

How Old Was Ahaziah?

A scriptural comparison of 2 Kings 8:26 and 2 Chronicles 22:2

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Are the Scriptures in Error?

Some people have charged that the King James Bible contains an error, specifically a contradiction, within the passages of 2 Kings 8:26 and 2 Chronicles 22:2. This is the reading of the King James translation:

2Ki 8:23-26

- (23) And the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
- (24) And Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.
- (25) In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah begin to reign.
- (26) **Two and twenty years old *was* Ahaziah when he began to reign;** and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Athaliah, the daughter of Omri king of Israel.

2Ch 22:1-2

- (1) And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the eldest. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned.
- (2) **Forty and two years old *was* Ahaziah when he began to reign,** and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also *was* Athaliah the daughter of Omri.

This is no error – as I will attempt to prove, these verses are correct in **translation** and **preservation**, as well as being **completely accurate**. Our rule for Biblical interpretation must be that the scriptures are without error, and contain no contradictions – therefore, any seeming contradiction is usually a result of our failure to perfectly understand.

Since there would be severe consequences to our faith should there indeed be proven as much as a single error in our Bible, thus we must seriously consider this question from all angles, and never dismiss a sincere challenge. Therefore, we will now examine the issues of:

- **Translation**
- **Preservation**
- **Accuracy**

Could this be a Translation Error?

To the contrary, this is the correct translation of the Hebrew Masoretic text, which uses the Hebrew word for twenty in our passage in 2 **Kings**, and likewise the Hebrew word for forty in our passage in 2 **Chronicles**. For the reference of the reader, I am citing entries for the Hebrew words that the King James translators interpreted as **twenty** and **forty** below:

Strong's reference number H6242

עשרים

ʿeśrîym

es-reem'

From H6235; *twenty*; also (ordinal) *twentieth*: - [six-] score, twenty (-ieth).

Strong's reference number H705

ארבעים

'arbâ'îym

ar-baw-eem'

Multiple of H702; *forty*: - forty.

It is not assumed that the reader is proficient with the Hebrew tongue, nor is it intended to imply that we must be to understand the scriptures. However, it should be easy for anyone to distinguish between the enlarged words in **blue** and **red**, thus to prove to themselves that the King James indeed accurately translates these verses when it uses “**two and twenty years**” in 2 **Kings** and “**forty and two years**” in 2 **Chronicles**.

(2 Kings 8:26)

בן-עשרים ושתים שנה אחזיהו במלכו ושנה אחת מלך בירושלם ושם אמו עתליהו
בת-עמרי מלך ישראל:

(2 Chronicles 22:2)

בן-ארבעים ושתים שנה אחזיהו במלכו ושנה אחת מלך בירושלם ושם אמו עתליהו
בת-עמרי:

Were these Scriptures Preserved?

There are a great many proofs that our scriptures have been preserved, especially concerning the Hebrew Masoretic text. These include the strict rigor and attention to detail that the Hebrew scribes used when making copies, the checksums they performed on the number of words in their finished products. Such was their precision that any copy that contained an error was to be destroyed, **so as to never risk corruption of the Holy Scriptures.**

Furthermore, Jesus specifically promised that the scriptures would be preserved.

Mat 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

It is not my intent to go over these many proofs, as there are other authors that have done so already. These may be researched at the reader's discretion. However, while Christ's promise from the Bible should be sufficient for those of faith, the bible skeptic requires a proof that he can see with his eyes. **Thus we shall proceed.**

In answer to the charge that this must be a copyist error I will ask the reader to examine these two Hebrew words for himself. Does it seem as if the one word could have been **accidentally mistaken or replaced with the other?**

Twenty	Forty
עשרים	ארבעים
<i>es-reem'</i>	<i>ar-baw-eem'</i>

The answer is that these words are truly distinct, and would be unlikely to be mistaken for one another. Their pronunciation is not similar, the amount of space they would take on a page is different, and the only thing they share is the last letters of each word (ם' are the last letters because Hebrew is read from right to left.)

So these two words are as similar as the English words for **twenty** and **forty** – different pronunciation, different size, and although sharing their last two letters “ty”– their meaning is usually not confused by those proficient with the English language. They share “-eem” at the end, but nothing else.

There is no apparent reason why a scribe would become confused in these passages, and insert the Hebrew word for “**twenty**” where it should have read “**forty**”, or vice versa, of entering the Hebrew word for “**forty**” where it should have read “**twenty**.” In other words, without sufficient reason to suggest why one word would be substituted for another, we can assume that these scriptures were properly preserved, **and it is now time to look to the accuracy of the book itself.**

Can both of these Scriptures be Accurate?

Although some people assume that these two accounts are contradictory, this conclusion is usually reached without a sincere attempt to resolve Kings and Chronicles in the context of accuracy and inerrancy. If the desired result is to undermine the scriptures, the investigation goes no further. However, **honest misunderstandings** are often the result of a bad assumption on the part of the reader, which can usually be resolved by proper application of the context of the passage, and other related verses.

When examining 2 Kings 8:26 and 2 Chronicles 22:2 in context, we will do so with the assumption that both can be correct. These are books of antiquity, and if either was in error, their legitimacy would have likely been questioned by the Hebrew historians long ago. This is **standard procedure** when examining documents – you must assume accuracy first, until discrepancy can be proven.

2Ch 22:1-2

- (1) **And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the eldest. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned.**
- (2) **Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri.**

Some Bible translators determine that the account of 2 Chronicles must be in error, and on their own initiative, translate “forty two years old” as “twenty two years old” in an attempt to make this verse identical to 2 Kings (such as the NIV, NASB, and NLT.)

Their reasoning might be based on these facts:

- Jehoram was **thirty-two years old** when he began to reign, and
- Jehoram reigned **eight years** in Jerusalem. (see 2 Ch 21:5)
- Ahaziah is described as the **youngest son** of Jehoram king of Judah

At this point, these translators probably determine that if Jehoram king of Judah died at age forty, that Ahaziah, being his youngest son (after the rest of his heirs were slain by a band of men with the Arabians) could not possibly be forty-two years of age (two years older than Jehoram.)

This is an incorrect conclusion. It is quite possible to inherit a son (through marriage) that is older than oneself. This is uncommon, because usually people marry others that are close to their same age. However, it is well known that marriages among kings, queens, princes, and princesses are often made for political reasons, which makes this a very real possibility that **Ahaziah was the step-son of Jehoram.**

If this interpretation is correct, then Chronicles, when describing Ahaziah as Jerhoram’s youngest son, must be interpreted in the light of the relevant **context**: all other heirs to the throne had already been slain. The term “youngest” is used when describing Ahaziah’s claim to the throne. Jehoram’s natural sons would possess a superior claim to the throne, and in this context, would be the “eldest” sons. **The terms “youngest” and “eldest” are used in the context of right of succession.**

It is noteworthy that both the accounts of Kings and Chronicles give special attention to the fact that Athaliah, daughter of Omri, was the mother of Ahaziah. This emphasis lends further weight to our interpretation that Ahaziah ascended to the throne of Judah **by virtue of legal succession of his mother's marriage** to Jehoram.

Then who was the actual father of Ahaziah? A man has both a mother and a father. When accounting the kings of Israel and Judah, although it is unusual to make mention of the mother, we should be able to find the name of the father. In fact, this is no secret at all, for in seven more verses Chronicles tells us:

2Ch 22:9 And he sought Ahaziah: and they caught him, (for he was hid in Samaria,) and brought him to Jehu: and when they had slain him, they buried him: Because, said they, **he is the son of Jehoshaphat**, who sought the LORD with all his heart. So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom.

It was common knowledge that King Ahaziah was the son of Jehoshaphat. There is no need to suppose that this verse means that Ahaziah was simply a male descendant of Jehoshaphat, or that these two verses contradict each other. We are clearly told that Ahaziah was the legal son of Jehoram and in the same chapter we are told he is the son of Jehoshaphat. **This is not a contradiction.**

It is important at this point to consider Athaliah, for she is pivotal in these accounts. We are told that she was the daughter of Omri (2 Kings 8:26 and 2 Ch 22:2). This would make her the sister of Ahab, king of Israel. Omri secured his right to rule Israel by the sword, fighting the other half of the people that united under Tibni, and is described as being exceedingly wicked.

(1Ki 16:25) But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that *were* before him.

It would not be unusual to assume that Omri would want to keep the throne he had won, or try to further his power and influence through political means. Omri set Ahab on the throne of Israel after himself, but Ahab was not his only child. We are told that Ahab and Athaliah are both the children of Omri. **How would Athaliah gain power?**

2Ch 17:1-2

- (1) And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, **and strengthened himself against Israel.**
- (2) **And he placed forces in all the fenced cities** of Judah, and **set garrisons** in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken.

1Ki 22:43-44

- (43) And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; *for* the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places.
- (44) **And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.**

2Ch 18:1

- (1) Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, **and joined affinity with Ahab.**

The surest means for Athaliah to gain power would be through marriage. During both the reigns of Omri and Ahab, Judah remained a strong nation. We are not told when this joining of affinity took place, other than it was during the reigns of King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah. **It is not uncommon for kingdoms to use royal marriages as a means to secure a peace or alliance.**

(2Ch 21:5-6) Jehoram *was* thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. **And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife:** and he wrought *that which was evil* in the eyes of the LORD.

The term daughter is used in a broad context. Obviously, she cannot be the literal daughter of both Omri and Ahab. Some people conclude that Athaliah must have been the granddaughter of Omri, and the literal daughter of Ahab. Perhaps their perceptions are shaped because they imagine that Jehoram would not marry someone who was older than himself. **I do not think that this is a correct conclusion.**

It is more reasonable to conclude that Athaliah was the literal daughter of Omri. When Athaliah is called the “daughter of Ahab” (2 Kings 8:18 and 2 Chronicles 21:6) it is in reference to why her husband Jehoram walked after the kings of Israel. The king of Israel at this time was King Ahab, and Jehoram was related by marriage to King Ahab. The term “daughter” could be appropriate, because Athaliah would be a female descendant of the kings of Israel, **of which King Ahab was representative.**

However, when Athaliah is called the “daughter of Omri” (2 Kings 8:26 and 2 Chronicles 22:2) this is in the context of lineage, for the purpose of establishing the legal right of her son Ahaziah to rule Judah as well as the influence that Athaliah had on her son. If Athaliah influenced King Jehoram to do wickedly, she no doubt had ample influence on her son Ahaziah. **Athaliah can be the literal daughter of Omri,** and in the sense of being like the kings of Israel, also be the “daughter of Ahab” in the sense of her involvement in a political marriage.

If Athaliah was the literal daughter of Omri, then she could definitely be older than Jehoram. In fact, if she is the mother of Ahaziah, she would have to be older than her son, who was two years older than Jehoram. If Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he officially succeeded Jehoram to the throne of Judah, then he was born during the reign of King Omri, two years before Ahab took the throne of Israel. Due to age considerations, it is more probable that Ahab was literally her brother.

Jehoshaphat would have been just under thirty years of age when Ahaziah was born. We may assume his mother was young (age 16) or a little older (age 25) which would still place his mother’s age at anywhere from fifty-eight to sixty-nine years of age when she had the other heirs slain and took the throne of Judah for herself. She may have been as young as twenty-five or as old as thirty-five when Jehoshaphat “joined affinity” with King Ahab (we are not told exactly when this took place) but **she would have still been of a marriageable age, and could have married King Jehoshaphat.**

At this point, based on our evidence, let us consider a scenario. Omri takes the throne of Israel through civil war, and has at least two children, Ahab and Athaliah. Jehoshaphat would be a twenty year old prince of Judah during the beginning of the reign of Omri (he was age thirty-five when he became king of Judah.) Young Athaliah may have served as an emissary for King Omri, and may have even been instructed to seduce Jehoshaphat (Omri, Ahab, and Athaliah were known for far more wicked tricks than this, so this is not beyond reason) or at least to gain favor with the young prince.

In our scenario, Athaliah becomes very friendly with young Jehoshaphat, becomes pregnant with his child (Ahaziah) and returns to Israel. Later, after Omri is dead and Ahab is king, Jehoshaphat strengthens Judah militarily, begins to make peace with Israel, and “joins affinity” with King Ahab – **officially marrying Athaliah and recognizing his son Ahaziah.**

This reasoning meshes perfectly with the account in Chronicles. Ahaziah would be forty-two years old when he began to reign *in Jerusalem*, his mother was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri, Jehoram was his step-father (legally, his father) and King Jehoshaphat would be recognized by Jehu (and the rest of Israel) as his actual father.

However, this does not necessarily contradict the account in Kings, which states that Ahaziah was twenty-two years of age when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. In fact, this last part easily fits into place given what we can infer about the political maneuverings during that time.

(2Ch 22:10) But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah.

Athaliah lost no opportunity to further her own goals, which included the rule of her son or herself over Judah. When we remember that she did not hesitate to slay the heirs of the throne once her own son was dead, to take the throne for herself, **it helps to establish proper perspective.**

Both accounts agree that Ahaziah only reigned a single year in Jerusalem. They are obviously referring to the same year, between King Jehoram and the usurper Athaliah. But if we read the account in Kings carefully, it does not say that Ahaziah was twenty-two years of age when he began his reign in Jerusalem, but **only that he was twenty-two years of age when he began to reign.**

A marriage between Jehoshaphat and Athaliah would by necessity recognize their son as a legal heir to the throne of Judah, and Ahaziah was their son. This recognition may have occurred at the time of the “joining of affinity” between Ahab and Jehoshaphat. Regardless, Ahaziah would have been twenty-two years of age two years before King Ahab attempted to have King Jehoshaphat killed at Ramothgilead at the hands of the Syrians (see I Kings 22:1 – 22:39, 2 Chronicles 18:1-34). If Jehoshaphat had been killed instead of Ahab (as seems to have been his plan) who would have taken over the throne of Judah? **Why would the house of Ahab attempt to kill their ally... unless they had some plan to profit in the aftermath?**

Thus, Ahaziah could have begun to reign at twenty-two years of age, not in the sense of being the sole monarch over Judah and reigning from Jerusalem, but probably in the sense of being named the direct successor of Jehoshaphat, *as a crowned prince*. It is even possible that he exercised some degree of power as a prince or regent, which would very literally fulfill the description of “began to reign” at twenty-two years of age.¹

There is evidence that Jehoshaphat was willing to share power while he was still alive. Jehoram co-reigned in Jerusalem for three years before his father’s death. Thus, it is not far-fetched to conclude that Ahaziah, being known as the son of Jehoshaphat, could have begun to reign at twenty-two years of age with less authority than was given to Jehoram, while Jehoshaphat was still king of Israel. The difference is that **the Chronicles of Judah** only considers his reign to have begun when he officially “reigned in Jerusalem” while **the Kings of Israel** counts more generously.

2Ki 8:16 And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, **Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah**, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign.

The final objection that others might raise, is how could Athaliah have had a son through Jehoshaphat and later have married Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, so that her son Ahaziah would become his heir after all the rest of Jehoram’s sons were slain by the band that was with the Arabians?

Surely, a virtuous woman would not have married her step-son. However, we are not given any indication that Athaliah was a virtuous woman. To the contrary, she is credited with being cut from the same cloth as Omri and Ahab, and murdering the heirs to the throne after her son was killed by Jehu. It seems awfully convenient that a band of men with the Arabians killed every possible competitor to her son Ahaziah’s claim of the throne - **one might suspect she had something to do with this.**

Thus, the account of Kings is easily resolved when we recognize that Ahaziah may have begun to reign (being trusted by King Jehoshaphat) long before he truly reigned in Jerusalem. Athaliah and Ahaziah may have fallen out of favor, for one reason or another, and Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, became the named successor to the throne (co-reigning with Jehoshaphat during his last three years.) Thus, Athaliah would have shifted her attention to the new monarch, and no doubt she had convincing reasons why her political savvy and influence, **as queen**, would be useful for Jehoram.

In conclusion, there need be no contradiction between I Kings 8:26 and II Chronicles 22:2 concerning the age of King Ahaziah of Judah. First, we must be willing to consider that both might be true, and second, we must be willing to read the appropriate context. Ahaziah began to reign at age twenty-two, in a lesser role under King Jehoshaphat, but officially took the throne at age forty-two. He reigned a single year in Jerusalem as the official monarch. **Both accounts are true and accurate, but separately reflect the perspectives of Israel and Judah.**

¹ King Ahab had sons named Ahaziah and Jehoram (also called Joram) that also served as kings of Israel. These are not the same as Ahaziah, son of Athaliah, the daughter of Omri, and Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, which were kings of Judah.

In Summary,

Both books tell us that Ahaziah only reigned a single year as King of Judah.

The book of Kings (of Israel) reports Ahaziah as beginning to rule at the younger age of twenty-two. This does not necessarily mean that this was the year he was crowned King, simply that he was given some degree of rule at this time. From the perspective of the patriotic historians of Israel, it seems Ahaziah officially rose to power at the early age, starting when King Jehoshaphat joined affinity with King Ahab.

The book of Chronicles (of Judah) reports Ahaziah as beginning to rule at the older age of forty-two, which would have been when he was officially crowned as King of Judah. From the perspective of the Jewish historian, any earlier regency (which privilege may have been altered or possibly even revoked by the actual king of Judah in the meantime) was not sufficient to count as “reigning” and thus they defined it in its strictest sense.

The two different perspectives, rather than containing a contradiction, instead give us a clearer three-dimensional picture of the history of Israel and Judah. These scriptures can combine without conflict.

Bonus Round:

Consider this following scenario, written from two separate sources:

Historian A: James began to reign at **one** year of age, and he reigned twenty two years in London.

Historian B: James began to reign at **thirty six** years of age, and he reigned twenty two years in London.

Question:

- 1) Do these two accounts contradict?
- 2) Is this obvious evidence of copyist errors?
- 3) Is this James just a fictional character?
- 4) Or could both of these accounts be correct?

Answer:

James was a real person: his mother was Mary Queen of Scots, and he was crowned **King James VI of Scotland** at 13 months of age. Upon the death of Queen Elizabeth, he was crowned **King James I of England** at thirty six years of age. Both accounts are correct – there was no contradiction. However, if you asked a **Scot** how old James was when he began to reign, you might get a different answer than if you asked an **Englishman**. Like the case of Ahaziah, the answer was determined by **perspective**.