

ATTEMPTS TO OVERCOME THE EVIDENCE

AS RELATED in the *Introduction*, the original manuscript of this work was first presented to the Watch Tower Society in 1977. During the subsequent correspondence with the headquarters of that organization, additional lines of evidence were presented which were later included in the published edition of the work in 1983.

In possession of all this information, it might be expected that the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses at the Brooklyn headquarters would have been prepared to reevaluate their Gentile times calculation in accord with their stated interest in biblical truth and historical facts. On the contrary, they chose to retain and defend the 607 B.C.E. date and the interpretations founded upon it.¹

1 Several years before the treatise was sent to the Brooklyn headquarters, some members on the writing staff had begun to see the weakness of the prophetic interpretations attached to the 1914 date. These included Edward Dunlap, former Registrar of Gilead School, and Governing Body member Raymond Franz. These researchers, therefore, could agree with the conclusion that the 607 B.C.E. date for the destruction of Jerusalem is chronologically insupportable. Some others on the writing staff, too, who read the treatise, came to realize that the 607 B.C.E. date seriously lacked support in history and began to feel serious doubts about the date. (The writing staff at that time included about 18 members.) Even Governing Body member Lyman Swingle expressed himself before the other Body members to the effect that the Watch Tower organization got their 1914 date (which depends on the 607 B.C.E. date) from the Second Adventists "lock, stock and barrel." However, the attempts by Raymond Franz and Lyman Swingle to bring up the evidence for discussion on the Governing Body met unfavorable response. The other members on the Body did not see fit to discuss the subject, but decided to continue to advocate the 1914 date.— See Raymond Franz, *Crisis of Conscience* (Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1983 and later editions), pp. 140-143, 214-216.

A. THE WATCH TOWER SOCIETY'S APPENDIX TO "LET YOUR KINGDOM COME"

The new defense of the 607 B.C.E. date appeared in a book published in 1981 entitled "*Let Your Kingdom Come*". In chapter 14 (pages 127-140) of the book another discussion of the Gentile times calculation is presented, which does not differ materially from previous discussions of the subject in the Watch Tower publications. But in a separate "Appendix to Chapter 14" at the end of the book, some of the lines of evidence weighing against the 607 B.C.E. date are now briefly discussed—and rejected.² The discussion, though, is seriously lacking in objectivity and proves to be nothing more than a weak attempt to conceal facts.

In the area of historical research an event is generally regarded as a "historical fact" if it is testified to by at least two independent witnesses. We recognize this rule from the Bible: "At the mouth of *two or three witnesses* every matter may be established." (Matthew 18:16) In Chapter 2 of the first edition of the present work *seven* historical "witnesses" against the 607 B.C.E. date were presented, at least four of which clearly qualify as independent witnesses. Most of the records giving this seven-fold testimony are found on documents preserved from the Neo-Babylonian era itself. These include royal inscriptions, business documents and the Apis stelae from the contemporary Egyptian Saite dynasty. Only the astronomical diaries, Berossus' Neo-Babylonian chronology and the king list of the Royal Canon ("Ptolemy's Canon") are found on later documents, but those records, too, were seen to be copied from earlier ones that—directly or indirectly—went back to the Neo-Babylonian era.

In Chapters 3 and 4 of the present updated edition of the work, the original seven lines of evidence are increased to *seventeen*. The added lines of evidence include prosopographical evidence, chronological interlocking joints, and an additional number of astronomical texts (three planetary tablets and five lunar eclipse texts). The evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date, therefore, is overwhelming, and very few reigns in ancient history

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2 "*Let Your Kingdom Come*" (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1981), pp. 186-189. The book was written by Governing Body member Lloyd Barry. The "Appendix to Chapter 14," however, was written by someone else, possibly Gene Smalley, a member of the writing staff. The "spadework" was probably done by John Albu, a scholarly Witness in New York. According to Raymond Franz, Albu has specialized in Neo-Babylonian chronology on behalf of the Watch Tower Society and did some research in connection with my treatise at the request of the Writing Department.

The Watch Tower Society's "Appendix to Chapter 14" in the book "Let Your Kingdom Come" (1981), pages 186-189:

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 14

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

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

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

Some major lines of evidence for this secular chronology are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The prophet Jeremiah predicted that the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem and make the city and land a desolation. (Jeremiah 25:8, 9) He added: "And all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations

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will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years." (Jeremiah 25:11) The 70 years expired when Cyrus the Great, in his first year, released the Jews and they returned to their homeland. (2 Chronicles 36:17-23) We believe that the most direct reading of Jeremiah 25:11 and other texts is that the 70 years would date from when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and left the land of Judah desolate.—Jeremiah 52:12-15, 24-27; 36:29-31.

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

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

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

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

But the Bible itself provides even more telling evidence against the claim that the 70 years began in 605 B.C.E. and that Jerusa-

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

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

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

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

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

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

may be established with such conclusiveness as the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 B.C.E.).

A-1: Misrepresentations of historical evidence

The Watch Tower Society in its “Appendix to Chapter 14” briefly mentions *some* of the lines of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date, including “Ptolemy’s Canon” and the king list of Berossus, but *fails to mention* that both of these king lists are based on sources that originated in the Neo-Babylonian period itself. Instead, the Watch Tower publication alleges that the origin of their dates is to be found in the Seleucid era, that is, some three centuries later.³

Further, for the first time the Watch Tower Society mentions the *Nabonidus Harran Stele* (Nabon. H 1, B), a *contemporary* document establishing the length of the whole Neo-Babylonian era up to the ninth year of Nabonidus. But it *fails to mention another contemporary stele* from the reign of Nabonidus, the *Hillah stele*, that also establishes the length of the whole Neo-Babylonian era, *including* the reign of Nabonidus!

Thirdly, the astronomical diary VAT 4956 is mentioned. Referring to the fact that it is a copy of an original text from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, claimed to be made during the Seleucid era, the Society repeats the theory that “it is possible that its historical information is simply that which was accepted in the Seleucid period.”⁴ This reasoning is completely fallacious, however, as it has been proven false by another astronomical diary, *B.M. 32312*, a fact the Society passes over in silence, although it is very well aware of it.⁵

Finally, the Society mentions the *business tablets*, admitting that these thousands of *contemporary* documents give the reigns of *all* the Neo-Babylonian kings, and that the lengths of reign given by these documents *agree with* all the other lines of evidence referred to—the Royal Canon, Berossus’ chronology, Nabonidus’ royal inscriptions, and the astronomical diaries.⁶ It *fails to mention*, though, that such agreement refutes the notion that the information on VAT 4956 could have been concocted during the Seleucid period. Apart from the above-mentioned lines of evidence, another strong one against the

3 “*Let Your Kingdom Come*” (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1981), p. 186.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

5 The astronomical diary B.M. 32312 is discussed in Chapter 4, section A-2, of the present volume. In the first (1983) edition, the discussion is found on pp. 83-86.

6 “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” p. 187.

607 B.C.E. date is completely ignored, too, namely, *the synchronisms to the contemporary and independently established Egyptian chronology*.

By omitting nearly half of the seven lines of evidence discussed in the first edition of the present work (the Hillah stele, the diary B.M. 32312, and the contemporary Egyptian documents) and misrepresenting some of the others, the real facts about the strength and validity of the established Neo-Babylonian chronology *are concealed*. From this basis Watch Tower scholars proceed to a critical appraisal of the limited evidence presented. They state:

However, no historian can deny the possibility that the present picture of Babylonian history might be misleading or in error. It is known, for example, that ancient priests and kings sometimes altered records for their own purposes.⁷

Again, the facts are concealed. Though it is true that ancient scribes sometimes distorted history in order to glorify their kings and gods, scholars agree that, although such distortion is found in *Assyrian* royal inscriptions and other documents, *Neo-Babylonian scribes did not distort history in this way*. This was also pointed out in Chapter 3 (section B-1-b) of the present work, where A. K. Grayson, a well-known authority on Babylonian historical records, was quoted as saying:

Unlike the Assyrian scribes the Babylonians neither fail to mention Babylonian defeats nor do they attempt to change them into victories.⁸

Of the Neo-Babylonian *chronicles* Grayson says that they “contain a reasonably reliable and representative record of important events in the period with which they are concerned,” and “within the boundaries of their interest, the writers are quite objective and impartial.”⁹ Of the Babylonian *royal inscriptions* (such as the Nabonidus’ stela) Grayson remarks that they are “primarily records of building activity and on the whole seem to be reliable.”¹⁰

The scribal distortion of history, then, refers to Assyrian, but not to Neo-Babylonian history, a fact which is *concealed* in the Watch Tower Society’s “Appendix” to “*Let Your Kingdom Come*”.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

8 A. K. Grayson, “Assyria and Babylonia,” *Orientalia*, Vol. 49:2, 1980, p. 171.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 170, 171.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

The next argument advanced by the Society in the “Appendix” is that, “even if the discovered evidence is accurate, it might be misinterpreted by modern scholars or be incomplete so that *yet undiscovered material could drastically alter the chronology of the period.*”¹¹

Evidently the Watch Tower scholars realize that as of now all the evidence discovered since the middle of the 19th century unanimously points to 587 B.C.E. instead of 607 as the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. Among the tens of thousands of discovered documents from the Neo-Babylonian era they have not been able to find the slightest support for their 607 B.C.E. date—hence, the reference to “*yet undiscovered material.*” A chronology that has to be based on “*yet undiscovered material,*” because it is demolished by the *discovered* material, is resting on a weak foundation indeed. If an idea, refuted by an overwhelming mass of *discovered* evidence, is to be retained because it is hoped that “*yet undiscovered material*” will support it, *all* ideas, however false, could be retained on the same principle. But it should be remembered that such a faith is not founded upon “the evident demonstration of realities though not beheld” (Hebrews 11:1); it is founded solely upon wishful thinking.

If it really were true that (1) “no historian can deny the possibility that the present picture of Babylonian history might be misleading or in error,” that (2) “priests and kings sometimes altered” the Neo-Babylonian historical records, that (3) “even if the discovered evidence is accurate, it might be misinterpreted by modern scholars or be incomplete,” and that (4) “*yet undiscovered material could drastically alter the chronology of the period,*” what reason do we have for accepting *any* date from the Neo-Babylonian era established by historians—for example 539 B.C.E. as the date for the fall of Babylon? This date, too, has been established *solely* by the aid of secular documents of the same type as those which have established 587 B.C.E. as the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. And of the two dates, 587 has much better support than 539 B.C.E.!¹²

If 587 B.C.E. is to be rejected for the above-mentioned reasons, the 539 B.C.E. date should also be rejected for the same, if not stronger, reasons. Yet the Watch Tower Society not only accepts the 539 B.C.E. date as reliable, but even puts so much trust in it that it

11 “*Let Your Kingdom Come,*” p. 187.

12 This was thoroughly demonstrated earlier in Chapter 2.

has made it *the very basis of its Bible chronology!*¹³ If its reasons for rejecting the 587 B.C.E. date are valid, they are equally valid for the 539 B.C.E. date, too. To reject one date and retain the other is not only inconsistent; it is a sad example of scholastic dishonesty.

A-2: Misrepresentation of scholars

In support of their reasons for rejecting the Neo-Babylonian chronology established by historians, a well-known authority on ancient Near Eastern history is referred to.

“Evidently realizing such facts,”—that the present picture of Babylonian history might be in error, that ancient priests and kings might have altered the ancient Neo-Babylonian records, and that yet undiscovered material could drastically alter the chronology of the period:

Professor Edward F. Campbell, Jr., introduced a chart, which included Neo-Babylonian chronology, with the caution: “It goes without saying that these lists are provisional. The more one studies the intricacies of the chronological problems in the ancient Near East, the less he is inclined to think of any presentation as final. For this reason, the term *circa* [about] could be used even more liberally than it is.”¹⁴

This quotation is taken from a chapter written by Edward F. Campbell, Jr., which first appeared in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East (BANE)*, a work edited by G. Ernest Wright and published by Routledge and Kegan Paul of London, in 1961. The Watch Tower Society did not mention, however, that the chart referred to in this work covers the chronologies of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Assyria and Babylon from *c. 3800 B.C.E. to the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E.*, and although the term *circa* is placed before many of the reigns given in the lists for this long period, *no circas are placed before any of the reigns given for the kings of the Neo-Babylonian period!*

13 As was pointed out above in Chapter 2, from 1955 up to about 1971 the date 539 was termed an “absolute date” in Watch Tower publications. When it was discovered that this date did not have the support that Watch Tower scholars imagined, they dropped this term. In *Aid to Bible Understanding*, page 333 (= *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 459), 539 is called “a pivotal point.” And in “*Let Your Kingdom Come*” it is stated only that “historians calculate,” “hold,” or “accept” that Babylon fell in October 539 B.C.E. (pp. 136, 186, 189). Yet the Society still anchors its whole “Bible chronology” to this date.

14 “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” p. 187.

The question is: When Professor Campbell, in cooperation with Professor David N. Freedman, prepared the chronological lists in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, did he then feel that “the present picture of Babylonian history might be misleading or in error” when it comes to the *Neo-Babylonian* era? Did he think there was any possibility that “ancient priests and kings sometimes altered” the *Neo-Babylonian* records “for their own purposes”? Was he, for whatever reason, prepared to put the term *circa* before any of the reigns of the *Neo-Babylonian* kings? In other words, did the Watch Tower Society give a correct presentation of the views of Campbell and Freedman?

When these questions were put to Dr. Campbell, he wrote in reply:

As perhaps you will have concluded, I am dismayed at the use made of Noel Freedman’s and my chronological lists by the Watch Tower Society. I fear that some earnest folk will reach for any straw to support their already-arrived-at conclusions. This is most certainly a case of doing just that.

Let me first explain that the division of responsibility for the chronological charts in *BANE* assigned the larger Near Eastern chronology to me and the Biblical dates to Professor David Noel Freedman, now of the University of Michigan. We did indeed talk about the *caveats* we placed before our charts, but there was absolutely no intent to suggest that there was leeway of as much as twenty years for the dates relating [to] Babylonia and Judah. I am fairly confident that Dr. Freedman makes explicit somewhere in the apparatus of the *BANE* chapter that the 587/6 date can be off by no more than one year, while the 597 date is one of the very few *secure* dates in our whole chronological repertoire. I know that he remains convinced of this, as do I. There is not a shred of evidence that I know of to suggest even the possibility that the dates in The Babylonian Chronicle have been altered by priests or kings for pious reasons. I am in hearty agreement with Grayson.¹⁵

15 Letter received from Dr. Edward F. Campbell, Jr., dated August 9, 1981. The reason for uncertainty among scholars as to whether Jerusalem was desolated in 587 or 586 B.C.E. stems from the Bible, not extra-biblical sources. All scholars agree in dating Nebuchadnezzar’s eighteenth regnal year to 587/86 B.C.E. (Nisan to Nisan). The Bible dates the desolation to Nebuchadnezzar’s *nineteenth* regnal year at 2 Kings 25:8 and Jeremiah 52:12 (the latter passage being an almost literal repetition of the former), but to his *eighteenth* year at Jeremiah 52:29. This discrepancy may be solved if a nonaccession year system is postulated for the kings of Judah. (See the section, “Methods of reckoning regnal years,” in the Appendix for Chapter 2 below). The 597 B.C.E. date for the earlier capture of Jerusalem and the deportation of Jehoiachin, says Dr. Campbell, is one of the very few secure historical dates recognized by scholars. The reason is the exact synchronism between the Bible and the Babylonian Chronicle at this point. — See the two sections, “The ‘third year of Jehoiakim’ (Daniel 1:1-2)” and “Chronological tables covering the seventy years,” in the Appendix for Chapter 5 that follows.

Dr. Campbell forwarded the questions put to him to Dr. Freedman, to give the latter an opportunity to express his views. Freedman had the following to say on the matter:

. . . I agree entirely with everything that Dr. Campbell has written to you. It is true that there are some uncertainties about biblical chronology for this period, but those uncertainties stem from confusing and perhaps conflicting data in the Bible, and have nothing to do with the chronological information and evidence for the Neo-Babylonian period from cuneiform inscriptions and other non-biblical sources. This is one of the best-known periods of the ancient world, and we can be very sure that the dates are correct to within a year or so, and many of the dates are accurate to the day and month. There is therefore absolutely no warrant for the comments or judgments made by the Watchtower Society based on a statement about our uncertainty. What I had specifically in mind was the disagreement among scholars as to whether the fall of Jerusalem should be dated in 587 or 586. Eminent scholars disagree on this point, and unfortunately we do not have the Babylonian chronicle for this episode as we do for the capture of Jerusalem in 597 (that date is now fixed exactly). But it is only a debate about one year at most (587 or 586), so it would have no bearing upon the views of the Jehovah's Witnesses who apparently want to rewrite the whole history of the time and change the dates rather dramatically. There is no warrant whatever for that.¹⁶

Thus the Watch Tower Society, in its attempt to find support for the 607 B.C.E. date, misrepresented the views of Dr. Campbell and Dr. Freedman. Neither of them believes that ancient priests or kings might have "altered records" from the Neo-Babylonian period, or that "yet undiscovered material could drastically alter the chronology of the period." And neither of them is prepared to put the term *circa* before any of the reigns given in their lists for the kings of the Neo-Babylonian era.

The only uncertainty they point to is whether the date for the desolation of Jerusalem should be set at 587 or 586 B.C.E., and this uncertainty does not come from any errors or obscurities in the extra-biblical sources, but from the seemingly conflicting figures given in the Bible, evidently its references to Jerusalem's destruction as taking place, in one case, in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year, and, in another, in his nineteenth year.—Jeremiah 52:28, 29; 2 Kings 25:8.

16 Letter received from Dr. David N. Freedman, dated August 16, 1981.

A-3: Misrepresentation of ancient writers

The last two pages of the “Appendix” to “*Let Your Kingdom Come*” are devoted to a discussion of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy years.¹⁷ All arguments in this section have been thoroughly refuted in Chapter 5 of the present work, “The Seventy Years for Babylon” (which corresponds to chapter 3 of the first edition), to which the reader is directed. Only a few points will be made here.

Against Berossus’ statement that Nebuchadnezzar took Jewish captives in his accession year, shortly after the battle at Carchemish (see Chapter 5 above, section A-4), it is argued that “there are no cuneiform documents supporting this.”¹⁸ But the Watch Tower Society *fails to mention that Berossus’ statement is clearly supported by the most direct reading of Daniel 1:1-6.*¹⁹

Daniel reports that “in the third year of the kingship of Jehoiakim” (corresponding to the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar; see Jeremiah 25:1) Nebuchadnezzar took a tribute from Judah, consisting of utensils from the temple and also “some of the sons of Israel and of the royal offspring and of the nobles,” and brought them to Babylonia. (Daniel 1:1-3, NW) It is true that the Babylonian Chronicle does not specifically mention these Jewish captives. It does mention, however, that Nebuchadnezzar, in his accession year, “marched about victoriously in Hattu,” and that “*he took the vast booty of Hattu to Babylon.*”²⁰ Most probably captives from the Hattu territory were included in this “vast booty,” as is also pointed out by Professor Gerhard Larsson:

It is certain that this “heavy tribute” consisted not only of treasure *but also of prisoners from the conquered countries.* To refrain from doing so would have been altogether too alien from the customs of the kings of Babylon and Assyria.²¹

Thus, although the Babylonian Chronicle does not specifically mention the (probably very small) Jewish deportation in the accession

17 “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” pp. 188, 189.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

19 See the section, “The ‘third year of Jehoiakim’ (Daniel 1:1-2)” in the Appendix for Chapter 5 below.

20 A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), p. 100.

21 Gerhard Larsson, “When did the Babylonian Captivity Begin?,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 18 (1967), p. 420.

year of Nebuchadnezzar, it strongly indicates this to have taken place, in agreement with the *direct* statements of Daniel and Berossus.

Further, it is to be noticed that the same Babylonian chronicle (BM 21946) speaks of the vast booty taken to Babylon in the *seventh* year of Nebuchadnezzar in similar laconic terms. Although it is known from the Bible (2 Kings 24:10-17; Jeremiah 52:28) that this booty included *thousands of Jewish captives*, the chronicle does not mention anything about this but just says:

A king of his own choice he [Nebuchadnezzar] appointed in the city (and) *taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon.*²²

If, therefore, the silence of the cuneiform documents about the deportation of Jewish captives in the *accession* year of Nebuchadnezzar indicates, as the “Appendix” of “*Let Your Kingdom Come*” implies, that it did not take place, the silence about the deportation in his *seventh* year would indicate that this one did not take place either. However, since the Bible mentions both deportations, the Babylonian chronicle evidently includes them in the “vast booty” or tribute taken to Babylon at both occasions.

The Society finds another argument against a deportation in the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 52:28-30:

More significantly, Jeremiah 52:28-30 carefully reports that Nebuchadnezzar took Jews captive in his seventh year, in his 18th year and his 23rd year, *not* his accession year.²³

This argument, however, presupposes that Jeremiah 52:28-30 contains a *complete* record of the deportations, which it clearly does not. The sum total of Jewish captives taken in the three deportations referred to in the passage is given in verse 30 as “four thousand and six hundred.” However, 2 Kings 24:14 gives the number of those deported during *only one of these deportations* as “ten thousand” (and perhaps 8,000 more in verse 16, if these are not included in the first number)!

Different theories have been proposed to explain this discrepancy, none of which may be regarded as more than a guess. The Watch

22 A. K. Grayson, *op. cit.*, p. 102. (Emphasis added.)

23 “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” p. 188.

Tower Society's Bible dictionary *Insight on the Scriptures*, for instance, states that the figures at Jeremiah 52:28-30 "apparently refers to those of a certain rank, or to those who were family heads."²⁴ The *New Bible Dictionary* holds that "the difference in figures is doubtless due to different categories of captives being envisaged."²⁵ All agree that Jeremiah 52:28-30 does not give a complete number of those deported, and some commentators also suggest that not all deportations are mentioned in the text.²⁶

At least the deportation in the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar described by Daniel is not mentioned by Jeremiah—which does not prove that it did not take place. The reason why it is not included among the deportations enumerated in Jeremiah 52:28-30 most probably is that it was a small deportation only, consisting of Jews chosen from among "the royal offspring and of the nobles" with the intention of using them as servants at the royal palace. (Daniel 1:3-4) The important thing is that Daniel, *independently of Berossus*, mentions this deportation in the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar.

Against the clear statements of both Daniel and Berossus, the Watch Tower Society refers to the Jewish historian Josephus, who claims that, in the year of the battle of Carchemish (during Nebuchadnezzar's accession year), Nebuchadnezzar conquered all of Syria-Palestine "excepting Judea."²⁷ The Watch Tower publication argues that this conflicts with the claim that the 70-year servitude began in that accession year. Josephus wrote this more than 600 years after Daniel and almost 400 years after Berossus. Even if he were right, this would not contradict the conclusion that the *servitude* of the nations surrounding Judah began in the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah's prophecy clearly applies the servitude, not to the Jews, but to "these nations" (Jeremiah 25:11), that is, the nations surrounding Judah. (See Chapter 5 above, section A-1.) In fact, Josephus even *supports* the conclusion that these nations became subservient to Nebuchadnezzar in his accession year, as he states that the king of Babylon at that time "took all

24 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (1988), p. 415.

25 *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edition, ed. by J. D. Douglas *et al* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 630.

26 See Albertus Pieters' discussion in *From the Pyramids to Paul* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1935), pp. 184-189.

27 "Let Your Kingdom Come," p. 188, quoting from Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* X, vi, 1.

Syria, as far as Pelusium, excepting Judea.” Pelusium lay on the border of Egypt.

Dr. E. W. Hengstenberg, in his thorough discussion of Daniel 1:1ff., gives the following comment on the expression “excepting Judea” in Josephus’ *Antiquities* X, vi, 1:

It should not be thought that Josephus got the *parex tes Ioudaias* [excepting Judea] from a source no longer available to us. What follows shows clearly that he just derived it from a misunderstanding of the passage at 2 Kings 24:1. As he erroneously understood the three years mentioned there as the interval between the two invasions, he thought that no invasion could be presumed before the 8th year of Jehoiakim.²⁸

However, the translation of *parex tes Ioudaias* as “excepting Judea” is a mistranslation. *Parex* does not mean “except for” [in the meaning of “excluding”], but “aside from”, as pointed out in the journal *Historia*, Vol. 18 (1969), pages 5 and 6. So what Josephus really said was that the king of Babylon “took all Syria, as far as Pelusium, aside from [i.e. in addition to] Judea.”

The Watch Tower Society next quotes two passages from Josephus’ works in which the seventy years are described as seventy years of *desolation* (*Antiquities* X, ix, 7, and *Against Apion*, I, 19).²⁹ But they conceal the fact that Josephus, in his last reference to the period of Jerusalem’s desolation, states that *the desolation lasted for fifty years, not seventy!* The statement is found in *Against Apion* I, 21, where Josephus quotes Berossus’ statement on the Neo-Babylonian reigns, and says:

This statement is both correct and in accordance with our books [that is, the Holy Scriptures]. For in the latter it is recorded that Nabochodonosor in the eighteenth year of his reign devastated our temple, that *for fifty years it ceased to exist*, that in the second year of

28 Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, *Die Authentie des Daniels und die Integrität des Sacharjah* (Berlin, 1831), p. 57. Translated from the German.

29 Josephus mentions the seventy years five times in his works, viz., at *Antiquities* X, 7, 3; X, 9, 7; XI, 1, 1; XX, 10, 2; and *Against Apion* I, 19. In these passages the seventy years are alternately referred to as a period of slavery, captivity, or desolation, extending from the destruction of Jerusalem until the first year of Cyrus.

Cyrus the foundations were laid, and lastly that in the second year of the reign of Darius it was completed.³⁰

In support of this statement Josephus quotes, not only the figures of Berossus, but also the records of the Phoenicians, which give the same length for this period. Thus in this passage Josephus contradicts and refutes his earlier statements on the length of the period of desolation. Is it really honest to quote Josephus in support of the idea that the desolation lasted for seventy years, but conceal the fact that he in his latest statement on the length of the period argues that it lasted for fifty years? It is quite possible, even probable, that in this last passage he *corrected* his earlier statements about the length of the period.

The translator of Josephus, William Whiston, wrote a special dissertation on Josephus' chronology, entitled "Upon the Chronology of Josephus," which he included in his publication of Josephus' com-

30 Josephus' *Against Apion* I, 21 is here quoted from the translation of H. St. J. Thackeray, published in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1993 reprint of the 1926 edition), pp. 224-225. Some defenders of the Watch Tower Society's chronology claim that there is a textual problem with the "fifty years," pointing out that some manuscripts have "seven years" instead of "fifty" at I, 21, which some earlier scholars felt could be a corruption for "seventy." Modern textual critics, however, have demonstrated that this conclusion is wrong. It has been shown that all extant Greek manuscripts of *Against Apion* are later copies of a Greek manuscript from the twelfth century C.E., *Laurentianus 69, 22*. That the figure "seven" in these manuscripts is corrupt is agreed upon by all modern scholars. Further, it is universally held by all modern textual critics that the best and most reliable witnesses to the original text of *Against Apion* are found in the quotations by the church fathers, especially by Eusebius, who quotes extensively and usually literally and faithfully from Josephus' works. *Against Apion* I, 21 is quoted in two of Eusebius' works: (1) in his *Preparation for the Gospel*, I, 550, 18-22, and (2) in his *Chronicle* (preserved only in an Armenian version), 24, 29-25, 5. Both of these works have "50 years" at I, 21. The most important of the two works is the first, of which a number of manuscripts have been preserved from the tenth century C.E. onwards. All modern critical editions of the Greek text of *Against Apion* have "fifty" (Greek, *pentēkonta*) at *Against Apion* I, 21, including those of B. Niese (1889), S. A. Naber (1896), H. St. J. Thackeray (1926), and T. Reinach & L. Blum (1930). Niese's critical edition of the Greek text of *Against Apion* is still regarded as the standard edition, and all later editions are based on—and improvements of—his text. A new critical textual edition of all the works of Josephus is presently being prepared by Dr. Heintz Schreckenberg, but it will probably take many years still before it is ready for publication. Finally, it should be observed that Josephus' statement about the "fifty years" at *Against Apion* I, 21 is preceded by his presentation of Berossus' figures for the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings, and these figures show there was a period of *fifty years, not seventy*, from the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar to the second year of Cyrus. Josephus himself emphasizes that Berossus' figures are "both correct and in accordance with our books." Thus the context, too, *requires* the "fifty years" at *Against Apion* I, 21.

plete works as *Appendix V*.³¹ In this careful study Whiston points out that often in the later parts of his works, Josephus attempted to *correct* his earlier figures. Thus he demonstrates that Josephus first gives the length of the period from the Exodus to the building of the temple as 592 years, which figure he later changed to 612.³² The next period, from the building of the temple to its destruction, he first gives as 466 years, which he later “corrected” to 470.³³

Of the seventy years, which Josephus first reckons from the destruction of the temple to the return of the Jewish exiles in the first year of Cyrus, Whiston says that “it is certainly Josephus’ own calculation,” and that the 50 years for this period given in *Against Apion* I, 21, “may probably be his own correction in his old age.”³⁴

If this is the case, Josephus might even be quoted as an argument *against* the application of the seventy years made by the Watch Tower Society. In any case, it seems obvious that his statements on the seventy years cannot be used as an argument against Berossus in the way the Society does. Josephus’ last figure for the length of the desolation period *is in complete agreement with Berossus’ chronology, and Josephus even emphasizes this agreement!*³⁵

In addition to Josephus, the Watch Tower Society also refers to *Theophilus of Antioch*, who wrote a defense of Christianity towards the end of the second century C.E. As the Society points out, he commenced the seventy years with the destruction of the temple.³⁶ But the Watch Tower writers conceal the fact that Theophilus was confused about the *end* of the period, as he first places this in the “second year” of Cyrus (537/36 B.C.E.) and then in the “second year . . . of Darius” (520/19 B.C.E.).³⁷

Some other early writers, including Theophilus’ contemporary, *Clement of Alexandria* (c. 150-215 C.E.), also ended the seventy

31 *Josephus’ Complete Works*, translated by William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978), pp. 678-708. Whiston’s translation was originally published in 1737.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 684, § 14.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 686, § 19.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 688, 689, § 23.

35 *Against Apion* I, 20-21.

36 “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” p. 188.

37 On Theophilus’ application of the seventy years, see A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprinted 1979), p. 119. Theophilus probably based his terminal date of the seventy years on Ezra 4:24, confusing Darius Hystaspes with “Darius the Mede” of Daniel 5:31 and 9:1-2.

years “in the second year of Darius Hystaspes” (520/19 B.C.E.), which would place the desolation of Jerusalem about 590/89 B.C.E.³⁸

Eusebius in his chronicle (published c. 303 C.E.) adopted Clement’s view, but also tries another application, starting with the year in which Jeremiah began his activity, forty years prior to the desolation of Jerusalem, and he ends the seventy years in the first year of Cyrus, which he sets at c. 560 B.C.E. *Julius Africanus*, in c. 221 C.E., applies the seventy years to the period of Jerusalem’s desolation, the end of which he, like Eusebius later, erroneously dates to c. 560 B.C.E. It is very obvious that these early Christian writers did not have access to sources that could have helped them to establish an exact chronology for this ancient period.

The Watch Tower Society’s use of ancient writers then, is demonstrably very selective. They quote Josephus on the seventy years of desolation, at the same time concealing the fact that he finally gives fifty years for the period. Their reference to Theophilus reflects the same methods: He is quoted, not because he really presents evidence that supports them, but because his calculation to some extent agrees with theirs. Other contemporary Christian writers, whose calculations differ from theirs, are ignored. This procedure is a clear misrepresentation of the full body of evidence from the various ancient writers who discussed the matter at hand.

A-4: Misrepresentation of the Biblical evidence

In its further discussion of the seventy years, the Watch Tower Society attempts to show that, even if the historical evidence is against their application of the period, the Bible is on their side. First, at the top of page 188 of “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” they state, categorically, that “we believe that the most direct reading of Jeremiah 25:11 and other texts is that the 70 years would date from when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and left the land of Judah desolate.”

The simple truth is, however, that the Society bluntly refuses to accept the most natural understanding of Jeremiah 25:11 and a number

38 *Ibid.*, p. 329. This application of the seventy years may have been influenced by Rabbinic views. Referring to the Rabbinic chronicle *Seder Olam Rabbah* (SOR), Dr. Jeremy Hughes points out that “later Jewish tradition reckoned 52 years for the Babylonian exile (SOR 27) and 70 years as the interval between the destruction of the first temple and the foundation of the second temple, with this event dated in the second year of *Darius* (SOR 28; cf. Zc 1.12).” The 70 year-period was “divided into 52 years of exile and 18 years from the return to the foundation of the second temple (SOR 29).” —Jeremy Hughes, *Secrets of the Times* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 41 and 257.

of other texts related to this subject.³⁹ As was discussed in Chapter 5, the most direct reading of Jeremiah 25:11 shows the seventy years to be a period of *servitude, not desolation*: “These nations shall *serve* the king of Babylon seventy years.” (NASB) It was further pointed out that the other text in Jeremiah referring to the seventy years, Jeremiah 29:10, confirms this understanding. The most direct reading of the best and most literal translation of this text shows those “seventy years” to be a reference to the Babylonian rule: “When seventy years have been completed *for Babylon*.” (NASB) Both texts clearly refer to Babylon, not Jerusalem.

If the seventy years refer to *the Babylonian rule*, as these verses show, this period ended with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E.; and this is directly stated at Jeremiah 25:12: “Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation.” (NRSV) As this punishment took place in 539 B.C.E., the end of the seventy years cannot be extended beyond that date, either to 537 B.C.E. or any other date, as that would be in conflict with a direct reading of Jeremiah 25:12.⁴⁰

There cannot be any reasonable doubt about the matter: The most direct reading of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10) is in clear conflict with the application that the Watch Tower Society gives to the seventy years. In spite of this, it boldly declares:

But the Bible itself provides even more telling evidence against the claim that the 70 years began in 605 B.C.E. and that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587/6 B.C.E.⁴¹

What “telling evidence”? This:

As mentioned, if we were to count from 605 B.C.E., the 70 years would reach down to 535 B.C.E. However, the inspired Bible writer Ezra reported that the 70 years ran until “the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia,” who issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland.⁴²

But did Ezra really report that? As was shown in the discussion of 2 Chronicles 36:21-23 in Chapter 5, Ezra *does not* clearly indicate

39 As is shown in the Appendix for Chapter 5, “The ‘third year of Jehoiakim’ (Daniel 1:1-2),” these texts also include Daniel 1:1-2 and 2:1.

40 For a full discussion of the texts dealing with the seventy years, see Chapter 5 of the present work.

41 “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” pp. 188-189.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

that the seventy years ended “in the first year of Cyrus,” or in 537, as the Watch Tower Society holds. On the contrary, such an understanding of his words would be in direct conflict with Jeremiah 25:12, where the seventy years are ended in 539 B.C.E.! This scripture provides the most telling evidence *against* the claim that the seventy years ended in 537 B.C.E. or in any other year after 539.

It is true that in the original manuscript of *The Gentile Times Reconsidered* (sent to the Society in 1977), one of the possible applications of the seventy years considered was that they could be counted from 605 to 536/35 B.C.E. But this application was presented as a less likely alternative. In the published editions of the work this suggestion has been omitted because, like the application of the period advocated by the Watch Tower Society, it was found to be in clear conflict with Jeremiah’s prophecy. In discussing this application, the Society argues that “there is no reasonable way of stretching Cyrus’ first year from 538 down to 535 B.C.E.”⁴³ As the application discussed did not imply this, and as I am not aware of any other modern commentator that attempts to stretch Cyrus’ first year “down to 535 B.C.E.,” this statement seems to be nothing but a “straw man” created by the Watch Tower Society itself. Although an argument directed against such a fabricated “straw man” may easily knock it down, the argument completely misses the real target.⁴⁴

Finally, the Watch Tower Society claims,

... we are willing to be guided primarily by God’s Word rather than by a chronology that is based principally on secular evidence or that disagrees with the Scriptures. It seems evident that the easiest and most direct understanding of the various Biblical statements is that the 70 years began with the complete desolation of Judah after Jerusalem was destroyed.⁴⁵

Again, these statements tend to give the impression that there is a conflict between the Bible and the secular evidence on the seventy

43 *Ibid.*

44 Most commentators end the seventy years either with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., with Cyrus’ decree in 538, with the return of the first Jewish remnant to Palestine in 538 or 537 (Ezra 3:1-2), or with the commencing of the reconstruction of the temple in 536 (Ezra 3:8-10). (Cf. Professor J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, the 1980 reprint of the 1973 edition, p. 339.) Curiously, these alternatives (except for the Watch Tower Society’s own 537 B.C.E. date) are not even mentioned in the “Appendix” to “*Let Your Kingdom Come*”!

45 “*Let Your Kingdom Come*,” p. 189.

years, and that the Watch Tower Society faithfully stands for the Bible against secular evidence. But nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, biblical and historical data are in good agreement on the period under discussion. Here, historical and archaeological discoveries, as in so many other cases, *uphold and confirm* biblical statements. On the other hand the interpretation of the seventy-year period given by the Watch Tower Society *does* conflict with facts established by secular evidence. As has been clearly demonstrated above and in Chapter 5, it is also in flagrant conflict with the “easiest and most direct understanding of the various Biblical statements” on the seventy years, such as Jeremiah 25: 11-12; 29:10; Daniel 1:1-6; 2:1; and Zechariah 1:7, 12, and 7:1-5.

The *real* conflict, therefore, is not between the Bible and secular evidence, but between the Bible and secular evidence on the one hand, and the Watch Tower Society on the other. As its application of the seventy years is in conflict both with the Bible and the historical facts, it has nothing to do with reality *and merits rejection by all sincere Christians*.

SUMMARY

It has been amply demonstrated above that the Watch Tower Society in its “Appendix” to “*Let your Kingdom Come*” does not give a fair presentation of the evidence against their 607 B.C.E. date:

(1) Its writers misrepresent *historical evidence* by omitting from their discussion nearly half of the evidence presented in the first edition of this work (the Hillah stele, the diary BM 32312, and contemporary Egyptian documents) and by giving some of the other lines of evidence only a biased and distorted presentation. They erroneously indicate that priests and kings might have altered historical documents (chronicles, royal inscriptions, etc.) from the Neo-Babylonian era, in spite of the fact that all available evidence shows the opposite to be true.

(2) They misrepresent *authorities on ancient historiography* by quoting them out of context and attributing to them views and doubts they do not have.

(3) They misrepresent *ancient writers* by concealing the fact that Berossus is supported by the most direct reading of Daniel 1:1-6, by quoting Josephus when he talks of seventy years of desolation without mentioning that in his last work he changed the length of the period to *fifty* years, and by referring to the opinion of the second century bishop,

Theophilus, without mentioning that he ends the seventy years, not only in the second year of Cyrus, but also in the second year of Darius Hystaspes (as did his contemporary Clement of Alexandria and others), thus confusing the two kings.

Finally, (4) they misrepresent *biblical evidence* by concealing the fact that the most direct understanding of the passages dealing with the seventy years shows them to be the period of Neo-Babylonian rule, not the period of Jerusalem's desolation. This understanding is in good agreement with the historical evidence, but in glaring conflict with the application given to it by the Watch Tower Society. It is truly distressing to discover that individuals, upon whose spiritual guidance millions rely, deal so carelessly and dishonestly with facts. Their "Appendix" to "*Let Your Kingdom Come*" in defence of their chronology is nothing but yet one more clever exercise in the art of concealing truth.

It may be asked why the leaders of an organization that constantly emphasizes its interest in "the Truth" in reality find it necessary to suppress the truth and even oppose it?

The obvious reason is that they have no other choice, *as long as they insist that their organization was appointed in the year 1919 as God's sole channel and mouthpiece on earth*. If the 607 B.C.E.—1914 C.E. calculation is abandoned, this claim will fall. Then these leaders will have to admit, at least tacitly, that their organization for the past hundred years has appeared on the world scene in a false rôle with a false message.

When occasionally the questioning of the 607 B.C.E. date has been commented upon in the Watch Tower publications in recent years, the sole defense has been a reference to the "Appendix" of 1981. In *The Watchtower* of November 1, 1986, for example, it is claimed that "in 1981 Jehovah's Witnesses published *convincing evidence* in support of the 607 B.C.E. date." Then the reader is referred to the book "*Let Your Kingdom Come*," pages 127-40 and 186-89.⁴⁶

As the Society's "Appendix" only contains a series of failed attempts to undermine the evidence *against* the 607 B.C.E. date, and as the only "convincing evidence" presented *in support of* the date is a reference to "yet undiscovered material," the Watch Tower writers evidently trust that the majority of the Witnesses are completely unaware of the actual facts. And the leaders of the Watch Tower

46 *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1986, p. 6. (Emphasis added.) A similar reference to the "Appendix" is found in the *Watchtower* of March 15, 1989, p. 22.

When Did the “Seven Times” Really End?

Some people argue that even if the “seven times” are prophetic and even if they last 2,520 years, Jehovah’s Witnesses are still mistaken about the significance of 1914 because they use the wrong starting point. Jerusalem, they claim, was destroyed in 587/6 B.C.E., not in 607 B.C.E. If true, this would shift the start of “the time of the end” by some 20 years. However, in 1981 Jehovah’s Witnesses published convincing evidence in support of the 607 B.C.E. date. (“*Let Your Kingdom Come,*” pages 127-40, 186-9) Besides, can those trying to rob 1914 of its Biblical significance prove that 1934—or any other year for that matter—has had a more profound, more dramatic, and more spectacular impact upon world history than 1914 did?

From *The Watchtower* of November 1, 1986, page 6.

Society want to keep it that way. This is clear from the warnings repeatedly published in the Watch Tower publications against reading literature by former Witnesses who know the facts about their chronology. The leaders of the Watch Tower Society evidently fear that if Witnesses are allowed to be exposed to these facts, they might discover that the basis of the prophetic claims of the movement is nothing but a groundless, unbiblical and unhistorical chronological speculation.

Thus, although the Watch Tower organization probably uses the word “Truth” more often than most other organizations on earth, the fact is that truth has become an enemy of the movement. Therefore it has to be resisted and concealed.

Anybody, of course, be it an individual or an organization, is fully entitled to believe whatever he/she/it prefers to believe, as long as it

does not hurt other people—that flying saucers exist, that the earth is flat, or, in this case, that Jerusalem, contrary to all the evidence, was desolated in 607 B.C.E., and that, somewhere, there may be “yet undiscovered material” to support such views.

If, however, such “believers” are not willing to concede to others the right to disagree with their theories, and instead classify those who no longer are able to embrace their views as godless apostates, condemn them to Gehenna if they do not change their minds, force their friends and relatives to regard them as wicked ungodly criminals that must be avoided, shunned and even hated, explaining that God will shortly exterminate them forever together with the rest of mankind—then it is high time for such “believers” to be held responsible for their views, attitudes and deeds. Any faith leading to such grave consequences for other people must first clearly be shown to be deeply rooted in the actual reality, not just in untenable speculations that can be supported only by “yet undiscovered material.”

B. UNOFFICIAL DEFENSES WRITTEN BY SCHOLARLY WITNESSES

The “Appendix” of 1981 is so far the only official attempt by the Watch Tower Society to overcome the lines of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date presented in *The Gentile Times Reconsidered*. Evidently realizing that the Society’s defense is hopelessly inadequate, some scholarly Jehovah’s Witnesses and members of other Bible Student groups have on their own initiative set about to work out papers in defense of the Gentile times chronology. About half a dozen of such papers have come to my attention. Most of them have been sent to me by Jehovah’s Witnesses who have read them and wanted to know my opinion about them.

A common feature of these papers is their lack of objectivity. They all start with a preconceived idea that has to be defended at all costs. Another common feature is that the papers time and again reflect inadequate research, often resulting in serious mistakes. Unfortunately, some of the papers also repeatedly resort to defaming language. In scholarly publications authors usually treat each other with respect, and critical papers are regarded as constructive contributions to the ongoing debate. Should it not be expected that Christians, too, refrain from using disparaging and disgraceful language in referring to sincere critics? Classifying them as “detractors,” “ridiculers,” and so on, is the very opposite of the attitude recommended by the apostle Peter at 1 Peter 3:15.

As the most important arguments presented in the papers that have come to my attention have already been considered in their proper contexts in the present work, there is no need to deal with them again here. A brief description of the papers composed by two of the most qualified defenders of the Watch Tower Society's chronology may be of interest to readers and is given below.⁴⁷

Rolf Furuli is a Jehovah's Witness who lives in Oslo, Norway. He is a former district overseer and is regarded by Norwegian Witnesses as the leading apologist of Watch Tower teachings in that country, and Witnesses often turn to him with their doctrinal problems. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he has seen it as an important task to "refute" my work on the Watch Tower Society's Gentile times chronology.

Furuli's first attempt of that sort, a paper of more than one hundred pages called "*Den nybabyloniske kronologi og Bibelen*" ("The Neo-Babylonian Chronology and the Bible"), was sent to me by Witnesses in Norway in 1987. Like the Watch Tower Society in its "Appendix," Furuli attempted to undermine the reliability of the historical sources for the Neo-Babylonian chronology presented in my work. To meet the wishes of the Norwegian Witnesses (who had contacted me in secret), I decided to write a reply to Furuli's paper.

The first 31 pages of my reply (which in all finally amounted to 93 pages) were sent in the spring of 1987 to the Norwegian Witnesses, who soon provided Rolf Furuli with a copy, too. Furuli quickly realized that his discussion had been shown to be untenable, and if he continued to circulate his paper, my reply would be circulated, too. To prevent this, he wrote me a letter, dated April 23, 1987, in which he described his paper as just "private notes" which "not in all details" represented his "present views" but was solely an expression of the information available to him at the time it was written. He asked me to destroy my copy of his paper and never quote from it again.⁴⁸

47 According to the information I have, John Albu in New York is probably the Watch Tower chronologist who was most deeply read in Neo-Babylonian history. Some years ago I was told that he has prepared some material in defense of the 607 B.C.E. date, but up till now nothing of it has come to my attention. Albu died in 2004.

48 As I later found out that Furuli continued to share his paper with Witnesses who had begun to question the Society's chronology, I saw no reason to stop the circulation of my reply to it.

A main point in Furuli's argumentation was that the dates on some cuneiform documents from the Neo-Babylonian era create "overlaps" of a few *months* between some of the reigns, which he regarded as proof that extra *years* must be added to these reigns. These "overlaps" are discussed in the Appendix for chapter 3 of the present work.

Three years later Furuli had prepared a second paper aimed at overthrowing the evidence presented in my work. For some time Furuli had been studying Hebrew at the university in Oslo, and in his new paper of 36 pages (dated February 1, 1990) he tried to argue that my discussion of the seventy years “for Babylon” was in conflict with the original Hebrew text.

It was evident, though, that Furuli’s knowledge of Hebrew at that time was very imperfect. Having consulted with a number of leading Scandinavian Hebraists, I wrote a reply of 69 pages, demonstrating in detail that his arguments throughout were based on a misunderstanding of the Hebrew language. As Furuli in his discussion had questioned the reliability of the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT) of the book of Jeremiah, my reply also included a defense of this text against the Greek Septuagint text (LXX) of the book.

In 2003 Furuli published a book of 250 pages on the *Persian* chronology, which is basically a defence of the erroneous Watch Tower dating of the reign of Artaxerxes I. Also included is a section of 18 pages containing another linguistically untenable discussion of the Biblical 70-year passages.⁴⁹

Philip Couture, a Jehovah’s Witness who resides in California, USA, has been a member of the Watch Tower movement since 1947. He has for years been doing research on Neo-Babylonian history and chronology, evidently in order to find some support for the 607 B.C.E. date.

In the autumn of 1989 a friend in New Jersey, U.S.A., sent me a copy of a treatise of 72 pages (which included a section with pages copied from various works) entitled *A Study of Watchtower Neo-Babylonian Chronology in the Light of Ancient Sources*. It was written by an anonymous Watch Tower apologist, and I did not notice until much later that my friend had enclosed a slip of paper stating that the author was Philip Couture.⁵⁰

Although Couture carefully avoids mention of my work, he repeatedly quotes from it or alludes to its contents. The reason is, quite evidently, that he is not supposed to have read what in the Watch Tower publications is classified as “apostate literature.” The only critic that Couture mentions by name is a Seventh-Day

49 Rolf Furuli, *Persian Chronology and the Length of the Babylonian Exile of the Jews* (Oslo: R. Furuli A/S, 2003). For a review of the book, see the Appendix.

50 This was also confirmed to me by Professor John A. Brinkman at the University of Chicago, a letter from whom to Couture had been included in the treatise (with the name of the addressee removed).

Adventist, William MacCarty, who wrote a booklet on the Watch Tower Society's Gentile times calculation back in 1975.⁵¹

Like Furuli's first paper, Couture's treatise is an attempt to undermine the reliability of the historical sources for the Neo-Babylonian chronology. Despite his efforts, however, he fails to come up with even one tenable argument that can move the burden of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date. The reason for this simply is that, however skilful and capable a person may be, it will in the end be impossible for him to find any real and valid support for an idea that is false and therefore basically indefensible.

About half of Couture's treatise deals with *astronomy* and its relation to Neo-Babylonian chronology. Unfortunately, this is an area that Couture, at least at the time he wrote the treatise, was not quite familiar with. Thus, although a separate section of his paper contains a "word of caution" regarding "the use and abuse of eclipses," he himself repeatedly falls into the very pitfalls against which he warns.⁵²

As this and other important points brought up by Couture have been dealt with in various sections of the present work, no further comments on his treatise are given here.⁵³ I do not know if Couture is still prepared to defend his position.

Some of the other papers sent to me present discussions of the Biblical passages on the seventy years, but ignore the historical evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date.⁵⁴ Such a discussion is not, as the author of the paper may intimate, an attempt to defend the Bible

51 William MacCarty, *1914 and Christ's Second Coming* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975).

52 One example of this is his discussion of the lunar eclipse on Ululu 13 of the second year of Nabonidus, described in the royal inscription Nabon. No. 18, which modern astronomers have identified with the one that took place on September 26, 554 B.C.E. (This eclipse is discussed in Chapter 3 of the present work, section B-1-c.) On page 11 of his treatise, Couture claims that "within a few years either direction there are a number of other lunar eclipses which are just as possible." But at *none* of the six alternative eclipses presented by Couture (dating from 563 to 543 B.C.E.) did the moon set heliacally, as is explicitly stated in the inscription, and three of them were *not even visible* in Babylonia! Such errors reveal that Couture, at least at the time he wrote his treatise, did not know how to calculate and identify ancient lunar eclipses.

53 For readers who have read Couture's treatise and are interested in my response to it, a separate, detailed refutation is available at a charge to cover copying costs and postage.

54 One example of this is a book of 136 pages written by Charles F. Redeker, *The Biblical 70 Years. A Look at the Exile and Desolation Periods* (Southfield, Michigan: Zion's Tower of the Morning, 1993). Redeker is a member of the Dawn Bible Students, a conservative Bible Student offshoot of the Watchtower organization formed in the early 1930's in reaction to the many changes of Russell's teachings introduced by the Watch Tower Society's second president, Joseph F. Rutherford.

against attacks founded upon secular sources. Rather, it is an attempt to force the meaning of the Biblical texts to adapt them to *a theory* that is in glaring conflict with all historical sources from the Neo-Babylonian period. The choice in such discussions is not really between the Bible and secular sources; it is between a cherished theory and the historical evidence. As long as the historical reality is ignored, such discussions amount to little more than futile exercises in escapism or wishful thinking.

It is to be expected that the attempts to overcome the historical evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date presented in this work will continue. New discussions, prepared by the Watch Tower Society and/or other defenders of the 607 B.C.E.—1914 C.E. calculation will probably appear in the future. If, at least on the surface, some arguments presented in such discussions appear to have some strength, they will have to be critically examined and evaluated. If it turns out to be necessary, a running commentary on such discussions will be made available on the Internet.