahem. From 2 Kings 15:19, we know that Menahem was pro-Assyrian, and from 2 Kings 15:29 we know that Pekah was anti-Assyrian. That would explain why the northern kingdom split into two factions – one faction was in favor of closer ties with Assyria, while the other faction was not.

The third piece of evidence comes from this book of Hosea.

Hosea 5:5 – The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.

Hosea 11:12 – Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.

How many kingdoms do we have here? Just two? Israel and Judah? No. We see three in these verses: Israel, Ephraim, and Judah. I think those verses are additional evidence that for this 12 year time period there were two northern kingdoms – Israel and Ephraim – one led by Menahem and Pekahiah, and the other led by Pekah.

Most likely, Pekah was based in Gilead, while Menahem and Pekahiah were based in Samaria.

2 Kings 15:25 – And Pekah the son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him with fifty men of the people of **Gilead**, and struck him [Pekahiah the son of Menahem] down in **Samaria**, in the citadel of the king's house...

Finally, 2 Kings 15:17 tells us that Menahem began to reign in 39th year of Azariah (Uzziah), and 2 Kings 15:27 tells us that Pekah began to reign in the 52nd year of Azariah (Uzziah). If our view here is correct, then that beginning of Pekah's reign was the beginning of his sole reign, which lasted 8 years after his co-reign of 12 years.

Now where were we? We were trying to figure out the minimum length of Hosea's ministry if it lasted from the end of Jeroboam's reign to the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, and so far we have figured out half of the puzzle. We know that Jeroboam's reign ended in 753 BC.

So when did Hezekiah's reign begin? And with that question we have arrived at another of the most difficult issues regarding the kings of Judah and Israel!

If you look at the handout, you will see that, according to it, the 29 year reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:2) was from 715 to 686 BC.

And that makes perfect sense when we look at 2 Kings 18:13 and Isaiah 36:1. Why? Because both of those texts tell us that the Assyrian king Sennacherib attacked Judah in the 14th year of

Hezekiah, and we know from extra-Biblical evidence that that attack occurred in 701 BC. If 701 BC is the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign, then 715 BC is the first year of his reign, which is the year shown on the handout.

Now, if Hezekiah's reign started in 715 BC, that means that Hezekiah did not begin to reign until **after** Assyria had invaded the northern kingdom in 723/722 BC. Does that make sense with the facts we see about Hezekiah's reign in the Bible? And the answer is yes, it does.

2 Chronicles 29:3 tells us that in the first year of Hezekiah's reign, he began to repair and cleanse the temple after his father Ahaz had defiled the temple. After doing this, King Hezekiah called everyone to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. We read about that in 2 Chronicles 30.

Now here is our question – whom did Hezekiah call? Just Judah, as we would expect if Israel still had its own king? No. Hezekiah, we are told in 2 Chronicles 30:1 called “all Israel and Judah.” Verse 4 tells us they made “a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan.”

What does that tell us? It tells us that there was no king or kingdom in Israel at this time, which means that it was after 723/722 BC (as shown on the handout for Hezekiah's reign). At the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, he was the only king of both north and south.

But I thought everyone in the north was carried off in 723/722 BC? How could there still be people in the north to receive this proclamation from Hezekiah? The answer is that not everyone was carried off by the Assyrians. We see that in verse 6 of 2 Chronicles 30.

2 Chronicles 30:6 – So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, “O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.

Well, that all sounds pretty simple. Where is the big difficulty? It is in three verses, which together constitute one of the biggest puzzles in Old Testament chronology:

2 Kings 18:1 – In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.

2 Kings 18:9-10 – In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it, and at the end of three years he took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken.

Those verses tell us that the reign of Hezekiah and the reign on Hoshea overlapped. That would mean that Hezekiah was reigning before and at the time of the Assyrian invasion of Israel.

But how can that be? We know the 14th year of Hezekiah’s reign was in 701, which means that the beginning of Hezekiah’s reign was in 715 BC. And

we know that he reigned for 29 years (2 Kings 18:2). And, although we have not gone through all the subsequent kings of Judah, they all fit together perfectly when Hezekiah's 29 year starts in 715 and ends in 686. You can see them all listed on the handout for Lesson 1, along with the years of their reigns up to the Babylonian deportation of 586 BC.

So how then do we explain 2 Kings 18:1, 9, and 10? We have three options, none of which is entirely appealing.

OPTION 1: We can throw up our hands in defeat and await further investigation or further information, perhaps from archaeology.

OPTION 2: We can determine that the brief linkages to the reign of Hoshea in those three verses (which, by the way, are not found in the parallel passages from 2 Chronicles) were added later by some scribe and were not part of the original inspired text.

OPTION 3: We can determine that Hezekiah must have had a period of co-regency with his father Ahaz that is not otherwise described in the Bible and that is not counted as part of his official 29 year reign.

As I said, none of those options makes us do a victory dance! They all have problems.

Although many commentators take the first "throw up our hands" approach, I don't like that approach at all. If we throw up our hands whenever we reach a hard part of the Bible, that

rightly does not leave the world with much confidence about what we have to say about the other parts of the Bible.

But does any of this really matter? Why not just skip over it? The answer is that it matters.

First, it matters because it is the word of God. And maybe we don't need a second reason when that is the first reason.

But second, it matters because those who argue against the inerrancy of the Bible often start right here, and we need to know how to respond.

And third, it matters because it will help us understand Hosea because it forms the backdrop of the book. Jeroboam, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Jehu are mentioned in the first chapter. Doesn't that mean we need to know about Jeroboam, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Jehu?

So let's move on to Option 2 – that the links to the reign of Hoshea in those three verses were later added by some scribe and were not part of the original inspired text. We might be tempted to dismiss that option out of hand, and perhaps we should, but let's look at it for a moment.

First, we know that some minor additions were made to the inspired text over the years. How do we know that? Because we have the manuscripts that show the minor differences. And we can usually figure out which of the variant readings

is most likely (and, in some cases, is certainly) the original version.

Yes, we can be confident that we have the inspired word of God in our modern translations, but we know that some minor changes occurred over the intervening thousands of years. Do those very minor changes have any impact on the message of the Bible. No, they do not. And there are remarkably few of them given the length of time and the number of copies involved. God has preserved his word by his providence, and nothing we say today has any impact on that wonderful truth!

So, yes, we know that a few minor changes have occurred over the millennia, but that is not the only reason we should pause and consider Option 2.

Second, and this is a big one, what would happen to our timeline if we did not recognize that Pekah was reigning alongside Menahem and Pekahiah?

Well, we know what would happen. What would happen is that the entire timeline of the northern kingdom would get moved ahead by 12 years. That would mean that Hoshea would begin to reign in 720 BC rather than in 732 BC. And that would mean that the nine year reign of Hoshea would end in 711 BC. But Hezekiah began to reign in 715, and so that would give us about a three year difference between the reign of Hezekiah and the reign of Hoshea, which is precisely the shift we see in the 2 Kings 18:1.

If that is a just a coincidence, it is a remarkable coincidence!

So what can we say from that? What we can say is that IF I were reading 2 Kings, and IF I did not know that Pekah's reign overlapped two other kings by 12 years, then I would naturally think that Hoshea's third year coincided with Hezekiah's first year. And if I were a scribe trying to making sense of it all, I might have jotted that down in the margin, causing some later copier to think it was part of the original text.

Is that what happened? I am the last one to ever argue that any word in our translations of the Bible came in after the fact, but here I think we can see how it might have happened.

And, again, if Hoshea and Hezekiah really reigned at the same time, then how would we explain the account in 2 Chronicles 30 where Hezekiah in his first year sends a proclamation to "the remnant of you [in the north] who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria"?

If we reject that second option, what is left? What is left is the conclusion that Hezekiah did begin to reign during the reign of Hoshea, but Hezekiah reigned alongside his father Ahaz, and the 29 year length of his reign given in 2 Kings 18:2 includes only his reign after the death of Ahaz. That is possible, and perhaps that is where we should end up.

Why does it matter? It matters because we know from verse 1 that Hosea's ministry extended up

until Hezekiah. And so where we put the beginning of Hezekiah's reign tells us how long Hosea's ministry was and whether Hosea's ministry included the fall of the north.

If the reference to Hezekiah in the first verse of Hosea refers to his 29 year reign that began in 715, then it means that Hosea saw the fall of the north that occurred in 723/722 BC. And it also means that the minimum length of Hosea's ministry is the time from the end of Jeroboam's reign in 753 up until the beginning of Hezekiah's reign in 715, which is 38 years.

But if the reference to Hezekiah in the first verse of Hosea refers to some prior co-regency of Hezekiah with Ahaz that started in the third year of Hoshea, then it means that Hosea may not have seen the fall of the north. And it also means that the minimum length of Hosea's ministry is the time from the end of Jeroboam's reign in 753 up until the third year of Hoshea's reign in 729, which is only 24 years.

We will proceed under the well-attested view that Hezekiah's 29 year reign started in 715 BC. As for whether he also reigned as co-regent prior to that date, let's leave that as an open question for now and see what the text has to tell us.