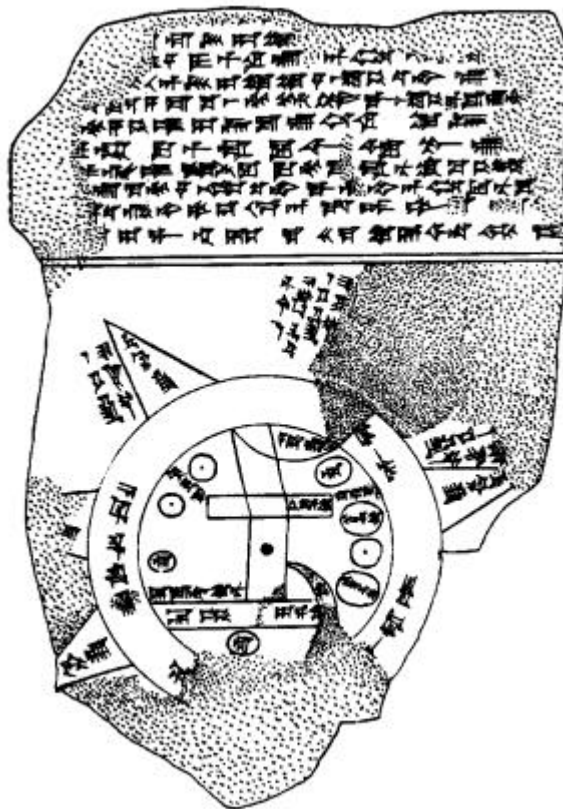


Seventy Years of Servitude

Doug Mason



This is a **FREEWARE** publication. This means it may be freely circulated, but without any amendments.

© Copyright Notice, May 2001

This is a restructure of material I published in 1972 and incorporates material I prepared or received in the mid-1970s. This explains the dates of some quotations.

I will appreciate your corrections, comments, suggestions, information and criticisms.

Except where indicated, artwork is © 1999 New Vision Technologies.

Cover picture:

"The Babylonian 'world map' from about 600 BC. The parallel lines running down the center show the Euphrates, crossed by a rectangle marked, in cuneiform writing, Babylon. At the bottom another rectangle shows the marshland of southern Iraq, next to a horn-shaped Persian Gulf. The small circles show the countries surrounding Babylonia, including Assyria (northern Iraq), Urartu (Armenia) and parts of western Iran. The map is highly schematic, its main purpose being to show the 'four regions' at the edges of the world in relationship to Babylonia. These are shown by the triangles jutting out from the circular ocean and have captions describing the fabulous beasts that lived there. Overall it is very reminiscent of the *mappae mundi* produced two thousand years later in medieval Europe." *Ancient Inventions*, James and Thorpe, page 59 © 1994

I am grateful to Bruce Price for his permission to reproduce material that originally appeared in the mid-1970s in the *Witness* magazine that he so ably produced and published. This material is included at Appendix D.



On the Watch

Doug Mason
PO Box 224
Kilsyth
Victoria
Australia 3137

doug_mason1940@yahoo.com.au

Contents

THE SIGNIFICANCE	1
Jerusalem.....	1
Dating the Destruction	1
The Significance of the Destruction	2
The Significance of the Date.....	2
The Society's Method	2
Difficulties Facing the Watchtower Society	2
Solid Rock or Simply Sand?	3
THE HISTORY	4
The Assyrians	4
Nabopolassar.....	4
Assyrians and Egyptians in an Alliance	5
Pharaoh Necho.....	5
The Battle at Carchemish.....	5
Judah and Jerusalem under Babylonian Rule.....	6
Nebuchadnezzar Ascends the Throne	7
Different Systems of Reckoning.....	7
Jeremiah's Prophecies	8
The Prophecy at Jeremiah 25.....	8
"Serve the King of Babylon Seventy Years"	8
Jehoiakim Hardens his Heart	9
Jeremiah's Repeated Warnings Ignored	9
Jerusalem Falls.....	9
Zedekiah Placed on the Throne	10
Zedekiah Rebels	10
Failure to Serve Babylon Will Increase the Servitude.....	10
The False Prophet Hananiah	11
Hananiah Rebuked by Jeremiah.....	11
Increased Servitude Possible	11
Jeremiah's Final Plea: Spare the City	12
Jerusalem Destroyed.....	12
People Left Behind.....	12
A Stiff-necked People Cause Unnecessary Destruction.....	13
THE EXEGESIS.....	15
Jeremiah's Message	15
Jeremiah's Ministry	15
Many nations were to serve Babylon	16

Nebuchadnezzar Returns.....	17
The Plea to Zedekiah.....	17
If only they listened	17
Babylon's Dominance.....	18
The Choice for the Nations	18
Babylon was Dominating the World.....	19
The False Prophet Hananiah	19
"Head of Gold" by his Second Year	19
World Dominance with the Battle at Carchemish	19
The Event that Completed the 70-year Dominance.....	20
Ezra Confirms	20
Judah's Desolations.....	20
Daniel Understands.....	21
Desolation While Still Populated	21
<i>Chorbah</i> and <i>Shamem</i>	21
Ezekiel Shows Shades of Meaning.....	21
The Length of Babylon's Rule	22
"The Problem is Difficult".....	23
Other Thoughts.....	23
Summary	24
Appendix A Dating The Jews' Return.....	25
Cyrus' Decree	25
Chronological Principles	26
Accession-Year Reckoning	26
Calendars	26
Using these Chronological Principles.....	26
Ezra-Nehemiah was one book	26
Nehemiah's and Ezra's Tishri reckoning.....	27
The Jews' Accession-Year reckoning.....	27
Cyrus' First Year.....	27
The Society and Darius.....	28
The Society's First Pronouncement.....	28
The Society's Second Pronouncement.....	29
The Society's Third Pronouncement.....	29
The Society's Fourth Pronouncement	29
The Society's Fifth Pronouncement.....	29
The Society's Sixth Pronouncement.....	29
Daniel's Reckoning.....	30

Summary	30
Appendix B Shades of Desolation	31
Chorbah	31
Shamem	31
2 Chronicles 36:21	31
Further Degrees of Desolation	32
Resolving the Problem	32
Appendix C Dating the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Fall of Babylon	33
Absolute Dates	33
Absolute Dates for the Period	33
The Dating of Tablets	34
Nebuchadnezzar's 37 th Year	34
Nebuchadnezzar's Years Doubly Fixed	35
The Date of Jerusalem's Destruction	35
Chronologies	35
The Accepted Chronology	36
Dating Intervening Events	36
Claudius Ptolemy	36
Lady Adda Guppi Stele	38
Synchronisms with Other Dating Systems	39
The Date of Babylon's Fall	39
A Most Difficult Position for the Watchtower Society	40
Summary	40
Dating the Destruction of Jerusalem	40
Dating the Fall of Babylon	40
Conclusion	40
Appendix D "The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy"	41
Introduction	41
The nature of the Canon	41
Insight on the News: Claudius Ptolemy – a Fraud	42
My Initial Investigations	43
The Scientific American Article	43
First Letter to Newton	43
Newton's Replies	43
Newton Upholds Ptolemy's neo-Babylonian Dates	44
The Watchtower Society Informed	44
Professor Theile's Comments	44
Newton's Letter of January 4, 1978	45

Newton's Letter of January 23, 1978	45
"Scientific American" Acquits Ptolemy	46
Julia Neuffer Defends Ptolemy	46
Base of Babylonian Chronology	46
Pre-Babylonian Chronology	47
Babylonian Chronology	47
Post-Babylonian Chronology	47
Complete Agreement	47
Newton's Venture into Chronology	47
Newton's Chronologist	48
Newton Destroys The Watchtower Dates	48
Did Newton Use Watchtower Reasoning?	48
"Everything to Gain"	49
Appendix E Personal Letters from Edwin Theile	50
Letter of October 25, 1964	50
Letter of January 21, 1971 to Dr Edmond C. Gruss	50
Letter of February 24 1978 to Doug Mason	51
Letter of January 12, 1979 to Bruce Price	55

Figures

Figure 1: Typical Costume	1
Figure 2: The Babylonian Empire at the time of Daniel's captivity	6
Figure 3 Glazed-brick relief from the Ishtar Gate, during Nebuchadnezzar's reign	7
Figure 4: Reconstruction of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem	9

Table

Table 1: Dating Jehoiakim's and Nebuchadnezzar'-s years according to the Tishri and Nisan Systems of Reckoning	14
---	----

Seventy Years of Servitude

THE SIGNIFICANCE

Jerusalem

When Saul the first king of Israel was killed in battle, David was chosen as his successor.

One of David's first acts as king was the conquest of Jerusalem. He named it the "City of David" and declared it the capital of his kingdom. The city was at the centre of the three great territories allotted to the twelve tribes of Israel, bordering on the territory of the Tribe of Benjamin - which King Saul had belonged to - and on Judah, King David's tribe.

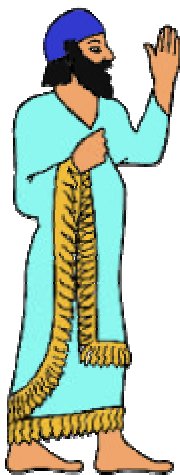


Figure 1: Typical Costume¹

After conquering Jerusalem about 1000 BCE and turning it into the centre of government, David radically altered its status when he brought the Ark of the Covenant to the city. Jerusalem became the political and the spiritual focus of the people of Israel.

David built an altar on the summit of Mount Moriah but left the building the Temple to his son, Solomon.

Jerusalem served as the capital of the united kingdom for only two generations. During the reign of King Rehoboam, Solomon's son, the kingdom was split into two: Judah in the south with Jerusalem as its capital and Israel in the north with different capitals at different times.

When the northern Kingdom of Israel was laid waste by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, Jerusalem reasserted its status, with major prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah operating there.

Dating the Destruction

In his 19th year, Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon destroyed the city and the temple.

Dating the destruction is a straightforward task. The Bible does not provide dates in terms of the Julian or Gregorian calendars that we use now.² The Chronologers start with fixed known dates, known as "Absolute Dates" and then apply reliable chronologies, such as king lists, to determine the intervening dates.³

For this period, a tablet in the Berlin Museum known as VAT4956 sets the Absolute Date. It is a series of planetary observations. These readings provide the undeniable date. The tablet was written of Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year and Chronologers have set that year at 568 BCE.

¹ © Hebrew University Jerusalem <http://jeru.huji.ac.il/njeru/eb61.htm>

² A coin or document with a date such as "100 BCE" written on it would have to be viewed with no small degree of suspicion!

³ For further information, see Appendix C

Since we know that Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in his 19th year, this fixes the event in 587/6 BCE.

The Significance of the Destruction

The Watchtower Society sees the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar as the end of the Temple's sacred role and marking the beginning of "The Appointed Times of the Gentiles". This period, it teaches, ended in 1914 CE with the setting up of The Kingdom, but this time it is located in "the heavens".

This 20th century Kingdom is the successor to the Temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The sole voice of this Kingdom, this direct descendant of Solomon's Temple, is the Watchtower and Bible Tract Society.

Jehovah's Witnesses listen to and follow the utterances of the Society because of whom it is, not because of the veracity of what it says. It is God's sole voice upon earth. To fail to listen to the Society is to be deaf to Him. To suggest change is to go ahead of Him. God speaks to humankind only through the voice and pages of the Watchtower Society.

The Society thus derives its authority from the authority vested in the original Temple at Jerusalem. Details of the Destruction of Jerusalem are therefore of critical importance to the Watchtower Society and to Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Significance of the Date

The date of the Destruction of Jerusalem is critically important to the Watchtower since it uses that date as the starting point to arrive at the date of 1914 CE for the setting up of the Kingdom.

The Watchtower Society emphatically that the Destruction occurred in 607 BC whereas every authority provides the date of 586 BC.

The Society's Method

To arrive at its 607 BC date for the Destruction of Jerusalem, the Watchtower Society commences with the date of the Fall of Babylon (539 BC), it then assumes the Jews returned to Jerusalem in 537 BC and since there was to be a 70 Year period of desolation, the Society assumes this means Jerusalem was destroyed 70 years before the Jews returned. Hence the 607 BC date.

Difficulties Facing the Watchtower Society

There are several broad difficulties facing the Watchtower Society as it creates its foundation:

1. The Absolute Date for this period is 568 BCE for Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year. This date is the starting point for determining the other dates in the period, including 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon. Since the Society accepts the 539 BCE date for that event it is accepting the recognised Absolute Date and the secular chronology of the period, which is supplied by or based on the work of Claudius Ptolemy. Since Jerusalem was destroyed in Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year it is a simple matter to determine that this occurred in 587/7 BCE. The date of 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon is not an Absolute Date, it is a calculated date.
2. The Watchtower Society faces great difficulty to prove beyond any shadow of doubt that the Jews returned to the site of the Temple in 537 BCE.⁴

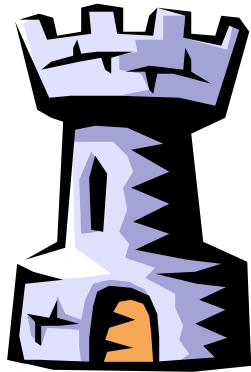
⁴ See Appendix A at the conclusion of this Paper

3. This Paper presents several issues that the Watchtower Society faces in regards to the "Seventy Years".
4. After it has faced these factually provable evidences, the Watchtower Society has the unenviable task of justifying its interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, described in Daniel 4. The straightforward explanation is that Daniel chapter 2 describes the King's dream in which he saw a multi-metalled image, with Babylon represented by the head of gold (*"You are that head of gold."*⁵). The following Chapter 3 of Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar's response to his dream, in which he created a large statue, but it was gold from head to toe (*"They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever!"*⁶). In Chapter 4 of Daniel the King is given a dream and a fulfilment that showed him that it is in God's hand to whom He will provide power and authority over men (*"Acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."*⁷). And it is quite strange to perceive the fate of the Kingdom of God being symbolised by the actions of a heathen, one who at the same time was responsible for destroying it.



Solid Rock or Simply Sand?

If the Watchtower Society is not providing its followers with the full and true picture from the historical records and if it is not providing its followers with the full and true picture of the record provided by Scripture, the question must be asked:



Is the Watchtower rock solid?



Or is it built on sand and made of sand?

⁵ Daniel 2:38. All citations are from the New International Version (NIV)

⁶ Daniel 3:9

⁷ Daniel 4:32

⁸ © <http://www.execulink.com/~wblank/index.htm>

Seventy Years of Servitude

THE HISTORY

Archaeologists are deciphering more and more of the hundreds of thousands of cuneiform tablets that lie in dark and dingy museums.

As the archaeologists do this, Kings and Kingdoms, cities and peoples, though dead for thousands of years, spring to life.

Legendary men like Nebuchadnezzar and Darius relive their famous exploits. Modern man can study the political intrigues, the famous battles, even the innermost thoughts of these great leaders.

Cities long covered by sand stand again. Their mighty walls monuments to man's abilities. Myriads throng within them; camel trains stream through their gates, bringing their wares. To the general cacophony is added the bartering of people in the market and the chanting of priests performing their never-ending rites.

The eyes pick out the bright reds and blues; the ears the sounds of the noisy, jostling crowds. The nose reacts to the smells of humanity and of animals.

The thundering hooves stir the dust into a smoke-like trail, as horsemen pound across shimmering sands, the blazing sun beating mercilessly like a golden orb suspended from a rich azure curtain. At night, stars move along their paths in a black velvet sky. History vibrates to life.

The Assyrians

The cruel powerful Assyrians, men who made a sport of torture. The very mention of their name brought fear to even the bravest breast. And stomachs still sicken at the records of their vile exploits. But oppressed men desire to be free, and there were men prepared to fight.

Even Kandalanu, who was made governor of Babylon by the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal after the revolt that was led there by the king's own brother, even he revolted against Assyria during the confusion that followed Ashurbanipal's death.

Nabopolassar

In an apparent move to oppose Kandalanu, Sin-sar-iskun, Assyria's new king, appointed Nabopolassar administrator of the sea land. But the record of 626 BC opens with Nabopolassar in open conflict against Sin-sar-iskun, and in the twelfth month (9/10 October) the Babylonian and Assyrian troops engaged one another. The Assyrians were decisively beaten and the Babylonians obtained the independence they sought.

Six weeks later, on the 26th of Marcheswan (22/23 November) Nabopolassar sat on the throne of Babylon.

The Assyrian army continued their annual summer/autumn excursions into occupied territory, but never again did they occupy Babylon. The Babylonian army also made annual excursions, which were designed to obtain tribute and to show strength.

Assyrians and Egyptians in an Alliance

The Assyrian army declined rapidly in strength while Babylon's increased, and with an ally which was probably the Medes under Kyaxares, they destroyed the Assyrian capital Ninevah in 612 BC. Defeated, the Assyrians found a new ally in the Egyptians, and the provincial city of Harran was declared capital of Assyria.

Nabopolassar was unwilling to make a direct engagement with the Assyrians and Egyptians, and showed strength in only those areas where his army had no difficulty maintaining order. However, when his army was joined by an auxiliary force which included Medes and Scythians, Nabopolassar marched upon Harran. The Assyrians and Egyptians withdrew before the Babylonians, and Harran was taken undefended.

Pharaoh Necho

The Assyrians made a token siege of Harran in the following year (609/8 BC) but lifted it before the Babylonian army even arrived. The only power now confronting the Babylonians was Egypt's, whose ruler was Pharaoh Necho.



By this time, Nabopolassar's son, crown prince Nebuchadnezzar (more correctly, Nebuchadrezzar), commanded his own force independently of his father's. In 607/6 BC, Nabopolassar's army remained in Babylon until Nebuchadnezzar's return; apparently the royal family had opposition to meet in Babylon.

In 606/5 BC Nabopolassar set out to meet the renewed threat of Egyptian hostilities. The Egyptian troops were based at Carchemish, and Nabopolassar made two unsuccessful attempts at placing garrisons in strategic positions handy to the Egyptian base. Nabopolassar returned to Babylon in Sebat (January/February) 605 BC, leaving the stage set for a major conflict between Nebuchadnezzar's troops and the Egyptians at Carchemish. And when Nebuchadnezzar took out his troops in the following year (605/4 BC), he was commander-in-chief of the whole Babylonian army.

The Battle at Carchemish

Nebuchadnezzar marched up the Euphrates to Carchemish and annihilated the Egyptians. Those Egyptians who fled before the conflict were overtaken and slain. The record intones that "not a man escaped to his own country."

The battle of Carchemish, which definitely occurred in 605 BC¹ (probably May/June), was decisive, and the Babylonians took from the Egyptians territories that included Syria and Palestine. Speaking of the effects of the battle, Jeremiah comments: "The king of Egypt did not march out from his own country again, because the king of Babylon had taken all his territory, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River."²

¹ "Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings (626-556 BC) In the British Museum", D.J. Wiseman, page 25

² 2 Kings 24:7

Judah and Jerusalem under Babylonian Rule

Thus Judah and Jerusalem came under the control of Babylon when the Egyptians were defeated at Carchemish in 605 BC.



Figure 2: The Babylonian Empire at the time of Daniel's captivity³

The king of Judah at the time was Jehoiakim. Pharaoh Necho of Egypt had placed him there only a few years before:

"Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah and changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. . . Jehoiakim paid Pharaoh Neco the silver and gold he demanded. In order to do so, he taxed the land and exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land according to their assessments."⁴

Jehoiakim, placed upon the throne by Pharaoh Necho, had a special regard for him. This is only natural. However, with the defeat of Necho, Jehoiakim became vassal to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon.

Calling Nebuchadnezzar "king of Babylon", either prophetically or because he said it when Nebuchadnezzar had become king, Jeremiah says:

³ "Bible Facts", Jenny Roberts, Grange Books (1997), page 20

⁴ 2 Kings 23:34-35

"The army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt . . . was defeated at Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah."⁵

Thus in his fourth year on the throne, Jehoiakim became vassal to the power who was opposed to the one he owed natural allegiance to.

"The effect on Judah was that king Jehoiakim, a vassal of Necho, submitted voluntarily to Nebuchadnezzar, and some Jews, including the prophet Daniel, were taken as captives or hostages to Babylon (Daniel 1:1)."⁶

Nebuchadnezzar Ascends the Throne

Nabopolassar died in Babylon on the 8th of Ab (15/16 August 605 BC), after a reign of 21 years. Upon hearing the news, which may have taken a fortnight to reach him, Nebuchadnezzar raced across the shortest desert route to Babylon. He reached the city only 23 days after his father's death and ascended the throne on the day he arrived.

The cuneiform tablets reckon the next 8 months until the commencement of the new year in the following Nisan (March/April) as Nebuchadnezzar's Accession Year. His first Regnal Year commenced in Nisan 604 BC.

Thus Daniel was able to complete three years training by Nebuchadnezzar's second year.⁷ Although it was Nebuchadnezzar's second regnal year by Babylonian reckoning, he had been on the throne for three years when he had his first vision.

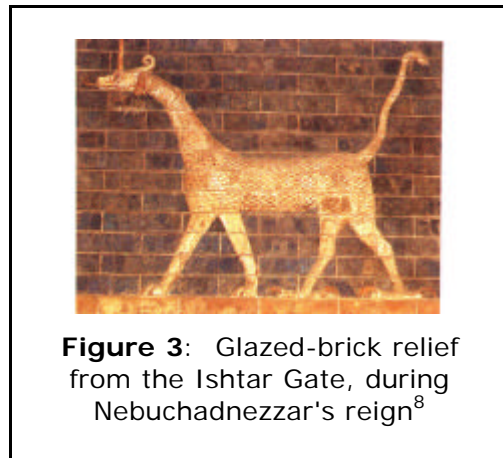


Figure 3: Glazed-brick relief from the Ishtar Gate, during Nebuchadnezzar's reign⁸

Different Systems of Reckoning

The system of reckoning used by Daniel (*Tishri*⁹) reckoned the year in which he was taken captive as being Jehoiakim's third¹⁰, whereas the system used by Jeremiah (*Nisan*¹¹) reckons, as we have seen, that year in which Jehoiakim became vassal to Babylon as being Jehoiakim's fourth year¹².

For examples of differences produced by the two systems, see page 19 of "The Chronology of Ezra 7" by Horn and Wood. See the Table following this Chapter for the two dating systems used for Jehoiakim's and Nebuchadnezzar's reigns.

⁵ Jeremiah 46:2

⁶ Wiseman, page 26

⁷ Daniel 2:1, 1:5

⁸ "Bible Facts", Jenny Roberts, Grange Books, page 150

⁹ "The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings" (1965) E.R. Theile, page 166

¹⁰ Daniel 1:1

¹¹ "The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings" (1965) E.R. Theile, page 161

¹² Jeremiah 25:1. See also JNES 15 (1956) pages 226ff and others. The reference to Nebuchadnezzars' 'First Year' should read 'Accession Year'. See H. Tadmor in JNES 15 (1956) pages 226, 227, 229 and "The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings" (1965) E.R. Theile, page 163

Jeremiah's Prophecies

When Judah and Jerusalem became vassal to Babylon with the defeat of Necho at Carchemish, Jeremiah uttered several prophecies. Some concerned the Jews and some concerned neighbouring countries, such as Egypt.¹³

Jeremiah's original statements were edited and expanded by his biographer, and many theological discussions hinge on determining which are Jeremiah's words and which are those of his biographer¹⁴. These problems do not concern us in this particular venture as it is immaterial whether Jeremiah foresaw events ascribed to him or whether his biographer placed words in his mouth in the light of subsequent events. In either case we have reliable comment and interpretation.

The Prophecy at Jeremiah 25

Of the prophecies uttered by Jeremiah at the time Judah and Jerusalem became vassal to Babylon with the defeat of Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish, it is the one recorded in chapter 25 that is of primary interest. This prophecy 'came . . . in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon'.¹⁵

Jeremiah reminded the people of Judah that "the word of the LORD has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened. And though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. . . They said, 'Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the LORD gave to you and your fathers for ever and ever. . . Do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you. But you did not listen to me,' declares the LORD."¹⁶

"Serve the King of Babylon Seventy Years"

Jeremiah saw the coming of Nebuchadnezzar as God's means of punishing the people, making the land a desolation and causing the nation and its surrounding neighbours to serve the king of Babylon for seventy years:

"Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: 'Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon', declares the LORD, 'and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. . . This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.'¹⁷

Jeremiah's prophecy concerned not only God's people, but surrounding nations as well. They were all to serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. It is clear that with the coming of Nebuchadnezzar, the seventy year servitude to Babylon by the listed nations had commenced.

¹³ Jeremiah 46

¹⁴ JNES IV (1945) pages 217 – 227 and others

¹⁵ Jeremiah 25:1

¹⁶ Jeremiah 25:3 - 8

¹⁷ Jeremiah 25:8 - 11

Jehoiakim Hardens his Heart

However, Jehoiakim hardened his heart to God's punishment and willingly served Babylon for only three years¹⁸.

The Babylonian tablet reveals the reason for Jehoiakim's actions. For three years Nebuchadnezzar continued his annual forays to gather tribute and to show force, but in his fourth year, Nebuchadnezzar fought a battle with Pharaoh Necho which ended indecisively ("a draw"). Jehoiakim took heart at the resurgence of Egyptian power, showing more natural allegiance to that power than to his Babylonian overlord. His attitude was further strengthened when Nebuchadnezzar's army remained in Babylon the following year to repair the loss sustained in the battle with Pharaoh Necho.

Jeremiah's Repeated Warnings Ignored

Jeremiah repeatedly warned the people that servitude to Babylon was decreed by God, and to resist God's decree would result in national calamity.

But Jeremiah's voice went unheeded and Nebuchadnezzar, as God's instrument, laid siege on Jerusalem. When he took the city, he removed the new king Jehoiachin, who had been on the throne for only 3 months following Jehoiakim's mysterious death.

Jerusalem Falls

Jerusalem fell in Jehoiakim's 11th year. Since servitude to Babylon commenced, according to the reckoning used by Jeremiah, in Jehoiakim's 4th year (605/4 BC), this fall of the city occurred in 598/7 BC. The precise date was the 2nd of Adar (15/16 March) 597 BC.

Nebuchadnezzar spared the city itself, taking as his spoils heavy tribute, 10,000 captives including Ezekiel, and treasures from Solomon's temple and palace¹⁹. Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon and replaced by a puppet king, Zedekiah.

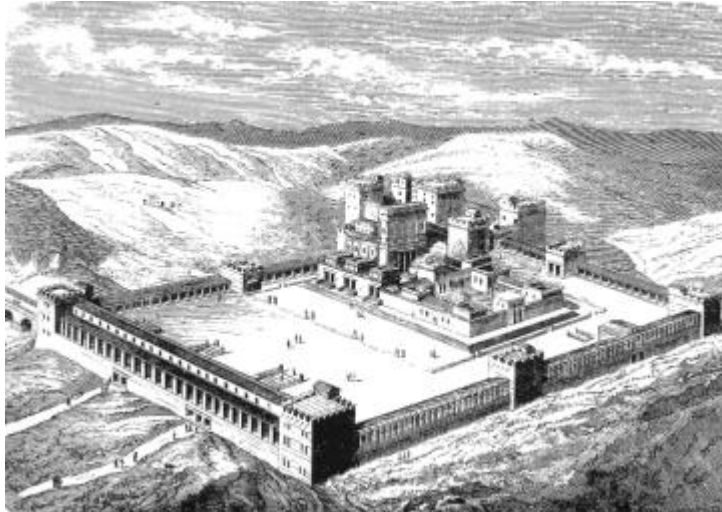


Figure 4: Reconstruction of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem²⁰

¹⁸ 2 Kings 24:1

¹⁹ 2 Kings 24:13-14

²⁰ "Bible Facts", Jenny Roberts, Grange Books, page 20

Zedekiah Placed on the Throne

"(The king of Babylon) made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah."²¹

Jeremiah wrote from Jerusalem to the captives in Babylon, telling them to submit to life in Babylon and not to expect swift release. Seventy years of servitude to Babylon had already been decreed by God, it had commenced and the full servitude would certainly be completed. Jeremiah had to restate the position, as false prophets in Babylon were promising swift release:

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'

"Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,' declares the LORD.

"This is what the LORD says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place."²²

The Seventy Years were "for" Babylon, not "at" Babylon.

Zedekiah Rebels

Despite being a puppet King to Babylon, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, refusing to serve him as God had decreed.

"(Zedekiah) rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. . . He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel. Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem."²³

Failure to Serve Babylon Will Increase the Servitude

The king listened to the false prophets who promised swift release from the yoke of bondage to Babylon. Jeremiah repeated his warning that their servitude was God's punishment of Jerusalem and of the surrounding nations. Jeremiah warned that should God's decree continue to be resisted, this would result in even more stringent servitude:

"Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon²⁴ through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. Give them a message for their masters and say, 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Tell this to your masters: . . . I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; . . . All nations will serve him and

²¹ 2 Kings 24:17

²² Jeremiah 29:5 - 10

²³ 2 Chronicles 36:13 - 14

²⁴ See map at Figure 2

his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.

" 'If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the LORD, until I destroy it by his hand. So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, `You will not serve the king of Babylon.' They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish. But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the LORD.

"I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, "Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live. Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the LORD has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, `You will not serve the king of Babylon', for they are prophesying lies to you. `I have not sent them', declares the LORD. They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you. . . Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin?" ²⁵

The False Prophet Hananiah

The false prophet Hananiah confronted Jeremiah, saying: " 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the LORD's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon', declares the LORD, `for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.' "²⁶

Hananiah Rebuked by Jeremiah

To which Jeremiah, symbolically wearing a yoke around his neck, replied that after Hananiah's two years it would be seen who was prophesying truthfully. Whereupon Hananiah in his rage broke Jeremiah's yoke, saying: "This is what the LORD says: `In the same way will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years.' "²⁷

Increased Servitude Possible

Jeremiah went his way until the word of the Lord came upon him, saying: "Go and tell Hananiah, `This is what the LORD says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him."²⁸

Jeremiah thus demonstrated the definiteness of their servitude and then he demonstrated the possibility of its severity being increased. The servitude had

²⁵ Jeremiah 27:3 - 16

²⁶ Jeremiah 28:2 - 4

²⁷ Jeremiah 28:11

²⁸ Jeremiah 28:13 - 14

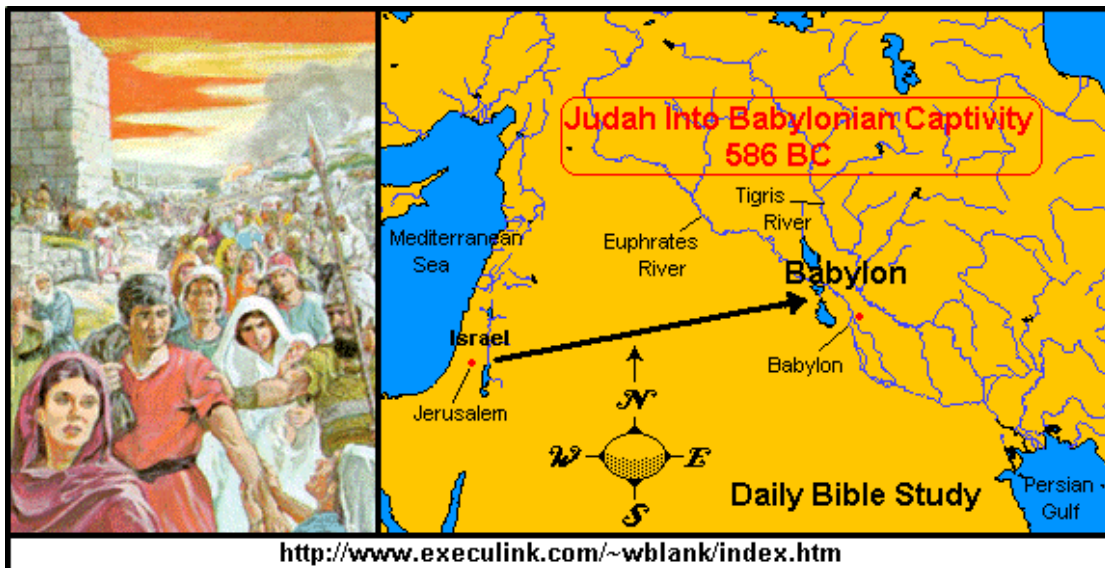
been decreed to continue until the 70 years had elapsed. The only control in the hands of the Jews and of the nations was its severity. Things would worsen if they did not serve Babylon willingly.

Jeremiah's Final Plea: Spare the City

Zedekiah's obstinacy continued and Jeremiah made one final plea: "This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live. But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down.'"²⁹

Jerusalem Destroyed

But Jeremiah's plea was made in vain, and after a lengthy siege Nebuchadnezzar, again as God's instrument, took the city once more. Again he removed a king from its throne, but this time he made no replacement. Instead, he destroyed the city and the sanctuary, and removed the last of its great men.³⁰



People Left Behind

Vinedressers and husbandmen were left to tend the ravaged ground³¹ and were commanded not to go in to Egypt.³² Nebuchadnezzar left Gedaliah in charge of the remnant, since he was a descendant of the family that helped Jeremiah in his strait times.³³ Shortly after, Gedaliah was murdered and many of the remnant fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them as prisoner. Rebellion continued and Nebuchadnezzar removed more captives from the land four years later.³⁴

²⁹ Jeremiah 38: 17 – 18; See also Jeremiah 28:8 - 10

³⁰ 2 Kings 25: 7-11

³¹ 2 Kings 25:12. Jeremiah 52:16

³² Jeremiah 42: 2-3, 9-10, 13-19. Jeremiah 43: 2-7

³³ 2 Kings 25:22

³⁴ Jeremiah 52:30

A Stiff-necked People Cause Unnecessary Destruction

Thus did a stiff-necked people cause severe impositions upon themselves and cause the unnecessary destruction of their city and of God's house, the Sanctuary. Because of their obstinacy, the city and the land lay in waste for the final fifty years of the seventy year servitude.³⁵ As the Hebrew University Jerusalem states:

" In 586 BCE the city (of Jerusalem) succumbed to the Babylonians. At the order of their king, Nebuchadnezzar, the city was torched, the Temple razed, and the people taken into exile. A small number returned 50 years later."³⁶

However, as Jeremiah prophesied,³⁷ Babylon's rule came to an end and the servitude experienced by the nations was in turn experience by Babylon.³⁸



And so an episode passed into Judah's history, one that remained a landmark in its experience.

In fact, instead of having a lax attitude, many Jews developed a highly self-righteous, cautious, "Pharisaical" attitude, determined never again to experience another seventy years as servant to a heathen nation.

The servitude to Babylon was too bitter to forget.

³⁵ "Flavius Josephus Against Apion", Whiston's Translation, Book 1, par 21, p 614.

³⁶ <http://jeru.huji.ac.il/eb1s.htm>

³⁷ Jeremiah 25:12

³⁸ Jeremiah 25:14. 2 Chronicles 36:20

Table 1: Dating Jehoiakim's and Nebuchadnezzar's years according to the Tishri and Nisan Systems of Reckoning

Year (BCE)	Month	Jehoiakim's years		Nebuchadnezzar's years																	
		Tishri system (Daniel)	Nisan system (Jeremiah)	Tishri system (Kings)	Nisan system (Jeremiah)																
609	Nisan	Accession year	Acc'n year																		
	Tishri																				
608	Nisan					1	2														
	Tishri																				
607	Nisan									2	3										
	Tishri																				
606	Nisan													3	4	Acc'n year	Accession year				
	Tishri																				
605	Nisan																	4	5	1	1
	Tishri																				
604	Nisan																				
	Tishri																				
603	Nisan	6	7	3	3																
	Tishri																				
602	Nisan					7	8	4	4												
	Tishri																				
601	Nisan									8	9	5	5								
	Tishri																				
600	Nisan													9	10	6	6				
	Tishri																				
599	Nisan																	10	11	7	7
	Tishri																				
598	Nisan																				
	Tishri																				
597	Nisan			9	9																
	Tishri																				
596	Nisan																				
	Tishri																				

Jehoiakim's accession (Theile, page 165)

Battle of Carchemish, between Nisan and Ab.

Jeh's 3rd year: Daniel 1:1
4th year: Jer 46:2

Neb on throne 7 Sept 605 (Horn & Wood, p 65)

Jehoiakim's 4th year overlapped Nebuch's accn. Year: Jer 25: 1-3. See Theile p 163 and Tadmor in JNES 15 (1956), pp226-229

Jerusalem taken 16 Mar 597.
Neb's 8th year (2 Kings 24: 12)
Neb's 7th year (Babylonian Chronicle)

Seventy Years of Servitude

THE EXEGESIS

Exegesis must consider the circumstances that evoked the original inspired comment. Exegesis of Jeremiah's prophecies concerning seventy years of Babylonian domination must consider the immediate historical situation.

The Society contends that Jeremiah's prophecy did not see its commencement until Jerusalem had been destroyed, the Sanctuary razed and the land depopulated. We contend Scripture teaches that the Seventy Years refers to a period of Babylonian domination, not to a period of Judean depopulation, and that it began some twenty years before the city was razed. This is confirmed, we contend, by the fact that Jerusalem served Babylon for years before its destruction and there was no need for the city to be destroyed for the prophecy to see out its fulfilment.

Jeremiah's Message



Jeremiah served God "from the thirteenth year of Josiah¹ . . . until the completion of the eleventh year of Zedekiah,² . . . until Jerusalem went into exile in the fifth month . . . that is, about forty-one years."³

As with Paul centuries later, God warned Jeremiah at the commencement of his ministry "that he would meet with violent opposition",⁴ for God had appointed him "over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant".⁵

True to God's word, Jeremiah's message of doom "brought the hatred of his fellow-countrymen upon him. . . but he remained true to duty. He was a lone man, misunderstood, maligned, persecuted, . . . forced to turn for consolation and sympathy and companionship to God only. Being thus thrown much upon God, he came to realize the sense of individual responsibility to God. . . Religion in the heart and in the life is a dominant note in Jeremiah's preaching".⁶

Jeremiah's Ministry

Jeremiah's ministry began when King Josiah commenced suppressing idolatry and other forms of unlawful worship. To prevent purely external reformation, Jeremiah preached on reformation of the inner life. He declared, "God looks at the heart (11:20: 17:10, 20:12). To serve God man must remove carnal lust

¹ Jeremiah 25:3

² Jeremiah 1:3

³ "Davis Dictionary of the Bible", John D Davis, age 364, art. "Jeremiah"

⁴ *ibid.*, see Jeremiah 1:18 - 19

⁵ Jeremiah 1:10

⁶ Davis, page 365

from it (4:4; cp Deut 10:16), wash it of wickedness (4:14), and return to God with the whole heart and not feignedly (3:10; 17:5)."⁷

In the conflict between Egypt and Assyria, Josiah allied himself to Assyria. He engaged in battle with the Egyptian forces at Megiddo, where he received a mortal blow. Upon Josiah's death, the people placed his third son Jehoahaz on the throne. His reign lasted only three months, when Pharaoh Necho replaced him with Jehoiakim, Jehoahaz's elder brother.

In a short time Jehoiakim undid his father's reforms, and with external signs of reformation removed, Jeremiah's message of internal reformation fell upon deaf ears, especially Jehoiakim's.⁸

Jeremiah saw the ascendancy of the Chaldean power at Babylon and the defeat at Carchemish of Jehoiakim's protector Egypt in Jehoiakim's fourth year as being God's punishment for Judah's spiritual condition:

" 'Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon', declares the LORD, . . . 'against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. . . This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.' "⁹

Many nations were to serve Babylon

Judah was not alone in having to serve Babylon. Jeremiah catalogues a swathe of nations:

"So I took the cup from the LORD's hand and made all the nations¹⁰ to whom he sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today; Pharaoh king of Egypt, his attendants, his officials and all his people, and all the foreign people there; all the kings of Uz; all the kings of the Philistines (those of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the people left at Ashdod); Edom, Moab and Ammon; all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; the kings of the coastlands across the sea; Dedan, Tema, Buz and all who are in distant places; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the foreign people who live in the desert; all the kings of Zimri, Elam and Media; and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other--all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. And after all of them, the king of Sheshach will drink it too." ¹¹

To prove this prophecy would see its fulfilment, with Babylon ruling all these nations for seventy years, God invited all to consider the existent state of Jerusalem:

"But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: You must drink it! See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the LORD Almighty.' " ¹²

⁷ Davis, page 365

⁸ See Jeremiah 36

⁹ Jeremiah 25:8 - 11

¹⁰ See map at Figure 2

¹¹ Jeremiah 25:17 - 26

¹² Jeremiah 25:28 - 29

Nebuchadnezzar Returns

Of all the nations that were commanded to willingly bow to their Babylonian overlord, God's people would not do so. Nebuchadnezzar was ultimately forced to come against the city, remove prisoners including King Jehoiachin and the prophet Ezekiel, and place his puppet Zedekiah on the throne, expecting allegiance from him.

Jeremiah warned the captives at Babylon not to expect swift release, as was being preached by false prophets living among them, but to submit to their condition. God had already decreed Judah and the surrounding nations were to serve Babylon for seventy years.

Despite Jeremiah's pleading that rebellion to God's punishment would see the unnecessary destruction of Jerusalem, opposition continued at all levels. The people expected Jehoiachin to return to Jerusalem as King; Zedekiah refused to submit to Babylonian rule; the false prophets in Jerusalem and in Babylon continued prophesying swift release¹³.

The Plea to Zedekiah

"Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, 'This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live. But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from their hands".' "¹⁴

Because of their continuing obstinacy, Jeremiah repeated his message:

"I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, 'Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live. Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the LORD has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? . . . Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin?' "¹⁵

But so deeply entrenched was their rebellion, that even after the devastation of God's city, the people continued to rebel, and refused to remain on the land as had God commanded. Jeremiah's desire to inspect land at his native Anathoth before Jerusalem fell¹⁶ indicates his expectancy to live in the land after the city's destruction.

Thus the balance of Judah's servitude was spent as an untilled land, bearing only a few nomadic tribes and an unnecessarily destroyed city.

If only they listened

If only they had hearkened to God's Word! Then they would have spent the seventy years in their own land, tilling their own soil, able to worship God in His House of Praise.

¹³ For example, Jeremiah 27:9 – 10 (in Zedekiah's accession year) and Hananiah

¹⁴ Jeremiah 38:17 - 18

¹⁵ Jeremiah 27:12 - 13, 17

¹⁶ Jeremiah 37:11 - 12

"But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the LORD."¹⁷

Clearly the surrounding nations listed by Jeremiah as having to serve Babylon for seventy years with Judah¹⁸ accepted their plight, as there is no indication of any of these experiencing time with capitals razed and temples destroyed.

Obedience would have resulted in lessening of the severity of the decreed servitude,¹⁹ as had occurred at a previous time in Judah's history²⁰. But Scripture records the people's blindness and as Josephus records²¹, Jerusalem experienced fifty years of obscurity. What, an unnecessary calamity.

Babylon's Dominance

As soon as Zedekiah had been placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon sent messengers²², apparently to 'sound him out'. In view of Jeremiah's message to them, it was likely a Council of War against Babylon.

As he gave his message from God to the nations, Jeremiah wore a yoke²³, symbolising the theme of his warning:

"Tell this to your masters: I (the LORD) made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. . . All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson."²⁴

The Choice for the Nations

Opposition to God's decree would result in God turning his attention to their destruction:

" 'If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague' declares the LORD, 'until I destroy it by (Nebuchadnezzar's) hand.' "²⁵

Submission to God's decree would result in that nation resting in its own land:

"But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there', declares the LORD."²⁶

¹⁷ Jeremiah 27:11

¹⁸ Jeremiah 25:19 - 26

¹⁹ Jeremiah 18:8 - 11

²⁰ Jeremiah 26:19. See also Jonah 3:1 – 10 regarding Ninevah

²¹ "Against Apion", book 1:21

²² Jeremiah 27:3

²³ Jeremiah 27:2

²⁴ Jeremiah 27:4 - 7

²⁵ Jeremiah 27:8

²⁶ Jeremiah 27:11

Babylon was Dominating the World

Babylon's world dominance thus existed by the time of Zedekiah's accession. This world dominance is shown to be in existence by the kings sending their emissaries. They took this action because they were already subservient, and this is all that Jeremiah had decreed should be their experience for seventy years.

The False Prophet Hananiah

Jeremiah's and Hananiah's actions in the same year, recorded in chapter 28, enacted the prevailing conditions. Jeremiah, wearing a wooden yoke to symbolise their bondage, declared that Hananiah's declarations of release within two years and the return of Jehoiachin were false.

Hananiah broke Jeremiah's yoke, saying that the existing servitude to Babylon would soon likewise be broken. Jeremiah replaced the broken wooden yoke with one of iron, declaring that the servitude would be increased should the people continue to rebel against God's decree. The degree of the servitude lay in the hands of the Judeans.

"Head of Gold" by his Second Year



Daniel, using language similar to Jeremiah 27:5-6, declared to Nebuchadnezzar that by the time of his second year, Nebuchadnezzar was already the "head of gold", the world dominating power. This is some eight years before God's statement through Jeremiah.

To state, as the Society does, that the words "second year"²⁸ in Daniel do not refer to Nebuchadnezzar's second regnal year but to his second year after Jerusalem's destruction, indicates prejudicial exegesis. There is no statement that "second year" should not be understood normally, and the Society's implicit reasoning from Daniel having completed three years training by Nebuchadnezzar's second year is no reason. (See the Table following the previous Chapter).

By Daniel's Tishri method of reckoning, he was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar during Jehoiakim's third year, which was Nebuchadnezzar's accession year. By the time of Nebuchadnezzar's second year, Daniel had received three years training, through most of the year that constituted Nebuchadnezzar's accession year until Tishri 1 (October), through his first regnal year until the following Tishri 1, and through the intervening months of his second regnal year. By Daniel's Jewish method of inclusive reckoning, this is three (3) years.

World Dominance with the Battle at Carchemish

Jeremiah indicates that Babylon's world dominance began in Nebuchadnezzar's accession year, with the battle at Carchemish.²⁹

Judah and the other nations began serving Babylon at least 10 years and probably some 20 years before Jerusalem was destroyed.

²⁷ © <http://www.execulink.com/~wblank/index.htm>

²⁸ Daniel 1:1

²⁹ Jeremiah, chapters 46, 47

The Event that Completed the 70-year Dominance

The event completing Babylon's seventy year dominance is prophesied by Jeremiah and is described by Ezra. The prophet Jeremiah declared that "when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation."³⁰

"All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him."³¹

Babylon would experience servitude, even as the surrounding nations had experienced servitude at the hands of Babylon. Babylon's servitude started with the removal of Belshazzar and Nabonidus (Daniel 5:26, 28, 30-31).

Ezra Confirms

Ezra the chronicler records the events fulfilling Jeremiah's words, giving inspired comment on the event that marked the end of Babylon's rule, and hence the end of the seventy years of Babylonian domination:

"The remnant . . . became servants to (Nebuchadnezzar) and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power, . . . in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah."³²

Thus the seventy year servitude spoken of by Jeremiah ceased when "the kingdom of Persia came to power". Because the servitude to Babylon had already finished:

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, . . . the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm . . . : "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth." "³³

This decree was made because Babylon's dominance had ended. God had already given all the kingdoms over to Persia. The 70 years of servitude to Babylon were already over.

Nowhere does Ezra relate the cessation of the seventy years to the time the Jews' returned to their homeland. He says that:

"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."³⁴

Babylon's dominance therefore began with events directly related to the defeat of Necho in 605 BC and ceased with events directly related to the defeat of Babylon by the Persians, probably as soon as Cyrus began to exert his authority.

Judah's Desolations

The degree of oppression experienced by Judah depended on its willingness to serve Babylon. As rebellion to God's punishment continued, Judah became more sorely pressed and after some 20 years, this resulted in the unnecessary destruction of God's beloved city, and in the unnecessary removal of most of the land's remaining inhabitants.

³⁰ Jeremiah 25:12

³¹ Jeremiah 27:7

³² 2 Chronicles 36:20 ,21

³³ 2 Chronicles 36:22 - 23

³⁴ 2 Chronicles 36:21

Daniel Understands

Some eight or nine years before the downfall of the Babylonian power, Daniel had been told that: "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."³⁵ This appeared to be such a long time that Daniel felt sick:

"The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future. I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days."³⁶

When Babylon fell, Daniel understood what Jeremiah had prophesied:

"In the first year of (Darius') 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."³⁷

Desolation While Still Populated

Nowhere does Scripture require depopulation for a land to be desolated, nor is depopulation required for the land to keep Sabbath. The law regarding the sabbaths of the land (Leviticus 26) did not require the nation to leave the country each sabbatical year.

Scripture shows that "desolation" was experienced by Jerusalem while it remained populated, and that each of the stage of the desolation became progressively worse until finally the city was unnecessarily destroyed. Following this, the land received further devastations. For example, when Nebuchadnezzar came against the city and took prisoners, including Jehoiachin and Ezekiel, this was one stage during the devastation. After this the people were still able to live on the land, with the throne intact and the city still standing. This was its continuing experience during the first twenty years of its devastations.

Chorbah and Shamem

Of the several Hebrew words rendered "devastated", "desolated" and so on, two are of greatest interest, Chorbah and Shamem.

The original of "desolation" in Daniel is "Chorbah". At every other instance, Daniel uses "Shamem" but as he was quoting Jeremiah at this instance he uses the same word that Jeremiah had used to describe the seventy years: "Chorbah".

Ezekiel Shows Shades of Meaning

Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, shows the differences in shade between Chorbah and Shamem. Speaking at least five months after Jerusalem's destruction, Ezekiel prophesied:

"Those who are left in the ruins (CHORBAH) will fall . . . I will make the land a desolate waste (SHAMAMAH) . . . and the mountains of Israel will become desolate (SHAMEM)"³⁸.

The land was thus still inhabited several months after the Society wishes to commence the Seventy Years.

³⁵ Daniel 8:14

³⁶ Daniel 8:26 - 27

³⁷ Daniel 9:2

³⁸ Ezekiel 33:27 - 28

The land was in a state of "chorbah" and was still inhabited: "the people living in those ruins (chorbah) in the land of Israel"³⁹ The "desolate" land (chorbah) could be made more desolate (shamem). There are thus degrees of devastation, of which "chorbah" is a lesser degree. And it was seventy years of "chorbah" that Judah experienced.³⁷

Ezekiel prophesied forty years of desolation for Egypt.⁴⁰ Obviously the Bible writers had different understanding of "desolation" from what may be our modern concepts. Shades of "desolation" are discussed further in Appendix B.

The Length of Babylon's Rule

By the method of inclusive reckoning used by the Jews, 605 BC to 539 BC is 67 years. We may contend "that this is sufficiently near to seventy years"⁴¹ or we may "look for another period which will fit"⁴¹, such as the period 605 - 536 BC, or "the period between the destruction of the Temple and its rededication [586 – 516]."⁴¹

Several facts tend to indicate "seventy years" may be understood as a term appropriately describing a long servitude.

- (i) Jeremiah 27:7 speaks of Babylonian rule lasting three generations: " 'All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes' . . . This latter reference suggests that the seventy year period in Jeremiah chapters 25 and 29 is not to be regarded as an exact computation . . . but as a round figure, a general term for a period of considerable length." ⁴¹
- (ii) Isaiah 23:15-18 "refers to a disaster upon Tyre which was to last seventy years . . . We may legitimately conclude that we have here a common usage, an appropriate period of punishment." ⁴¹
- (iii) Inscriptions of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon state "that the desolation of Babylon after its destruction by Sennacherib should originally have lasted seventy years according to a decision of the God Marduk . . . which would (with Jer. 25:12, 29:10, 2 Chron. 36:21f, Dan. 9:2) seem to indicate that seventy years was a perfectly proper period for an ancient oriental city to be desolate." ⁴²
- (iv) Psalm 90:10 accords seventy years to a man's life. "Seventy years after the destruction of a city and the deportation of its inhabitants practically the whole original rebellious or sinful population would be dead. In Isa. 23:15 the seventy year period during which Tyre will be forgotten is described as the 'days of one King'. Prof. G. B. Gray, in his commentary on the book of Isaiah . . . pp. 395f considers some possible explanations of this expression. The first possibility is that the full span of human life is meant."⁴¹

Compare also Numbers 14:29-34, where "it is taken for granted that after 40 years (round numbers!) practically all the people above 20 years old

³⁹ Ezekiel 33:24

⁴⁰ Ezekiel 29:8 - 13

⁴¹ "Two Old Testament Historical Problems of the Early Persian Period", Journal of Near Eastern Studies (JNES) 17, 1958, Peter Ackroyd, page 24

⁴² "An Additional Remark on P. R. Ackroyd, JNES XVII, 23-27", JNES 18, 1959, R. Borger, page 74

who rebelled against Moses would have died, so that none of the adult rebellious Israelites would ever set foot in Canaan."⁴²

"The Problem is Difficult"

This is not to say that Babylon's rule was not precisely 70 years in length, simply that in the understanding of Semitic minds 2500 years ago the term "70 years" might be understood as a long indefinite period of punishment.

Of course the opposite may be true, and it was exactly 70 years long. These uncertainties make it essential for the Watchtower Society to prove without any doubt which events were seen by the Jews as marking the commencement and the conclusion of the period.

The Bible's language is for the mind of modern man, with some pieces of information missing, sufficiently loose to accept several possibilities, each of which "fits the bill". The best we may say is, "the problem is difficult".⁴³

In the end, it is up to the Watchtower Society to prove its case beyond any shadow of doubt.

Other Thoughts

- (i) The period 537 to 607 is, by the Jewish method of inclusive reckoning, 71 years, not 70.
- (ii) Never were all the Judean population kept in Babylon; some went to Egypt.
- (iii) Nebuchadnezzar removed several hundred persons from the land four years after the Society wishes it to be completely depopulated. The Society's rationale that these were taken from Egypt is purely wishful thinking, and without Scriptural basis.
- (iv) Nowhere does Scripture teach the necessity of the land to pay off a "perfect number" of Sabbaths, 7 x 70.
- (v) The whole land given to Moses did not experience even one year of Sabbatical rest with the land depopulated, for the Northern Tribes were never involved in the decimation experienced by Judah.
- (vi) The Society wishes to make the expression "third year" of Jehoiakim refer to the third year of his vassalship to Nebuchadnezzar and not to his third regnal year. This is without Scriptural warrant. "Third year" is naturally understood to mean regnal year and there is no explicit statement allowing for any other understanding. Daniel chapters 1 and 2 show that the Watchtower's position is not tenable. Comparison with profane history, as outlined in the previous chapter and specified in the Babylonian Chronicles confirms this.
- (vii) 2 Chronicles 36 does not explicitly state the commencement event of the 70 years. If the context is from verse 5, the period encompassed the desolations from Jehoiakin's time onwards.
- (viii) God in his loving wisdom may take a shorter period as fulfilment of a larger one. For example, although the Israelites were said to be in Egypt

⁴³ "A New Record of Nebuchadnezzar's Palestinian Campaigns", IEJ, A. Malamat (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), pages 250 - 251

for 430 years, study shows this to be actually 215 years, with the commencement of the incarceration beginning with Abraham.⁴⁴

Summary

Consistent exegesis clearly shows Judah experienced some 70 years of progressively worsening desolations, their severity depended upon the people's willingness to serve Babylon.

But the servitude to Babylon did not require the removal of the line of David from the throne, the destruction of the city and of God's house, nor the removal of every inhabitant from the land.

Yet Jeremiah's prophecy could have been fulfilled. The Society's concepts are erroneous.

⁴⁴ Compare Genesis 12:1 – 4; 15:13; Exodus 12:40; Galatians 3:16, 17

Appendix A

Dating The Jews' Return

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has the need and the responsibility to precisely determine the date when the Jews returned to their homeland. Because it considers this event marks the termination of the seventy years' servitude prophesied by Jeremiah, the Society uses the date of this event to calculate the date that Jerusalem was razed. It considers that destruction of Jerusalem as marking the beginning of the Jews' servitude to Babylon and as the commencement date for its significant date of 1914 CE.

This discussion of the date of the Jews' return does not endorse the Society's view that the return marks the end of the servitude, nor does it endorse the Society's view that the razing of Jerusalem marked the commencement of the servitude, or that seventy years were to elapse between these events or that the period 607-537 BC is, by the Jews' method of inclusive reckoning, seventy years.

For the Society's sake "it is very important to fix (the) date"¹ for the Jews' return, but it is not possible to do so. Using reconstructions of the events from available evidences, two or three possible dates emerge.

Because of the significance of the date for justification of the Society's claims and authority, the onus rests upon the Society to justify beyond any doubt the one date it accepts, to the positive exclusion of all others.

However, even with all the schemes that the Society proposes, it is not possible to be positive in which year the Jews returned. In fact, the Society's declarations, which are based on its ability and authority to interpret Scripture, prevent the Jews returning in the year it so desperately needs.

Cyrus' Decree

During his first year over Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. The decree is recorded in sacred history by Ezra² and also in secular records³.

Following the decree, fifty thousand exiles prepared for their four-month journey⁴ and for their sustenance upon reaching a ravaged land, immediately before the onslaught of winter.⁵

We are not told whether Cyrus' decree was made early in his first year, or late. Nor are we told how long the exiles took to prepare for their journey and settling in. One can surmise that the preparations and organization for such a task took some time. For example, adequate food would be required for fifty thousand persons on a four-month journey, with extra food needed until the harvest could be gathered from the land. As the exiles were "settled 'in their cities' in Judah by

¹ "Babylon The Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules", page 367 ("Babylon!" book)

² Ezra, 1:1-4; 2 Chronicles 36:22,23. See "Aid to Bible Understanding", page 410

³ "Ancient Near Eastern Texts" edited by J. Pritchard, page 316

⁴ Ezra 7:9; "Aid", pages 410, 912

⁵ Ezra 3:1;6; "Aid", page 410

the 'seventh month' (Tishri)⁶, which approximates our October, one can surmise that little would be gleaned from the land until the following year, after winter.

So perhaps the organisers of the march had to prepare virtually a year's supplies.

Chronological Principles

Accession-Year Reckoning

Cyrus took Babylon during Tishri 539 BC. In that year, Tishri corresponded with our September 27. Babylon fell in our October, after Tishri had commenced.

Cyrus "always conformed to the traditions of the thrones he usurped"⁷. Since Babylon used the accession-year method of reckoning, Cyrus' First Regnal Year did not commence until the following New Year's Day.

"Under the accession-year system of counting regnal years, the unexpired portion of the calendar year in which a king's reign begins is called his accession year. Then his first full year, coinciding with the next calendar year, is numbered 'year 1'. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians after them, used the accession year system. . . The use of the designation 'year 1' (is) deferred until the New Year's Day following the accession."⁸

Calendars

Although "the Babylonians celebrated their New Year's Day in the spring"⁹ the Jews employed two systems, a religious year beginning in spring with Nisan (March/April) and a civil year beginning in autumn with Tishri (Sept/Oct).¹⁰

Some Hebrew writers used the Nisan (spring) Calendar while others used the Tishri (autumn) Calendar.¹¹ In fact, the Jews in Palestine reckoned the years of the Persian kings in their own civil Tishri calendar even though the Persians used the Nisan calendar.¹²

Using these Chronological Principles

Ezra the scribe recorded Persian king Cyrus' decree, with the information that the Decree was given during his "first year". We shall now see that Ezra used Tishri reckoning when speaking of Cyrus' first year and that he used the accession-year system.

Ezra-Nehemiah was one book

"In the Hebrew Bible the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were regarded as one volume until AD 1448 . . . In the Greek translations the division is found since the

⁶ "Aid", page 410

⁷ "Babylon", page 366 ftn.

⁸ "The Chronology of Ezra 7" Horn and Wood, pages 16-17. See also "All Scripture Inspired of God and Beneficial," pages 283, 284; "Aid", pages 336-339;

⁹ Horn and Wood, page 45

¹⁰ Ibid, page 74; "Aid", pages 278 -- 279

¹¹ "The Mysterious Numbers of the, Hebrew Kings, " (1965) by E. R. Theile, page 161; Horn and Wood, pages 64-73

¹² Horn and Wood, pages 120-121 ,59, 71-73, 75, 91

time of Origen (3rd century), and in the Latin translations since Jerome's Vulgate (5th century)".¹³

The significance of this is that "the book Ezra-Nehemiah therefore seems to have had a common editor . . . (which) leads to the conclusion that if in the section of the book containing Nehemiah's memoirs a fall-to-fall year can be demonstrated, the same calendar would naturally apply to the section dealing with Nehemiah's contemporary, Ezra".¹³

Nehemiah's and Ezra's Tishri reckoning

Comparison of the chronological data in Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1 shows that the book used Tishri reckoning, "even for Persian kings".¹⁴

This is confirmed by study of Ezra's writings, including 2 Chronicles 36 (which chapter includes Ezra's reference to Cyrus' decree):

"Another Hebrew term used in a chronological setting is *teshubah*, meaning literally the 'return'. In 2 Samuel 11:1, 1 Kings 20:22,26; 1 Chronicles 20:1; and 2 Chronicles 36:10 the phrase *teshubah hashshannah* is used. . . In all these texts the Hebrew reads 'return of the year'. . . The most plausible explanation is to consider it as an expression that indicates a turning point of the year halfway between the beginning and the end. . . The author does not mean the beginning or the end of a certain period or journey, but its turning point. The military campaigns, to which the texts refer, usually began in the spring. . . This shows that the spring was considered to be the turning point, lying halfway between the beginning and the end of the year, which points to the fall as the beginning of the civil year".¹⁵

The Jews' Accession-Year reckoning

"The Biblical evidence shows that the Jews had used the accession-year system in the Babylonian period, so that it could be assumed that they retained this method after the Exile in common with Persian practice. This conclusion has been proved correct by the contemporary Jewish documents from Elephantine."¹⁶

Cyrus' First Year

From the evidences that Ezra used the accession-year system with the Tishri calendar when reckoning the reigns of Persian kings, we conclude that for Ezra, Cyrus' first year ran from Tishri 538 to Tishri 537.

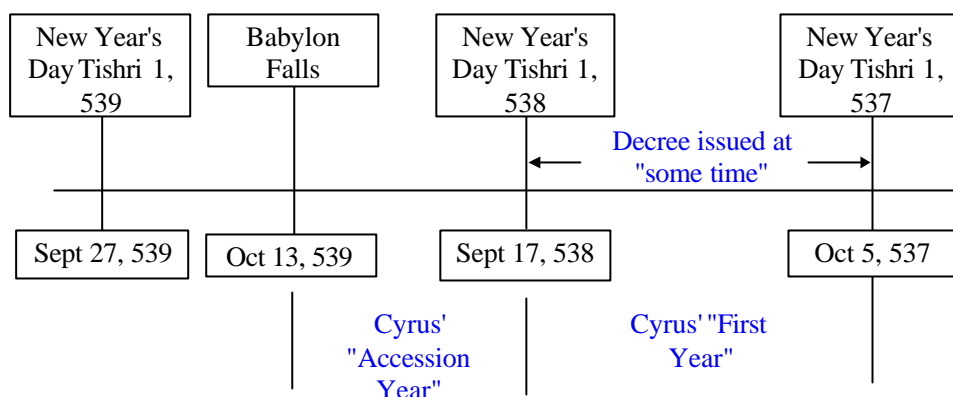
¹³ Horn and Wood, page 73; see page 91 and also "Aid", page 558

¹⁴ Theile, page 161 (see also reference 12); "Aid", page 1216

¹⁵ Horn and Wood, pages 57-58. See also "Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings" by D. Wiseman, p 34

¹⁶ Horn and Wood, page 120. See also pages 75-83, 129-159 and Theile, page 161

The following diagram is not to scale.



Because Cyrus' First Regnal Year commenced in September 538, there is only a remote possibility that the Jews returned in 537. The Society needs something that is definite and positive.

If Cyrus' Decree were made very early in his first year, say October 538, preparations may have been made during winter and if there was a spring harvest, sufficient food may have been gathered for their return in 537.

If the Decree were made in spring (April?) or Early Summer (June?) of 537, it is unlikely that the necessary preparations could have been made to allow the Jews to return until 536.

If the decree were made late in Cyrus' First Regnal Year, preparations could have been made during the winter of 537, with food gathered from the harvests of 536, allowing them to return in 536 or as late as 535.

The later the Decree, the less the possibility of a return in 537. However, on the basis of its exegetical abilities, the Society makes "pronouncements" that moves Cyrus' First Regnal Year even later!

So, instead of clarifying and confirming why it accepts 537 as the date of the Jews' return, the Society presents statements that make that date even more improbable!

The Society and Darius

Daniel speaks of "Darius the Mede" ruling at Babylon. Some students identify him with Cyrus, others as a local governor, with Cyrus ruling as king over the Persian Empire. Whatever position is taken regarding Darius, it is generally accepted that Cyrus ascended to the Babylonian throne when he took the city. The Society disagrees.

The Society's First Pronouncement

The Society decries those who believe Cyrus came to the throne of Babylon immediately it was overthrown. Such people are said to depend upon "undiscovered, incomplete, imperfect, uninspired worldly documents."¹⁷

Thus its pronouncements are based on its exegetical abilities, over and above "uninspired" records: "in calculating the 'first year of Cyrus the King of Persia, we must faithfully proceed according to the inspired Word of God."¹⁸

¹⁷ Watchtower, August 15, 1968, page 493

¹⁸ "Babylon", page 366

The Society's first pronouncement declares: "In harmony with the Bible we must accept at least one year with possibly part of a second year, for King Darius the Mede. Hence, at the very earliest, the first year of King Cyrus the Persian may not have begun till late in the year 538 BC to extend over into the following year of 537 BC."¹⁸

It does not take much thought to see that this would make Cyrus' first regnal year too late for the Jews to return in 537.

The Society's Second Pronouncement

"Cyrus' decree was evidently not issued before the first year of Darius the Mede was disposed of and Cyrus became sole ruler of Babylon."¹⁸

This statement by the Society makes doubly certain that it has pushed Cyrus' first regnal year too far for its own good.

The Society's Third Pronouncement

"Cyrus issued his decree in his own name in his own first year of his reign aside from Darius the Mede - Daniel 9:1-18."¹⁹

The Society's Fourth Pronouncement

Darius 1, we are told by the Society, had a sole reign "for at least a full year (Dan. 9:1; 11:1). Cyrus followed him on the throne."¹⁷

Just to cloud the issue (which is not much use when trying to justify and clarify a point!), the Society also declares: "In March 538 Cyrus began his first Regnal year."²⁰

The Society's Fifth Pronouncement

The Society proclaims: "'The first year of Darius' . . . appears to have intervened between the fall of Babylon and 'the first year of Cyrus' over Babylon. This would mean that Cyrus' first year might not have begun until late in the year 538. Even if Darius' rule over Babylon were to be viewed as that of a viceroy . . . Babylonian custom would still place Cyrus' first regnal year as running from Nisan of 538 to Nisan of 537."²¹

However, we are not concerned with "Babylonian custom" but with Ezra's writings, of a scribe who is a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a staunch nationalist, using the Hebrew customs and the pre-exilic Tishri calendar, not the Babylonian Nisan - Nisan calendar.

Also, with Cyrus' rule not commencing "until late in the year 538", it is doubtful his Decree would have been made in sufficient time for the Jews to make their preparations.

The Society's Sixth Pronouncement

This statement is different from the others, but it still illustrates the Society's precarious position. It shows the Society cutting the suit to fit the cloth, deciding that Cyrus' decree was made in sufficient time for the Jews to return in 537 because they returned in 537. But as we have seen, no proof has yet been forthcoming to confirm or deny this date, either from Scripture or from secular history. The Society writes:

¹⁹ "Babylon", page 367

²⁰ "All Scripture Inspired of God and Beneficial" page 85. "Aid", page 912

²¹ "Aid", page 410

"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. This would allow time for the Jewish exiles to prepare to move out of Babylon and make the long trek to Judah and Jerusalem. . . and yet be settled 'in their cities' in Judah by the 'seventh month' (Tishri) of the year 537."²¹

Daniel's Reckoning

Comparison of Daniel 1:1 with Jeremiah 46.2 and with cuneiform records shows that Daniel too used Tishri reckoning²². Since it is only Daniel who records "Darius the Mede", and accords him a "first year", if any of the Society's statements were correct, the "first year" of Cyrus would be pushed too far into the future for the Society's purposes.

The Society is thus further confounded by the two writers who refer to the events immediately following the Fall of Babylon. Each uses Tishri reckoning, thereby making the return date of 537 BC highly improbable.

Summary

We began with the understanding that the onus lays upon the Society to conclusively prove that the Jews returned in 537 BC.

From the evidences before us, the most we may say is that the Jews may have returned in that year or they may not have. And the Society's pronouncements, exegetically based as God's sole channel of truth through whom alone divine instruction was to come, places serious doubt on the veracity of that date. Dare anyone place his eternal destiny upon such nebulous facts?

²² Theile, page 166

Appendix B

Shades of Desolation

Chorbah

In Jehoiakim's fourth year (which was Nebuchadnezzar's first), the prophet Jeremiah prophesied that "this whole land shall be a desolation" (Jer. 25: 1, 11). The word he uses for "desolation" is CHORBAH.

Following the defeat of Babylon, when Daniel says he understood the nature of the "70 years" he describes it as CHORBAH. This is the only time he uses the word.

Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, explains the meaning of CHORBAH when he uses it to describe an inhabited land:

"They that inhabit those wastes (chorbah). . . They that are in the wastes (chorbah)". (Ezekiel 33:24,27).

Shamem

In the same passage Ezekiel describes a future worse state of the land ("most desolate") as SHAMAMAH. This statement was made at least five months after Jerusalem had fallen.

Ezekiel also prophesied that Egypt would be desolate (SHAMEM), waste (CHORBAH) and uninhabited for 40 years (Ezekiel 29:9-11).

2 Chronicles 36:21

Reviewing the period, Ezra describes the 70 years as one of SHAMEM.

Study of Jeremiah 10:25; 12:11-13; 33:12 and in Ezra 9:34 shows that SHAMEM, like CHORBAH, does not mean depopulated in the absolute sense, as we might use it today.

Jeremiah 10:25 states that Jacob's habitation was already SHAMEM, yet verse 18 says the people were still to be flung out.

Jeremiah 12:11-13 says that the land was SHAMEM. However, there were people living in it who had sown wheat, even though they were going to reap thorns from it in the future.

Jeremiah 33:12 says that the land was ALREADY desolate (SHAMEM) "without man and beast" yet this was written while Jeremiah was still locked up in prison in Jerusalem and the people were still fighting the Chaldeans (verses 1, 5). Jeremiah 32:43 was also written while the people were still in the land, fighting the Chaldeans (verses 1-3, 28).

Ezra, the writer of 2 Chronicles, describes his penitent state as SHAMEM (Ezra 9:3,4).

Consequently the state of SHAMEM described by 2 Chronicles 36:21 is the desolation that means people are still living in the land. This low state of the land was all that was necessary for it to enjoy its rest (SHABATH).

Further Degrees of Desolation

When they describe desolation that is worse than CHORBAH and SHAMEM, the prophets use qualifiers such as "much", "most", "wholly" and "utterly". See for example Isaiah 6:11; Jeremiah 49:2, 50:13; Ezekiel 35:3.

Even further degrees of desolation are indicated by totally different words such as:

SHAMAD - "destroy", Ezekiel 14:9.

KALAH - "consumed", Ezra 9:14.

CUWPH - "consume", Jeremiah 8:13; Daniel 2:44; Zephaniah 1:2,3
and ultimately:

BOHUN - "void", Jeremiah 4:23, (Compare Gen. 1:2).

Resolving the Problem

The 70 years describes the period of Babylon's dominance over all the surrounding nations. This period commenced in Jehoiakim's fourth year, some 22 years before the city was unnecessarily destroyed. The context of 2 Chronicles 36:21 shows that the supremacy of Babylon commenced with the captivity of Jehoiakim (verse 6) and finished when Babylon fell in 539 BC (verse 20).

Thus Biblical and secular history are not in conflict. The 48 years between the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Fall of Babylon are part of the 70 years domination by Babylon.

It is only the incorrect reading of Scripture that produces a problem where none exists.

This could easily be an indicator that the Watchtower Society's reading of Scripture is faulty in other areas as well.



Appendix C

Dating the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Fall of Babylon

Absolute Dates

An Absolute Date is a definitely known, fixed date for an historical event. As the Society says, "from this date as a pivotal point we can figure backward or forward and assign calendar dates."¹

The Absolute Dates for the period in question are determined by computation of astronomical data. They provide the solid anchor points that the accepted chronologies are tethered to.

"One of these anchor points from which we can locate other relative dates is furnished by an astronomical tablet bearing a series of observations dated in the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. These fix the year as having begun on April 22/23, 568 BCE and ended on April 11/12, 567 B C. Another astronomical tablet of equal importance has established that the 7th year of Cambyses lasted from April 6/7 523 to March 25/26 522 BCE. With the help of the Canon of Ptolemy and thousands of dated cuneiform documents written on clay tablets, which agree throughout as to the total of regnal years for each king, it is possible to arrive at exact dates for each of the kings reigning in the period between the two astronomical tablets."²

Other authorities agree.³ The Society comments, "mathematicians can calculate the date of tablets by the astronomical data they contain."⁴

The Society says that it depends upon "secular historians (for) the year 539 BCE . . . (for) the downfall of Babylon."⁵ The Society depends upon these authorities because "in the Old Testament no absolute dates are given."⁶

Absolute Dates for the Period

The astronomically-proven Absolute Dates for this period are:

- 621 BCE: Nabopolassar's 5th year (eclipse on April 21)
- 568 BCE: Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year
- 523 BCE: Cambyses' 7th year

¹ "Aid to Bible Understanding", WTBS, page 333. See also "Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings", Theile, pages 16, 39

² "The Chronology of Ezra 7", Horn and Wood, pages 96 – 97. See the list in Theile, page 218

³ For example, Theile pages 16 – 21, 39 - 45

⁴ Awake!, April 22, 1963, page 17

⁵ "Babylon the Great Has fallen! God's Kingdom Rules!", WTBS, page 366

⁶ Theile, page 39

The Dating of Tablets

When the Ancients expressed themselves in terms of the dates of years, events, chronologies and so on, they did not use our modern calendar systems.

"Tablets are 'dated' in the sense that they refer to the year, month and day of a particular king's rule. For example, 'VII/14/17': The 7th Hebrew month Tishri, 14th day, 17th year of Nabonidus' reign."⁷

This tablet from Nabonidus' 17th year tells the story of its fall to the Persians. It has been named the "Nabonidus (*Nabunaid*) Chronicle". Historians apply the information that has been provided by the Absolute Date for Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year and Canon of Ptolemy to convert the "VII/14/17" into our current Calendar. In this way, the Historians calculate the date of 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon.

"A date formula like 'on the 1st day of the 5th month in the 16th year of Xerxes' is a relative statement; it means different things in different dating systems. . . In order to pin down these regnal-year series in absolute chronology, we depend on certain specific documents that furnish additional data of the sort that enables us to locate exact BC dates - such information as synchronisms with other dating systems or astronomical data that can be verified by calculation."⁸

Nebuchadnezzar's 37th Year

The astronomical tablet for the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar is known as VAT4956. It is held in the Berlin Museum⁹. It details the relative positions of the planets Saturn, Jupiter, Venus, Mars and Mercury, with mutual respect to the constellations and stars. The readings are accurately fixed in degrees and minutes.¹⁰

On this tablet "mention is made of failure to observe a predicted eclipse of the moon. The eclipse is found by computation to have been real but invisible at Babylon. It was doubtless predicted by cycle."¹¹

Thus tablet VAT4956 provides the positions of the planets relative to the backdrop of the fixed stars as well as an unobserved predicted eclipse.

Calculation undeniably dates these phenomena as having occurred in 568/7 BCE. The Babylonian year starts in April, hence the double date. Since the tablet is dated to Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year, this fixes the dates of his rule in terms of our modern calendar systems.

⁷ The Watchtower, August 15, 1968, page 491 footnote

⁸ Horn and Wood, page 96

⁹ "Ein astronomischer Beobachtungstext aus dem 37 Jahre Nebukadnezars II (-567/66)" [*An astronomical observation text from the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar (-567/66)*] contained in "Berichter über die Verhandlungen der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. -his. Klasse", 67 (1915), part 2, pp 29 – 89 [*Reports Concerning the Proceedings of the Royal Saxon Society of Science at Leipzig*]. NOTE: The minus sign (-567) is used in astronomical reckoning since the first year before 1 CE is designated as "Year Zero". ("Handbook of Biblical Chronology", Jack Finegan, page 133). Thus "-567" of the astronomer is "568 BCE" of the historian.

¹⁰ "History of the Empire" page 200 and "The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures", Volume LV, April 1938, page 120, A. T. Olmstead

¹¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, 1961 edition, volume 7, page 914

No Other Year is Possible

Saturn, for example, has a cycle of 29 years. This means that from the same place on the earth it takes 29 years before Saturn holds the same position relative to a fixed constellation at the same time of the year.

The least common multiple under such circumstances for 1 year (to provide the same backdrop of constellations), 11.86 years (Jupiter) and 29.46 years (Saturn) is 1,746,978 years. The least common multiple for all the recorded planets against that background is even more astronomical. Needless to say, Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year is 568 BCE.

The Society's attempt to dismiss VAT4956

The Society attempts to pass off the significance of VAT4956, because of the damage it causes them, on the basis that it is a copy made later, during the Seleucid era. If one were to dismiss every ancient document that is not the original but a copy, we would have no Hebrew Scriptures ("Old Testament") or Greek Scriptures ("New Testament"). We certainly would not have any faith in a Scripture translated in 1950 that is based on a text prepared in the 19th century CE. These are all copies of copies of reconstructions. There are no original documents of the sacred Scriptures, yet they are accepted by the Society, albeit reworded by them when the words are uncomfortable.

Nebuchadnezzar's Years Doubly Fixed

Another Absolute Date for the period is 621 BCE for Nabopolassar's 5th year, for an eclipse on April 21. Nabopolassar ruled 21 years. As the eclipse fixes his 5th year as 621 BCE, he died in 605 BCE.

Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year is fixed absolutely at 568/567 BCE. Therefore, as the Babylonians used the accession-year system, his father, who preceded him, died in 605 BCE.

Thus two Absolute Dates, 621 BCE and 568 BCE, provide double verification of 605 BCE for Nebuchadnezzar's Accession Year.

The Date of Jerusalem's Destruction

Jerusalem was destroyed in Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year. The doubly-verified date of 605 BCE for Nebuchadnezzar's accession proves that Jerusalem was destroyed during 587/6 BCE.

"For the fall of Jerusalem we have the Bible statements dating it in the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar . . . (which) happens to be more easily located than many others, because archaeologists have found a document from the time of Nebuchadnezzar giving a series of astronomical observations for his 37th year that locate that BCE year unmistakably, and therefore also the 19th year."¹² These years are 568 BCE for Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year and 586 BCE for the Destruction of Jerusalem.

Chronologies

A chronology provides a sequence of rulers and the length of each reign or period of authority.

The one authority consistently referred to by the Society is the work "Babylonian Chronology 626 BCE - A D 75" by Parker and Dubberstein. This work, which is accurate to one day, uses the accepted chronology of the period:

¹² Horn and Wood, pages 10 - 11

"The general basis for the chronology of the period here treated is furnished by the Ptolemaic Canon, with help from classical sources. Cuneiform chronicles and lists of kings have also been of considerable help. . . The numerous cuneiform economic texts often furnish an accurate check. . . Dates from cuneiform astronomical texts are especially helpful."¹³

The Accepted Chronology

Parker and Dubberstein's work provides the following chronology of the period:

NABOPOLASSAR	May 17, 626	August 15, 605
NEBUCHADNEZZAR II	Sept. 7, 605	Oct. 8, 562
AMEL-MARDUK	Oct. 8, 562	Aug. 7, 560
NERGAL-SHAR-USUR	Aug. 13, 560	April 16, 556
LABASHI-MARDUK	May 3, 556	June 20, 556
NABUNAID	May 25, 556	Oct. 13, 539

An alternative rendering for Amel-Marduk is Evil-Merodach; for Nergal-shar-usur, Neriglissar; and for Nabunaid, Nabonidus.

The Society agrees with this chronological sequence: "The successive reigns of . . . Evil Merodach (Amel-Marduk) . . . Neriglissar . . . Labashi-Marduk and finally . . . Nabonidus"¹⁴.

The Society repeats the list: "Nabopolassar . . . and his successors Nebuchadnezzar II, Evil-Merodach, Neriglissar, Labashi-Marduk, Nabonidus and Belshazzar."¹⁵ Belshazzar ruled as co-regent of Babylon with his father from Nabonidus' third year.

The Watchtower Society does not accept the number of years that have been allocated to the reigns of some of the kings. The Society, with its need to have Jerusalem fall in 607 BCE, some 19 years before it actually fell, needs to add in those 19 years to the reigns of one or more of the Babylonian kings.

Dating Intervening Events

Anchor points at each end thus fix the extent of the Neo-Babylonian period. Nebuchadnezzar, at the beginning of the era, has his 37th year fixed at 568/7 BCE and Cambyses, immediately following it, has his 7th year fixed at 523/2 BCE. The dates of intervening events are determined with the use of the accepted chronology for the period.

Claudius Ptolemy

The Alexandrian mathematician, astronomer and geographer, Claudius Ptolemy, lists in his work 'Almagest', 19 lunar eclipses ranging over 9 centuries dated to the year, month, day and hour, in terms of the regnal years of several kings.

"Ptolemy not only dates the eclipses to the hour in his own calendar reckoning but also gives in most cases the number of Egyptian (365-day) years, days, and hours from the starting point of the era. . . Further, Ptolemy's 19 eclipses . . . are all in mutual agreement, and various astronomers who have calculated these eclipses by modern methods have all agreed on their dates, varying slightly as to

¹³ "Babylonian Chronology 626 BCE - A D 75", Parker and Dubberstein, page 10

¹⁴ "Aid", page 176

¹⁵ "Aid", page 305

the hour. Oppolzer's tables of lunar eclipses show that the average variance between his computations and Ptolemy's statements is about ten minutes."¹⁶

"Claudius Ptolemaeus or Ptolemy was a noted mathematician, astronomer and geographer who lived at Alexandria in the second century of our era. He is most famous for his astronomical theory, embodied in a monumental Greek work better known by the Arabic name 'Almagest'."¹⁶

In the Almagest, Ptolemy tried to prove his theory of an earth-centred universe. His theory has long been disproved but his record of what was seen - the evidences - have been verified as accurate. The evidences consist of lunar eclipses which have been verified by modern astronomers.

"Since the intervals between these observations were important to Ptolemy's theory of celestial motions, he gave as a sort of appendix to the Almagest a list, or canon, of kings, with the length of each reign to serve as a chronological scale for his astronomical data.

"The first king listed in Ptolemy's Canon is the Babylonian monarch Nabonassar, whose first regnal year began . . . on the Julian date that has been established by lunar eclipses as February 26, 747 BCE. This is the starting point of what is called the Nabonassar era. The Canon gives the number of regnal years of each king listed. Ptolemy's intention was not to give a complete historical list of Kings, but rather to have a convenient chronological scale to establish the intervals between his various astronomical observations discussed in the Almagest. So long as every year in the scale carried a regnal number, it served Ptolemy no useful purpose to list kings who reigned less than a year; hence it is not surprising that these are not included."¹⁶

A Century of Overlap with the Assyrian eponym list

Using the Assyrian eponym list (limmu list), an astronomical computation of a solar eclipse has fixed the year of the eponymy of Bur-Sagale as 763 BCE.¹⁷ Ptolemy's 'Almagest' begins with the year 747 BCE. Since the Assyrian eponym lists continue to 648 BCE we have "a century where these two important chronological guides overlap. . . On the basis of Ptolemy's Canon we are able to provide dates to all the other eponymies on the Assyrian lists, and we thus secure 763 for the eponymy of Bur-Sagale. This is the same date as was secured for that eponymy by the evidence of the solar eclipse."¹⁸

Authorities find the Canon Dependable

Parker and Dubberstein, whom the Watchtower cites as an authority on the subject, states that the "Ptolemaic Canon" provides the general basis of its chronology.¹⁹

Another authority concurs:

"Since the starting point of his Nabonassar era on Thoth 1 of the year 747 BCE (February 26) is established by 19 lunar eclipses, we can locate any year of any of these kings as reckoned by the Egyptian calendar year, and can compute it in BCE dating. This is an easy process."¹⁶

¹⁶ Horn and Wood, pages 41 - 42

¹⁷ Theile, page 41

¹⁸ Theile, page 45

¹⁹ Parker and Dubberstein, page 10

Complete Confidence in Ptolemy's List

Yet another authority that the Society quotes²⁰ on the topic, says of Ptolemy's Canon: "The dates of the Nabonassar era have thus been fully established and . . . the Canon of Ptolemy may be used as a historical guide with the fullest confidence. . . Ptolemy's Canon gives precise and absolutely dependable data. . .

"When the student has at his disposal chronological materials so dependable as the Assyrian eponym list and the Ptolemaic Canon, he may have complete assurance that he has a solid foundation upon which to build."²¹

The Britannica comments: "The Assyrian method of chronological computation was particularly exact. . . The Babylonian chronology . . . is equally accurate. Events in Babylonia were reckoned by the regnal years of each king; these can be dated with certainty from Nabonassar (747-735 B. C.) onwards by comparing the lists of kings with the 'Canon of Ptolemy', which also records certain astronomical observations."²²

Because the Canon is so dependable and because the absolute dates, such as 568 BCE for Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year are so precise, we may be certain that the computed date of 539 BCE is the date of the Fall of Babylon.

Lady Adda Guppi Stele



The Lady Adda Guppi Stele are Babylonian tablets. They made two identical copies, one placed on each side of a pavement. They are the record of the mother of Nabonidus, who lived for 104 years, and they list the kings who ruled during her lifetime.



They therefore are a contemporary record of the chronology of the period.

One copy was discovered in 1906, and it is quite damaged. The other copy was discovered in 1956, and it is not damaged. She omits one king, presumably because the Lady considered him a pretender to the throne, but as he ruled less than one year, there is no effect on an extended chronology of this sort. The undamaged Stele gives a sequence of kings and lengths of reigns that is identical to Ptolemy's Canon.

When presenting the first translation of the stele²³, Gadd comments about a 2-year discrepancy in the lengths of reigns of the Assyrian Kings listed. The problem does not concern the dates of the Neo-Babylonian chronology since they involve the time "between the death of Assurbanipal and the accession of Nabopolassar".²⁴

Thus a person who was contemporary with the times confirms the chronology of the kings from Nebuchadnezzar to Nabonidus.

Firstly, the Stele lists the chronology of the kings prior to the accession of Nabonidus:

²⁰ "Aid", page 327

²¹ Theile, pages 44 - 46

²² Volume 3, pages 511 - 512

²³ Anatolian Studies VIII, (1958) pages 35 - 92

²⁴ Anatolian Studies VIII, page 72

"From the 20th year of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, when I was born, until the 42nd year of Ashurbanipal, the 3rd year of his son Ashur-etil-ili, the 21st year of Nabopolassar, the 43rd year of Nebuchadnezzar, the 2nd year of Awel-Merodach, the 4th year of Neriglissar, during these 95 years."²⁵

The author of the tablet then comments that she died in the 9th year of Nabonidus,²⁶ aged 104. This tallies with the previous arithmetic:

"From the time of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, to the 9th year of Nabonidus, king of Babylon, the son whom I bore, (that is) one hundred and four happy years."²⁷

A list is given of the kings whom Lady Adda Guppi served, "omitting Evil-merodach, from whose court she was banished, or absented herself".²⁸

"I have obeyed with all my heart and have done my duty (as a subject) during the 21 years in which Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon, the 43 years in which Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabopolassar and the four years in which Neriglissar, the king of Babylon, exercised their kingship, (altogether) 68 years."²⁹

Needless to say, there is absolutely no doubt about either the dates or the chronology of the period of the Neo-Babylonian era in question.

Synchronisms with Other Dating Systems

In addition, we find that "synchronisms with other dating systems"² confirm 539 BCE as the date for the Fall of Babylon.

"The date of 539 BCE for the fall of Babylon can be arrived at not only by Ptolemy's canon but by other sources as well. Historians such as Diodorus, Africanus and Eusebius show that Cyrus' first year as king of Persia corresponded to Olympiad 55, year 1 (560/59 BCE) while Cyrus' last year is placed at Olympiad 62, year 2 (531/30 BCE). Cuneiform tablets give Cyrus a rule of 9 years over Babylon which would therefore substantiate the year 539 as the date of the conquest of Babylon."³⁰

Thus we find a Greek system, not in use contemporary with the times in question, combined with the accepted Babylonian chronology, substantiating (that is, not providing primary evidence but confirming previously made calculations) the year 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon.

The Date of Babylon's Fall

To determine the dates of events during the Neo-Babylonian Era, such as its Fall to Cyrus, use is made of the Absolute Date as the starting point and then applying the accepted chronology of the period. That is how authorities calculate the date of the Fall.

"The date 539 for the Fall of Babylon has been reckoned from the latest dates on the contracts of each king in the period counting from the end of Nabopolassar's

²⁵ "Ancient Near Eastern Texts", Third Edition Revised with supplement, edited by James Pritchard, page 561. See also Gadd, pages 47, 69

²⁶ See also Pritchard, page 306

²⁷ Pritchard, page 561. See Gadd, pages 49, 69

²⁸ Gadd, page 70

²⁹ Pritchard, page 561. See Gadd, pages 51, 69

³⁰ "Handbook of Biblical Chronology" (1964), Jack Finegan, pages 112, 168 – 170

reign in 605 BCE, viz. Nebuchadnezzar 43, AmelMarduk 2, Nergal-Shar-Usur 4, Labashi-Marduk (accession only), Nabonidus 17 = 66"³¹

A Most Difficult Position for the Watchtower Society

If the accepted chronology was incorrect, then it is not possible to arrive at 539 BCE as the date of the Fall of Babylon.

The Watchtower Society is thus in a particularly difficult position. The starting point of the Watchtower's calculations assumes that the date of 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon is correct, but this date depends on a chronology that the Watchtower does not accept.

Summary

Dating the Destruction of Jerusalem

The date of Jerusalem's destruction cannot be more firmly fixed. One Absolute Date of the period lies within Nebuchadnezzar's reign and the Destruction, which occurred in Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year, occurred in 586 BCE. Another Absolute Date, for 621 BCE, firmly fixes the Accession Year of Nebuchadnezzar, providing further proof, if any was needed.

Dating the Fall of Babylon

The date 539 BCE is a date calculated from a premise that 568/7 BCE is Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year and that the accepted chronology is correct. Since Ptolemy's Canon is correct, Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 BCE. The Watchtower Society says it cannot accept Ptolemy's Canon yet its very authority depends on the date that relies on the correctness of the accepted chronologies such as Ptolemy's Canon.

Conclusion

The Watchtower Society is in a bind!

³¹ Cambridge Ancient History, volume 3, page 224

Appendix D

"The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy"

Introduction

The date of 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon is the key starting date for laying down the Watchtower Society's foundation of authority. The Society receives this date from Historians, and they use the Canon of Ptolemy to arrive at that calculated date.

The date of the Destruction of Jerusalem does not rely on Ptolemy's Canon. The date is positively fixed by two Absolute Dates, one occurring within Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

It is the date for the Fall of Babylon that requires the accepted chronologies such including Ptolemy's Canon. Quite perversely, the Society does not accept that the Canon is accurate, yet it relies on the date of 539 BCE as being correct!

The nature of the Canon

Ptolemy's canon, or list of kings, starts with Nabonassar in 747 BCE. He then provides a continuous list of rulers, omitting only those kings who ruled for less than 12 months, since they were irrelevant to his purpose.

He dated each reign against the Egyptian Calendar, regardless of where a king ruled, making it easy to convert against our Julian or Gregorian Calendars. He also linked each reign back to his starting point, calling this the Nabonassar Era.

The following is Ptolemy's list from its start to the Fall of Babylon. The list includes the conversion to our Calendar system.

Ruler		Years	Year of the Nabonassar Era	Years of the Christian Era
Nabonassar	Nabonassaros	14	1-14	747-734 BCE
Nabu-nadinzir	Nadius	2	15-16	733-732
Ukinzer, Pulu	Chinziros and Poros	5	17-21	731-727
Ululai	Houlaios	5	22-26	726-722
Marduk-appal-iddin	Mardokempados	12	27-38	721-710
Sargon	Arkeanos	5	39-43	709-705
First Interregnum		2	44-45	704-703
Bel-ibni	Belibos	3	46-48	702-700
Assur-nadin-shurn	Aparanadios	6	49-54	699-694
Nergal-ushezib	Regebelos	1	55	693
Mushezib-Marduk	Mesesimordakos	4	56-59	692-689
Second Interregnum		8	60-67	688-681
Assur-akh-iddin	Asaridinos	13	68-80	680-668
Shamash-shum-ukin	Saosdouchinos	20	81-100	667-648
Kandalanu	Kineladanos	22	101-122	647-626

(continued next page)

Ruler	Years	Year of the Nabonassar Era	Years of the Christian Era
Nabopolassar Nabopolassaros	21	123-143	625-605
Nebuchadnezzar Nabocolassaros	43	144-186	604-562
Amel-Marduk Illaoroudamos	2	187-188	561-560
Nergal-shar-usur Nerigasolassaros	4	189-192	559-556
Nabonidus Nabonadios	17	193-209	555-539

The listing shows the chronology of the Canon for the neo-Babylonian Period. Ptolemy ignored Labashi Marduk since he reigned for less than a year and hence was not relevant to his purpose.

Interestingly, the Watchtower Society provides the following information, without providing its sources:

Ruler	Reign	Watchtower Society Reference	
Nebuchadnezzar	43 years	Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God's Kingdom Rules	Page 279
Evil-Merodach	2 years	ditto	Page 184
Neriglissar	4 years	ditto	Page 184
Labashi Marduk	A few months	ditto	Page 184
Nabonidus	556 – 539 BCE	All Scripture Inspired of God and Beneficial	Pages 139, 140, see footnote

Insight on the News: Claudius Ptolemy – a Fraud

The Watchtower of December 15, 1977 carried this piece:

"How certain can we be of the presently accepted chronology of the ancient Babylonian Empire? For many years, chronologists have put heavy reliance on the king list of Claudius Ptolemy, a second-century Greek scholar often considered the greatest astronomer of antiquity.

"However, in his new book 'The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy', the noted physicist Robert R. Newton of Johns Hopkins University offers proof that many of Ptolemy's astronomical observations were 'deliberately fabricated' to agree with his preconceived theories 'so that he could claim that the observations prove the validity of his theories'.

"In its comments on Newton's book, 'Scientific American' magazine notes 'Ptolemy's forgery may have extended to inventing the length of reigns of Babylonian kings. Since much modern reconstruction of Babylonian chronology has been based on a list of kings that Ptolemy used to pinpoint the dates of alleged Babylonian observations, according to Newton "all relevant chronology must now be reviewed and all dependence upon Ptolemy's [king] list must be removed." October 1977, p 80.

"These findings illustrate why secular history and chronological reckoning cannot be relied upon when they conflict with the Bible. Unlike secular historians, the Bible writers had nothing to gain by misrepresenting the facts. Also, what they wrote become part of 'all Scripture' that 'is inspired of God'. -2 Tim. 3.16."

Let us see if the Watchtower Society has anything to gain by "misrepresenting the facts".

My Initial Investigations

When I first read the piece in *The Watchtower*, I knew that the chronology of the Society was still be in trouble, as it depends upon 539 BC being the correct date for the Fall of Babylon, and this date is calculated by using a chronology that agrees with and is largely based upon Ptolemy's Canon. If the Canon was wrong, so would be the date of 539 BCE for Babylon's fall, which the Society claims as an "Absolute" date and uses it in connection with its 607 BCE and 1914 AD dates.

The fact that the Watchtower was excited in being able to discredit Ptolemy's work greatly interested me, as they had been working to show that none of the Society's Babylonian chronology is dependent upon Ptolemy, and had been placing great emphasis on using other methods such as the Olympiadic dating system. There are other systems independent of Ptolemy that provide the dates of the neo-Babylonian chronology, but they all confirm the accuracy of Ptolemy's Canon. If Ptolemy were a fraud, how could his Babylonian dates agree with every other independent reliable source?"

(Later I was to find that the author of the claim, R.R. Newton, was referring to the period before the neo-Babylonian era of Nebuchadnezzar, and that the dates he assigns to Nebuchadnezzar agree completely with the dates of Ptolemy).

The Scientific American Article

I immediately secured a copy of the article in the Scientific American. Sure enough, in the October 1977 issue on pages 79-81 was the article, 'Claudius Ptolemy: Fraud'. It stated:

"Now, according to Robert R. Newton of Johns' Hopkins University in a book titled The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy, soon to be published . . . Ptolemy is revealed as the most successful fraud in the history of science."

The Society had lost no time in making the most of this article in its December 15, 1977 issue of "The Watchtower" with the four paragraph piece announcing "Claudius Ptolemy - A Fraud", and quoted Robert R. Newton.

First Letter to Newton

I wrote to Professor Newton as I was having difficulty reconciling his conclusions concerning Ptolemy with those in his book Ancient Planetary Observations and the Validity of Ephemeris Time (1976) where he used several readings from an astronomical tablet from Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year to calculate it as corresponding to Julian dates during 568 and 567 BC. (The ancients did not start their years on January 1, hence the double dates). These dates agreed perfectly with those of Ptolemy.

Newton's Replies

In his reply dated January 4 1978, Newton stated that the context of his statement "Applied only to chronology before the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. The dates of Nebuchadnezzar are well established by astronomical observations."

I immediately thanked him for his reply and asked him to confirm the Julian dates of Nebuchadnezzar's reign that were "well established". He replied on the 23rd January 1978, that "The year 626 BC (-625) is the accession year of Nabopolassar, (Nebuchadnezzar's father) and it is the earliest Babylonian year that we can date accurately." He also stated that "I take it to be well established that -567 is Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year and hence that -603 is his first year".

Newton Upholds Ptolemy's neo-Babylonian Dates

Newton thus upholds the same dates for Nebuchadnezzar as those established by the Canon of Ptolemy, Olympiadic Dating and other sources of archaeological and astronomical dates. All of which are at variance with the chronology of the Watchtower Society.

Newton's statement that Nebuchadnezzar's first year was -603 (which is 604 BCE) means his accession year was in 605 BCE and his 19th year, in which he destroyed Jerusalem, occurred in 587/6 BCE, instead of the date 607 B.C.E. upheld by the Watchtower Society, and forms the basis of the significance it gives to 1914 AD.

The Watchtower Society Informed

Because the Society had been misled by the sensational and imprecise article in the Scientific American, I wrote to the Society's Australian headquarters telling them that:

- a. Newton's statement refers to chronology before Nebuchadnezzar's reign;
- b. Newton uses an astronomical tablet to calculate Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year at 568 B.C.E. and
- c. Ptolemy's King list is not used to derive the dates of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, but it is used in the derivation of 539 BCE for the date of the Fall of Babylon.

I received in reply merely a printed copy of the article in Scientific American with a circle ringed around the final sentence, "All research in either history or astronomy that has been based on the syntaxis must now be done again."

I wrote back to the Society stating how its own position is in jeopardy, since 539 BCE for Babylon's Fall relies upon Ptolemy whereas Newton shows the 568 BCE date for Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year does not. Consequently, I told them, they must now start using the correct dates for the neo-Babylonian era, including 586 BCE for the Fall of Jerusalem, instead of the incorrect date of 607 BCE. I have not, of course, received a reply to this letter. The Society is too deeply entrenched in its chronology to admit error and change, even when those authorities it had hoped support them, in turn show the utter hopelessness of their position.

Professor Theile's Comments

I wondered what the world authority on chronology, Professor E. R. Theile thought of Ptolemy being claimed as a fraud? Since the Society often quoted Professor Theile in its publications, including the "Aid" book, I decided I would write to him for his assessment of what has been quoted from Newton's statements concerning Ptolemy.

In Professor Thiele's reply, he stated that the article in Scientific American was "highly unfortunate and totally unjustified. Ptolemy was not a fraud. He was one of the greatest scholars of antiquity". (The complete text of his reply is carried in Appendix E.)

The personal letters written by Professors Newton and Thiele, summarise what these men have written in their well-known publications, and neither supports the chronology of the Watchtower Society. While the Society has been very happy to be misled by the sensationalist article in the Press, which has given the impression that Ptolemy's dates and the neo-Babylonian chronology is in doubt, nothing is further from the truth!

Newton's Letter of January 4, 1978

Mr. D. Mason
Kilsyth
Victoria,
Australia 3137

Dear Mr. Mason:


Thank you for your letter about the review of The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy in Scientific American. I have studied Babylonian chronology only from the standpoint of the astronomical observations that can be dated by the use of that chronology, and I have not studied it in general. Therefore I cannot give an answer to some of your questions.

In context, my statement about Babylonian chronology applied only to chronology before the reign of Nebuchnezzar. The dates of Nebuchnezzar are well established by astronomical observations that were made during his reign and that were dated by using his regnal years. I have shown this point in my book Ancient Planetary Observations and the Validity of Ephemeris Time, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland 21218, 1976.

I can now respond to your questions, using the same letters to identify them that you used.

- (a) In the period before Nebuchnezzar, there are no absolute Babylonian dates known, to the best of my knowledge. There are many such dates known in and after his reign.
- (b) Since Babylonian chronology is not my field, I am not acquainted with the Adad Guppi Stele that you mention.
- (c) I do not know how certain the dates of the destruction of Jerusalem and the deposing of Zedekiah are, but my work has no bearing upon the question. So far as my work is concerned, the situation about dating those events is unchanged.
- (d) I believe that the date of 539 BC for the capture of Babylon is well established, but my work has no impact upon the dating of this event, since it is after the reign of Nebuchnezzar

Sincerely yours,


R. R. Newton

RRN/mjo

Newton's Letter of January 23, 1978

Mr. Doug Mason
Kilsyth,
Victoria,
Australia 3137

Dear Mr. Mason:

P. V. Neugebauer and E. F. Weidner in "Ein astronomischer Beobachtungstext aus dem 37. Jahre Nebukadnezars II. (-567/-566)" (Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlich Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologie-Historie Klasse, Band 67, Heft 2, pp. 29-89, 1915) have published a text which,

as the title implies, gives a large number of astronomical observations from a year that is dated as the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. I have summarized these observations in Tables IV.3 through IV.10, beginning on page 131, of Ancient Planetary Observations and the Validity of Ephemeris Time. These are the observations with a "Tentative Julian Date" in -567 or -566.

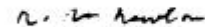
The analysis of these data is summarized in Chapters X and XIV, on the assumption that the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar was the Babylonian year that began in the spring of -567. I don't believe that I say so anywhere in the book, but I have tested other possible years and can find no other year that fits the data. Thus I take it to be well established that -567 is Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year and hence that -603 is his first year.

Existing documents give ample evidence about the reign of his predecessor Nabopolassar, and I think there can be no substantial question that Nabopolassar's first year began in the spring of -624.

By the way, there is a difference between the accession year of a Babylonian king and his first year. In Babylonian usage, the first year was considered to be the year after his accession.

The best source for the Babylonian dates that can be accurately correlated with our calendar is by R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, Babylonian Chronology, 626 BC -AD 75, Brown University Press, Providence, Rhode Island, U.S.A., 1956. This lists the day on which each Babylonian month began within the indicated years. The year 626 BC (-625) is the accession year of Nabopolassar, and it is the earliest Babylonian year that we can date accurately. Many scholars claim that they can date earlier years, but I believe that they have no sound basis for their claims.

Sincerely yours,


R. R. Newton

RRN/mjo

"Scientific American" Acquits Ptolemy

Following the appearance of Newton's charges against Ptolemy, experts in several disciplines examined them and concluded that they are groundless and collapse in the light of full knowledge.

The March 1979 issue of Scientific American revisited the charge against Ptolemy, and after reviewing an article appearing in The American Scholar by Noel M. Swerdlow of the University of Chicago, and independent studies by Victor E. Thoren of Indiana University and Owen J. Gingerich of Harvard University, acquitting Ptolemy of all charges, saying that "Newton's case against Ptolemy collapses because it is based on faulty statistical analysis and a disregard of the methods of early astronomy".

Julia Neuffer Defends Ptolemy

In her paper, "Ptolemy's Canon" Debunked, (Andrews University Seminary Studies, volume XVII, no. 1, 1979, page 40) Julia Neuffer mentions the book review appearing in Science, 24 February 1978, page 872, in which Barnard R. Goldstein points out specific flaws in Newton's astronomical argument.

In her paper, chronologist Julia Neuffer makes several pertinent observations.

Base of Babylonian Chronology

Referring to Newton's observation that "much Babylonian chronology is based upon Ptolemy's Canon", Neuffer writes:

"This alarm is sounded nearly a hundred years late. . . Much Babylonian chronology once was (not is) dependent on Ptolemy's regnal dates. . . From the 1880's to about 1960 archaeology has furnished Babylonian and other records paralleling and corroborating 'Ptolemy's king list'." (Neuffer, page 41)

Pre-Babylonian Chronology

Speaking of the period prior to the neo-Babylonian era, Neuffer explains that "the Canon figures for every reign. . . (from) Nabonassar through Kandalanu are, contrary to Newton's expectations, completely in harmony with the ancient Babylonian records." (Neuffer, page 41)

Babylonian Chronology

Writing of the Babylonian period from Nabopolassar to Nabonidus' year 9, she writes: "The Neo-Babylonian reigns appear, exactly as in the Canon, in the more complete form of the Nabonidus Harran Inscription, supplemented by two chronicles plus commercial tablets and for the last reign, by the Nabonidus Chronicle. Further, the whole is dated by the astronomical tablet that fixes Nebuchadnezzar's year 37 at 568/7 BC. . . This tablet is pivotal." (Neuffer, page 43)

Post-Babylonian Chronology

Of the post-Babylonian period, Neuffer shows, among other things, that there is complete harmony throughout history – from Cambyses' reign (which is astronomically dated), through Cyrus and Darius 1, through the next four Persian reigns (Xerxes to Artaxerxes II), which are firmly held in place, and like the others, in agreement with the Canon down to the Romans.

Complete Agreement

There is thus no doubt that the dating of the period from pre-Babylonian times is firmly fixed and corresponds with the data provided by Claudius Ptolemy. And "the strongest evidence (of Ptolemy's accuracy) is the complete agreement of the Canon with the extant ancient records. . . After centuries of transmission of the text (of the Canon), it is still in agreement with the long buried ancient documents now brought to light by modern archaeology." (Neuffer, page 46)

Newton's Venture into Chronology

Robert R. Newton was attached to the Applied Physics Laboratory of the Johns Hopkins University, Maryland, U.S.A. He was not a chronologist. In his letter of January 4, 1978 to me, he writes: "Babylonian chronology is not my field".

In his book, The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy, Newton shows how shallow his research into chronology really is. Writing of the period before 601 BCE (Nebuchadnezzar's first regnal year), Newton states:

"I have not attempted to study the evidence available from sources other than Ptolemy."

His misunderstanding of the method of constructing the Babylonian chronology is shown by his statement:

"Much Babylonian chronology is based upon Ptolemy's king list" (page 375). Actually, archaeology has furnished data that makes Ptolemy's data superfluous, although they do corroborate his work.

Writing of Newton's move from astronomy to chronology, Julia Neuffer states: "Newton unquestionably leaps to a non sequitur". (Andrews University Seminary Studies, volume XVII, No.1,1979, page 40)

Newton's Chronologist

Since Newton was not a chronologist, where did he obtain his incorrect information and fallacious reasoning? On page XIV, in the preface to his book, The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy, he extends his thanks to a person who helped him in his understandings of the relationship of chronology to astronomy. This person who had communicated with Newton during the preparation of his material was a Jehovah's Witness of long standing. I have a letter written and signed by him attesting to that fact.

It was the undying hope of the Watchtower Society that Newton, in collecting together his previous denigrations of Ptolemy into one volume, would totally remove Ptolemy's credibility. This would allow some semblance of respectability to their date of 607 BCE for the final destruction of Jerusalem.

It has always been the Society's problem that while people reckoned that Nebuchadnezzar's 1st regnal year was 604 BCE (accession year 605 BCE), there was no possibility of recognition of their 607 BCE date for the destruction of Jerusalem in Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year. Nebuchadnezzar did not even commence his reign until a few years after the 607 BCE date.

Now however, with Newton making such strong charges against Ptolemy, there arose the chance to press home an obvious victory. But such was not to be!

Newton Destroys The Watchtower Dates

In his book, in the section dealing with cbronology, on the very subject that the Jehovah's Witness had been assisting him with, Newton dealt them a stunning blow when he declared that Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year is positively located at 587/6 BCE.

"There is another document from the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. According to Ptolemy's list, this year began in the spring of -567 (i.e. 568 BCE). . . . When I analyze (the document) . . . I find that . . . we have quite strong confirmation that Ptolemy's list is correct for Nebuchadnezzar. . . . The beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign takes us back to -603 (i.e. 604 BCE)." (page 375)

The document used by Newton to positively date Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year at 568/7 BCE is known as VAT4956. Not only does Newton refer to it on page 375 of his book, The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy, he also refers to it in his book Ancient Planetary Observations and the Validity of Ephemeris Time, page 131ff, and in his letter to me of January 23, 1978.

Did Newton Use Watchtower Reasoning?

As he is not a chronologist, and since he acknowledges gratitude to a Jehovah's Witness in formulating his chronological understanding, it is natural to assume that Newton's propositions reflect Watchtower reasoning. Such seems to be the case.

Newton could not gainsay the undeniable proof of the dates of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, dates which utterly confound the Society's dates, yet did he fall prey to the rationale fed him by his Jehovah's Witness mentor?

For example, his assertion that much Babylonian chronology is dependent upon Ptolemy is a Watchtower cliché, not based on fact. The chronology is provided by archaeological documents which confirm Ptolemy's list.

Additionally, his reasoning that, "Ptolemy does not need an authentic king list . . . Even if his king list is fabricated, he can still use it", reflects the Society's stance that "accuracy in astronomy does not prove accuracy in history". Crime of

Claudius Ptolemy, page 374; Aid to Bible Understanding, page 331). This reasoning is passed off as a non sequitur by chronologist Julia Neuffer.

"Everything to Gain"

In its December 15, 1977 article on Newton, the Society wrote: "The Bible writers had nothing to gain by misrepresenting the facts". The fact is that the Society has everything to gain by doing so.

Appendix E

Personal Letters from Edwin Theile

Prof. E. R. Theile is the author of "Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings".

Letter of October 25, 1964

In reply to a letter regarding the accuracy of 604 BC being the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, Theile replied in a letter dated October 25, 1964:

"Concerning the time of the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. First of all, allow me to say that there is not the slightest question as to when that reign began. No other date in ancient history is more firmly established than this. That is because of the two eclipses involved. First there is an eclipse of April 22, 621, which took place in the 5th year of Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar. Since Nabopolassar reigned twentyone years, his death would thus have taken place in 605, when his son Nebuchadnezzar began to reign. Then we also have the eclipse which took place in the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar, 568, which once more establishes 605 as the beginning of his reign. There could be no evidence more positive than this."

Letter of January 21, 1971 to Dr Edmond C. Gruss

January 21, 1971

Dr. Edmond C. Gruss
Los Angeles Baptist College
Newhall, California 91321

Dear Doctor Gruss:

In regard to your request for my comment on the use of my quotation in the WATCHTOWER concerning Ptolemy's Canon, I will say that it is misleading and unscrupulous. It is misleading in that it would give an entirely different impression concerning the important canon of Ptolemy than I hold. It is unscrupulous, because a procedure of this type is not honest.

If the writer of this article had been honest--or informed--he would have known that I use Ptolemy's Canon in an entirely different way than he would have it used.

I have the utmost respect for the Canon, and find myself almost standing in awe of its detailed historical accuracy. The man who wrote it must have had at his finger tips an amazing amount of detail concerning early Near Eastern history, and an astonishing amount of astronomical information fitting in at point after point with specific years of the kings. It is accurate and reliable all along the line. Astronomy is one thing upon which we can depend with complete confidence. And when the eclipses of the canon are so fully in harmony with the years of the kings, we can be certain that the chronology involved is sound. The canon is right and Jehovah's witnesses are wrong.

What would I say about the article in general? I would say that such a writer and reader has no business writing about such a subject. He does not know the facts, or if he does, he does not use them in an honest manner. It reminds me of the

way an unscrupulous lawyer would deal with facts in order to have them seem to support a case he knows not to be sound.

Let us be charitable with the man and say that in his reading he does not read as an informed scholar should. In other words, let us accuse him rather of ignorance than dishonesty.

I know that I am using strong words, but in a matter such as this, Biblical truth and the salvation of souls are involved, and both are important.

I thank you for your inquiry.

Sincerely yours,

Edwin R. Thiele

Letter of February 24 1978 to Doug Mason

Mr. Doug Mason
Kilsyth
Victoria 3137
Australia

Dear Mr. Mason:

In reply to your letter asking my reaction to the attack in the October, 1977 issue of the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN by Robert Newton on the integrity of Claudius Ptolemy, I can only say that I regard this as highly unfortunate and totally unjustified.

Ptolemy was not a fraud. He was one of the greatest scholars of antiquity and he passed on to posterity information of great importance. Ptolemy possessed a vast amount of astonishingly accurate astronomical and historical data which he tied together with great meticulousness.

The article in the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN says that "the accuracy of certain observations of the planets and the stars that Ptolemy claims to have made is so great that in some cases the odds are a billion to one against his having made them with the instruments described." Well and good, as far as his results are concerned. The vital thing is not the means by which Ptolemy secured his results, --whether by personal observation, calculation, or borrowing from others,--but the accuracy or inaccuracy of the historical and astronomical facts he sets forth.

In the article in the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN we read:

"Since much modern reconstruction of Babylonian chronology has been based on a list of kings that Ptolemy used to pinpoint the dates of alleged Babylonian observations, according to Newton "all relevant chronology must now be reviewed and all dependence upon Ptolemy's [king] list must be removed."

This statement is not in accord with the facts and the conclusion drawn is not called for. No reputable modern student of the ancient Near East would go to Ptolemy for his reconstruction of the chronology of ancient times. He does not need to. Many thousands of ancient contemporary documents from the ancient Near East have come down to us which make possible the most precise reconstruction of the years of the rulers then in power. Among these are the Assyrian Eponym list, the annals of Assyrian kings, the Babylonian Chronicle, the Babylonian King List, and many thousands of precisely dated state and business documents.

One of the best examples of a modern reconstruction of ancient chronology by the most capable of modern scholars is BABYLONIAN CHRONOLOGY 626 BC-AD 75, by Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein. Here is provided a good opportunity of checking the accuracy of the years of Ptolemy's Canon which extends from the commencement of the Nabonassar era in 747 BC to Antoninus Pius, 157-160 AD, years 885 to 907 of the Nabonassar era. Parker and Dubberstein follow the practice of establishing the years of reign of every ruler by consulting the earliest and last available dated contemporary documents from his reign. This makes it possible to set forth the dates of the rulers with great exactitude, not only for months and years, but at times to the very day of the commencement or end of a reign. Although some of the ancient documents that have come down to us are from within a few days or weeks from the beginning or end of a reign. others may be some months removed. But enough have been preserved to make it possible to set dates with great preciseness. Following are some of the dates given by Parker and Dubberstein in accord with the above procedure:

Evidence for Beginning of Nabopolassar's Reign

II/13, 16 and 19, accession year (May 17, etc.. 626)
VI/22/acc. (Sept.21, 626)

Evidence for End of Nabopolassar's Reign

II/6/21 (May 16, 605)
V/1/21 (Aug. 8, 605)
V/8/21 (Aug. 15, 605)

Evidence for Beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's Reign

VI/1/acc. (Sept. 7, 605)
VI/12/acc. (Sept. 18, 605)
VII/5/acc. (Oct. 11, 605)

Evidence for End of Nebuchadnezzar's Reign

VI/14/43 (Sept. 26, 562)
VI/21/43 (Oct. 3, 562)
VI/26/43 (Oct. 8, 562)

Two eclipses fix the dates for Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar. One took place on April 22, 621, in the 5th year of Nabopolassar. Nabopolassar reigned 21 years, so he began in 626 and ended in 605. The eclipse of 621 took place in year 127 of the Nabonassar era. According to Ptolemy the years of Nabopolassar were 123-143 of the Nabonassar era. For Nebuchadnezzar a calculated eclipse is recorded in his 37th year, which took place in 568 BC. This gives the 43 years of his reign as 605-562. Again we find Ptolemy in agreement with these dates, for he correctly gives him 43 years, years 144-186 of the Nabonassar era.

The evidence for the years of reign of Nebuchadnezzar is of particular importance, for there is a large religious group that erroneously sets forth 625 as the year when Nebuchadnezzar began his reign. According to them the year 607 marks the beginning of a chronological scheme which extends to the Biblical time of the end and the restoration of the kingdom of God. All the way through, however, their dates can be shown to be in error.

No date in ancient history is more firmly established than is 605 for the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. We have already given the astronomical evidence of the eclipse of 621 in the 5th year of Nabopolassar which gives 605 for the end of his 21 years and the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar. And we have given the eclipse of 568 in the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar, which again fixes 605 as the year when Nebuchadnezzar began.

There is another item of evidence which fully fixes 605 as the year when Nebuchadnezzar began and that is the Babylonian Chronicle. This gives a

remarkably interesting year-by-year, detailed record of Babylonian events. For the year 605 this record reads as follows:

"For twenty-one years Nabopolassar had been king of Babylon. On the 8th of the month of Ab (Aug. 15) he died. . . . In the month of Elul Nebuchadrezzar returned to Babylon and on the first day of the month of Elul (Sept. 7) he sat on the royal throne in Babylon." (D. J. Wiseman, CHRONICLES OF CHALDEAN KINGS (626-556 BC) IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM, p.69.)

It was noted that we had contemporary cuneiform tablets from May and August, dated in the 21st year of Nabopolassar, and tablets dated in September and October of the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar, 605 BC, and these fully confirm the Babylonian Chronicle and the Canon of Ptolemy.

As contemporary evidence from Babylon shows the Canon of Ptolemy to be sound, this is also true of Persia. For the commencement of the reign of Cambyses, Parker and Dubberstein cite three tablets dated on the 12th, 16th, and 20th days of the 6th month of the year of Cambyses' accession, 530. For the end of Cambyses four documents are cited, all in the 1st month of the 8th year of his reign, dating from March 30 to April 18, 522. This gives Cambyses a reign of 530-522. Ptolemy notes an eclipse for year 225 of the Nabonassar era, and this took place on July 16, 523, in the 7th year of Cambyses. According to Ptolemy Cambyses had a reign of 8 years, and these were years 219-226 of the Nabonassar era. Thus the contemporary Persian evidence for Cambyses is identical to that of Ptolemy.

When Parker and Dubberstein come to Xerxes they give tablets dated Dec. 1, 486 and Jan. 14, 485 of his accession year, thus attesting to 486 as the year when Xerxes began. For the close of his reign they cite tablets March 24 and Aug. 4 or 8 of his 20th and 21st years, 465. This contemporary evidence fixes 486-465 for the reign of Xerxes. According to the Canon of Ptolemy Xerxes had 21 years, which are years 263 to 283 of the Nabonassar era. Once more contemporary evidence confirms Ptolemy.

For the next ruler of Persia, Artaxerxes, Parker and Dubberstein cite four tablets dated June 11, Aug. 9, Oct. 12, and Oct. 13, 464, of his first year. That gives 465 as the year of Artaxerxes' accession. For the close of his reign there are tablets dated Dec. 24, 424. and Feb. 26, 423, both in his 41st year. That gives 423 for the end of Artaxerxes, and 465-423 as his years of reign. The Canon of Ptolemy gives Artaxerxes a reign of 41 years, which are years 284-324 of the Nabonassar era. Thus again the years of the Canon of Ptolemy are fully confirmed by the contemporary cuneiform tablets that have come down to us.

The years of these rulers of Persia are important to Bible students, and their dates must be correctly established if the Biblical record is to be correctly understood.

In addition to the lines of evidence already discussed there is yet another line of evidence which again fully confirms the accuracy of the years of Ptolemy's Canon. This is by placing the years of the Assyrian Eponym list alongside the years of the Canon of Ptolemy where they overlap each other.

During the seventh and eighth centuries before the Christian era Assyria and Babylon existed side by side and each nation left its own historical records. In Assyria each year was named after some official who was termed the eponym, and the Assyrian Eponym Canon reported the prominent events that took place in the various years. In 763 BC Bur-Sagale was the eponym, and the record for that year states that "In the month of Simanu an eclipse of the sun took place". Simanu was the month of June, and astronomers have given June 15, 763 as the date of that eclipse. Having 763 as the year when Bur-Sagale was eponym, we can go backwards or forwards and secure the date for every eponym on the lists.

By this means we secure 709 as the year when Mannu-ki-Assur-li was the eponym. The citation for that year is that "Sargon took the hand of Bel". Bel was the great god of Babylon, and this citation therefore reveals that in the year 709 Sargon the king of Assyria also became the king of Babylon.

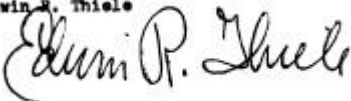
There are two tablets in the British Museum, K 5280 and K 2688, which state that the eponymy of Mannu-ki-Assur-li marked the 13th year of Sargon as king of Assyria and his 1st year as king of Babylon. This is a matter of great importance, for we now have a connecting bridge between the years of the rulers of Assyria and the years of the rulers of Babylon. Based on the Assyrian eclipse of June 15, 763, we now secure 709 as the year when Sargon, king of Assyria, began to reign as king of Babylon. And that now gives us the dates for the other rulers of Babylon, and also for all the rulers of Ptolemy's Canon, from beginning to end. And on this basis we can now assign a specific date to any of Ptolemy's astronomical phenomena which are tied in with the year of any ruler on Ptolemy's list. When this is done, the year of each astronomical item turns out to be correct.

Or, going the other way round, we can take the dates of Ptolemy's astronomical facts to give 709 as the year when Sargon became king of Babylon and when Mannu-ki-Assur-li was the eponym of Assyria. And on that basis we can assign the dates for all the eponymies and all their events. And when we come to Bur-Sagale we can now say that is 763 BC, and that in the month of June an eclipse of the sun took place in Assyria. And when astronomical science shows that to be correct, we can know that all the years of both the Assyrian eponym list and of the Canon of Ptolemy are sound.

When Ptolemy is so correct in the years of his astronomical observations and of the reigns of the rulers to which they are tied, we cannot but look upon him with great respect, and we have no reason to vilify him as a fraud. He was an informed scholar of outstanding ability who used his knowledge well. We may not know just how he secured his historical or astronomical data, but we may know that both are amazingly accurate. When we remember that he did his work in Alexandria in Egypt, in the second century AD and that he dealt with events in the heavens and on the earth many centuries removed from the time in which he lived, we can only look with wonder and respect upon the results achieved.

Whatever the perturbations to which a study of some of the details of Ptolemy's work might give rise, let no one think that the basic correctness of his chronological findings has been disproved. His years of stars and kings are sound. Error will always remain error and truth must ever be truth. The year 605 will remain provingly correct as the year when Nebuchadnezzar began his reign. 486 will be the attested date when Xerxes began his twenty-one years, and 465 will be the date when Artaxerxes began and 457 will be his seventh year.

He who has a genuine regard for truth will search diligently for it, and when he finds it he will accept it and will walk in the light that it brings to him. Only such a course will lead anyone to the gates of the Kingdom of God.

Edwin P. Thiele


Letter of January 12, 1979 to Bruce Price

Dear Pastor Price:

For over forty years I have been setting forth my views on ancient chronology and chronologers, and my confidence in Claudius Ptolemy has become widely known. But for many years Jehovah's Witness publications have been setting me forth as holding a view concerning Ptolemy that is directly contrary to what I hold. Individuals who know my views write to me from many parts of the world, wanting to know why the Witnesses do not tell the truth concerning my full confidence in Ptolemy.

Ptolemy was one of the greatest scholars of antiquity. The outstanding American astronomer, Owen Gingerich at the American Astronomical meeting at Honolulu, January 18, 1977 in a paper on Ptolemy termed him "the greatest astronomer of antiquity."

The chronological data on the rulers of ancient Babylon and Persia set forth by Ptolemy are astronomically established. The date 605 BC for the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is verified by two eclipses and there is not the slightest question about its accuracy. But the Witnesses' date for Nebuchadnezzar is twenty years in error and their prophetic calculations based on their date are wrong.

To proceed on a basis of honesty and integrity those among the Jehovah's Witnesses who in their publications have set forth untruths about what I and others have written should retract their errors, for only truth has a right to stand.

Honesty is akin to godliness. Truth is from above but falsehood is from below. Concerning the evil one Jesus said that "he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). The Bible declares that "whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" will be outside of the kingdom of God, and that "there shall in no wise enter into it" anyone who "maketh a lie" (Revelation 22:15; 21:27). Paul warned that a power would come working "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" and they would be given over to "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thessalonians 2:10,11). "He that speaketh lies shall perish" (Proverbs 19:9).

It is perilous to tamper with truth. All who hope to participate in the kingdom of God should be keenly alert against error. There are multitudes among the Jehovah's Witnesses who are very sincere Christians and they should be careful not to allow themselves to be misled. Concerning ancient chronology I know that much of error has been set forth, and the truth in this regard needs to be known.

Sincerely,

Edwin R. Thiele