

## THE SEVENTY YEARS FOR BABYLON

*For thus says the LORD, “When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill my good word to you, to bring you back to this place.” — Jeremiah 29:10, NASB.*

**T**HE DATE 607 B.C.E. as given by Watchtower chronologists for the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Babylonians is determined by adding the seventy years predicted by Jeremiah to 537 B.C.E., the date when the Jewish remnant are thought to have returned from exile. It is held that these seventy years were a period of *complete desolation* for Judah and Jerusalem:

The Bible prophecy does not allow for the application of the 70-year period to any time other than that between the desolation of Judah, accompanying Jerusalem’s destruction, and the return of the Jewish exiles to their homeland as a result of Cyrus’ decree. It clearly specifies that the 70 years would be years of *devastation of the land of Judah*.<sup>1</sup>

If no other understanding of the seventy-year period is allowed for by Bible prophecy, then a choice has to be made between the date determined by this application and the one established by at least seventeen lines of historical evidence.

When a certain interpretation of a Biblical prophecy contradicts historical evidence, this indicates that either the prophecy failed or the

1 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1988), p. 463.

interpretation is wrong. It is true that a certain application sometimes looks very convincing, so much so that no other appears feasible. It seems to the reader to be given by the Bible itself. In such a case it may also seem to be a sound Christian position to discard the historical evidence and “just stick to what the Bible says.”

When this position is taken, however, those taking it often overlook the fact that the fulfillment of a prophecy cannot be demonstrated *aside from history*, because only history can show whether, when, and how it was fulfilled. Actually, prophecy is not generally understood until after it has been fulfilled historically through events in time. Serious mistakes have sometimes been made by sincere Bible students because historical evidence *contrary* to a certain application or interpretation has been rejected. One example will be given below to illustrate this fact.

### *History and time prophecies—a lesson*

Most commentators agree that Daniel’s prophecy of the “seventy weeks” (Daniel 9:24-27) refers to a period of 490 years. But various opinions have been held regarding the *starting point* of this period. Although it is stated at Daniel 9:25 that “from the going forth of [the] word to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah [the] Leader, there will be seven weeks, also sixty-two weeks” (NW), different views are held regarding when and by whom this “word” was sent forth.<sup>2</sup>

If we “just stick to the Bible,” it seems to point to the Persian king Cyrus. At Isaiah 44:28 Jehovah “saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built; and of the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (ASV). And further, in chapter 45, verse 13: “I myself have roused up someone in righteousness [Cyrus], and all his ways I shall straighten out. *He is the one that will build my city*, and those of mine in exile he will let go, not for a price nor for bribery” (NW).

Thus it would seem clear that according to the Bible itself the “word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” was issued by Cyrus. This application, however, limits the period from Cyrus’ edict (Ezra 1:1-4) until Messiah to 483 years (“seven weeks, also sixty-two weeks”). If this period ended at the baptism of Christ, usually dated somewhere in the period 26-29 C.E., Cyrus’ first year as king of Babylon would

2 The principal interpretations are stated by Edward J. Young in *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 192-195.

have to be dated in the period 458-455 B.C.E. instead of 538, the historically acknowledged date.

Contrary to all historical evidence, several Christian commentators in the past have chosen this application, and it is still adhered to by some expositors. The idea was popularized in the last century by Martin Anstey in his work *The Romance of Bible Chronology*, London 1913.<sup>3</sup> Dr. E. W. Bullinger (1837-1913) accepted the same position, as may be seen in Appendix 91 (pp. 131-32) of his *The Companion Bible*.

The reasoning underlying this unhistorical position is clearly demonstrated by one of its adherents, George Storrs, a Bible student from the 19th century and editor of the periodical *Bible Examiner*. In an article dealing with the seventy weeks, he states:

In examining this point, we have nothing to do with profane chronology, or the chronology of the historians. The Bible must settle the question, and if profane chronology does not tally with it, we have a right to conclude such chronology is false, and not to be trusted.<sup>4</sup>

Storrs, like some other expositors before and after him, tried to cut off nearly 100 years from the Persian period, holding that a number of the Persian kings mentioned in "Ptolemy's canon" (the Royal Canon) and other historical sources never existed! George Storrs surely was an honest and sincere Christian Bible student, but his (and others') rejection of historical sources proved to be a grave mistake.<sup>5</sup>

- 3 Republished in 1973 by Kregel Publications under the title *Chronology of the Old Testament*. See p. 20 on the 490 years. Among more recent Bible commentators, Dr. David L. Cooper, founder of the Biblical Research Society and editor of the *Biblical Research Monthly*, held this same thesis in his *The Seventy Weeks of Daniel* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1941).
- 4 George Storrs (ed.), *Bible Examiner* (published in Brooklyn, N.Y.), April, 1863, p. 120.
- 5 The early Christian writer Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225 C.E.), in his *Against the Jews*, reckoned the 490 years from the first year of "Darius the Mede" (Dan. 9:1, 2) to the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. This would date the first year of "Darius the Mede" to 421 B.C.E. instead of 538. Jewish rabbis in the Talmud (*Seder Olam Rabbah*) counted the 490 years from the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians to the destruction of the second temple by the Romans, which would place the destruction of the first temple in 421 B.C.E. instead of 587. (R. T. Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation," in *Revue de Qumran*, Vol. 10:40, 1981, pp. 531-32, 539-40.) Although modern discoveries have made such applications wholly untenable, they still find adherents. See, for example, Rabbi Tovia Singer in *Outreach Judaism. Study Guide to the "Let's Get Biblical!" Tape Series, Live!* (Monsey, NY: Outreach Judaism, 1995), pp. 40-41.

That the Persian kings mentioned in the Royal Canon really did exist has been proved beyond all doubt by archeological discoveries in modern times.<sup>6</sup> This is an instructive illustration of the necessity of considering the historical evidence in relation to biblical time prophecies. Although this special application of the seventy weeks seemed *very biblical* and very convincing, it has been refuted by historical facts and therefore cannot be correct.

The same is also true of the application of the seventy-year prophecy made by the Watch Tower Society. Although on the surface it may seem to be supported by some passages in the Bible, it should be abandoned because it is incompatible with historical facts established by a multitude of modern discoveries.

Is it possible, then, to find an application of the seventy years that accords with the historical evidence? It is, and a close examination of biblical texts dealing with the seventy years will demonstrate that there is no real conflict between the Bible and secular history in this matter. As will be shown below, *it is the application made by the Watch Tower Society that conflicts, not only with secular history, but also with the Bible itself.*

There are seven scriptural texts referring to a period of seventy years which the Watch Tower Society applies to one and the same period: Jeremiah 25:10-12; 29:10; Daniel 9:1-2; 2 Chronicles 36:20-23;

6 During the years 1931-1940, reliefs, tombs, and inscriptions of the kings these expositors thought never existed were excavated in Persia. (Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990, pp. 368-70.) That the Royal Canon puts these kings in the right order is also demonstrated by the inscription discovered on the walls of a palace of Artaxerxes III (358-337 B.C.E.), which reads: "Says Artaxerxes the great king, king of kings, king of countries, king of this earth: I (am) the son of Artaxerxes (II) the king; Artaxerxes (was) the son of Darius (II) the king; Darius (was) the son of Artaxerxes (I) the king; Artaxerxes (was) the son of Xerxes the king; Xerxes (was) the son of Darius (I) the king; Darius was the son of Hystaspes by name." (E. F. Schmidt, *Persepolis I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953, p. 224.) The absolute chronology of the later Persian kings thought not to have existed is today firmly established by numerous astronomical cuneiform texts extant from this period. In passing, the Watch Tower Society's application of the 490 years is basically as historically unsound as are those of the others mentioned in this section. The dating of the 20th year of Artaxerxes I to 455 B.C.E. instead of 445 is in direct conflict with a number of historical sources, including several astronomical texts. When, therefore, *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1994, p. 30, claims that, "Accurate secular history establishes 455 B.C.E. as that year," this is grossly misleading. (Cf. the similar misstatement in *Awake!*, June 22, 1995, p. 8.) No secular historian today would date the 20th year of Artaxerxes I to 455 B.C.E. (For a refutation of the idea, see the web essay referred to in footnote 14 on page 82 above.)

Zechariah 1:7-12; 7:1-7, and Isaiah 23:15-18. These will now be examined one by one in chronological order.<sup>7</sup>

### A. JEREMIAH 25:10-12

The original prediction is that of Jeremiah 25:10-12, which is dated to “the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, that is, the first year of Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon” (verse 1). Jehoiakim ruled for eleven years and was followed by his son Jehoiachin, who ruled for three months. Jehoiachin in turn was succeeded by his uncle Zedekiah, in whose eleventh year Jerusalem was desolated. Jeremiah’s prophecy, then, was given eighteen years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

#### *Jeremiah 25:10-12:*

“And I will destroy out of them the sound of exultation and the sound of rejoicing, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the hand mill and the light of the lamp. And all this land [Judah] must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and *these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years*. And it must occur that *when seventy years have been fulfilled I shall call to account against the king of Babylon and against that nation*,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “their error, even against the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite.” (NW)<sup>8</sup>

- 7 The seventy years for Tyre at Isaiah 23:15-18 will not be discussed here, as it cannot be proved that they refer to the period of Neo-Babylonian supremacy. Some scholars, in fact, apply it to circa 700-630 B.C.E., when Tyre was controlled by Assyria. See, for example, Dr. Seth Erlandsson, *The Burden of Babylon* (= *Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series 4*) (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1970), pp. 97-102.
- 8 The quotation is from *The New World Translation* (NW), which is based on the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT). The Greek *Septuagint* version (LXX) says: “and they will serve among the nations,” instead of: “and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon.” In Jeremiah 25:1-12 of the LXX, for some unknown reason, all references to Babylon and king Nebuchadnezzar are omitted. There are many differences between Jer-MT and Jer-LXX. Jer-LXX is about one-seventh shorter than Jer-MT, which contains 3,097 more words than Jer-LXX. A number of modern scholars hold that Jer-LXX was translated from a Hebrew text that was earlier than the text tradition represented by Jer-MT, arguing that Jer-MT represents a later revision and expansion of the original text, either by Jeremiah himself, his scribe Baruch, or some later editor(s). Thus, with respect to Jeremiah’s prediction that the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar would attack and destroy the kingdom of Judah, these scholars often find it difficult to believe that Jeremiah was able to give such concrete and specific forecasts. They find it easier to accept the more general and vague wordings of the Jer-LXX as representing the original prediction, with all references to Babylon and king Nebuchadnezzar being left out. However, some of the scholars who have adopted this view admit that it creates problems. If the original prophecy of Jeremiah 25:1-12, which was given in the fourth year of Jehoiakim and...

Three things are predicted in this prophecy:

- (1) The land of Judah would become a “devastated place”.
- (2) “These nations” would “serve the king of Babylon seventy years”.
- (3) When the seventy years had been “fulfilled” God would “call to account against the king of Babylon and against that nation . . . their error, even against” the land of the Chaldeans.

What does this passage really tell us about the “seventy years”?

### *A-1: Desolation or servitude — which?*

Although it is predicted in the passage that the land of Judah would be a devastated place, it should be noted that this “devastation” is not equated with, or linked with, the period of the seventy years. All that is clearly and unambiguously stated in the text is that “these nations will have to *serve the king of Babylon* seventy years.” The phrase “these nations” is a reference back to verse 9, in which it is predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would come against “this land [that is, Judah] and its inhabitants, and *also against all these nations round about.*”

The seventy years, then, should be understood to mean years of *servitude* for these nations. This conclusion is so obvious that the Watch Tower Society, at the head of page 826 of its large-print edition

...was presented to the king a few months later (Jeremiah 36:1-32), did not contain any references to Babylon and king Nebuchadnezzar, how then could Jehoiakim, after having listened to and burned up the roll with the prophecy, ask Jeremiah: “Why is it that you have written on it, saying: *The king of Babylon will come without fail and will certainly bring this land to ruin and cause man and beast to cease from it?*” (Jeremiah 36:29, NW) As this same question is found *both in Jer-MT and Jer-LXX*, the original prophecy must have explicitly mentioned the king of Babylon. Professor Norman K. Gottwald cites this verse and says: “If the prophet had not somewhere in his scroll openly identified Babylon as the invader, the sharp retort of the king is difficult to explain.” (N. K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth*. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964, p. 251.) This strongly indicates that Jer-MT represents the original text here.

It should be kept in mind that LXX is a *translation* made hundreds of years after the time of Jeremiah from a Hebrew text that is now lost, and, as the editors of Bagster’s *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament* point out in the “Introduction,” some of the translators of the LXX were not competent to their task and often inserted their own interpretations and traditions. Most scholars agree with this observation. The Watch Tower Society, too, emphasizes that “the Greek translation of this book [Jeremiah] is defective, but that does not lessen the reliability of the Hebrew text.”—*Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, 1988, p. 32.

For a thorough defense of the superiority of the MT text of Jeremiah, see Dr. Sven Soderlund, *The Greek Text of Jeremiah* (= *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series 47), Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1985.

of the *New World Translation* (1971 ed.), automatically describes the seventy years as “70 years’ *servitude* due.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet, in their discussions of this text, Watchtower writers never point out that Jeremiah spoke of seventy years of *servitude*, or that this servitude related to *the nations surrounding Judah*. They try always to give the impression that the seventy years referred to Judah, and Judah only, and they always describe the seventy years as a period in which Judah suffered *complete desolation*, “*without an inhabitant*.”<sup>10</sup> This they reckon as having happened from the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. But their application is in direct conflict with the exact wording of Jeremiah’s prediction, and it can be upheld only by ignoring what the text actually says.

“Servitude” here should not be taken to mean the same thing as desolation and exile. For the nations surrounding Judah the servitude

9 As the attention was drawn to this heading in the original version of the present work (sent to the Watchtower headquarters in 1977), and also in the published edition of 1983, it was no surprise to find that it had been changed in the 1984 large-print edition of NW. The heading (p. 965) now reads: “70 years’ *exile* due.”

10 The Hebrew word for “desolation,” *chorbáh*, is also used in verse 18, where Jerusalem and the cities of Judah are stated to become “a desolation (*chorbáh*), . . . as it is today.” As Dr. J. A. Thompson remarks, “The phrase *as it is today* suggests that at the time of writing some aspects of this judgment, at least, were apparent.” (*The Book of Jeremiah*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980 p. 516) The prophecy was uttered and written down “in the fourth year of Jehoiakim . . . that is, the first year of Nebuchadnezzar.” (Jer. 25:1; 36:1-4) But as that scroll was burned by Jehoiakim some months later, in the ninth month of his fifth year (36:9-25), another scroll had to be written. (36:32) At that time Nebuchadnezzar’s armies had already invaded and ravaged the land of Judah. At the time of writing, therefore, the phrase “as it is today” was probably added as a result of this desolation.

That the word *chorbáh* does not necessarily imply a state of *total* desolation “without an inhabitant” can be seen from other texts which use the word, for example Ezekiel 33:24, 27 (“the *inhabitants* of these *devastated places*”) and at Nehemiah 2:17. During Nehemiah’s time Jerusalem was inhabited, yet the city is said to be “devastated (*chorbáh*).” The phrase “desolate waste, *without an inhabitant*” is found at Jeremiah 9:11 and 34:22. Although it refers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah it is nowhere equated with the period of seventy years. As pointed out by Professor Arthur Jeffrey in the *Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 6, p. 485), *chorbáh* is “often employed to describe the state of a devastated land after the armies of an enemy have passed (Leviticus 26:31, 33; Isaiah 49:19; Jeremiah 44:22; Ezekiel 36:34; Malachi 1:4; 1 Maccabees 1:39).” It would not be inaccurate, therefore, to talk of Judah as *chorbáh* eighteen years prior to its depopulation, *if the land had been ravaged by the army of an enemy at that time*. Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia show that, in order to break the power and morale of a rebel quickly, the imperial army would try to ruin the economic potential “by destroying unfortified settlements, cutting down plantations and devastating fields.” — Israel Eph’al, “On Warfare and Military Control in the Ancient Near Eastern Empires,” in H. Tadmor & M. Weinfield (eds.), *History, Historiography and Interpretation* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1984), p. 97.

first of all meant *vassalage*.<sup>11</sup> Although Judah, too, was subdued by Babylon, it time and again revolted and attempted to throw off the Babylonian yoke, which brought wave after wave of devastating military ravages and deportations until the country was at last desolated and depopulated after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. That such a fate was not the same thing as servitude, but would come as a punishment upon any nation that *refused to serve* the king of Babylon, had been clearly predicted by Jeremiah, at chapter 27, verses 7, 8, and 11:

“And all the nations must serve even him [Nebuchadnezzar] and his son and his grandson until the time even of his own land comes, and many nations and great kings must exploit him as a servant.

“And it must occur that *the nation and the kingdom that will not serve him*, even Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon; and the one that will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, *with the sword and with the famine and with the pestilence I shall turn my attention upon that nation*,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “*until I have finished them off by his hand*.”

“*And as for the nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and actually serve him, I will also let it rest upon its ground*,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “*and it will certainly cultivate it and dwell in it*.” (NW)

From these verses it is very clear what it meant to a nation to *serve* the king of Babylon. It meant to accept the yoke of Babylon as a vassal and by that be spared from desolation and deportation. The servitude, therefore, was *the very opposite of revolt, desolation, deportation, and exile*.<sup>12</sup> That is why Jeremiah warned the people against

11 As brought out by any Hebrew dictionary, the Hebrew verb ‘*abad*, “work, serve,” could also mean to serve as a subject or vassal, e.g. by paying tribute. The corresponding noun ‘*ebed*, “slave, servant,” is often used of vassal states or tributary nations. In fact, the technical term for “vassal” in Hebrew was precisely ‘*ebed*. — See Dr. Jonas C. Greenfield, “Some aspects of Treaty Terminology in the Bible,” *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Papers*, Vol. I, 1967, pp. 117-119; also Dr. Ziony Zevit, “The Use of ‘*ebed* as a Diplomatic Term in Jeremiah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 88, 1969, pp. 74-77.

12 The difference is noted by Dr. John Hill in his analysis of Jeremiah 25:10, 11: “In vv. 10-11 there is a twofold elaboration of the punishment announced in v. 9. The first part of the elaboration is in vv. 10-11a, which refers to the subjugation and devastation of Judah. The second part is in v. 11b which refers to the subjugation of Judah’s neighbours. Vv. 10-11 then distinguishes the fate of Judah from that of its neighbours, which is that of subjugation. Judah’s fate is to suffer the devastation of its land.”—J. Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (Brill:Leiden etc., 1999), p. 110, note 42.

attempting to throw off the Babylonian yoke and admonished them: “Serve the king of Babylon and keep on living. Why should this city become a devastated place?” —Jeremiah 27:17, *NW*.

Thus, the nations that accepted the Babylonian yoke would *serve* the king of Babylon seventy years. But the nations that *refused to serve* the Babylonian king would become *devastated*. This fate at last befell Judah after about eighteen years of servitude, interrupted by repeated rebellions. The seventy years of servitude foretold by Jeremiah, therefore, did not apply to Judah as a nation, but only to the nations who submitted to the king of Babylon. As Judah refused to submit, it had to get the punishment for this—desolation and exile—exactly as had been predicted at Jeremiah 25:11. Of course, the exiled Jews also had to perform various kinds of “service” in Babylonia. This was not the service of a *vassal* state, however, but the service of *captured and deported slaves*.<sup>13</sup>

### ***A-2: When would the seventy years end?***

The prediction that “these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (Jeremiah 25:11) implies that there would be a change in Babylon’s position of supremacy at the end of the seventy-year period. This change is described in verse 12 of Jeremiah 25:

“And it must occur that *when seventy years have been fulfilled* I shall call to account against the king of Babylon and against that nation,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “their error, even against the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite.” (*NW*)

All historians, and also the Watch Tower Society, agree that the Neo-Babylonian empire ended in 539 B.C.E. On October 12 (Julian calendar) that year the city of Babylon was captured by the armies

13 Other nations, too, who refused to accept the Babylonian yoke, were desolated, and captives were brought to Babylon. For example, one of the Philistine city-states, probably *Ashkelon* (the name is only partly legible), was “plundered and sacked” and “turned ... into a ruin heap,” according to the *Babylonian Chronicle* (B. M. 21946). This destruction, predicted by Jeremiah at Jeremiah 47:5-7, took place in the month Kislimu (9th month) of the first year of Nebuchadnezzar according to the chronicle, that is, in November or December, 604 B.C.E. (A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Locust Valley, N.Y.: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1975, p. 100.) That Ashkelon was ruined is now confirmed by excavations. In 1992, Lawrence E. Stager uncovered at Ashkelon the archaeological evidence for this Babylonian destruction.—See L. E. Stager, “The Fury of Babylon: Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 22:1 (1996), pp. 56-69, 76-77.

of the Persian king Cyrus. Belshazzar, the son of king Nabonidus, was killed, according to the book of Daniel, chapter 5, verse 30. Nabonidus himself was taken prisoner and exiled to Carmania in the east, where he spent the rest of his life as governor of that province, according to Berossus.<sup>14</sup>

The year in which Jehovah would “call to account against the king of Babylon and against that nation . . . their error, even against the land of the Chaldeans” therefore was evidently 539 B.C.E. At that time the seventy years had “been fulfilled,” according to Jeremiah’s prophecy. The Persian conquest of Babylonia in 539 B.C.E. definitely put an end to the Babylonian supremacy over the nations who had served as its vassals up to that year. After that year it was impossible to “serve the king of Babylon” in any sense, either as vassals or as exiled captives in Babylonia. From that year onward these people had to serve, not the king of Babylon, but the king of Persia.<sup>15</sup> The seventy years of servitude, therefore, definitely ended in 539 B.C.E., *not later*.

Note, then, that Jeremiah’s prophecy is clearly incompatible with the view that the seventy years referred to the period of *the desolation of Judah and Jerusalem*. Why? Because this desolation did not end in 539 B.C.E. but later, when a remnant of the Jewish exiles had returned to Judah as a result of Cyrus’ edict. (Ezra 1:1–3:1) According to the Watch Tower Society this took place *two years after* the fall of Babylon, or in 537 B.C.E. In that year, they hold, the seventy years ended. But *how* did Jehovah “call to account *against the king of Babylon and against that nation . . . their error*” in 537 B.C.E., two years *after* his dethronement and the fall of Babylon? A solution to this problem has never been presented in the publications of the Watch Tower Society.

### ***A-3: The historical setting of the seventy-year prophecy***

If the seventy years ended in 539 B.C.E., when did they begin? Clearly, they cannot be counted from the year of the desolation of Jerusalem. The period from the established date of 587 B.C.E. to 539 was only forty-eight years. However, as the seventy years have been shown above to refer to the period of *subservience to Babylon*, not

14 See the comments of Paul-Alain Beaulieu in *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556–539 B.C.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 230, 231.

15 In accordance with this, 2 Chron. 36:20 states that the exiled Jews “came to be servants to him [Nebuchadnezzar] and his sons *until the royalty of Persia began to reign*” (NW), that is, until the autumn of 539 B.C.E., *but no longer*.

to Jerusalem's desolation, the right question to be asked is: When did the period of *servitude* begin?

First of all, it is important to establish the historical background against which this prophecy was given. As pointed out earlier, it was given eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (Jeremiah 25:1), that is, in 605 B.C.E.

That year saw a very important event take place, with momentous consequences to Judah and its neighbours. It was the year of the well known *battle of Carchemish* (on the Euphrates river in northern Syria), when Nebuchadnezzar decisively defeated the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho and his military force. This important victory opened the way for the Babylonian king to the areas in the west, Syria and Palestine, which for a few years previous (609-605 B.C.E.) had been controlled by Egypt. This famous battle is also referred to, and dated, at Jeremiah 46:2:

For Egypt, concerning the military force of Pharaoh Necho the king of Egypt, who happened to be by the river Euphrates at Carchemish, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah. (NW)

The prophecy of the seventy years was thus given at a crucial point of time. Could it be that Judah and her neighbours were made vassals to and began to serve the king of Babylon in that year? Research does find evidence to show that Judah and a number of the surrounding nations *began to be made subservient to the king of Babylon very soon after the battle of Carchemish, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim and thereafter.*

In 1956 Professor D. J. Wiseman published a translation of the Babylonian Chronicle *B.M. 21946*, covering the period from the last (21st) year of Nabopolassar up to and including the tenth year of his son and successor, Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>16</sup> This tablet commences with a concise description of the battle at Carchemish and the subsequent events. The opening portion is quoted here in full because of its importance for our examination:<sup>17</sup>

16 D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1961), pp. 66-75.

17 The quotations in the following are taken from A.K. Grayson's more recent translation of the chronicles in his *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), pp. 99, 100.



### Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 B.C.E.)

The only portrait of Nebuchadnezzar II extant is found on this cameo, now in the Berlin Museum. It was probably engraved by a Greek in the service of the great king. The surrounding cuneiform inscription reads: "To Marduk his lord, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, for his life this made." The picture of the cameo, which has the inventory number VA 1628, is used courtesy of the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin.

[The twenty-first year]: The king of Akkad stayed home (while) Nebuchadnezzar (II), his eldest son (and) the crown prince, mustered [the army of Akkad]. He took his army's lead and marched to Carchemish which is on the bank of the Euphrates. He crossed the river [to encounter the army of Egypt] which was encamped at Carchemish. [...] They did battle together. The army of Egypt retreated before him. He inflicted a [defeat] upon them (and) finished them off completely. In the district of Hamath the army of Akkad overtook the remainder of the army of [Egypt which] managed to escape [from] the defeat and which was not overcome. They (the army of Akkad)

inflicted a defeat upon them (so that) a single (Egyptian) man [did not return] home. At that time Nebuchadnezzar (II) conquered all of Ha[ma]th.<sup>18</sup>

For twenty-one years Nabopolassar ruled Babylon. On the eighth day of the month Ab he died. In the month Elul Nebuchadnezzar (II) returned to Babylon and on the first day of the month Elul he ascended the royal throne in Babylon.<sup>19</sup>

In (his) accession-year Nebuchadnezzar (II) returned to Hattu. Until the month Shebat he marched about victoriously in Hattu. In the month Shebat he took the vast booty of Hattu to Babylon. ...

The first year of Nebuchadnezzar (II): In the month Sivan he mustered his army and marched to Hattu. Until the month Kisleb he marched about victoriously in Hattu. *All the kings of Hattu came into his presence and he received their vast tribute.*

The chronicle makes evident the far-reaching consequences of Egypt's defeat at Carchemish. Immediately after the battle in the summer of 605 B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar began to take over the western areas in vassalage to Egypt, using Riblah in Hamath in Syria as his military base.

The terrifying annihilation of the whole Egyptian army at Carchemish and in Hamath paved the way for a rapid occupation of the whole region by the Babylonians, and they do not seem to have met much resistance. During this victorious campaign Nebuchadnezzar learned that his father Nabopolassar had died, so he had to return to Babylon to secure the throne, evidently leaving his army in Hattu to continue the operations there.

As Wiseman points out, *Hattu* was a geographical term that at that time denoted approximately Syria-Lebanon. As argued by Dr. J.

- 18 *Hamath* was a district at the river Orontes in Syria where Pharaoh Nechoh, at a place called Riblah, had established the Egyptian headquarters. After the defeat of the Egyptian army, Nebuchadnezzar chose the same site as the base for his operations in the west.—See 2 Kings 23:31-35; 25:6, 20-21; Jeremiah 39:5-7; 52:9-27.
- 19 Nabopolassar's death on 8 Abu corresponds to August 16, 605 B.C.E. (Julian calendar). Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne on Ululu 1 (September 7, 605). The battle of Carchemish in May or June, 605, therefore, took place in the same year as his *accession-year*. His first regnal year began next spring, on Nisanu 1, 604 B.C.E. The reason why the Bible dates the battle to the *first year* of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jer. 46:2 and 25:1) seems to be that the Jewish kings applied the nonaccession-year system, in which the accession-year was counted as the first year. See the Appendix for chapter two, "Methods of reckoning regnal years."

D. Hawkins in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, it also, ‘in an extended sense,’ included Palestine and Phoenicia.<sup>20</sup>

After his enthronement in Babylon (on September 7, 605), Nebuchadnezzar quickly went back to the Hattu territory, where he “marched about victoriously” for some months until “the month Shebat” (the eleventh month, corresponding to February, 604 B.C.E.). Evidently most of the countries in the west had now been brought under Babylonian control, and he could, therefore, take a heavy tribute to Babylon, which also, as will be shown immediately, included prisoners from Judah and adjacent countries.

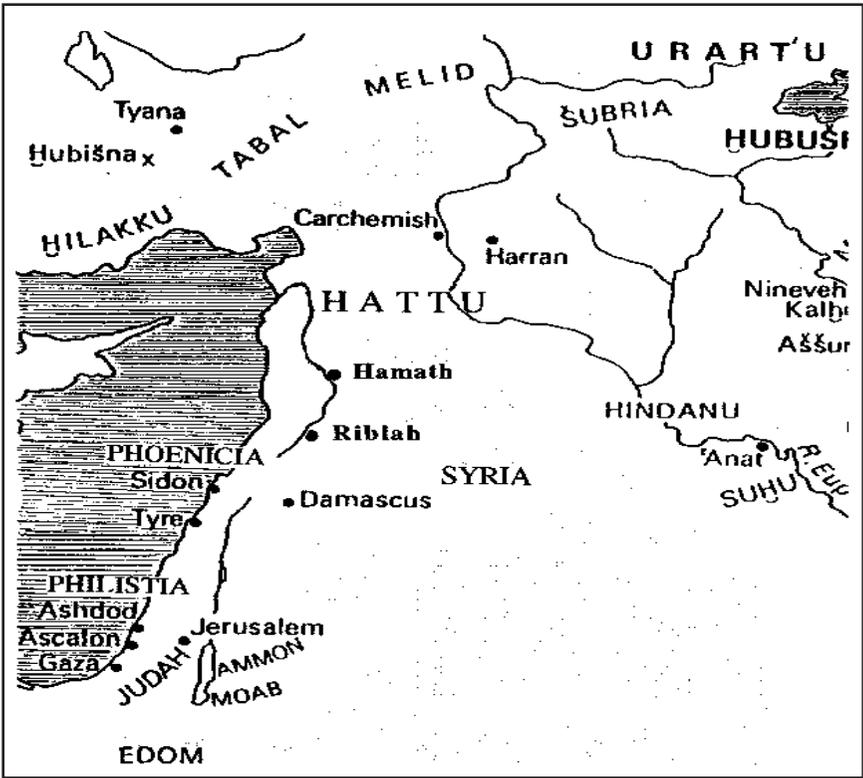
Early in his first regnal year (in June, 604 B.C.E.) Nebuchadnezzar led another campaign to Hattu to maintain his rule over the conquered territories. Similar campaigns are also recorded for the following years. Clearly, the nations in the Hattu area became vassals to Babylon very soon after the battle at Carchemish. The seventy years of servitude had evidently begun to run their course.

#### ***A-4: The Babylonian occupation of Hattu and Daniel 1:1-6***

Not only did Nebuchadnezzar bring a number of the nations surrounding Judah under his dominion in 605 B.C.E., but he also laid siege to Jerusalem and brought some Jewish captives to Babylon in that very year. This is clear from Daniel 1:1-6.

In recording the event, Daniel states that it occurred “in the *third* year of the kingship of Jehoiakim.” Yet the siege and deportation apparently followed the battle at Carchemish which Jeremiah places “in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim.” (Jeremiah 46:2) This seeming contradiction has caused much debate, and different solutions have been proposed in order to resolve the difficulty. But if, as is pointed out in note 19, the different methods of reckoning regnal years in Judah and Babylon are taken into consideration, the whole matter is easily cleared up. Daniel, as a Jewish exile living in Babylon and as an official at the Babylonian court, quite naturally conformed to the Babylonian regnal year system and adopted the accession-year

20 D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 18; *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, Vol. 4 [ed. D. O. Edzard], 1972-1975, pp. 154-56. Reasonably, Jehoiakim must have been one of “all the kings of Hattu” paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar at this time. Of this, J. P. Hyatt says: “It was probably in 605, or in the following year, that Jehoiakim submitted to the Babylonian king, as recorded in II Kings 24:1; . . . and II Kings 24:7 says that ‘the king of Babylon took all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates.’” —J. P. Hyatt, “New Light on Nebuchadnezzar and Judean History,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 75 (1956), p. 280.



**Judah and the surrounding nations**

method and even did so when referring to Jewish kings. This method of counting would make Jehoiakim’s fourth year his third, in accordance with the accession-year system.

Daniel 1:2 states that at this time “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand” (*NASB*). This does not necessarily imply that the city was taken and Jehoiakim brought captive to Babylon. To be given into someone’s hand may simply mean to be forced into submission. (Compare Judges 3:10; Jeremiah 27:6, 7, and similar texts.) The indication is that Jehoiakim *capitulated* and became a *tributary* to the king of Babylon. He evidently paid a tribute to Nebuchadnezzar at this time in the form of “some of the vessels of the house of God.”—Daniel 1:2.

As this clearly points to a beginning of the servitude early in the reign of Jehoiakim, the Watch Tower Society has advanced several arguments *against* a natural and direct reading of this text. Thus it holds that the “third year” should be understood as *the third year of Jehoiakim’s vassalage* to Nebuchadnezzar, which, it is argued, was *his*

*eleventh and last regnal year* (which partly overlapped the *seventh* year of Nebuchadnezzar, or his *eighth* year in the nonaccession-year system).

But this explanation directly contradicts Daniel 2:1, which shows Daniel at the court of Nebuchadnezzar and interpreting his dream of the image already in the “second year” of this king. If Daniel was brought to Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar’s *seventh* year, how could he be there interpreting his dreams in his *second* year? So, to save their interpretation, this text, too, had to be changed and made to say something else besides what it *clearly* says. Two different explanations have been offered through the years, the last one being that in this verse Daniel reckons Nebuchadnezzar’s years from the destruction of Jerusalem in his eighteenth year. Nebuchadnezzar’s *second* year, then, should be understood as his *nineteenth* year (the *twentieth* year in the nonaccession-year system)!

Thus, once again we find that the application of the seventy years held to by the Watch Tower Society contradicts the Bible, this time Daniel 1:1-2 and 2:1. In order to uphold its theory, it is forced to reject the easiest and most direct reading of these texts.<sup>21</sup>

That some Jewish captives had already been brought to Babylon in the year of Nebuchadnezzar’s accession is also confirmed by Berossus in his Babylonian history written in the third century B.C.E. His account of the events of this year reads as follows:

Nabopalassaros, his father, heard that the satrap who had been posted to Egypt, Coele Syria, and Phoenicia, had become a rebel. No longer himself equal to the task, he entrusted a portion of his army to his son Nabouchodonosoros, who was still in the prime of life, and sent him against the rebel. Nabouchodonosoros drew up his force in battle order and engaged the rebel. He defeated him and subjected the country to the rule of the Babylonians again. At this very time Nabopalassaros, his father, fell ill and died in the city of the Babylonians after having been king for twenty-one years.

Nabouchodonosoros learned of his father’s death shortly thereafter. After he arranged affairs in Egypt and the remaining territory, he ordered some of his friends *to bring the Jewish, Phoenician, Syrian, and Egyptian prisoners together with the bulk of the army and the rest of the booty to Babylonia*. He himself set out with a few companions and reached Babylon by crossing the desert.<sup>22</sup>

21 For additional comments on Daniel 1:1, 2 and 2:1, see the Appendix for Chapter 5.

22 Stanley Mayer Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus* (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1978), pp. 26, 27.

Thus Berossus gives support to Daniel's statement that Jewish captives were brought to Babylon in the year of Nebuchadnezzar's accession. This confirmation of Daniel 1:1 is important because, as was shown in Chapter three, Berossus derived his information from the Babylonian chronicles, or sources close to those documents, originally written during the Neo-Babylonian era itself.<sup>23</sup>

### ***A-5: The servitude as reflected in Jeremiah, chapters 27, 28, and 35***

That the servitude of "these nations" (Jer. 25:11) began long before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. is also clear from Jeremiah, chapters 27, 28, and 35.

In chapter 27, as discussed earlier, Jeremiah urges Zedekiah not to revolt, but to bring his neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him. The context shows this occurred in the fourth year of Zedekiah, that is, in 595/94 B.C.E.<sup>24</sup> The background of this "word . . . from Jehovah" was, according to verse 3, that messengers had come to Zedekiah from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, apparently in order to enlist him in an extensive revolt against the Babylonian yoke. Obviously all these nations were *vassals* to Babylon at this time, as was Judah.

The revolt plans aroused unfounded hopes and enthusiasm among the people, and the prophet Hananiah even foretold that the Babylonian yoke would be broken within two years:

23 Berossus' account of these events has been the subject of criticism, but was accepted by historians such as Hugo Winckler, Edgar Goodspeed, James H. Breasted and Friedrich Delitzsch. See "The Third Year of Jehoiakim," by Albertus Pieters, in *From the Pyramids to Paul*, edited by Lewis Gaston Leary (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1935), p. 191. The discovery of the Babylonian Chronicle B.M. 21946 has given additional support to Berossus' description of Nebuchadnezzar's conquests after the battle at Carchemish. D. J. Wiseman, the first translator of this chronicle, says that Berossus' account of these events "rings true." (*The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. III:2, J. Boardman *et al* [eds.], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 230-231.) On Berossus' description of Pharaoh Necho as a *rebellious satrap* Dr. Menahem Stern says: "From the point of view of those who regarded the neo-Babylonian empire as a continuation of the Assyrian, the conquest of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia by the Egyptian ruler might be interpreted as the rape of Babylonian territory." — M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem 1974), p. 59.

24 In verse 1 of chapter 27 this message is dated to the beginning of the reign of "Jehoiakim," but a comparison with verses 3 and 12 shows that the original reading most probably was "Zedekiah." This is also confirmed by the next chapter, Jeremiah 28, dated in verse 1 to "the same year," which is explained to be "in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year" (NASB), that is, in 595/94 B.C.E.

This is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said, “I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years more I am bringing back to this place all the utensils of the house of Jehovah that Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon took from this place that he might bring them to Babylon.”—Jeremiah 28:2, 3, *NW*.<sup>25</sup>

This prophecy, of course, presupposed that the Babylonian yoke had already been put on the neck of the nations. That is why Hananiah could take the yoke bar from the neck of Jeremiah, break it and say: “This is what Jehovah has said, ‘Just like this I shall break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon within two full years more *from off the neck of all the nations.*’” (Jeremiah 28: 10, 11) So, in the fourth year of Zedekiah the Babylonian yoke lay on “the neck of all the nations.” The servitude was a hardfelt reality for “all these nations” at that time, and had evidently been so for a number of years.

The Babylonian invasion of Judah soon after the battle at Carchemish is also reflected in Jeremiah chapter 35, dated in “the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah.” (verse 1) The Rechabites, who normally dwelt in tents in obedience to the command of their forefather, Jehonadab the son of Rechab, lived in Jerusalem at that time. Why? They explained to Jeremiah:

But it came about *when Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon came up against the land* that we began to say, “Come, and let us enter into Jerusalem because of the military force of the Chaldeans and because of the military force of the Syrians, and let us dwell in Jerusalem.”—Jeremiah 35:11, *NW*.

Thus, some time earlier in the reign of Jehoiakim, the Babylonian army had invaded the territory of Judah, forcing the Rechabites to seek refuge inside the walls of Jerusalem. Either this invasion was the one described in Daniel 1:1-2, or the one that took place in the following year, when, according to the Babylonian chronicle, “all the kings of Hattu” presented their tribute to the Babylonian king as a sign of their vassalage.

That Judah became a vassal of Babylon early in the reign of Jehoiakim is clearly stated in 2 Kings 24:1, which says that in the days

25 The reason for the widespread revolt plans in this year could have been the rebellion in Nebuchadnezzar’s own army in Babylonia, in the tenth year of his reign (= 595/94 B.C.E.) according to the Babylonian Chronicle B. M. 21946.—A. K. Grayson, *ABC* (see note 17 above), p. 102. Nebuchadnezzar’s tenth year partly overlapped Zedekiah’s fourth year. See the remarks on this revolt in the last section of the Appendix: “Chronological tables covering the seventy years.”

of Jehoiakim “Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and so *Jehoiakim became his servant* for three years. However, he turned back and rebelled against him.” (NW) This rebellion caused the king of Babylon “to send against him marauder bands of Chaldeans and marauder bands of Syrians and marauder bands of Moabites and marauder bands of the sons of Ammon [these nations were now obviously under the control of the king of Babylon], and he kept sending them against Judah to destroy it.” (Verse 2, NW)

It has been demonstrated above that Jeremiah’s prediction of the seventy years in Jeremiah 25:10-12 did not refer to a period of complete desolation of Jerusalem, but a period of *servitude*, not for Judah, but for “these nations,” that is, the nations surrounding Judah.

It was further shown that the Bible and secular historical sources, such as the Babylonian chronicle and Berossus, all agree that the servitude for these nations began long before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. The Babylonian chronicle B.M. 21946 shows that Nebuchadnezzar started to conquer these areas immediately after the battle at Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. Daniel 1:1-6 relates that Nebuchadnezzar, in the same year, laid siege to Jerusalem and brought Jewish captives to Babylon. Berossus confirms Daniel 1:1-6 with respect to this first deportation (which probably was rather small). Jeremiah, chapters 27, 28, and 35 all show that Judah and the surrounding nations were vassals to Babylon as early as in the reign of Jehoiakim, and this is also apparent from 2 Kings 24:1-2. For Judah and a number of the surrounding nations, the servitude evidently began in the same year Jeremiah uttered his prophecy, that is in 605 B.C.E.

The application of the seventy years made by the Watch Tower Society, on the other hand, is in direct conflict with the prophecy of Jeremiah. It applies the seventy years to Judah only, ignoring the fact that Jeremiah’s prophecy refers to a period of *servitude for a number of nations*, not a state of complete desolation “without an inhabitant” of Jerusalem and Judah.

The next text which deals with the seventy years will be seen to be in direct conflict with the Society’s application as well.

## **B: JEREMIAH 29:10**

Jeremiah’s second reference to the seventy years is given in a letter that Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the Jews who had been deported

to Babylon, not only those who had been brought there in the first deportation in 605 B.C.E., but also those “whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, after *Jeconiah the king* [= Jehoiachin; compare 2 Kings 24:10-15] *and the lady and the court officials, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen and the builders of bulwarks had gone forth from Jerusalem.*” —Jeremiah 29:1-2, *NW*.

This would date the prophecy to the reign of Zedekiah (verse 3) and probably about the same time as the preceding chapter, that is, to the fourth year of Zedekiah, 595/94 B.C.E. —Jeremiah 28:1.

The background situation seems to have been the same in both chapters: The widespread revolt plans which stirred up hopes of liberation from the Babylonian yoke in Judah and the surrounding nations also reached the exiles at Babylon. As in Judah, false prophets arose among the Jews at Babylon and promised release in a short time. (Jeremiah 29:8-9) This was the reason why at this time, *several years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem*, Jeremiah sent a letter to these exiles at Babylon, calling their attention to the prophecy of the seventy years:

***Jeremiah 29:8-10:***

For this is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said: “Let not YOUR prophets who are in among YOU and YOUR practicers of divination deceive YOU, and do not YOU listen to their dreams that they are dreaming. For it is in falsehood that they are prophesying to YOU in my name. I have not sent them,” is the utterance of Jehovah. For this is what Jehovah has said, “In accord with the fulfilling of *seventy years at Babylon* I shall turn my attention to YOU people, and I will establish toward YOU my good word in bringing YOU back to this place.” (*NW*)

This utterance clearly presupposed that the seventy years were in progress at the time. If the period had not *commenced*, why did Jeremiah connect it with the exiles’ staying on at Babylon? If the seventy-year period was not *already in progress*, what relevance is there in Jeremiah’s reference to it? Jeremiah did not urge the exiles to wait until the seventy years would *begin*, but to wait until the period *had been completed*. As Jeremiah sent his message to the exiles some six or seven years *before* the destruction of Jerusalem, it is obvious that he reckoned the beginning of the seventy years from a point many years *prior to* that event.

The context of Jeremiah 29:10, therefore, further supports the earlier conclusion that the seventy years should be reckoned from a point several years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

However, apart from the context, the text itself makes it clear that the seventy years can be applied neither to the period of the desolation of Jerusalem nor to the period of the Jewish exile.

**B-1: Seventy years — “at” Babylon or “for” Babylon?**

The *New World Translation’s* rendering of Jeremiah 29:10 seems to depict the seventy years as a period of *captivity*: “seventy years at Babylon.” Although it is true that the Hebrew preposition ל, here translated “at”, in certain expressions may have a local sense (“at, in”),

**JEREMIAH 29:10:**  
**“seventy years ... for Babylon”**

שְׁלַחְתִּים	נֹאמ־	יְהוָה:	כִּי־	כֹּה	אָמַר	יְהוָה	כִּי
I-sent-them	declaration-of	Yahweh	(10)	indeed	he-says	Yahweh	when
לִפִּי	מְלֵאת	לְבַבְלִי	שִׁבְעִים	שָׁנָה	אֶפְקֹד	אֲתֶכֶם	
by-mouth-of-me	to-be-completed	for-Babylon	year	seventy	I-will-come	to-you	
וְהִקְמַתִּי	עֲלֵיכֶם	אֶת־	דְּבָרִי	הַטּוֹב	לְהָשִׁיב	אֲתֶכֶם	אֵל-
and-I-will-fulfill	for-you	***	promise-of-me	the-gracious	to-bring-back	to you	
הַמָּקוֹם	הַזֶּה:	כִּי	אֲנֹכִי	יְדַעְתִּי	אֶת־הַמַּחְשָׁבָה	אֲשֶׁר	אֲנֹכִי
the-place	the-this	(11)	I-for	I-know	the-plans	***	I that
					חָשַׁב	עֲלֵיכֶם	
					planning	for-you	

From John R. Kohlenberger III (ed.), *NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

its general meaning is “for, to, in regard to, with reference to,” and is so rendered at Jeremiah 29:10 by most modern translations.<sup>26</sup>

The following examples are taken from some of the better known translations in English:

*Revised Version* (1885): “After seventy years be accomplished for Babylon.”

26 The view that the basic meaning of ל (l) is *local* and *directional* is rejected by Professor Ernst Jenni, who is probably the leading authority on the Hebrew prepositions today.—Ernst Jenni, *Die Hebräischen Präpositionen, Band 3: Die Präposition Lamed* (Stuttgart, etc.: Verlag Kohlhammer, 2000), pp. 134, 135. This work devotes 350 pages to the examination of the preposition ל alone. (Interestingly, the Danish NWT of 1985 has “for Baylon”, and the new revised Swedish NWT of 2003, too, has now changed its earlier “in” to “for Babylon”!)

Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible* (3rd ed., 1897): "That as soon as there are fulfilled to Babylon seventy years."

*American Standard Version* (1901): "After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon."

*New American Standard Version* (1973): "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon."

*New International Version* (1978): "When seventy years are completed for Babylon."

*The New Jerusalem Bible* (1985): "When the seventy years granted to Babylon are over."

Other translations give expression to the same thought in other words:

Smith-Goodspeed's *The Complete Bible* (1931): "As soon as Babylon has finished seventy years."

Byington's *The Bible In Living English* (1972): "As soon as Babylon has had a full seventy years."

*The Anchor Bible* (John Bright: *Jeremiah*, 2nd ed., 1986): "Only when Babylon's seventy years have been completed."

*Tanakh. The Holy Scriptures* (The Jewish Publication Society, 1988): "When Babylon's seventy years are over."

*The Revised English Bible* (1989): "When a full seventy years have passed over Babylon."

All these translations express the same thought, namely, that the seventy years refer to *the Babylonian supremacy*, not to the Jewish captivity nor to the desolation following the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.

That this is what the Hebrew text meant to say is supported by the fact that it is in agreement with Jeremiah's prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 on the seventy years' *servitude*. As long as the Babylonian king held supremacy, other nations had to serve him.

The *New World Translation*, however, is not the only translation that renders the preposition *le* by "at" in Jeremiah 29:10. Some other translations, too, use the preposition "at" in this text. The best known is the *King James Version* (KJV), originally published in 1611, which for more than three centuries remained the *Authorized Version* (AV) for Anglican and many other Protestant churches. In the course of time this translation has acquired an authority and sanctity of its own. This is also reflected in modern revisions of KJV. A recent example

is the *New King James Version* (NKJV), published in 1982. Although the language has been modernized, the editors have endeavoured to retain the text of the old venerable KJV as far as possible. The progress made in the last two centuries, especially by the discoveries of numerous ancient manuscripts of the Bible, is at best reflected in the footnotes, not in the running text. That this very conservative version retains the preposition “at” in Jeremiah 29:10, therefore, is not to be wondered at.

It is interesting to note, however, that other, less tradition-bound revisions of KJV, such as RV, ASV, and RSV, have replaced “at” by “for” in Jeremiah 29:10, as shown by the quotations given above. And the latest revision of this kind, the *New Revised Standard Version* (1990), has replaced KJV’s “seventy years . . . at Babylon” by “Babylon’s seventy years”.<sup>27</sup>

Why do these and most other modern translations reject the rendering “at Babylon” in Jeremiah 29:10 in favour of “for Babylon” or some paraphrase conveying the same idea?

### ***B-2: What Hebrew scholars say***

Modern Hebrew scholars generally agree that the local or spatial sense of *lʿ* is highly improbable, if not impossible, at Jer. 29:10. Dr. Tor Magnus Amble at the University of Oslo, Norway, for example, says:

“The preposition *lʿ* means ‘to’, ‘for’ (‘direction towards’ or ‘reference to’). *Aside from in a few fixed expressions, it hardly has a locative sense, and in any case not here.* Very often it introduces an indirect object (‘respecting to’, corresponding to a Greek dative). This is also how the translators of LXX have understood it, as you quite correctly points out. Thus the translation has to be: seventy years ‘for Babel’.”  
— Private letter dated November 23, 1990. (Emphasis added.)

The Swedish Hebraist Dr. Seth Erlandsson is even more emphatic:

“*The spatial sense is impossible at Jer. 29:10.* Nor has LXX ‘at Babylon’, but dative; consequently ‘for Babylon’.” — Private letter dated December 23, 1990. (Emphasis added.)

27 A few other modern translations that still have “at Babylon” in Jeremiah 29:10 may have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by KJV. One of my friends, a Danish linguist, has also drawn my attention to the fact that the Latin Vulgate (4th century C.E.) has “in Babylone” in our text, which, like KJV’s “at Babylon”, is an interpretation rather than a translation. It is quite possible that this ancient and highly esteemed translation, too, may have influenced some modern translations.

It would be easy to add many other similar statements by Hebrew scholars, but it may suffice here to quote Professor Ernst Jenni at Basel, Switzerland. This leading authority on *l*<sup>e</sup> (footnote 26 above) says:

The rendering in all modern commentaries and translations is “for Babel” (Babel as world power, not city or land); this is clear from the language as well as also from the context. By the “local meaning” a distinction is to be made between where? (in, at) and where to? (local directional “to, towards”). The basic meaning of *l* is with reference to, and with a following local specification it can be understood as local or local-directional *only in certain adverbial expressions* (e.g. Num. 11,10 [Clines DCH IV, 481b] “at the entrance”, cf. *Lamed* pp. 256, 260, heading 8151).

On the translations: LXX has with *babylōni* unambiguously a dative (“for Babylon”). Only Vulgata has, to be sure, *in Babylone*, “in Babylon”, thus King James Version “at Babylon”, and so probably also the New World Translation.—Letter Jenni-Jonsson, October 1, 2003. (Emphasis added.)

Thus, as Jeremiah 29:10 literally speaks of seventy years “for Babylon,” it is clear that they cannot refer to the period of the desolation of Jerusalem and its temple, or even to the period of the Jewish exile at Babylon. Rather, like Jeremiah 25:10-12, what is in view is *the period of Babylonian supremacy*. This is also the conclusion arrived at by scholars who have carefully examined the text. Some typical comments are cited in the accompanying box.

Jeremiah 25:10-12 and 29:10 contain the *prophecy* of the seventy years. The next two texts to be discussed, Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:20-21, are just *brief references* to Jeremiah’s prophecy. Neither of them pretends to be a thorough discussion of the prophecy nor gives a detailed application of the period. Every attempt to find an application of the seventy-year period, therefore, must *proceed from the prophecy*, not from the references to it. It is only the prophecy that gives specific details on the seventy years, as follows, (1) that they refer to “these nations,” (2) that they were to be a period of *servitude* for these nations, (3) that they refer to the period of Babylonian supremacy, and (4) that this period would be fulfilled when the king of Babylon was punished. Such detailed information is missing in the latter references to the prophecy by Daniel and Ezra. The discussion of these references, then, should always be done in the light of what the prophecy actually is about.

### The seventy years “for Babylon”

“The sense of the Hebrew original might even be rendered thus: ‘After seventy years of (the rule of) Babylon are accomplished etc.’ The seventy years counted here evidently refer to Babylon and *not* to the Judeans or to their captivity. They mean seventy years of Babylonian rule, the end of which will see the redemption of the exiles.”—Dr. Avigdor Orr, “The seventy years of Babylon,” *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. VI (1956), p. 305.

“It is appropriate to begin with the passages of Jeremiah and to observe, with Orr, that the references in Jer. 25:11-12 and 29:10—whether original to the passages or not—are to a period of seventy years of Babylonian rule, and not to a period of seventy years of actual captivity.”—Dr. Peter R. Ackroyd, “Two Old Testament historical problems of the early Persian period,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. XVII (1958), p. 23.

“Certainly it must be stressed that the seventy years refer primarily to the time of Babylonian world dominion and not to the time of the exile, as is often carelessly supposed. As an estimate of Babylon’s domination of the ancient Near East it was a remarkably accurate figure, for from the Battle of Carchemish (605) to the fall of Babylon to Cyrus (539) was sixty-six years.”—Professor Norman K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth* (New York, Evanston, London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), pp. 265, 266.

“It has often been pointed out that the textually unobjectionable verse with its seventy years does not have in view the length of the exile, but rather the duration of the Babylonian dominion, which from its beginning until the Persian conquest of Babylon may be calculated to about seven decades.”—Dr. Otto Plöger, *Aus der Spätzeit des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), p. 68. (Translated from the German.)

### C: DANIEL 9:1-2

The Babylonian dominion was definitely broken when the armies of Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon in the night between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> October, 539 B.C.E. (Julian calendar). Previously in the same night Belshazzar, the son of king Nabonidus and his deputy on the throne, got to know that the days of Babylon were numbered. Daniel the prophet, in his interpretation of the miraculous writing on the wall, told him that “God has numbered [the days or years of] your kingdom

and has finished it.” In that very night Belshazzar was killed, and the kingdom was given to “Darius the Mede.” (Daniel 5:26-31, *NW*) Obviously, the seventy years allotted to Babylon ended that night. This sudden collapse of the Babylonian empire incited Daniel to turn his attention to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy years. He tells us:

***Daniel 9:1-2:***

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

It is not unreasonable to think that the “books” consulted by Daniel may have been a collection of scrolls containing the prophecies of Jeremiah. But the sources for his inquiry may as well have been limited to the letters that Jeremiah had sent to the exiles in Babylon fifty-six years earlier (Jeremiah 29:1-32), the first of which dealt with the seventy years “for Babylon.”<sup>28</sup> No doubt, these letters, at least, were available to him. The content of Daniel 9, in fact, and especially the prayer of Daniel recorded in verses 4-19, is closely related to the content of Jeremiah’s letters, as has been demonstrated in detail by Dr. Gerald H. Wilson.<sup>29</sup>

***C-1: Did Daniel understand the seventy-year prophecy?***

When Daniel states that he “discerned” (*NW*) in the writings of Jeremiah the prophecy of the seventy years, does this mean that he “understood” (*KJV, RV, ASV*) the sense of this prophecy and realized that the period had now ended? Or is he merely saying that he “noticed” (*Moffatt*) or “observed” (*NASB*) the seventy years mentioned by Jeremiah and “tried to understand” (*NAB*) them? The Hebrew verb used here, *bîn*, may contain all these various shades of meaning. However, if Daniel had any difficulties in understanding the meaning of

28 The Hebrew word translated “books” at Dan. 9:2, *s’parîm*, the plural form of *seper*, was used of writings of various kinds, including legal documents and letters. Thus the word *seper* is also used of Jeremiah’s first “letter” to the exiles at Babylon recorded in Jeremiah 29:1-23. Verses 24-32 of the same chapter quotes from a second letter sent by Jeremiah to the Jewish exiles, probably later in the same year or early next year.

29 Gerald H. Wilson, “The Prayer of Daniel 9: Reflection on Jeremiah 29,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Issue 48, October 1990, pp. 91-99.

this seventy-year period, one would expect that the prayer he offered as a result of his reading would contain a plea for understanding the prediction. But not once in his lengthy prayer does Daniel mention the seventy years. Instead, the whole emphasis of his prayer is on the Jewish exiles and the conditions set forth in Jeremiah's letter for their return to Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup>

It seems logical to conclude, therefore, that Daniel had no problems in understanding the seventy-year prophecy. As a Hebrew-speaking Jew, he would have no difficulties in understanding that the Hebrew text of Jeremiah 29:10 speaks of seventy years "for Babylon," and that this was a reference to the period of Babylonian supremacy. From the fact that this supremacy had just ended, Daniel could draw only one conclusion: The seventy years had ended!

Of greater importance for Daniel, however, was what the end of the seventy years could mean for his own people, the Jewish exiles at Babylon, and for the devastated city of Jerusalem and its ruined temple. And this was the subject that Daniel brought up in his prayer.

### *C-2: The purpose of Daniel's prayer*

According to Jeremiah's letter, Jehovah had promised that, "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, *I will visit you and fulfill my good word to you, to bring you back to this place.*" —Jeremiah 29:10, *NASB*.

As the seventy years "for Babylon" were now completed and "the first year" of "Darius the Mede" was well in progress, why had Jehovah still not fulfilled his promise to bring the exiles in Babylon back to Jerusalem (the "place" from which they had once been deported, Jeremiah 29:1, 20), thus ending the desolate state of their city? Would not the end of the seventy years "for Babylon" *be followed by the end of the exile and the desolation of Jerusalem? Why the delay?* Judging from Daniel's prayer this matter appears to have been his prime concern and the actual cause for his prayer.

In his letter to the exiles Jeremiah also had explained that Jehovah's fulfilling of his promise to restore them to Jerusalem after the end of the seventy years *rested on certain conditions*:

If you invoke me and pray to me, I will listen to you: when you seek me, you shall find me; if you search with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD. I will restore your fortunes and gather

30 Compare the discussion of Gerald H. Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 94, 95.

you again from all the places to which I have banished you, says the LORD, and bring you back to the place from which I have carried you into exile.—Jeremiah 29:12-14a, *NEB*.

The conditions to be fulfilled before the exiles could be returned to Jerusalem, then, were that they had to return to Jehovah, by seeking him with prayer, confessing their sins, and starting to listen to his voice. *And this was precisely what Daniel did:*

“And I proceeded to set my face to Jehovah the [true] God, in order to seek [him] with prayer and entreaties, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.”—Daniel 9:3, *NW*.

From Daniel’s prayer, recorded in the subsequent verses (4-19), it is clear that his main interest was in seeking forgiveness for his people in order that they might be returned to their homeland. He knew that the “devastations of Jerusalem” and the desolation of the land were the curse predicted “in the law of Moses” (Daniel 9:13; compare Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28), because of their violating Jehovah’s law. (Daniel 9:11) He knew that Jehovah would bring them back to their land only when they returned to him and began to listen to his voice. Awareness of this condition, laid down in the law (Deuteronomy 30:1-6) and repeated and emphasized in the letter of Jeremiah, is reflected in Daniel’s prayer. Obviously, his interest in Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy years was motivated by the exciting discovery that the end of the desolation of Jerusalem was close at hand, as the seventy years “for Babylon” now had been completed.

### ***C-3: The relation of the seventy years to “the devastations of Jerusalem”***

Daniel, then, in his examination of Jeremiah’s letter, evidently took a great interest in the fact that the end of the seventy years “for Babylon” was directly linked to the end of the desolation of Jerusalem. The end of the latter period presupposed and was dependent on the end of the former:

Only when Babylon’s seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place [Jerusalem].—Jeremiah 29:10, *NRSV*.

This was evidently the reason why Daniel, in his reference to Jeremiah’s prophecy, connected the seventy years “for Babylon” with

*Jerusalem*, speaking of them as “the number of years . . . for fulfilling the devastations of Jerusalem.” (Daniel 9:2, *NW*) It was clear from Jeremiah’s letter that the completion of Babylon’s seventy years would entail the “fulfilling of the desolations of Jerusalem” (by the return of the exiles), and it is this *consequence* that Daniel lays the stress on in his statement.<sup>31</sup>

Read in isolation from the wider context, however, these words could easily be misinterpreted to mean that Daniel equated the seventy-year period with the period of Jerusalem’s desolation. Some Bible translators have understood the text that way. Thus *Tanakh*, a translation published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1985, speaks of “the number of years that . . . were to be the term of Jerusalem’s desolation—seventy years.” Similarly, *The New International Version (NIV)* presents Daniel as saying that, “I understood from the Scriptures . . . that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.”

Both of these translations, however, are freely *paraphrasing* the passage, which neither speaks of the “term” of Jerusalem’s desolation, nor that it would “last” seventy years. None of these words are found in the original text. They have been added in an attempt to *interpret* the text. There is no compelling reason to accept this interpretation, not only because it is arrived at by a paraphrasing of the text, but also because it is in direct conflict with Jeremiah’s own prophecy.<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted that Daniel himself does not equate the seventy years with the period of Jerusalem’s desolation. It is only the *expiration* of the seventy-year period—not the period as a whole—that he relates to the “fulfilling of the desolations of Jerusalem.” This focusing on the *end* of the period is totally absent in the two translations quoted above (*Tanakh* and *NIV*), as they both fail to translate

31 Dr. C. F. Keil, one of the greatest Hebrew scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, noticed in his grammatical analysis how Daniel connected and yet distinguished the two periods, concluding: “Consequently, in the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede over the kingdom of the Chaldeans the seventy years prophesied of by Jeremiah were now full, the period of the desolation of Jerusalem determined by God was almost expired.”—C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1872), pp. 321, 322.

32 A number of critical scholars, who regard the book of Daniel as a late composition from the end of the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.), have argued that Jeremiah’s original prophecy of the seventy years was repeatedly reinterpreted and reapplied by the later Bible writers Ezra, Zechariah, and Daniel. There is no reason to discuss these theories here, especially as there is wide disagreement on them among these scholars.

the Hebrew word *l'mal'ot*, “fulfilling, to fulfill”. Most translations (including *The New World Translation*) are more in conformity with the original text in this respect.<sup>33</sup>

What Daniel discovered by reading Jeremiah’s letter, then, was not that Jerusalem’s desolation would last for seventy years (for this is nowhere stated in Jeremiah), but that the desolations of Jerusalem would not cease until the seventy years “for Babylon” had ceased. The focus of the “seventy years” was on Babylon, and her period of dominance, rather than on Jerusalem.

The end of Babylon’s dominance would, of course, as a *natural consequence* or *byproduct*, open up the prospect for a Jewish return to Jerusalem. This is the simplest meaning of Daniel’s words in the light of what was actually written in Jeremiah’s letter. As the Babylonian supremacy suddenly had been replaced by the Medo-Persian rule and the seventy years “for Babylon” and her international domination had thus been completed, Daniel understood—by the aid of Jeremiah’s letter—that the completion of the devastations of Jerusalem was now due. This was the reason for Daniel’s excitement and strong feelings, as expressed in his prayer.

### D: 2 CHRONICLES 36:20-23

The two books of Chronicles record the history of Israel up to the end of the Jewish exile in Babylon. These books, therefore, must have been finished some time after that event. The last verses of 2 Chronicles connect the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy years with the Persian conquest of Babylon and the end of the Jewish captivity, as follows:

#### *2 Chronicles 36:20-23:*

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

33 A detailed grammatical analysis of the Hebrew text of Dan. 9:2 has been received from the linguist mentioned in note 27 above, which step by step clarifies the exact meaning of the verse. In conclusion, the following translation was offered, in close accord with the original text: “In his [Darius’] first regnal year I, Daniel, ascertained, in the writings, that the number of years, which according to the word of JHWH to Jeremiah the prophet would be completely fulfilled, with respect to the desolate state of Jerusalem, were seventy years.”

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

23 "This is what Cyrus the king of Persia has said, 'All the kingdoms of the earth Jehovah the God of the heavens has given me, and he himself has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among YOU of all his people, Jehovah his God be with him. So let him go up.'" (NW)

It may be observed that the Chronicler repeatedly emphasizes the *agreement* between the prophecies of Jeremiah and its fulfillment in the events he records. Thus the statement in verse 20 is an application of Jeremiah 27:7: "And all the nations *shall serve him, and his son, and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes*". This time of Babylon came, the Chronicler explains, when "the royalty of Persia began to reign [i.e., in 539 B.C.E.], to fulfill Jehovah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah, . . . to fulfill seventy years." This, then, would also fulfill the prediction at Jeremiah 25:12, that the time of Babylon would come "when seventy years have been fulfilled." Thus the Chronicler seems clearly to be saying that the seventy years were fulfilled at the Persian conquest of Babylon.

What complicates the matter in our text is the statement (italicized in the quotation above) about the "sabbath rest" of the land, which is inserted in the middle of the reference to Jeremiah's prophecy. This has caused a number of scholars to conclude that the Chronicler *re-interpreted* the prophecy of Jeremiah by applying the seventy years to the period of the desolation of Judah.<sup>34</sup>

Such an understanding, however, would not only conflict with Jeremiah's prophecy; it would also contradict the Chronicler's own emphasis on the agreement between the original prophecy and its fulfillment. So what did the Chronicler mean by his insertion of the statement about the sabbath rest of the land?

### ***D-1: The sabbath rest of the land***

A cursory reading of verse 21 could give the impression that the Chronicler states that the land had enjoyed a sabbath rest of seventy years, and that this had been predicted by Jeremiah. But Jeremiah

34 See, for example, Avigdor Orr in *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. VI (1956), p. 306, and Michael Fishbane in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) pp. 480-81.

does not speak of the seventy years in terms of allowing the land to pay off its sabbath years. In fact, there is no reference at all to a sabbath rest for the land in his book.

Therefore Ezra's words, "until the land had paid off its sabbaths; all the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath," could not be a fulfillment of "Jehovah's word *by the mouth of Jeremiah*." The two clauses about the sabbath rest are, as has been observed by Bible commentators, a reference to *another prediction*, found at Leviticus, chapter 26.

Among other things, this chapter forewarns that, if the people did not obey *the law of the sabbatical years* (discussed in the preceding chapter, Leviticus 25), they would be scattered among the nations and their land would be desolated.<sup>35</sup> In this way the land would be allowed to "pay off its sabbaths":

At that time *the land will pay off its sabbaths all the days of its lying desolated*, while YOU are in the land of YOUR enemies. At that time the land will keep sabbath, as it must repay its sabbaths. *All the days of its lying desolated it will keep sabbath*, for the reason that it did not keep sabbath during YOUR sabbaths when YOU were dwelling upon it.—Leviticus 26:34-35, *NW*.

Like Daniel earlier, the writer of the Chronicles understood the desolation of Judah to be a fulfillment of this curse predicted in the law of Moses. He therefore inserted this prediction from Leviticus 26 to show that it was fulfilled after the final deportation to Babylon, exactly as was predicted through Moses, "while you are in the land of your enemies."<sup>36</sup> By inserting the two clauses from Leviticus 26, the Chronicler did not mean to say that the land enjoyed a sabbath rest of *seventy years*, as this was not predicted, either by Moses or by Jeremiah. He *does not tell explicitly how long it rested*, only that "all the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath."—2 Chronicles 36:20.<sup>37</sup>

35 According to the law of the sabbatical years the land would enjoy a sabbath rest every seventh year, i.e., the land should lie fallow and not be cultivated. (Leviticus 25:1-7) This "served to reduce the quantity of alkalines, sodium and calcium, deposited in the soil by irrigation waters."—Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 272. Violation of this ordinance would gradually destroy the soil and drastically reduce the crop yields.

36 Some translators have put the Chronicler's quotation from Leviticus 26 within dashes or in parentheses (as does the Swedish translation of 1917), in order to emphasize that they do not refer to Jeremiah.

37 The actual length of the land's sabbath rest was 49 years, from the final desolation and depopulation in 587 B.C.E. until the return of the exiles in 538. Perhaps it is just a coincidence, but this was also the maximal period during which a Hebrew could be deprived of the proprietorship of his ancestral inheritance, according to the law of ...

As with Daniel, the main interest of the Chronicler was the return of the exiles, and therefore he points out that they had to remain in Babylonia until two prophecies had been fulfilled: (1) that of Jeremiah on the seventy years of supremacy “for Babylon,” and (2) that in Leviticus on the desolation and sabbath rest for the land of Judah. These prophecies should not be mixed up or confused, as is often done. Not only do they refer to periods of different character and different lengths; they also refer to different nations. But as the two periods were closely connected in that the end of one period was contingent on the end of the other, the Chronicler, like Daniel, brought them together.

### ***D-2: Jeremiah’s prophecy on the return of the exiles***

Many commentators hold that the Chronicler ended the seventy years in the first year of Cyrus (538/37 B.C.E.), because of what he says in the last two verses:

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

“This is what Cyrus the king of Persia has said, ‘All the kingdoms of the earth Jehovah the God of the heavens has given me, and he himself has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among YOU of all his people, Jehovah his God be with him. So let him go up.’ ”—2 Chronicles 36:22-23, *NW*.

If Jehovah’s word “by the mouth of Jeremiah” is here taken to be another reference to the seventy years, it might prove that Ezra ended that period in 538/37 B.C.E. But in view of the fact that these verses actually deal with Cyrus’ decree allowing the Jews to return to their

... land tenure. If he became so poor that he had to sell his land, it could not be sold beyond reclaim. If it could not be bought back, the purchaser had to return it to him at the next jubilee.—Leviticus 25:8-28.

If the 49 years of sabbath rest corresponded to the exact number of sabbatical years that had been neglected by the Israelites, the whole period of violation of the law would be  $49 \times 7 = 343$  years. If this period extended to 587 B.C.E., its beginning would date from about 930 B.C.E. Interestingly, modern chronologers who have carefully examined both the Biblical and extra-Biblical evidence, usually date *the division of the kingdom* to 930 B.C.E. or thereabouts. (F. X. Kugler, for example, has 930, E. R. Thiele and K. A. Kitchen 931/30, and W. H. Barnes 932 B.C.E.) As this national disaster resulted in a massive break away from the temple cult in Jerusalem by a majority of the people, it is not unreasonable to think that an extensive neglect of the sabbatical years also dates from this time.

homeland, it is more natural to understand his reference to Jeremiah's prophecy as a reference to what the prophet said immediately after his prediction of the seventy years "for Babylon" at Jeremiah 29:10:

For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, *I will visit you and fulfill my good word to you, to bring you back to this place.*' — Jeremiah 29:10, NASB.

Note that the prophet did not say that Jehovah first would visit the exiles, causing them to return to Jerusalem, and that *as a result of that* the seventy years would be accomplished. This is how the Watch Tower Society applies this prophecy. To the contrary, the prophet clearly states that the seventy years would be accomplished first, and *after their fulfillment* Jehovah would visit the exiles and cause them to return to Jerusalem. *The seventy years, then, would be fulfilled while the Jewish exiles were still in Babylon!*

And so it happened: Babylon fell to Cyrus, the king of Persia, in October, 539 B.C.E., thus fulfilling the prophecy of the seventy years "for Babylon." The next year Cyrus issued his decree, allowing the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> The end of the seventy years at the fall of Babylon, and the return of the Jews one year later are two separate events, and it is the last of these that Ezra is speaking of at 2 Chronicles 36:22-23. His reference to the word "by the mouth of Jeremiah" in these verses, then, must be a reference to the second half of verse 10 in chapter 29 of the book of Jeremiah.

Thus we find that 2 Chronicles 36:20-23, like Daniel 9:2, may be brought into harmony with the prophecy of Jeremiah on the seventy years. The Chronicler ends the period while the Jewish exiles were still living in Babylonia, when "the royalty of Persia began to reign" in 539 B.C.E. He lays stress upon the fact that the Jewish exiles could not return to Jerusalem until *Babylon's* seventy years had been fulfilled, and the land had paid off its sabbaths. After that Jehovah caused them to return to their homeland, in fulfillment of Jeremiah 29:10b, in the first year of Cyrus. The words of the Chronicler, correctly understood, cannot be taken to mean that the desolation of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple lasted for seventy years.

38 As argued earlier (chapter 3 above, note 2), the Jewish remnant most probably returned from the exile in 538 B.C.E., not in 537 as the Watch Tower Society insists.

The last two texts to be discussed, Zechariah 1:7-12 and 7:1-5, are sometimes thought to be two additional references to Jeremiah's prophecy about the seventy years, and the Watch Tower Society holds them to be so. But the evidence for this conclusion is totally lacking.

None of the texts contains any reference to Jeremiah (as do Daniel 9:1-2 and 2 Chronicles 36:20-23), and the *context* of these texts strongly indicates that the seventy years mentioned there must be given a different application. This is also the conclusion of many commentators.<sup>39</sup> This will also become apparent in the following discussion.

### E: ZECHARIAH 1:7-12

The first statement about a period of seventy years in the book of Zechariah appears in a vision given to Zechariah on “the twenty-fourth [day] of the eleventh month, that is, the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius.”—Zechariah 1:7.

Darius' second regnal year corresponded to 520/19 B.C.E., and the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month may be translated to 15 February 519 B.C.E. in the Julian calendar.<sup>40</sup> Although the Jews had resumed the work on the temple in Jerusalem five months earlier (Haggai 1:1, 14-15), Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were still in a sorry condition. That is why the angel in Zechariah's vision brings up a question that undoubtedly troubled many of the repatriated Jews:

#### *Zechariah 1:12:*

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

39 Dr. Otto Plöger, for example, notes that “the two texts in the book of Jeremiah are not referred to here.”—O. Plöger, *Aus der Spätzeit des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), p.69.

40 R. A. Parker & W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.–A.D. 75* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1956), p. 30. This presupposes that the date is given according to the Persian accession year system. If Zechariah applies the Jewish nonaccession year system, the date would have fallen about one year earlier, in February, 520 B.C.E. (See E. J. Bickerman's discussion of this problem in *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 88, 1981, pp. 19-28). The Watch Tower Society accepts the secular dating of Darius' reign, as may be seen, for example, on page 124 of the book *Paradise Restored to Mankind—By Theocracy!* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1972).

***E-1: Denunciation—for seventy years or ninety?***

According to the angel, Jehovah had denounced Jerusalem and the cities of Judah for seventy years. The Watch Tower Society applies these seventy years of denouncement (“indignation,” *KJV, ASV*; “wrath,” *NEB*) to the period 607-537 B.C.E., thus equating them with the seventy years of Jeremiah 25:10-12 and 29:10.<sup>41</sup> It seems evident, though, that the reason why the angel put this question about the denouncement was that Jehovah still, in Darius’ second year (519 B.C.E.), had not shown mercy to the cities of Judah. Or did the angel mean to say that Jehovah had denounced Jerusalem and the cities of Judah for seventy years up to 537 B.C.E., and then continued to be hostile against them for about eighteen more years up to 519? This would make the period of hostility nearly *ninety* years, not seventy.<sup>42</sup>

But the “indignation” or “wrath” clearly refers to the devastated state of the cities of Judah, including Jerusalem and its temple, which began after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. This condition was still prevailing, as may be seen from Jehovah’s answer to the angel’s question:

Therefore this is what Jehovah has said, “I shall certainly return to Jerusalem with mercies. My own house will be built in her,” is the utterance of Jehovah of armies, “and a measuring line itself will be stretched out over Jerusalem.”

Call out further, saying, “This is what Jehovah of armies has said: ‘My cities will yet overflow with goodness; and Jehovah will yet certainly feel regrets over Zion and yet actually choose Jerusalem.’” —Zechariah 1:16-17, *NW*.

41 *Paradise Restored to Mankind—by Theocracy!*, pp. 131-134.

42 The Watch Tower Society attempts to explain this contradiction by arguing that Jehovah had denounced the cities of Judah for 70 years up to 537 B.C.E., but allowed the Gentile nations to carry on the denunciation up to the time of Zechariah, making it *seem* as if he was still denouncing the cities of Judah! —*Ibid.*, pp. 131-34.

Also from a grammatical point of view it is difficult to uphold the idea that the seventy years here refer to a period that had ended many years in the past. The demonstrative pronoun “these” (Hebr. *zeh*) denotes something near in time or space. Commenting on the expression “these seventy years” at Zech. 1:12, the Swedish Hebraist Dr. Seth Erlandsson explains: “Literally it says ‘these 70 years,’ also at 7:5, which is tantamount to ‘now for 70 years.’” (Letter Erlandsson-Jonsson, dated Dec. 23, 1990.) This is evidently the reason why Professor Hinckley G. Mitchell renders the phrase as “*now seventy years*” in both texts.—H. G. Mitchell in S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, & C. A. Briggs (eds.), *The International Critical Commentary. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), pp. 123-24, 199-200.

Counted from 587 B.C.E. the indignation had now, in 519, lasted for nearly seventy years, or sixty-eight years to be exact. And if counted from the *beginning* of the siege on January 27, 589 B.C.E. (2 Kings 25:1; Ezekiel 24:1-2; Jeremiah 52:4), the indignation had lasted for almost exactly seventy years on February 15, 519. But just two months earlier the work on the foundation of the temple had been finished. (Haggai 2:18) From that time onward Jehovah began to remove his indignation: "From this day I shall bestow blessing." —Haggai 2:19, *NW*.

It seems clear, therefore, that the seventy years mentioned in this text do not refer to the prophecy of Jeremiah, but simply to the time that had elapsed by 519 B.C.E. since the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 589-587 B.C.E.<sup>43</sup>

That seventy years elapsed from the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C.E. to its rebuilding in the years 520-515 is also confirmed by the next text in the book of Zechariah to be considered.

### **F: ZECHARIAH 7:1-5**

Again, the event recorded in this passage is exactly dated, to "the fourth year of Darius . . . on the fourth [day] of the ninth month." (Zech. 7: 1) This date corresponds to December 7, 518 B.C.E. (Julian calendar).<sup>44</sup>

#### ***Zechariah 7:1-5:***

Furthermore, it came about that in the fourth year of Darius the king the word of Jehovah occurred to Zechariah, on the fourth [day] of the ninth month, [that is,] in Chislev. And Bethel proceeded to send Sharezer and Regem-melech and his men to soften the face of Jehovah, saying to the priests who belonged to the house of Jehovah

43 This is also the conclusion of many modern commentators. J.A. Thompson, for example, says: "In Zech. 1:12 it seems to denote the interval between the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C. and its rebuilding in 520-515 B.C." (*The Book of Jeremiah*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980, p. 514.) Dr. Carroll Stuhlmueller observes that, "if we tabulate from the beginning of Babylon's plans for the first siege of Jerusalem (590/589; 2 Kgs. 24:10) to the time of this vision (520), the seventy years show up in a remarkably accurate way!" — Stuhlmueller, *Rebuilding with Hope. A Commentary on the Books of Haggai and Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1988), p. 64.

44 Parker & Dubberstein, *op. cit.* (note 40 above), p. 30.

of armies, and to the prophets, even saying: “Shall I weep in the fifth month, practicing an abstinence, the way I have done these O how many years?” And the word of Jehovah of armies continued to occur to me, saying: “Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, ‘When YOU fasted and there was a wailing in the fifth [month] and in the seventh [month], *and this for seventy years* [literally ‘these seventy years,’ as in 1:12], did you really fast to me, even me?’ ” (NW)

### ***F-1: Fasting and wailing—for seventy years or ninety?***

Why did “all the people of the land” fast and wail in the fifth month and in the seventh month? Speaking of the fast in the fifth month the Watch Tower Society admits:

It was observed evidently on the tenth day of that month (Ab), in order to commemorate how on that day Nebuzaradan, the chief of Nebuchadnezzar’s bodyguard, after two days of inspection, burned down the city of Jerusalem and its temple. (Jer. 52:12, 13; 2 Kings 25:8, 9)<sup>45</sup>

Further, the fast in the seventh month was “to commemorate the assassination of Governor Gedaliah, who was of the royal house of King David and whom Nebuchadnezzar made governor of the land for the poor Jews who were allowed to remain after the destruction of Jerusalem. (2 Kings 25:22-25; Jer. 40:13 to 41:10)”<sup>46</sup>

For how long had the Jews been fasting in these months in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the assassination of Gedaliah? For “seventy years,” according to Zechariah 7:5. The year 518/17 was the seventieth year since 587 B.C.E.!<sup>47</sup>

45 *Paradise Restored to Mankind—by Theocracy!*, p. 235.

46 *Ibid.*—Zechariah 8:19 shows that days of fasting and mourning in memory of various fateful events during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem were held in four different months: (1) *in the tenth month* (because of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem in January, 589 B.C.E., 2 Kings 25:1-2); (2) *in the fourth month* (because of the capture of Jerusalem in July, 587 B.C.E., 2 Kings 25:2-4; Jer. 52:6-7); (3) *in the fifth month* (because of the burning of the temple in August, 587 B.C.E., 2 Kings 25:8-9); and (4) *in the seventh month* (because of the assassination of Gedaliah in October, 587 B.C.E., 2 Kings 25:22-25).

47 From the end of August 587 B.C.E., when the temple was burned down, to December 518 it was sixty-nine years and about four months. From October 587, when the remaining Jews fled to Egypt and left Judah desolated, to December 518 was sixty-nine years and about two months.

That the Jews still, in 518 B.C.E., held these fasts in the fifth and seventh months is clear from the fact that the men from Bethel had come to ask if they, “now that the faithful remnant of Jews were rebuilding the temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem and were about half through, should ... continue to hold such a fast.”<sup>48</sup>

If now the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple is dated in 607 B.C.E. instead of 587, once again this would make the time these fasts had been observed *ninety* years rather than seventy. This is actually conceded by the Watch Tower Society in the book quoted above, but no satisfying explanation is given for this discrepancy.<sup>49</sup>

Thus Zechariah 1:7-12 and 7:1-5 both give very strong support for the year 587 B.C.E. as the correct date for the destruction of Jerusalem. As in the case of Jeremiah 25:10-12; 29:10; Daniel 1:1-2 and 2:1, the easiest and the most direct reading of Zechariah 1:7-12 and 7:1-7, too, is seen to be in open conflict with the interpretation the Watch Tower Society gives to the seventy years.

### G: THE APPLICATION OF THE SEVENTY YEARS OF SERVITUDE

From a close examination of the texts dealing with the seventy years, certain facts have been established that cannot be ignored in any attempt to find an application of the seventy-year period that is in harmony with both the Bible and historical facts:

- (1) The seventy years refer to *many nations*, not Judah only: Jeremiah 25:11.
- (2) The seventy years refer to a period of *servitude* for these nations, that is, vassalage to Babylon: Jeremiah 25:11.
- (3) The seventy years refer to the period of *Babylonian supremacy*, “seventy years for Babylon”: Jeremiah 29:10.
- (4) The seventy years were accomplished *when the Babylonian king and his nation were punished*, that is, in 539 B.C.E.: Jeremiah 25:12.
- (5) The seventy years of servitude began *many years before the de-*

48 *Paradise Restored to Mankind—by Theocracy!*, p. 235.

49 “When the exiled Jews fasted during the seventy years of desolation of the land of Judah and also during all these years since the remnant of them returned to their homeland, were they really fasting to Jehovah?” —*Paradise Restored to Mankind—by Theocracy!*, p. 237. (Emphasis added.)

*struction of Jerusalem:* Jeremiah chapters 27, 28, and 35; Daniel 1:1-4; 2:1; 2 Kings 24:1-7; the Babylonian chronicles, and Berossus.

(6) *Zechariah 1:7-12 and 7:1-5 are not references to Jeremiah's prophecy*, but refer to the period from the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in the years 589-587 to the rebuilding of the temple in the years 520-515 B.C.E.

The application given by the Watch Tower Society to the seventy-year prophecy, that it refers to Judah only, and to the period of complete desolation of the land, "without an inhabitant," following the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, is seen to be in direct conflict with each of the above established Biblical and historical facts.

An application that is in clear conflict with both the Bible and such historical facts cannot have anything to do with reality. In a serious discussion of possible applications of the seventy years, this alternative is *the first which must be rejected*. It is held to by the Watch Tower Society, not because it can be supported by the Bible and historical facts, but because it is a necessary prerequisite for their calculation of the supposed 2,520 years of Gentile times, 607 B.C.E.-1914 C.E.

If their application of the seventy years is dropped, the Gentile times calculation leading to 1914 C.E. immediately proves false, together with all the prophetic claims and speculations that are tied to it.

### ***G-1: The use of "seventy" as a "round" number***

The conclusion arrived at in the above discussion is that Judah and a number of the surrounding nations became vassals to the king of Babylon soon after the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. Does this mean that the seventy-year period "for Babylon" must be applied to the period 605-539 B.C.E.? To this suggestion it may quite naturally be objected that the length of this period is not seventy, but a little more than sixty-six years, which is, of course, true.

Many scholars argue, however, that the numeral "70" in the Bible often seems to be used as "a round number." It occurs fifty-two times independently in the Old Testament, and is used with a variety of different meanings—for weights, lengths of measurements, numbers of people, periods of time, and so forth.<sup>50</sup> In a discussion of the biblical use of the numeral "70," which also includes extra-biblical occurrences, Dr. F. C. Fensham concludes:

50 Some examples are: *70 years* (Gen. 5:12; 11:26; Ps. 90:10); *70 days* (Gen. 50:3); *70 descendants of Jacob* (Gen. 46; Ex. 1:5; Deut. 10:22); *70 palm trees* (Ex. 15:27); *70 elders* (Ex. 24:1; Num. 11:16; Ezek. 8:11); *70 submissive Canaanite kings* (Judg. 1:7); *70 sons* (Judg. 8:30; 12:14; 2 Kings 10:1).

It is quite probably used as a kind of symbolic figure, just like seven. With the usage of seven and seventy the ancient Semites tried to make a difference between a smaller symbolic figure and a larger one.<sup>51</sup>

When used of periods of time it might have been used as an appropriate period of punishment. In a building inscription of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680-667 B.C.E.), it is stated that the desolation of Babylon after its destruction by Sennacherib in 689 B.C.E. should have lasted seventy years, but the god Marduk in his mercy changed the period to eleven years.<sup>52</sup> A few decades earlier Isaiah predicted that "Tyre must be forgotten seventy years, *the same as the days of one king.*" (Isaiah 23:15) The explanation that the seventy years should be understood as "the same as the days of one king" is often interpreted to mean a normal life-span of a king, or "the full span of human life," in accordance with Psalm 90:10, where the number seventy clearly is not meant to be viewed as a precise figure.

Thus it is quite possible and perhaps probable that the seventy years of servitude predicted by Jeremiah were used as a round number. Such an understanding could also be supported by the fact that not all the nations surrounding Judah (some of which are obviously enumerated in Jeremiah 25:19-26) seem to have been made vassals to the king of Babylon at the same time, in 605 B.C.E. Some of them seem to have been brought into subjection somewhat later. The period of servitude, therefore, was not of exactly the same duration for all these nations. Yet the prophet said that all of them were to serve the king of Babylon "seventy years."

### ***G-2: The seventy years "for Babylon": 609–539 B.C.E.***

Although it is true that the servitude of a number of nations turned out to be somewhat less than seventy years, the prophecy does not clearly

- 51 F. C. Fensham, "The Numeral Seventy in the Old Testament and the Family of Jerubbaal, Ahab, Panammuwa and Athirat," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, July-December 1977, pp. 113-115. Cf. also Eric Burrows, "The Number Seventy in Semitic," *Orientalia*, Vol. V, 1936, pp. 389-92.
- 52 The inscription says: "Seventy years as the period of its desolation he wrote (down in the Book of Fate). But the merciful Marduk—his anger lasted but a moment—turned (the Book of Fate) upside down and ordered its restoration in the eleventh year." — D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. II (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 243. As pointed out by Luckenbill, "the Babylonian numeral '70,' turned upside down or reversed, becomes '11,' just as our printed '9,' turned upside down, becomes '6.'" (*Ibid.*, p. 242. Cf. also R. Borger in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. XVII, 1958, p. 74.) In this way Esarhaddon "explained" his decision to restore Babylon after the death of his father Sennacherib in 681 B.C.E.

imply that the seventy years “for Babylon” should be reckoned from 605 B.C.E. It must be remembered that *all* nations were predicted to become servants of Babylon: “*all the nations* must serve him and his son and his grandson.”<sup>53</sup> (Jeremiah 27:7, *NW*) Some nations had become subject to Babylon *even prior to* the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. If the seventy years “for Babylon” are counted from the time when Babylon crushed the Assyrian empire, thus beginning to step forward as the dominant political power itself, even a more exact application of the seventy years is possible. A short review of the last years of Assyria will make this clear.

**ASSYRO-BABYLONIAN CHRONOLOGY, 680-609 B.C.E.**

ASSYRIA	B.C.	BABYLONIA
Esarhaddon (12 years)	680	680 Esarhaddon (12 + 1 years)
	669	
	668	668
		667
		Shamashshumukin (20 yrs)
Assurbanipal (42 yrs)		648
		647
		Kandalanu (21 + 1 years)
	627	
Assur-etillu-ilani (4 yrs?)	626	626
		625
Sinsharishkun (11 yrs?)	612	
Assur-uballit (2 yrs)	611-610	Nabopolassar (21 yrs)
Assyria crushed	609	
		605

Up to 627 B.C.E. Assyria held hegemony over many countries, including Babylonia and the Hattu-area. But on the death of Ashurbanipal in that year, Assyria’s power began to wane. Nabopolassar, the governor of southern Babylonia, drove the Assyrians from Babylon in 626 and occupied the throne. In the following years he successfully established Babylonian independence.

The most important source for the history of the final years of the Assyrian empire is the Babylonian chronicle *B.M. 21901*, which describes the events from the tenth year of Nabopolassar until the begin-

53 Nebuchanezzar’s son and successor was Evil-Merodach. His grandson was evidently Belsazzar, the son of Nabonidus who, according to R.P. Dougherty was married to Nitocris, a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.—R. P. Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 30-32, 79. See also the comments by D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 11-12.

ning of his eighteenth regnal year, that is, from 616 to 608 B.C.E.

In 616, Nabopolassar attacked the Assyrians and defeated them, but an Egyptian army led by Psammetichus I came up to assist the Assyrian king (Sin-shar-ishkun), and Nabopolassar chose to withdraw to Babylon.

By this time the Medes, too, began to attack Assyria, and in 614 they took Ashur, the ancient Assyrian capital. After the city had fallen, Nabopolassar, whose army arrived too late to help the Medes, made a treaty with the Median ruler, Cyaxares.

In 612, the two allies attacked the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, captured it and destroyed it. The Assyrian king, Sin-shar-ishkun, perished in the flames. His successor, Ashur-uballit II, fled to the provincial capital of Harran, where he established his government, still claiming sovereignty over Assyria.

During the subsequent years Nabopolassar successfully campaigned in Assyria, and by the end of 610, he marched against Harran, joined by Median forces.<sup>54</sup> Ashur-uballit fled, and the city was captured and plundered either late in 610 or early in 609 B.C.E.<sup>55</sup> Late in the summer of 609 Ashur-uballit, supported by a large Egyptian force headed by Pharaoh Necho, made a last attempt to recapture Harran, but failed. This definitely put an end to the Assyrian empire.

That 609 B.C.E. marked the definite end of the Assyrian empire is the prevailing view among leading authorities today. Some typical statements are quoted in the following box:

**THE FALL OF ASSYRIA — 609 B.C.E.**

“In 610 the Babylonians and their allies took Harran, and Ashur-uballit with the wreckage of his forces fell back across the Euphrates into the arms of the Egyptians. An attempt (in 609) to retake Harran failed miserably. Assyria was finished.”—Professor John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 316.

54 The term used for the Medes in the chronicle, “Umman-manda,” has often been taken to refer to, or at least include, the *Scythians*. This hypothesis appears to be untenable in the light of recent research. See the extensive discussion by Stefan Zawadzki in *The Fall of Assyria and Median-Babylonian Relations in Light of the Nabopolassar Chronicle* (Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 1988), pp. 64-98.

55 According to the Babylonian chronicle BM 21901 the two armies set out against Harran in *Arahsamnu*, the eighth month, which in 610 B.C.E. roughly corresponded to November in the Julian calendar. After the capture of the city they returned home in *Addaru*, the twelfth month, which roughly corresponded to March in the following year, 609 B.C.E. Most probably, therefore, the city was captured early in 609 B.C.E.—A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), pp. 95-96.

In 609 B.C.E. “Assyria ceased to exist and her territory was taken over by the Babylonians.”—Professor D. J. Wiseman in *The New Bible Dictionary*, J. D. Douglas (ed.), 2nd ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 101.

“In 609, the Babylonians finally routed the Assyrians and began the establishment of their control over Phoenicia, Syria and Palestine.”—The Russian Assyriologist M. A. Dandamaev in *History of Humanity*, Vol. III, ed. by J. Herrman & E. Zürcher (Paris, London, New York: UNESCO, 1996), p. 117.

“In 609 Assyria was mentioned for the last time as a still existing but marginal formation in northwestern Mesopotamia. After that year Assyria ceased to exist.”—Stefan Zawadzki in *The Fall of Assyria* (Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 1988), p. 16.

Thus, the seventy years “for Babylon” may also be reckoned from 609 B.C.E. From that year the Babylonian king regarded himself as the legitimate successor of the king of Assyria, and in the following years he gradually took over the control of the latter’s territories, beginning with a series of campaigns in the Armenian mountains north of Assyria.

The Egyptian Pharaoh, Necho, after the failed attempt to recapture Harran in 609, succeeded in taking over the areas in the west, including Palestine, for about four years, although his control of these areas seems to have been rather general and loose.<sup>56</sup> But the battle at Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. put an end to this brief Egyptian presence in the west. (Jeremiah 46:2) After a series of successful campaigns to “Hattu,” Nebuchadnezzar made it clear to Necho that he was the real heir to the Assyrian Empire, and “never again did the king of Egypt come out from his land, for the king of Babylon had taken all that happened to belong to the king of Egypt up to the river of Euphrates.”—2 Kings 24:7, *NW*.<sup>57</sup>

56 Compare 2 Kings 23:29-34; 2 Chronicles 35:20-36:4. On Necho’s “general, but loose” control of the areas in the west, see the comments by T. G. H. James in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. III:2 (see note 23 above), p. 716.

57 Ross E. Winkle, too, concludes that “the defeat of Assyria is the obvious choice for the actual beginning of the seventy years. This is because of the fact that with Assyria out of the way, Babylon was truly the dominant power in the North.”—R. E. Winkle, “Jeremiah’s seventy years for Babylon: a re-assessment,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (AUSS), Vol. 25:3 (1987), p. 296. Winkle’s discussion of the texts dealing with the seventy years (in AUSS 25:2, pp. 201-213, and 25:3, pp. 289-299) is remarkably similar to that published already in the first edition of the present work in 1983. Winkle does not refer to it, however, and it is quite possible that it was not known to him.

If the Babylonian supremacy is reckoned from 609 B.C.E., the year that marked the definite end of the Assyrian Empire, exactly seventy years elapsed up to the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E. This period may be counted as the “seventy years for Babylon.” (Jeremiah 29:10)<sup>58</sup> As not all the nations previously ruled by Assyria were brought under the Babylonian yoke in that same year, the “seventy years” of servitude in reality came to mean a round number for individual nations.<sup>59</sup>

- 58 Several historians and biblical scholars have been amazed at the exactness with which Jeremiah’s prediction was fulfilled. Some scholars have tried to explain this by suggesting that the passages in Jer. 25:11 and 29:10 were added to the book of Jeremiah *after* the Jewish exile. There is no evidence in support of this theory, however. Professor John Bright, for example, commenting on Jer. 29:10, says: “One cannot explain rationally why it was that Jeremiah was assured that Babylon’s rule would be so relatively brief. But there is no reason to regard the verse as a *vaticinium ex eventu* [a ‘prophecy’ made after the event]; we can only record the fact that the prediction turned out to be approximately correct (which may be why later writers made so much of it). From the fall of Nineveh (612) to the fall of Babylon (539) was seventy-three years; from Nebuchadnezzar’s accession (605) to the fall of Babylon was sixty-six years.”— John Bright, *The Anchor Bible: Jeremiah* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 2nd. ed. 1986), pp. 208-09.
- 59 Interestingly, the Watch Tower writers, too, seem finally to have realized this. Commenting on the 70 years that Tyre would be forgotten according to Isaiah 23:15-17—a period they equate with the 70 years for Babylon—their recent commentary on Isaiah says: “True, the island-city of Tyre is not subject to Babylon for a full 70 years, since the Babylonian Empire falls in 539 B.C.E. Evidently, the 70 years represent the period of Babylonia’s greatest domination . . . Different nations come under that domination at different times. But at the end of 70 years, that domination will crumble.” (*Isaiah’s Prophecy. Light for All Mankind*, Vol 1, 2000, p. 253) These remarkable statements are more or less a reversal of earlier views.