

Who Conquered Samaria?

Reconstructing the Northern Kingdom's Final Years

The final years of the northern kingdom of Israel have long been debated, especially the date of Samaria's fall and the identity of its conqueror. Related questions concern Shalmaneser V's siege of Samaria, Hoshea's imprisonment, the extent of the city's destruction, Sargon II's claims regarding its conquest, and the regnal synchronisms in Kings. A reevaluation of the relevant biblical and Assyrian evidence supports the argument that Shalmaneser V captured Samaria in 723 BCE after a three-year siege and that Sargon II's later claims reflect his suppression of a renewed western revolt in 720 BCE. A concluding historical synthesis reconstructs the events leading to the fall of the northern kingdom.

See also [*A History of Ancient Israel*](#) (Zondervan Academic, 2026).

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The difficulty of reconstructing the final decade of the northern kingdom of Israel is not surprising when one considers the traumatic conditions that must have prevailed throughout the land in the aftermath of the Assyrian conquest of Galilee and Gilead (2 Kgs 15:29). The resulting strain on the government in Samaria and Israelite society as a whole undoubtedly affected recordkeeping of the day. Compounding the problem is the lack of Assyrian records from the reign of Shalmaneser V. Consequently, scholars have long debated both who conquered the northern kingdom and whether its fall occurred in 723, 722, or 721 BCE. Enough evidence now exists, however, to resolve this debate with considerable confidence. Related questions will also be examined, including Hoshea's imprisonment, Shalmaneser's siege of Samaria, the city's destruction, and Sargon II's claims concerning its conquest. This essay will conclude by proposing a detailed chronology of the events of Israel's final decade.

The Difficulty of Dating Hoshea's Reign

Understanding the final years of the kingdom of Israel must begin with consideration of the chronological records in the Bible. These texts have long been questioned and often rejected. Of this era, Edwin Thiele wrote, "It is here that the most baffling problems of Hebrew chronology are found. . . . In the many chronological systems that are now afield, almost every type of adjustment has been attempted in the Biblical data, yet in all of them something is wrong, and it is frankly admitted that the final solution has not been found."¹ The two most challenging problems are the synchronisms given for Hoshea and Hezekiah.

Israel's final king, Hoshea, came to the throne when he assassinated Pekah. This is recorded in 2 Kings 15:30: "And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him and put him to death and became king in his place, in the

¹ Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 118.

twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.”² Pekah’s twenty-year reign has been the subject of much discussion, but it is best to recognize that he first reigned in Gilead as a rival to Menahem in Samaria beginning in 752 BCE. Thus, Pekah’s reign ended and Hoshea’s reign began in 732 BCE. This accords with 2 Kings 15:30’s dating of Hoshea’s accession to the twentieth year of Jotham.³

But the synchronism of 2 Kings 15:30 appears to conflict with that of 2 Kings 17:1, which is often translated: “In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king (*malakh*) over Israel in Samaria *and reigned* nine years.” Did Hoshea begin to reign in Jotham’s twentieth year or in Ahaz’s twelfth year? Solutions using coregencies will not work here because of conflicts created with other chronological texts. Instead, the solution recognizes from the context that *malakh* should be understood as “reigned” or “had reigned,” not as “began to reign” or “became king” (see 1 Kgs 14:21; 16:15; 2 Kgs 15:8; cf. Gen 36:31; Josh 13:10, 12).⁴ Thus, 2 Kings 17:1 should be translated: “In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah had reigned in Samaria over Israel nine years.”

In other words, 2 Kings 15:30 identifies the first year of Hoshea’s reign (in Jotham’s twentieth year; 732 BCE) and 2 Kings 17:1 identifies the last year of Hoshea’s reign (in Ahaz’s twelfth year). Ahaz began his coregency in 735 BCE, and his twelfth year was in 723 BCE. This agrees with the dating of Hoshea’s ninth year to 723 BCE.

Recognizing Hezekiah’s Coregency

Edwin Thiele is rightly praised for his careful reconstruction of Israelite chronology without freely emending the text. But Thiele struggled to understand the synchronisms for the reign of Hezekiah, and so at this point he argued that the Masoretic Text preserved errors in the original Hebrew text of the book of Kings.⁵ But as Leslie McFall and others have observed, the biblical data makes sense as it stands if one recognizes that Hezekiah began a coregency with his father Ahaz in 729.⁶ The relevant texts and interpretations are as follows:

² Unless otherwise noted, all translations come from the Legacy Standard Bible.

³ Jotham’s twentieth year was also the year he died (732 BCE). Previously, Jotham had been removed from the throne by the leaders of Judah in 735 BCE (his sixteenth year; 2 Kgs 15:33), apparently in order to install his pro-Assyrian son Ahaz in his place. Jotham’s regnal years continued to be counted until his death in 732 BCE (his twentieth year; 2 Kgs 15:30). Cf. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 132; Rodger C. Young, “When Was Samaria Captured? The Need for Precision in Biblical Chronologies,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (2004): 585–86.

⁴ Edmund A. Parker, “Note on the Chronology of 2 Kings 17:1,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 6, no. 2 (1968): 129–33; Leslie McFall, “Did Thiele Overlook Hezekiah’s Coregency?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (1989): 396–99. This interpretation is superior to other views, such as one that dates the beginning of Ahaz’s coregency to the reign of his *grandfather* in 744 BCE or one that assumes that a copyist made an error.

⁵ Thiele writes, “When the editors of Kings were bringing that book into its final shape, they did not understand dual dating for Pekah; and this fact was responsible for the [erroneous] synchronisms of 2 Kings 17 and 18 . . . It is only when the synchronisms of 2 Kings 17 and 18 are seen as late and artificial that the true picture of Hebrew history of this time can be reconstructed” (*Mysterious Numbers*, 3rd ed., 134, 136).

⁶ Leslie McFall, “Did Thiele Overlook Hezekiah’s Coregency?,” 400–402; Young, “When Was Samaria Captured?,” 583.

Questioned Synchronism	Explanation
2 Kings 18:1 “Now it happened in the third year of Hoshea, the son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah became king.”	Hezekiah’s coregency began in Hoshea’s third year, 729 BCE
2 Kings 18:9 “Now 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.”	Hezekiah’s fourth year of his coregency = Hoshea’s seventh year = first year of Shalmaneser’s siege = 725 BCE
2 Kings 18:10 “And at the end of three years they captured it; in the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was captured.”	Hezekiah’s sixth year of his coregency = Hoshea’s ninth year = third year of Shalmaneser’s siege = 723 BCE

It should be noted that in 2 Kings 18:13, Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah is dated to the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, an event widely recognized as occurring in 701 BCE. This synchronism relates to Hezekiah’s reign after his father died, not to his coregency. Second Kings 18 unusually preserves synchronisms from Hezekiah’s coregency (2 Kgs 18:1, 9, 10) as well as his sole reign (2 Kgs 18:13). Perhaps this regnal reckoning is due to a desire on the part of Hezekiah to disassociate his reign from the government of his apostate father.⁷ Synchronisms linking Hoshea’s reign to Hezekiah’s years of coregency had already been recorded in the official records which were presumably the basis for the synchronisms in 2 Kings 18:1, 9, 10.

The chronology of the kings may be summarized as follows, with the dating of coregencies designated with a slash:

Kings of Israel	Kings of Judah
Menahem (752–742 BCE)	Uzziah (792/767–740 BCE)
Pekahiah (742–740 BCE)	Jotham (750/740–735 BCE)
Pekah (752/740–732 BCE)	Ahaz (735–716 BCE)
Hoshea (732–723 BCE)	Hezekiah (729/716–687 BCE)

The Date of Samaria’s Fall and the Identity of Its Conqueror

This brings us to consideration of the date of the fall of the northern kingdom and the identity of the Assyrian king who conquered it. The biblical record is very concise, and almost no Assyrian records have been preserved from Shalmaneser V’s brief reign. Eckart Frahm observes, “We have no royal inscriptions of any significance written in Shalmaneser’s name (see RINAP 1: 171–88), and the Assyrian Eponym Chronicles are only fragmentarily preserved for his reign.”⁸ Israel’s fall has been dated by scholars to 723, 722, and 721 BCE, and the conqueror has been identified as either Shalmaneser V (727–722 BCE) or Sargon II (722–705 BCE).

⁷ Hezekiah is said to have been twenty-five years old at his accession, but this too must refer to the beginning of his sole reign, for his father Ahaz, born in 755 BCE, would not have been old enough in 729 BCE to have had a twenty-five-year-old son (Young, “When Was Samaria Captured?,” 588 n. 21).

⁸ Eckart Frahm, “The Neo-Assyrian Period (ca. 1000–609 BCE),” in *A Companion to Assyria*, ed. Eckart Frahm, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 180.

The Assyrian Eponym Chronicle provides what little information we have of Shalmaneser's reign from Assyrian records.⁹ This may be summarized as follows:

727 BCE	Shalmaneser V "sat on his throne" (this phrase indicates that he became king but did not campaign outside of the Assyrian homeland)
726 BCE	His first year; he stayed in the land of Assyria
725 BCE	His second year; he fought "against" [name not preserved]
724 BCE	His third year; he fought "against" [name not preserved]
723 BCE	His fourth year; he fought "against" [name not preserved]
722 BCE	His fifth year; he "sat on his throne"; he died and was succeeded by Sargon II

The location of Shalmaneser's campaigns in 725, 724, and 723 BCE is not preserved in this list. The Babylonian Chronicle, however, reports that Shalmaneser "ravaged" Samaria.¹⁰ This is the only activity attributed to Shalmaneser in the Chronicle, and although no dates are provided, it is reasonable to identify the ravaging of Samaria with the campaigns of those three years. This identification is confirmed by 2 Kings 17:5, which reports that Shalmaneser besieged Samaria for three years. Thus, Shalmaneser campaigned against Israel in 725, 724, and 723 BCE.¹¹

The Assyrian campaign concluded when Samaria fell, which was in Shalmaneser's fourth year, or 723 BCE. This agrees with the dating of Hoshea's reign, which concluded in his ninth year, also 723 BCE. The fall of the northern kingdom should be dated to 723 BCE, though it is worthwhile to consider why other dates have been proposed.

The Claims of Sargon II

Samaria's fall has been dated by scholars to 722 or 721 BCE as a result of confusion created by the records of Sargon II. Near the end of Sargon's reign (722–705 BCE), the Assyrian king began to rewrite his own history, claiming early victories abroad when he was actually subduing rebellions at home.¹² Though Sargon II was a son of Tiglath-pileser and a brother of Shalmaneser V, he was apparently not the legitimate successor, and the struggle for the throne and the unrest

⁹ Alan R. Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910–612 BC*, State Archives of Assyria Studies, vol. 2 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994), 45–46, 59–60.

¹⁰ A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 73.

¹¹ More than a century ago, A. T. Olmstead proposed restoring the Eponym Chronicle as campaigns against Samaria, and no better alternatives have emerged in the meantime ("The Fall of Samaria," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 21, no. 3 [1905]: 181–82). Alberto R. W. Green says that to deny this interpretation is "to ignore the obvious" ("The Identity of King So of Egypt—An Alternative Interpretation," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52, no. 2 [1993]: 106).

¹² Eckart Frahm, "Samaria, Hamath, and Assyria's Conquests in the Levant in the Late 720s BCE: The Testimony of Sargon II's Inscriptions," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, ed. Shuichi Hasegawa, Christoph Levin, and Karen Radner, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 60–61, 74–75. J. R. A. Hughes writes, "Since Tadmor's important discussion of the matter (Tadmor 1958:31–40), almost all Assyriologists now accept that Sargon's claim to have captured Samaria in his accession year is historically inaccurate. This claim was apparently one of several attempts, made late in Sargon's reign, to conceal the fact that the first few years of Sargon's reign were marked by widespread internal revolts that prevented him from undertaking external military campaigns until his 2nd regnal year" (*Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 66 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990], 207–8).

that followed prevented him from mounting foreign campaigns in 722 and 721 BCE. He did not conquer Samaria in 722 or 721 BCE because he was occupied elsewhere.

Only in 720 BCE did Sargon march west to face a coalition of western states that had formed against him.¹³ At that time, Sargon claimed that he defeated Hamath, Arpad, Damascus, Hatarikka, and Samaria in a battle at Qarqar.¹⁴ Samaria is mentioned last in Sargon's list and was certainly a minor player. Its participation must have come from a remnant of Israelite forces who, by joining the coalition, hoped to create an opportunity to revive the kingdom of Israel. But Sargon prevailed, and their dreams were crushed. Sargon subsequently deported 27,290 Israelites.¹⁵ Sargon's victory in 720 BCE was the suppression of a renewed western revolt involving a small Samaritan contingent, not the conquest of Samaria itself, which Shalmaneser had accomplished in 723 BCE.¹⁶

The Imprisonment of Hoshea

One particularly mysterious element in the record of Israel's final years is the notice of Hoshea's imprisonment. The only record of it is given in a brief notice in 2 Kings 17:4–5: "But the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, who had sent messengers to So king of Egypt and had offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as *he had done* year by year; therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria went up against the whole land and he went up to Samaria and besieged it three years."

It is natural to assume that Hoshea was captured when Samaria fell in 723 BCE, but the sequence of 2 Kings 17:4–5 indicates that Hoshea was captured and imprisoned by Assyria before the siege of Samaria began. The king of Assyria bound Hoshea (v. 4) and "then went up" against Samaria (v. 5).

A reasonable reconstruction is that when Shalmaneser arrived in the Levant in 725 BCE, Hoshea recognized the danger and presented himself before the Assyrian king in submission. Shalmaneser, however, rejected this gesture and placed Hoshea in fetters. The Assyrian army then laid siege to Samaria. If this reconstruction is correct, Samaria was governed by the city elders throughout the siege.¹⁷ Without another king on the throne, Israel continued to reckon its years from Hoshea's accession until the city fell in 723 BCE, Hoshea's ninth year.

Shalmaneser V's Siege of Samaria

According to 2 Kings 17:5, Shalmaneser's siege of Samaria lasted for three years. This comports with the limited Assyrian and Babylonian records. The siege likely began in late spring or early summer of 725 BCE, continued throughout 724 BCE, and concluded in its third year in the summer of 723 BCE.

¹³ K. Lawson Younger Jr., "The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (1999): 468; Frahm, "The Neo-Assyrian Period," 180.

¹⁴ Younger, "The Fall of Samaria," 471. There is some question as to whether Sargon himself was present in the west in 720 BCE (Frahm, "Samaria, Hamath, and Assyria's Conquests," 62).

¹⁵ A second inscription gives the number as 27,280. Cf. "Nimrud Prisms D & E," trans. K. Lawson Younger Jr. (*Context of Scripture* 2.118D:295–96).

¹⁶ This view is known as the "two-conquests theory"; it was formulated by Winckler in 1892, elaborated by Tadmor, defended by Becking, and now accepted by most scholars. Cf. Bob Becking, "How to Encounter an Historical Problem? '722–720 BCE' as a Case Study," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, 30.

¹⁷ The prominence of the city elders of Samaria is noted a century earlier in 2 Kgs 10:1.

A siege of such length is best explained by two factors. First, the capital of Samaria enjoyed a secure location, built on a hill that was protected on all sides by valleys (cf. Isa 28:1). Second, Shalmaneser likely imposed a blockade on Israel's capital while plundering Israel's countryside and attacking other enemies, including Tyre.¹⁸ By the third year of the siege, 723 BCE, Samaria fell and Shalmaneser began deporting Israelites to Assyria.

The Question of Samaria's Destruction

It is commonly stated in the literature that the Assyrians laid waste to the city of Samaria. This conclusion is based on the claim by archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon that Shalmaneser V carried out "the complete destruction of the capital city."¹⁹ Ron Tappy, however, has extensively studied Kenyon's records and determined that her analysis was flawed.²⁰ In fact, the conquest occurred "with minimal physical destruction to Samaria."²¹

This makes sense given Samaria's participation in a brief rebellion in 720 BCE. It is even more compelling when one recognizes that the Assyrians made the city the capital of the Assyrian province of *Samerina* shortly thereafter. The Assyrian strategy was to defeat the rebels but to inflict little damage on the city so that they could use it for their own purposes in the coming years.²² Assyria began significant repopulation efforts in 716 BCE.²³

Conclusion

The fog of war and the lack of preserved records from both Shalmaneser's and Hoshea's reigns make a reconstruction of the final decade of Israel's existence particularly challenging. This is further complicated by Sargon II's attempt to claim more credit for himself than he deserved. But a tentative reconstruction may be offered.

In 733 BCE, Tiglath-pileser III conquered Galilee and Gilead, deporting many of their inhabitants to Assyria (2 Kgs 15:29).

In 732 BCE, Hoshea led a coup against Pekah, apparently with Assyrian support (2 Kgs 15:30). He executed the anti-Assyrian Pekah and began his reign. In Judah, Jotham died while his son Ahaz was in the fourth year of his reign.

In about 731 BCE, Hoshea traveled to southern Babylonia to affirm his loyalty to Tiglath-pileser III.

In 730 BCE, Osorkon IV ("So") began his rule in the eastern Nile Delta.

In 729 BCE, Ahaz made his son Hezekiah coregent of Judah.

¹⁸ Ron E. Tappy, "The Annals of Sargon II and the Archaeology of Samaria: Rhetorical Claims, Empirical Evidence," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, 185.

¹⁹ Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Royal Cities of the Old Testament* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 133.

²⁰ Ron E. Tappy, "Samaria," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 857; Tappy, "Annals of Sargon II," 168. W. F. Albright and G. E. Wright had previously doubted Kenyon's claim (William G. Dever, "Archaeology and the Fall of the Northern Kingdom: What Really Happened?," in *Up to the Gates of Ekron: Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gitin*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford [Jerusalem: W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and Israel Exploration Society, 2007], 82–83).

²¹ Ron E. Tappy, "Samaria," 857.

²² Bob Becking, "How to Encounter an Historical Problem?," 31.

²³ Ron E. Tappy, "The Annals of Sargon II," 186.

- In 727 BCE, Tiglath-pileser III died, and Shalmaneser V became king of Assyria. He did not campaign outside of Assyria that year.
- In 726 BCE, Shalmaneser V remained in the land of Assyria. Various states in the Levant withheld their tribute payment from Assyria, including Israel.
- In 725 BCE, Hoshea sought help from Osorkon IV (“So”) but received none. Hoshea traveled north to submit to Shalmaneser V and pay the overdue tribute. Shalmaneser refused the belated gesture and imprisoned Hoshea. Shalmaneser subsequently marched south to Samaria, where the city’s elders refused to surrender, prompting him to impose a blockade.
- In 724 BCE, Shalmaneser continued the siege of Samaria while conducting operations against Tyre and Israelite cities in the hill country.
- In 723 BCE, Shalmaneser captured Samaria but did not destroy the city. He deported many of its inhabitants and resettled them in Assyria. Biblical chronology reckons this as Hoshea’s ninth year and the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.
- In 722 BCE, Shalmaneser V died and was succeeded by Sargon II. Sargon’s later inscriptions credited him with conquering Samaria in his accession year, but he did not leave the Assyrian homeland that year.
- In 721 BCE, remnants of the Israelite army joined other states in the Levant in an act of rebellion against Sargon II, who remained in Assyria that year.
- In 720 BCE, Sargon II defeated a coalition of forces from Hamath, Arpad, Damascus, Hatarikka, and Samaria at Qarqar. He then marched all the way to the Egyptian border, demonstrating his full control of the Levant. Sargon created the Assyrian province of *Samerina*, made Samaria its capital, and deported 27,290 Israelites. Significant repopulation efforts began in 716.