
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

607 Files

**Why Jehovah's Witnesses accept 607 B.C.E. as the date
for Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians.**

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Why do Jehovah's Witnesses accept 607 B.C.E. as the date for Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians, instead of 587/6 B.C.E.?

Simply put, Jehovah's Witnesses accept the detailed testimony of the Bible, the inspired Word of God, over the *present understanding* of secular history. "Christians who believe the Bible have time and again found that its words stand the test of much criticism and have been proved accurate and reliable. They recognize that as the inspired Word of God it can be used as a measuring rod in evaluating secular history and views."—*Let Your Kingdom Come*, p. 187.

Concerning the date of Jerusalem's destruction, many scholars claim to be concerned about harmonizing their views with the Bible, but in fact, *are more concerned with not contradicting secular chronology*. On the other hand, the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses have paid "more than the usual attention" to detail, and they have arrived at the only conclusion that they conscientiously can. (Hebrews 2:1) Their methodology involves adhering to the Bible *in its entirety* and not compromising on issues that might seem insignificant to secular historians. To do otherwise would make them guilty of distorting Jehovah's intended message.

So, how do Jehovah's Witnesses arrive at 607 B.C.E. as the year for Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians?

While most historians base their date for the destruction of Jerusalem on an independent line of secular evidence, Jehovah's Witnesses base theirs on a Biblically-foretold seventy-year period of servitude to Babylon for Judah:

"The word that occurred to Jeremiah . . . concerning all the people of Judah and concerning all the inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . **all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.**"—Jeremiah 25:1a, 2, 11.

Eighteen years after this prophecy occurred to Jeremiah, the priest and copyist Ezra describes the events that followed the destruction of Jerusalem, in the nineteenth year (or eighteenth *regnal* year) of Nebuchadnezzar:

"Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and **they came to be servants to him** and his sons until the royalty of Persia began to reign; **to fulfill Jehovah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah**, until the land had paid off its sabbaths. **All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.**"—2 Chronicles 36:20, 21.

Jehovah's Witnesses unequivocally believe that the correct understanding of these, and related verses, is that the seventy years of servitude followed the destruction of Jerusalem, for it was at this time that Judah became "a devastated place, an object of astonishment." At 2 Kings 25:25, 26, the Bible reports that by the seventh month even those left behind, "all the people, from small to great," fled to Egypt, leaving the land completely desolate, "without an inhabitant." *As this factor was necessary for fulfillment* (Isaiah 6:11, 12; Jeremiah 4:23, 25; 4:27, 29; 6:7, 8; 9:11; 24:8, 10), Jehovah's Witnesses recognize that the seventy years of desolation could not officially begin to be counted until after the first of the seventh Jewish month.

Ezra 1:1 shows that it was "in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia," or 538/7 B.C.E., that Cyrus issued the decree releasing the Jews from captivity. The Bible notes that the Jews arrived back in their homeland by the seventh month, Tishri, which would be September 29-30, 537 B.C.E. (Ezra 3:1-3). From this date, Jehovah's Witnesses count back seventy years to 607 B.C.E. as the year for Jerusalem's destruction. Thus, the "devastations of Jerusalem, [namely], seventy years," spoken of by Daniel the prophet, were *exactly* seventy years in duration, running from the seventh month of 607 B.C.E. to the seventh month of 537 B.C.E.

However, the current picture of Neo-Babylonian history, as accepted by the vast majority of scholars, does not allow for a seventy-year interval between the destruction of Jerusalem (which they place in 587/6 B.C.E.) and the reoccupation of the land of Judah two years after the Persian conquest of Babylon (which both secular historians *and* Jehovah's Witnesses agree occurred in 539 B.C.E.).

Where *exactly* these seventy years fit in the stream of time is not easily ascertained by those who subscribe to this widely-held chronological framework. Testifying to this, *Encyclopedia Britannica* relates:

“Many scholars cite 597 BC as the date of the first deportation, for in that year King Jehoiachin was deposed and apparently sent into exile with his family, his court, and thousands of workers. Others say the first deportation followed the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar in 586; if so, the Jews were held in Babylonian captivity for 48 years. Among those who accept a tradition (Jeremiah 29:10) that the exile lasted 70 years, some choose the dates 608 to 538, others 586 to c. 516 (the year when the rebuilt Temple was dedicated in Jerusalem).”—*Encyclopedia Britannica* (1990 edition, Volume 1, p. 771).

Clearly, there is much diversity of opinion among Bible scholars as to *which* period of seventy years the Biblical prophets were referring to. Upon closer examination, one soon becomes aware that it is a subject far more complex than it first appears. However, coming to an accurate knowledge of what actually transpired is essential to understanding important Biblical prophecies that affect us today.

To underscore the uncertainty that surrounds this issue, a brief summary of the most widely-held positions follows:

There are those who advance the theory that the seventy years ran from **609 B.C.E. to 539 B.C.E.**, relating only to the period of Babylonian world rule following the conquest of Assyria. Others prefer to believe that the seventy years ran from **589 B.C.E. to 519 B.C.E.**, beginning with the final two-year siege against Jerusalem. Still others believe that the prophecy concerned the seventy years between **587/6 B.C.E. and 516 B.C.E.**, that is, from the destruction of Jerusalem to the completion of the reconstructed temple. And, there are even some who regard the seventy years as just an approximate or round number, somewhere in the vicinity of 67 years (from **605 B.C.E. to 538 B.C.E.**), believing that the servitude and devastation began in Nebuchadnezzar's accession year.

The proponents of each of these “solutions” insist that their point of view is the correct one, both in light of secular history *and* Biblical corroboration. (Incidentally, critics of Jehovah's Witnesses often draw support from *all* available theories when making their argument. It is apparent that these ones are not interested in the *truth* of the matter; their *only* goal lies in attacking the beliefs held by Jehovah's Witnesses.)

With such diversity of opinion over what in fact transpired, does it seem reasonable that Jehovah's Witnesses should be singled out for scrutiny? And which, if any, of the proposed “solutions” is the correct one?

Perhaps most interesting is the fact that *each* of the above theories *appears*, at least in part, to be supported by the Scriptures and secular history. *Nevertheless, there can only be one correct solution.*

Upon weighing *all* the Biblical evidence, Jehovah's Witnesses have taken a very definite stand on the matter, rejecting all of the aforementioned theories, and holding to the view that the seventy years ran from **607 B.C.E. to 537 B.C.E.**:

“The Bible prophecy does not allow for the application of the 70-year period to any time other than that between the desolation of Judah, accompanying Jerusalem's destruction, and the return of the Jewish exiles to their homeland as a result of Cyrus' decree. It clearly specifies that the 70 years would be years

of *devastation of the land of Judah*. The prophet Daniel so understood the prophecy, for he states: "I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, for fulfilling the *devastations* of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years." (Da 9:2) After describing the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21 states: "Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be servants to him and his sons until the royalty of Persia began to reign; to fulfill Jehovah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah, *until the land had paid off its sabbaths*. All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."—*Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 1, p. 463.

"The closing verses of Second Chronicles (36:17-23) give conclusive proof of the fulfillment of Jeremiah 25:12 and, in addition, show that a full 70 years must be counted from the complete desolation of the land to the restoration of Jehovah's worship at Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. This desolation therefore begins in 607 B.C.E.—Jer. 29:10; 2 Ki. 25:1-26; Ezra 3:1-6."—*All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*, p. 84.

It is this clear and concise Bible-based view that Jehovah's Witnesses hold, and have held since the days of Charles Taze Russell who, in *The Time Is At Hand (Studies in the Scriptures, Series 2, 1912 edition)*, p. 52, comments:

"Usher dates the seventy years desolation *eighteen years* earlier than shown above—*i.e.*, before the dethronement of Zedekiah, Judah's last king—because the king of Babylon took many of the people captive at that time. (2 Chron. 36:9, 10, 17, 21; 2 Kings 24:8-16.) He evidently makes the not uncommon mistake of regarding those seventy years as the period of *captivity*, whereas the Lord expressly declares them to be seventy years of *desolation* of the land, that the land should lie "desolate, without an inhabitant." Such was not the case prior to Zedekiah's dethronement. (2 Kings 24:14.) But the desolation which followed Zedekiah's overthrow was complete; for, though some of the poor of the land were left to be vine-dressers and husbandmen (2 Kings 25:12), shortly even these—"all people, both small and great"—fled to Egypt for fear of the Chaldees. (Verse 26.) There can be no doubt here; and therefore in reckoning the time to the *desolation of the land*, all periods up to the close of Zedekiah's reign should be counted in, as we have done."

There is no shortage of critics who openly voice their opinion that the Watchtower Society has dogmatically stuck to a doctrine for which they have had to go to extreme lengths to make appear credible, notwithstanding the fact that the Watchtower Society has provided ample documentation to support their viewpoint (see "Additional Reading" at the end of this article). Unfortunately, included among these are some who allowed themselves to be stumbled to the point of abandoning the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses. For those with such tendencies, the Society provides the following admonition:

"If you find that you are stumbled or are offended about something being taught in God's organization, or some adjustments being made, keep this in mind: God has put enough in the Bible to provide a complete foundation for faith. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) He has also left many details of various events in the Bible out of the account, enough so that one whose heart is not right, who wants to discover an apparent fault, who wants to find an excuse for leaving the way of truth, can find it."—*The Watchtower*, August 15, 1972, p. 507.

Nevertheless, some critics have endeavored to "reconcile" the Biblical account with the current secular understanding of Neo-Babylonian history, alleging that the Watchtower Society is simply misinterpreting the relevant Biblical material. **A close examination of the facts, however, reveals the "solutions" proposed by these critics to be feeble, inaccurate, and ignorant of clear statements made in God's Word.** Their error lies in not heeding the counsel at Proverbs 3:5: "Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your

own understanding.” These ones have put more faith in the “knowledge” of men than in the unfailing Word of Jehovah, evidently not considering the counsel of the prophet Isaiah:

“This is what Jehovah has said . . . “I, Jehovah, am . . . **the One that turns even their knowledge into foolishness**; the One making the word of his servant come true, and the One that carries out completely the counsel of his own messengers.”—Isaiah 44:24-28.

It is our sincere hope that the information presented in the in-depth articles that follow will help all to see that Jehovah's Witnesses are *not* mistaken in their point of view, nor are they guilty of resorting to “scriptural acrobatics” in order to substantiate their claims. Rather, they should be commended for refusing to invalidate the Word of God by favoring the traditional historical views put forward by imperfect man. (Matthew 15:6; Mark 7:13) It is because of their unwavering faith in God's Word that Jehovah has provided them with insight:

“Jehovah's Witnesses have been interested in the findings of archaeologists as these relate to the Bible. However, where the interpretation of these findings conflicts with clear statements in the Bible, we accept with confidence what the Holy Scriptures say, whether on matters related to chronology or any other topic. . . . For the same reason, they have realized that the prophecy in Daniel chapter 4 regarding the “seven times” began counting in 607-606 B.C.E. and that it pinpointed 1914 C.E. in the autumn as the year when Christ was enthroned in heaven as ruling King and this world entered its time of the end. But they would not have discerned these thrilling fulfillments of prophecy if they had wavered in their confidence in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Thus, the insight that they have shown has been directly associated with their reliance on God's Word.”—*The Watchtower*, March 15, 1989, p. 22.

If you are under the impression that critics have presented information that seriously challenges that presented by the Watchtower Society, you owe it to yourself to examine all of the facts carefully. **These facts will not go away if you choose to ignore them.** If you truly believe that the Bible is the unerring, inspired Word of God, and you are sincerely interested in knowing the truth of this matter from a *Biblical* perspective, please consider the following detailed questions and answers.

In-Depth

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1) When does the *Bible* indicate that the nation of Judah began serving the king of Babylon?

In Jeremiah chapter 25, we are told of the eventuality that was to befall the inhabitants of Judah: “The word that occurred to Jeremiah . . . concerning all the people of Judah and concerning all the inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.” (Jeremiah 1a, 2, 11)

Critics have attempted to show that this servitude to the king of Babylon, mentioned in verse 11, began to be fulfilled long before Jerusalem's destruction. Some of them reason that the nation of Judah began serving the king of Babylon when they became a vassal to Babylon, while others believe that it commenced with the initial exile.

Is there anything wrong with these views? Isn't it quite reasonable to conclude that Judah's servitude to Babylon commenced when they became a vassal to Babylon?

Jewish historian Josephus tells us that Jehoiakim became a tributary king to Babylon in his eighth year:

“But when Nebuchadnezzar had already reigned four years, which was the eighth of Jehoiakim's government over the Hebrews, the king of Babylon made an expedition with mighty forces against the Jews, and required tribute of Jehoiakim”—*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, Chapter VI, Verse 1.

Josephus' testimony is consistent with the Biblical record, which shows that Jehoiakim became a tributary king to Nebuchadnezzar for a period of three years, after which he rebelled, resulting in his being given into “the hand of Nebuchadnezzar” in Jehoiakim's eleventh year. Secular chronologists place Jehoiakim's eighth regnal year in 601/600 B.C.E. (see *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Jack Finegan, Princeton, 1964, p. 203), thus accounting for an interval of only sixty-two to sixty-four, and not seventy, years.

Similarly, the first recorded exile occurred ten years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, and would therefore account for only fifty-eight years according to accepted secular chronology. Because of this, some have tried to advance the theory that an earlier exile occurred in the third year of Jehoiakim (due to a [misunderstanding of Daniel 1:1](#)), despite the fact that this too comes up short, allowing for, at most, anywhere from sixty-six to sixty-eight years. (See [Appendix to Chapter 14](#), “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” pp. 186-9 for further details.) **Nevertheless, any such exile prior to that which occurred at the time of Jerusalem's destruction, when “Judah went into exile from off its soil” (2 Kings 25:8-21), would involve only the servitude of the specific individuals taken captive, and not the nation of Judah.**

Clearly, neither Judah's vassalage nor the initial exile satisfy *a full seventy years* of servitude for the *nation of Judah* to Babylon. In light of this, is it possible that the seventy years of servitude simply referred to the subservient position that other nations would occupy during the period of Babylonian world domination (from 609 B.C.E. to 539 B.C.E., according to secular chronology)?

No, for the Bible clearly shows that the seventy years were to be years of *devastation for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah* (Jeremiah 25:1a, 2, 11; Daniel 9:2). While some critics argue that Jeremiah 25:11 only refers to seventy years of *servitude*, Daniel 9:2 confirms that the prophecy also entailed seventy years of *devastation* for the land of Judah. Second Chronicles 36:20, 21 further shows that it was the composite effect of exiling the remaining ones who “came to be servants to [Nebuchadnezzar]” and the resulting devastation and desolation of the land of Judah that began to fulfill the prophecy concerning the seventy years. **In no way did Babylon's dominant position alone satisfy these requirements.**

Furthermore, Ezra 1:1 and 2 Chronicles 36:22 show that “Jehovah's word from the mouth of Jeremiah” had *not yet been accomplished* by the first regnal year of Cyrus, that is, *after* Babylon had already fallen to the Persians:

“And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, **that Jehovah's word from the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished**, Jehovah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia so that he caused a cry to pass through all his realm.”—Ezra 1:1 (see also 2 Chronicles 36:22).

This verse establishes that the Persian conquest of Babylon was *not* the determining factor in fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy, disproving the theory that the seventy years simply referred to the period of Babylonian world domination.

How, then, are we to understand Jeremiah 27:6 which, in the *New World Translation* and numerous other translations, seems to indicate that at the "beginning of the kingdom of Jehoiakim" (Jeremiah 27:1) Jehovah had already made the nations and the wild beasts *servants* to Nebuchadnezzar?

"And now I myself **have given** all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and even the wild beasts of the field **I have given** him to serve him."—Jeremiah 27:6, *New World Translation* (compare with *NIV*, which reads: "Now **I will** hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; **I will** make even the wild animals subject to him.")

While Jeremiah 27:6 shows that "these nations" had been made subject to Nebuchadnezzar by divine authority, nevertheless, Jeremiah 28:14 shows that *even by the time of the "kingdom of Zedekiah"* (Jeremiah 28:1), *some eleven years later*, the actual *servitude* was still seen as a future event:

"For this is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said: "A yoke of iron **I will** put upon the neck of all these nations, to serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon; and **they must serve him**. And even the wild beasts of the field **I will** give him.""

The nations that were "given into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand" were given a choice of either willingly submitting, or alternatively, being brought under subjection forcibly. (Jeremiah 27:12-14) However, until such time that *this* occurred, it could not rightly be said that they were *servant* to the king of Babylon.

As a case in point, all creation is *subject* to its Creator, Jehovah. However, one who claims to be *servant* to Jehovah is not *actually serving him* if he is not doing according to His will. Thus, at Jeremiah 27:11, Jehovah could rightly extend favor toward any nation that would bring their necks "under the yoke of the king of Babylon and *actually serve him*."

Even in the minds of the false prophets of Zedekiah's day, it was clear that the inhabitants of Judah were not yet bound by servitude to Babylon:

"And as for you men, do not listen to your prophets and to your practicers of divination and to your dreamers and to your practicers of magic and to your sorcerers, who are saying to you: "**You men will not serve the king of Babylon.**" . . . Even to Zedekiah the king of Judah I spoke according to all these words, saying: "**Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him** and his people and keep on living. Why should you yourself and your people die by the sword, by the famine and by the pestilence according to what Jehovah has spoken to the nation that does not serve the king of Babylon? And do not listen to the words of the prophets that are saying to you men, '**You will not serve the king of Babylon,**' because falsehood is what they are prophesying to you."—Jeremiah 27:9, 10, 12-14.

So, how exactly was Zedekiah to bring his neck "under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him"? The answer is found at Jeremiah 38:17, 18:

"Jeremiah now said to Zedekiah: "This is what Jehovah, the God of armies, the God of Israel, has said, '**If you will without fail go out to the princes of the king of Babylon**, your soul will also certainly keep living and this city itself will not be burned with fire, and you yourself and your household will certainly keep living. But **if you will not go out to the princes of the king of Babylon, this city must**

also be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they will actually burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape out of their hand.”—Jeremiah 38:17, 18.

Jeremiah 15:2 explains what this voluntary “going out” would require:

And it must occur that should they say to you, ‘**Where shall we go out to?**’ you must also say to them, ‘This is what Jehovah has said: . . . **whoever is for the captivity, to the captivity!**’—Jeremiah 15:2.

As long as Jehoiakim, and later, Zedekiah, *refused* to “go out to the princes of the king of Babylon,” the nation of Judah could not be said to be *servicing the king of Babylon*. Furthermore, Jeremiah 1:1-3 tells us that the prophetic warnings continued right down to the “eleventh year of Zedekiah . . . *until Jerusalem went into exile in the fifth month.*”

A prophecy recorded 900 years earlier makes it clear that Jehovah’s intention from the start was that the nation of Judah would be absent from their homeland during the prophesied period of servitude, whether they chose to submit peaceably or had to be removed forcibly:

“At that time the land will pay off its sabbaths all the days of its lying desolated, **while you are in the land of your enemies**. At that time the land will keep sabbath, as it must repay its sabbaths. All the days of its lying desolated it will keep sabbath, for the reason that it did not keep sabbath during your sabbaths when you were dwelling upon it.”—Leviticus 26:34.

Conclusion

Jeremiah 25:11 outlines the events comprising the prophecy of the seventy years: “And [1] all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment *and* [2] these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.” This verse makes it clear that the seventy years of Judah’s servitude *as a nation* were to begin *at the time of*, or *immediately following*, the *devastation* of Jerusalem, but not before. The servitude *and* the devastation of the land were to last seventy years, which is precisely why Daniel could accurately refer to “the devastations of Jerusalem, [namely], seventy years.” (Daniel 9:2)

In the next article, it is shown that the devastation of the land could not have occurred prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, and in line with this, neither could the servitude. It is also demonstrated that Jeremiah’s prophecy had not yet begun to be fulfilled by the “fourth year of Jehoiakim” (Jeremiah 25:1), since Jeremiah 25:11 indicates that the land would *become* a devastated place, indicating a future fulfillment. Thus, Judah’s servitude to Babylon was also reserved for future fulfillment, and for a certainty then, did not begin in Jehoiakim’s *third* year, as suggested by some. (See also Jeremiah 36:9, 29 which indicates that Nebuchadnezzar had not yet come up against Jerusalem even by the *fifth* year of Jehoiakim.)

Despite the initial exile of “Jeconiah [Jehoiachin] the son of Jehoiakim . . . together with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 27:20) some ten years earlier, Jeremiah evidently realized that it was not until the “eleventh year of Zedekiah” that “*Jerusalem went into exile.*” This is strongly corroborated by the testimony at 2 Kings 25:8, 21, which shows that the nation of Judah did not go “into exile from off its soil” until *after* the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar:

“And in . . . **the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar** the king of Babylon . . . he proceeded to burn the house of Jehovah and the king’s house and all the houses of Jerusalem; and the house of every great man he burned with fire. And the walls of Jerusalem, all around, the entire military force of Chaldeans that were with the chief of the bodyguard pulled down. And the rest of the people that were left behind in the city and the deserters that had gone over to the king of Babylon and the rest of the

crowd Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguard took into exile. . . . **Thus Judah went into exile from off its soil.**”—2 Kings 25:8-21.

Second Chronicles 36:19-21 adds:

“And he [Nebuchadnezzar] proceeded to burn the house of the [true] God and pull down the wall of Jerusalem; and all its dwelling towers they burned with fire and also its desirable articles, so as to cause ruin. Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they **came to be servants to him and his sons** until the royalty of Persia began to reign; to fulfill Jehovah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah, **until the land had paid off its sabbaths. All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.**”

It wasn't until the last of the inhabitants of Judah “came to be servants to him” that the *nation* of Judah could be said to be serving the king of Babylon. This same verse proves beyond a doubt that the *inhabitants* of Judah were not serving the king of Babylon prior to his nineteenth year, since it was only *after* they were taken captive that they “*came to be* servants to him.” And, as the above-quoted verse establishes, it was also at this time that the desolation of the land commenced.

H.W.F. Saggs, in his book *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, helps put things in perspective, showing that prior to Jerusalem's destruction Judah was only *indirectly* subject to Babylon:

“After . . . the deportation of the young king Jehoiachin along with his nobles, Nebuchadnezzar attempted **indirect rule**, using Zedekiah as a vassal prince bound to Babylonia: for nine years the experiment was successful. Even after the siege and capture of Jerusalem consequent on Zedekiah's ultimate yielding to the pro-Egyptian party, Nebuchadnezzar still did not abandon the attempt to employ some form of **indirect rule**, and appointed a Jewish nobleman, Gedaliah, as governor. **It was only after Gedaliah's assassination by Jewish patriots . . . that Judah came under direct Babylonian administration.**”—*The Greatness That Was Babylon*, H.W.F. Saggs, 1962, p. 261.

Yes, the Bible is very clear as to when the seventy-year period of servitude commenced. It could not have begun until the crown of Zedekiah was removed, completely abolishing the Judean kingship with “no one sitting on the throne of David.” (Jeremiah 36:30) Following the removal of Zedekiah's crown, and after those remaining (who were under the governorship of Gedaliah) fled for fear of the Chaldeans (2 Kings 25:22-26) in the seventh month, the entire nation of Judah fell under *direct servitude* to the king of Babylon, **no longer possessing its own king as intermediary**, as had previously been the case with Judah's tributary submission to Babylon (and to other nations prior to this).

2) Is it possible that the “devastations of Jerusalem,” as spoken of at Daniel 9:2, began several years prior to its destruction, perhaps commencing with the initial exile?

At Daniel 9:1-2 we read: “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus of the seed of the Medes, who had been made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans; in the first year of his reigning I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, for fulfilling **the devastations of Jerusalem, [namely,] seventy years.**”

The Hebrew word translated “devastations” at Daniel 9:2 is *chorbâh*. Please note that Daniel refers to “the word of Jehovah [that] had occurred to Jeremiah.” This is more or less a direct reference to Jeremiah 25:11, where the same Hebrew word is used:

“And all this land must become **a devastated place**, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”

It is important that we identify exactly when the devastation of Jerusalem took place if we are to correctly understand the prophecy concerning the seventy years.

In order to understand what Daniel meant by the “devastations of Jerusalem,” we need to understand what Jeremiah meant by the land becoming “a devastated place.” Additionally, we must comprehend the *extent* or *magnitude* of devastation that the Hebrew word *chorbâh* signifies.

At this point, one thing is certain. Since the prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 “occurred to Jeremiah . . . in the fourth year of Jehoiakim” (Jeremiah 25:1), we know for a fact that the devastation of Jerusalem did not begin with the *supposed* siege and captivity that critics place in Jehoiakim’s third regnal year, due to a [misunderstanding of Daniel 1:1](#). Why? Because the words, “all this land **must become** a devastated place,” stated at Jeremiah 25:11, show that the devastation was to be a *future* event. This is confirmed at Jeremiah 26:9, which states that “this very city **will be** devastated.”

Furthermore, scholars who accept present-day secular chronology cannot suggest that the seventy years of devastation (Daniel 9:2) commenced with the first Biblically-recorded exile, which occurred in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 52:28), since this would account for a total, by their reckoning, of just under sixty years.

The English word *devastate*, the noun form of which is used at Daniel 9:2 and the adjective form at Jeremiah 25:11, is defined as: “**to lay waste; ravage**” (*Webster’s*) or, “**to lay waste; destroy**” (*American Heritage*). We have already seen that the Hebrew word used in both of these instances is *chorbâh*.

Some critics have gone as far as to state that this word does not imply complete destruction, so as to suggest that the “devastation” began prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. However, the *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* by Dr. James Strong (1890), defines *chorbâh* as:

“a place laid waste, ruin, waste, desolation.”

Similarly, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1959), defines *chorbâh* as:

“waste, desolation, ruin.”

Thus, the meaning of *chorbâh* is closely related to the Hebrew word *shâmêm*, translated at 2 Chronicles 36:21 as “desolated.” In fact, it is so closely related, that although the *New World Bible Translation Committee* opted to translate *chorbâh* as “devastations” (likely to preserve the subtle shade of difference between the two Hebrew words), other Bibles have translated *chorbâh* at Daniel 9:2 as follows:

“in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the **desolation** of Jerusalem would last seventy years.”—Daniel 9:2, *New International Version*.

“in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, have understood by books the number of the years, (in that a word of Jehovah hath been unto Jeremiah the prophet,) concerning the fulfilling of the **wastes** of Jerusalem—seventy years.”—Daniel 9:2, *Young’s Literal Translation*.

Now, please note how the following Bibles translate *chorbâh* where it appears at Jeremiah 25:11:

“And this whole land shall be **a desolation**”—*American Standard Version* (1901)

“All this land will be **a waste**”—*Bible in Basic English* (1965)

“And this whole land shall be **a waste**”—*Green's Literal Translation* (1993)

“This whole country will become **a desolate wasteland**”—*New International Version* (1984)

“And this whole land shall be **a desolation**”—*New King James Version* (1984)

“This whole land shall become **a ruin and a waste**”—*New Revised Standard Version* (1989)

We are beginning to get a sense of the magnitude of the devastation that was to befall Judah. But does Jeremiah anywhere specifically *qualify* what this devastation would entail? Jeremiah 26:9 answers:

“Why is it that you have prophesied in the name of Jehovah, saying, ‘Like that in Shiloh is how this house will become, and **this very city will be devastated so as to be without an inhabitant**?’”—
Jeremiah 26:9.

To what extent would Jerusalem be devastated? The Scriptures reveal that the city would be devastated *so as to be without an inhabitant*.

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the prophet continually and consistently confirms what he had in mind when he wrote Jeremiah 25:11:

“Be corrected, O Jerusalem, that my soul may not turn away disgusted from you; that I may not set you as **a desolate waste, a land not inhabited**.”—Jeremiah 6:7-8.

“And I will make Jerusalem piles of stones, the lair of jackals; and the cities of Judah I shall make **a desolate waste, without an inhabitant**.”—Jeremiah 9:11.

“I saw the land, and, look! **[it was] empty and waste**; and into the heavens, and their light was no more. . . . I saw, and, look! **there was not an earthling man, and the flying creatures of the heavens had all fled**.”—Jeremiah 4:23, 25.

“For this is what Jehovah has said: “**A desolate waste is what the whole land will become**, and shall I not carry out a sheer extermination? . . . Every city is left, and **there is no man dwelling in them**.”—
Jeremiah 4:27, 29b.

“So I shall give Zedekiah the king of Judah and his princes and the remnant of Jerusalem who are remaining over in this land and those who are dwelling in the land of Egypt. . . . And I will send against them the sword, the famine and the pestilence, **until they come to their finish off the ground that I gave to them and to their forefathers**.”—Jeremiah 24:8, 10.

Furthermore, the extent of devastation, recorded at 2 Chronicles 36:19-21 as resulting from the destruction of Jerusalem, was foretold by the prophet Isaiah over 120 years in advance:

“Until the cities actually **crash in ruins**, to be **without an inhabitant**, and the houses be **without earthling man**, and **the ground itself is ruined into a desolation**; and Jehovah actually **removes earthling men far away**, and **the deserted condition does become very extensive in the midst of the land**.”—Isaiah 6:11, 12.

It goes without saying that Judah was not made a “desolate wasteland” (*NIV*) or a “ruin and a waste” (*NRSV*), “without an inhabitant,” at any point prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, can it honestly be said that Jerusalem was *devastated* as a result of the initial exile?

Specifically referring to that event, historian Max I. Dimont provides the answer:

“Nebuchadnezzar took the eighteen-year-old King Jehoiachin into captivity and deported 8,000 of the country’s leading citizens—all who might possibly foment another uprising. **He did not** sack Jerusalem at this time, or **devastate the country.**”—*Jews, God and History*, 1962, p. 58.

In speaking to the “Jews that were dwelling in the land of Egypt” (Jeremiah 44:1) who fled there *following the destruction of Jerusalem*, Jeremiah establishes the matter beyond all doubt:

“You yourselves have seen all the calamity that I have brought in upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah, and here they are **a devastated place this day**, and in them **there is no inhabitant**. . . . So my rage, and my anger, was poured out and it burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and **they came to be a devastated place, a desolate waste, as at this day.**”—Jeremiah 44:2, 6.

The above verses show that Jeremiah’s prophecy that “this land must become a devastated place” (Jeremiah 25:11) began to be fulfilled after the destruction of Jerusalem, and that it encompassed the complete desolation of the land. Daniel 9:2 confirms that this “desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.” —Daniel 9:2, *NIV*.

3) Is it not true that Jeremiah 25:18 indicates that Jerusalem and the cities of Judah had already become “a devastated place, an object of astonishment” by the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the first year of Nebuchadnezzar?

No, this is nothing more than a misconception held by some critics.

Jeremiah 25:1, 2, 17, 18 reads as follows:

“The word that occurred to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah **in the fourth year of Jehoiakim** the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, that is, the first year of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon; which Jeremiah the prophet spoke concerning all the people of Judah and concerning all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying . . . And I proceeded to take the cup out of the hand of Jehovah and to make all the nations drink to whom Jehovah had sent me: namely, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and her kings, her princes, to make them a devastated place, an object of astonishment, something to whistle at and a malediction, **just as at this day.**”—Jeremiah 25:1, 2, 17, 18.

Certain individuals have misapplied the words “just as at this day” as an indication that Judah was already considered a devastated place by the fourth year of Jehoiakim. However, Jeremiah is here writing about the prophecy that occurred to him in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. *In no way does this imply that Jeremiah chapter 25 is being written in this year.* Rather, it is a narration of the events that took place in that year. In Bible translations that include quotation marks where appropriate (e.g. *NWT, NIV, RSV, By, NKJV*), one will notice that the verses that *follow* verse 2 are enclosed in quotation marks. It will also be noted that verses 17 to 23 of Jeremiah chapter 25, which contain the words in question, are *not* enclosed in quotation marks, as are the majority of verses in chapter 25. This is because verses 17 and 18 are part of the narrative written after Judah had been laid desolate.

Thus, the words “just as at this day” refer to the time when Jeremiah 25 was written down (i.e., after the destruction of Jerusalem) and therefore, not in the fourth year of Jehoiakim which refers specifically to the events being narrated.

4) Ezekiel 33:24, 27 refers to those in “devastated places.” Is it true that these words were “written ten years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem,” and does this indicate that “the

devastations of Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:2) did not entail seventy years of complete desolation of the land, “without an inhabitant”?

At least one not-too-astute critic has stated that the words at Ezekiel 33:24, 27 were “written ten years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem,” thus supporting his claim that Jerusalem was considered a devastated place at this time.

This claim is manifestly false. Going back *only a few verses*, Ezekiel 33:21 is clear as to what time period these words apply. He specifically refers to an “escaped one from Jerusalem” who notifies the exiles in Babylon that Jerusalem *had been destroyed*. For this reason, Jehovah could accurately refer to “the inhabitants of these devastated places.” (See also Jeremiah 44:2, 6 which provides evidence that Judah “came to be a devastated place” only after its destruction, as related to those who fled to Egypt in 607 B.C.E.)

But does the phrase “inhabitants of . . . devastated places” imply that the “devastations of Jerusalem,” referred to at Daniel 9:2, did not entail seventy years of complete desolation of the land, “without an inhabitant”?

No, for these very verses confirm that Jehovah’s judgment against Judah was *still in progress*, and even those who tried to remain in the land (thinking it was an inheritance) would fall by the sword, thus fulfilling Jehovah’s Word by Jeremiah that the land would lie desolate, “without an inhabitant” (see Jeremiah 9:11; 26:9; 32:43; 33:10-12; 34:22):

“And the word of Jehovah began to occur to me, saying: “Son of man, the inhabitants of these devastated places are saying even concerning the soil of Israel, ‘Abraham happened to be just one and yet he took possession of the land. And we are many; to us the land has been given as something to possess.’ . . . “This is what you should say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord Jehovah has said: “As I am alive, surely the ones who are in the devastated places will fall by the sword itself; and the one who is upon the surface of the field, to the wild beast I shall certainly give him for food; and those who are in the strong places and in the caves will die by the pestilence itself. **And I shall actually make the land a desolate waste, even a desolation**, and the pride of its strength must be made to cease and the mountains of Israel must be laid desolate, **with no one passing through**. And they will have to know that I am Jehovah when I make the land a desolate waste, even a desolation, on account of all their detestable things that they have done.”’”—Ezekiel 33:23, 24, 27-29.

In fulfillment, 2 Kings 25:25, 26 reports that by the seventh month, “all the people, from small to great” fled to Egypt, leaving the land desolate, “without an inhabitant”:

“And it came about in the seventh month . . . that all the people, from small to great, and the chiefs of the military forces rose up and came into Egypt; for they had become afraid because of the Chaldeans.”

Thus, Jehovah’s Witnesses recognize that the seventy years of the desolation of the land officially begun to be counted after the first of the seventh Jewish month in 607 B.C.E. (or September 21-22, 607 B.C.E. on the Gregorian calendar).

5) Critics allege that the *New World Translation* is biased in its translation of Jeremiah 29:10. Is this true?

כִּי־כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה כִּי לְפִי מָלְאֵת
 לְבַבְךָ שְׁבָעִים שָׁנָה אֶפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם
 וְתִקְמַתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם אֶת־דְּבַר־יְהוָה
 לְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה׃

Jeremiah 29:10 in Hebrew

The *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, translates Jeremiah 29:10 as follows:

“For this is what Jehovah has said, ‘In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years **at Babylon** I shall turn my attention to you people, and I will establish toward you my good word in bringing you back to this place.’”

Critics of Jehovah's Witnesses assert that the Hebrew word *le Babel* translated as “at Babylon” is more correctly translated “for Babylon,” which would significantly change the meaning of this verse. Their purpose is to make it appear as if the seventy years of servitude to Babylon did not entail that the *entire nation of Judah* be exiled for the *full seventy year period*. They reason that the “seventy years” refer *only* to the period of Babylonian world domination (hence, “seventy years *for* Babylon”), thus accounting for the twenty or so missing years in their chronology. However, upon close examination it becomes obvious that Jeremiah 29:10 does not in any way support this theory. It will also be demonstrated that the *New World Translation* is not biased, nor are Jehovah's Witnesses alone in their translation of this verse.

Let us first set forth that “at Babylon,” as used by the *New World Translation*, is an *allowable* and *grammatically correct* translation of this Hebrew word.

The inseparable preposition *le* (or לְ, comprised of the Hebrew consonant *La'medh* and the half-vowel *Shewa'*'), as used at Jeremiah 29:10, can accurately be translated as “to,” “for,” or “at” (some references also include “of” or “against”) depending on its context. This can be verified with any authority on Biblical Hebrew, such as *The Essentials of Biblical Hebrew* (by Kyle M. Yates, Ph.D.; revised by John Joseph Owens, Associate Professor of Old Testament Interpretation), p. 173.

Having been established that, from a technical standpoint, the word *le Babel* can accurately be rendered “at Babylon,” a precise translation of this verse now becomes primarily an issue of context. So, in what context were the words at Jeremiah 29:10 spoken? Let us read it in the setting of the surrounding verses:

“This is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said **to all the exiled people, whom I have caused to go into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon**, ‘Build houses and inhabit [them], and plant gardens and eat their fruitage. Take wives and become father to sons and to daughters; and take wives for your own sons and give your own daughters to husbands, that they may give birth to sons and to daughters; and become many there, and do not become few. Also, seek the peace of **the city to which I have caused you to go into exile**, and pray in its behalf to Jehovah, for in its peace there will prove to be peace for you yourselves. For this is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said: “Let not your prophets who are in among you and your practicers of divination deceive you, and do not you listen to their dreams that they are dreaming. For ‘it is in falsehood that they are prophesying to you in my name. I have not sent them,’ is the utterance of Jehovah.”” “For this is what Jehovah has said, **In**

accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at Babylon I shall turn my attention to you people, and I will establish toward you my good word **in bringing you back to this place.**”—Jeremiah 29:4-10.

Throughout the verses cited, the writer continually refers to the *locality* of Babylon, where the nation of “Judah went into exile from off its soil,” (2 Kings 25:21) and from where the nation of Judah would be brought back, as prophesied at Jeremiah 33:7: “I will bring back the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel, and I will build them just as at the start.”

However, various experts in the field of Near Eastern studies hold to the view that the seventy years referred only to the period of Babylonian rule:

“The seventy years counted here **evidently refer to Babylon and not to the Judeans or to their captivity.** They mean seventy years of Babylonian rule, the end of which will see the redemption of the exiles.”—*The Seventy Years of Babylon*, Avigdor Orr, Vetus Testamentum, Vol VI, 1956, p. 305; *boldface ours.*

“Evidently”? The word *evidently* means “according to the available evidence.” What is the source of this expert’s evidence?

Evidently, not the Bible. There are numerous contextual settings in which the “seventy years” appear in the Scriptures:

“Furthermore, he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be servants to him and his sons until the royalty of Persia began to reign; to fulfill Jehovah’s word by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had paid off its sabbaths. **All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.**”—2 Chronicles 36:20-21.

“The word that occurred to Jeremiah **concerning all the people of Judah . . . all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.**”—Jeremiah 25:1a, 11.

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus of the seed of the Medes, who had been made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans; in the first year of his reigning I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, for fulfilling **the devastations of Jerusalem, [namely,] seventy years.**”—Daniel 9:1-2.

“So the angel of Jehovah answered and said: “O Jehovah of armies, how long will you yourself not show mercy **to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah, whom you have denounced these seventy years?**”—Zechariah 1:12.

Upon considering these verses, it becomes evident that the “seventy years” relate to far more than Babylon’s world dominion. Also, the phrase, “that Jehovah’s word from the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished,” found at 2 Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 1:1, proves that the “seventy years” had not yet been fulfilled even after Babylon was overthrown by Cyrus. According to the Bible, then, the “seventy years” *do not* refer to the period of Babylon’s world rule.

In fact, the seventy years are *most often* referred to in connection with the nation of Judah as a people (i.e., “concerning all the people of Judah”—Jeremiah 25:1), and the desolation of the land of Judah (2 Chronicles 36:21; Jeremiah 25:11; Daniel 9:2). Babylon was simply the instrument, i.e., Jehovah’s “servant” (Jeremiah 25:9), used to impose judgment against the cities of Judah. Yes, the *purpose* of “the devastations of Jerusalem, [namely,] seventy years,” referred to at Daniel 9:2, was of a *punitive* nature, resulting from the flagrant

disobedience of Jehovah's people, despite countless warnings. This is confirmed at length in the book of Jeremiah:

“Just as you have left me and have gone serving a foreign god in your land, so you will serve strangers in a land that is not yours.”—Jeremiah 5:19.

“For the sons of Judah have done what is bad in my eyes,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘They have set their disgusting things in the house upon which my name has been called, in order to defile it. . . . **“Therefore, look! days are coming,**’ is the utterance of Jehovah, . . . **the land will become nothing but a devastated place.”**—Jeremiah 7:30-34.

“On what account should the land actually perish, be actually burned like the wilderness without anyone passing through?” And Jehovah proceeded to say: **“On account of their leaving my law that I gave [to be] before them, and [because] they have not obeyed my voice and have not walked in it.”**—Jeremiah 9:12-13.

“Therefore this is what Jehovah of armies has said, **“For the reason that you did not obey my words,** here I am sending and I will take all the families of the north,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “even [sending] to Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and **I will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will devote them to destruction and make them an object of astonishment and something to whistle at and places devastated to time indefinite.”**—Jeremiah 25:8-9.

Returning to our discussion of Jeremiah 29:10, let us now see how other Bible translations have rendered this verse.

The true sense or meaning of Jeremiah 29:10 is preserved in the paraphrased *Living Bible*:

“The truth is this: You will be **in Babylon** for a lifetime. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and bring you home again.”

Besides the *New World Translation* and the *Living Bible*, over the years a number of other Bible translations have translated the Hebrew word *le Babel* at Jeremiah 29:10 as “at Babylon” or “in Babylon.” These include:

“quia haec dicit Dominus cum coeperint impleri **in Babylone** septuaginta anni visitabo vos et suscitabo super vos verbum meum bonum ut reducam vos ad locum istum.”—*Latin Vulgate* (c. 405).

“But thus saith the Lord, That after seuentie yeres be accomplished **at Babél**, I wil visit you, and performe my good promes toward you, and cause you to returne to this place.”—*The Geneva Bible* (1560).

“For thus saith the Lord: When the seventy years shall begin to be accomplished **in Babylon**, I will visit you: and I will perform my good word in your favour, to bring you again to this place.”—*Douay Version* (1609).

“For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished **at Babylon** I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.”—*Authorized King James Version* (1611, 1769).

“For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed **at Babylon**, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.”—*New King James Version* (1984; based on the 1967/1977 Stuttgart edition of *Biblia Hebraica*).

Clearly, “at [or, in] Babylon” is the translation of *le Babel* that is immediately discerned when the verse is read *in context*. It has only been in recent years that Bible translators (of RSV, NRSV, NIV, etc.) have *chosen* to translate *le Babel* at Jeremiah 29:10 as “for Babylon.” This has largely been the result of their inability to explain the simultaneous occurrence of a full seventy years of exile of the *entire nation* of Judah in light of the present-day interpretation of Neo-Babylonian history.

Thus, the rendition of Jeremiah 29:10 in the *New World Translation* is by no means biased or improper, and is supported by numerous Bible translations, and the context of the Scriptures themselves.

6) Is it true that 2 Chronicles 36:21 doesn't really say that Jerusalem laid desolate for seventy years?

The *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, translates 2 Chronicles 36:17-21 as follows:

“So he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who proceeded to kill their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, neither did he feel compassion for young man or virgin, old or decrepit. Everything He gave into his hand. And all the utensils, great and small, of the house of the [true] God and the treasures of the house of Jehovah and the treasures of the king and of his princes, everything he brought to Babylon. And he proceeded to burn the house of the [true] God and pull down the wall of Jerusalem; and all its dwelling towers they burned with fire and also all its desirable articles, so as to cause ruin. Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be servants to him and his sons until the royalty of Persia began to reign; **to fulfill Jehovah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had paid off its sabbaths. All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.**”

Regarding these, and the verses that follow, the publication, *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*, p. 84, states: “The closing verses of Second Chronicles (36:17-23) give conclusive proof of the fulfillment of Jeremiah 25:12 and, in addition, show that a full 70 years must be counted from the complete desolation of the land to the restoration of Jehovah's worship at Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. This desolation therefore begins in 607 B.C.E.—Jer. 29:10; 2 Ki. 25:1-26; Ezra 3:1-6.”

There is the opinion among some, however, that the words at 2 Chronicles 36:21 do not necessary indicate that Jerusalem laid desolate for seventy years. They point out that this verse does not specify when the seventy years began, and therefore, at best, only indicates that Jerusalem laid desolate for the *remainder* of the seventy years. Thus, they reason that Ezra (the writer of 2 Chronicles) was simply pointing out that the desolation of the land *ended* at the close of the seventy years spoken of by Jeremiah. —Jeremiah 25:11.

It is true that the desolation of the land ended at the close of the seventy years. But if we refer back to Jeremiah 25:11 we see that the seventy years began to count after Jerusalem became “a devastated place,” that is, at the time of its destruction, which is precisely the event narrated at 2 Chronicles 36:17-21. It is for this reason that Ezra does not elaborate on when the seventy years commenced; it is to be understood that they took place from that point forward.

Furthermore, mentioning the seventy years *solely as an end point* for the desolation of the land would be unnecessary since the verses immediately preceding *and* following verse 21 make this fact known in much more definitive terms. The desolation of the land was the result of carrying “off those remaining . . . to Babylon.” The

preceding verse (2 Chronicles 36:20) tells us that these ones became servants to Nebuchadnezzar and his sons “until the royalty of Persia began to reign.” And, the two verses that follow (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23) mention Cyrus’ decree, “in the first year of Cyrus,” permitting the Jews to return to their homeland to bring an end to the desolation of the land. Therefore, only if the prophesied seventy-year period *commenced* with the desolation of the land would Ezra have addressed the issue at all; to do so for any other reason would serve no purpose but to confuse.

A popular Bible translation among those who hold to the view that Ezra was simply stating that the land laid desolate for the remainder of the seventy years is the *New International Version*, which translates 2 Chronicles 36:21 as follows:

“The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.”—2 Chronicles 36:21, *New International Version*.

Whether intentionally or not, the translators of the *NIV* have arranged the sentence structure of verse 21 so that it appears that the seventy years are not in any way connected to the *desolation* of the land of Judah. Incidentally, a literal word-for-word translation of 2 Chronicles 36:21 is provided by the publishers of the *New International Version* in the *Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament* (John R. Kohlenberger III, Zondervan Publishing, 1987). Shown below, each word or hyphenated word-group corresponds to an original Hebrew word, with the words arranged so that they read from left to right:

“**to-fulfill** | word-of | Yahweh | by-mouth-of | Jeremiah | until | she-enjoyed | the-land | Sabbaths-of-her | all-of | days-of | to-be-desolate | she-rested | **to-complete** | seventy | year.”

Please note the word translated by the *NIV* as “to-complete.” It is the Hebrew word *lemâlê*, comprised of the inseparable preposition *le* followed by *mâlê*, which literally means “to fill” or “to be full of.” Strong’s *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* also defines the word, when used in this context (i.e., as an infinitive verb form), as “accomplish,” “satisfy,” or “fulfill.”

Interestingly, the *NIV* translates the identical word, *lemâlê*, as “to-fulfill” at the beginning of the *very same* verse where it later translates it as “to-complete.” In comparison, most other Bibles translate both occurrences of *lemâlê* in verse 21 as “to fulfill.” Is it possible that the translators of the *NIV* chose the rendering “to-complete” to give the reader the impression that the seventy years were already in progress?

Possibly. But, the significant word here is not the verb “complete,” but rather, the preposition “to,” which, when modifying a verb, literally means “with the resultant condition of.” Under no circumstance can it be translated “until,” as done by the *New International Version*. **The word-for-word interlinear translation reveals that the land laid desolate with the resultant condition of seventy years being fulfilled.** However, if, as critics claim, the seventy years had already begun to be fulfilled several years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, and if the desolation of the land was not in any way connected to the fulfillment of the seventy years, its mention would be completely meaningless. **The desolation of the land could not add to the fulfillment of the prophecy if it was already being fulfilled (since this would require that all criteria for fulfillment had already been met). Thus, 2 Chronicles 36:21 can mean one thing only—that the seventy years of devastation began after Jerusalem’s destruction.**

A few other Bibles translate 2 Chronicles 36:21 in a manner similar to the *NIV*. Among these are the *New American Standard Bible*, the *New English Bible*, and *The Bible in Basic English*. Despite their chosen rendition, the translators of the *New American Standard Bible* evidently recognized the importance of preserving the *true* meaning of this verse, as shown by the included footnote:

“to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath¹ until seventy years were complete.

Footnote: ¹**Lit to fulfill seventy years**”

While “to complete” is certainly a *possible* translation of *lemâlê*, most Bible translations have rendered it as “to fulfill” as shown below:

“to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, **to fulfil** seventy years.”—*Revised Standard Version*.

“to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, **to fulfill** seventy years.”—*New Revised Standard Version*.

“To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, **to fulfil** threescore and ten years.”—*King James Version*.

“to fulfil the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath, **to fulfil** seventy years.”—*Darby Translation*.

“This was to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths; for as long as it lay desolate it had a Sabbath-rest, **fulfilling** seventy years.”—*The Modern Language Bible: The New Berkeley Version in Modern English*.

“to fulfil the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths: for as long as it lay desolate it kept sabbath, **to fulfil** threescore and ten years.”—*American Standard Version*.

“to fulfil Jehovah’s word by the mouth of Jeremiah, till the country had paid up its sabbaths: all the time of its desolation it kept sabbath, **filling out** seventy years.”—*The Bible in Living English*.

The following Bibles translate 2 Chronicles 36:21 more uniquely, but preserve the intended meaning:

“All this was to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah: “Until the land has retrieved its lost sabbaths, during all the time it lies waste it shall have rest **while** seventy years are fulfilled.””—*The New American Bible*.

“Thus the word of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah came true, that the land must rest **for** seventy years to make up for the years when the people refused to observe the Sabbath.”—*The Living Bible* (paraphrased).

“in order to fulfill the word of Jehovah in the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths; all the days of the desolation it kept the sabbath, **to the full measure of** seventy years.”—*Green’s Literal Translation*.

“to fulfil the word of Jehovah in the mouth of Jeremiah, till the land hath enjoyed its sabbaths; all the days of the desolation it kept sabbath—**to the fulness of** seventy years.”—*Young’s Literal Translation*.

The *Awake!* of August 8, 1980 (p. 19) correctly points out that “although the Bible does not depend on Josephus, or any secular historian, for verification of what it says, nevertheless an appreciation of how the Bible has proved true in the past might well encourage objective persons to consider closely what it says for our day.”

Thus, we'll do well to consider two separate accounts by Jewish historian Josephus, which corroborate the Biblical account, showing that the seventy years commenced *after* the complete fall of Jerusalem:

“But the King of Babylon . . . placed no other nation in their country. **By which means all Judea, and Jerusalem, and the temple, continued to be a desert for seventy years.**”—*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, Chapter IX, Verse 9.

“he [Nebuchadnezzar] . . . set our temple that was at Jerusalem on fire; nay, and **removed our people entirely out of their own country**, and transferred them to Babylon; **when it so happened that our city was desolate during the interval of seventy years.**”—*Against Apion*, Book I, Chapter 19. (See appendix article: [Josephus: Seventy or Fifty Years?](#) on page 39.)

Second-century (C.E.) historian, Theophilus of Antioch, also attests that the seventy years began *following* the destruction of the temple:

“He transferred the people of the Jews to Babylon, and **destroyed the temple** which Solomon had built. And **in the Babylonian banishment the people passed 70 years.**”—*Theophilus to Autolytus*, Book I, Chapter XXV.

And, Hippolytus of Rome (170-236 C.E.) records:

“When the **whole people, then, was transported, and the city made desolate, and the sanctuary destroyed**, that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled which He spake by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “**The sanctuary shall be desolate seventy years.**”—*On Daniel*, Chapter I.

Referring to the words at 2 Chronicles 36:21, a well-known critic of Jehovah's Witnesses has gone on the record admitting that, “these words *can* imply that the land was desolated for exactly seventy years.” To the contrary, however, he reasons that they *don't* imply this (and then [incorrectly applies Ezekiel 33:24](#) in support of his view).

The word-for-word interlinear translation of 2 Chronicles 36:21, as well as numerous supporting Bible translations and the above historical testimony, affirm that *following the destruction of Jerusalem*, the Jews spent a *full seventy years* in Babylonian captivity while the land comprising Judah laid *completely desolate*, “without an inhabitant.”

7) Do the words at Zechariah 1:7, 12 indicate that by 519 B.C.E. the seventy years of desolation had not yet been fulfilled? If so, might this suggest that the seventy-year period began in or around 589 B.C.E.?

At Zechariah 1:7 we read:

“On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, that is, the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of Jehovah occurred to Zechariah the son of Berechiah the son of Iddo the prophet.”

Using 539 B.C.E. as a pivotal date establishes the “twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month” of the “second year of Darius” as February 9, 519 B.C.E. on the Gregorian calendar. It should be noted that the Darius spoken of at Zechariah 1:7 is the Persian king *Darius I* (also known as *Darius the Great*, or *Darius Hystaspes*), and not *Darius the Mede* (“the son of Ahasuerus of the seed of the Medes.”—Daniel 9:1) who took administrative control of Babylon following its conquest by Cyrus the Great.

Zechariah continues in verse 12:

“So the angel of Jehovah answered and said: ‘O Jehovah of armies, how long will you yourself not show mercy to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah, whom you have denounced these seventy years?’”

From the angel's use of the words “*these* seventy years” (*New World Translation*), it might appear to some that toward the conclusion of the seventy years the angel is asking Jehovah how much longer Jerusalem must lie desolate. (Compare with “*those* seventy years” as used by the following translations: *Amplified Bible*, *Living Bible*, *King James Version*, *Modern King James Version*, *Darby Version*, and *Green's Literal Translation*.) Those who recognize and admit that the Biblical evidence indicates that the seventy years of desolation commenced *after* the destruction of Jerusalem, but who are unable to reconcile the twenty or so missing years (according to presently-accepted secular chronology), have advanced the theory that the “seventy years” ran up to the completion of the reconstructed temple in Jerusalem. Somehow, they reason that up until this time the land of Judah was still considered “desolate.”

This, of course, was not the case. At Jeremiah 29:10, Jehovah reassured the Jewish exiles that *after* seventy (not forty-eight or fifty) years had been fulfilled [at Babylon](#), they would be permitted to return to their homeland:

“For this is what Jehovah has said, ‘In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at Babylon I shall turn my attention to you people, and I will establish toward you my good word in bringing you back to this place.’”

The Bible elsewhere reports that the seventy years ran “until the royalty of Persia began to reign” (2 Chronicles 36:20). Cyrus' decree, made in “the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia,” (Ezra 1:1-4) or 538/7 B.C.E., released the Jews from servitude to Babylon, permitting them to return to Judah to rebuild their cities. Thus, in 537 B.C.E., a total of 49,897 Jews made the expedition back to their homeland (Ezra 2:64), and “when the seventh month arrived the sons of Israel were in [their] cities.”—Ezra 3:1.

Yes, the fact that the Persian king Darius I is ruling at this time, as stated in Zechariah 1:7, establishes that the seventy years ended as much as twenty years earlier, when, in the first year of Darius the Mede, Daniel correctly discerned that their completion was approaching.—Daniel 9:2.

To suggest that the seventy year period ran from 589 B.C.E. to 519 B.C.E. (or 587/6 B.C.E. to 516 B.C.E.), whether speaking in terms of servitude *or* desolation, or both, is completely without foundation, and contradicts both Scripture *and* well-established history. This subject is discussed further, with details as to what the angel was speaking of, in [Chapter 8: Mercy to the Persecuted But Judgment to the Persecutors](#) of the Watchtower Society publication *Paradise Restored To Mankind - By Theocracy!*, pp. 130-3 on page 67).

8) Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E., but the Jewish captives did not return to their homeland until 537 B.C.E. Therefore, how could it be said that the Jews served “the king of Babylon” for seventy years if the king of Babylon was conquered two years earlier?

At Ezra 1:1-3 we read that it was in the first year of Cyrus that the decree was issued allowing the Jews to return to their homeland:

“**And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia**, that Jehovah's word from the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Jehovah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia so that he caused a cry to pass through all his realm, and also in writing, saying:

“This is what Cyrus the king of Persia has said, ‘All the kingdoms of the earth Jehovah the God of the heavens has given me, and he himself has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, may his God prove to be with him. So let him

go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of Jehovah the God of Israel—he is the [true] God—which was in Jerusalem.”—Ezra 1:1-3, *NWT* (see also 2 Chronicles 36:22-23).

Some critics have suggested that Jehovah's Witnesses have concocted an unorthodox and dishonest explanation in asserting that the seventy years of desolation ended in 537 B.C.E. Is this claim substantiated?

No. At Ezra 1:1, reference is made to “the first year of Cyrus,” not “the year Cyrus became king” (or *accession* year), so he was speaking of the first *regnal* year of Cyrus, which cuneiform documentation places in 538/537 B.C.E. Jewish historian Josephus corroborates by referring to “the first year of the *reign* of Cyrus.”—*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, Chapter I.

This point is generally agreed upon by historians. For instance, the *Handbook of Bible Chronology* by Jack Finegan (Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 170, states:

“The biblical references to the first year of Cyrus when he made the proclamation which allowed the Jewish exiles to return from Babylon to Jerusalem (II Ch 36:22f.; Ezr 1:1f.) are presumably stated in terms of his reign in Babylon since they deal with an event in that city. According to the cuneiform evidence and the Babylonian calendar, Babylon fell on Tashritu 16 = Oct 12, 539 B.C., and Cyrus entered the city two and one-half weeks later on Arahsamnu 3 = Oct 29. His Babylonian regnal years began, therefore, as shown in Table 77. Accordingly his first year, in which he made the proclamation, was 538/537 B.C.”

TABLE 77. BABYLONIAN REGNAL YEARS OF CYRUS
AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS REIGN

Accession	539/538
Year 1	538/537
Year 2	537/536

The Watchtower of May 1, 1952, pp. 271-2 further observes:

“In late years several cuneiform tablets have been discovered pertaining to the fall of Babylon which peg both Biblical and secular historic dates. The one tablet known as the “Nabunaid Chronicle” gives the date for the fall of Babylon which specialists have ascertained as being October 12-13, 539 B.C., Julian Calendar, or October 6-7, 539 B.C., according to our present Gregorian Calendar. This tablet also says that Cyrus made his triumphant entry into Babylon 16 days after its fall to his army. Thus his *accession* year commenced in October, 539 B.C. However, in another cuneiform tablet called “Strassmaier, *Cyrus* No. 11” Cyrus' first *regnal* year is mentioned and was determined to have begun March 17-18, 538 B.C., and to have concluded March 4-5, 537 B.C. It was in this first *regnal* year of Cyrus that he issued his decree to permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. (Ezra 1:1) The decree may have been made in late 538 B.C. or before March 4-5, 537 B.C.

In either case this would have given sufficient time for the large party of 49,897 Jews to organize their expedition and to make their long four-month journey from Babylon to Jerusalem to get there by September 29-30, 537 B.C., the first of the seventh Jewish month, to build their altar to Jehovah as recorded at Ezra 3:1-3. Inasmuch as September 29-30, 537 B.C., officially ends the seventy years of desolation as recorded at 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21, so the beginning of the desolation of the land must have officially begun to be counted after September 21-22, 607 B.C., the first of the seventh Jewish month in 607 B.C., which is the beginning point for the counting of the 2,520 years.”

The account is summarized nicely by Werner Keller in his book *The Bible As History*, p. 352:

“In any case it was a risky business to leave this wealthy country of Babylon, where they had established themselves and where most of them had grown up, and to set out on the difficult road back to the ruins of a ravaged land. Despite this, **in the spring of 537 B.C.**, after long preparations a lengthy caravan set out on the trail toward the old homeland. . . . Almost 800 miles have to be covered between Babylon and distant Jerusalem, with the clouds of dust churned up by the caravan as a faithful companion throughout the whole journey.”

Until their release in 537 B.C.E., for the entire duration that the Jewish exiles were held captive in Babylon, it could rightly be said that they were *servicing the king of Babylon*. This is expanded upon in paragraph 10 of an article entitled “*The ‘Cup’ That All Nations Must Drink at God’s Hand*” that appeared in the September 15, 1979 issue of *The Watchtower*, p. 24:

“It is true that he [Cyrus] conquered Gentile Babylon in 539 B.C.E., or about two years before the “seventy years” of desolation of the land of Judah ran out. He proclaimed himself “king of Babylon” and at first did not alter the policy of the Babylonian dynasty of King Nebuchadnezzar. Thus the nations subjugated by Nebuchadnezzar continued to serve “the king of Babylon” 70 years.”

Are Jehovah’s Witnesses justified in making this claim? Yes, for the Bible tells us that after Cyrus II conquered Babylon, Darius the Mede *became* “king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans,” (Daniel 5:31, 9:1) and shortly thereafter, Cyrus established his kingship over all of Babylon, even being referred to as “Cyrus the king of Babylon” at Ezra 5:13. A contemporary inscription on a clay barrel confirms the accuracy of the Biblical account:

“All the inhabitants of Babylon as well as the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors (included), bowed to him (Cyrus) and kissed his feet, jubilant that **he (had received) the kingship** . . . I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, **king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad.**”—*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, James B. Pritchard, p.316.

However, does that fact that Jeremiah 27:7 indicates that the nations would serve “him [Nebuchadnezzar], his son, and his grandson” mean that the seventy years of servitude would not include Cyrus as “king of Babylon”?

In fulfillment of Jeremiah 27:7, the exiled Jews did in fact *literally* serve Nebuchadnezzar’s son (Evil-merodach) and Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson (co-regent Belshazzar, whose mother was reportedly Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter, Nitocris). However, the captive Jews also served other kings of Babylon, including Neriglissar, Labashi-Marduk and Nabonidus, none of whom bore any blood relation to Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, the words at Jeremiah 27:7, though indisputably true, were obviously not meant to be an all-encompassing list of rulers whom the Jews would serve during the seventy years. Therefore, the Jews continued to serve the king of Babylon, which included Cyrus, until their official release initiated by Cyrus’ decree described at Ezra 1:1:

“And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, **that Jehovah’s word from the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished**, Jehovah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia so that he caused a cry to pass through all his realm.”—Ezra 1:1 (see also 2 Chronicles 36:22).

The highlighted portion of the above-quoted verse serves as unimpeachable evidence that “Jehovah’s word from the mouth of Jeremiah” had not yet been accomplished, even by the “first year of Cyrus,” proving conclusively that the conquest of Babylon by Persia was *not* the determining factor in fulfilling Jeremiah’s prophecy. Therefore, the Jewish nation continued to serve the king of Babylon until their release from captivity in 537 B.C.E., resulting in the reoccupation of the land of Judah and the end of the desolation of the land.

9) In what manner did Jehovah “call to account against the king of Babylon and . . . against the land of the Chaldeans . . . their error” mentioned at Jeremiah 25:12?

This scripture reads in its entirety: “‘And it must occur that **when seventy years have been fulfilled** I shall call to account against the king of Babylon and against that nation,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘their error, even against the land of the Chaldeans, **and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite.**’”—Jeremiah 25:12, *New World Translation*.

As explained in the [previous article](#), Cyrus the Great proclaimed himself “king of Babylon” and at first did not alter the policy of the Babylonian dynasty of King Nebuchadnezzar of keeping the captives. Thus the nations subjugated by Nebuchadnezzar continued to serve “the king of Babylon” seventy years. Only in the seventieth year of the desolation of Judah did Cyrus the Great release the exiled Jews from their direct servitude to the king of Babylon and let them return home to rebuild their desolated country and their national capital Jerusalem and its temple. (Ezra 1:1 through 3:2) In this way Jehovah called to the account of the Babylonians “their error” that they had committed against the God of Israel.—Jeremiah 25:12.

But does this mean that Jehovah held Babylon to account for executing his judgment against his people? Knowing what “their error” was will make it clear that that is not the case. The indications are that Nebuchadnezzar was extremely religious, building and beautifying the temples of numerous Babylonian deities. Particularly was he devoted to the worship of Marduk (or Merodach), the chief god of Babylon and likely a deified Nimrod. To him Nebuchadnezzar gave credit for his military victories. Trophies of war, **including the sacred vessels of Jehovah’s temple**, appear to have been deposited in the temple of Marduk. (Ezra 1:7; 5:14) Says an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar: “For thy glory, O exalted MERODACH a house have I made. . . . May it receive within itself the abundant tribute of the Kings of nations and of all peoples!”—*Records of the Past: Assyrian and Egyptian Monuments*, London, 1875, Vol. V, p. 135. And it was these trophies of war from Jehovah’s temple that were used by Belshazzar during his drunken party on the night of the Medo-Persian invasion.—Daniel 5:2-4.

Another “error” committed by Nebuchadnezzar was his golden image erected in the Plain of Dura, which may have been dedicated to Marduk. This image was designed to promote religious unity in the empire, including the exiled Jews to pressure them into rejecting Jehovah as the most high God. This led to the persecution of three of them, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.—Daniel 3.

Jehovah therefore declared:

“Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has eaten me up; he has thrown me into confusion. He has **set me as an empty vessel**. He has swallowed me down like a big snake; **he has filled his abdomen with my pleasant things**. He has rinsed me away. . . . Here I am conducting your legal case, and I shall certainly execute vengeance for you. And I will dry up her sea, and I will make her wells dry. And Babylon must become piles of stones, the lair of jackals, an object of astonishment and something to whistle at, without an inhabitant.”—Jeremiah 51:34, 36, 37, NWT (see also verse 39 and Isaiah 13:18-22).

Thus, as declared in Jeremiah 25:12, Jehovah’s judicial decision was to “make it desolate wastes to time indefinite” after the conclusion of the seventy years. **When though, did this actually occur?** As can be seen, **Cyrus did not desolate Babylon when he conquered it. No, Babylon still existed for some time, but from 539 B.C.E. its glory began to fade as the city declined.** While some critics try to prove that this verse applies to 539 B.C.E. only, the facts prove otherwise. Consider the following, in chronological order:

1. Twice it revolted against the Persian emperor Darius I (Hystaspis), and on the second occasion it was dismantled.
2. A partially restored city rebelled against Persian emperor Xerxes I and was plundered.

3. Alexander the Great intended to make Babylon his capital, but he suddenly died in 323 B.C.E.
4. Seleucus I Nicator conquered the city in 312 B.C.E. and transported much of its material to the banks of the Tigris for use in building his new capital of Seleucia.
5. A settlement of Jews remained in early Christian times, giving the apostle Peter reason to visit Babylon, as noted in his letter.—1 Peter 5:13.
6. Cuneiform texts found there show that Babylon's temple of Bel existed as late as 75 C.E.
7. About the fourth century C.E., as reported by Jerome, the city appears to have passed out of existence. It became nothing more than "piles of stones."—Jeremiah 51:37.

Therefore, notwithstanding some recent, discontinued efforts at rebuilding parts of it, the desolate condition of Babylon today testifies to the fulfillment of Jeremiah 25:12. This verse could be read and understood the most naturally as:

“And it must occur that **when seventy years have been fulfilled** [in 537 B.C.E.] I shall call to account [in 537 B.C.E.] against the king of Babylon [represented by Cyrus] and against that nation,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘their error, even against the land of the Chaldeans, **and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite** [as fulfilled centuries after 537 B.C.E.]’—Jeremiah 25:12, *New World Translation*.

If it was fulfilled in 539 B.C.E., notice what happens:

“And it must occur that **when seventy years have been fulfilled** [in 539 B.C.E., seventy years prior being 609 B.C.E.] I shall call to account [in 539 B.C.E.] against the king of Babylon and against that nation,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘their error, even against the land of the Chaldeans, **and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite** [unfulfilled as Cyrus used Babylon as his capital].’—Jeremiah 25:12, *New World Translation*.

Since the fall of Babylon and the end of the Babylonian exile are not synchronized as the later ended in Cyrus' first regnal year, 539 B.C.E. does not fit, especially since Babylon was used as a capital city. Interestingly, in the secular chronology based on Ptolemy's canon, Nebuchadnezzar's first regnal year was 605 B.C.E., which is four years after the supposed starting year 609 B.C.E.! These glaring discrepancies force 539 B.C.E. out of Jeremiah 25:12, as only 537 B.C.E. can be referred to. (See appendix article: [The Babylonian Exile of the Jews – The Bible Versus the Traditional Chronology](#) by Rolf Furuli on page 40.)

Indeed, Jeremiah 25:12 most emphatically applies to the fulfillment of desolation against Babylon after her fall in 539 B.C.E. and not on her fall.

(Adapted from: The Watchtower. November 1, 1965, pp. 662-3, September 15, 1979, p. 23 and Insight on the Scriptures, Volume 1, pp. 237, 482)

[See page 60 for a satellite photograph of Babylon today.]

10) The book “Revelation - Its Grand Climax at Hand” (published by the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society) states in the footnote on p. 105 that “research made it necessary to adjust B.C. 606 to 607 B.C.E.” Critics allege that there was no such “research” and that there is “no evidence whatsoever for this new date.” Is this true?

The footnote on p. 105 of *Revelation - Its Grand Climax at Hand* reads: “Providentially, those Bible Students had not realized that there is no zero year between “B.C.” and “A.D.” Later, when research made it necessary to adjust B.C. 606 to 607 B.C.E., the zero year was also eliminated, so that the prediction held good at “A.D. 1914.”—See *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, published by the Watch Tower Society in 1943, page 239.”

What "research" made it necessary to adjust the date 606 B.C.E. to 607 B.C.E.?

The Watchtower of February 1, 1955, states on p. 94: "Jehovah's witnesses from 1877 up to and including the publishing of *The Truth Shall Make You Free*" of 1943 considered 536 B.C. as the year for the return of the Jews to Palestine, basing their calculations for the fall of Babylon on secular histories that were inaccurate, not up to date on archaeological evidences. This meant that Jeremiah's seventy years of desolation for Jerusalem ran back from 536 B.C. to 606 B.C., instead of more correctly as now known from 537 B.C. to 607 B.C. (2 Chron. 36:21; Jer. 25:12; Zec. 1:12)"

A more detailed account of this research was presented in the *Watchtower* of May 1, 1952, pp. 271-2:

²¹ At this point some will inquire why Charles T. Russell in 1877 used the date 606 B.C. for the fall of Jerusalem whereas *The Watchtower* of late years has been using 607 B.C. This is because, in the light of modern scholarship, two slight errors were discovered to have been made which cancel each other out and make for the same result, namely, 1914. Concerning the first error, Russell and others considered 1 B.C. to A.D. 1 as being two years whereas in fact this is only one year because, as has been said above, there is no "zero" year in the B.C.-A.D. system for counting years. "The Christian era began, not with no year, but with a 1st year."—*The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 102.

²² The second error had to do with not beginning the count of the 2,520 years at the right point in view of historic facts and circumstances. Almost all early Bible chronology ties in with secular history at the year 539 B.C., in which year the fall of Babylon to Darius and Cyrus of the Medes and the Persians occurred. In late years several cuneiform tablets have been discovered pertaining to the fall of Babylon which peg both Biblical and secular historic dates. The one tablet known as the "Nabunaid Chronicle" gives the date for the fall of Babylon which specialists have ascertained as being October 12-13, 539 B.C., Julian Calendar, or October 6-7, 539 B.C., according to our present Gregorian Calendar. This tablet also says that Cyrus made his triumphant entry into Babylon 16 days after its fall to his army. Thus his *accession year* commenced in October, 539 B.C. However, in another cuneiform tablet called "Strassmaier, *Cyrus* No. 11" Cyrus' first *regnal year* is mentioned and was determined to have begun March 17-18, 538 B.C., and to have concluded March 4-5, 537 B.C. It was in this first *regnal year* of Cyrus that he issued his decree to permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. (Ezra 1:1) The decree may have been made in late 538 B.C. or before March 4-5, 537 B.C.

²³ In either case this would have given sufficient time for the large party of 49,897 Jews to organize their expedition and to make their long four-month journey from Babylon to Jerusalem to get there by September 29-30, 537 B.C., the first of the seventh Jewish month, to build their altar to Jehovah as recorded at Ezra 3:1-3. Inasmuch as September 29-30, 537 B.C., officially ends the seventy years of desolation as recorded at 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21, so the beginning of the desolation of the land must have officially begun to be counted after September 21-22, 607 B.C., the first of the seventh Jewish month in 607 B.C., which is the beginning point for the counting of the 2,520 years.

As one can plainly see, the *Revelation Climax* book is truthful in stating that "research made it necessary to adjust B.C. 606 to 607 B.C.E." The false claim advanced by apostates amounts to nothing more than a feeble attempt to "speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves."—Acts 20:30.

11) Are Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of twisting the scriptures found at Daniel 1:1 and Daniel 2:1 to support their fundamental belief regarding 1914?

At Daniel 1:1 we read the following:

“In the third year of the kingship of Jehoiakim the king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and proceeded to lay siege to it.”

Referring to a later period, Daniel 2:1 reads:

“And in the second year of the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams; and his spirit began to feel agitated, and his very sleep was made to be something beyond him.”

How do Jehovah's Witnesses interpret these scriptures?

With regards to “the third year of the kingship of Jehoiakim” referred to at Daniel 1:1, the following comments are offered:

“Second Kings 24:1 shows that Nebuchadnezzar brought pressure upon the Judean king “and so Jehoiakim became his servant [or vassal] for three years. However, he [Jehoiakim] turned back and rebelled against him [Nebuchadnezzar].” **Evidently it is to this third year of Jehoiakim as a vassal king under Babylon that Daniel refers at Daniel 1:1.**”—*Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 1, p. 1269.

“This “third year” of vassalage to Babylon would be the eleventh year of Jehoiakim’s entire reign.”—*The Watchtower*, September 15, 1964, p. 637.

And, the “second year” of Nebuchadnezzar mentioned at Daniel 2:1, is interpreted as follows:

“The book of Daniel states that it was in “the second year” of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingship (**probably counting from the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. and therefore actually referring to his 20th regnal year**) that Nebuchadnezzar had the dream about the golden-headed image. (Da 2:1)”—*Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 2, p. 481.

“In the second year after Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E., **which would be the twentieth year of his kingship over Babylon** but the second year of his exercise of world domination, he had a dream that was a prophecy from God. (Dan. 2:1)”—*The Watchtower*, December 15, 1964, p. 756.

How can Jehovah's Witnesses say these things, especially when the Scriptures appear to be so clear on the matter? Is it not a deliberate distortion of God's Word to suggest that these scriptures do not mean what they say?

Daniel 1:1

The Bible encyclopedia, *Insight on the Scriptures*, summarizes the Witnesses' position on Daniel 1:1 well:

“Second Kings 24:1 shows that Nebuchadnezzar brought pressure upon the Judean king “and so Jehoiakim became his servant [or vassal] for three years. However, he [Jehoiakim] turned back and rebelled against him [Nebuchadnezzar].” Evidently it is to this third year of Jehoiakim as a vassal king under Babylon that Daniel refers at Daniel 1:1. It could not be Jehoiakim’s third year of his 11-year reign over Judah, for at that time Jehoiakim was a vassal, not to Babylon, but to Egypt’s Pharaoh Necho. It was not until Jehoiakim’s fourth year of rule over Judah that Nebuchadnezzar demolished Egyptian domination over Syria-Palestine by his victory at Carchemish (625 B.C.E. [apparently after Nisan]). (Jer 46:2) Since Jehoiakim’s revolt against Babylon led to his downfall after about 11 years on the throne, the beginning of his three-year vassalage to Babylon must have begun toward the end of his eighth year of rule, or early in 620 B.C.E.”—*Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 1, p. 1269.

Can this explanation be substantiated? A detailed examination of the Biblical and historical facts bears out that it can. However, let us first establish some of the surrounding details.

Critics of Jehovah's Witnesses often put forward the idea that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Judah and took captives in his accession year (605 B.C.E., according to secular chronology). By their reasoning, this enables them to suggest that the seventy years of servitude commenced at this time, even though, in actuality, this would amount to only 67 years. Some of these critics have gone on the record stating that the year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is not mentioned along with the "third year of Jehoiakim" at Daniel 1:1, because it was Nebuchadnezzar's accession year. Incidentally, this claim is false. Nebuchadnezzar ascended to the throne *following* the battle of Carchemish, which didn't occur until the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim. This is attested to by the Scriptures (Jeremiah 46:2), and is also supported by Jewish historian Josephus, and most modern-day historical references that deal with the subject. For example, the *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, by historian Jack Finegan (Princeton University, 1964), p. 200 states: "According to the contemporary prophet Jeremiah, the battle of Carchemish took place in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim of Judah." After a detailed examination of Jeremiah's claim, Finegan concludes on p. 201: "This was in fact in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim as stated in Jer 46:2."

But what about Jeremiah 25:1, where "the fourth year of Jehoiakim" is equated with the "first year of Nebuchadnezzar?" Finegan goes on to explain:

"In Hebrew the words are *hashshannah haroshniyt*. The phrase is not found elsewhere but we recognize, modifying the word "year," the feminine singular form of the adjective which can mean either "first" or "beginning." Since a related noun is used in the standard designation of an accession year, the phrase in Jer 25:1 probably also means the "beginning year," i.e., the accession year, of Nebuchadnezzar. Accepting this as the correct translation, the synchronism in Jer 25:1 is correct and in agreement with that in Jer 46:2. The fourth year of Jehoiakim included the battle of Carchemish and the accession of Nebuchadnezzar to the throne of Babylon."—*Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Jack Finegan, Princeton University, 1964, p. 202.

Thus, Jewish historian Josephus was correct in reporting that "in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, one whose name was Nebuchadnezzar *took* the government over the Babylonians." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, Chapter VI, Verse 1) The Bible confirms the testimony that Nebuchadnezzar did not defeat Egypt until the fourth year of Jehoiakim, up until which point Judah continued as a vassal to Egypt:

"This is what occurred as the word of Jehovah to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations: For Egypt, concerning the military force of Pharaoh Necho the king of Egypt, who happened to be by the river Euphrates at Carchemish, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon defeated **in the fourth year of Jehoiakim** the son of Josiah, the king of Judah."—Jeremiah 46:1-2.

The Biblical testimony on this subject does not end there. The book of Jeremiah contains "the words of Jeremiah . . . to whom the word of Jehovah occurred." (Jeremiah 1:1-2) These included Jeremiah's prophetic pronouncements against disobedient Judah, which began in the thirteenth year of Josiah, and continued down to "the completion of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, until Jerusalem went into exile in the fifth month." (Jeremiah 1:3) After some 23 years of continuous prophesying, specifically in the fourth and fifth years of Jehoiakim's reign, we read of the nature of Jeremiah's message at this time:

"Now it came about **in the fourth year of Jehoiakim** the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, that this word occurred to Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying: "Take for yourself a roll of a book, and you must write in it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and against Judah and against all the nations, since the day that I spoke to you, since the days of Josiah, clear down to this day. Perhaps those of the house of Judah will listen to all the calamity that I am thinking of doing to them, to the end that they may

return, each one from his bad way, and that I may actually forgive their error and their sin.”—Jeremiah 36:1-3.

“Now it came about **in the fifth year of Jehoiakim** the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, in the ninth month, that all the people in Jerusalem and all the people that were coming in from the cities of Judah into Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before Jehovah. . . . And against Jehoiakim the king of Judah you should say, ‘This is what Jehovah has said: “You yourself have burned up this roll, saying, ‘Why is it that you have written on it, saying: “**The king of Babylon will come without fail and will certainly bring this land to ruin** and cause man and beast to cease from it”?’”’—Jeremiah 36:9, 29.

The above scriptures suggest that by the “fifth year of Jehoiakim,” Nebuchadnezzar had not yet come up against Judah, for Jehoiakim confidently rejects the words of Jeremiah in disbelief, inasmuch as he burned up the roll upon which Jeremiah’s words were written.

Yet, some contend that statements made by Berossus, a Babylonian priest of Bel who lived more than 250 years after the fact, indicate that Nebuchadnezzar did in fact take Jewish captives in his accession year. Nevertheless, it has been observed that “many modern scholars have been inclined to distrust Berossus.” (*A Scheme of Babylonian Chronology*, Duncan Macnaughton, London, 1930, p. 2) Aside from the fact that there are no cuneiform tablets supporting Berossus’ alleged claim (whereas cuneiform documentation does exist for Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege against Judah in his 7th year^{fin1}), it is unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar took captives from Judah after the battle of Carchemish, as we are told that, although having defeated Egypt, “he was prevented from following up his advantage immediately because the death of his father in Babylon made it necessary for him to return home to be crowned.” (*Biblical Archaeology*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1979 edition, p. 177.) Along similar lines, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, by J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, adds that “The young Babylonian crown prince [Nebuchadnezzar] had to depart Syria speedily upon receiving word of the death of his father.” (p. 389)

Also, it is noteworthy that Jewish historian Josephus specifically reports that Nebuchadnezzar did *not* take Jewish captives in his accession year:

“Now in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, one whose name was Nebuchadnezzar . . . the king of Babylon passed over Euphrates, and took all Syria, as far as Pelusium, **excepting Judea.**”—*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, Chapter VI, Verse 1.

But even more telling is the *silence* of the Biblical record as to any captivity prior to the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar *when expressly dealing with the subject at Jeremiah 52:28-30*. Unquestionably, a book that so extensively details the history of the Jewish nation with such candor and honesty, would not be lacking in such details if they were historically factual.

Josephus explains that it was not until Jehoiakim refused to “pay his tribute” to the Babylonian king, in Jehoiakim’s *third year as a vassal king* (which was his eleventh year as king over the Hebrews, and Nebuchadnezzar’s seventh regnal year), that Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to lay siege to Jerusalem. (Daniel 1:1; 2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chronicles 36:5-7):

“But when Nebuchadnezzar had already reigned four years, which was the eighth of Jehoiakim’s government over the Hebrews, the king of Babylon made an expedition with mighty forces against the Jews, and required tribute of Jehoiakim, and threatened, on his refusal, to make war against him. He was affrighted at his threatening, and bought his peace with money, and brought the tribute he was ordered to bring for three years. But on the third year, upon hearing that the king of the Babylonians made an expedition against the Egyptians, he did not pay his tribute.”—*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, Chapter VI, Verses 1, 2.

It was a short time after *this* that Nebuchadnezzar took the first Jewish captives. It was expressly *because of Jehoiakim's rebellion* that Nebuchadnezzar took captives, for up to that point he had Jerusalem's full cooperation, as observed by historian G. Ernest Wright:

“Jehoiakim of Judah promptly submitted and remained loyal for a time before rebelling (II Kings 24:1).”—*Biblical Archaeology*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1979 edition, p. 177, 179.

Historian and chronologist Jack Finegan further expands:

“The purpose of Nebuchadnezzar now undoubtedly included punishment of the defection of Judah and re-establishment of his control there, and in the record of the seventh year we are told explicitly of an attack upon “the city of Judah” which must mean Jerusalem.”—*Light from the Ancient Past*, Princeton University, Second Printing, 1974, p. 222.

Josephus' account agrees with the Biblical record at Jeremiah 52:28-30, which specifically reports that Nebuchadnezzar took Jewish captives in his 7th year, 18th year and 23rd year. Critics may point out that Jeremiah 52:28-30 does not say that Nebuchadnezzar did *not* take captives in his accession year, however, the conclusive nature of verses 28 to 30 does not allow for this, as the highlighted portions demonstrate:

“These are the people whom Nebuchadnezzar took into exile: in the seventh year, three thousand and twenty-three Jews.

In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, from Jerusalem there were eight hundred and thirty-two souls.

In the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguard took Jews into exile, seven hundred and forty-five souls.

All the souls were four thousand and six hundred.”—Jeremiah 52:28-30.

While critics of Jehovah's Witnesses frequently put forward the theory that Nebuchadnezzar took Jewish captives in his accession year, so as to suggest that the “seventy years” commenced at this time, this is not the position generally taken by modern historians. For example, the following authoritative references support the understanding that the first Jewish captives were not taken until Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year:

A History of the Babylonians and Assyrians

by George Stephen Goodspeed, Professor of Ancient History, University of Chicago, 1927.

The Greatness That Was Babylon

H. W. F. Saggs, London University, 1962.

Archaeology and the Old Testament World

Dr. John Gray, King's College, University of Aberdeen, 1962.

Everyday Life in Babylonia and Assyria

H. W. F. Saggs, 1965.

Light from the Ancient Past

Jack Finegan, Princeton University, 1974.

Biblical Archaeology

G. Ernest Wright, Westminster, 1979.

Furthermore, it would be nonsensical to suggest that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and took captives in his accession year, and then didn't demand tribute (i.e., vassalage) from Jehoiakim for another four to five years. It was only after having already served faithfully as a tributary king under Nebuchadnezzar for three years, and then rebelling, that Nebuchadnezzar saw fit to punish Judah.

Interestingly, the verses immediately following Daniel 1:1 may provide the most convincing evidence that Daniel was not referring to the third year of Jehoiakim's kingship over Judah:

“In the third year of the kingship of Jehoiakim the king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and proceeded to lay siege to it. **In time Jehovah gave into his hand Jehoiakim** the king of Judah and a part of the utensils of the house of the [true] God, so that he brought them to the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and the utensils he brought to the treasure-house of his god.

Then the king said to Ashpenaz his chief court official to bring some of the sons of Israel and of the royal offspring and of the nobles, children in whom there was no defect at all, but good in appearance and having insight into all wisdom and being acquainted with knowledge, and having discernment of what is known, in whom also there was ability to stand in the palace of the king; and to teach them the writing and the tongue of the Chaldeans.”—Daniel 1:1-4.

Verse 2 relates that Jehovah gave Jehoiakim and “a part of the utensils” of the temple into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. This event certainly did not occur in Jehoiakim's third year over Judah, as 2 Kings 23:36 and 2 Chronicles 36:5 tell us that Jehoiakim reigned in Jerusalem for a total of eleven years. Those who attempt to equate this event (at Daniel 1:2) with the tributary submission mentioned at 2 Kings 24:1 seem to ignore the fact that a siege was not necessary to persuade Jehoiakim to submit; the siege is mentioned only in connection with Jehoiakim's rebellion *after having served faithfully for three years*. Thus, Jehoiakim's being given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar did not occur in his third year over Judah, but rather, refers to the capture and death of Jehoiakim in his eleventh year, after which, 2 Kings 24:8-17 reports, Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, reigned for only three months in Jerusalem before himself being taken captive to Babylon, along with “the princes and all the valiant, mighty men,” which presumably included Daniel himself.

It is these “princes” and “valiant men,” mentioned at 2 Kings 24:12-14 as being taken captive in the *eighth year* of Nebuchadnezzar, that Daniel 1:3 refers to as “royal offspring” and “nobles.” **The “princes” (or “royal offspring”) could not have been taken captive more than once, indicating that the events described at Daniel 1:1-3 are the same as those described at 2 Kings 24:12-16** (where it is established that “*all* the princes and *all* the valiant, mighty men” were taken captive).

Also, please note that verse 3 begins with the adverb “then” (*NWT, NIV, NKJV*; other translations use “and,” meaning “together with or along with”) indicating that the events described in this verse occurred at the time of, or following, the events mentioned in the previous verse. Therefore, the exiles mentioned at Daniel 1:3 were brought to Babylon *after* Jehoiakim was given into Nebuchadnezzar's hand, in the eleventh year of his reign over Judah.

When these details are not overlooked, it becomes increasingly obvious that Daniel 1:1-3 is nothing more than a condensed account of 2 Kings 24:1-17 and 2 Chronicles 36:5-10. It is not unusual that Daniel omits mention of Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, since his reign lasted a mere three months before he was whisked away to Babylon along with the other “royal offspring.” The fact that this three month reign was considered insignificant so far as Bible prophecy is concerned is seen in the fact that Jeremiah 36:30 foretells that Jehoiakim would “come to have no one sitting upon the throne of David.” True to this prophecy, during the continuing siege against Jerusalem, Jehoiachin was removed from the throne by Nebuchadnezzar shortly after his accession.

In light of the above evidence establishing that Daniel was not referring to Jehoiakim's third year of his eleven-year kingship over Judah, is it reasonable to suggest that he was stating the year of Jehoiakim's reign as a tributary king under Nebuchadnezzar?

Most definitely. As already touched upon, the Bible shows that the "siege" referred to at Daniel 1:1 is a parallel account to that described at 2 Kings 24:1-2, which plainly states that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Judah after Jehoiakim rebelled upon completing *three years* of tributary kingship to the Babylonian king:

"In his days Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and so Jehoiakim became his servant for three years. However, he turned back and rebelled against him. And Jehovah began to send against him marauder bands of Chaldeans and marauder bands of Syrians and marauder bands of Moabites and marauder bands of the sons of Ammon, and he kept sending them against Judah to destroy it."—2 Kings 24:1-2.

Additionally, becoming a vassal to a foreign king was a significant political event, which could easily change the terms by which a king's reign was reckoned. Historian and chronologist Jack Finegan presents details to that effect:

"At that time and in connection with that submission Jehoiakim may very well have accepted the Babylonian calendar. As late as the eighteenth year of Josiah the old Israelite year was still in use and the regnal year began in the fall, and the same was probably true up to the present point in the reign of Jehoiakim. But with the acceptance of the Babylonian calendar the regnal year would begin in the spring."—*Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Princeton University, 1964, pp. 202-3.

So, instead of trying to reconcile the king's past reign under the new Babylonian calendar, which would introduce a seven-month shift (and confusion) into the equation, the Jews may have kept a separate count of Jehoiakim's kingship under Nebuchadnezzar.

In summary, as the preceding evidence demonstrates, the "third year of the kingship of Jehoiakim," referred to at Daniel 1:1 cannot be referring to his third year over Judah, and therefore, is presumably expressed in terms of Jehoiakim's *tributary kingship*.

Daniel 2:1

Once it has been established that Daniel 1:1 refers to the third year of Jehoiakim's tributary kingship under Nebuchadnezzar, the meaning of Daniel 2:1 is immediately affected, for Daniel would not have been brought to Babylon until Nebuchadnezzar's eighth regnal year, and therefore could not stand before the king in his "second year."

Despite this foregone conclusion, there is further evidence supporting this position, which in turn, corroborates the evidence put forth regarding Daniel 1:1.

Daniel 1:3-5, 18 demonstrates that Daniel 2:1 cannot be referring to Nebuchadnezzar's second regnal year:

"Then the king said to Ashpenaz his chief court official to bring some of the sons of Israel and of the royal offspring and of the nobles, children in whom there was no defect at all, but good in appearance and having insight into all wisdom and being acquainted with knowledge, and having discernment of what is known, in whom also there was ability to stand in the palace of the king; and **to teach them the writing and the tongue of the Chaldeans**. Furthermore, to them the king appointed a daily allowance from the delicacies of the king and from his drinking wine, even to nourish them **for three years, that at the end of these** they might stand before the king. . . . And **at the end of the days that the king had**

said to bring them in, the principal court official also proceeded to bring them in before Nebuchadnezzar.”—Daniel 1:3-5, 18.

Yes, during a three-year educational program Daniel and his companions were to learn the “the writing and the tongue of the Chaldeans.” This would be a necessary step, since Jehovah foretold that the “house of Israel” would become subject to a nation “whose language [they] do not know, and [they] cannot hear [understandingly] what they speak.” (Jeremiah 5:15) It would not have been until after the completion of this three-year educational program, “at the end of the days that the king had said to bring them in,” (Daniel 1:18) that Daniel could likely serve in any useful capacity before the king, and even after which, a reasonable amount of time would have to have passed before he came to be recognized as one of the “wise men” of Babylon eligible for death at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 2:12, 13) Therefore, if Daniel 2:1 was in fact referring to Nebuchadnezzar’s second *regnal* year, the testimony at Daniel 1:3-5, 18 could not be true.

However, at least one critic has asserted that Nebuchadnezzar’s accession year must be added to the “second year” mentioned at Daniel 2:1 to compensate for the apparent discrepancy. However, there are at least two problems with this point of view.

According to cuneiform documentation, Nebuchadnezzar’s accession year began in September, and therefore was only one half-year in duration, completing in the Babylonian month of Nisanu (or March/April of the following year on our calendar). Secondly, when Daniel says “in the second year of the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar” he is indicating that Nebuchadnezzar’s second regnal year had not yet completed. Even when Nebuchadnezzar’s accession year is *included*, the entire time period covered *could* amount to as little as a year-and-a-half. On the other hand, had the dream occurred at the *end* of his second year, *which it does not state*, this would still only amount to a *maximum* of two-and-a-half years, whereas Daniel chapter 1 specifically reports that Daniel and his companions were brought before the king *after* a period of three years had elapsed.

It is apparently because of this that some Hebrew scholars have suggested that the rendition of Daniel 2:1 should read “twelfth year” instead of “second year,” as born out in the footnote on Daniel 2:1 in *Biblia Hebraica*, by Rudolf Kittel, ninth edition of 1954, and in the footnote in *The Cross-Reference Bible*, Variorum Edition, by Harold E. Monser, B.A., edition of 1910. (For further details, see pp. 172-3 of the Watchtower Society publication “*Babylon the Great Has Fallen!*” *God’s Kingdom Rules!*)

In the final analysis, though, this “second year” most likely refers to the second year of Nebuchadnezzar following the destruction of Jerusalem, which would be the twentieth year of his reign over Babylon. Two years prior to this, the dethronement of Zedekiah took place, completely abolishing the Judean kingship with “no one sitting on the throne of David” (Jeremiah 36:30), until its prophesied restoration to occur at the end of the “appointed times of the nations.” (Ezekiel 21:26-27; Luke 21:24) With the removal of Zedekiah’s crown, the entire nation of Judah fell under direct servitude to the king of Babylon, no longer possessing its own king as intermediary, as had previously been the case with Judah’s tributary submission to Babylon (and to other nations prior to this). **From a Jewish point of view, this would in fact be the “second year of the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar”; Nebuchadnezzar had, in effect, become the king of the Jews. Furthermore, by overturning Jehovah’s typical kingdom, he had also acquired sovereignty over all nations of the world. It is therefore not the least bit unusual that Daniel would choose to refer to his kingship in these terms.**

Summary

It is not by mere chance or coincidence that the explanations offered by Jehovah’s Witnesses work out. They are not the product of twisting scriptures, but rather, they result when one endeavors to harmonize *all* Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), recognizing that every word, no matter how *apparently* insignificant, comprises the unfailing Word of God.

Footnotes

1. "Year 7, month Kislimu: The king of Akkad moved his army into Hatti land, laid siege to the city of Judah (*Ia-a-hu-du*) and the king took the city on the second day of the month of Addaru. He appointed in it a (new) king of his liking, took heavy booty from it and brought it into Babylon."—*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, J. M. Pritchard, p. 563-4.

12) Is it not true that 587/6 B.C.E. is every bit as reliable as 539 B.C.E., and therefore, could it not equally be used as a pivotal date?

A date that can be used as a pivotal point is the year 539 B.C.E., which is supported by various historical sources (including Diodorus, Africanus, Eusebius, Ptolemy, and Babylonian tablets) as the year for the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus (technically known as Cyrus II, the grandson of Cyrus I).

The date of 539 B.C.E. for the fall of Babylon can be arrived at not only by Ptolemy's canon but by other sources as well. The historian Diodorus, as well as the Christian historians Africanus and Eusebius, shows that Cyrus' first year as king of Persia corresponded to Olympiad^{ftn1} 55, year 1 (560/559 B.C.E.), while Cyrus' last year is placed at Olympiad 62, year 2 (531/530 B.C.E.). Cuneiform tablets give Cyrus a rule of nine years over Babylon, which would therefore substantiate the year 539 as the date of his conquest of Babylon.—*Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, by Jack Finegan, 1964, pages 112, 168-170; *Babylonian Chronology, 626 B.C.–A.D. 75*, p. 14.—*Insight on the Scriptures*, "Chronology," p. 454.

Two Babylonian tablets are connected with dating the fall of Babylon, they being Strm Kambys 400 (also known as BM 33066) and the Nabonidus Chronicle, discussed in turn below:

Strm Kambys 400: Standing for "Strassmaier Cambyses II tablet transcription number 400," this tablet contains the following astronomical information for the seventh year of Cambyses II son of Cyrus II: "Year 7, Tammuz, night of the 14th, 1 2/3 double hours [three hours and twenty minutes] after night came, a lunar eclipse; visible in its full course; it reached over the northern half disc [of the moon]. Tebet, night of the 14th, two and a half double hours [five hours] at night before morning [in the latter part of the night], the disc of the moon was eclipsed; the whole course visible; over the southern and northern part the eclipse reached." (*Inschriften von Cambyses, König von Babylon*, by J. N. Strassmaier, Leipzig, 1890, No. 400, lines 45-48; *Sternkunde und Sterndienst in Babel*, by F. X. Kugler, Münster, 1907, Vol. I, pages 70, 71) These two lunar eclipses can *evidently* be identified with the lunar eclipses that were visible at Babylon on July 16, 523 B.C.E., and on January 10, 522 B.C.E. (*Oppolzer's Canon of Eclipses*, translated by O. Gingerich, 1962, p. 335) Thus, this tablet establishes the seventh year of Cambyses II as beginning in the spring of 523 B.C.E. This is an astronomically confirmed date.

"Since the seventh year of Cambyses II began in spring of 523 B.C.E., his first year of rule was 529 B.C.E. and his accession year, and the last year of Cyrus II as king of Babylon, was 530 B.C.E. The latest tablet dated in the reign of Cyrus II is from the 5th month, 23rd day of his 9th year. (*Babylonian Chronology, 626 B.C.–A.D. 75*, by R. Parker and W. Dubberstein, 1971, p. 14) As the ninth year of Cyrus II as king of Babylon was 530 B.C.E., his first year according to that reckoning was 538 B.C.E. and his accession year was 539 B.C.E."—*Insight on the Scriptures*, "Chronology," p. 453, emphasis original.

In summary, 523 plus seven is 530, and adding Cyrus' nine produces 539.

While Strm Kambys 400 provides this lunar eclipse data that is testable and produces an astronomically confirmed date, it contains some errors. Yet these do not damage the credibility of dating Cambyses' seventh year, for "the plausible explanations of the errors and all the correct observations suggest that the original

observations were made in year 7 of Cambyses, which then was 523/2 B.C.E.” Thus its observations still make a good correlation between 523 B.C.E. and the seventh year of Cambyses II.^{fn2}

The Nabonidus Chronicle: This remains the most complete cuneiform record of the fall of Babylon available and gives the month and day of its fall, but the year is broken off. In the third of its four columns, beginning with line 5, pertinent sections read: “[Seventeenth year:] . . . In the month of Tashritu, when Cyrus attacked the army of Akkad in Opis on the Tigris, the inhabitants of Akkad revolted, but he (*Nabonidus*) massacred the confused inhabitants. The 14th day, Sippar was seized without battle. Nabonidus fled. The 16th day, Gobryas (*Ugbaru*), the governor of Gutium and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle. Afterwards Nabonidus was arrested in Babylon when he returned (there). . . . In the month of Arahshamnu, the 3rd day, Cyrus entered Babylon, green twigs were spread in front of him—the state of ‘Peace’ (*sulmu*) was imposed upon the city.”—*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 306.

It must be noted that the phrase “Seventeenth year” does not appear on the tablet, that portion of the text being damaged. This phrase is inserted by the translators because they believe that Nabonidus’ 17th regnal year was his last. So they assume that the fall of Babylon came in that year of his reign and that, if the tablet were not damaged, those words would appear in the space now damaged. Even if Nabonidus’ reign was of greater length than is generally supposed, this would not change the accepted date of 539 B.C.E. as the year of Babylon’s fall, for there are other sources pointing to that year. This factor, however, does lessen to some extent the value of the Nabonidus Chronicle.

While the year is missing, the month and day of the city’s fall, nevertheless, are on the remaining text. Using these, secular chronologers calculate the 16th day of Tashritu (Tishri) as falling on October 11, Julian calendar, and October 5, Gregorian calendar, in the year 539 B.C.E. Since this date is an accepted one, there being no evidence to the contrary, it is usable as a pivotal date in coordinating secular history with Bible history.—*Insight on the Scriptures*, “Nabonidus,” p. 459.

Based on the above, secular chronologists have thus set the date for the fall of Babylon as October 11, 539 B.C.E., according to the Julian calendar, or October 5 by the Gregorian calendar. During Cyrus’ first year his decree releasing the Jews from exile was given. And, as considered below, it is very probable that the decree was made by the winter of 538 B.C.E. or toward the spring of 537 B.C.E. This would permit the Jews time to make necessary preparations, effect the four-month journey to Jerusalem, and still arrive there by the seventh month (Tishri, or about October 1) of 537 B.C.E.—Ezra 1:1-11; 2:64-70; 3:1.

By his decreeing the end of the Jewish exile, Cyrus fulfilled his commission as Jehovah’s ‘anointed shepherd’ for Israel. (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1-4) The proclamation was made “in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia,” meaning his first year as ruler toward conquered Babylon. The Bible record at Daniel 9:1 refers to “the first year of Darius,” and this may have intervened between the fall of Babylon and “the first year of Cyrus” over Babylon. If it did, this would mean that the writer was perhaps viewing Cyrus’ first year as having begun late in the year 538 B.C.E. However, if Darius’ rule over Babylon were to be viewed as that of a viceroy, so that his reign ran concurrent with that of Cyrus, Babylonian custom would place Cyrus’ first regnal year as running from Nisan of 538 to Nisan of 537 B.C.E. This is more likely, as Daniel 9:1 reports that Darius was “made king over the kingdom of the *Chaldeans*” (Da 5:31; 9:1), but not as “the king of Persia,” the regular form for referring to King Cyrus.—Da 10:1; Ezr 1:1, 2; 3:7; 4:3.

Thus, in view of the Bible record, Cyrus’ decree freeing the Jews to return to Jerusalem likely was made late in the year 538 or early in 537 B.C.E. This would allow time for the Jewish exiles to prepare to move out of Babylon and make the long trek to Judah and Jerusalem (a trip that could take about four months according to Ezra 7:9) and yet be settled “in their cities” in Judah by “the seventh month” (Tishri) of the year 537 B.C.E. (Ezra 3:1, 6) This marked the end of the prophesied seventy years of Judah’s desolation that began in the same month, Tishri, of 607 B.C.E.—2 Kings 25:22-26; 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21.

(Adapted from: *Insight on the Scriptures, Volume 1, p. 458 "Chronology," pages 568-569 "Cyrus," p. 581 "Darius" and All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial, pages 282-283*)

Figure 1 below displays the historical and archaeological sources that together point to 539 B.C.E.:

Figure 1:

Secular support for 539 B.C.E.

1. **Strm Kambys 400** (Strassmaier Cambyses II tablet transcription number 400)/**BM 33066**
The seventh year of Cambyses II began in the spring of 523 B.C.E.
2. **Nabonidus Chronicle**
Babylon fell on Tishri 16, the year is effaced but may have been "17" per Ptolemy's canon, Berosus, and a number of cuneiform tablets.
3. **Claudius Ptolemy (and Berosus)**
"Canon of Kings." Nabonidus reigned seventeen years and Cyrus nine, likely per Berosus.
4. **Diodorus Siculus (and the Christian historians Sextus Julius Africanus and Eusebius Pamphili)**
(First century B.C.E., third and fourth century C.E. respectfully)
Report that Cyrus' first year as king of Persia corresponded to Olympiad 55, year 1 (560/559 B.C.E.), while Cyrus' last year is placed at Olympiad 62, year 2 (531/530 B.C.E.). Nine years over Babylon (per **cuneiform tablets**) from 530 B.C.E. arrives at 539 B.C.E.
5. **Cyrus cuneiform tablets**
Assign Cyrus a nine-year reign, eight regnal years and one accession year, over Babylon, datable to 530-539 B.C.E.

While the above outlines the multiple attestation for 539 B.C.E., the following will outline how 587/6 B.C.E. is derived for comparison. This year has been calculated using **Ptolemy's canon** which appears to harmonize with the astronomical diary called **VAT 4956**, as outlined in Figure 2:

Figure 2:

Secular support for 587/6 B.C.E.

1. **VAT 4956** (Vorderasiatische Museum tablet number 4956)
Cuneiform tablet that assigns Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year to 568/7 B.C.E. per lunar and planetary data (but see below).
2. **Claudius Ptolemy**
"Canon of Kings." 66 years from Nebuchadnezzar II to Nabonidus.

Ptolemy's canon mentions five kings of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty that reigned before the conquest of Cyrus: (1) Nabopolassar (assigned a 21-year reign), (2) Nebuchadnezzar II (assigned 43 years), (3) Evil-merodach (assigned 2 years), (4) Neriglissar (assigned 4 years) and (5) Nabonidus (assigned 17 years); the sum of the last four figures of 43, 2, 4, and 17 years being 66 years.

Counting those 66 years back from 539 B.C.E. points to Nebuchadnezzar's reign beginning in 605 B.C.E., and VAT 4956 seems to corroborate that date, locating Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh regnal year in 568 B.C.E. Since the scriptures 2 Kings 25:8 and Jeremiah 32:1, 2; 52:29 show that the desolation of Jerusalem occurred in the eighteenth regnal year of Nebuchadnezzar (nineteenth if including his accession year), this points to the year 587 B.C.E.

However, the lunar data on VAT 4956 fit better with 588 than with 568 B.C.E., twenty years prior. Additionally, the planetary data was most likely calculated backwards and not observed for 568 B.C.E. Thus the most reliable information on VAT 4956, the lunar data, may actually point to 588 B.C.E. as 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar II!^{fn3} In that year, he attacked Egypt according to the fragmentary cuneiform tablet BM 33041. In this year, a Bible prophecy that supports the seventy-year desolation, the forty-year desolation of Egypt, began to be fulfilled. (Ezekiel 29:12-14) Removing twenty years from the seventy-year desolation ruins this prophecy, as Egypt's forty-year desolation would be cut short as well, as it ended before an alliance was made with Nabonidus against Persia. Regarding Egypt, Ezekiel 29:18-20 states that it was compensation to Nebuchadnezzar for his successful campaign against the city Tyre. Tyre was to be "forgotten" in a commercial sense for seventy years according to Isaiah 23:15-16, which began when Nebuchadnezzar besieged it after Jerusalem's destruction. (Ezekiel 26:1) Seventy years later, it supplied timbers to the returnees in Jerusalem for Jehovah's temple, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. (Isaiah 23:17-18; Ezra 3:7) Both of these prophecies of Egypt and Tyre require a full seventy-year desolation, and ironically are connected to Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year of VAT 4956! (See also in "[Additional Reading](#)" regarding VAT 4956 and Ptolemy's Canon of Kings: [Appendix to Chapter 14](#) [*"Let Your Kingdom Come,"* pages 186-9] and [When Did Babylon Desolate Jerusalem?](#) [*Awake!*, May 8, 1972, pages 27-8]).

In summary, the year 539 B.C.E. is advantageous over 587/6 B.C.E. as it enjoys corroborative attestation from various historical sources, which 587/6 B.C.E. lacks, with VAT 4956 being unreliable in jumbling its lunar and planetary data. **Thus, in answer to the title's question, in no way is 587/6 B.C.E. as every bit as reliable as 539 B.C.E.** Furthermore, the year 587/6 B.C.E. does not support the scriptural seventy-year exile and desolation ending in 537 B.C.E. The only period harmonizing with the scriptures regarding the length of the seventy-year exile and desolation is the one commencing in Tishri 607 B.C.E. and ending the same month seventy years later, past the pivotal date of 539 B.C.E. and ending in 537 B.C.E., allowing the time prophecies of Egypt and Tyre to be fulfilled as well.

Regarding 587/6 B.C.E., it may be noted that:

1. It cannot be pivotal as it is imprecise: 587 or 586?
2. One of its two supports, VAT 4956, is of dubious value, and Ptolemy's Babylonian chronology is twenty years truncated.
3. It is by no means as well attested as the pivotal date of 539 B.C.E. for the overthrow of Babylon. (See also: [The Watchtower, August 15, 1968, paragraph 18.](#))

Therefore, it is no where near as reliable as 539 B.C.E., and as these "[In-Depth](#)" articles have shown, **587/6 B.C.E. is twenty years off for the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in Bible chronology.**

In closing, notice what one *Watchtower* magazine stated:

"For some time requests have been coming in from various parts asking THE WATCH TOWER to publish something about chronology in reply to the many theories that have been set forth in recent months. This is to advise our readers that beginning with the issue of May 1 a series of articles will be published dealing with chronology. Our advice to the friends is not merely to read them, but to study them carefully, with Bible in hand, referring to each text."

This appeared on the second page of the April 15, 1922 issue! True to its word, the May, June, and July issues contained study articles on Bible chronology regarding the seventy-year desolation and the related “Gentile Times,” with additional articles appearing later.^{fn4} In fact, a year later, the July 1, 1923 issue had an in-depth study article that even carried a supplemental chronology poster!^{fn5} As it was encouraged then, so it still holds true today, to ‘not merely read’ articles defending Bible chronology, “but to **study them carefully, with Bible in hand**, referring to each text.” This admonition closed with: “We also urge upon the friends a careful study of Volumes II and III of *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES* in connection with these articles.” While those books have since been replaced with fresher presentations, as seen in “[Additional Reading](#),” the same encouragement applies today, to carefully study that material in connection with these “[In-Depth](#)” articles, “with Bible in hand.”

Footnotes

1. An Olympiad, especially in ancient literature, was a period of four years (Polybius, *Histories* 9.1.1) counting inclusively (the fifth year during which the Olympic games were held was also the first year in the beginning of the new cycle), starting with the games at Olympia. The ancient Olympics, it is believed, originated from Heracles, the oldest of five brothers, who matched them in a race and crowned the winner with an olive branch. The games, in accordance with the number of brothers, were held every fifth year (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* [Elis 1] 5.7.6-9). By our modern Gregorian calendar system, the first Olympiad is reckoned to the year 776 B.C.E., which year is arrived at deductively based on the year from the founding of Rome. (“Ancient Olympics.” [Olympiad](#). Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympiad#Ancient_Olympics> [February 5, 2008].)

2. Furuli, Rolf. *Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Persian Chronology Compared with the Chronology of the Bible, Volume I: Persian Chronology and the Length of the Babylonian Exile of the Jews*. Awatu Publishers. Oslo, 2006. Pages 135-8, quote on page 137.

See also: Furuli, Rolf. *Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Persian Chronology Compared with the Chronology of the Bible, Volume II: Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian Chronology*. Awatu Publishers. Oslo, 2007. Page 28 footnote 20.

3. See Rolf Furuli’s examination of VAT 4956 in Volume II, *supra* note 2. Interestingly, the intercalary cycle (the cycle of adding a thirteenth or intercalary month to the lunar calendar) is nineteen years, which is close to the missing twenty years.

4. These being seven study articles from May to July, with a related study article in August, including a letter as seen in the table below:

May 1st	“Gentile Times,” pages 131-9
May 15th	“Chronology,” pages 147-150
June 1st	“Seventy Years’ Desolation (Part I),” pages 163-8
June 15th	“Seventy Years’ Desolation (Part II),” pages 183-7 “The Handwriting on the Wall,” pages 189-190
July 1st	“End of the Seventy Years’ Desolation,” pages 203-5 (Related study article: “The Temple Rebuilt,” pages 205-7)
July 15th	“The Strong Cable of Chronology,” pages 217-9
August 1st	“Back From Babylon to God’s Temple,” pages 236-9
August 15th	“Interesting Letters: Mistakes of Ptolemy, the Pagan Historian,” pages 253-4 (letter from a reader)

The November 15th issue had another study article exploring hypothetical chronological parallels.

5. “A Clear Vision of Chronology,” pages 195-202.

See also the following detailed presentation: “Jerusalem 607 B.C.E.” at www.jehovahsjudgment.co.uk/607 which features numerous color charts and an extensive appendix.

Appendix

I) Josephus: Seventy or Fifty Years?

Some critics claim that Josephus' uses of "seventy years" are quoted unfairly, because in one place Josephus appears to refer to the same period as being fifty years long. Thus, if one is going to use Josephus to support a seventy-year desolation, they assert, this must be balanced by quoting his reference to fifty years too. Is this true? Indeed, why is the "fifty years" not quoted? This is the issue that will now be addressed.

In five places in his historical corpus, Josephus stated that the desolation of Judah lasted seventy years. The first four being in *Antiquities of the Jews*: **Book X, Chapter VII, Verse 3**,^{ftn1} **Book X, Chapter IX, Verse 7**,^{ftn2} **Book XI, Chapter I, Verse 1**,^{ftn3} and **Book XX, Chapter X, Verse 1**.^{ftn4} In *Against Apion* however, Josephus first wrote "seventy" in **Book I, Chapter 19 §132**,^{ftn5} but just two chapters later in the same book he wrote "fifty" (**Book I, Chapter 21 §154**)^{ftn6}! Why is that? Is the last reference to "fifty" as reliable as the previous usage of "seventy"? What is the context of the "fifty"? As to why, first it must be known that *Against Apion* was written to the Greeks after *Antiquities of the Jews* to defend it. Perhaps he was aware of secular chronology leaving only fifty years for the desolation, and was pandering to both biblical and secular chronology. As to the reliability of this "fifty years" anomaly, on page 71 of Rolf Furuli's book *Persian Chronology and the Length of the Babylonian Exile of the Jews*^{ftn7} we find: "Some manuscripts of Josephus give a different number than 50 years here [in *Against Apion* I, 21 §154], but both Eusebius and Syncellus in their quotes from Josephus use 50." Thus it should be apparent why Josephus' use of "fifty years" is not quoted like his use of "seventy years" are, the "fifty years" reference is simply not as secure as the "seventy years," as the "seventy years" is better attested, enjoying a *five to one ratio*, and does not suffer from variations in manuscripts.

As to the context of the "fifty," first note that the "seventy years" in *Against Apion* is directly tied to the city and land being desolate, with the mention of the temple being burned (see footnote 5). The "fifty years" though is specifically tied to the obscurity of the temple (see footnote 6): first it is laid desolate, and then it lays in obscurity for fifty years. This may leave open the possibility that the temple was burned but not completely destroyed, with some prominent feature(s) still standing.^{ftn8} If so, then for the first twenty years the temple's burned ruins were visible to travelers, then after collapsing completely, its exact location lay in obscurity for the remainder of the seventy-year desolation, the "fifty years." This explanation answers why Josephus would use two figures in the same apologetic book just two chapters apart, the "seventy years" referring to the entire period and the "fifty years" referring to the time when the remnants of the temple collapsed and it passed out of view from the viewpoint of passersby. Supporting this theory of standing remains is that King Josiah repaired the temple in his eighteenth year, about thirty five years before 607 B.C.E. In this repair work, cracks were filled in and timbers and hewn stones were installed. (2 Kings 22:3, 5-6) Also, it may be significant that while the Bible mentions the temple being burned, the only thing recorded as actually being demolished was the city wall.—2 Kings 25:9, 10; 2 Chronicles 36:19; Jeremiah 52:13, 4.

Given the reasons above, there simply is no reason to quote the "fifty years" as if it had the same authority as the "seventy years," especially since it may not even refer to the entire period of desolation!

Footnotes

1. "But Jeremiah came among them, and prophesied what contradicted those predictions, and what proved to be true, that they did ill, and deluded the king; that the Egyptians would be of no advantage to them, but that the king of Babylon would renew the war against Jerusalem, and besiege it again, and would destroy the people by famine, and carry away those that remained into captivity, and would take away what they had as spoils, and would carry off those riches that were in the temple; nay, that, besides this, he would burn it, and utterly overthrow the city, and that they should serve him and his posterity **seventy years.**" (emphasis added)

2. "All Judea and Jerusalem, and the temple, continued to be a desert for **seventy years**." (emphasis added)
3. "God commiserated the captivity and calamity of these poor people, according as he had foretold to them by Jeremiah the prophet, before the destruction of the city, that after they had served Nebuchadnezzar and his posterity, and after they had undergone that servitude **seventy years**, he would restore them again to the land of their fathers, and they should build their temple, and enjoy their ancient prosperity." (emphasis added)
4. "But after the term of **seventy years**' captivity under the Babylonians, Cyrus, king of Persia, sent the Jews from Babylon to their own land again, and gave them leave to rebuild their temple." (emphasis added)
5. "[The Babylonians] set our temple that was at Jerusalem on fire; nay, and removed our people entirely out of their own country, and transferred them to Babylon; when it so happened that our city was desolate during the interval of **seventy years**, until the days of Cyrus king of Persia." (underscore and emphasis added) Compare with 2 Kings 25:9, 2 Chronicles 36:19, and Jeremiah 52:13.
6. "These accounts agree with the true histories in our books; for in them it is written that Nebuchadnezzar, in the eighteenth year of his reign, laid our temple desolate, and so it lay in that state of obscurity for **fifty years**; but that in the second year of the reign of Cyrus its foundations were laid, and it was finished again in the second year of Darius." (underscore and emphasis added) The Greek word for "desolate" is *erêmoô* and the Greek word for "obscurity" is *aphanês*.
7. Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Persian Chronology Compared with the Chronology of the Bible, Volume I. Awatu Publishers. Oslo, 2006.
8. One prominent feature that may have initially survived was the towering 120 cubit-high porch. (2 Chronicles 3:4) While 2 Chronicles 3:4 states the length of the porch was 20 *cubits*, its height is left as 120, with cubits being implied. Since "hundred" and "cubit" are spelled similarly in Hebrew as m-a-h and a-m-h respectively, it may be possible the height was also 20 cubits if "hundred" was a scribal error for "cubit." However, two facts indicate the height was 120 cubits: (1) The two pillars in front of the porch totaled 23 cubits high (2 Kings 7:15-16; Jeremiah 52:21-22), which would appear inappropriately high if the porch was only 20 cubits high. (2) A porch 120 cubits high would be an impressive sight, and its towering smooth surface would be illuminated by the rising sun.

II) The Babylonian Exile of the Jews – The Bible Versus the Traditional Chronology

By Rolf Furuli

The cuneiform tablet *Strm Kambys 400* contains several astronomical observations that fit the year 523 B.C.E., and the tablet is dated to the 7th year of the Persian king Cambyses. If 523 was the 7th year of Cambyses, and his father Cyrus reigned 9 years, as the evidence seems to show, we can, on the basis of the tablet, fix the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus to 539 B.C.E. The other tablet, *VAT 4956*, lists many positions of the heavenly bodies which fit the year 568 B.C.E.,^{[fn1](#)} and this tablet is connected with the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Based on these two tablets the following absolute chronology can be made; Nebuchadnezzar started his reign in 605 B.C.E., and Babylon was conquered by the Medes and the Persians 66 years later, in the year 539 B.C.E. This is completely in harmony with the relative chronology of the New Babylonian kings which are found in several old lists of kings. The Bible, on the other hand, says unambiguously that Jerusalem and the land of Judah **were a desolate waste without inhabitants** for a full 70 years. This cannot be harmonized with the New Babylonian chronology outlined above, which only allows for around 50 years for the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, usually counted from 587 B.C.E. to 539 B.C.E.

There are two approaches that have been followed to solve the mentioned discrepancy. Many historians and scholars who view the Bible a document that is similar to other ancient documents, do not take the Bible seriously and simply reject its information. Persons who believe that God's word is in the Bible or that the Bible is God's word try to interpret the Bible in light of the traditional chronology, thus reading into the Biblical texts their own viewpoints. My task in this essay is to show what the Bible really says, thus clearing up some misunderstandings.

To view ambiguous passages in the light of unambiguous ones

There are six passages in the Bible where a 70-year period in connection with Babylon is mentioned, Jeremiah 25:11,12; 29:10, Daniel 9:2; 2 Chronicles 36:21, and Zechariah 1:12; 7:5. Two of these (Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:21) can hardly be understood in more than one way, and the other four must be seen in the light of these. The principle to understand ambiguous passages in the light of unambiguous ones is universally accepted. But it is rather strange that the reverse course is to a great extent followed in articles dealing with the Babylonian exile. An additional reason to start with Daniel and the Chronicler, is that they lived after the exile and had information about its true length. Thus their words have weight because they both knew the prophecies and their fulfillment.

Does the Bible speak about a literal period of 70 years?

The first one to mention the period of 70 years is the prophet Jeremiah (25:11, 12; 29:10). It has been argued that these 70 years represent a round figure and not 70 literal years. Whereas this is a possible interpretation of Jeremiah's words, we should keep in mind that one interpretation that is possible can be shown to be untenable if someone who have witnessed the prophecy's fulfillment gives his witness. This is the case in connection with Jeremiah's 70 years. Daniel (9:1-3) read the words of Jeremiah, and he indicates that seventy literal years were in focus. His words "the number of the years" and his prayer, which shows that he lived when the 70 years were on the point of ending, indicate that the period was literally 70 years. If the period in his mind was not literal, how could he seek God's mercy with the prayer that God soon would end Jerusalem's desolate condition (vv. 15-20)?

A 70-year period of desolation

The Hebrew text of Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 shows unambiguously that Jerusalem should be a desolate waste for a full 70 years. This excludes any possibility that the 70 years began the first and second time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was not desolate before the third time Nebuchadnezzar conquered the city. That the desolate condition was the starting point of the 70 years is shown by Zechariah (7:5) as well. The fast in the 5th month was because of the destruction of the temple and the fast of the 7th month was because Gedaliah was murdered.^{fm2} These fasts were held during the 70 years, and this period could therefore not begin before the 7th month in Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year when the land became desolate.

But when did the 70 years end? It has been argued on the basis of 2 Chronicles 36:20 that the period ended when Cyrus conquered Jerusalem in October 539. The words "until the kingdom of Persia came to power" (NIV) are supposed to show that conclusively. To draw definite conclusions on the basis of a single word (in this case the preposition *'ad* = until) is dangerous linguistically speaking. Single words signal concepts in the minds of people speaking the same language, and these concepts are often rather broad. It is true that *'ad* may have a temporal meaning and often signals "until," but it can also signal "during," "as long as," as it does in 2 Kings 9:22 NIV, where we read: "'How can there be peace," Jehu replied, "as long as (*'ad*) all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?" This example shows that the preposition need not refer to a single point in the future, but it can imply durative action. Even when *'ad* is used temporally and it is connected with a single point, this point need not be the end of the time period connected with *'ad*. Please consider Genesis 26:33 NIV "He called it Shibah, and to (*'ad*) this day the name of the town has been Beersheba." Obviously the name was not changed at speech time, but the town continued to be called Beersheba. Thus the time period which includes *'ad* continued after "this day." Two examples which particularly can throw light on 2 Chronicles 36:20 are Judges 6:31 "Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by (*'ad*) morning!" and 1 Kings 10:7 "But I did not believe these things until (*'ad*) I came and saw with my own eyes." In the first example the preposition points to the "morning," which is a rather broad word. The person would not necessarily be put to death when the first ray of the sun became visible, but some time during the period that could be called morning. In the second example the preposition does not refer to the point when the queen came, but it refers both to her coming and to all she saw during a rather long time after her coming.

Returning now to 2 Chronicles 36:20 we note the following renderings:

NIV: "until the kingdom of Persia came to power."

ASV: "until the reign of the kingdom of Persia:"

NRSV: "until the kingdom of Persia came to power"

NWT: "until the royalty of Persia began to reign"

The text says word-for-word "until ('*ad*) reign (*melokh*) of the kingdom (*malkut*) of Persia (*paras*)." In view of the examples above, we need not conclude that the mentioned 70 years ended the same day or the same year Cyrus conquered Babylon. The preposition '*ad* may have this force, but it can include a time period after the conquest as well, as in the case of the Queen of Sheba. The force of '*ad* must therefore be construed on the basis of the context, and this is easy to do when we read the next verse.

In verse 21 we again find the preposition '*ad*, and please note the following renderings of the clause where it occurs.

NIV: "('*ad*) The land enjoyed its sabbath rests"

ASV: "until ('*ad*) the land had enjoyed its sabbaths"

NLT: "The land finally ('*ad*) enjoyed its Sabbath rest"

NWT: "until ('*ad*) the land had paid off its sabbaths"

The NIV rendering takes the preposition in the sense "during," and the same seems to be true with the NLT. What verse 21 does tell, however, is that the land was desolate and kept its sabbaths during the period of 70 years. And this duration is expressed by the preposition '*ad*. A careful analysis of the Hebrew text shows that it is extremely difficult to avoid this conclusion.

In 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 we learn that in his first year Cyrus (538 B.C.E.) made a proclamation urging the Jews to go back to Jerusalem to build the house of God. Cyrus conquered Babylon on the fourteenth day of the 7th month which is the Julian date 10 October 539. Cyrus accession year lasted until the twelfth month of that year, and his first regnal year would start in March/April 538. In the year when the Jews returned to Babylon we learn that in the 7th month they "were in their cities" (Ezra 3:1). Even if Cyrus had made his proclamation on the first day of his 1st year, it is quite impossible that the Jews "were in their cities" six months later (in the 7th month of 538). We must presume that some time had to pass after Cyrus' proclamation when the Jews sold their properties and made their families ready for the journey, and after that they had to travel around five months to reach Judah. In order to settle in their cities some time had to elapse as well. So the earliest point when it could be said that the land was no longer a desolate waste, was the year 537 B.C.E.

It is interesting that the Chronicler (who was possibly Ezra) and Ezra (1:1-4) connects Cyrus' proclamation with the words of Jeremiah regarding the 70 years. We may also note that it was after the fall of Babylon (in the first year of Darius the Mede) that Daniel discerned Jeremiah's prophecy about the 70 years. We may further note that at that time God's wrath was still upon Jerusalem and the sanctuary was still desolate (Daniel 9:15-17) when Daniel discerned Jeremiah's words. Thus the 70 years of Jeremiah could not have ended in 539!

One passage which is used by some against this conclusion, is Jeremiah 25:12. Most translations render this verse in the same way as does NIV: "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation." The argument is that the 70 years first had to end, and then the king of Babylon was punished. Because this happened in 539 B.C.E., the 70 years must have ended by then. The NIV rendering is fine, but the problem with translation from Hebrew to English is that the translators all the time must make choices, and nuances are often lost when one rendering is chosen. In the Hebrew text we find an infinitive of the verb *male* (to fill) with the preposition *ke* (when) prefixed to it. Literally we read "when to fill seventy years."

We should remember that Hebrew is a language which generally is more ambiguous than English, because the modern precision connected with hours, minutes and seconds and other expressions was not needed. The default interpretation of the passage (if the context did not suggest something else) would be that after the 70 years had ended, the king of Babylon would be punished. However, because the force of such an infinitive is quite fluid, linguistically speaking, a punishment just before or after the end of the 70 years is not excluded. The Hebrew consciousness of time in connection with such prophecies is also seen in the last clause of 25:12. A part of the punishment was that Babylon would be “made desolate forever” (NIV). Our modern consciousness of time would lead us to expect this desolation shortly after the 70 year period ended, but more than 600 years elapsed before Babylon became desolate. Thus we cannot conclude on the basis of this passage that Babylon’s king was punished *after* the end of the 70 years.

The Bible versus the traditional history

Ancient history cannot be proven because there are no living informants. This means that any chronological system is based on several assumptions that must be accepted, thus chronological views include a great measure of faith. Because of this, it is fine that any student of chronology assesses the assumptions of the chronological system to which s/he adheres and honestly distinguishes between what the different systems really say. This is important because it is impossible to harmonize the information found in the Bible with the accepted New Babylonian chronology that is found in lexica and text-books. One therefore has to choose, and one’s choice should be based on the best possible evidence.

The following synthesis can be made of the Biblical information:

1. Daniel 9:2-19 shows that Jeremiah prophesied about a literal period of 70 years.
2. Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:21 say unambiguously that Jerusalem was a desolate waste for a full 70 years.
3. Zechariah 7:5 indicates that the start of the 70 years was the desolation of Jerusalem, because he speaks of the fast in the seventh month (in memory of the murder of Gedaliah) that were kept for 70 years.
4. Cyrus’ proclamation was made in his first year (March/April 538-March/April 537), and the earliest time that the land could be said to no longer be desolate was in the autumn of 537 (Ezra 1:1,2; 3:1).

The almost universal view that the third conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar occurred on 587 (or 586) B.C.E. leaves only 49 or 50 years for the exile. Thus this view flatly contradicts the Biblical information.

We should respect the right of all people to make their own choices, and this must apply to the choice of chronological system as well. But we should insist that a choice must be made, because the Bible and the traditional New Babylonian chronology are mutually exclusive. Therefore, we must either believe in what the Bible says or believe in the assumptions of the traditional chronology; we cannot ride two horses at the same time.

(October 6, 2003)

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Footnotes

1. This was written before the author examined VAT 4956 himself. After examining it, he made a remarkable discovery about the lunar and planetary data recorded on it: the lunar data fits better with 588 B.C.E., twenty years prior, and the planetary data was calculated and not observed by a scribe who was twenty years off in his understanding of chronology. See: [Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Persian Chronology Compared with the Chronology of the Bible, Volume II: Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian Chronology](#). Awatu

2. The Fast of Gedaliah is observed on Tishri 3.

III) Does *The Watchtower* Unwittingly Support 587 B.C.E. for Jerusalem's Destruction?

Some have put forth the argument that the Neo-Babylonian chronology seen in Watchtower publications unwittingly or unintentionally supports 587 B.C.E. for Jerusalem's destruction. This line of reasoning can be made in four steps, listed below:

Step 1:

Quote Watchtower references on Neo-Babylonian kinglist chronology. For instance, the January 1, 1965 issue of *The Watchtower* had an article entitled "The Rejoicing of the Wicked Is Short-lived" that stated on page 29:

"Evil-merodach reigned two years and was murdered by his brother-in-law Neriglissar, who reigned for four years, which time he spent mainly in building operations. His underage son Labashi-Marduk, a vicious boy, succeeded him, and was assassinated within nine months. Nabonidus, who had served as governor of Babylon and who had been Nebuchadnezzar's favorite son-in-law, took the throne and had a fairly glorious reign until Babylon fell in 539 B.C.E." (underscore added)

Regarding the length of Nabonidus' reign, the August 15, 1968 issue of *The Watchtower* had an article entitled "[The Book of Truthful Historical Dates](#)" that stated on page 491 (page 56): "In the seventeenth year of King Nabonaid [Nabonidus], Babylon fell to Cyrus the Persian." (underscore added) Lastly, Nebuchadnezzar is given "43 years" per the February 1, 1969 issue in the article "[Babylonian Chronology - How Reliable?](#)" on page 89 (page 51).

Step 2:

With the above information, a list and table like this has been made:

- Nabonidus - 17 years
- Labashi-Marduk - 1 year (9 months actually)
- Neriglissar - 4 years
- Evil-merodach - 2 years
- Nebuchadnezzar - 43 years, but we only count from the 19th year according to 2 Kings 25:8 and Jeremiah 52:12, thus 24.

King	Reign
Nabonidus	17 years
Labashi-Marduk	1 year (9 months actually)
Neriglissar	4 years
Evil-merodach	2 years
Nebuchadnezzar	24 years

Step 3:

Do the math: Total the lengths of reign 24+2+4+1+17=48 years from Jerusalem's destruction to 539 B.C.E. Finally, 539-48=587. (48 years prior to 539 B.C.E. takes us to 587 B.C.E.)

Step 4:

Declare that Watchtower publications unwittingly support 587 B.C.E.

Problems with the argument

Problem 1:

When the above 1968 *Watchtower* stated that Nabonidus' reign was seventeen years, it was under the premise that the Nabonidus Chronicle stated that. However, the May 15, 1971 issue of *The Watchtower* acknowledged in its article "Testimony of the Nabonidus Chronicle" on page 316 that this in fact is not the case, that there is a lacuna where the year evidently appeared originally. (See [FtnA](#) to the 1968 *Watchtower* article on page 59.)

Problem 2:

According to current Watchtower publications, as seen in the encyclopaedic two-volume *Insight on the Scriptures*, the Neo-Babylonian chronology looks like this:

Nabonidus: “Even if Nabonidus’ reign was of greater length than is generally supposed [seventeen years], this would not change the accepted date of 539 B.C.E. as the year of Babylon’s fall, for there are other sources pointing to that year.” (Volume 2, page 459)

Labashi-Marduk: Under “Nabonidus” it states: “Nabonidus’ ascension to the throne followed the assassination of Labashi-Marduk.” (Volume 2, page 458) No length of reign is given.

Neriglissar: Under “Babylon” it states: “Little is known about the reigns of Neriglissar, evidently the successor of Evil-merodach, and of Labashi-Marduk.” (Volume 1, page 239) Furthermore, under “Chronology” it states: “For Neriglissar, considered to be the successor of Awil-Marduk [Evil-merodach], contract tablets are known dated to his fourth year.” (Volume 1, page 453)

Evil-merodach: “Berossus, quoted by Josephus, attributes to him a reign of two years. Josephus himself assigns him 18 years. Supposedly slain as the result of a plot, Evil-merodach was replaced by Neriglissar (Nergal-sharezer). Reliable confirmation of these details is lacking.” (Volume 1, page 773) Furthermore, under “Chronology” it states: “tablets dated up to his second year of rule have been found.” (Volume 1, page 453)

Nebuchadnezzar: “ruled as king for 43 years”. (Volume 2, page 480)

See also the 1969 *Watchtower* article under [Additional Reading: “Babylonian Chronology - How Reliable?”](#) under “Solid History or Questionable Synthesis?” (Page 51.) This article concluded with this observation: “The reader can judge for himself whether the reckonings and conjectures of modern historians have produced a dependable Babylonian chronology. Probably it can be said that they have a system that brings some semblance of order out of the relative chaos of ancient secular records.” So we can see that by 1969 it became more evident to the Watchtower research staff that Babylonian chronology is not as clear as we would like. Additionally, by 1971 it was realized that the Nabonidus Chronicle also is not as clear as we would like, as it has lacunae in important places.

Thus, a more accurate, up-do-date list and table would look like this:

- Nabonidus - 17 or more years
- Labashi-Marduk - ? ^{fn1}
- Neriglissar - 4 or more years
- Evil-merodach - 2 or more years
- Nebuchadnezzar - 43 years, but we only count from the 19th year according to 2 Kings 25:8 and Jeremiah 52:12, thus 24.

King	Reign
Nabonidus	17 or more years
Labashi-Marduk	?
Neriglissar	4 or more years
Evil-merodach	2 or more years
Nebuchadnezzar	24 years

Thus we can see that the “Step 2” above is destroyed, which deflates the rest of the argument. **Therefore, *The Watchtower* and Jehovah’s Witnesses do not unwittingly support 587 B.C.E. for Jerusalem’s destruction.**

Footnotes

1. This name does not appear in Claudius Ptolemy’s Canon of Kings. Ptolemy had 66 years from Nebuchadnezzar to the end of Nabonidus. (See In-Depth [number 12](#) on page 36.)

Additional Reading

A) Appendix to Chapter 14

"Let Your Kingdom Come," pp. 186-9

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Historians hold that Babylon fell to Cyrus' army in October 539 B.C.E. Nabonidus was then king, but his son Belshazzar was coruler of Babylon. Some scholars have worked out a list of the Neo-Babylonian kings and the length of their reigns, from the last year of Nabonidus back to Nebuchadnezzar's father Nabopolassar.

According to that Neo-Babylonian chronology, Crown-prince Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. (Jeremiah 46:1, 2) After Nabopolassar died Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to assume the throne. His first regnal year began the following spring (604 B.C.E.).

The Bible reports that the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in his 18th *regnal* year (19th when accession year is included). (Jeremiah 52:5, 12, 13, 29) Thus if one accepted the above Neo-Babylonian chronology, the desolation of Jerusalem would have been in the year 587/6 B.C.E. But on what is this secular chronology based and how does it compare with the chronology of the Bible?

Some major lines of evidence for this secular chronology are:

Ptolemy's Canon: Claudius Ptolemy was a Greek astronomer who lived in the second century C.E. His Canon, or list of kings, was connected with a work on astronomy that he produced. Most modern historians accept Ptolemy's information about the Neo-Babylonian kings and the length of their reigns (though Ptolemy does omit the reign of Labashi-Marduk). Evidently Ptolemy based his historical information on sources dating from the Seleucid period, which began more than 250 years after Cyrus captured Babylon. It thus is not surprising that Ptolemy's figures agree with those of Berossus, a Babylonian priest of the Seleucid period.

Nabonidus Harran Stele (NABON H 1, B): This contemporary stele, or pillar with an inscription, was discovered in 1956. It mentions the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-Merodach, Neriglissar. The figures given for these three agree with those from Ptolemy's Canon.

VAT 4956: This is a cuneiform tablet that provides astronomical information datable to 568 B.C.E. It says that the observations were from Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year. This would correspond to the chronology that places his 18th regnal year in 587/6 B.C.E. However, this tablet is admittedly a copy made in the third century B.C.E. so it is possible that its historical information is simply that which was accepted in the Seleucid period.

Business tablets: Thousands of contemporary Neo-Babylonian cuneiform tablets have been found that record simple business transactions, stating the year of the Babylonian king when the transaction occurred. Tablets of this sort have been found for all the years of reign for the known Neo-Babylonian kings in the accepted chronology of the period.

From a secular viewpoint, such lines of evidence might seem to establish the Neo-Babylonian chronology with Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year (and the destruction of Jerusalem) in 587/6 B.C.E. However, no historian can deny the possibility that the present picture of Babylonian history might be misleading or in error. It is known, for example, that ancient priests and kings sometimes altered records for their own purposes. Or, even if the discovered evidence is accurate, it might be misinterpreted by modern scholars or be incomplete so that yet undiscovered material could drastically alter the chronology of the period.

Evidently realizing such facts, Professor Edward F. Campbell, Jr., introduced a chart, which included Neo-Babylonian chronology, with the caution: "It goes without saying that these lists are provisional. The more one studies the intricacies of the chronological problems in the ancient Near East, the less he is inclined to think of any presentation as final. For this reason, the term *circa* [about] could be used even more liberally than it is."—*The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (1965 ed.), p. 281.

Christians who believe the Bible have time and again found that its words stand the test of much criticism and have been proved accurate and reliable. They recognize that as the inspired Word of God it can be used as a measuring rod in evaluating secular history and views. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) For instance, though the Bible spoke of Belshazzar as ruler of Babylon, for centuries scholars were confused about him because no secular documents were available as to his existence, identity or position. Finally, however, archaeologists discovered secular records that confirmed the Bible. Yes, the Bible's internal harmony and the care exercised by its writers, even in matters of chronology, recommends it so strongly to the Christian that he places its authority above that of the ever-changing opinions of secular historians.

But how does the Bible help us to determine when Jerusalem was destroyed, and how does this compare to secular chronology?

The prophet Jeremiah predicted that the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem and make the city and land a desolation. (Jeremiah 25:8, 9) He added: "And all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years." (Jeremiah 25:11) The 70 years expired when Cyrus the Great, in his first year, released the Jews and they returned to their homeland. (2 Chronicles 36:17-23) We believe that the most direct reading of Jeremiah 25:11 and other texts is that the 70 years would date from when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and left the land of Judah desolate.—Jeremiah 52:12-15, 24-27; 36:29-31.

Yet those who rely primarily on secular information for the chronology of that period realize that if Jerusalem were destroyed in 587/6 B.C.E. certainly it was not 70 years until Babylon was conquered and Cyrus let the Jews return to their homeland. In an attempt to harmonize matters, they claim that Jeremiah's prophecy began to be fulfilled in 605 B.C.E. Later writers quote Berossus as saying that after the battle of Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar extended Babylonian influence into all Syria-Palestine and, when returning to Babylon (in his accession year, 605 B.C.E.), he took Jewish captives into exile. Thus they figure the 70 years as a period of servitude to Babylon beginning in 605 B.C.E. That would mean that the 70-year period would expire in 535 B.C.E.

But there are a number of major problems with this interpretation:

Though Berossus claims that Nebuchadnezzar took Jewish captives in his accession year, there are no cuneiform documents supporting this. More significantly, Jeremiah 52:28-30 carefully reports that Nebuchadnezzar took Jews captive in his seventh year, his 18th year and his 23rd year, *not* his accession year. Also, Jewish historian Josephus states that in the year of the battle of Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar conquered all of Syria-Palestine "excepting Judea," thus contradicting Berossus and conflicting with the claim that 70 years of Jewish servitude began in Nebuchadnezzar's accession year.—*Antiquities of the Jews* X, vi, 1.

Furthermore, Josephus elsewhere describes the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and then says that "all Judea and Jerusalem, and the temple, continued to be a desert for seventy years." (*Antiquities of the Jews* X, ix, 7) He pointedly states that "our city was *desolate* during the interval of seventy years, until the days of Cyrus." (*Against Apion* I, 19) This agrees with 2 Chronicles 36:21 and Daniel 9:2 that the foretold 70 years were 70 years of full desolation for the land. Second-century (C.E.) writer Theophilus of Antioch also shows that the 70 years commenced with the destruction of the temple after Zedekiah had reigned 11 years.—See also 2 Kings 24:18–25:21.

But the Bible itself provides even more telling evidence against the claim that the 70 years began in 605 B.C.E. and that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587/6 B.C.E. As mentioned, if we were to count from 605 B.C.E., the 70 years would reach down to 535 B.C.E. However, the inspired Bible writer Ezra reported that the 70 years ran until “the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia,” who issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. (Ezra 1:1-4; 2 Chronicles 36:21-23) Historians accept that Cyrus conquered Babylon in October 539 B.C.E. and that Cyrus' first regnal year began in the spring of 538 B.C.E. If Cyrus' decree came late in his first regnal year, the Jews could easily be back in their homeland by the seventh month (Tishri) as Ezra 3:1 says; this would be October 537 B.C.E.

However, there is *no reasonable way* of stretching Cyrus' first year from 538 down to 535 B.C.E. Some who have tried to explain away the problem have in a strained manner claimed that in speaking of “the first year of Cyrus” Ezra and Daniel were using some peculiar *Jewish* viewpoint that differed from the official count of Cyrus' reign. But that cannot be sustained, for both a non-Jewish governor and a document from the Persian archives agree that the decree occurred in Cyrus' first year, even as the Bible writers carefully and specifically reported.—Ezra 5:6, 13; 6:1-3; Daniel 1:21; 9:1-3.

Jehovah's “good word” is bound up with the foretold 70-year period, for God said:

“This is what Jehovah has said, ‘In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at Babylon I shall turn my attention to you people, and I will establish toward you my good word in bringing you back to this place.’” (Jeremiah 29:10)

Daniel relied on that word, trusting that the 70 years were not a ‘round number’ but an exact figure that could be counted on. (Daniel 9:1, 2) And that proved to be so.

Similarly, we are willing to be guided primarily by God's Word rather than by a chronology that is based principally on secular evidence or that disagrees with the Scriptures. It seems evident that the easiest and most direct understanding of the various Biblical statements is that the 70 years began with the complete desolation of Judah after Jerusalem was destroyed. (Jeremiah 25:8-11; 2 Chronicles 36:20-23; Daniel 9:2) Hence, counting back 70 years from when the Jews returned to their homeland in 537 B.C.E., we arrive at 607 B.C.E. for the date when Nebuchadnezzar, in his 18th regnal year, destroyed Jerusalem, removed Zedekiah from the throne and brought to an end the Judean line of kings on a throne in earthly Jerusalem.—Ezekiel 21:19-27

B) When Did Babylon Desolate Jerusalem?

Awake!, May 8, 1972, pp. 27-8

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SECULAR historians usually give the year 586 B.C.E. as the correct date for the desolation of Jerusalem. Why, then, do Jehovah's Christian witnesses speak of this event as occurring in 607 B.C.E.? It is because of confidence in what the Bible says about the duration of Jerusalem's lying desolate.

The Scriptures assign a period of seventy years to the desolation of Judah and Jerusalem. After describing the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, 2 Chronicles 36:21 reports: “All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.” By means of his prophet Jeremiah, Jehovah had declared: “All this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”—Jer. 25:11.

Was this really a period of seventy literal years? Yes, that is the way the prophet Daniel, toward the close of the period of Jerusalem's desolation, understood it, saying: “I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, for fulfilling the

devastations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.” (Dan. 9:2) Note that here Daniel speaks of the “number of the years” of devastation as seventy. Surely he could not have done so if the seventy years were symbolic or an inflated round number.

Additional evidence is provided in the book of Zechariah. We read: “When you fasted and there was a wailing in the fifth month and in the seventh month, and this for seventy years, did you really fast to me, even me?” (Zech. 7:5; 1:12) The way this question is framed, with reference to specific months, certainly indicates that a period of seventy literal years was involved.

That the Jews in ancient times understood the seventy years as being literal and involving a total devastation of the land is apparent from the works of Josephus, a Jewish historian. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, chap. 9, par. 7, he tells that “all Judea and Jerusalem, and the temple, continued to be a desert for seventy years.”

When the Israelites were able to return to Judah and Jerusalem, that desolation ended. There is general agreement that Babylon fell to Cyrus on October 5/6, 539 B.C.E. From the Scriptural record at 2 Chronicles 36:21-23 and Ezra 3:1-3, which tells of Cyrus' decree liberating the Jews and their return to their homeland, the indications are that the Jews arrived back in their homeland around the early part of October of 537 B.C.E., ending the seventy years of desolation. Jerusalem must, therefore, have been destroyed seventy years earlier, in 607 B.C.E.

Various attempts to harmonize the date 586 B.C.E. with what the Bible says are therefore unsatisfactory. None of such attempts fit the Bible's testimony that Jerusalem and Judah lay *desolate for seventy years*.

The 586 B.C.E. date is based primarily on what is known as “Ptolemy's Canon,” which assigns a total of 87 years to the Babylonian dynasty beginning with Nabopolassar and ending with Nabonidus at the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E. According to this Canon, the five kings that ruled during this period were Nabopolassar (21 years), Nebuchadnezzar (43 years), Evil-merodach (2 years), Neriglissar (4 years) and Nabonidus (17 years). In line with the number of years thus assigned to each ruler, Jerusalem's desolation in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year (nineteenth year if counting from his “accession year”) would fall in 586 B.C.E.—2 Ki. 25:8; Jer. 52:29.

But how dependable is Ptolemy's Canon? In his book *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, Professor E. R. Thiele writes:

“Ptolemy's canon was prepared primarily for astronomical, not historical, purposes. It did not pretend to give a complete list of all the rulers of either Babylon or Persia, nor the exact month or day of the beginning of their reigns, but it was *a device* which made possible the correct allocation into a *broad chronological scheme* of certain astronomical data which were then available. Kings whose reigns were less than a year and which did not embrace the New Year's day were not mentioned.” (Italics ours.)

So the very purpose of the Canon makes absolute dating by means of it impossible. There is no way to be sure that Ptolemy was correct in assigning a certain number of years to various kings. For example, while Ptolemy credits Evil-merodach with only two years of rule, Polyhistor assigns him twelve years. Then, too, one cannot be certain that just five kings ruled during this period. At Borsippa, for instance, were found names of a number of Babylonian kings that do not appear elsewhere. [For the record, E. R. Thiele was a supporter of Ptolemy's canon.]

Nevertheless, someone may ask, Is there not an ancient astronomical tablet, “VAT 4956,” that places the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign exactly in the same year as does Ptolemy's Canon?

It should not be overlooked that the source of corroborative evidence should bear the earmarks of dependability. Can this be said about "VAT 4956"? Not really. The text is not an original and it contains numerous gaps. Certain terms found therein cannot even be understood now. Twice in the text the notation *hi-bi* (meaning "broken off, obliterated") appears. Thereby the scribe acknowledged that he was working from a defective copy.

Even if, despite these problems, the *astronomical* information presents a true picture of the original, this would not establish the correctness of the *historical* data. As Ptolemy used the reigns of ancient kings (as he understood them) simply as a framework in which to place astronomical data, so the copyist of "VAT 4956" may, in line with the chronology accepted in his time, have inserted the 'thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar.' As admitted by the German scholars Neugebauer and Weidner (the translators of this text), the scribe evidently changed words to conform with the abbreviated terminology common in his day. But he was both inconsistent and inaccurate. So he could just as easily have inserted other information to suit his purposes. Hence both Ptolemy's Canon and "VAT 4956" might even have been derived from the same basic source. They could share mutual errors.

Opposed to Ptolemy's Canon and "VAT 4956" stands the unanimous testimony of Jeremiah, Zechariah, Daniel and the writer of 2 Chronicles, that Judah and Jerusalem lay *desolate* for seventy years. Thousands of ancient manuscripts of these writings contain the identical testimony. So, because of the problems inherent in Ptolemy's Canon and "VAT 4956," it takes more faith to accept them than it does to accept the Bible's testimony, which would place the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 607 B.C.E.*

Footnotes

* For additional details, see the book *Aid to Bible Understanding*, pp. 327, 331, 339, 348.

C) Babylonian Chronology—How Reliable?

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SOME of the writings of historians and archaeologists in this twentieth century leave the impression that there is a Babylonian chronology that seriously challenges the count of time recorded in the Bible. How serious is this challenge? Is there really a sound Babylonian chronology? Is it supported on solid foundations? Does it include data that command higher respect than the facts related in the Bible?

Babylon enters the scene, insofar as the Jewish people are concerned, principally from the time of Nebuchadnezzar. The reign of that monarch's father, Nabopolassar, is termed "the beginning of the Neo-Babylonian Empire." That era ended with the reigns of Nabonidus and his son, Belshazzar, when Babylon was overthrown by Cyrus the Persian. This is a period of special interest to Bible scholars, since it embraces the time of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians and the greater part of the seventy-year desolation of the land of the defeated Jews.

The Bible record is quite detailed in its account of the first punitive expedition against the kingdom of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar (or Nebuchadrezzar) in his seventh regnal year (or eighth year from his accession to the throne). (Jer. 52:28; 2 Ki. 24:12) In harmony with this a cuneiform inscription of the Babylonian Chronicle states: "In the seventh year, the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad [Nebuchadnezzar] mustered his troops, marched to Hatti-land [Syria-Palestine], and encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city and captured the king [Jehoiachin]. He appointed there a king of his own choice [Zedekiah], received its heavy tribute and sent (them) to Babylon."—*Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (626-556 B.C.), D. J. Wiseman, pages 67, 73.

SOLID HISTORY OR QUESTIONABLE SYNTHESIS?

Despite such a bright beginning for the synchronization of the Bible account with Babylonian records, one is thereafter faced with a blank as to further information from actual Babylonian sources. For the final thirty-three years of Nebuchadnezzar, for example, no historical records have yet been unearthed aside from a fragmentary inscription relating to a campaign against Egypt in the king's thirty-seventh year. So we have no Babylonian account of Jerusalem's destruction in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth regnal year (nineteenth from his accession). (Jer. 52:29; 2 Ki. 25:8-10) The Bible is the sole source of authentic information on this event.

As to Nebuchadnezzar's son Amel-Marduk (Evil-merodach, 2 Ki. 25:27, 28), tablets dating to his second year of rule have been found. However, they contain little information about his reign and give no indication as to its length. So, too, for Neriglissar, said to be the successor of Evil-merodach, only one strictly historical tablet has come to light, and it is dated in his third year as king.

What is thought to be a memorial tablet written either for the mother or the grandmother of Nabonidus, gives some chronological data for this period, but many portions of the text have been damaged, leaving much to the ingenuity and conjecture of historians. The reader can appreciate how fragmentary the text is *by ignoring the bracketed material* in the following translation of one section of this memorial—material that represents modern attempts at restoring the missing, damaged or illegible portions:

“[During the time from Ashurbanipal], the king of Assyria, [in] whose [rule] I was born—(to wit): [21 years] under Ashurbanipal, [4 years under Ashur]etillu-ilani, his son, [21 years under Nabopol]assar, 43 years under Nebuchadnezzar, [2 years under Evil-Merodach], 4 years under Neriglissar, [in summa 95 year]s, [the god was away] till Sin, the king of the gods, [remembered the temple] . . . of his [great] godhead, his clouded face [shone up], [and he listened] to my prayers, [forgot] the angry command [which he had given, and decided to return t]o the temple é-hul-hul, the temple, [the mansion,] his heart's delight. [With regard to his impending return to] the [temp]le, Sin, the king of [the gods, said (to me)]: ‘Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, the son [of my womb] [shall] make [me] en[ter/sit down (again)] in (to) the temple é-hul-hul!’ I care[fully] obeyed the orders which [Sin], the king of the gods, had pronounced (and therefore) I did see myself (how) Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, the offspring of my womb, reinstalled completely the forgotten rites of Sin, . . .”

Farther along in the text Nabonidus' mother (or grandmother) is represented as crediting Sin with granting her long life “from the time of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, to the 6th year of Nabonidus, king of Babylon, the son of my womb, (that is) for 104 happy years, . . .” —Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pages 311, 312.

From this very incomplete inscription it can be seen that the only figures actually given are the 43 years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign and 4 years of Neriglissar's reign. As to this latter monarch, the text does not necessarily limit his reign to four years; rather it tells of something that happened in his fourth year. How far within the reign of Ashurbanipal the life of Nabonidus' mother (or grandmother) began is not stated, so that we are left in the dark as to the commencement and the close of the “104 happy years.” Nor is there any information as to the lengths of the reigns of Ashur-etillu-ilani, Nabopolassar and Evil-merodach. And there is no mention of Labashi-Marduk, now generally acknowledged by historians as reigning between Neriglissar and Nabonidus.

It will be noted, too, that the conjectured numbers of years, inserted by modern historians on the basis of Ptolemy's canon, when added to the “6th year of Nabonidus,” give a total of 100 or 101 years, and not the 104 years mentioned in the text itself. So this fragmentary record provides scant information for the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian period.

THE CANON OF PTOLEMY

And this canon of Ptolemy, what is it? We are particularly interested, seeing that historians find it necessary to lean so heavily upon it in connection with their chronology for the Neo-Babylonian period. Claudius Ptolemy lived in Egypt during the second century C.E., or over 600 years after the close of the Neo-Babylonian period. He was not a historian, and is known primarily for his works on astronomy and geography. As E. R. Thiele states: "Ptolemy's canon was prepared primarily for astronomical, not historical purposes. It did not pretend to give a complete list of all the rulers of either Babylon or Persia, nor the exact month or day of the beginning of their reigns, but it was a device which made possible the correct allocation into a broad chronological scheme of certain astronomical data which were then available."—*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, page 293, fn. [For the record, E. R. Thiele was a supporter of Ptolemy's canon.]

Ptolemy assigned 21 years to the reign of Nabopolassar, 43 to Nebuchadnezzar, 2 to Evil-merodach, 4 to Neriglissar, and 17 to Nabonidus, for a total of 87 years. Counting back from the first year of Cyrus, following the fall of Babylon, therefore, historians date Nabopolassar's first year as commencing in 625 B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar's first year as 604, and the destruction of Jerusalem as in 586 or 587. These dates are some 20 years later than those indicated by Bible chronology, yet modern historians favor the system of dating based on Ptolemy.

Even though the length of the reigns of the kings of Babylon and Persia, as set forth in Ptolemy's canon, may be *basically* correct, there seems to be no reason for holding that the canon is necessarily accurate in every respect for all periods. As already noted, we lack Babylonian historical records that could either substantiate or undermine Ptolemy's figures for the reigns of certain kings.

Critics of the Bible claim that the date for the destruction of Jerusalem (607 B.C.E.), founded on Bible chronology, leaves a gap in the Babylonian chronology. On the other hand, those who hold to a strict Ptolemaic reckoning are obliged to explain a sizable gap of their own. This gap develops when they attempt to harmonize Babylonian and Assyrian history so as to arrive at 625 B.C.E. for the start of the Neo-Babylonian period.

The Babylonian Chronicle states that Nineveh, Assyria's capital, fell to the Babylonian forces in Nabopolassar's fourteenth year. Following Ptolemy, the secular historians date that event in 612 B.C.E. At the same time, on the basis of astronomical calculations, they also hold to the year 763 B.C.E. as an absolute date representing the ninth year of Assyrian king Assur-dan III. So, they should be able to count forward from that year and show that Assyrian rule at Nineveh did extend as far as 612 B.C.E. But can they? Well, with the help of eponym and king lists and other source material, they manage to set up a chronology that reaches as far as 668 B.C.E., the year they assign for the start of Ashurbanipal's reign. But from that point forward there is considerable confusion.

Especially with regard to Ashurbanipal's reign there is much confusion. For example, the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1959 edition, Vol. 2, page 569) gives Ashurbanipal's reign as 668-625 B.C.E. Then, on page 851 of the same volume, the reign is given as 669-630 B.C.E. In volume 5 of the same edition, page 655, it lists this same reign as "668-638(?)." The 1965 edition of the same work says '669-630 or 626.' (Vol. 2, page 573) Other suggested dates for the close of Ashurbanipal's reign are:

- 633 *A History of Israel*, John Bright, 1964.
- 631 *Ancient Iraq*, Georges Roux, 1964.
- 629 *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962.
- c.631-627 *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962.
- 626 *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, D. D. Luckenbill, 1926.

As might be expected, the above sources also give varied dates for the reign of Ashurbanipal's probable successor, Ashur-etillu-ilani. And so, too, for the reign of Sin-shar-ishkun, apparently the king at the time of Nineveh's fall. Some historians extend this last king's reign for as long as eighteen years, though dated tablets have been found only up to his seventh year.

Thus historians are willing to exhibit much flexibility in order to hold to both the Ptolemaic chronology and their pivotal date of 763 B.C.E., even to the point of conjecturing longer reigns for these final rulers of the Assyrian empire than the evidence at hand will support. They have an awkward gap on their hands—one that is not easy to fill. The Bible, however, offers stronger evidence for the 607 B.C.E. date for the destruction of Jerusalem.— See [*The Watchtower*, August 15, 1968, pages 490-494](#) [from paragraph 12 to end, entire article included].

BEROSSUS—HOW RELIABLE?

Ptolemy, in preparing his canon, is believed by some to have followed Berossus, a third-century B.C.E. Babylonian priest. Of his writings Professor Olmstead remarks: “. . . only the merest fragments, abstracts or traces have come down to us. And the most important of these fragments have come down through a tradition almost without parallel. Today we must consult a modern Latin translation of an Armenian translation of the lost Greek original of the Chronicle of Eusebius, who borrowed in part from Alexander Polyhistor who borrowed from Berossus direct, and in part from Abydenus who apparently borrowed from Juba who borrowed from Alexander Polyhistor and so from Berossus. To make a worse confusion, Eusebius has in some cases not recognized the fact that Abydenus is only a feeble echo of Polyhistor, and has quoted the accounts of each side by side!”

He continues: “And this is not the worst. Although his Polyhistor account is in general to be preferred, Eusebius seems to have used a poor manuscript of that author.” (*Assyrian Historiography*, pages 62, 63) Josephus, a Jewish historian of the first century C.E., also claims to make quotations from Berossus, but the figures he uses are not consistent, so they can hardly be considered conclusive. And, remembering that at least three hundred years intervened between Berossus and Ptolemy, we can see that there is no certainty that Ptolemy's supposed references from Berossus were accurate.

And what about the cuneiform tablets themselves? How accurate are they? Can they always be depended upon? The casual student may tend to think those tablets were always written close to the time of the events recorded. However, the Babylonian historical texts, and even many astronomical texts, give evidence of being of a much later period. Specifically, one portion of the so-called Babylonian Chronicle, covering the period modern historians would date as 747-648 B.C.E., is “a copy made in the twenty-second year of Darius from an older and damaged text.”—*Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, page 1.

So this writing was not only separated from the events recorded by anywhere from 150 to 250 years, but it was also a copy of a defective earlier writing. And from this same publication we have the following, relating to the Babylonian Chronicle texts covering the period from Nabopolassar to Nabonidus: “The Neo-Babylonian Chronicle texts are written in a small script of a type which does not of itself allow any precise dating but which can mean that they were written from any time almost contemporary with the events themselves to the end of the Achaemenid rule”—or 331 B.C.E. So even if Ptolemy had what he quite likely did not have, namely, authentic copies of Berossus' writings, there would still remain some serious question as to the age and authenticity of Berossus' cuneiform sources.

NO SERIOUS CHALLENGE

The reader can judge for himself whether the reckonings and conjectures of modern historians have produced a dependable Babylonian chronology. Probably it can be said that they have a system that brings some semblance of order out of the relative chaos of ancient secular records. However, when they place so much confidence in Ptolemy's dating one may well question the wisdom of their doing so. We have noted that neither Ptolemy's purpose in setting down his record nor the nature of his source material were such as might inspire confidence in its historical accuracy. Further, if any of his information came from Berossus, it doubtless came through

many hands, and offers, at best, very fragile testimony. The cuneiform sources, too, were subject to damage and restoration that may well have involved much conjecture.

Both the lack of contemporary historical records from Babylon and the ease with which secular data could be altered definitely allow for the possibility that one or more of the Neo-Babylonian rulers had a longer reign than the Ptolemaic canon shows. In view of all these factors, is it wise to accept without reserve the reconstruction of Babylonian history by modern historians? Surely one is justified in concluding that there is here no real challenge to the credibility of the Bible record!

D) The Book of Truthful Historical Dates

The Watchtower, August 15, 1968, pp. 488-494

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THERE is no question in our minds as to where we are as of this moment, and we, of course, know how we got here. We are also quite conscious of time in relation to events we have personally experienced. We know, for instance, where we were and what we did an hour ago, a day ago, a week ago. Most of us know how old we are, and we can relate with a good deal of accuracy some of the great events in our lifetime.

² But what about the distant past before our time? What do we know about dates and events that were no part of our personal experience? For example, do we know what year Jesus was born or, more important, the date of his death? After all, he was the greatest man ever to walk this earth. Do we know what year Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians? That particular date is highly important if we are to understand why certain events have occurred in our lifetime. Where are we today on the stream of time? Do we know that the seventh year from now will conclude the 6,000th year since Adam was created? And if we live to that year 1975, what should we expect to happen?

³ These are certainly interesting and important questions, but where can we find truthful answers to them? Since events that occurred long before we were born have a great bearing on these matters, how may we obtain the facts? What written records of the past can we rely upon as factual and true?

⁴ The honest seeker of the truth should not be stymied in his search for answers to these questions, thinking it is a hopeless undertaking. In reality he has at his disposal the most ancient book of history and, more important, one that can be trusted and depended upon as the supreme authority, one by which all other testimony can be measured and judged. Fortunately, this historical document is now translated in the language the inquirer can read. This book is the Holy Bible, the inspired and sacred Word of Jehovah God. Jehovah alone knows both the end and the beginning.—Isa. 46:10.

⁵ Secular historians who reach back in time to tell us of the distant past, but who scornfully ignore the Bible's record, are compelled to fill in the gaps between their meager fragmentary archaeological findings with unreliable traditions, fancy calculations and outright guesswork. On the other hand, honest investigators, and there are many, recognize the truly genuine worth of the Bible as unimpeachable testimony, confirmed by all the discoveries that have been unearthed. When put to the test, the Bible indeed has proved its worth as the most complete record of ancient happenings and as a book of sterling accuracy. We are therefore equipped, with this book of truthful historical dates in hand, to count all the way back to Adam's creation with little difficulty, filling in the gaps of secular history with dependable data. What is more, we can do so quickly and with little effort.

CHANGES IN THE CALENDARS

⁶ Today we measure time on the Gregorian calendar, but this yardstick is less than 400 years old. It was Pope Gregory XIII, who, in 1582, did away with the Julian calendar, which by that year was some ten days out of time with the sun. To correct the discrepancy the pope ordered ten days dropped out of the month of October. So October 5 was made October 15, 1582. This present calendar is so accurate that there is only about 26.3 seconds difference between it and the true solar year, and this difference increases at the very small rate of 0.53 seconds every century. That is a difference of less than nine minutes every hundred thousand years, less than a day every sixteen million years.

⁷ The Julian calendar, which the Gregorian calendar superceded, was instituted by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C.E., known as "the year of confusion." This was because at that time the older calendars were some three months ahead of the sun's schedule, making it necessary for the year 46 B.C.E. to have 445 days so the sun could catch up with the calendar, so to speak.

⁸ If events recorded in the Bible were dated according to the Julian or other preceding calendars, it would be a rather simple matter to convert such dates to the Gregorian calendar. But not so. The Bible tells of particular and often detached periods and events, and these are dated in their own special ways, independent of one another. Sometimes they are dated according to the beginning of a certain king's reign (Neh. 2:1; Esther 1:1-3; Dan. 9:1, 2; Luke 3:1), or by a military victory or the destruction of a great nation (1 Ki. 6:1; Ezek. 1:1, 2; 8:1; 20:1; 40:1), or they are dated in relation to an unusual event such as the flood of Noah's day. (Gen. 9:28, 29) The difficult task, then, is to determine when these Bible events occurred if measured by our present-day calendar.

⁹ The problem may be illustrated by the following story. An English traveler, visiting a historic place on the continent of Europe, left his hotel one morning and slowly walked through the woods, stopping briefly at the scenic spots and the refreshing pools along the way. Sometime during the afternoon he crossed a stream and followed the path over the mountain. Toward the close of the day the question of how far he had traveled came to mind. He remembered that earlier during the day the distances between the places where he stopped were clearly marked in meters on the signposts, but after crossing the bridge the signposts were discontinued.

¹⁰ To learn how far he had come, it was not enough for our traveler to go back and translate from meters to feet the recorded distances on the early part of his journey. He must first of all measure back from his present position, over the mountain and across the bridge, to the last-recorded marker. Once this distance was determined, the rest would be comparatively easy, if he would but trust the figures on the signposts.

¹¹ So too in determining where mankind is on the pathway of time, it will not solve the problem simply to translate ancient calendars into present-day systems. One must first measure back in time across the gulf that separates the present from the ancient Biblical record of the past, to a stationary point in history, to a fixed date of the past, to an *absolute date*, if you please. Such a date must be one where sacred and secular historical events coincide and are linked in perfect agreement with current methods of measuring time distances. With such a date fixed in terms of the Gregorian yardstick we will know how far we have come from that point and where we are at present. Then from that pivot point we can also measure either forward or backward in dating other events of Bible history even though originally they were dated according to a different system.

THE ABSOLUTE DATE OF 539 B.C.E.

¹² One such fixed or absolute date is in connection with the events recorded in the fifth chapter of Daniel, verses one to thirty-one. That was concerning the time when the Medes and Persians under Cyrus the Great broke up Belshazzar's notorious carousal, captured the city of Babylon, and overthrew the Third World Empire. The year was 539 B.C.E. on the Gregorian calendar, four years after the Buddhist Era began in India.

¹³ The fixing of 539 B.C.E. as the year when this historical event occurred is based on a stone document known as the Nabonidus (Nabunaid) Chronicle. This important find was discovered in ruins near the city of Baghdad in 1879, and it is now preserved in the British Museum. A translation of this finding was published by Sidney Smith in *Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon*, London, 1924, and reads in part:

¹⁴ “In the month of Tashritu [Tishri, Hebrew 7th month], when Cyrus attacked the army of Akkad in Opis on the Tigris, the inhabitants of Akkad revolted, but he (Nabonidus) massacred the confused inhabitants. The 14th day, Sippar was seized without battle. Nabonidus fled. The 16th day [October 11-12, 539 B.C.E., Julian, or October 5-6, Gregorian] Gobryas (*Ugbaru*), the governor of Gutium and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle. Afterwards Nabonidus was arrested in Babylon when he returned (there). . . . In the month of Arahshamnu [Heshvan, Hebrew 8th month], the 3rd day [October 28-29, Julian], Cyrus entered Babylon, green twigs were spread in front of him—the state of ‘Peace’ (Sulmu) was imposed upon the city.”—*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton; 1955), James B. Pritchard, p. 306.

¹⁵ Please note, the Nabonidus Chronicle gives precise details as to the time when these events took place. This, in turn, enables modern scholars, with their knowledge of astronomy, to translate these dates into terms of the Julian or Gregorian calendars. Explaining why this Chronicle makes no particular reference to Belshazzar in connection with the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, and also confirming the date of 539, note what professor Jack Finegan says in *Light from the Ancient Past* (1959), pages 227-229:

¹⁶ “Nabunaid (Nabonidus) shared the kingship with his own oldest son Belshazzar. Belshazzar is named as the crown prince in Babylonian inscriptions. . . . Since, therefore, Belshazzar actually exercised the coregency at Babylon and may well have continued to do so unto the end, the book of Daniel (5:30) is not wrong in representing him as the last king of Babylon. In the seventeenth year of King Nabunaid, Babylon fell to Cyrus the Persian. The Nabunaid chronicle gives exact dates. In the month of Tashritu on the fourteenth day, October 10, 539 B.C., the Persian forces took Sippar; on the sixteenth day, October 12, ‘the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle’; and in the month of Arahshamnu, on the third day, October 29, Cyrus himself came into the city.”

¹⁷ Other investigators say this: “The Nabunaid Chronicle . . . states that Sippar fell to Persian forces VII/14/17^{ftn1} (Oct. 10, 539)^{ftn2}, that Babylon fell VII/16/17 (Oct. 12), and that Cyrus entered Babylon VIII/3/17^{ftn3} (Oct. 29). This fixes the end of Nabunaid’s reign and the beginning of the reign of Cyrus. Interestingly enough, the last tablet dated to Nabunaid from Uruk is dated the day after Babylon fell to Cyrus. News of its capture had not yet reached the southern city some 125 miles distant.”—Brown University Studies, Vol. XIX, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.—A.D. 75*, Parker and Dubberstein, 1956, p. 13.^{ftnA}

¹⁸ Recognized authorities of today accept 539 B.C.E. without any question as the year Babylon was overthrown by Cyrus the Great. In addition to the above quotations the following gives a small sampling from books of history representing a cross section of both general reference works and elementary textbooks.^{ftn4} These brief quotations also show that this is not a date recently suggested, but one thoroughly investigated and generally accepted for the past sixty years.

“Cyrus entered Babylon in 539 B.C.” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1946, Vol. 2, p. 852) “When Cyrus defeated the army of Nabonidus, Babylon itself surrendered, in Oct. 539, to the Persian general Gobryas.”—*Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 930.

“In 539 B.C. Babylon fell without a struggle to the Achaemenid Persian, Cyrus the Great.”—*The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1956, Vol. III, p. 9.

“Babylon was captured by Cyrus in 539 B.C.”—*Yale Oriental Series · Researches · Vol. XV, 1929, Nabonidus and Belshazzar*, Dougherty, p. 46.

“The Persians took the city in 539 B.C.” (*The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 10) “In 539 B.C., the Persians conquered Babylonia.” (*Ibid.*, p. 13) “Nabonidus, the last king of Chaldean Babylonia, who reigned from 555 to 539 B.C.”—*Ibid*, p. 193.

“The downfall of Lydia prepared the way for a Persian attack on Babylonia. The conquest of that country proved unexpectedly easy. In 539 B.C. the great city of Babylon opened its gates to the Persian hosts.”—*Ancient History*, Hutton Webster, 1913, p. 64.

“In 539 B.C. Babylon, too, was captured by Cyrus.”—*The Story of the Ancient Nations*, W. L. Westermann, 1912, p. 73.

“In 539 B.C., however, Cyrus advanced for the conquest of Babylonia. . . . Sippar was taken without a blow and, two days later, the van of the army of Cyrus entered Babylon.”—*History of the Hebrews*, F. K. Sanders, 1914, p. 230.

“It is not likely that there was a long interval between his [Nebuchadnezzar’s] death and the fall of the Chaldean Empire before the onslaught of Cyrus in 539.”—*The Biblical Period*, W. F. Albright, Reprinted from *The Jews; Their History, Culture and Religion*, edited by Louis Finkelstein, 1955, p. 49.

“Cyrus entered Babylon on October 29, 539 B.C. and presented himself in the role of the liberator of the people.”—*The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, 1965, p. 193; see also pages 93, 104, 198, 569.

“Nebuchadnezzar had surrounded Babylon with huge walls, but after the defeat of Belshazzar’s army the city surrendered with slight resistance in 539 B.C.”—*World History at a Glance*, Reither, 1942, pp. 28, 29.

“When the Neo-Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians, Babylon opened its gates to Cyrus in 539 B.C. without opposition.”—*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962, p. 335.

“In the seventeenth year of Nabonidus (B. C. 539), Cyrus captured Babylon.”—*The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopædia and Scriptural Dictionary*, Fallows, 1913, Vol. 1, p. 207.

“Cyrus the Great, in 539 B.C., added the Babylonian to the other empires which he had acquired and consolidated with magical ease and celerity.”—*A New Standard Bible Dictionary*, 1926, p. 91.

“The city [Babylon] was taken by surprise B. C. 539.”—*The Universal Bible Dictionary* Peloubet, 1912, p. 69.

“539 B.C. marked the collapse of Semitic hegemony in the ancient Orient, and the introduction of Aryan leadership which continued for at least a thousand years. This conquest of Babylon by Cyrus laid the foundation for all the later developments under Greek and Roman rule.”—*Darius the Mede*, Whitcomb, 1959, Introduction, p. 2.

“It was Cyrus, also, who conquered Babylon in the year 539 B.C. and thus became master of Mesopotamia and Syria.”—*Ancient and Medieval History*, Hayes and Moon, 1930, p. 92.

“Nabonidus (Nabunaid) . . . was the last King of Babylon (555-539 B.C.)”—*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1907, Vol. 2, p. 184.

“In 539 the kingdom of Babylon fell to Cyrus.”—*The New Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia*, 1952, Vol. 10, p. 3397.

“The Chaldean Empire, with its capital at Babylon (Second Babylonian Empire), lasted, . . . until 539 B.C., when it collapsed before the attack of Cyrus.”—*The Outline of History*, H. G. Wells, 1921, p. 140.

“Cyrus conquered Babylonia in 539 B. C.”—*The International Standard Bible Encyclopædia*, 1960, Vol. 1, p. 367.

“In the year 539 Cyrus conquers the city Babylon, Babylonia becomes a province of the Persian Empire.”—Translated from the German *Bibel-Lexikon*, edited by Herbert Haag together with associates, printed in Switzerland, in 1951. See page 150 under Babylonia.

¹⁹ With the date 539 B.C.E. so firmly fixed and agreed to by so many scholars, we are quite confident where we stand today in relation to the fall of Babylon twenty-five centuries ago. October 6, 1968, will mark 2,506 years since the fall of that third world empire.^{fn5} Other important events which occurred prior to 539 may now be quite accurately dated. If one will accept the dates posted in the Bible, this becomes a rather easy matter, and some of the erroneous pitfalls into which traditional chronologers of Christendom have fallen will be avoided.

JERUSALEM DESTROYED, 607 B.C.E.

²⁰ Believers in Daniel's God Jehovah know that the historical accuracy of the Bible does not rest upon undiscovered, incomplete, imperfect, uninspired worldly documents. So just because in the pagan cuneiform inscriptions *so far discovered* the name “Darius” is nowhere found, that does not alter in any way the truthfulness of the Bible's testimony. The historical facts written under divine inspiration are clear: “In that very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed, and Darius the Mede himself received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.” (Dan. 5:30, 31) Some investigators believe, and the argument is strong, that Darius was the same as Gubaru, Cyrus' governor, who entered Babylon with him and who appointed governors in the city.^{fn6} However, Daniel repeatedly speaks of Darius the Mede, not as Governor, but as King, even personally addressing him as such.—Dan. 6:1, 6-9, 12-25.

²¹ During the few months that Darius was on the throne Daniel made a startling chronological discovery: “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus of the seed of the Medes, who had been made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans; in the first year of his reigning I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, for fulfilling the devastations of Jerusalem, namely, *seventy years*.” (Dan. 9:1, 2) Without a doubt the question as to when this time limit of seventy years would expire was one that pressed hard upon Daniel's mind. Fortunately, he did not have to wait long for the answer.

²² The reign of Darius I was brief; mention of “the first year” of his reign infers he was king for at least a full year. (Dan. 9:1; 11:1) Cyrus followed him on the throne by late 538 and Jehovah's prophet Daniel continued in his high office. “As for this Daniel, he prospered in the kingdom of Darius and in the kingdom of Cyrus the Persian.” (Dan. 6:2, 28) That there was a very close association between these two kings and their kingdoms is indicated by the repeated expression, “the law of the Medes and the Persians.”—Dan. 6:8, 12, 15.

²³ Two centuries earlier Jehovah by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah had declared: “[I am] the One saying of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and all that I delight in he will completely carry out’; even in my saying of Jerusalem, ‘She will be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘You will have your foundation laid.’” (Isa. 44:28) Without further delay this two-hundred-year-old prophecy was about to be fulfilled. Cyrus acceded to the throne and “in the first year” of his reign, at least before the spring of 537, “Jehovah roused the spirit of Cyrus.” He issued the famous edict permitting the Jews to return and rebuild Jehovah's temple, copies of which were written and

circulated throughout the realm. This allowed sufficient time for the Jews to resettle in their homeland, 'establish the altar firmly upon its own site,' and "from the first day of the seventh month" start offering up burnt sacrifices to Jehovah. This date, the "first day of the seventh month," according to the best astronomical tables available,^{fm7} is calculated to be October 5 (Julian) or September 29 (Gregorian) 537 B.C.E.—Ezra 1:1-4; 3:1-6.

²⁴ Here, then, very definitely established, is another milestone—the time when the seventy years of desolation of the land of Judah came to an end—about October 1, 537. (Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10) It is now a simple formula to determine when the seventy years began. One has only to add 70 to 537 to get 607. So about October 1, 607 B.C.E., the desolating of the land of Judah and the complete emptying out of its inhabitants was fully accomplished.

²⁵ The importance of the year 607 B.C.E. in this Biblical chronology will become more apparent in the following article, as we seek an answer to the provocative question, When was Adam created?

Footnotes

1. "VII/14/17": The 7th Hebrew month Tishri, 14th day, 17th year of Nabonidus' reign.
 2. Julian calendar.
 3. The 8th Hebrew month Heshvan.
 4. To extend the list would be an easy matter, but it would only serve to further confirm a date not in question.
 5. In adding 539 and 1968 subtract 1 because of no zero year between B.C.E. and C.E.
 6. See *Darius the Mede* (1959 American Edition), J. C. Whitcomb, Jr., chap. 7; and *Babylonian Problems* (1923 Edition), W. H. Lane, p. 201.
 7. Brown University Studies, Vol. XIX, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.—A.D. 75*, (1956) Parker and Dubberstein, p. 29
- A. (Added by editor.) Note that the year "17" of Nabonidus is actually not on the Nabonidus Chronicle, as it has since eroded away. *The Watchtower* acknowledged this in its issue of May 15, 1971, "Testimony of the Nabonidus Chronicle," stating on page 316:

But does the Nabonidus Chronicle of itself provide the basis for establishing the year for this event? No. This inscription shows that Babylon fell to the army of Cyrus on the sixteenth day of Tishri (corresponding to October 11/12 [Julian calendar] or October 5/6 [Gregorian calendar] of the year 539 B.C.E.) but reference to the "seventeenth year" of Nabonidus (which year historians believe fell in 539 B.C.E.) has been inserted by translators. There being no extant cuneiform tablets dated beyond Nabonidus' seventeenth year, it has been assumed that the fall of Babylon must have come in that year and that, if the tablet were not partially effaced, those words would appear in the space now damaged. (It may also be noted that the Jewish historian Josephus [quoting Babylonian priest Berossus (of the third century B.C.E.)] reports that Cyrus took Babylon in the seventeenth year of Nabonidus' reign.)—*Against Apion*, Book I, par. 20. (underscore added)

Also other sources, including Ptolemy's canon, point to the year 539 B.C.E. as the date for Babylon's fall. For example, ancient historians such as Diodorus, Africanus and Eusebius show that Cyrus' first year as king of Persia corresponded to Olympiad 55, year 1 (560/59 B.C.E.), while Cyrus' last year is placed at Olympiad 62, year 2 (531/30 B.C.E.). (The years of the olympiads ran from approximately July 1 to the following June 30.) Cuneiform tablets give Cyrus a rule of nine years over Babylon. This would harmonize with the accepted date for the start of his rule over Babylon in 539 B.C.E.

Though the year is not found in the Nabonidus Chronicle itself, the available evidence is nevertheless sufficient for accepting 539 B.C.E. as the date for Babylon's fall. Of course, this factor does lessen the value of the Nabonidus Chronicle in determining the *time* for the event. But the inscription is still of considerable value, for it provides noteworthy testimony concerning the *manner* of Babylon's fall. Also, since the inscription shows that Nabonidus was not in Babylon at the time of the city's fall, this explains why the Bible does not mention him by name. However, the Holy Scriptures imply his existence

in that Belshazzar is shown to have offered Daniel the third position in the kingdom, the first being held by Nabonidus and the second by Belshazzar.—Dan. 5:16.

E) From 607 B.C.E. to return from exile

Insight on the Scriptures, Volume 1, p. 463

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The length of this period is fixed by God's own decree concerning Judah, that "all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years."—Jer 25:8-11.

The Bible prophecy does not allow for the application of the 70-year period to any time other than that between the desolation of Judah, accompanying Jerusalem's destruction, and the return of the Jewish exiles to their homeland as a result of Cyrus' decree. It clearly specifies that the 70 years would be years of *devastation of the land of Judah*. The prophet Daniel so understood the prophecy, for he states: "I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, for fulfilling the *devastations* of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years." (Da 9:2) After describing the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21 states: "Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be servants to him and his sons until the royalty of Persia began to reign; to fulfill Jehovah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah, *until the land had paid off its sabbaths*. All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."

Jerusalem came under final siege in Zedekiah's 9th year (609 B.C.E.), and the city fell in his 11th year (607 B.C.E.), corresponding to Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year of actual rule (counting from his accession year in 625 B.C.E.). (2Ki 25:1-8) In the fifth month of that year (the month of Ab, corresponding to parts of July and August) the city was set afire, the walls were pulled down, and the majority of the people were led off into exile. However, "some of the lowly people of the land" were allowed to remain, and these did so until the assassination of Gedaliah, Nebuchadnezzar's appointee, whereupon they fled into Egypt, finally leaving Judah completely desolate. (2Ki 25:9-12, 22-26) This was in the seventh month, Ethanim (or Tishri, corresponding to parts of September and October). Hence the count of the 70 years of desolation must have begun about October 1, 607 B.C.E., ending in 537 B.C.E. It was in the seventh month of this latter year that the first repatriated Jews arrived back in Judah, exactly 70 years from the start of the full desolation of the land.—2Ch 36:21-23; Ezr 3:1.

F) Jehovah, Enforcer of Prophecy

The Watchtower, December 1, 1964, pp. 732-4

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MEN interpret events to try to make prophecy. Some have made forecasts, but they have been very vague and sketchy, unable to give details. None have proved to be wholly accurate and reliable. In many instances, those who have believed in and followed their prophecies have experienced disastrous results.

Only Jehovah can make true prophecy, for he has a perfect understanding, not only of the mind of man and all the factors, animate and inanimate, that bear upon events, but also of the other essentials, namely, the ability and power to move all these things to bring about the fulfillment of his prophecy. Jehovah utters prophecies so that his people may know his purposes. He then backs up his word with all his mighty invisible angelic organization and with his irresistible holy spirit or active force; so he sees to it that prophecy is enforced to come true. He works out his good purpose, and never violates any of his righteous principles in doing so.

JUDGMENT ENFORCED ON JERUSALEM

To warn ancient Jerusalem, and for our benefit today, Jehovah by his prophets foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of Judah and gave details concerning it. Exactly on time he used the king of a world power as an instrument to enforce these prophecies. In previous issues we have discussed why this judgment was determined and how it began to be enforced by the siege of Jerusalem. Finally, the Babylonian army entered Jerusalem on the ninth day of the fourth month, in the eleventh year of King Zedekiah of Judah. On the tenth day of the fifth month, Ab (August 2-3, 607 B.C.E.), they completely destroyed the temple, the royal palace and the walls of the city. Jeremiah, an eyewitness, tells us that the Babylonians broke up the copper pillars of the temple and the gigantic copper basin, the "molten sea." They also took the utensils of copper, silver and gold. As for the golden ark of the covenant that contained the two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, it had seemingly disappeared already, so that it did not fall into pagan hands.—Jer. 52:12-14, 17-23.

God also enforced his judgment on the unfaithful priesthood of the defiled temple, as foretold at Ezekiel 9:6-8. "The chief of the bodyguard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest and the three doorkeepers, and from the city he took one court official that happened to be commissioner over the men of war, and seven men of those having access to the king, who were found in the city, and the secretary of the chief of the army, the one mustering the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land, who were found in the midst of the city. . . . And these the king of Babylon proceeded to strike down and to put them to death in Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah went into exile from off its soil."—Jer. 52:24-27.

The executioners were cruel, hanging some of the Jewish princes by just their hand. They raped the women right in Zion itself. They slaughtered King Zedekiah's sons before his eyes and deported him to Babylon, where he died. This act against the king was like stifling those who had respect for the royal line of David: "The very breath of our nostrils, the anointed one of Jehovah, has been captured in their large pit, the one of whom we have said: 'In his shade we shall live among the nations.'"—Lam. 4:20.

COVENANT WITH DAVID CONTINUES IN FORCE

Though Jehovah enforced this judgment exactly as foretold, he did not forget his unbreakable covenant with David. He providentially preserved one of the royal line through whom the promised Shiloh could come. It was Jehoiachin, a nephew of Zedekiah, who had been taken into captivity in 617 B.C.E. Jehoiachin had sons at Babylon, Shealtiel, Malchiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama and Nedabiah. Of these sons, Shealtiel was *reckoned* as the father of Zerubbabel, who became governor of Judah under Persia and who rebuilt the temple at restored Jerusalem.—1 Chron. 3:15-19; Ezra 3:2, 8; Matt. 1:12; Luke 3:27.

Likewise, when the high priest Seraiah was put to death Jehovah saw to it that his son Jehozadak was spared and taken into exile to Babylon. (1 Chron. 6:14, 15) He had a son named Jeshua (or, Joshua; *LXX*, Jesus). Joshua was the one who cooperated with Zerubbabel in rebuilding the temple at the restored Jerusalem. In this way neither the line of the house of David nor the Aaronic family line of high priests was broken, but continued on until Jesus Christ appeared on the scene.—Ezra 3:2; Neh. 12:26; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 3:1; Luke 3:1, 2.

Nebuzar-adan, the chief of the bodyguard, let some of the lowly people of the land remain as vinedressers and compulsory laborers. He appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan. (2 Ki. 25:12, 22) But Jehovah had said that he would "make Jerusalem piles of stones, the lair of jackals," and the cities of Judah "a desolate waste, without an inhabitant." (Jer. 9:11; 4:7; 6:8; 26:9; 32:43; 33:10, 12; Zech. 7:5, 14) How would he enforce this?

Jeremiah, who was also allowed to remain with the people there, reports that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama of the royal offspring came with a group of men and assassinated Gedaliah, and fled out of Judah to Ammon. The remaining leaders of the people asked Jeremiah to pray for Jehovah's counsel, and received advice to stay in the land of Judah as servants of King Nebuchadnezzar. But they rejected this counsel

and went down to Egypt, taking along with them Jeremiah and Baruch his secretary. They took up dwelling in Egypt in Tahpanhes, Migdol and Noph (Memphis) and in the land of Pathros. (Jer. 41:1 to 44:1) But they could not escape God's judgment there, for Jehovah told them that he would also give Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt into the hand of his enemies.—Jer. 44:2-30; compare Ezekiel 29:17-20; 30:22-26.

WILD ANIMALS ONLY INHABITANTS FOR SEVENTY YEARS

By this move of the people in the middle of the seventh month, Tishri or Ethanim, which would be near the Gregorian calendar date of October 1, 607 B.C.E., the land of Judah was left completely desolate, without human inhabitant or domestic animal. The timing of the enforcement of Jehovah's prophecy here is remarkable. For it was in this seventh month Ethanim, on the tenth day, the day of atonement, that the trumpet was blown in a Jubilee year to "proclaim liberty in the land to all its inhabitants." It began a sabbath year for the God-given land. (Lev. 25:8-22) So exactly at the appropriate time of the year an uninterrupted run of sabbath years began, in compensation for all the sabbath years that the disobedient Israelites had failed to keep. The land was to enjoy, figuratively, a perfect number of sabbath years—seventy, during which time it was to be utterly desolate, without human inhabitant, a place to be shunned like a haunted place by passers-by. The record written later on, a testimony to Jehovah's ability to enforce his word, reads:

"So he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, . . . And he proceeded to burn the house of the true God and pull down the wall of Jerusalem; . . . Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be servants to him and his sons until the royalty of Persia began to reign; to fulfill Jehovah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had paid off its sabbaths. All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."—2 Chron. 36:17-23; compare also Daniel 9:1, 2.

The Jewish secular historian, Flavius Josephus, of the first century of our Common Era, corroborates the Bible account, writing about Jerusalem's desolation:

He [the Chaldean historian Berosus in the third century B.C.E.] gives us a catalogue of the posterity of Noah, who adds the years of their chronology, from Noah himself to Nabulassar king of the Babylonians and Chaldeans, with an account of this king's exploits. He tells us that he sent his son Nabuchodonosor with a mighty army into Egypt and Judea where, upon his being informed of a revolt, he reduced the people to subjection, set fire to our temple at Jerusalem, and carried off our whole nation in captivity to Babylon. After this our city lay desolate during an interval of seventy years, till the days of Cyrus, King of Persia.—Book 1, section 36, of *To Epaphroditus on the Antiquities of the Jews in Answer to Apion*.

And such was the end of the nation of the Hebrews; it having twice gone beyond Euphrates. For the people of the ten tribes were carried out of Samaria by the Assyrians, in the days of King Hoshea. After which the people of the two tribes, that remained after Jerusalem was taken, were carried away by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon and Chaldea. Now as to Shalmaneser, he removed the Israelites out of their country, and placed therein the nation of Cutheans who had formerly belonged to the interior of Persia and Media; but were then called Samaritans; by taking the name of the country to which they were removed. But the King of Babylon, who brought out the two tribes, placed no other nation in their country. By which means all Judea, and Jerusalem, and the temple, continued to be a desert for seventy years.—Book 10, chapter 9, last paragraph, of *Antiquities of the Jews*, edition by Whiston.

So just when did the foretold seventy years of the desolation of Jerusalem and Judah begin to count? Not in 626 B.C.E., the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim, for there was no captivity of Jews in Babylon then. Even in his ninth year, 620 B.C.E., Jehoiakim merely became tributary to the king of Babylon. In the eleventh year of his reign, in 618 B.C.E., he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who came up against him.^{ftn1} Shortly before the end of Jehoiakim's eleventh year his son and successor, Jehoiachin, who reigned only three months and ten

days, went out in self-surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, who was besieging the city. It was on Nisan 1, 617 B.C.E., (in the spring) that the first regnal year began for Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, whom Nebuchadnezzar made king of Jerusalem in place of Jehoiachin. (2 Ki. 24:12-18) This, then, was not the desolation but only the captivity of comparatively few, namely, 3,023 Jews with their wives and families.—Jer. 52:28.

WHEN DESOLATION BEGAN AND ENDED

Certainly, when King Jehoiakim was in open revolt against Nebuchadnezzar and, later on, when Zedekiah broke his oath and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in the last part of his reign, the *nation* could not be said to be captive to Babylon. Thus the seventy years of unbroken captivity to Babylon did not begin until 607 B.C.E., in the month Ethanim, when the land was left completely desolate when its remaining inhabitants went down to Egypt. Then the Jews as a nation went into exile at Babylon, without a king at Jerusalem. This exile was for an *uninterrupted* period of seventy years. (Dan. 9:1, 2) The seven hundred and forty-five Jews taken into exile, as mentioned at Jeremiah 52:30, were not taken from the desolated land of Judah, but were captured later when Nebuchadnezzar, as Jehovah's symbolic cup, made nations that bordered on the land of Judah drink the bitter potion of being violently conquered.—Jer. 25:17-29.

When would the desolation end? In 537 B.C.E., when King Cyrus of Persia released the Jewish remnant and they left Babylon and began to repopulate the land of Judah. This date can be established by use of the records of secular history. The period of desolation of the land of Judah began seventy years earlier, in 607 B.C.E. No settlers were brought in by Nebuchadnezzar to occupy the land of Judah, as had been done by the king of Assyria in the land of Samaria when he captured that land. Jehovah enforced his prophecy by miraculous means and the land of Judah was kept a complete desolation, that it might rest the foretold seventy years.—2 Chron. 36:21-23.

Ezekiel, over in Babylonia, heard about the destruction, evidently before Nebuchadnezzar's troops arrived back victorious, in the eleventh year of his exile in Babylon. He says: "At length it occurred in the twelfth year [by a certain calculation^{fm2}], in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month of our exile, that there came to me the escaped one from Jerusalem, saying: 'The city has been struck down!'" (Ezek. 33:21) From then on, Ezekiel could prophesy about the coming restoration at the end of the seventy years of desolation.—Ezek. 36:1 to 37:28.

Though Jehovah enforced his prophecy, was this something of joy to him and to his faithful prophet Jeremiah? No. He inspired Jeremiah to write the Bible book called Lamentations, describing the sad state of Jerusalem:

"O how she has come to sit solitary, the city that was abundant with people! How she has become like a widow, she that was populous among the nations! . . . Her adversaries have become the head. . . . Because Jehovah himself has brought grief to her on account of the abundance of her transgressions, her own children have walked captive before the adversary. And from the daughter [city] of Zion there goes out all her splendor."—Lam. 1:1-6, 17; 2:13; 5:16-22.

But this regrettable state of the people who had God's name upon them and who suffered because of their sins against Jehovah did not in any way cancel Jehovah's covenant nor make him unhappy with his purposes. It is true that in 607 B.C.E. the adversaries of Zion became "the head." "Jehovah's throne" in Zion had been overturned. The typical or miniature kingdom of God had passed away. No longer was there any typical kingdom of God on earth to block the Gentile or non-Jewish nations in their way to full world domination. By God's permission they had complete sway.

GOD'S KINGDOM NOT FOREVER OVERTURNED

Why was Jehovah God not unhappy? Because, though these uninterrupted "times of the Gentiles" or "appointed times of the nations" set in at the desolation of Judah in the seventh Jewish month of 607 B.C.E., they would

last only until Shiloh, the One who has the legal right to the overturned kingdom of God, should come and God should give to him the crown, the royal turban, and the scepter, to rule in the midst of the Gentiles, the worldly nations who are his enemies. But when would the enthronement of the royal Son of David be? The heavenly King of Eternity had set the time. He foretold it and had it recorded in his inspired Word. He would certainly enforce it. The next issue of *The Watchtower* will consider the length of the “times of the Gentiles.”—Gen. 49:10; Luke 21:24; Ezek. 21:25-27; Ps. 110:1-6.

In their days the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel had seen many former prophecies of Jehovah come true, and they had complete confidence in the ability of Jehovah to foretell events and to enforce his words of prophecy. Therefore the prophecies, many of which these very men were inspired to write, concerning the One who had the legal right and concerning his coming to exercise kingship upon Jehovah's throne, were even more sure for the apostles and early Christians, for they had a record of and even witnessed the fulfillment of many of the prophecies of these prophets. Peter expressed this confidence: “Consequently we have the prophetic word made more sure; and you are doing well in paying attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place.”—2 Pet. 1:19.

Since the days of the apostles, nineteen centuries have passed and we can be yet more sure than the first-century Christians, for multitudinous prophecies have since been fulfilled. The One whose legal right it is will take world domination completely out of the hands of the nations and hold it permanently for the blessing of all families of the earth. For we must remember, as Peter went on to say: “No prophecy of Scripture springs from any private interpretation. For prophecy was at no time brought by man's will, but men spoke from God as they were borne along by holy spirit.” The all-wise Giver of prophecy is also the all-powerful Enforcer of it.—2 Pet. 1:20, 21.

Footnotes

1. This was in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar, which ran from Nisan 1, 618 B.C.E., to Adar 29, 617 B.C.E. (spring to spring). His ninth year had begun (on Nisan 1, 617 B.C.E.) by the time Jehoiachin and the other Jewish captives were taken away.—2 Chron. 36:9, 10.

2. (Added by editor.) *The Watchtower*, March 1, 1973 p. 148 elaborated on this with the following: “There are eight Hebrew manuscripts besides the Syriac Version and some manuscripts of the Greek *Septuagint* Version that **read ‘eleventh year’ instead of ‘twelfth year.’** This would mean that the fugitive from Jerusalem arrived during the latter half of December (Tebeth 5) in 607 B.C.E., or six months after Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians [on the fourth month Tammuz 9]. (2 Ki. 25:2-4) If the months are counted on a spring-to-spring basis and the year reckoned on an autumn-to-autumn basis, **Tebeth 5 of the ‘twelfth year’ would also fall during the latter half of December in 607 B.C.E.**” (emphasis added)

G) Astronomical Calculations and the Count of Time

The Watchtower, March 15, 1969, pp. 184-7.

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HISTORIANS generally have a preference for their own calculated chronologies over the chronology of the Bible. In this attitude they claim support from ancient astronomical calculations—some of them on tablets uncovered by the archaeologist's spade. One historian even declares that “astronomical confirmation can convert a relative chronology, one that merely establishes the sequence of events, into an absolute chronology, a system of dates related to our [modern] calendar.”¹

How accurate is this claim? Of course, the celestial bodies were provided by the Creator to serve as a timekeeper for men upon earth. At Genesis 1:14 we can read: “Let luminaries come to be in the expanse of the

heavens to make a division between the day and the night; and they must serve as signs and for seasons and for days and years.” However, the efforts of men to relate ancient astronomical data to human events of the past involves a number of factors that allow for error—error in calculation and in interpretation.

At first glance it might seem to be quite simple to determine the date of some specific happening when an ancient cuneiform tablet informs us that the event coincided with some eclipse of the sun or moon. There are, however, partial eclipses and total eclipses, and it is quite important to know which it is in any given connection. Why? Well, according to *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, any “particular town or city would on the average experience some 40 lunar eclipses and 20 partial solar eclipses in 50 years, [although] only one total solar eclipse in 400 years.”² So, the fixing of some specific historical date by means of an eclipse would be open to considerable question unless it was a case of *a definitely stated total solar eclipse visible in a specific area*. Unfortunately, such precise and vital information is rare in ancient sources.

WEAK LINKS IN THE CHAIN

Even as to the area of visibility for any given eclipse there is an element of uncertainty. Earth scientists have long understood that tidal currents in the oceans, coming into contact with sea bottom in shallower areas, may tend slightly to retard the earth's rotation. “A number of scientists,” reports a recent scientific work, “have found plausible evidence for the cumulative effect of tidal slowing in ancient records of eclipses. An eclipse is visible over only a small part of the earth's surface. Moreover, the area of visibility can be calculated for eclipses that occurred centuries (or even millennia) in the past. It turns out, however, that modern calculations do not agree with the ancient records. The eclipses seem to have been observed in areas some hundreds of miles to the east of where they should have appeared.”³

Here is an example that will reveal the weakness in this method of arriving at precise dates. There is one solar eclipse that is specially relied on by historians in their attempt to relate the chronology of Assyria with that of the Bible. This eclipse is mentioned in an Assyrian eponym (prominent name) list^{fn1} as taking place in the third month, counting from spring, of the ninth year of King Assur-dan III. Modern historians conclude that it was the eclipse occurring on June 15, 763 B.C.E.⁴ Counting back 90 years (or names, since they calculate a name for each year) on the eponym list, they arrive at 853 B.C.E. as the date for the battle of Qarqar in Shalmaneser's sixth year. They claim that in other records Shalmaneser lists King Ahab of Israel as in the enemy coalition facing Assyria in that battle, and that twelve years later (Shalmaneser's 18th year) he refers to King Jehu of Israel as one of those paying tribute to him.⁵ They then deduce that the year 853 B.C.E. marked the date of Ahab's last year and 841 B.C.E. the start of Jehu's reign.⁶

How sound are those calculations? Since the eponym list did not state the nature of this eclipse, whether partial or total, historians may not be warranted in concluding that it marked the year 763 B.C.E. Indeed, some scholars have preferred to settle for the year 809 B.C.E., during which an eclipse occurred that would have been at least partially visible in Assyria. But on the same basis there were also partial eclipses in the years 817, 857, and so on—each visible in Assyria.⁷ Nevertheless, historians object to any change from the solar eclipse of 763 B.C.E. on the ground that it would ‘introduce confusion into Assyrian history.’ Assyrian history, however, is already in considerable confusion.^{fn2}

The presence of King Ahab at the battle of Qarqar in the year 853 B.C.E. is quite unlikely. The Bible says nothing of it, and the translation of the Assyrian text on which this idea is based is quite conjectural. Bible chronology places Ahab's death around 919 B.C.E. and the commencement of Jehu's reign about 904 B.C.E. Shalmaneser's mention of Jehu is not necessarily a reference to his first year. It could have been a later year of Jehu's reign. Then, too, we have to keep in mind that the chroniclers of Assyria were given to juggling the years of their campaigns and even crediting their kings with receiving tribute from persons long dead. So there are weak links in the chain of data, including the astronomical data, relied on to synchronize Assyrian chronology and Bible chronology.

LUNAR ECLIPSES

Lunar eclipses, as found in Ptolemy's canon and presumably drawn from data in the cuneiform records, have been used in efforts to substantiate the dates usually given for particular years of the Neo-Babylonian kings. But even though Ptolemy may have been able to calculate accurately the dates of certain eclipses in the past, this does not prove that his transmission of historical data is correct. His relating of eclipses to the reigns of certain kings may not always be based on the facts. Additionally, the frequency of lunar eclipses certainly does not add great strength to this type of confirmation.

For example, a lunar eclipse in 621 B.C.E. (April 22) is used as proof of the correctness of the Ptolemaic date for Nabopolassar's fifth year. However, another eclipse could be cited twenty years earlier in 641 B.C.E. (June 1) to correspond with the date that Bible chronology would indicate for Nabopolassar's fifth year. Besides, this latter eclipse was total, whereas the one in 621 B.C.E. was partial.⁸

Perhaps the date of Herod's death furnishes the best illustration of the uncertainty involved in dating by means of lunar eclipses. The Jewish historian Josephus shows Herod's death to have occurred shortly after a lunar eclipse and not long before the start of the Passover season. Many fix 4 B.C.E. as the date of Herod's death, citing as proof the lunar eclipse on the night of March 12/13 in that year. Due to this reckoning, some modern chronologers place Jesus' birth in 5 B.C.E.

However, W. E. Filmer, writing in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, October 1966, shows the weakness of this reckoning. He points out that eclipses also took place on both January 9 and December 29 of the year 1 B.C.E. and that either of these could fit the requirements of an eclipse not long before Passover. Also he shows that the eclipse of January 9, 1 B.C.E., which was total, would better fit the circumstances than the one in 4 B.C.E., a partial eclipse. Summing up the matter, he says: "Thus, so far as the evidence of lunar eclipse goes, Herod may have died in either of the years 4 or 1 B.C.E., or even in A.D. 1." And either of these latter two dates would harmonize with the date of Jesus' birth as calculated according to the Bible's count of time, namely, the autumn of 2 B.C.E.

Thus it is obvious that eclipses of the moon of themselves are by no means sure pointers to the accuracy of dates in a relative system of chronology.

ASTRONOMICAL "DIARIES"

Not all the texts historians use to date events and periods of ancient history are based on eclipses, however. Astronomical "diaries" have been found. These diaries give the position (in relation to certain stars and constellations) of the moon at its first and its last visibility on a specific day in Babylon, along with positions of certain planets at these same times. For example, one such entry states that "the moon was one cubit in front of the rear foot of the lion." Modern chronologers point out that such a combination of astronomical positions would not be duplicated in thousands of years. These diaries also contain references to the reigns of certain kings and seem to coincide with Ptolemy's canon.

Strong and incontrovertible though such evidence may appear to be, there are factors that greatly impair its strength. First, the observations made in Babylon may have contained errors. Babylon's astronomers were more concerned about celestial phenomena occurring close to the horizon, at the rising or the setting of the sun or the moon. However, as viewed from Babylon, the horizon is often obscured by sandstorms, as Professor Neugebauer points out. He mentions that Ptolemy himself complained about "the lack of reliable planetary observations [from ancient Babylon]. He [Ptolemy] remarks that the old observations were made with little competence, because they were concerned with appearances and disappearances and with stationary points, phenomena which by their very nature are difficult to observe."—*The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, page 98.

Another factor reducing the strength of testimony from extant astronomical diaries is the date of their writing. The majority of those now known were, in fact, written, not in the time of the Neo-Babylonian or Persian empires, but in the Seleucid period, about 364-312 B.C.E. True, they contain data relating to much earlier periods, and it is assumed that they were copies of earlier documents. However, the accuracy of such copying and the possibility of additions or adjustments certainly reduces the value of this evidence. Actually there is a serious lack of contemporary astronomical texts by which historians might establish the full chronology of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods.

Then, too, as in the case of Ptolemy, even if the astronomical data in the available texts, as now interpreted and understood, is accurate, this does not prove that the *historical data* accompanying the astronomical information is accurate. Just as Ptolemy used the reigns of certain kings (as he understood them) simply as a framework in which to place his astronomical data, so too the writers or copyists of the Seleucid period may have simply inserted in their astronomical texts what was “popular” chronology in their time. That “popular” chronology may well have contained errors.

To illustrate, an ancient astronomer of the second century B.C.E. might state that a certain celestial event took place in the year that, according to our calendar, would be 465 B.C.E. And his statement may prove to be correct when accurate computations are made to verify it. But he may also state that the year in which the celestial event took place was the ‘twenty-first year of Xerxes’ and be entirely wrong. Simply stated, accuracy in astronomy does not prove accuracy in history.

A DEPENDABLE COUNT OF TIME

On the other hand, the dependability of the Bible’s time references is vouchsafed to us by the very characteristics of the Bible itself: its candor and honesty; the fact that everywhere we are made conscious of time as we peruse the various Bible books; the measurement of time by days, by seven-day weeks, by months and by years—a system of counting that is to be noted from the very outset of the Bible’s writing; the prophesied periods of time, so many of which we know to have been fulfilled exactly on time. All of this unites to assure us that the guiding power behind the numerous Bible writers was the One of whom it may be truly said that he is “the One telling from the beginning the finale, and from long ago the things that have not been done.”—Isa. 46:10.

Did not the Bible long in advance foretell the seventy years during which Judea would lie desolate and her inhabitants would languish in Babylonian exile? In due time, the decree of Cyrus the Persian conqueror offered the faithful worshipers of Jehovah release and reinstatement in their own land. They were back in Jerusalem exactly on time.—Jer. 25:11, 12; Dan. 9:2.

The reader who will take the time to read the Bible passages at 1 Kings 6:1 and at Luke 3:1, 2 cannot but be impressed by the meticulous manner of referring to important historical dates. Sufficient data is offered so that the student may pin down the exact time of the event. The Bible writers themselves credit the factualness of their information to the Divine Author who merely used them as writing instruments. Surely, then, we can look to this same Source for accurate chronological data—data that is much more dependable than the speculations and conjectures of human historians!

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1. *The Old Testament World*, Martin Noth, p. 272.
2. *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1965 ed., Vol. 7, p. 297.

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5. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Pritchard, pp. 277-280.

6. *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, E. R. Thiele, p. 53.

7. *Oppolzer's Canon of Eclipses*, Charts 17, 19, 21 (1962 ed.).

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 333, 334.

Footnotes

1. *The Watchtower*, December 15, 1968, p. 758, "Assyria's Historical Records and the Bible."

2. For evidence of this, see *The Watchtower*, December 15, 1968, pp. 757, 758, "Assyria's Historical Records and the Bible."

H) Exiles Return From Babylon

Insight on the Scriptures, Volume 2, p. 332

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IN 607 B.C.E. the once-prosperous land of Judah was made "a desolate waste, without an inhabitant," as Jewish captives were led away to exile in Babylon and a remnant fled to Egypt. (Jer 9:11) The God of loving-kindness, though, would not leave his people in exile forever. He foretold that they would "have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years," after which he would deliver a faithful remnant. (Jer 25:11, 12; 29:10-14) And not even the seemingly impregnable world power of Babylon could thwart God's stated purpose. The return of the Jewish exiles demonstrates the unerring accuracy with which Jehovah's prophecies are fulfilled.

Even before the end of the 70 years of exile, Babylon fell, in 539 B.C.E., to the invading armies of Persian King Cyrus. Then, during his first year as ruler of Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree opening the way for the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem. (Ezr 1:1-4) A remnant that may have numbered 200,000 (including men, women, and children) made the journey, arriving in Judah in 537 B.C.E. (Ezr 1:5-3:1; 4:1) Thus the 70 years' desolation ended exactly on time!

Not all the exiles returned at that time, however. In 468 B.C.E., another group of returnees accompanied the priest Ezra, who brought to Jerusalem gifts for the temple. (Ezr 7:1-8:32) Then in 455 B.C.E., Nehemiah traveled from Shushan to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. (Ne 2:5, 6, 11) As to the exact route followed by the returnees, the Scriptures are silent. Some reasonable possibilities are shown on the map.

[Please see printed edition of *Insight on the Scriptures* or page 70.]

I) Mercy to the Persecuted But Judgment to the Persecutors

"Paradise Restored To Mankind - By Theocracy!" pp. 130-3

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¹⁸ "So the angel of Jehovah answered and said: 'O Jehovah of armies, how long will you yourself not show mercy to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah, whom you have denounced these seventy years?'"—Zechariah 1:12.

¹⁹ To some minds, according to what was said by the angel, it appeared that Jehovah's denunciation of "these seventy years" was still continuing against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah. This was due to the fact that the rebuilding of his temple had been neglected for the past seventeen years. He had had very much indignation against their fathers who suffered exile because of profaning the former temple that had been built by King Solomon. Now, in the eighth month (Heshvan) of the year 520 B.C.E. Jehovah had warned the repatriated Jewish remnant to avoid suffering divine indignation through becoming like their fathers and not returning to Jehovah with zeal for full worship of Him through a rebuilt temple. (Zechariah 1:1-6) In the light of this we are to understand the outcry of the angel according to what these things might indicate to him regarding Jerusalem and the other cities of repopulated Judah.

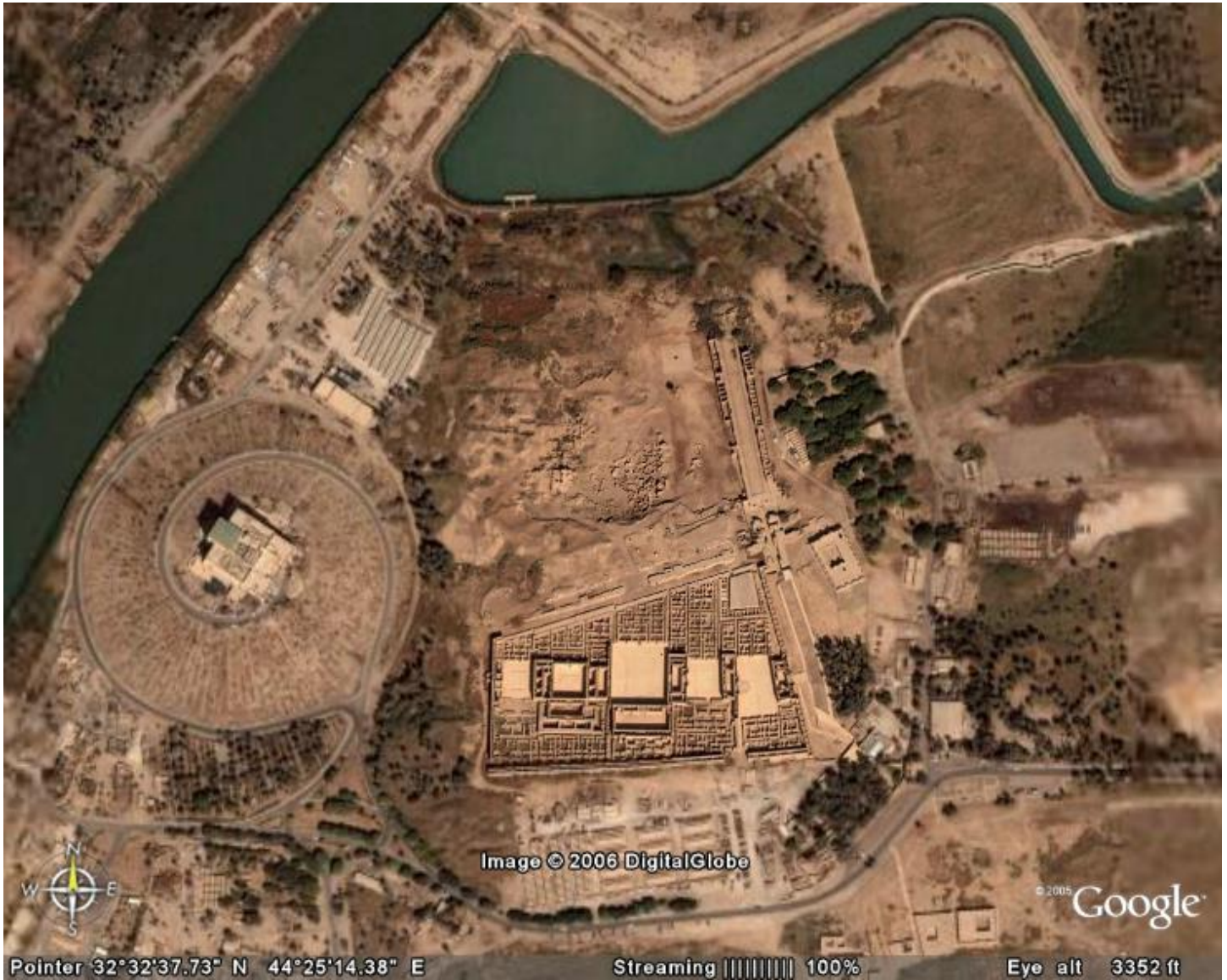
²⁰ The angel's mention of these "seventy years" calls to mind the seventy years mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah. During those seventy years the nations of Judah and Israel must serve the dynasty of kings of Babylon, at the end of which seventy years Jehovah was to call the erroneous conduct of the king of Babylon and of the Chaldeans to account and He would punish them therefor. (Jeremiah 25:11-13) So did Jehovah's angel mean that those seventy years had not yet ended, or that they had just now ended? This could not historically be true. Why not? Because about twenty years before this (in 539 B.C.E.) Jehovah had used Cyrus the Great of Persia to overthrow Babylon as a world power and about two years later, in 537 B.C.E., Jehovah moved Cyrus who was acting as the king of Babylon to let the Jewish exiles leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem to rebuild Jehovah's temple.—Ezra 1:1 to 2:2; 2 Chronicles 36:20-23.

²¹ Furthermore, the land of Judah was to keep a "sabbath, to fulfill seventy years." (2 Chronicles 36:21) How? By lying as a "desolate waste without man and domestic animal," it having been "given into the hand of the Chaldeans." (Jeremiah 32:43; 33:10-12) Both the prophet Zechariah and the angels knew that those seventy years of utter desolation of the land of Judah and Jerusalem without man and domestic animal had ended in the year 537 B.C.E. when the Jewish remnant returned from Babylon and reoccupied the land, they being reported back in their cities in the seventh month (Tishri) of that year. (Ezra 3:1, 2) Instead of its lying as a desolate waste any longer, crops began to be raised in the land, as the prophet Haggai reports seventeen years later. (Haggai 1:6-11; 2:16, 17) So those seventy years were long past!

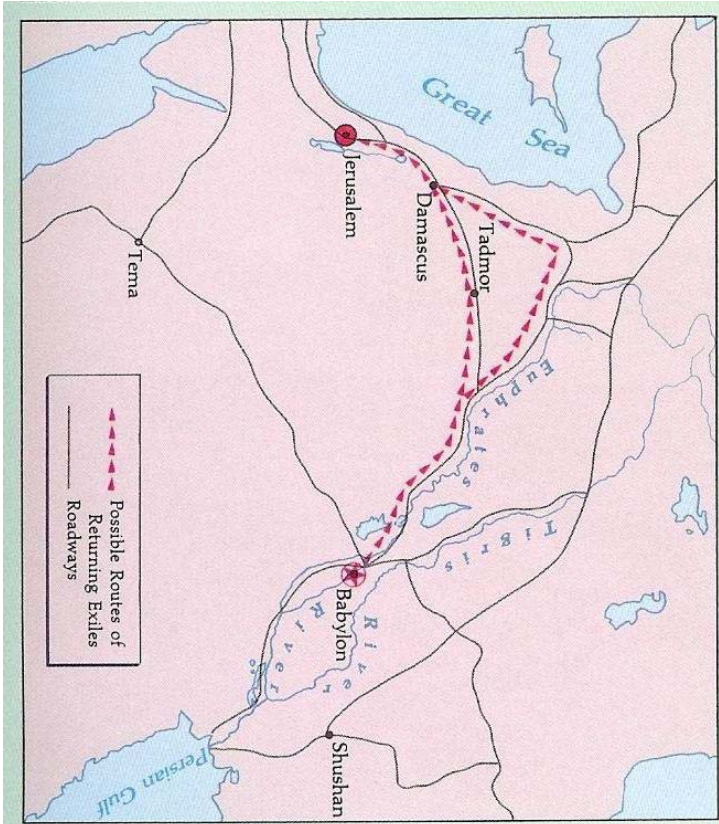
²² If, at the time of Zechariah's first vision, those seventy years were still continuing or were just now over, why would the angel, knowing what he did, speak as he did? Since he knew that the time period was definitely seventy years long, why would he say: "O Jehovah of armies, how long?" (Zechariah 1:12) Why, away back in the first year of Darius the Mede after the overthrow of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., the prophet Daniel "discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, for fulfilling the devastations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years." (Daniel 9:1, 2) And certainly Daniel verified the number of years, not seventeen long years before they were due to end, but immediately before the end of the seventy years in the first year of the reign of King Cyrus the Persian. Thus the aged prophet Daniel, who lived at least into "the third year of Cyrus the king of Persia," could know that he had calculated the length of the time period correctly. (Daniel 10:1) Hence those "seventy years" did not extend to the time when Zechariah got his first vision, in 519 B.C.E.

²³ Be it remembered, also, that those unforgettable seventy years were the first seventy years of the Gentile Times, "the appointed times of the nations." So, when those seventy years ended in 537 B.C.E., the Gentile Times still continued on for Jerusalem to be trampled on by the Gentile nations. (Luke 21:24) Apparently, then, the angel who cried out, "O Jehovah of armies, how long?" was referring *back* to that former period of seventy years as an illustration of Jehovah's denunciation of his chosen people. He was asking whether Jehovah's denunciation of them was being renewed because of their long neglect toward His temple. And so the angel was asking how long it would yet be before Jehovah would show mercy to Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah. The prophet Zechariah was also interested in knowing this. We, also!

Maps: Modern Babylon and Roads to Jerusalem.



Babylon today. The structures around the ruins reflect the Saddam Hussein administration's discontinued plans of rebuilding parts of it. The building on the hill to the left is a modern presidential palace.



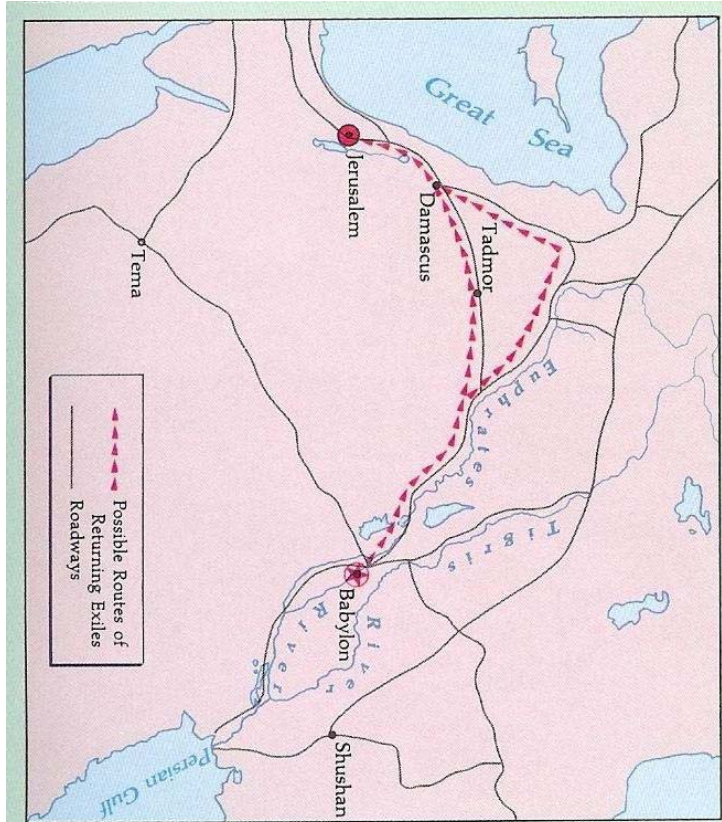
Original map seen in *Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 2, p. 332

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