

The Gentile Times Reconsidered

Chronology and Christ's Return

Carl Olof Jonsson



The idea that the "Gentile times" referred to at Luke 21:24 form a period of 2,520 years has led to speculation and disappointment among many who expected Christ's return during the past two centuries. How did this belief originate and develop? What do the historical and Biblical facts show?



FOURTH EDITION • REVISED AND EXPANDED

THE GENTILE TIMES
RECONSIDERED

Carl Olof Jonsson

Fourth Edition
Revised and Expanded

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Because of its subject matter, in this book Bible texts are generally quoted from the *New World Translation* (represented by the abbreviation *NW*), published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. Abbreviations for other translations of Biblical quotations, listed in the text or in the footnotes, are:

ASV *American Standard Version*
KJV *King James Version*
LXX *Septuagint Version* (Greek)
MT *Masoretic text* (Hebrew)
NAB *New American Bible*
NASB *New American Standard Bible*
NEB *New English Bible*
NIV *New International Version*
NKJV *New King James Version*
NRSV *New Revised Standard Version*
RSV *Revised Standard Version*
RV *Revised Version*

THE GENTILE TIMES RECONSIDERED

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FOREWORD

THE SUBJECT of the “Gentile times” is a crucial one today for millions of persons. Christ employed that phrase on a single occasion, as part of his response to his disciples’ question about his future coming and the end of the age. In the centuries that followed, numerous interpretations and time-applications of his expression have developed.

While this book provides a remarkably broad view of the subject, it primarily focuses on one prominent interpretation, one that in a very real sense defines for millions of Jehovah’s Witnesses the time in which they live, supplies what they consider a powerful criterion to judge what constitutes “the good news of the Kingdom” which Christ said would be preached, and acts for them as a touchstone for assessing the validity of any religious organization’s claim to represent Christ and the interests of his Kingdom. An unusual fact is that the foundation of this interpretation is a “borrowed” one, since, as the author documents, it originated nearly a half century before their own religious organization began to appear on the world scene.

Rarely has a single date played such a pervasive and defining role in a religion’s theology as has the date focused on by this interpretation: the date of 1914. But there is a date behind that date and without its support 1914 is divested of its assigned significance. That prior date is 607 B.C.E. and it is the Witness religion’s linking of that date with a particular event—the overthrow of Jerusalem by Babylon—that lies at the crux of the problem.

Those of us who have shared in editing this present work and who were ourselves, more than thirty years ago, part of the writing and editorial staff at the international headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York, can remember the rather stunning effect the arrival of a treatise on the “Gentile times” from Carl Olof Jonsson in Sweden had on us in August of 1977. Not only the volume of the documentation, but even more so the weight of the evidence left us feeling somewhat disconcerted. We were, in effect, at a loss as to what to do with the material. That treatise later formed the basis for

Carl Olof Jonsson's book *The Gentile Times Reconsidered*, now in its fourth printing.

When we today read this book we become the beneficiaries of more than three decades of thorough and careful research. Not just the immense amount of time, but also the means of access to the sources of information that made possible so intensive a study, are something very few of us would have at our disposal. The author has not only made use of such facilities as the British Museum but also has had personal communication with, and assistance from, members of its staff, as also Assyriologists of various countries.

The research takes us back some two and a half millennia in the past. Many of us may think of those times as "primitive" and it thus may come as a surprise to realize how advanced certain ancient peoples were, their writings covering not merely historical events and monarchical dynasties, but also dealing with dated business documents such as ledgers, contracts, inventories, bills of sale, promissory notes, deeds, and similar matters. Their understanding of astronomy, of the progressive and cyclical movements of the lunar, planetary and stellar bodies, in an age unequipped with telescopes, is extraordinary. In the light of the Genesis statement that those celestial luminaries serve to "mark the fixed times, the days and the years," this takes on true significance, particularly in a study in which chronology plays a central role.¹ Nothing, except the modern atomic clocks, surpasses those heavenly bodies in precision in the measurement of time.

Of the quality of the research into the Neo-Babylonian period, Professor of Assyriology Luigi Cagni writes:

Time and again during my reading [of Jonsson's book] I was overcome by feelings of admiration for, and deep satisfaction with, the way in which the author deals with arguments related to the field of Assyriology. This is especially true of his discussion of the astronomy of Babylonia (and Egypt) and of the chronological information found in cuneiform texts from the first millennium B.C.E., sources that hold a central position in Jonsson's argumentation.

. . . His seriousness and carefulness are evidenced in that he has frequently contacted Assyriologists with a special competence in the fields of astronomy and Babylonian chronology, such as Professors H. Hunger, A. J. Sachs, D. J. Wiseman, Mr. C. B. F. Walker at the British Museum and others.

1 Genesis 1:14, *NAB*.

With respect to the subject field I am particularly familiar with, the economic-administrative texts from the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, I can say that Jonsson has evaluated them quite correctly. I put him to the test during the reading of the book. When I finished the reading, I had to admit that he passed the test splendidly.²

Readers of the first or second edition of this book will find much that is new here. Entire sections, including some new chapters have been added. Contributing to the readability of the book is the inclusion of about thirty illustrations, including letters and other documents. Many of the illustrations are rare and will undoubtedly be new to most readers.

The original research behind the book inescapably brought the author on a collision course with the Watch Tower organization and—not unexpectedly—led to his excommunication as an “apostate” or heretic in July 1982. This dramatic story, not told in the first two editions, is now presented in the section of the Introduction titled “The expulsion.”

The discussion of the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian period has been greatly expanded. The seven lines of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date presented in the first two editions have since been more than doubled. The evidence from astronomical texts forms a separate chapter. The burden of evidence presented in Chapters 3 and 4 is indeed enormous and reveals an insurmountable disharmony with, and refutation of, the chronology of the Watch Tower Society for this ancient period.

Despite the wealth of information from ancient secular sources, this book remains primarily Biblical. In the chapter “Biblical and Secular Chronology” it clears up a common and serious misconception as to how we arrive at a “Biblical chronology,” as also the erroneous idea that a rejection of the Watch Tower’s 607 B.C.E. date implies a placing of secular chronology as superior to such “Biblical chronology.”

We are confident that the reading of this unique book will aid many to gain, not only a more accurate knowledge of the past, but also a more enlightened outlook regarding their own time, and increased appreciation of the trustworthiness and historicity of the Scriptures.

The Editors

2 From the preface to the Italian edition of *The Gentile Times Reconsidered* by Luigi Cagni, Professor of Assyriology at the University of Naples, Italy. Professor Cagni was, among other things, a leading expert on the Ebla tablets, the about 16,000 cuneiform texts that have been excavated since 1975 in the royal palace of the ancient city of Ebla (present Arabic name: *Tell Mardikh*) in Syria. Luigi Cagni died in January, 1998.



THE GENTILE TIMES RECONSIDERED

INTRODUCTION

THE DISILLUSIONING and sometimes dramatic process that ended up in the decision to publish this treatise could fill a whole book. Due to considerations of space, however, that background can be only touched upon briefly here.

Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to put great trust in the Watch Tower Society and its leadership. Toward the end of my twenty-six years as an active Jehovah's Witness, however, the signs indicating that such trust was mistaken had mounted. To the very last I had hoped that the leaders of the organization would honestly face the facts respecting their chronology, even if those facts should prove fatal to some of the central doctrines and unique claims of their organization. But when at last I realized that the Society's leaders—apparently for reasons of organizational or “ecclesiastical” policy—were determined to perpetuate what, in the final analysis, amounts to a deception of millions of persons, doing this by suppressing information which they regarded and continue to regard as undesirable, no other course seemed open to me but to publish my findings, thus giving every individual who has a concern for truth an opportunity to examine the evidence and draw his or her own conclusions.

We are each responsible for what we know. If a person has information on hand that others need in order to get a correct understanding of their situation in life—*information that furthermore is withheld from them by their religious leaders*—then it would be morally wrong to remain silent. It becomes his or her duty to make that information available to all who want to know the truth, however this may appear. That is the reason why this book has been published.

The role of chronology in the teaching of the Watch Tower Society

Few people are fully cognizant of the very central role played by chronology in the claims and teachings of the Watch Tower Society. Even many of Jehovah's Witnesses are not fully aware of the indissoluble connection between the Society's chronology and the message they preach from door to door. Confronted with the many evidences against their chronology, some Jehovah's Witnesses tend to downplay it as something they somehow can do without. "Chronology is not so important, after all," they say. Many Witnesses would prefer not to discuss the subject at all. Just how important, then, is the chronology for the Watch Tower organization?

An examination of the evidence demonstrates that *it constitutes the very foundation for the claims and message of this movement.*

The Watch Tower Society claims to be God's "sole channel" and "mouthpiece" on earth. Summing up its most distinctive teachings: it asserts that the kingdom of God was established in heaven in 1914, that the "last days" began that year, that Christ returned invisibly at that time to "inspect" the Christian denominations, and that he finally rejected all of them except the Watch Tower Society and its associates, which he appointed in 1919 as his sole "instrument" on earth.

For about seventy years, the Society employed Jesus' words at Matthew 24:34 about "this generation" to teach clearly and adamantly that the generation of 1914 would positively not pass away until the final end came at the "battle of Armageddon," when every human alive except active members of the Watch Tower organization would be destroyed forever. Thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses of the "1914 generation" fully expected to live to see and to survive that doomsday and then to live forever in paradise on earth.

As decades went by, leaving 1914 ever farther behind, this claim became increasingly difficult to defend. After *80 years* had passed, the claim became virtually preposterous. So, in the November 1, 1995, issue of the *Watchtower* (pages 10 through 21), a new definition of the phrase "this generation" was adopted, one that allowed the organization to "unlink" it from the date of 1914 *as a starting point.* Despite this monumental change, they still retained the 1914 date—in fact they *could not do otherwise* without dismantling their major teachings regarding Christ's "second presence," the start of the "time of the end," and the appointment of their organization as

May 15, 1984

The Watchtower

Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom



1914

The Generation That Will Not Pass Away

1914 — the generation that would not pass away

Christ's unique instrument and God's sole channel on earth. Though now recognizing "this generation" as defined by its *characteristics* rather than by a chronological period (with a particular starting point), they still found a way to include 1914 in their new definition. They accomplished this by including in the definition an arbitrarily added

factor, namely, that the “generation” is composed of “those persons who see the sign of Christ’s presence but fail to mend their ways,” resulting in their destruction. Since the official teaching continues to be that the “sign of Christ’s presence” became visible *from and after 1914*, this allows for the date’s continuing to form a key part of the definition of “this generation.”

All these factors, then, bear testimony to the highly crucial role that 1914 plays in the teaching of the Watch Tower Society. Since the date itself obviously is not stated in Scripture, what is its source?

That date is a product of a chronological calculation, according to which the so-called “times of the Gentiles” referred to by Jesus at Luke 21:24 constitute a period of 2,520 years, beginning in 607 B.C.E. and ending in 1914 C.E.¹ *This calculation is the real basis of the principal message of the movement.* Even the Christian gospel, the “good news” of the kingdom (Matthew 24:14), is claimed to be closely associated with this chronology. The gospel preached by other professed Christians, therefore, has never been the *true gospel*. Said *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1981, on page 17:

Let the honest-hearted person compare the kind of preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom done by the religious systems of Christendom during all the centuries with that done by Jehovah’s Witnesses since the end of World War I in 1918. They are not one and the same kind. That of Jehovah’s Witnesses is really “gospel,” or “good news,” *as of God’s heavenly kingdom that was established by the enthronement of his Son Jesus Christ at the end of the Gentile Times in 1914.* [Italics mine.]

In agreement with this, *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1982, stated that, “of all religions on earth, Jehovah’s Witnesses are the only ones today that are telling the people of earth this ‘good news’.” (Page 10) A Jehovah’s Witness who attempts to tone down the role of chronology in the Society’s teaching simply does not realize that he or she thereby radically undermines the major message of the movement. Such a “toning down” is not sanctioned by the Watch Tower leader-

1 The designations “B.C.E.” (Before the Common Era) and “C.E.” (Common Era) customarily used by Jehovah’s Witnesses, correspond to “B.C.” and “A.D.” They are often used in scholarly literature, especially by Jewish authors, and have been adopted by the Watch Tower Society, as will be seen in the subsequent quotations from the Watch Tower publications. For the sake of consistency, these designations, B.C.E. and C.E., are regularly used in this work, the exception being where material is *quoted* in which the B.C. and A.D. designations are employed.

ship. On the contrary, *The Watchtower* of January 1, 1983, page 12, emphasized that “the ending of the Gentile Times in the latter half of 1914 still stands on a historical basis as *one of the fundamental Kingdom truths to which we must hold today.*”²

The hard reality is that the Watch Tower Society views rejection of the chronology pointing to 1914 as a sin having fatal consequences. That God’s kingdom was established at the end of the “Gentile times” in 1914 is stated to be “the most important event of our time,” beside which “all other things pale into insignificance.”³ Those who reject the calculation are said to incur the wrath of God. Among them are “the clergy of Christendom” and its members, who, because they do not subscribe to that date, are said to have rejected the kingdom of God and therefore will be “destroyed in the ‘great tribulation’ just ahead.”⁴ Members of Jehovah’s Witnesses who openly question or discard the calculation run the risk of very severe treatment. If they do not repent and change their minds, they will be disfellowshipped and classified as evil “apostates,” who will “go, at death, . . . to Gehenna,” with no hope of a future resurrection.⁵ It makes no difference if they still believe in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. When one of the readers of *The Watchtower* wrote and asked, “Why have Jehovah’s Witnesses disfellowshipped (excommunicated) for apostasy

2 Italics and emphasis added. The Watch Tower Society’s former president, Frederick W. Franz, in the morning Bible discussion for the headquarters family on November 17, 1979, stressed even more forcefully the importance of the 1914 date by saying: “The sole purpose of our existence as a Society is to announce the Kingdom established in 1914 and to sound the warning of the fall of Babylon the Great. We have a *special* message to deliver.” (Raymond Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*, Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1991, pp. 32, 33).

3 *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1988, pp. 10, 11.

4 *The Watchtower*, September 1, 1985, pp. 24, 25.

5 *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1982, p. 27. In *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1992, page 12, such dissidents are described as “enemies of God” who are “intensely hating Jehovah.” The Witnesses, therefore, are urged to “hate” them “with a complete hatred.” This exhortation was repeated in *The Watchtower* of October 1, 1993, page 19, where the “apostates” are stated to be so “rooted in evil” that “wickedness has become an inseparable part of their nature.” The Witnesses are even told to ask God to kill them, in imitation of the psalmist David, who prayed of his enemies: “O that you, O God, would slay the wicked one!” In this way the Witnesses “leave it to Jehovah to execute vengeance.” Such rancorous attacks on former members of the organization reflect an attitude that is exactly the reverse of that recommended by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount.—Matthew 5:43-48

some who still profess belief in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ?" the Society answered, among other things:

Approved association with Jehovah's Witnesses requires accepting the entire range of the true teachings of the Bible, including those Scriptural beliefs that are unique to Jehovah's Witnesses. What do such beliefs include? . . . *That 1914 marked the end of the Gentile times and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the heavens, as well as the time for Christ's foretold presence.* [Italics mine]⁶

No one, therefore, who repudiates the calculation that the "Gentile times" expired in 1914, is approved by the Society as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. In fact, even one who *secretly* abandons the Society's chronology and thus may still *formally* be regarded as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, has, in reality, rejected the essential message of the Watch Tower Society and, according to the organization's own criterion, is factually no longer a part of the movement.

How this research began

For one of Jehovah's Witnesses to question the validity of this basic prophetic calculation is, then, no easy matter. To many believers, especially in a closed religious system such as the Watch Tower organization, the doctrinal system functions as a sort of "fortress" inside which they may seek shelter, in the form of spiritual and emotional security. If some part of that doctrinal structure is questioned, such believers tend to react emotionally; they take a defensive attitude, sensing that their "fortress" is under attack and that their security is threatened. This defense mechanism makes it very difficult for them to listen to and examine the arguments on the matter *objectively*. Unwittingly, their need for emotional security has become more important to them than their respect for truth.

To reach behind this defensive attitude so common among Jehovah's Witnesses in order to find open, listening minds is extremely difficult—especially when so basic a tenet as the "Gentile times" chronology is being questioned. For such questioning rocks the very foundations of the Witness doctrinal system and therefore often causes Witnesses at all levels to become belligerently defensive. I have repeatedly experienced such reactions ever since 1977 when I first presented the material in this volume to the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses.

6 *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1986, pp. 30, 31.

It was in 1968 that the present study began. At the time, I was a “pioneer” or full-time evangelist for Jehovah’s Witnesses. In the course of my ministry, a man with whom I was conducting a Bible study challenged me to prove the date the Watch Tower Society had chosen for the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, that is 607 B.C.E. He pointed out that all historians marked that event as having occurred about twenty years later, in either 587 or 586 B.C.E. I was well aware of this, but the man wanted to know the reasons why historians preferred the latter date. I indicated that their dating surely was nothing but a guess, based on defective ancient sources and records. Like other Witnesses, I assumed that the Society’s dating of the desolation of Jerusalem to 607 B.C.E. was based on the Bible and therefore could not be upset by those secular sources. However, I promised the man I would look into the matter.

As a result, I undertook a research that turned out to be far more extensive and thoroughgoing than I had expected. It continued periodically for several years, from 1968 until the end of 1975. By then the growing burden of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date forced me reluctantly to conclude that the Watch Tower Society was wrong.

Thereafter, for some time after 1975, the evidence was discussed with a few close, research-minded friends. Since none of them could refute the evidence demonstrated by the data I had collected, I decided to develop a systematically composed treatise on the whole question which I determined to send to the headquarters of the Watch Tower Society at Brooklyn, New York.

That treatise was prepared and sent to the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1977. The present work, which is based on that document, was revised and expanded during 1981 and then published in a first edition in 1983. During the years that have passed since 1983, many new finds and observations relevant to the subject have been made, and the most important of these have been incorporated in the last two editions. The seven lines of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date presented in the first edition, for example, have now been more than doubled.

Correspondence with the Watch Tower headquarters

In 1977 I began to correspond with the Governing Body concerning my research. It soon became very evident that they were unable to refute the evidence produced. In fact, there was not even an attempt made to do so until February 28, 1980. In the meantime, however,

I was repeatedly cautioned not to reveal my findings to others. For example, in a letter from the Governing Body dated January 17, 1978, the following warning was given:

However, no matter how strong the argumentation may be in support of those views, they must, for the present, be regarded as your personal viewpoint. It is not something that you should talk about or try to advance among other members of the congregation.⁷

And further, in a letter dated May 15, 1980, they stated:

We are sure you appreciate that it would not be appropriate for you to begin to state your views and conclusions on chronology that are different than those published by the Society so as to raise serious questions and problems among the brothers.⁸

I accepted such advice, as I was given the impression that my spiritual brothers at the Watch Tower headquarters needed time to re-examine the whole subject thoroughly. In their first reply to my treatise, dated August 19, 1977, they had stated: “We are sorry that the press of work here has not allowed us to give it the attention we would like to up to the present time.” And in the letter of January 17, 1978, they wrote:

We have not had the opportunity of examining this material as yet, as other urgent matters are occupying our attention. However, we will look into this material when we have the opportunity.... You can be assured that your views will be examined by responsible brothers.... In due course we hope to look into your treatise and evaluate what is contained therein.

Judging from these and similar statements, Watch Tower officials at the Brooklyn headquarters seemed prepared to examine the data presented to them honestly and objectively. In a very short time, however, the whole matter took quite a different course.

Interrogation and defamation

Early in August, 1978, Albert D. Schroeder, a member of the Governing Body, held a meeting in Europe with representatives from

7 Names of the authors of letters from the Watch Tower Society are never given. Instead, internal symbols are used. The symbol “GEA” in the upper left corner of this letter shows that the author was Lloyd Barry, one of the members of the Governing Body.

8 The symbol “EF” means the writer was Fred Rusk of the Writing Department. For the full correspondence, see <http://kristenfrihet.se/english/corr.htm>

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WATCH TOWER
BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY
OF PENNSYLVANIA

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GEA:ESB

January 17, 1978

Carl Olof Jonsson
Hjeltegatan 14
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Sweden

Dear Brother Jonsson:

To hand is your letter of December 12, 1977, and also the treatise that you have prepared entitled "The Gentile Times Re-considered."

We have not had the opportunity of examining this material as yet, as other urgent matters are occupying our attention. However, we will look into this material when we have the opportunity.

We appreciate your sincerity in wanting to set forth your views. However, no matter how strong the argumentation may be in support of these views, they must, for the present, be regarded as your personal viewpoint. It is not something that you should talk about or try to advance among other members of the congregation. We mention this because you state in your letter that several brothers have examined your treatise and that "we are all eagerly looking forward to your comments."

As you can appreciate, what you state in your treatise amounts to a radical departure from the present understanding of chronology by Jehovah's Witnesses. We are sure that you can appreciate that if changes of importance are made they should be made in an orderly way, even as was the case in the first century, with central direction being given. (Acts 15:1, 2) We are also sure that you appreciate that for individuals to advance and advocate such changes would have, not a unifying effect, but a divisive one producing confusion. We mention this to you in view of the fact that the treatise you sent contains a statement on the front page describing it as "prepared by Jehovah's Witnesses, for Jehovah's Witnesses." To say that something is "prepared by Jehovah's Witnesses" implies that it has the sanction of Jehovah's Witnesses as a body, and we are sure you realize that this is not the case with the treatise at hand. This could give a false impression and we are confident that this is not your desire. You can be assured that your views will be examined by responsible brothers, and that if doctrinal change should be made at some time it will come through the proper channels. This is important in preserving the unity of Jehovah's organization.

It is hoped that you will observe the counsel supplied above. In due course we hope to look into your treatise and evaluate what is contained therein.

Please be assured of our warm love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower B. & J. Society
OF PENNSYLVANIA
For the Writing Committee
of the Governing Body

European Watch Tower branch offices. At that meeting, he told the audience that there was a campaign going on both inside the movement and from outside to have the Society's 607 B.C.E.—1914 C.E. chronology overthrown.⁹ *The Society, however, had no intention of abandoning it*, he stated.

Three weeks later, on September 2, I was summoned to a hearing before two representatives of the Watch Tower Society in Sweden, Rolf Svensson, one of the two district overseers in the country, and Hasse Hulth, a circuit overseer. I was told that they had been commissioned by the Society's branch office to hold such a hearing because "the brothers" at the Brooklyn headquarters were deeply concerned about my treatise. Once again I was cautioned not to spread the information I had gathered. Rolf Svensson also told me that the Society did not need or want individual Jehovah's Witnesses to become involved in research of this kind.

Partly as a result of this meeting, I resigned from my position as an elder in the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and also from all my other tasks and assignments in the congregation and the circuit. I did this in the form of a lengthy letter, addressed to the local eldership and the circuit overseer, Hasse Hulth, in which I briefly explained the reasons for the position I had taken. Soon it became widely known among my Witness brothers in different parts of Sweden that I had rejected the chronology of the Society.

In the following months, I and others who had questioned the chronology began to be condemned privately as well as from the platforms of Kingdom Halls (congregational meeting places) and at Witness assemblies or conventions. We were publicly characterized in the most negative terms as "rebellious," "presumptuous," "false prophets," "small prophets who have worked out their own little chronology," and "heretics." We were called "dangerous elements in the congregations," "evil slaves," "blasphemers," as well as "immoral, lawless ones." Privately, some of our Witness brothers, including a number of the Watch Tower Society's traveling representatives, also intimated that we were "demon-possessed," that we had "flooded the Society with criticism" and that we "should have been disfellowshipped long ago." These are just a few examples of the widespread

9 Except for my treatise, which came from inside the movement, Schroeder could have had in mind two non-Witness publications which attack the Society's chronology: *The Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Speculation*, by Edmund C. Gruss (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1972), and *1914 and Christ's Second Coming* by William MacCarty (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975).

defamation, one that has gone on ever since, although no names, for obvious legal reasons, have ever been mentioned publicly.

That such obvious slander was not just a local phenomenon, but had the sanction of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, was evident from the fact that similar statements were printed in *The Watchtower* magazine.¹⁰

This description of the situation that developed has not been given in order to criticize Jehovah's Witnesses as individuals. These people are usually kind and sincere in their belief. The description has rather been given to illustrate how easily an individual may unwittingly fall prey to the irrational, psychological reactions described earlier in this introduction. In a letter to Albert Schroeder, dated December 6, 1978, I described the new turn of events, calling attention to the sad fact that although my treatise had been composed with the greatest thoughtfulness and sent to the Society in all sincerity, I had become the victim of backbiting, vilification and character assassination:

How tragic, then, to observe how a situation develops, where the attention is drawn away from the question raised—the validity of the 607 B.C.E. date—and directed to the person who raised it, and *he*—not the question—is regarded as the problem! How is it possible that a situation of this kind develops in our movement?

The answer to this question, one to which the Society never officially responded, is to be found in the psychological defense mechanism described by Dr. H. Dale Baumbach:

Insecure individuals, when faced with a problem which highlights their insecurity, instinctively respond by attempting to destroy that

10 Abandoning the 607 B.C.E.—1914 C.E. calculation also implies abandoning those interpretations founded upon it such as the idea that God's kingdom was established in 1914 and that Christ's "invisible presence" began in that year. Of Jehovah's Witnesses who cannot embrace such views, *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1979, stated on page 13: "*Lawless persons* have even tried to penetrate the true Christian congregation, arguing that the 'promised presence' of our Lord is not in this day . . . Persons of this kind are included in Jesus' warning recorded at Matthew 7:15-23: 'Be on the watch for the *false prophets* that come to you in sheep's covering, but inside they are ravenous wolves. . . . In that day I will confess to them: I never knew you! Get away from me, you *workers of lawlessness*.'" Further, *The Watchtower* of August 1, 1980, page 19, said: "Peter was also speaking of the danger of being 'led away' by some within the Christian congregation who would become '*ridiculers*,' making light of the fulfillment of prophecies concerning Christ's 'presence' and adopting a *law-defying* attitude toward 'the faithful and discreet slave,' the Governing Body of the Christian congregation and the appointed elders." [Italics mine] See also paragraph 11 on the same page and paragraph 14 on page 20 of the same issue.

which addresses their insecurity or to banish it to the recesses of the mind.¹¹

Awareness of this defense mechanism, it is hoped, will help those readers who are associated with Jehovah's Witnesses to examine the evidence presented in this work with due consideration and an open mind.

Eventually the Watch Tower Society did attempt to refute the evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date, but this was not done until a special representative of the Governing Body in Sweden had written to the Society asking them to provide an answer to *the content* of the treatise sent to them, telling them that the author was still waiting for a reply. This representative was the coordinator of the Society's work in Sweden, Bengt Hanson.

Hanson had paid me a visit on December 11, 1979, to discuss the situation that had developed. During our discussion, he was brought to realize that it was the *evidence* I had presented to the Society against the 607 B.C.E. date—not me, my motives or attitude—that was the real issue. If the evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date was *valid*, this was a problem that should be of equal concern to every Witness in the organization. Under such circumstances, my personal attitude and motives were as irrelevant as those of other Witnesses.

As a result of this, early in 1980, Hanson wrote a letter to the Governing Body explaining the situation, telling them that I was still waiting for a reply to the evidence I had brought against their chronology. And so, at long last, nearly three years after my sending them the research material, in a letter dated February 28, 1980, an attempt was made to tackle *the question* instead of *the questioner*.

The argumentation presented, however, turned out to be largely a repetition of earlier arguments found in various places in the Watch Tower Society's literature, *arguments which had already been demonstrated in the treatise to be unsatisfactory*. In a letter dated March 31, 1980, I answered their arguments and added two new lines of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date. Thus the Society not only failed

11 *Spectrum*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1981, p. 63. (This journal was published by the Associations of Adventist Forums, Box 4330, Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.) The *Awake!* magazine of November 22, 1984, similarly explained that such behaviour is a sign of "a closed mind," saying: "For example, if we are unable to defend our religious views, we may find ourselves lashing out against those who challenge our beliefs, not with logical arguments, but with slurs and innuendos. This smacks of prejudice and of a closed mind." (Page 4; compare also the *Awake!* of May 22, 1990, page 12.)

to defend its position successfully, but the evidence against it also became considerably stronger.

No further attempt to deal with the whole matter was made by the Society until the summer of 1981, when a short discussion of it appeared as an “Appendix” to the book *“Let Your Kingdom Come”* (pages 186-189). This latest discussion added nothing new to the earlier arguments, and to anyone who has carefully studied the subject of ancient chronology, it appears to be no more than a feeble attempt to save an untenable position by concealing facts. This is clearly demonstrated in the last chapter of this present work, titled “Attempts to overcome the evidence.” The contents of the Watch Tower Society’s “Appendix,” however, finally convinced me that *the leaders of this organization were clearly not prepared to let facts interfere with traditional fundamental doctrines.*

“Waiting upon Jehovah”

It may be noted that while the Society’s officers feel perfectly free to publish any argument *in support of* their chronology, they have gone to great lengths to try to keep Jehovah’s Witnesses at large in ignorance of the heavy burden of evidence *against it*. Thus they had not only repeatedly cautioned me not to share my evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date with others, but they have also supported the widespread defamation of any and all Jehovah’s Witnesses who have questioned the organization’s chronology. This mode of procedure is not only unfair towards those who have questioned it; it is also most unfair towards Jehovah’s Witnesses in general. They have a right to hear *both* sides of the issue and learn *all* the facts. That is why I decided to publish *The Gentile Times Reconsidered*.

Interestingly, various arguments have been advanced by representatives of the Watch Tower Society to justify the position that facts and evidence which go contrary to its teachings should not be made known among Jehovah’s Witnesses. One line of reasoning goes as follows: Jehovah reveals the truth *gradually* through his “faithful and discreet slave” class, whom Christ has appointed “over all his belongings.” (Matthew 24:47, NW) This “slave” class expresses itself through those who oversee the publishing and writing of Watch Tower literature. We should, therefore, *wait upon Jehovah*—wait, in other words, until the organization publishes “new truths.” Anyone who “runs ahead” of the organization is therefore *presumptuous*, for he thinks he knows better than “the faithful and discreet slave.”

Such an argument, however, is invalid *if the Society's suppositions regarding Bible chronology are wrong*. How so? Because the very concept that it is possible today to identify a “faithful and discreet slave class,” whom Christ, as the “master” in the parable at Matthew 24:45-47, has appointed “over all his belongings,” rests unequivocally on the *chronological calculation* that the “master” arrived in 1914 and made such an appointment a few years later in 1919. If, as will be shown in this work, the Gentile times *did not* end in 1914, then the basis for claiming that Christ returned in that year disappears, and Watch Tower leaders cannot claim to have been appointed “over all his belongings” in 1919. If this is so, neither can they rightfully claim a divinely-assigned monopoly on publishing “the truth.”

It should also be noted that it is the “master” of the parable who, on his arrival, decides who is “the faithful and discreet slave,” *not the slaves themselves*. So, for a group of individuals to claim—in the “master’s” absence—to be “the faithful and discreet slave,” elevating themselves over all the master’s “belongings,” *is itself grossly presumptuous*. On the other hand, an individual who claims for himself no lofty position can hardly be regarded as presumptuous if he publishes information that contradicts some of the teachings of the Watch Tower Society.

To “wait upon Jehovah,” of course, is the duty of every Christian. Unfortunately, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, like many other apocalyptic movements, has time and again “announced” that the time has come for the fulfillment of God’s prophecies, doing this in each case without regard to God’s own “times and seasons” for their fulfillment. This has been the case ever since the very beginning in the 1870s.

When the leaders of the Watch Tower movement for about 55 years (1876-1931) persistently taught that Christ had arrived invisibly in 1874, were they setting an example of “waiting upon Jehovah”?

When they taught that the “remnant” of Christ’s church would be changed (1 Thessalonians 4:17), first in 1878, then in 1881, then in 1914, then in 1915, then in 1918, and then again in 1925, did they “wait upon Jehovah”?¹²

12 *The Watch Tower*, February 1, 1916, p. 38; September 1, 1916, pp. 264, 265; July 1, 1920, p. 203.

When they taught that the end of the present system of things would come in 1914, then in 1918-20, then in 1925, then about 1941-42, and then again about 1975, were they “waiting upon Jehovah”?¹³

If 1914 is not the terminal point of the “Gentile times” as the Watch Tower Society continues to hold, then the numerous current “prophetic” applications stemming from it are additional proofs that the Society *still* is not prepared to “wait upon Jehovah.” In that light and under such circumstances it seems a bit misplaced to advise others to “wait upon Jehovah.” The one who *genuinely* wants to wait upon Jehovah cannot simply wait until the leaders of the Watch Tower Society are prepared to do that. If, upon careful consideration of the evidence he comes to the conclusion that the Watch Tower Society has produced, within the framework of its chronology, a clearly arbitrary “fulfillment” of Bible prophecy in our time, then he needs to dissociate himself from the persistent attempts made to *impose* that arbitrary position on others as required belief. Then he could rightly be said to be prepared to start “waiting upon Jehovah.”

The expulsion

For over a century the Watch Tower publications have been filled with a massive and continuous criticism of the errors and evils of other Christian denominations. Even if this criticism often has been sweeping and superficial, it has not infrequently also hit the target. The Watch Tower literature often has denounced the intolerance shown in the past by various churches against dissident members. “Christendom has had it fanatics—from people who set themselves on fire in political protest to *individuals acting intolerantly toward those holding different religious views*,” noted *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1987, page 28. This kind of intolerance found a frightening expression in the Inquisition, which was established by the Roman Catholic Church in the 13th century and lasted for over six centuries.

The word “Inquisition” is derived from the latin word *inquisitio*, meaning “examination.” It is briefly described as “a court established by the Roman Catholic Church in order to discover and punish her-

13 *The Time Is At Hand* (= Vol. 2 of the series *Studies in the Scriptures*, published in 1889), pp. 76-78; *The Finished Mystery* (= Vol. 7 of *Studies in the Scriptures*, published in 1917), pp. 129, 178, 258, 404, 542; *Millions Now Living Will Never Die!* (1920), p. 97; *The Watchtower*, Sept. 9, 1941, p. 288; *Awake!*, Oct. 8, 1966, pp. 19, 20; *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1968, pp. 271-272.

etics and apostates.”¹⁴ What was the situation of the people under this intolerant clergy rule? *The Watchtower* of September 1, 1989, explains on page 3:

No one was free to worship as he pleased or to express opinions conflicting with those of the clergy. This clerical intolerance created a climate of fear throughout Europe. The church established the Inquisition to root out individuals who dared to hold different views.

Such statements might give the impression that the Watch Tower Society, in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, acts with tolerance toward members who “hold different religious views” and defends their right to express opinions conflicting with the teachings of the organization. The truth is, however, that this organization takes exactly the same attitude to members holding different religious opinions as did the medieval Catholic Church. “Beware of those who try to put forward their own contrary opinions,” cautioned *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1986, page 17. In answer to the question why Jehovah’s Witnesses have “disfellowshipped (excommunicated) for apostasy some who still profess belief in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ,” the Watch Tower Society said:

Those who voice such an objection point out that many religious organizations claiming to be Christian allow dissident views. . . . However, such examples provide no grounds for our doing the same. . . . Teaching dissident or divergent views is not compatible with true Christianity.¹⁵

The Watch Tower Society has even established examination courts similar to those organized by the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, the only essential difference being that the Society’s “judicial committees” have no legal authority to torture their victims *physically*. I knew that the conclusions I had reached would eventually cause me to be tried and expelled by such a “court of inquisition,” provided that I did not leave the organization of my own accord before that. But I knew, too, that the consequences in both cases would be the same.

After twenty-six years as an active Jehovah’s Witness I was now, in 1982, prepared to leave the Watch Tower organization. It was quite clear to me that this would mean a complete break with the whole

14 The Swedish encyclopaedia *Nordisk Familjebok*, Vol. 11 (Malmö: Förlagshuset Norden AB, 1953), p. 35.

15 *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1986, pp. 30, 31.

social world I had been a part of during all those years. The rules of the Watch Tower Society require Jehovah's Witnesses to cut off all contacts with those who break with the organization, whether this break occurs by excommunication or by a voluntary resignation. I knew that I would not only lose virtually all my friends, but also all my relatives within the organization (of which there were over seventy, including a brother and two sisters with their families, cousins and their families, and so on). I would be regarded and treated as "dead," even if my physical "execution" would have to be postponed until the imminent "battle of Armageddon," a battle in which the Witnesses expect Jehovah God to annihilate forever all who are not associated with their organization.¹⁶

For some time I had been trying to prepare myself emotionally for this break. My plan was to publish my treatise as a public farewell to the movement. However, I did not manage to get the material ready for publication before a letter arrived from the Watch Tower Society's branch office in Sweden, dated May 4, 1982. The letter was a summons to an examination before a "judicial committee" consisting of four representatives of the Society, who had been appointed, the letter said, to "find out about your attitude toward our belief and the organization."¹⁷

I realized that my days within the organization now were numbered, and that I might not be able to get my treatise ready in time for publication. In a letter to the branch office I tried to have the meeting with the judicial committee postponed. I pointed out that, as they very well knew, the grounds for my "attitude toward our belief and the organization" consisted of the evidence I had presented against the Society's chronology, and if they genuinely wanted to change my

16 The disfellowshipping (excommunication) rules are discussed, for instance, in *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1981, pages 16-31, and in *The Watchtower*, April 15, 1988, pages 27, 28. With respect to the impending destruction of the present world system *The Watchtower* of September 1, 1989, states on page 19: "Only Jehovah's Witnesses, those of the anointed remnant and the 'great crowd', as a united organization under the protection of the Supreme Organizer, have any Scriptural hope of surviving the impending end of this doomed system dominated by Satan, the Devil." (Compare also *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1988, pages 14, 15)

17 The action was probably taken at the request of the headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. As Raymond Franz, who was a member of the Governing Body until Spring, 1980, wrote to me afterwards in a letter dated August 7, 1982: "I suppose it was somewhat of a foregone conclusion that the Society would take action toward you. In my own case, I feel that it had to be only a matter of time until they did something about me, no matter how low a profile I kept. I would not doubt that in your case the Branch office contacted Brooklyn and was advised to take action."

attitude, they had to start with the burden of evidence that was the *basis* for it. I requested, therefore, that the members of the committee be allowed to make a thorough examination of my treatise. After that we might reasonably have a meaningful meeting.

But neither the branch office nor the four members of the judicial committee showed any interest in the kind of discussion I had proposed, and they did not even comment on the conditions I had stated for having a meaningful meeting with them. In a brief letter they just repeated the summons to the committee examination. It seemed obvious that I was already judged in advance, and that the trial I had been summoned to would only be a meaningless and macabre farce. I therefore chose to stay away from the examination and was consequently judged and disfellowshipped in my absence on June 9, 1982.

Attempting to gain time I appealed the decision. A so-called “appeal committee” of four new members was appointed, and once again I repeated in a letter the conditions I found reasonable for having a meaningful conversation with them. The letter was not even answered. On July 7, 1982, therefore, the new committee met for another sham trial in my absence, and as expected it just confirmed the decision of the first committee. In both instances the sole “judicial” issue considered obviously was, Did I or did I not agree totally with Watch Tower teaching? The question of whether the reasons for my position were *valid* was simply treated as irrelevant.

Are the conclusions destructive of faith?

As pointed out earlier, the conclusions arrived at in this work upset the central claims and apocalyptic interpretations of the Watch Tower Society. Such conclusions, therefore, could cause some unrest among Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the leaders of the Society clearly feared that their dissemination would disrupt the unity of their flock. I was well aware that my efforts would be interpreted by Watch Tower officials as an attempt to destroy faith and to disrupt the unity of the “true Christian congregation.” But faith should rightly be in harmony with truth, with fact, and this includes historical facts. Thus I felt confident that publishing the facts on the subject at hand would not disturb peace and unity among those who are truly Christians. True unity is founded upon *love* among them, for love is the “perfect bond of union.” — Colossians 3:14.

On the other hand, there is also a false unity, founded, not upon love, but upon fear. Such “unity” is characteristic of authoritarian

organizations, political as well as religious. It is a *mechanistic* unity enforced by the leaders of such organizations who want to maintain their authority and keep control over individuals—a unity that does not depend on truth. In such organizations, individuals relinquish to central authorities their right and responsibility to think, speak, and act freely. Since the evidence and the conclusions that are presented in this work overthrow the authoritarian claims of the Watch Tower Society, the publication of this work may possibly be a threat to the *enforced* unity within this organization. But the *true* unity founded upon love among Christian individuals, whose “fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ,” will surely not be affected by this.—John 17:21-23; 1 John 1:3, *NIV*.

Thus, even if the prophetic claims and interpretations of the Watch Tower Society are found to be groundless, nothing of *real* value will be lost when these things dissolve and disappear. A Christian still has God’s Word, the real source of truth and hope. Christ is still his Lord, his only hope for future life. And he will still enjoy Christian peace and unity, with his Father, with Jesus Christ, and with those individuals on earth who turn out to be his true brothers and sisters. Even if he were to be expelled from an authoritarian religious system because he accepts what he clearly sees to be true, Christ will not forsake him, for he said: “Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.” (John 9:30, 34-39; Matthew 18:20, *NIV*) The answer to the question, “Where shall we go without the organization?” is still the same as at the time of the apostles, when Peter said: “Lord, *whom* shall we go away to? *You* have sayings of everlasting life.” (John 6:68) It is Christ, not an organization, who has “sayings of everlasting life.”¹⁸

During the years that have passed since this research started, I have come to know, personally or by letter, a growing number of Jehovah’s Witnesses at different levels of the Watch Tower organization who have examined thoroughly the question of chronology and independently arrived at the same conclusions that are presented in this volume. Some of these men tried very hard to defend the Society’s chronology before they were forced by the biblical and historical evidence to abandon it. Among such were members of the Watch Tower research committee appointed to produce the Society’s Bible

18 In the Watch Tower Society’s comments on this text, the “organization” has been substituted for Christ as the one to whom one should go to find “everlasting life.” See for example *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1981, page 19, and December 1, 1981, page 31.

dictionary, *Aid to Bible Understanding*. The section on chronology in this work on pages 322 through 348 is still the most able and thorough discussion of Watch Tower chronology ever published by that organization.¹⁹ Yet the individual who wrote the article in question ultimately came to realize that the Society's 607 B.C.E. date for the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians could not be defended, and later he abandoned it altogether, with all the calculations and teachings founded upon it. In a letter to me, he stated:

In developing the subject 'Chronology' for *Aid to Bible Understanding*, the Neo-Babylonian period, extending from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's father Nabopolassar to the reign of Nabonidus and the fall of Babylon, presented a particular problem. As Jehovah's Witnesses, we were obviously interested in finding and presenting some evidence, however small, in support of the year 607 B.C.E. as the date of the destruction of Jerusalem in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year. I was well aware of the fact that historians consistently point to a time some twenty years later and that they place the start of Nebuchadnezzar's reign in 605 B.C.E. (his accession year) rather than 625 B.C.E., the date used in Watch Tower publications. I knew that the 607 B.C.E. date was crucial to the Society's interpretation of the 'seven times' of Daniel chapter four as pointing to the year 1914 C.E.

A large amount of research went into the effort. At that time (1968), Charles Ploeger, a member of the Watch Tower headquarters staff, was assigned as an assistant to me. He spent many weeks searching through the libraries of New York City for any sources of information that might give some validity to the date of 607 B.C.E. as the time of Jerusalem's destruction. We also went to Brown University to interview Dr. A. J. Sachs, a specialist in astronomical texts relating to the Neo-Babylonian and adjoining periods. None of these efforts produced any evidence in support of the 607 B.C.E. date.

19 *Aid to Bible Understanding* was published in its entirety in 1971. A slightly revised edition in two volumes was published in 1988. The most important new feature is the addition of visual aids (maps, pictures, photographs, etc.), all in full color. The name of the dictionary was changed, however, to *Insight on the Scriptures*, evidently because the three principal authors, Raymond Franz, Edward Dunlap, and Reinhard Lengat, left the headquarters in 1980, and that two of them, Franz and Dunlap, were disfellowshipped because of their divergent views. In *Insight on the Scriptures*, more than half of the contents of the original article on "Chronology" has been cut off (see Vol. 1, pp. 447-467), the reason likely being the information on the subject presented in the treatise sent to the headquarters in 1977, along with a recognition of the tenuous nature of the organization's claims.

In view of this, in writing the article on ‘Chronology’ I devoted a considerable portion of the material to efforts at showing the uncertainties existent in ancient historical sources, including not only Babylonian sources but also Egyptian, Assyrian and Medo-Persian. Though I still believe that a number of the points presented as to such uncertainties are valid, I know that the argumentation was born of a desire to uphold a date for which there was simply no historical evidence. If the historical evidence did, in fact, contradict some clear statement in Scripture I would not hesitate to hold to the Scriptural account as the more reliable. But I realize that the issue is not some contradiction of clear Scriptural statement but contradiction of an *interpretation* placed upon portions of Scripture, giving to them a meaning that is not stated in the Bible itself. The uncertainties that are to be found in such human interpretations are certainly equal to the uncertainties to be found in chronological accounts of ancient history.²⁰

Acknowledgements

Before this introduction is concluded, I would like to thank the many knowledgeable persons all over the world, some of whom were still active Jehovah’s Witnesses at the time the treatise was written, who, by their encouragement, suggestions, criticism and questions have greatly contributed to this treatise. First among these I should mention Rud Persson in Ljungbyhed, Sweden, who participated in the work from an early stage and who more than anyone else assisted in these respects. Other friends of the same background, especially James Penton and Raymond Franz, have been of great help in preparing the book for publication by polishing my English and grammar.

With respect to the ideo-historical section (chapter one), my contacts with Swedish scholar Dr. Ingemar Lindén stimulated my interest and initiated my research in this area. Alan Feuerbacher, Beaverton, Oregon (now in Fort Collins, Colorado) provided important documents for this section. For the chapters on Neo-Babylonian chronology (chapters three and four) the contacts with authorities on the Babylonian cuneiform texts have been of invaluable help. This applies particularly to Professor D. J. Wiseman in England, who is a leading expert on the Neo-Babylonian period; Mr. C. B. F. Walker, Deputy Keeper in the Department of the Ancient Near East in the

20 Raymond Franz, former Governing Body member, wrote this letter, dated June 12,

British Museum, London, now retired; Professor Abraham J. Sachs in the U.S.A; Professor Hermann Hunger in Austria, who since the death of Abraham Sachs in 1983 is the leading expert on Babylonian astronomical observational texts; Dr. John M. Steele in Toronto, Canada, and Dr. Béatrice André at the Louvre Museum in Paris. On the exegetical sections (chapters 5-7), finally, a number of capable linguists and Hebraists willingly shared their expertise, especially Dr. Seth Erlandsson in Västerås, Sweden; Dr. Tor Magnus Amble and Dr. Hans M. Barstad, both in Oslo, Norway, and Professor Ernst Jenni in Basel, Switzerland.

First of all, however, my thanks go to the God of the Bible, who in the Old Testament from the time of Moses onwards carries the personal name Yahweh or Jehovah, but whom we in the New Testament meet and can approach as our heavenly Father, as this research has been done under constant prayer for his help and understanding. All honor goes to Him, since it is his Word of truth that has been the basis of this study. Although certain religious theories and interpretations were found to be untenable and had to be rejected, his prophetic Word was confirmed, over and over again, during the biblical and historical research connected with the subject under discussion. This faith-strengthening experience has been a real and lasting blessing to me. My hope is that the reader will be blessed in a similar way.

Carl Olof Jonsson
Göteborg, Sweden, 1982
Revised in 1998 and 2004

1

THE HISTORY OF AN INTERPRETATION

ALL IDEAS have a beginning. People who believe in an idea, however, are often completely unaware of its background, origin and development. Ignorance of that history may strengthen the conviction that the idea is true, even when it is not. As happens in other cases, this ignorance may provide fertile soil for fanaticism.

True, knowledge of the historical development of an idea does not necessarily disprove it, but such knowledge does enable us to improve our judgment of its validity. A clear example of an idea—in this case, an interpretation—that is obscured by ignorance is a widely-held concept concerning the “Gentile times” referred to by Christ at Luke 21:24:

They will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of Gentiles are fulfilled.—*NRSV*.

Millions of persons internationally have come to accept the belief that this prophetic statement definitely points to and is linked with a specific date in the twentieth century and they even build their present plans and future hopes on that belief. What is its history?

The “year-day principle”

The length of the period called the “Gentile times” (translated “the appointed times of the nations” in the Watch Tower Society’s *New World Translation*) has been calculated by some expositors, including the Watch Tower Society, to be 2,520 years. This calculation is founded upon the so-called “year-day principle.” According to this principle, in biblical time-related prophecies *a day always stands for a year*,



18

AWAKE! — OCTOBER 8, 1973

From the *Awake!* magazine of October 8, 1973, page 18.

The calculation of the "times of the Gentiles" as a period of 2,520 years, beginning in 607 B.C.E. and ending in 1914 C.E., is the chronological basis of the apocalyptic message preached worldwide by the Watch Tower Society.

"just as on a map one inch may stand for one hundred miles."¹ In the Bible there are two passages where prophetic periods are explicitly counted that way: Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.

In the first text, as punishment for their errors, the Israelites were to wander in the desert for forty years, measured out by the number of days the spies had spied out the land, forty days, "a day for a year."

In the second text Ezekiel was told to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days, prophetically carrying the errors of Israel and Judah committed during just as many years, "a day for a year."

It should be noted, however, that these specific interpretations are given to us by the Bible itself. "A day for a year" is *nowhere stated to be a general principle of interpretation* that applies also to other prophetic periods.

The development of the concept that the year-day principle can indeed apply to *any* time-related biblical prophecy has a long history. The shifting nature of its application during that history surely reveals something as to its reliability.

1 LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), Vol. II, p. 124.

Its use by Jewish scholars

Jewish rabbis were the first to begin applying this way of counting prophetic time beyond the two references cited, and they did this with the “seventy weeks” of Daniel 9:24-27, the first verse of which states: “Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”²

Despite this, the fact is that the “year-day” application was not stated as a general *principle* until the first century C.E., by the famous rabbi, *Akibah ben Joseph* (c. 50-132 C.E.).³

Hundreds of years passed and it was only at the beginning of the *ninth century* that a number of Jewish rabbis began to extend the year-day principle to other time periods in the book of Daniel. These included the 2,300 “evenings and mornings” of Daniel 8:14, and the 1,290 days and 1,335 days of Daniel 12:11, 12, all of which were viewed as having Messianic implication.

The first of these rabbis, *Nahawendi*, considered the 2,300 “evenings and mornings” of Daniel 8:14 as years, counting them from the destruction of Shiloh (which he dated to 942 B.C.E.) to the year 1358 C.E. In that year he expected the Messiah would come.⁴

Nahawendi was soon followed by others, such as *Saadiah ben Joseph* from the same century and *Solomon ben Jeroham* from the tenth century. The latter applied the year-day principle to the 1,335 days of Daniel 12:12. Counting them from the time of Alexander the Great, he arrived at the year 968 C.E. as the date for the redemption of Israel.

2 While this prophecy speaks of *weeks*, this of itself does not mean that it lends itself to an application of the “year-day principle.” To a Jew the Hebrew word for “week,” *shabû’a*, did not always signify a period of *seven days* as in English. *Shabû’a* literally means a “(period of) seven,” or a “heptad.” The Jews also had a “seven” (*shabû’a*) of *years*. (Leviticus 25:3, 4, 8, 9) True, when “weeks of *years*” were meant, the word for “years” was usually added. But in the later Hebrew this word was often left to be understood as implied. When “weeks of *days*” were meant, the word for “days” could sometimes be appended, as in the other passage in Daniel where *shabû’a* is found. (10:2, 3) Daniel 9:24, therefore, simply asserts that “seventy *sevens* are determined,” and from the context (the allusion to the “seventy years” in verse 2) it may be concluded that “seventy *sevens of years*” are intended. It is because of this apparent textual connection—and not because of any “year-day principle”—that some translations (*Moffatt, Goodspeed, AT, RS*) read “seventy weeks of years” in Daniel 9:24.

3 Froom, Vol. II, pp. 195, 196.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 196. Nahawendi also counted the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11 as a period of years, beginning with the destruction of the second temple [70 C.E.] and thereby arriving at the same date, 1358 C.E.

The famous rabbi, *Rashi* (1040-1105), ended the 2,300 year-days in 1352 C.E., when he thought the Messiah would come.

Abraham bar Hiyya Hanasi (c. 1065-1136) speculated that the 2,300-, the 1,290- and the 1,335-year periods would terminate on different dates in the fifteenth century. The end of the 2,300 year-days, for instance, was set at 1468 C.E.⁵

Even up into the nineteenth century, many other Jewish scholars were continuing to use the year-day principle to fix dates for the coming of the Messiah.

The methods the rabbinical scholars used in applying the year-day principle during those ten centuries were varied and the dates they arrived at differed. Whatever method employed, however, one thing was true: all the end-dates eventually proved empty of fulfillment.

Since the use of the year-day principle was relatively common among Jewish sources from early centuries, was this also the case among Christian Bible expositors?

Of greater interest, does the history of its use within the Christian community—and the *results* obtained—demonstrate a *contrast*, or does it follow a *similar pattern*? What has been its fruitage?

The “year-day principle” among Christian expositors

As we have seen, rabbi Akibah ben Joseph had presented the year-day method as a principle back in the first century C.E. We find no application of it—in that way, as a *principle*—among Christian scholars, however, for the following one thousand years.

True, several expositors from the fourth century onward suggested a *mystical* or *symbolic* meaning for the 1,260 days of Revelation, yet before the twelfth century they *never* applied the year-day rule to those days, nor to any other time period, with the sole exception of the 3½ days of Revelation 11:9. That period was interpreted to be 3½ *years* by a number of expositors, the first of whom was *Victorinus* in the fourth century.⁶ This, of course, was far from holding to a year-day rule or principle.

Joachim of Floris (c. 1130-1202), abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Corace, Italy, was most probably the first *Christian* expositor to apply the year-day principle to the different time periods of Daniel and Revelation. This was pointed out during the 19th century by *Charles Maitland*, a leading opponent of the idea, in a number of works and articles. For example, in refuting those holding that the

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 210, 211.

6 E. B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 3rd ed. (London, 1847), Vol. III, pp. 233-240.

1,260 days of Revelation 11:3 were 1,260 *years*, Maitland concluded, after a thorough investigation, that the system of the 1260 years “was never heard of till dreamed into the world by a wild Abbot in 1190.”⁷

Though many nineteenth-century adherents of the year-day principle tried to refute Maitland’s statement concerning the novelty of the principle, all their attempts proved unsuccessful. After a very thorough examination of all available sources, even the most learned of his opponents, the Reverend *E. B. Elliott*, had to admit that “for the *first four centuries*, the days mentioned in Daniel’s and the Apocalyptic prophecies respecting Antichrist were interpreted literally as *days*, not as *years*, by the Fathers of the Christian Church.”⁸ He thus had to agree with Maitland that Joachim of Floris was the first Christian writer to apply the year-day principle to the 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3, stating:

At the close of the 12th century Joachim Abbas, as we have just seen, made a first and rude attempt at it: and in the 14th, the Wyclifite *Walter Brute* followed.⁹

Joachim, who was probably influenced by Jewish rabbis, counted the 1,260 “year-days” from the time of Christ and believed that they would soon end in an “age of the Spirit.” Although he did not fix a specific date for this, it seems that he looked forward to the year 1260 C.E. After his death, that year came “to be considered by Joachim’s followers as the fatal date that would begin the new age, so much so that when it passed without any notable event some ceased to believe any of his teachings.”¹⁰

Joachim’s works initiated a new tradition of interpretation, a tradition in which the “year-day principle” was the very basis of prophetic

7 Charles Maitland, *The Apostles’ School of Prophetic Interpretation* (London, 1849), pp. 37, 38.

8 E. B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticae*, 3rd ed. (London, 1847), Vol. III, p. 233.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 240. The late Dr. LeRoy Edwin Froom, who was a modern defender of the year-day theory, arrived at a similar conclusion in his massive four-volume work, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. In Volume I (1950) on page 700, he states: “Heretofore, for thirteen centuries the seventy weeks had been recognized generally as weeks of years. But the first thousand years of the Christian Era did not produce any further applications of the principle, among Christian writers, save one or two glimpses of the ‘ten days’ of Revelation 2:10 as ten years of persecution, and the three and a half days of Revelation 11 as three and a half years. But now Joachim for the first time applied the year-day principle to the 1260-day prophecy.”

10 Froom, Vol. I, p. 716.

interpretations. During the following centuries innumerable dates were fixed for Christ's second advent, most of them built upon the year-day principle. At the time of the Reformation (in the sixteenth century), Martin Luther and most of the other reformers believed in that principle, and it was largely accepted among Protestant scholars far into the nineteenth century.

The principle applied to the Gentile times

As we have seen, Joachim of Floris applied the year-day principle to the 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3. The preceding verse converts this period into months, stating that "the nations . . . will trample the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." (Revelation 11:2, *NW*) Since this prediction about the "holy city" closely parallels Jesus' words at Luke 21:24 that "Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (*NASB*), some of Joachim's followers soon began to associate the "times of the Gentiles" with this calculated period in which the 1,260 days became 1,260 years.

However, because they believed that Revelation 11:2, 3 and 12:6, 14 dealt with the Christian church, Jerusalem or the "holy city" usually was interpreted to mean the church of Rome.¹¹ The period of the "times of the Gentiles," therefore, was thought to be the period of the affliction of the church, the end of which affliction was originally expected in 1260 C.E.

Others, however, believed the "holy city" to be the literal city of Jerusalem. The well known scholastic physician, *Arnold of Villanova* (c. 1235-1313), identified the Gentile times with the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11, converting them from 1290 days to 1290 years. Counting these from the taking away of the Jewish sacrifices after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E., he expected the end of the Gentile times in the fourteenth century. The Crusades were still being waged in his day and Arnold linked them with the hoped-for expiration of the Gentile times in the near future, arguing that, unless the end of the times of the Gentiles was near, how could the "faithful people" regain the Holy Land from the unbelievers?¹²

At the end of the fourteenth century, *Walter Brute*, one of John Wycliffe's followers in England offered yet another interpretation.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 717, 723, 726, 727. The information here is based on the work *De Seminibus Scripturarum*, fol. 13v, col. 2 (as discussed in Froom), which was written in 1205 A.D. The manuscript is known as Vat. Latin 3813.

According to him, the “times of the Gentiles” were the period when the Christian church was dominated by heathen rites and customs. This apostasy, he held, started after the death of the last apostle in about 100 C.E. and would continue for 1,260 years. This period, and also the 1,290 “year-days,” which he reckoned from the destruction of Jerusalem 30 years earlier (in 70 C.E.), had already expired in his days. He wrote:

Now if any man will behold the *Chronicles*, he shall find, that after the destruction of *Jerusalem* was accomplished, and after the strong hand of the holy people was fully dispersed, and after the placing of the abomination; that is to say, the Idol of Desolation of *Jerusalem*, within the Holy place, where the Temple of God was before, there had passed 1290 days, taking a day for a year, as commonly it is taken in the Prophets. And the times of the Heathen people are fulfilled, after whose Rites and Customs God suffered the holy City to be trampled under foot for forty and two months.¹³

Since the times of the Gentiles already had expired according to his calculations, Brute thought that the second coming of Christ must be *right at hand*.

Constantly changing dates

Time passed and left the many apocalyptic fixed dates behind, the predictions tied to them remaining unfulfilled. By now, counting the 1,260 or 1,290 years from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., or from the death of the apostles could no longer produce meaningful results. So, the *starting-point* had to be moved forward to a later date.

Groups persecuted and branded as heretics by the Roman church soon began to identify the ‘trampling Gentiles’ with the *papacy of Rome*. These persecuted groups commonly viewed themselves as “the true church”—pictured in Revelation 12 as a woman who had to flee into “the wilderness” for “a thousand two hundred and sixty days,” the period of trampling spiritual Jerusalem. (Revelation 12:6,

12 Arnold of Villanova, *Tractatus de Tempore Adventus Antichristi* (“Treatise on the Time of the Coming of Antichrist”), part 2 (1300); reprinted in Heinrich Finke, *Aus den Tagen Bonifaz VIII* (Münster in W., 1902), pp. CXLVIII-CLI, CXLVII. (See also Froom, Vol. I, pp. 753-756.)

13 From *Registrum Johannis Trefnant, Episcopi Herefordensis* (containing the proceedings of the trial of Walter Brute for heresy), as translated in John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 9th ed. (London, 1684), Vol. I, p. 547. (See also Froom, Vol. II, p. 80.)

14) This view now allowed them to advance the *starting-point* from the first century to a time somewhere in the *fourth century*, with its growth of authority on the part of the Roman church.

This “adjusted” view was very common among the Reformers. *John Napier* (1550-1617), the distinguished Scottish mathematician and student of prophecy, began the period about 300 or 316 C.E., and came up with the end of the Gentile times in the latter half of the sixteenth century.¹⁴

More time passed and the starting-point was once again moved forward, this time into the *sixth* or *seventh* centuries, the period when the popes had reached a real position of power. *George Bell*, for example, writing in the London *Evangelical Magazine* of 1796, counted the 1,260 years from either 537 or 553 C.E., and predicted the fall of Antichrist (the Pope) in “1797, or 1813.”¹⁵ Of the 1,260 years Bell says:

The holy city is to be trodden under foot by the Gentiles, or Papists, who, though they are Christians in name, are Gentiles in worship and practice; worshipping angels, saints, and images, and persecuting the followers of Christ. These Gentiles take away the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination that maketh the visible church of Christ desolate for the space of 1260 years.¹⁶

This was written in 1795 in the midst of the French Revolution. Shortly afterward the Pope was taken captive by French troops and forced into exile (in February, 1798). Very interestingly, these startling events in France and Italy had to some extent been “predicted” nearly a century in advance by several expositors, the best known of whom was the Scottish pastor, *Robert Fleming, Jr.* (c. 1660-1716).¹⁷ Surely, many felt, these major historical events had confirmed the rightness of their predictions! Because of this, the year 1798 was very soon quite commonly held among biblical commentators to be the terminal date for the 1,260 years.

This view—with some minor differences—was also adopted by Charles Taze Russell and his followers. And it is still prevalent among the Seventh-Day Adventists.

14 John Napier, *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of Saint John* (Edinburgh, 1593), pp. 64, 65. (See Froom, Vol. II, p. 458.)

15 G. Bell, “Downfall of Antichrist,” *Evangelical Magazine* (London), 1796, Vol. 4, p. 54. (See Froom, Vol. 2, p. 742.) Although published in 1796, the article was written July 24, 1795.

16 G. Bell, *ibid.*, p. 57. (See Froom, Vol. II, p. 742.)

17 Robert Fleming, Jr., *The Rise and Fall of Papacy* (London, 1701), p. 68. (For additional notes on this prediction, see Chapter 6, section D: “1914 in perspective.”)

Political and social upheaval fuels prophetic speculations

The French Revolution of 1789-1799 had extraordinary impact extending far beyond French borders. Following the violent removal of the French monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic in 1792, new extremist leaders not only brought about a period of terror and chaos in France itself, but they inaugurated an almost unbroken period of wars of conquest, which lasted until 1815, when Emperor Napoleon I was defeated at Waterloo. The Revolution's chaotic aftermath in Europe and other parts of the world excited intensified interest in prophetic study, especially as some of these upheavals had been partially predicted by expositors of the prophecies.

Historians recognize the French Revolution as marking a major turning-point in world history. It brought to an end a long era of relative stability in Europe, uprooting the established order and deeply changing political and religious thought.

Comparing the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte with the earlier Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) and the later World War I (1914-1918), historian Robert Gilpin says of these three wars that "*each was a world war involving almost all the states in the [international] system and, at least in retrospect, can be considered as having constituted a major turning point in human history.*"¹⁸

Another well-known historian, R. R. Palmer, in discussing the momentous role of the French Revolution in modern history, says:

Even today in the middle of the twentieth century, despite all that has happened in the lifetime of men not yet old, and even . . . in America or in any other part of a world in which the countries of Europe no longer enjoy their former commanding position, it is still possible to say that *the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century was the turning point of modern civilization.*¹⁹

The resultant uprooting of long-standing European political and social institutions caused many to believe that they were indeed living in *the last days*. Men of many backgrounds—ministers, politicians, lawyers, and laymen—became involved in prophetic study. A voluminous body of literature on the prophecies was produced, numerous

18 Professor Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (published in Cambridge, MA, and London, England), Vol. 18:4, Spring 1988, p. 606. (Emphasis added.)

19 R. R. Palmer in his foreword to Georges Lefebvre's *The Coming of the French Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1947), p. v.

prophetic periodicals were started, and prophetic conferences were held on both sides of the Atlantic.

The apocalyptic revival commenced in England, but soon spread to the European Continent and the United States of America where, in the latter case, it culminated in the well-known Millerite movement. Based on interpretations of Daniel 8:14, the predictions now developed generally pointed to 1843, 1844, or 1847 as the time for Christ's second advent.

It was in this feverish atmosphere that a new interpretation of the Gentile times was born, in which, for the first time, *the oft-used figure of 1,260 years was doubled to 2,520 years.*

The chart presented on the facing page shows the results that the "year-day" method of counting prophetic time-periods produced over a period of seven centuries. Though almost all of the thirty-six scholars and prophetic expositors listed were working from the same basic Scriptural text referring to 1,260 days, very rarely did they agree on the same starting and ending points for the period's fulfillment. The *ending* dates for the Gentile times set by them or their followers ran all the way from 1260 C.E. to 2016 C.E. Yet all of them advanced what to them were cogent reasons for arriving at their dates. What results now came from the doubling of this figure in connection with Jesus' statement about the "Gentile times"?

John Aquila Brown

In the long history of prophetic speculation, *John Aquila Brown* in England plays a notable role. Although no biographical data on Brown has been found so far, he strongly influenced the apocalyptic thinking of his time. He was the first expositor who applied the supposed 2,300 year-days of Daniel 8:14 so that they ended in 1843 (later 1844).²⁰ This became a key date of the Second Advent movement.²¹ He was also the first who arrived at a prophetic time period of 2,520 years.

Brown's calculation of 2,520 years was based on his exposition of the "seven times" contained in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the

20 Brown first published his chronology in an article in the London monthly *The Christian Observer* of November 1810. According to his understanding of the Gentile times, the "trampling Gentiles" were the Mohammedans (or Muslims), and he therefore regarded the 1,260 years so widely commented on as Mohammedan *lunar* years, corresponding to 1,222 *solar* years. He reckoned this period from 622 C.E. (the first year of the Mohammedan *Hegira* era) to 1844, when he expected the coming of Christ and the restoration of the Jewish nation in Palestine.—J. A. Brown, *The Even-Tide*, Vol. 1 (1823), pp. vii, xi, 1-60.

TABLE 1: THE MULTIPLE, SHIFTING APPLICATIONS OF THE 1,260 YEARS

Expositor	Publication date	Application (all dates C.E.)	Remarks
Joachim of Floris	1195	1-1260	
Arnold of Villanova	1300	c. 74-1364	Gentile Times=1290 years
Walter Brute	1393	134-1394	
Martin Luther	1530	38-1328	Gentile times =1290 years
A. Osiander	1545	412-1672	
J. Funck	1558	261-1521	
G. Nigrinus	1570	441-1701	
Aretius	1573	312-1572	
John Napier	1593	316-1576	
D. Pareus	1618	606-1866	
J. Tillinghast	1655	396-1656	
J. Artopaeus	1665	260-1520	
Cocceius	1669	292-1552	
T. Beverley	1684	437-1697	
P. Jurieu	1687	454-1714	
R. Fleming, Jr.	1701	552-1794	1260 years of 360 days
" "	1701	606-1848	= 1242 Julian years
William Whiston	1706	606-1866	
Daubuz	1720	476-1736	
J. Ph. Petri	1768	587-1847	
Lowman	1770	756-2016	
John Gill	1776	606-1866	
Hans Wood	1787	620-1880	
J. Bicheno	1793	529-1789	
A. Fraser	1795	756-1998	1242 Julian years
George Bell	1796	537-1797	
" "	1796	553-1813	
Edward King	1798	538-1798	
Galloway	1802	606-1849	1242 Julian years
W. Hales	1803	620-1880	
G. S. Faber	1806	606-1866	
W. Cuninghame	1813	533-1792	
J. H. Frere	1815	533-1792	
Lewis Way	1818	531-1791	
W. C. Davis	1818	588-1848	
J. Bayford	1820	529-1789	
John Fry	1822	537-1797	
John Aquila Brown	1823	622-1844	1260 lunar years

The table shows a sample of the many different applications of the 1,260 and 1,290 “year-days” from Joachim of Floris in 1195 to John Aquila Brown in 1823. It would have been easy to extend the table to include expositors after Brown. However, the table ends with him because at this time another interpretation of the Gentile times began to surface, in which the 1,260 years were doubled to 2,520 years.

chopped-down tree in Daniel, chapter 4. It was first published in 1823 in his two-volume work *The Even-Tide; or, Last Triumph of the Blessed and Only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*.²² He specifically states that he was the first to write on the subject:

Although many large and learned volumes have been written on prophetic subjects during a succession of ages; yet, *having never seen the subject*, on which I am about to offer some remarks, *touched upon by any author*, I commend it to the attention of the reader, not doubtingly, indeed, but with strong confidence that it will be found still further to corroborate the scale of the prophetic periods, assumed as the basis of the fulfillment of prophecy.²³

In his interpretation, Brown differed from other later expositors in that he nowhere connects the “seven times” of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream with the “seven times” of prophetic punishment directed against Israel at Leviticus 26:12-28. “Nebuchadnezzar was a type,” Brown wrote, “of the three successive kingdoms which were to arise.” Of the “seven times,” or years, of Nebuchadnezzar’s affliction, he said:

- 21 The second advent was expected to occur during the year 1843/44, counted from Spring to Spring as was done in the Jewish calendar. It has been maintained that expositors in the United States arrived at the 1843 date as the end of the 2,300 years independently of Brown. Although that *may* be true, it cannot be proved, and interestingly, the London, England, *Christian Observer*, a periodical founded in 1802 which frequently dealt with prophecy, also had an American edition published at Boston which ran article for article with the British edition. So Brown’s article on the 2,300 years could have been read by many in the United States as early as 1810. Soon afterwards, the 1843 date began to appear in American prophetic expositions.
- 22 Published in London; the pertinent material is found in Vol. II, pp. 130-152.
- 23 Perhaps some may be inclined to object to this statement on account of the table on pages 404 and 405 of Froom’s *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Volume IV. It is true that this table *seems* to show *James Hatley Frere* as the first to write on the 2,520 years in 1813. But the part of the table farthest to the right on page 405 entitled, “Dating of other time periods,” does not have any close connection with the “Publication date” column on page 404. It simply states the author’s general position on other time periods. Besides, Frere never held the times of the Gentiles (or the “seven times”) to be a period of 2,520 years. In his first book on prophecy, *A Combined View of the Prophecies of Daniel, Esdras, and St. John* (London, 1815), he does not comment on Daniel 4 or Luke 21:24. The “holy city” of Revelation 11:2 he explains to be “the visible church of Christ” and “during the period of 1260 years, the whole of this city is trodden under foot of the Gentiles, excepting the interior courts of its temple.” (Page 87) Many years later Frere calculated the Gentile times to be a period of 2,450 years from 603 B.C.E. to 1847 C.E. See, for example, his book, *The Great Continental Revolution, Marking the Expiration of the Times of the Gentiles A.D. 1847-8* (London, 1848). Note especially pages 66-78. John A. Brown, of course, was well acquainted with the many contemporary writings on prophecy, and Frere was one of the best known expositors in England. So there seems to be no reason to doubt Brown’s own statement of priority with respect to the 2,520 years.

[These] would, therefore, be considered as a grand week of years, forming a period of two thousand five hundred and twenty years, and embracing the duration of the four tyrannical monarchies; at the close of which they are to learn, like Nebuchadnezzar, by the “season and time” of the two judgements, that “*the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*”

Brown calculated the 2,520 years as running from the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, 604 B.C.E., to the year 1917, when “the full glory of the kingdom of Israel shall be perfected.”²⁴

Brown did not himself associate this period with the Gentile times of Luke 21:24. Nonetheless his calculation for the 2,520 years, and his having based these on Daniel chapter 4, have since played a key role in certain modern interpretations of those Gentile times.

The 2,520 years linked with the Gentile times

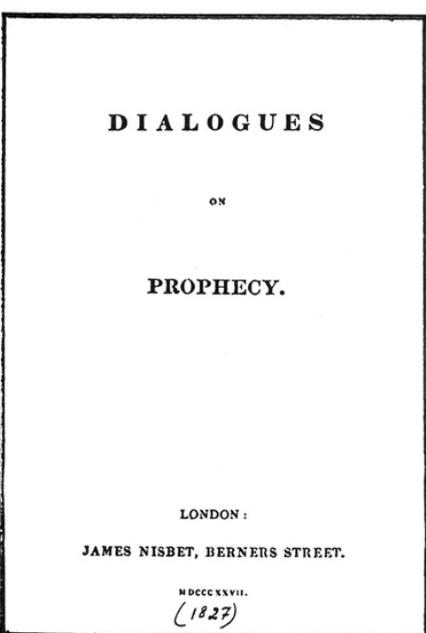
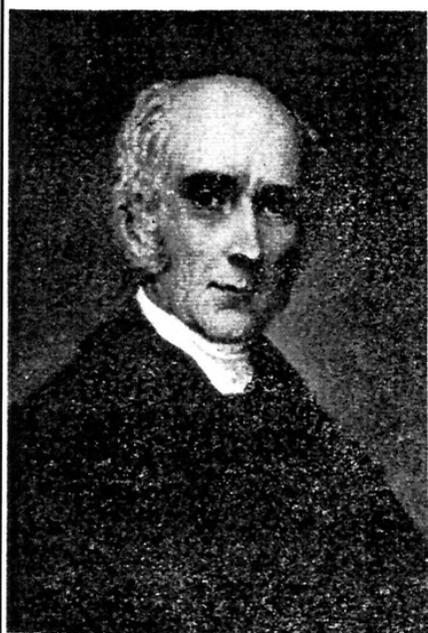
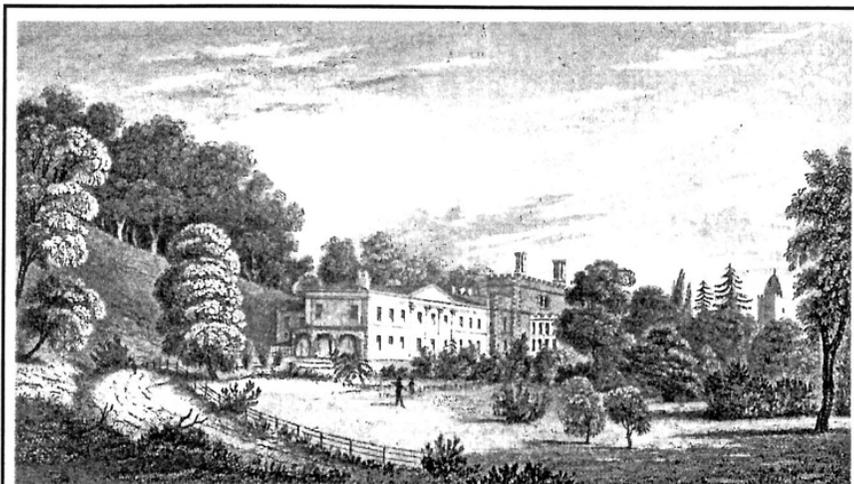
It was not long before other expositors began identifying the new calculation of 2,520 years with the “Gentile times” of Luke 21:24. But, even as with the 1,260 days, they came up with differing results.

At the *Albury Park Prophetic Conferences* (held annually at Albury near Guildford, south of London, England from 1826 to 1830), the “times of the Gentiles” was one of the topics considered. Right from the first discussions in 1826 they were connected with the 2,520 year period by *William Cuninghame*. He chose as his starting point the year when the ten tribes were carried into captivity by Shalmaneser (which he dated to 728 B.C.E.), thus arriving at 1792 C.E. as their last or termination date, a date that by then was already in the past.²⁵

Many biblical commentators counted the “seven times of the Gentiles” from the captivity of Manasseh, which they dated to 677 B.C.E. This was obviously done so that the Gentile times would end at the same time already being assigned to the 2,300 day-years, that

24 *The Even-Tide*, Vol. II, pp. 134, 135; Vol. I, pp. XLIII, XLIV.

25 Henry Drummond, *Dialogues on Prophecy* (London, 1827), Vol. I, pp. 33, 34. In this report from the discussions at Albury, the participants are given fictitious names. Cuninghame (“Sophron”) arrives at the 2,520 years by doubling the 1,260 years, not by referring to the “seven times” of Daniel 4 or Leviticus 26. In support of this he refers to the authority of *Joseph Mede*, an expositor living in the seventeenth century. Although Mede had suggested that the times of the Gentiles might refer to the four kingdoms beginning with Babylon, he never stated the period to be 2,520 years. (Mede, *The Works*, London, 1664, Book 4, pp. 908-910, 920.) In a later conversation “Anastasius” (Henry Drummond) connects the 2,520 years with the “seven times” of Leviticus 26 and, “correcting” the starting-point of Cuninghame from 728 to 722 B.C., he arrives at 1798 C.E. as the terminal date. (*Dialogues*, Vol. I, pp. 324, 325)



Above: The Albury Park residence, near Guildford, south of London, the place of the *Albury Park Prophetic Conferences*, 1826-1830. At these conferences certain ideas were developed that 50 years later were to become central parts of the message of the Watch Tower Society, viz., *the Gentile times as a period of 2,520 years, and the idea of Christ's second coming as an invisible presence.*

Below: Henry Drummond, owner of Albury Park and host of the conferences, who also published annual reports on the discussions (*Dialogues on Prophecy*).

is, in 1843 or 1844.²⁶ In 1835, *William W. Pym* published his work, *A Word of Warning in the Last Days*, in which he ended the “seven times” in 1847. Interestingly, he builds his calculation of the 2,520 years of Gentile times on the “seven times” mentioned in Leviticus 26 as well as the “seven times” of Daniel 4:

In other words, the judgements threatened by Moses, which should last during the seven times, or 2520 years; and the judgements revealed to Daniel, which should come to an end by the cleansing of the sanctuary after a portion of the greater number 2520.²⁷

Others, however, were looking forward to the year 1836 C.E., a year fixed on entirely different grounds by the German theologian *J. A. Bengel* (1687-1752), and they tried to end the “seven times” in that same year.²⁸

Illustrating the state of flux existing, *Edward Bickersteth* (1786-1850), evangelical rector of Watton, Hartfordshire, tried different starting-points for the “seven times of the Gentiles,” coming up with three different ending dates:

If we reckon the captivity of Israel as commencing in 727 before Christ, Israel’s first captivity under Salmanezar, it would terminate in 1793, when the French revolution broke out: and if 677 before Christ, their captivity under Esarhaddon (the same period when Manasseh, king of Judah, was carried into captivity,) (2 Kings xvii. 23, 24. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11.) it would terminate in 1843: or, if reckoned from 602 before Christ, which was the final dethronement of Jehoiakim by Nebuchadnezzar, it would terminate in 1918. All these periods may have a reference to corresponding events at their termination, and are worthy of serious attention.²⁹

One of the best known and most learned millenarians of the 19th century was *Edward Bishop Elliott* (1793-1875), incumbent of St. Mark’s Church in Brighton, England. With him, the date of 1914 first receives mention. In his monumental treatise *Horæ Apocalypticæ* (“Hours with the Apocalypse”) he first reckoned the 2,520 years from 727 B.C.E. to 1793 C.E., but added:

26 *John Fry* (1775-1849) was among those doing this, in his *Unfulfilled Prophecies of Scripture*, published in 1835.

27 Found on page 48 of his work. Quoted in *Froom*, Vol. III, p. 576.

28 So did *W. A. Holmes*, chancellor of Cashel, in his book *The Time of the End* which was published in 1833. He dated the captivity of Manasseh under Esarhaddon to 685 B.C.E., and counting the 2,520 years from that year, he ended the “seven times” in 1835-1836.

29 *Edward Bickersteth, A Scripture Help*, first edited in 1815. After 1832 *Bickersteth* began to preach on the prophecies, which also influenced later editions of *A Scripture Help*. The quotation is taken from the 20th edition (London, 1850), p. 235.

Of course if calculated from Nebuchadnezzar's own accession and invasion of Judah, B.C. 606, the end is much later, being A.D. 1914; just one half century, or jubilean period, from our probable date of the opening of the Millennium [which he had fixed to "about A.D. 1862"].³⁰

One factor that should be noted here is that in Elliott's chronology 606 B.C.E. was the *accession-year* of Nebuchadnezzar, while in the later chronology of Nelson H. Barbour and Charles T. Russell 606 B.C.E. was the date assigned for Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in his *18th year*.

The Millerite movement

The leading British works on prophecy were extensively reprinted in the United States and strongly influenced many American writers on the subject. These included the well-known Baptist preacher *William Miller* and his associates, who pointed forward to 1843 as the date of Christ's second coming. It is estimated that at least 50,000, and perhaps as many as 200,000 people eventually embraced Miller's views.³¹

Virtually every position they held on the different prophecies had been taught by other past or contemporary expositors. Miller was simply following others in ending the "Gentile times" in 1843. At the First General Conference held in Boston, Massachusetts, on October 14 and 15, 1840, one of Miller's addresses dealt with Biblical chronology. He placed the "seven times," or 2,520 years, as extending from 677 B.C.E. to 1843 C.E.³² The second coming of Christ was expected no later than 1844.

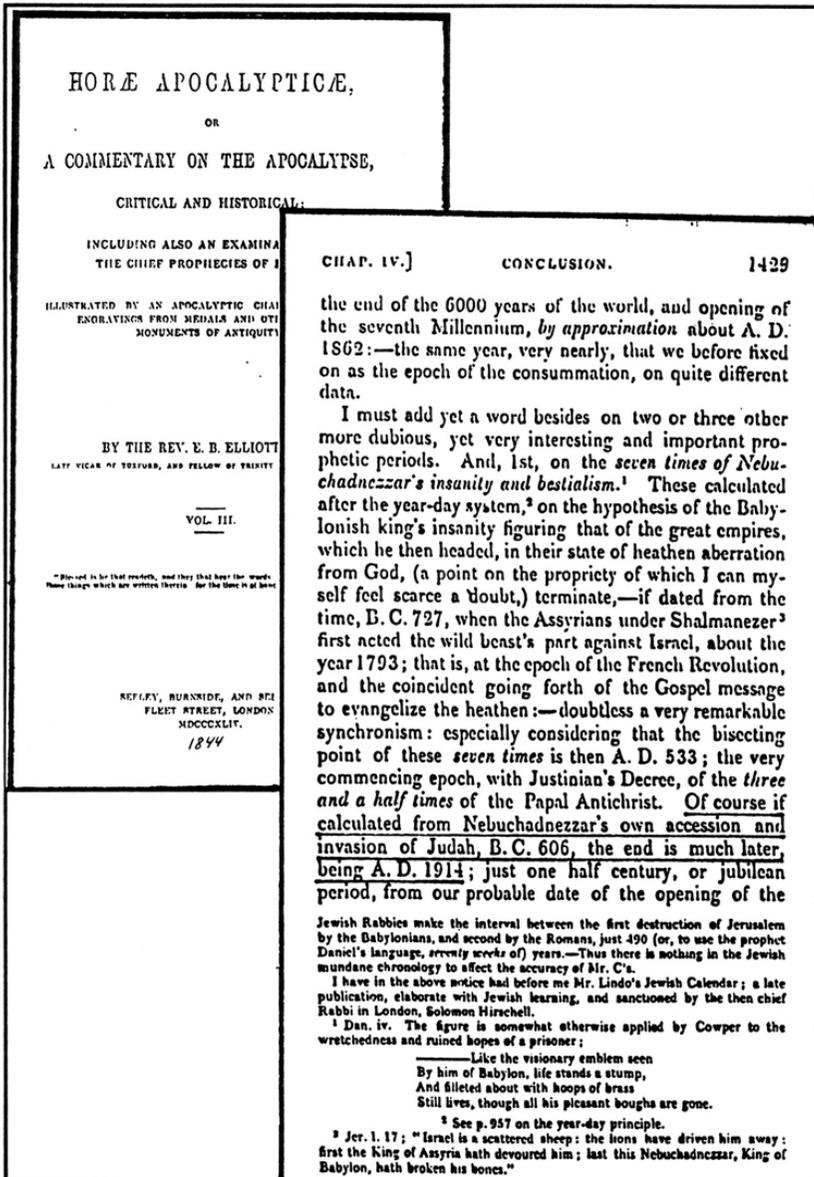
The date predicted for so long and by so many, with claimed Biblical backing, came and went, with nothing to fulfill the expectations based on it.

After the "Great Disappointment" of 1844, some, and among them Miller himself, openly confessed that the time was a mistake.³³

30 E. B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 1st ed. (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844), Vol. III, pp. 1429-1431. Elliott's work ran through five editions (1844, 1846, 1847, 1851, and 1862). In the last two he did not directly mention the 1914 date, although he still suggested that the 2,520 years might be reckoned from the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

31 David Tallmadge Arthur, "*Come out of Babylon*": A Study of Millerite Separatism and Denominationalism, 1840-1865 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1970), pp. 86-88.

32 William Miller, "A Dissertation on Prophetic Chronology" in *The First Report of the General Conference of Christians Expecting the Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Boston, 1842), p. 5. Other Millerites who stressed the 2,520 years included Richard Hutchinson (editor of *The Voice of Elijah*) in an 1843 pamphlet, *The Throne of Judah Perpetuated in Christ*, and Philemon R. Russell (editor of the *Christian Herald and Journal*) in the March 19, 1840 issue of that periodical. The 2,520 years also appear on charts used by Millerite evangelists. (See Fromm, Vol. IV, pp. 699-701, 726-737.)



E. B. Elliott's *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, Vol. III (1844)

E. B. Elliott was most probably the first expositor to reckon the "times of the Gentiles" from 606 B.C.E. to 1914 C.E. It should be noted, however, that in his chronology the starting-point, 606 B.C.E., was the *accession-year* of Nebuchadnezzar, while in the chronology of Barbour and Russell this was Nebuchadnezzar's *eighteenth year*. Their chronologies, therefore, were conflicting, although the dates accidentally happened to be the same.

BABYLON
 Daniel 2:31-35
 The great head of Gold
 Science and light
 2520 years
 677
 2520
 1843
 12
 84
 30

MEDIA AND PERSIA
 Daniel 7:2-8
 The four beasts
 2300 years
 457
 2300
 1843

GRECIA
 Daniel 8:1-8
 The ram and goat
 332
 332

PAGAN ROME
 Daniel 7:9-12
 The four beasts
 164
 158

ROME
 Daniel 9:24-27
 The seven weeks
 490
 508
 538

PAPAL ROME
 Daniel 7:13-14
 The little horn
 606
 1299
 1449
 1798
 508
 45
 1335
 1843

THE TEN KINGDOMS
 Daniel 2:31-35
 The ten kingdoms
 1335
 1290
 45

CHRONOLOGICAL CHART OF THE VISIONS OF DANIEL & JOHN.
 Published by J.V.H. in Downing St.
 1843

WILLIAM MILLER

The "1843" chart

used by William Miller (inset) and his associates in presenting the 1843 message. Miller presented fifteen separate "proofs" in support of his 1843 date, most of which were calculations based on the various year-day periods, including the 2300 and 2520 year-days.

Others, however, insisted that the time itself was right, but the event anticipated was wrong. Expressing what has become a familiar justification, they had expected “the wrong thing at the right time.”

This position was taken by a group which later came to be known as the Seventh-Day Adventists. They declared that Jesus, instead of descending to earth in 1844, entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary as mankind’s great high priest to introduce the antitypical atonement day.³⁴ This group, which separated from the rest of the “Second Adventists” in the end of the 1840’s, caused the first major division within the original movement.

Some leading Millerites who also held to the 1844 date—among them *Apollos Hale*, *Joseph Turner*, *Samuel Snow*, and *Barnett Matthias*—claimed that *Jesus had indeed come* as the Bridegroom in 1844, although spiritually and invisibly, “not in personally descending from heaven, but *taking the throne spiritually*.” In 1844, they declared, the “kingdom of this world” had been given to Christ.³⁵

Offshoots of the Millerite movement

Thus, following 1844, the Millerite “Second Advent” movement gradually broke into several Adventist groups.³⁶ A proliferation of new dates began to appear: 1845, 1846, 1847, 1850, 1851, 1852, 1853, 1854, 1866, 1867, 1868, 1870, 1873, 1875, and so on, and these dates, each having their promoters and adherents, contributed to even greater fragmentation. A leading Second Adventist, *Jonathan Cummings*, declared in 1852 that he had received a “new light” on the

33 “That I have been mistaken in the time, I freely confess; and I have no desire to defend my course any further than I have been actuated by pure motives, and it has resulted in God’s glory. My mistakes and errors God, I trust, will forgive . . .” (*Wm. Miller’s Apology and Defence*, Boston, 1845, pp. 33, 34.) *George Storrs*, who had been one of the leaders in the last stage of the Millerite movement, the so-called “seventh month movement,” in which the advent had been finally fixed to October 22, 1844, was even more outspoken. Not only did he openly and repeatedly confess and regret his error, but he also declared that God had not been in the “definite time” movement, that they had been “mesmerized” by mere human influence, and that “the Bible did not teach definite time at all.” (See D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92.)

34 For a clarifying discussion of the development of this doctrine, see Dr. Ingemar Lindén, *The Last Trump. A historico-genetical study of some important chapters in the making and development of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1978), pp. 129-133. Years later the doctrine was changed to mean that the so-called “investigative judgment” of the believers—dead and living—began on October 22, 1844.

35 From, Vol. IV, p. 888. A detailed discussion of these views is given by Dr. D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-115.

36 In 1855 a prominent Second Adventist, J. P. Cowles, estimated that there existed “some twenty-five divisions of what was once the one Advent body.” (See D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 319.)

chronology, and that the second advent was to be expected in 1854. Many Millerites joined Cummings, and in January, 1854, they started a new periodical, the *World's Crisis*, in advocacy of the new date.³⁷

Other factors besides dates began to play a role in the composition of the Second Advent movement. Right up to the present time they appear as distinctive features among a number of movements that developed from Second Adventism, including the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and certain Church of God denominations. These factors included the doctrine of conditional—not inherent—immortality of the soul, with its corollary tenet that the ultimate destiny of those who are rejected by God is destruction or annihilation, not conscious torment. The trinitarian belief also became an issue among some sectors of the Second Adventists. (For further details on these developments and their effect in contributing to division among the offshoots of the Millerite movements, see the Appendix for Chapter One.)

Most of these developments had already taken place by the time that Charles Taze Russell, still in his teenage years, began the formation of a Bible study group in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. From the end of the 1860's onward, Russell increasingly got into touch with some of the Second Adventist groups which developed. He established close connections with certain of their ministers and read some of their papers, including George Storrs' *Bible Examiner*. Gradually, he and his associates took over many of their central teachings, including their conditionalist and anti-trinitarian positions and most of their "age to come" views. Finally, in 1876, Russell also adopted a revised version of their chronological system, which implied that the 2,520 years of Gentile times would expire in 1914. In all essential respects, therefore, Russell's Bible Student movement may be described as yet another offshoot of the Millerite movement.

What, then, was the most *direct* source of the chronological system that Russell, the founder of the Watch Tower movement, adopted, including not only the 2,520 year-period for the Gentile times, its ending in 1914, but also the year 1874 for the start of an invisible presence by Christ? That source was a man named Nelson H. Barbour.

37 Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message* (Yarmouth, Maine, Boston, New York, London, 1874), pp. 594-597.

Nelson H. Barbour

Nelson H. Barbour was born near Auburn, New York, in 1824. He joined the Millerite movement in 1843, at the age of 19. He “lost his religion” completely after the “Great Disappointment” in 1844 and went to Australia where he became a miner during the gold rush there.³⁸ Then, in 1859 he returned to America by way of London, England. In a retrospect Barbour tells how his interest in the prophetic time periods was again aroused during this voyage:

The vessel left Australia with an advent brother [Barbour himself] on board, who had lost his religion, and been for many years in total darkness. To wile away the monotony of a long sea voyage, [an] English chaplain proposed a systematic reading of the prophecies; to which the brother readily assented; for having been a Millerite in former years, he knew right well there were arguments it would puzzle the chaplain to *answer*, even though the time had passed.³⁹

During this reading Barbour thought he discovered the crucial error in Miller’s reckoning. Why did Miller begin the 1,260 “year-days” of Revelation 11 in 538 C.E. and start the 1,290 and 1,335 year-days of Daniel 12 *thirty years earlier* in 508 C.E.? Should not all three periods start at the same date? Then the 1,290 years would end in 1828 and the 1,335 years in—not 1843 but—1873. “On arriving in London [in 1860], he went to the library of the British Museum, and among many other extensive works on the prophecies found Elliott’s *Horæ Apocalyptica*” in which Elliott reproduced a table, “The Scripture Chronology of the World,” prepared by his friend, Reverend *Christopher Bowen*. The table showed that 5,979 years since man’s creation ended in 1851.⁴⁰ Adding 21 years to the 5,979 years, Barbour discovered that *6,000 years* would end in 1873. This he saw as a remarkable and stirring confirmation of his own calculation of the 1,335-year period.

On returning to the United States, Barbour tried to interest other Second Adventists in his new date for the coming of the Lord. From 1868 onward he began to preach and publish his findings. A number of his articles on chronology were published in the *World’s Crisis*

38 Nelson H. Barbour, *Evidences for the Coming of the Lord in 1873; or the Midnight Cry*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, N. Y., 1871), p. 32.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 33; E. B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalyptica*, 4th ed. (London: Seeleys, 1851), Vol. IV; fly-leaf appended at p. 236. Elliott’s work at that time, 1860, was a standard work advocating 1866 as the time of the coming of the Lord.

and the *Advent Christian Times*, the two leading papers of the Advent Christian Association. In 1870 he also published the 100-page pamphlet *Evidences for the Coming of the Lord in 1873; or the Midnight Cry*, the second edition of which has been quoted above.⁴¹ In 1873 he started a monthly of his own called *The Midnight Cry, and Herald of the Morning*, the circulation of which within three months ran up to 15,000 copies.⁴² When the target year of 1873 had nearly passed, Barbour advanced the time of the second advent to the autumn of 1874.⁴³ But when that year, too, came and went, Barbour and his followers experienced great concern:

When 1874 came and there was no outward sign of Jesus in the literal clouds and in a fleshly form, there was a general re-examination of all the arguments upon which the ‘Midnight Cry’ was made. And when no fault or flaw could be found, it led to the critical examination of the Scriptures which seem to bear on the manner of Christ’s coming, and it was soon discovered that the expectation of Jesus in the flesh at the second coming was the mistake⁴⁴

An “invisible presence”

One of the readers of the *Midnight Cry*, B. W. Keith (later one of the contributors to *Zion’s Watch Tower*),

41 Nelson H. Barbour (ed.), *Herald of the Morning* (Rochester, N.Y.), September 1879, p. 36. Actually, Barbour’s new date for the second advent was adopted by an increasing number of Second Adventists, especially within the Advent Christian Church, with which Barbour evidently associated for a number of years. One reason for this readiness to accept the 1873 date was that it was not new to them. As Barbour points out in his *Evidences* . . . (pp. 33, 34), Miller himself had mentioned 1873 after the 1843 failure. Prior to 1843, several expositors in England had ended the 1,335 years in 1873, for instance John Fry in 1835 and George Duffield in 1842. (Froom, Vol. III, pp. 496, 497; Vol. IV, p. 337) As early as 1853 the “age to come” Adventist Joseph Marsh in Rochester, N.Y., concluded, like other expositors before him, that the “time of the end” was a period of 75 years that began in 1798 and would expire in 1873. (D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 360) In 1870 the well-known Advent Christian preacher Jonas Wendell included Barbour’s chronology in his pamphlet *The Present Truth; or, Meat in Due Season* (Edenboro, PA, 1870). The increasing interest in the date caused the Advent Christian Church to arrange a special conference, February 6 to 11, 1872, in Worcester, Mass., for the examination of the time of the Lord’s return and especially the 1873 date. Many preachers, including Barbour, participated in the discussions. As reported in the *Advent Christian Times* of March 12, 1872, “The point on which there seemed to be any general unanimity was the ending of the thirteen hundred and thirty-five years in 1873.” (p. 263)

42 Nelson H. Barbour (ed.), *The Midnight Cry, and Herald of the Morning* (Boston, Mass.) Vol. I:4, March, 1874, p. 50.

43 N. H. Barbour, “The 1873 Time,” *The Advent Christian Times*, Nov. 11, 1873, p. 106.

44 *Zion’s Watch Tower*, October and November 1881, p. 3 (= *Reprints*, p. 289).

... had been reading carefully Matt. xxiv chapter, using the ‘Emphatic Diaglott’, a new and very exact word for word translation of the New Testament [translated and published by Benjamin Wilson in 1864]; when he came to the 37th and 39th verses he was much surprised to find that it read as follows, viz.: ‘For as the days of Noah thus will be the *presence* of the son of man’.⁴⁶

Keith thus found the Greek word *parousia*, usually translated “coming,” here translated as “presence.” A widely held idea among expositors at this time was that Christ’s second coming would take place in *two stages*, the first of which would be invisible.⁴⁵ Could it be that Jesus *had* come in the fall of 1874, though *invisible*, and been *invisibly present* since then?

To Barbour this explanation not only seemed attractive, but as he and his associates could find no faults with their calculations, they saw in it the solution to their problem. The date was right, although their expectations had been wrong.

Once again, it was seen as a case of having expected “the wrong thing at the right time”:

It was evident, then, that though the *manner* in which they had expected Jesus was in error, yet the time, as indicated by the ‘Midnight Cry,’ was correct, and that the Bridegroom *came* in the Autumn of 1874⁴⁶

Most readers of the *Midnight Cry*, and *Herald of the Morning* magazine, however, could not accept this explanation, and the 15,000 readers rapidly “dwindled to about 200.” Barbour himself was convinced that the Millennial morning had already begun to dawn, and therefore he thought that the *Midnight Cry* no longer was a suitable name for his paper. He remarked: “Will some one inform me how a

45 This idea of Christ’s return was originally presented in about 1828 by a banker and expositor of the prophecies in London, *Henry Drummond*. It soon became very popular among the expositors of the prophecies during the rest of the century, especially among the Darbyists, who did much to popularize the idea. It was much discussed in the leading millenarian periodicals, in England in the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* (1849-1873) and *The Rainbow* (1864-1887), and in the United States in the *Prophetic Times* (1863-1881). The chief editor of the last mentioned paper (which was widely read also in Adventist circles, including that of C. T. Russell and his associates) was the well-known Lutheran minister Joseph A. Seiss. — An examination of the origin and dispersion of the “invisible presence” idea is found in *The Christian Quest* magazine (Christian Renewal Ministries, San Jose, CA), Vol. 1:2, 1988, pp. 37-59, and Vol. 2:1, 1989, pp. 47-58.

46 *Zion’s Watch Tower*, February 1881, p. 3, and October-November 1881, p. 3 (= *Reprints*, pp. 188 and 289).

‘Midnight Cry’ can be made in the *morning*?’⁴⁷ The paper, which had ceased publication in October 1874, was therefore restarted in June 1875 as the *Herald of the Morning*, thereby dispensing with the first part of the earlier title.

In one of the very first issues (September, 1875), Barbour published his calculation of the Gentile times, making them terminate in 1914 C.E.⁴⁸ (See following page.)

Charles Taze Russell

In 1870, as an 18-year-old businessman in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, *Charles Taze Russell*, together with his father Joseph and some friends formed a class for Bible study.⁴⁹ The group was formed as an outgrowth of Russell’s contacts with some of the former Millerites mentioned above, especially Jonas Wendell, George Storrs and George Stetson.

Wendell, a preacher from the Advent Christian Church in Edenboro, Pennsylvania, had visited Allegheny in 1869, and by chance Russell went to one of his meetings and was strongly impressed by Wendell’s criticism of the hellfire doctrine. Russell had been brought up a Calvinist, but had recently broken with this religious background

47 *Ibid.*, April 1880, p. 7 (= *Reprints*, p. 88).

48 Actually, Barbour hinted at the calculation already in the June, 1875 issue of *Herald of the Morning*, by stating that the Gentile times began with the end of reign of Zedekiah in 606 B.C., although he did not directly mention the terminal date (p. 15). In the July issue, he stated that the Gentile times would “continue yet *forty years*.” Although this seems to point to 1915, it is clear from the subsequent issues that Barbour had the year 1914 in mind. The August issue contains an article on “Chronology” (pp. 38-42), but the Gentile times are not discussed. The 1914 date is directly mentioned for the first time in the September, 1875 issue, where the following statement is found on page 52: “I believe that though the gospel dispensation will end in 1878, the Jews will not be restored to Palestine, until 1881; and that the ‘times of the Gentiles,’ viz. their seven prophetic times, of 2520, or twice 1260 years, which began where God gave all, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, 606 B.C.; do not end until A.D. 1914; or 40 years from this.” A lengthy discussion of the calculation was then published in the issue of October 1875, pp. 74-76.

49 Charles’ parents, Joseph L. and Ann Eliza (Birney) Russell, were both of Scottish-Irish descent. They had left Ireland during the great Irish famine of 1845-1849, when one and a half million people starved to death and another million emigrated abroad. Joseph and Eliza settled in Allegheny in 1846, where Charles was born in 1852 as number two of three children. As Eliza died in about 1860, Joseph had to take care of the upbringing of the children. As a youngster, Charles spent most of his leisure time in his father’s clothing store, and at an early age he became Joseph’s business partner. Their successful company, “J. L. Russell & Son, Gents’ Furnishing Goods,” finally developed into a chain of five stores in Allegheny and Pittsburgh.—For additional biographical notes on Russell, see M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed. The Story of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1985, 1997), pp. 13-15.

Vol. 3. SEPTEMBER, 1875. No. 4.

HERALD OF THE MORNING.

The seed of the woman shall
Come thou and all thy
Now the Lord had said to
thy country: into a land that
these shall all families of
And ye shall be unto Me

"Take off the diadem.
I will overturn, overturn
it shall be no
He come whose
and I will give

D. BOGGSWELL,
Dunsmuir, N. Y.,
Corresponding

bruise the serpent's head.
house, into the ark.
Abram, get thee out of
I will shew thee; and in
the earth be blessed.
a kingdom of priests.

remove the crown:
overturn it, and
more until
right it is
it Han"

J. H. PATON
Almont, Mich.
Editors.

N. H. BARBOUR, Editor, ROCHESTER N. Y.

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I believe that though the gospel dispensation will end in 1878, the Jews will not be restored to Palestine, until 1881; and that the "times of the Gentiles," viz. their seven prophetic times, of 2520, or twice 1260 years, which began where God gave all, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, 606 B. C.; do not end until A. D. 1914; or 40 years from this.

Herald of the Morning of September, 1875

in which N. H. Barbour first published the year 1914 as the end of the 2,520 years

because of his doubts in the predestination and hellfire doctrines. He was in a serious religious crisis at this time and even questioned if the Bible really was the word of God. His meeting with Wendell and his subsequent reading of Storrs' magazine, the *Bible Examiner*, restored his faith in the Bible. Articles published in this magazine seem to have been regularly discussed in Russell's study group.

Although Russell knew that some Adventists, including Jonas Wendell, expected Christ in 1873, he himself rejected the whole concept of time settings and fixing of dates. Then, in 1876, he began to alter his position:

It was about January, 1876, that my attention was specially drawn to the subject of prophetic time, as it relates to these doctrines and hopes. It came about in this way: I received a paper called *The Herald of the Morning*, sent by its editor, Mr. N. H. Barbour.⁵⁰

Russell states he was surprised to find that Barbour's group had come to the same conclusion as his own group about the *manner* of Christ's return—that it would be “thieflike, and not in flesh, but as a spirit-being, invisible to men.”

Russell at once wrote to Barbour about the chronology, and later in 1876 he arranged to meet him in Philadelphia where Russell had business engagements that summer. Russell wanted Barbour to show him, “if he could, that the prophecies indicated 1874 as the date at which the Lord's presence and ‘the harvest’ began.” “He came,” says Russell, “and the evidence satisfied me.”⁵¹

It is apparent that during these meetings Russell accepted not only the 1874 date but *all* of Barbour's time calculations, including his calculation of the Gentile times.⁵² While still in Philadelphia, Russell wrote an article entitled “Gentile Times: When do They End?” which was published in George Storrs' periodical the *Bible Examiner* in the October 1876 issue. Referring to the “seven times” of Leviticus 26:28, 33 and Daniel 4 on page 27 of the *Examiner*, he determines the length of the Gentile times to be 2,520 years which began in 606 B.C.E.

50 *Zion's Watch Tower*, July 15, 1906, pp. 230, 231 (= *Reprints*, p. 3822).

51 *Ibid.* In a two-page “Supplement to *Zion's Watch Tower*,” sent out “To the readers of ‘Herald of the Morning’” with the first issue of *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* of July 1, 1879, Russell gives an account of his meeting with Barbour and his associate John Paton in 1876 and their subsequent collaboration for the following three years in spreading the “Harvest message,” and explains why he had to break with Barbour in 1879 and start his own paper.

52 This is also indicated by Russell himself who states: “. . . when we first met, he had much to learn from me on the fulness of *restitution* based upon the sufficiency of the ransom given for all, as I had much to learn from him concerning *time*.”—*Zion's Watch Tower*, July 15, 1906, p. 231 (= *Reprints*, p. 3822).

and would end in 1914 C.E.—precisely the same dates Barbour had arrived at and had begun publishing a year earlier, in 1875.

Looking forward to 1914

What, exactly, would the end of the “Gentile times” mean for mankind? Although monumental events relating to Christ’s return were proclaimed to have taken place in 1874, these were all said to be invisible, occurring in the spirit realm unseen by human eyes. Would 1914 and the termination of the Gentile times be the same, or would it bring visible, tangible change for the earth and for human society on it?

In the book *The Time is at Hand*, published in 1889 (later referred to as Volume II of *Studies in the Scriptures*), Russell stated that there was “Bible evidence proving” that the 1914 date “will be the farthest limit of the rule of imperfect men.” What would be the consequences of this? Russell enumerated his expectations for 1914 in seven points:

Firstly, That at that date the Kingdom of God ... will have obtained full, universal control, and that it will then be ‘set up,’ or firmly established, in the earth.

Secondly, It will prove that he whose right it is thus to take dominion will then be present as earth’s new ruler ...

Thirdly, It will prove that some time before the end of A. D. 1914 the last member of the divinely recognized Church of Christ, the ‘royal priesthood,’ ‘the body of Christ,’ will be glorified with the Head ...

Fourthly, It will prove that from that time forward Jerusalem shall no longer be trodden down of the Gentiles, but shall arise from the dust of divine disfavor, to honor; because the ‘Times of the Gentiles’ will be fulfilled or completed.

Fifthly, It will prove that by that date, or sooner, Israel’s blindness will begin to be turned away; because their ‘blindness in part’ was to continue only ‘until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in’ (Rom. 11:25) ...

Sixthly, It will prove that the great ‘time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation,’ will reach its culmination in a worldwide reign of anarchy ... and the ‘new heavens and new earth’ with their peaceful blessings will begin to be recognized by trouble-tossed humanity.

Seventhly, It will prove that *before that date* God’s Kingdom, organized in power, will be in the earth and then smite and crush the Gentile image (Dan. 2:34)—and fully consume the power of

these kings.⁵³

These were indeed very daring predictions. Did Russell really believe that all these remarkable things would come true within the next twenty five years? Yes, he did; in fact, he believed his chronology to be *God's* chronology, not just his own. In 1894 he wrote of the 1914 date:

We see no reason for changing the figures — nor could we change them if we would. *They are, we believe, God's dates, not ours.* But bear in mind that the end of 1914 is not the date for the *beginning*, but for the *end* of the time of trouble.⁵⁴

Thus it was thought that the “time of trouble” was to commence some years *before* 1914, “not later than 1910,” reaching its climax in 1914.⁵⁵

In 1904, however, just ten years before 1914, Russell altered his view on this matter. In an article in the July 1, 1904 issue of *Zion's Watch Tower*, entitled “Universal anarchy — just before or after October, 1914 A.D.,” he argued that the time of trouble, with its worldwide anarchy, would begin *after* October, 1914:

We now expect that the anarchistic culmination of the great time of trouble which will precede the Millennial blessings will be after October, 1914 A.D.—very speedily thereafter, in our opinion—‘in an hour,’ ‘suddenly,’ because ‘our forty years’ harvest, ending October, 1914 A.D., should not be expected to include the awful period of anarchy which the Scriptures point out to be the fate of Christendom.⁵⁶

This change caused some readers to think that there might be other errors in the chronological system, too—one reader even suggesting that Bishop Ussher's chronology might be more correct when it dated the destruction of Jerusalem as having happened in 587 B.C.E. rather than in 606 B.C.E. This would end the 2,520 years in about 1934 instead of 1914. But Russell strongly reaffirmed his belief in the 1914 date, referring to other claimed “time parallels” pointing to it:

53 C. T. Russell, *The Time is at Hand* (= Vol. II of the *Millennial Dawn* series; later called *Studies in the Scriptures*), Pittsburgh: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1889, pp. 77, 78. Some of the predictions were slightly changed in later editions.

54 *Zion's Watch Tower*, July 15, 1894 (= *Reprints*, p. 1677).

55 *Ibid.*, September 15, 1901 (= *Reprints*, p. 2876).

56 *Ibid.*, July 1, 1904, pp. 197, 198 (= *Reprints*, p. 3389).

We know of no reason for changing a figure: to do so would spoil the harmonies and parallels so conspicuous between the Jewish and Gospel ages.⁵⁷

Answering another reader, he said:

The harmony of the prophetic periods is one of the strongest proofs of the correctness of our Bible chronology. They fit together like the cog-wheels of a perfect machine. *To change the chronology even one year would destroy all this harmony*,—so accurately are the various proofs drawn together in the *parallels* between the Jewish and Gospel ages.⁵⁸

These arguments were further backed up by articles written by the Edgar brothers of Scotland.⁵⁹

Growing doubts

So in 1904 Russell was still as convinced of his dates as he was in 1889, when he wrote that the understanding of these time features was the “*sealing of the foreheads*” mentioned at Revelation 7:3.⁶⁰

As the 1914 date drew nearer, however, Russell became more and more cautious in his statements. Answering an inquiring Bible student in 1907, he said that “we have never claimed our calculations to be infallibly correct; we have never claimed that they were *knowledge*, nor based upon indisputable evidence, facts, knowledge; our claim has always been that they are based on *faith*.”⁶¹

The dates no longer seemed to qualify as “God’s dates,” as he had stated thirteen years earlier; now they might be fallible. Russell even considered the possibility that 1914 (and 1915) could pass by with *none* of the expected events having occurred:

But let us suppose a case far from our expectations: suppose that A.D. 1915 should pass with the world’s affairs all serene and with evidence that the ‘very elect’ had not all been ‘changed’ and without the restoration of natural Israel to favor under the New Covenant. (Rom. 11:12, 15) What then? Would not that prove our chronology wrong? Yes, surely! And would not that prove a keen disappointment? Indeed it would! . . . What a blow that would be! One of the strings

57 *Ibid.*, October 1, 1904, pp. 296, 297 (= *Reprints*, pp. 3436, 3437).

58 *Ibid.*, August 15, 1904, pp. 250, 251 (= *Reprints*, p. 3415). Emphasis added.

59 *Ibid.*, November 15, 1904, pp. 342-344; June 15, 1905, pp. 179-186 (= *Reprints*, pp. 3459, 3460, 3574-3579).

60 C. T. Russell, *The Time is at Hand*, p. 169.

61 *Zion’s Watch Tower*, October 1, 1907, pp. 294, 295 (= *Reprints*, p. 4067).

of our ‘harp’ would be quite broken! However, dear friends, our harp would still have all the other strings in tune and that is what no other aggregation of God’s people on earth could boast.⁶²

Another point of uncertainty was whether a year 0 (between 1 B.C.E. and 1 C.E.) was to be included in the calculation or not. This matter had been brought up by Russell as early as 1904, but gained in importance as the year 1914 approached.

The 1914 date had been arrived at simply by subtracting 606 from 2,520, but gradually it was realized that no year 0 is allowed for in our present calendar of era reckoning. Consequently, from October 1, 606 B.C.E. to the beginning of January, 1 C.E. was only 605 years and 3 months, and from the beginning of January, 1 C.E. to October 1914 was only 1913 years and 9 months, making a total of 2,519 years, not 2,520. This would mean that the 2,520 years would end in October 1915, rather than October 1914.⁶³ But when the war broke out in Europe in August 1914, it apparently seemed ill-timed to correct this error. It was allowed to stand.

By 1913, with 1914 on the doorstep, the cautiousness regarding that year had increased. In the article “Let Your Moderation Be Known,” which appeared in the June 1, 1913 issue of *The Watch Tower*, Russell warned his readers against spending “valuable time and energy in guessing what will take place this year, next year, etc.” His confidence in his earlier published scheme of events was no longer evident: “This is the good tidings of God’s grace in Christ—whether the completion of the church shall be accomplished before 1914 or not.”⁶⁴ He expressed himself still more vaguely in the October 15 issue of the same year:

We are waiting for the time to come when the government of the world will be turned over to Messiah. We cannot say that it may not be either October 1914, or October 1915. It is possible that *we might be out of the correct reckoning on the subject a number of years.* We

62 *Ibid.*

63 *The Watch Tower*, December 1, 1912 (= *Reprints*, pp. 5141, 5142). As the First World War broke out in 1914 and that year was retained as *the end* of the Gentile times, the starting point of those times needed to be moved back one year from 606 to 607 B.C.E. in order to preserve a total of 2,520 years. Although some of the Society’s adherents had pointed this fact out very early (see, for example, the footnote on page 32 of John and Morton Edgar’s *Great Pyramid Passages*, 2nd ed., 1924) this necessary adjustment was not made by the Watch Tower Society until 1943, when it was presented in the book, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, on page 239. See also the book, *The Kingdom is at Hand*, 1944, p. 184. For additional details, see next chapter, page 79.

cannot say with certainty. We do not know. It is a matter of faith, and not of knowledge.⁶⁵

Earlier, 1914 had been one of “God’s dates,” and “to change the chronology even one year would destroy all this harmony.” But now they “might be out of the correct reckoning on the subject a number of years,” and nothing on the matter could be said “with certainty.” This was truly a *volte-face*! If it was indeed “a matter of faith,” one can only wonder in *what* or in *whom* that faith was to be based.

Russell’s own tottering faith in his chronology was further brought to light in *The Watch Tower* of January 1, 1914, in which he stated: “As already pointed out, we are by no means confident that this year, 1914, will witness as radical and swift changes of dispensation as we have expected.”⁶⁶ The article “The Days Are At Hand” in the same issue is especially revealing:

If later it should be demonstrated that the church is not glorified by October, 1914, we shall try to feel content with whatever the Lord’s will may be. . . . If 1915 should go by without the passage of the church, without the time of trouble, etc., it would seem to some to be a great calamity. It would not be so with ourselves. . . . If in the Lord’s providence *the time should come twenty-five years later*, then that would be our will. . . . If October, 1915, should pass, and we should find ourselves still here and matters going on very much as they are at present, and the world apparently making progress in the way of settling disputes, and there were no time of trouble in sight, and the nominal church were not yet federated, etc., we would say that evidently we have been out somewhere in our reckoning. In that event we would look over the prophecies further, to see if we could find an error. And then we would think, *Have we been expecting the wrong thing in the right time?* The Lord’s will might permit this.⁶⁷

Again, in the May 1, 1914 issue—forgetting his earlier statements about “*God’s dates*” and of “Bible evidence *proving*” that the predicted developments would occur in 1914—Russell told his readers that “in these columns and in the six volumes of *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES* we have set forth everything appertaining to the times and seasons *in a tentative form*; that is to say, not with positiveness, not with the claim that we knew, but merely with the suggestion that ‘thus and so’ seems to be the teaching of the Bible.”⁶⁸

64 *The Watch Tower*, June 1, 1913, pp. 166, 167 (= *Reprints*, p. 5249).

65 *Ibid.*, October 15, 1913, p. 307 (= *Reprints*, p. 5328). Emphasis added.

66 *Ibid.*, January 1, 1914, pp. 3, 4 (= *Reprints*, p. 5373).

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5 (= *Reprints*, p. 5374). Emphasis added.

68 *Ibid.*, May 1, 1914, pp. 134, 135 (= *Reprints*, p. 5450). Emphasis added.

Two months later Russell seemed to be on the point of rejecting his chronology altogether. Answering a colporteur, who wanted to know if the *Studies in the Scriptures* were to be circulated after October, 1914, “since you [Russell] have some doubts respecting the full accomplishment of all expected by or before October, 1914,” Russell replied:

It is our thought that these books will be on sale and read for years in the future, provided the Gospel age and its work continue. . . . We have not attempted to say that these views are infallible, but have stated the processes of reasoning and figuring, leaving to each reader the duty and privilege of reading, thinking and figuring for himself. *That will be an interesting matter a hundred years from now*; and if he can figure and reason better, he will still be interested in what we have presented.⁶⁹

Thus, by July 1914, Russell now seemed ready to accept the thought that the 1914 date probably was a failure, and that his writings on the matter were going to be merely of historical interest to Bible students a hundred years later!

Reactions to the outbreak of the war

With the outbreak of the war in Europe in August 1914, Russell’s wavering confidence in the chronology began to recover. Although the war itself did not exactly fit into the predicted pattern of events — that the “time of trouble” would be a class struggle between capital and labor, leading up to a period of worldwide anarchy — he saw in the war the prelude to that situation:

Socialism is, we believe, the main factor in the war now raging and which will be earth’s greatest and most terrible war — and probably the last.⁷⁰

Later in 1914, he wrote:

We think that the present distress amongst the nations is merely the beginning of this time of trouble. . . . The anarchy that will follow this war will be the real time of trouble. Our thought is that the war will so weaken the nations that following it there will be an attempt to bring in Socialistic ideas, and that this will be met by the governments — [etc., leading up to worldwide class struggle and

69 *Ibid.*, July 1, 1914, pp. 206, 207 (= *Reprints*, p. 5496). Emphasis added.

70 *Ibid.*, August 15, 1914, pp. 243, 244 (= *Reprints*, p. 5516).

anarchy].⁷¹

Like other millenarian authors, Russell believed that the expiration of the Gentile times would mean a restoration of the Jewish nation in Palestine. Toward the end of 1914, however, Palestine and Jerusalem were still occupied by Gentiles. It seemed obvious that the restoration would not begin to occur in 1914 as had been predicted. In the November 1 issue of *The Watch Tower*, therefore, Russell tried to reinterpret the end of the Gentile times to mean the end of the *persecution* of the Jews:

The treading down of the Jews has stopped. All over the world the Jews are now free—even in Russia. On September 5, the Czar of Russia issued a proclamation to all the Jews of the Russian Empire; and this was before the times of the Gentiles had expired. It stated that the Jews might have access to the highest rank in the Russian army, and that the Jewish religion was to have the same freedom as any other religion in Russia. Where are the Jews being trodden down now? Where are they being subjected to scorn? At present they are receiving no persecution whatever. We believe that the treading down of Jerusalem has ceased, because the time for the Gentiles to tread down Israel has ended.⁷²

However, the relief for the Jews in Russia and elsewhere referred to by Russell turned out to be only temporary. He could not, of course, foresee the coming fierce persecutions of the Jews in Germany, Poland, and other countries during the Second World War.

From the outbreak of the First World War and up to his death on October, 1916, Russell's restored confidence in his chronology remained unshaken, as demonstrated by the following extracts from various issues of *The Watch Tower* during the period:

January 1, 1915: “. . . the war is the one predicted in the Scriptures as associated with the great day of Almighty God—‘the day of vengeance of our God.’”⁷³

September 15, 1915: “Tracing the Scriptural chronology down to our day, we find that we are now living in the very dawn of the great seventh day of man's great week. This is abundantly corroborated by the events now taking place about us on every hand.”⁷⁴

71 *Ibid.*, November 1, 1914, pp. 327, 328 (= *Reprints*, p. 5567).

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 329, 330 (= *Reprints*, p. 5568).

73 *Ibid.*, January 1, 1915, pp. 3, 4 (= *Reprints*, p. 5601).

74 *Ibid.*, September 15, 1915, pp. 281, 282 (= *Reprints*, p. 5769).

February 15, 1916: “In STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, Vol. IV, we have clearly pointed out the things now transpiring, and the worse conditions yet to come.”⁷⁵

April 15, 1916: “We believe that the dates have proven to be quite right. We believe that Gentile Times have ended, and that God is now allowing the Gentile Governments to destroy themselves, in order to prepare the way for Messiah’s kingdom.”⁷⁶

September 1, 1916: “It still seems clear to us that the prophetic period known to us as the Times of the Gentiles ended chronologically in October, 1914. The fact that the great day of wrath upon the nation began there marks a good fulfilment of our expectations.”⁷⁷

In November 1918, however, the First World War suddenly ended—without being followed by a worldwide Socialist revolution and anarchy, as had been predicted. The last member of the “divinely recognized Church of Christ” had not been glorified, the city of Jerusalem was still being controlled by the Gentiles, the kingdom of God had not crushed “the Gentile image,” and the “new heavens and the new earth” could not be seen anywhere by trouble-tossed humanity. Not a single one of the seven predictions enumerated in the book *The Time is at Hand* had come true.⁷⁸ Pastor Russell’s “Bible Students” were confused, to say the least.

Yet—though not among the predictions—something *had* happened: The World War. Could it be that the time was right, after all, even though the predictions had failed? The explanation resorted to by the Adventists after 1844 and by Barbour and his associates after 1874—that they had expected “the wrong thing at the right time”—now seemed even more appropriate.⁷⁹ But how could the time be right, when all predictions based on it had failed? For years many of Russell’s followers experienced deep perplexity because of the non-arrival of the predicted events. After the lapse of some years, *J. F. Rutherford*, Russell’s successor as president of the Watch Tower Society, began to explain, step by step, what “really” had been fulfilled from 1914 onward.

75 *Ibid.*, February 15, 1916, pp. 51, 52 (= *Reprints*, p. 5852).

76 *Ibid.*, April 15, 1916 (= *Reprints*, p. 5888).

77 *Ibid.*, September 1, 1916, pp. 263, 264 (= *Reprints*, p. 5950).

78 See above, pages 50, 51. For a long time after 1914 it was held that the “time of trouble” (Matt. 24:21, 22) really began in that year, but this view was finally abandoned by the Watch Tower Society in 1969. (See *The Watchtower*, January 15, 1970, pp. 49-56.)

79 A. H. Macmillan, *Faith on the March* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 48.

In the address “The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand” at the September 5-13, 1922, Cedar Point Convention, Rutherford told his audience that the Kingdom of God *really had been established in 1914*, not on earth but *in the invisible heavens!*⁸⁰ And three years later, in 1925, he applied Revelation 12 to this event, stating that God’s Kingdom was *born in heaven in 1914* according to this prophecy.⁸¹

Previously the *Watch Tower’s* predictions had all been of an obvious, clearly visible, takeover of earth’s rulership by Christ. Now this was presented as something invisible, evident only to a select group.

Also at the Cedar Point Convention in 1922, Rutherford for the first time presented the view that “in 1918, or thereabouts, the Lord came to his (spiritual) temple.”⁸² Earlier, Russell and his associates had held the view that the heavenly resurrection took place in 1878. But in 1927 Rutherford transferred that event to 1918.⁸³ Likewise in the early 1930’s, Rutherford changed the date for the beginning of *Christ’s invisible presence* from 1874 to 1914.⁸⁴

Thus Rutherford gradually replaced the unfulfilled predictions with *a series of invisible and spiritual events* associated with the years 1914 and 1918. Ninety years after 1914 Rutherford’s “explanations” are still held by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

80 *New Heavens and a New Earth* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1953), p. 225. Until 1922, that is, for over forty years, the Bible Students had believed and taught that the kingdom of God had begun to be established in heaven in 1878. This event was now transferred to 1914. — See *The Time is at Hand* (= Vol. II of *Millennial Dawn*), 1889, p. 101.

81 See the article “Birth of a Nation” in *The Watch Tower* of March 1, 1925.

82 *The Watch Tower*, October 1, 1922, p. 298; November 1, 1922, p. 334.

83 *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1958), p. 192.

84 As of 1929 the Watch Tower Society still taught that “the second presence of the Lord Jesus Christ began in 1874 A.D.” (*Prophecy*, Brooklyn, N.Y.: International Bible Students Association, 1929, p. 65.) The exact date for the transference of the second coming from 1874 to 1914 is difficult to pinpoint. For some time confusing statements may be found in the publications. Perhaps the first indication of a change is the statement in *The Golden Age* of April 30, 1930, page 503, that “Jesus has been present *since the year 1914*.” However, *The Watch Tower* of October 15, 1930, somewhat vaguely states on page 308 that “the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ dates *from about 1875*.” Then, in 1931, the booklet, *The Kingdom, the Hope of the World*, again indicates that the second coming occurred in 1914. And in 1932 the booklet *What is Truth* clearly states on page 48: “The prophecy of the Bible, fully supported by the physical facts in fulfillment thereof, shows that *the second coming of Christ dates from the fall of the year 1914*.”

Summary

The interpretation of the “Gentile times” as having been of 2,520 years, beginning in 607 B.C.E. (earlier, 606 B.C.E.) and ending in 1914 C.E., was not some divine revelation made to Pastor Charles Taze Russell in the autumn of 1876. On the contrary, this idea has a long history of development, with its roots far back in the past.

It had its origin in the “year-day principle,” first posited by Rabbi Akibah ben Joseph in the first century C.E. From the ninth century onward this principle was applied to the time periods of Daniel by several Jewish rabbis.

Among Christians, Joachim of Floris in the twelfth century probably was the first to pick up the idea, applying it to the 1,260 days of Revelation and the three and one-half times of Daniel. After Joachim’s death, his followers soon identified the 1,260 year period with the Gentile times of Luke 21:24, and this interpretation was then common among groups, including the Reformers, branded as heretics by the church of Rome during the following centuries.

As time passed, and expectations failed when earlier explanations proved to be wrong, the starting-point of the 1,260 (or, 1290) years was progressively moved forward, in order to make them end in a then near future.

The first to arrive at a period of 2,520 years was apparently John Aquila Brown in 1823. Although his calculation was founded upon the “seven times” of Daniel 4, he did not equate those periods with the “Gentile times” of Luke 21:24. But this was very soon done by other expositors. Fixing the starting-point at 604 B.C.E., Brown reached the year 1917 as the seven times’ termination date. By using different starting-points, other biblical commentators in the following decades arrived at a number of different terminal dates. Some writers, who experimented with biblical “Jubilee cycles,” arrived at a period of 2,450 (or, 2,452) years ($49 \times 49 + 49$), which they held to be the period of the Gentile times.

The accompanying table presents a *selection* of applications of the 2,520 (and 2,450) years made by different authors during the last century. The calculations were in fact so numerous, that it would probably be difficult to find a single year between the 1830’s and 1930’s that does not figure in some calculation as the terminal date of the Gentile times! That a number of expositors pointed to 1914 or other years near to that date, such as 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1922 and 1923, is, therefore, not a cause for astonishment. The 1914

TABLE 2: APPLICATIONS OF THE 2,520 (OR 2,450) YEARS

Expositor	Date	Publication	Application BCE-CE	Comments
John Aquila Brown	1823	The Even-Tide . . .	604-1917	= "Seven times" of Daniel 4
William Cuninghame	1827	Dialogues on Prophecy, Vol. 1	728-1792	Report of the prophetic conferences at Albury Park
Henry Drummond	1827	" "	722-1798	
G. S. Faber	1828	The Sacred Calendar of Prophecy	657-1864	
Alfred Addis	1829	Heaven Opened	680-1840	
William Digby	1831	A Treatise on the 1260 Days	723-1793	
W. A. Holmes	1833	The Time of the End	685-1835	
Matthew Habershon	1834	A Dissertation . . .	677-1843	
John Fry	1835	Unfulfilled Prophecies . . .	677-1843	
William W. Pym	1835	A Word of Warning . . .	673-1847	
William Miller	1842	The First Report . . .	677-1843	
Th. R. Birks	1843	First Elements of Sacred Prophecy	606-1843	Gentile times = 2,450 years
Edward B. Elliott	1844	Horæ Apocalypticæ, Vol. III	727-1793	
" "	1844	" "	606-1914	A second alternative
Matthew Habershon	1844	An Historical Exposition	676-1844	
" "	1844	" "	601-1919	A second alternative
William Cuninghame	1847	The Fulfilling . . .	606-1847	Gentile times = 2,452 years
James Hatley Frere	1848	The Great Continental Revolution	603-1847	Gentile times = 2,450 years
Robert Seeley	1849	An Atlas of Prophecy	606-1914	Counted from "606 or 607"
" "	1849	" "	570-1950	A second alternative
" "	1849	" "	728-1792	A third alternative
Edward Bickersteth	1850	A Scripture Help	727-1793	Another of his calculations was 677-1843
" "	1850	" "	602-1918	

Anonymous	1856	The Watch Tower	727-1793	A pamphlet
Richard C. Shimeall	1859	Our Bible Chronology	652-1868	
J. S. Phillips	1865	The Rainbow, March 1,	652-1867	A London periodical edited by William Leask
"J. M. N."	1865	" " April 1,	658/47-1862/73	
Frederick W. Farrar	1865	" " November 1,	654-1866	
Anonymous	1870	The Prophetic Times, December,	715-1805	A periodical edited by Joseph A. Seiss <i>et al.</i> These are some examples; the writer gives twelve different alternatives!
" "	1870	" " "	698-1822	
" "	1870	" " "	643-1877	
" "	1870	" " "	606-1914	
" "	1870	" " "	598-1922	
Joseph Baylee	1871	The Times of the Gentiles	623-1896	
"P. H. G."	1871	The Quarterly Journal of Prophecy, April,	652/49-1868/71	A London periodical edited by Horatius Bonar
Edward White	1874	Our Hope, June,	626-1894	
N. H. Barbour	1875	Herald of the Morning , Sept & Oct.,	606-1914	A London periodical edited by Wm. Maude
C. T. Russell	1876	The Bible Examiner , October,	606-1914	Periodical published by Nelson H. Barbour Edited by George Storrs
E. H. Tuckett	1877	The Rainbow, August,	651/50-1869/70	
M. P. Baxter	1880	Forty Coming Wonders, 5th ed.	695-1825	
" "	1880	" " "	620-1900	A second alternative
H. Grattan Guinness	1886	Light for the Last Days	606-1915	These are only some of his many, diverse analyses
" "	1886	" " " "	604-1917	
" "	1886	" " " "	598-1923	
" "	1886	" " " "	587-1934	
W. E. Blackstone	1916	The Weekly Evangel, May 13	606-1915	This article sums up his viewpoints as published many years earlier
" "	1916	" " " "	595-1926	
" "	1916	" " " "	587-1934	

date would most probably have drowned in the sea of other failed dates and been forgotten by now had it not happened to be the year of the outbreak of the First World War.

When, back in 1844, E. B. Elliott suggested 1914 as a possible terminal date for the Gentile times, he reckoned the 2,520 years from Nebuchadnezzar's *accession-year*, which he dated to 606 B.C.E. N. H. Barbour, however, reckoned the 2,520 years from the desolation of Jerusalem in Nebuchadnezzar's *18th* regnal year. But as he dated this event to 606 B.C.E., he, too, in 1875, arrived at 1914 as the terminal date. Since their chronologies not only conflicted with each other, but also conflicted with the historically established chronology for Nebuchadnezzar's reign, their arriving at the same terminal year was simply a coincidence, demonstrating how arbitrary and gratuitous their calculations really were.

Barbour's calculation was accepted by C. T. Russell at their meeting in 1876. Barbour was then fifty-two years old while Russell was twenty-four—still very young. Although their ways parted again in the spring of 1879, Russell stuck to Barbour's time calculations, and since that time the 1914 date has been the pivotal point in prophetic explanations among Russell's followers.

Supplement to the third and later editions, chapter 1:

The information presented in this chapter has been available to the Jehovah's Witnesses since 1983, when the first edition of this book was published. In addition, the same information was summarized by Raymond Franz in chapter 7 of his widely known work, *Crisis of Conscience*, published in the same year. Thus—after 10 years—in 1993 the Watch Tower Society finally felt compelled to admit that neither the 2,520-year calculation nor the 1914 date originated with Charles Taze Russell as it had held until then. Further, the Society now also admits that the predictions Russell and his associates attached to 1914 failed.

These admissions are found on pages 134–137 of *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, a book on the history of the movement published by the Watch Tower Society in 1993. Prior to 1993 the impression given had been that Russell was the first to publish the 2,520-year calculation pointing to 1914, doing this for the first time in the October, 1876 issue of George Storrs' magazine the *Bible Examiner*. Also, that decades in advance Russell and his followers foretold the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and other events associated with the war. Thus the earlier organiza-

tional history book *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* quoted some very general statements made in the book *The Plan of the Ages* (published in 1886) about the "time of trouble" (originally believed to extend from 1874 to 1914) and claimed:

Although this was still decades before the first world war, it is surprising how accurately the events that finally took place were actually foreseen. (Emphasis added.)⁸⁵

Similarly, *The Watchtower* of August 1, 1971, made the following pre-tentious statements on page 468:

From the Bible chronology, Jehovah's witnesses as far back as 1877 pointed to the year 1914 as one of great significance. . . .

The momentous year of 1914 came, and with it World War I, the most widespread upheaval in history up to that time. It brought unprecedented slaughter, famine, pestilence and overthrow of governments. *The world did not expect such horrible events as took place. But Jehovah's witnesses did expect such things, and others acknowledged that they did. . . .*

How could Jehovah's witnesses have known so far in advance what world leaders themselves did not know? Only by God's holy spirit making such prophetic truths known to them. True, some today claim that those events were not hard to predict, since mankind has long known various troubles. But if those events were not hard to predict, *then why were not all the politicians, religious leaders and economic experts doing so? Why were they telling the people the opposite?* (Emphasis added.)

Unfortunately for the Watch Tower Society, none of these claims are in accordance with the facts of history. Whether deliberate or the result of ignorance, each represents a serious distortion of reality.

Firstly, although there were a number of predictions in the Watch Tower publications as to what would take place in 1914, *none of them came close to a prediction of the outbreak of a world war in that year.*

Secondly, political and religious leaders, *contrary to the statements in The Watchtower* quoted above, *long before 1914* expected that a great war sooner or later *would* break out in Europe. As early as 1871 *Otto von Bismarck*, the first Lord High Chancellor of the German Empire, declared that the "Great War" would come one day. For decades before 1914, the daily papers and weeklies were constantly occupied with the theme. To cite just one example among many, the January 1892 issue of the highly respected English weekly *Black and White* explained in an editorial introduction to a fictional serial on the coming war:

85 *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1959), p. 31.

The air is full of rumours of War. The European nations stand fully armed and prepared for instant mobilization. *Authorities are agreed that a GREAT WAR must break out in the immediate future*, and that this War will be fought under novel and surprising conditions. All facts seem to indicate that the coming conflict will be the bloodiest in history, and must involve the momentous consequences to the whole world. At any time the incident may occur which will precipitate the disaster.⁸⁶

I. F. Clarke, in his book *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984*, explains to what an extent the First World War “was being prepared in fact and in fiction”:

From 1871 onwards the major European powers prepared for the great war that Bismarck had said would come one day. And for close on half a century, while the general staffs and the ministries argued about weapons, estimates, and tactics, the tale of the war-to-come was a dominant device in the field of purposive fiction. . . . The period from the eighteen-eighties to the long-expected outbreak of the next war in 1914 saw the emergence of the greatest number of these tales of coming conflicts ever to appear in European fiction.⁸⁷

The people of that time, therefore, could not avoid being confronted with the constant predictions of a coming great war in Europe. The question was not *if* but *when* the Great War would break out. Here there was room for speculations, and many of the imaginative tales and novels suggested different dates. Specific dates were sometimes even pointed out in the very titles of the books, for example, *Europa in Flammen. Der deutsche Zukunftskrieg 1909* (“Europe in Flames. The Coming German War of 1909”), by Michael Wagebald, published in 1908, and *The Invasion of 1910*, by W. LeQueux, published in 1906.

Politicians and statesmen, too, sometimes tried to pinpoint the specific year for the outbreak of the expected great war. One of the more lucky was *M. Francis Delaisi*, a member of the French Chamber of Deputies. In his article “*La Guerre qui Vient*” (“The Coming War”), published in the parish periodical *La Guerre Sociale* in 1911, he discusses at great length the diplomatic situation, concluding that “a terrible war between England and Germany is preparing.” As shown by the following extracts from his article, some of his political forecasts turned out to be remarkably accurate:

A conflict is preparing itself compared with which the horrible slaughter of the Russo-Japanese war [in 1904-05] will be child’s play.

In 1914 the [naval] forces of England and Germany will be almost equal.

A Prussian army corps will advance with forced marches to occupy Antwerp.

We, the French, will have to do the fighting on the Belgian plains.

86 Quoted by I. F. Clarke in *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 66, 67.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

All newspapers will print in headlines as large as your hand these prophetic words: THE BELGIUM NEUTRALITY HAS BEEN VIOLATED. THE PRUSSIAN ARMY IS MARCHING UPON LILLE.⁸⁸

In the religious area, it was especially the “millennarians” that were then presenting predictions of the approaching end of the world. This movement included millions of Christians from different quarters, Baptists, Pentecostals, and so on. Pastor Russell and his followers, the “Bible Students,” were just a small branch of this broad movement. Common to them all was their pessimistic view of the future. In his book *Armageddon Now!* Dwight Wilson describes their reaction to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914:

The war itself came as no shock to these opponents of postmillennial optimism; they had not only looked toward the culmination of the age in Armageddon, but anticipated ‘wars and rumors of wars’ as signs of the approaching end.⁸⁹

Wilson then goes on to quote one of them, R. A. Torrey, dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, who, in 1913, one year before the outbreak of the war, wrote in his book, *The Return of the Lord Jesus*: “We talk of disarmament, but we all know it is not coming. All our present peace plans will end in the most awful wars and conflicts this old world ever saw!”⁹⁰

As Theodore Graebner tells in his book *War in the Light of Prophecy*, the war of 1914 had scarcely begun before a great host of writers from different religious quarters arose, claiming that the war had been foretold:

Soon the announcement was made by several investigators: IT HAS BEEN FORETOLD. Immediately thousands of Bible Christians became interested. Immediately, too, others set to work on Gog and Magog, Armageddon, the Seventy Weeks, 666, 1,260, etc., and soon religious periodicals, in this country and abroad, contained the message, announced with greater or less assurance, IT HAS BEEN FORETOLD. Pamphlets and tracts appeared promulgating the same message, and soon a number of books were on the market, running to 350 pages each, which not only contained most circumstantial ‘proof’ for this assertion, but announced likewise the exact time when the war would come to a close, who would be the victor, and the significance of the war for the Christian Church, now (it was said) about to enter into her millennial period.⁹¹

Graebner, who felt incited to examine a great number of these contentions, after a very thorough investigation concludes that:

88 Quoted by Theodore Graebner in his book, *War in the Light of Prophecy*. “Was it Foretold?” *A Reply to Modern Chiliasm* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), pp. 14, 15.

89 Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 36, 37.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

. . . the entire mass of millennial literature that flourished during the First World War—and a tremendous mass it was—was proved definitely, completely, absolutely, false *by the events*. In not a single point did the First World War develop as was to be expected after reading the chiliastic [millennialist] interpreters. Not a single [one] of them predicted the outcome of the war. Not a single [one] of them foretold the entrance of the United States. Not a single [one] of them foretold World War II.⁹²

Pastor Russell's speculations about the coming great war in Europe did not differ appreciably from those of the contemporary novel-writers and millenarian expositors. In the *Zion's Watch Tower* of February, 1885, he wrote: "Storm clouds are gathering thick over the old world. It looks as though a great European war is one of the possibilities of the near future."⁹³

Commenting on the prevailing world situation two years later he concluded, in the issue of February, 1887: "This all looks as though next Summer [1888] would see a war on foot which might engage every nation of Europe."⁹⁴ In the issue of January 15, 1892, he had postponed the war to "about 1905," at the same time *stressing that this generally expected Great War had nothing to do with 1914 and the expectations attached to that date*. In 1914 he expected—not a general European war—but the climax of the "battle of Armageddon" (which he thought had begun in 1874), when all the nations on earth would be crushed and be replaced by the kingdom of God. He wrote:

The daily papers and the weeklies and the monthlies, religious and secular, are continually discussing the prospects of war in Europe. They note the grievances and ambitions of the various nations and predict that war is inevitable at no distant day, that it may begin at any moment between some of the great powers, and that the prospects are that it will eventually involve them all. . . .

But, notwithstanding these predictions and the good reasons which many see for making them, we do not share them. That is, we do not think that the prospects of a general European war are so marked as is commonly supposed. . . . Even should a war or revolution break out in Europe sooner than 1905, we do not consider it any portion of the severe trouble predicted. . . . [The] ever-darkening war cloud will burst in all its destructive fury. This culmination we do not expect, however, before about 1905, as the events predicted will require about that time, notwithstanding the rapid progress in these directions now possible.⁹⁵

91 Graebner, *op. cit.*, p. 8, 9.

92 *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10.

93 *Reprints*, p. 720.

94 *Reprints*, p. 899.

95 *Reprints*, pp. 1354-1356

The generally expected Great War finally came in 1914. But probably none, and in any case not Charles Taze Russell and his followers, had predicted that it would come that year. The very different events that he and his associated “Bible Students” had attached to that date did not occur. Like the predictions of the many other contemporary millennialist writers, their predictions, too, were proved “definitely, completely, absolutely, false by the events.”

To claim afterwards, as the Watch Tower Society repeatedly did up to 1993, that they and they alone “accurately,” “by God’s holy spirit,” had predicted the outbreak of the war in 1914 and other events, and that “all the politicians, religious leaders, and economic experts” had been “telling the people the opposite,” is demonstrably a gross distortion of the historical facts.

As explained earlier, some of those pretentious claims were finally, in 1993, withdrawn in the new book *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*. The book was introduced at the district assemblies of Jehovah’s Witnesses that year as a “candid look” at the history of the movement. The admissions, however, usually are contextually surrounded by a minimum of background information which, moreover, is so apologetically slanted and warped that it often conceals more than it reveals.

True, the Society finally admits that Russell took over his calculation of the Gentile times from Nelson H. Barbour, who had published it one year before Russell “in the August, September, and October 1875 issues of the *Herald of the Morning*.”⁹⁶ In the preceding paragraph the book even seeks to enlist the 19th-century expositors of the 2,520-year calculation as supporting the 1914 date. This impression is further enhanced by the bold-typed statement to the left of the paragraph: “**They could see that 1914 was clearly marked by Bible prophecy.**” The presentation of the history, however, is narrowly limited to a few carefully selected expositors, the calculations of whom are partially obscured, adjusted and arranged so as to create the impression that the 2,520-year calculation *uniquely pointed forward to 1914*. *None of the many other terminal dates arrived at by expositors before Russell are mentioned*. Thus, although John A. Brown is stated to have arrived at the 2,520 years “as early as 1823,” his particular application of the period is completely veiled and distorted in the subsequent sentences:

⁹⁶ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1993), p. 134.

subtitle "Herald of Christ's Presence," which appeared on the cover of *Zion's Watch Tower*.

Recognition of Christ's presence as being invisible became an important foundation on which an understanding of many Bible prophecies would be built. Those early Bible Students realized that the presence of the Lord should be of primary concern to all true Christians. (Mark 13:33-37) They were keenly interested in the Master's return and were alert to the fact that they had a responsibility to publicize it, but they did not yet clearly discern all the details. Yet, what God's spirit did enable them to understand at a very early time was truly remarkable. One of these truths involved a highly significant date marked by Bible prophecy.

End of the Gentile Times

The matter of Bible chronology had long been of great interest to Bible students. Commentators had set out a variety of views on Jesus' prophecy about "the times of the Gentiles" and the prophet Daniel's record of Nebuchadnezzar's dream regarding the tree stump that was banded for "seven times."—Luke 21:24, *KJ*; Dan. 4:10-17.

As early as 1823, John A. Brown, whose work was published in London, England, calculated the "seven times" of Daniel chapter 4 to be 2,520 years in length. But he did not clearly discern the date with which the prophetic time period began or when it would end. He did, however, connect these "seven times" with the Gentile Times of Luke 21:24. In 1844, E. B. Elliott, a British clergyman, drew attention to 1914 as a possible date for the end of the "seven times" of Daniel, but he also set out an alternate view that pointed to the time of the French Revolution. Robert Seeley, of London, in 1849, handled the matter in a similar manner. At least by 1870, a publication edited by Joseph Seiss and associates and printed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was setting out calculations that pointed to 1914 as a significant date, even though the reasoning it contained was based on chronology that C. T. Russell later rejected.

Then, in the August, September, and October 1875 issues of *Herald of the Morning*, N. H. Barbour helped to harmonize details that had been pointed out by others. Using chronology compiled by Christopher Bowen, a clergyman in England, and published by E. B. Elliott, Barbour identified the start of the Gentile Times with King Zedekiah's removal from kingship as foretold at Ezekiel 21:25, 26, and he pointed to 1914 as marking the end of the Gentile Times.

Early in 1876, C. T. Russell received a copy of *Herald of the Morning*. He promptly wrote to Barbour and then spent time with him in Philadelphia during the summer, discussing, among other things, prophetic time periods. Shortly thereafter, in an article entitled "Gentile Times: When Do

They could see that 1914 was clearly marked by Bible prophecy

But he did not clearly discern the date with which the prophetic time period began or when it would end. He did, however, *connect these 'seven times' with the Gentile Times of Luke 21:24.*⁹⁷

Quite to the contrary, as shown in the chapter above, Brown expressly stated as his *firm conviction* that the 2,520-year period began in 604 B.C.E. and would end in 1917. Further, despite the Society's italicized statement, Brown *did not* connect the 2,520 years with the Gentile times of Luke 21:24, because, as pointed out in the chapter above, he held the Gentile times referred to in this text to be 1,260 (lunar) years, not "seven times" of 2,520 years. (See footnote 20 above.) Both statements about Brown's calculation, then, are demonstrably false.

In addition to John A. Brown, the Society in the same paragraph refers to Edward B. Elliott and Robert Seeley, both of whom mentioned 1914 as one of the possible dates for the end of the "seven times." Both of them, however, actually *preferred* 1793 (later changed to 1791 by Elliott) as the terminal date.⁹⁸

Finally, an unnamed publication edited by Joseph Seiss and others is stated to have set out calculations that pointed to 1914 as a significant date, "even though the reasoning it contained was based on chronology that C. T. Russell later rejected."⁹⁹

The fact is, however, that this holds true of *all* four expositors mentioned by the Society. *All of them used a chronology that dated the desolation of Jerusalem to 588 or 587 B.C.E.* (not 606 B.C.E. as in Russell's writings). Brown arrived at 1917 as the terminal date only because he reckoned the 2,520 years from the *first year* of Nebuchadnezzar (604 B.C.E.) instead of his 18th year, as did Barbour and Russell. And the other three arrived at 1914 by counting from Nebuchadnezzar's *accession-year*, which they

97 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

98 The Watch Tower Society gives no specific references. E. B. Elliott first published his calculations in *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 1st ed. (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844), vol. III, pp. 1429-1431. Robert Seeley published his calculations in *An Atlas of Prophecy: Being the Prophecies of Daniel & St. John* (London: Seeley's, 1849), p. 9. See also footnote 30 of chapter I.

99 The unnamed publication is the *The Prophetic Times* magazine. The calculation was presented in the article "Prophetic Times. An Inquiry into the Dates and Periods of Sacred Prophecy," written by an anonymous contributor and published in the issue of December, 1870, pp. 177-184. The author, on pages 178 and 179, presents *12 different starting-points for the times of the Gentiles, extending from 728 to 598 B.C.E., thus arriving at 12 different terminal dates extending from 1792 to 1922 C.E.!* The year 1914 is the next to the last of these terminal dates. The calculation pointing to 1914 is counted from the *accession-year* of Nebuchadnezzar, which the author, like Elliott and Seeley, dates to 606 B.C.E. Thus he, too, followed a chronology that dates the destruction of Jerusalem to 588 or 587 B.C.E., not 606 B.C.E. as in Russell's writings or 607 B.C.E. as in later Watch Tower publications.

dated to 606 B.C.E. (instead of 605 B.C.E., the date established by modern historians).¹⁰⁰

Although all of them based their calculations on chronologies that were rejected by Russell and his followers, the Society claims that these expositors “could see that 1914 was clearly marked by Bible prophecy.” How they “could see” this “clearly” by using chronologies that the Society still holds to be false is certainly puzzling. Of course, for a reader to discover such inconsistent reasonings, he or she has to check the works of these expositors. The problem is that the Society’s authors commonly avoid giving specific references. This practice makes it virtually impossible for the great majority of readers to discover the subtle methods used to support indefensible interpretations and cover over embarrassing evidence.

As just mentioned, the Society, contrary to earlier claims, concedes in the new book that the predictions attached to 1914 failed. As was shown in the chapter above, the very specific and distinct predictions about 1914 were summarized in seven points on pages 76-78 of Vol. II of *Millennial Dawn*, originally published in 1889. These predictions were there put forward in no uncertain terms. The discussion is teeming with words and phrases such as “facts,” “proof,” “Bible evidence,” and “established truth.” That 1914 would see “the disintegration of the rule of imperfect men,” for instance, is stated to be “a fact firmly established by the Scriptures.”¹⁰¹

What does the Society’s new history book do with the pretentious claims and the very positive language that originally encapsulated these predictions? They are totally smoothed over or concealed. Referring to the above-mentioned discussion of the Gentiles times in Vol. II of *Millennial Dawn*—but without quoting any of the *actual statements* made—the Society asks: “But what would the end of the Gentile Times mean?” The surprising answer given is that the Bible Students “were not completely sure what would happen”!

100 As shown in the chapter above, Barbour and Russell, too, started the Gentile times in 606 B.C.E., although this was held to be the date for the desolation of Jerusalem in the *eighteenth* year of Nebuchadnezzar. The 606 B.C.E. date is nowhere mentioned in the Society’s new book, probably because the Society today uses 607 B.C.E. as the starting-point. Reminding the readers of the earlier date, therefore, might only seem confusing, at least to those who have never heard of it. How the Society in 1944 (in the book *The Kingdom is at Hand*, p. 175) managed to change the starting-point from 606 to 607 B.C.E. and still retain 1914 as the terminal date has a strange history of its own, a history that has been recounted in the booklet *The Watchtower Society and Absolute Chronology* (Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, 1981), authored by “Karl Burganger” (a pen name I used at that time). See also next chapter, pp. 77-84.

101 *The Time is at Hand* (= Vol. II of *Millennial Dawn*, later called *Studies in the Scriptures*), Pittsburgh: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, 1889, pp. 76-102.

Although some of the predictions are briefly mentioned, the Society carefully avoids terming them “predictions” or “prophecies.” Russell and his associates never “predicted” or “foretold” anything, never claimed to present “proof” or “established truth.” They just “thought,” “suggested,” “expected,” and “earnestly hoped” that this or that “might” happen, but they “were not completely sure.”¹⁰² Thus the predictions are wrapped up in language that completely masks the true nature of the aggressive doomsday message proclaimed to the world by the International Bible Students for over a quarter of a century before 1914. Disguising the presumptuous predictions in such vague and unassuming words and phrases, of course, makes it easier to “humbly” concede that these failed.

102 *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (1993), page 135.

BIBLICAL AND SECULAR CHRONOLOGY

IN DEFENDING the date of 607 B.C.E. as the time of the desolation of Jerusalem and the starting point for calculating the length of the Gentile times, representatives of the Watch Tower Society claim that they are relying on the Bible. Those who date the desolation to 587 or 586 B.C.E. are said to rely on secular sources rather than the Bible. The anonymous author of the “Appendix to chapter 14” of the book *“Let Your Kingdom Come,”* for instance, states:

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.¹

Such statements obviously intend to create the impression that those who reject the 607 B.C.E. date for the desolation of Jerusalem have no real faith in the Bible. But do such statements give a fair description of the matter? Or are they just sanctimonious disparagement, aimed at defaming the Christian character of those who disagree, not with the Scriptures, but with the Watch Tower Society’s datings? Or may it even be that the defenders of the Society’s chronology have themselves not really understood the true nature of Biblical chronology?

The nature of the Biblical chronology

Today, people read or use the terms B.C. and A.D. (corresponding to B.C.E. and C.E.) and generally give no thought to the origin of these designations. Actually, the “Christian era,” in which events are dated in

1 *“Let Your Kingdom Come”* (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1981), p. 189.

relation to the year of the birth of Christ, is a rather late construction. As is well established, the system was not introduced until the sixth century C.E. by the Roman monk and scholar Dionysius Exiguus. Another 500 years would pass, however, before this new era had been generally accepted as a dating system in the Catholic world.

Since the Bible was written long before the time of Dionysius Exiguus, it does not, of course, give any dates according to our Christian era. Thus, although the Watch Tower Society dates the baptism of Jesus to 29 C.E., the 20th year of Artaxerxes I to 455 B.C.E., the fall of Babylon to 539 B.C.E., and the desolation of Jerusalem to 607 B.C.E., none of these dates are found in the Bible. The Bible gives *relative datings* only. What does that imply?

Consider this relevant example: In 2 Kings 25:2 the desolation of Jerusalem is dated to the “eleventh year of King Zedekiah,” the last king of Judah. Verse 8 additionally tells us that this occurred in the “nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.”

But when was that? How far from our own time was it? How many years before the Christian era did it happen? The fact is that the Bible *gives no information whatsoever that, of itself, links up these datings with our Christian era.*

Similarly, the books of Kings and Chronicles tell about the kings who ruled in Israel and Judah from Saul, the first king, on to Zedekiah, the last one. We are told who succeeded whom, and for how many years each of them ruled. By summing up the lengths of reign from Saul to Zedekiah we can measure the approximate space of time (there are many uncertain points) between these two kings. In this way we find that the period of the Hebrew monarchies covered roughly 500 years. But still we have found no answer to the question: *At what point on the stream of time did this period start and at what point did it end?*

If the Bible had gone on to give a continuous and unbroken series of regnal years from Zedekiah all the way down to the beginning of the Christian era, the question would have been answered. But Zedekiah was the last of the Jewish line of kings and his reign ended centuries before Christ’s coming. Nor does the Bible give any other information that directly identifies for us the length of the period from Zedekiah’s “eleventh year” (when Jerusalem was desolated) to the beginning of the Christian era. Thus we have a period of roughly 500 years, the period of the Hebrew monarchies, but we are not told how far from our time this period was and how it can be fixed to our Christian era.

If the Bible had preserved dated and detailed descriptions of *astronomical* events, such as solar and lunar eclipses, or the positions of the planets in relation to different stars and constellations, this would have made our problem easier. Modern astronomers, with their knowledge of the regular movements of the moon and the planets, are able to calculate the positions these heavenly bodies held on the starry sky thousands of years ago. But the fact is that the Bible provides no information of this kind.

The Bible of itself, then, does not show how its chronological datings may be connected with our own era. A chronology that is in this sense “hanging in the air” is simply the type of chronology called a *relative chronology*. Only if the Biblical information supplied us with the exact distance from the time of Zedekiah up to our own era—either by the aid of a complete and coherent line of lengths of reign, or by detailed and dated astronomical observations—we would have had an *absolute chronology*, that is, a chronology that gives us the exact distance from the last year of Zedekiah to our own time.² It seems evident that the Bible writers themselves were not concerned about supplying this, their focus simply being on other matters. What source, then, can we look to to make the connection with our era reckoning?

Is there a “Bible chronology” without secular sources?

Despite the *relative* nature of the Biblical dates, it is nonetheless not impossible to date events mentioned in the Bible. If we were able to synchronize the chronology of the Bible with the chronology of another country, whose chronology in turn can be fixed to our Christian era, then it would be possible to convert the Bible’s *relative* chronology into an *absolute* chronology. This means, however, that we would have to rely on *extra-Biblical*, that is, on *secular historical sources*, in order to date events in the Bible.

2 Dr. Michael C. Astour explains: “Absolute chronology means dating reigns, wars, treaties, destructions, rebuildings, and other events known from written and archaeological records, in terms of modern Western time reckoning, i.e., in years B.C.” (*Hittite History and Absolute Chronology of the Bronze Age*, Partille, Sweden: Paul Åströms förlag, 1989, p. 1.) Such a chronology is usually best established by the aid of recorded ancient astronomical observations. As the renowned expert on ancient astronomy, Professor Otto Neugebauer, puts it, “an ‘absolute chronology’ [is] a chronology which is based on astronomically fixed dates in contrast to a ‘relative chronology’ which tells us only the length of certain intervals, e.g., the total of regnal years in a dynasty.” — *A History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy*, Book VI (Berlin-Heidelberg-New York: Springer-Verlag, 1975), p. 1071.

And we have no other alternative. If we want to know when, in relation to our own time, an event mentioned in the Bible took place—be it the date for the fall of Babylon, the date for the desolation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the date for the rebuilding of the temple in the reign of Darius I, or any other date whatever—*then we are obliged to turn to the secular historical sources*. This is the sober fact every Bible believer has to accept, whether he or she likes it or not. The simple truth is that—as relates to connecting with our Christian era reckoning—*without secular sources there is no Bible chronology, no datings of Biblical events in terms of years “B.C.E.” or “C.E.”*

This also means, of course, that to speak of using the “chronology of the Bible” as a unilateral, independent time-measurer by which the correctness of a certain date can be established, is simply to ignore reality. When, for instance, some Witnesses point to the fact that modern historians date the fall of Babylon to 539 B.C.E. and then claim that “the chronology of the Bible is *in agreement* with this date,” they show they have not really understood what the *relative* nature of the Biblical chronology actually implies. Where does the Bible assign a *date* for the fall of Babylon? A Witness might refer to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the “seventy years” leading up to Babylon’s fall. But on what *date* did those seventy years *begin*, so as to count forward to their end? There is none supplied. Since the Bible does not give any date at all, not even a specific *relative* date, for the fall of Babylon, the statement that the Bible “*agrees*” with the secular dating of this event to 539 B.C.E. is completely meaningless.³ And

3 According to secular sources Babylon was captured by Persian king Cyrus’ troops in the 17th year of Nabonidus, which was thus to become the “accession-year” of Cyrus. (For the Babylonian accession year system, see the Appendix for Chapter 2.) Although the fall of Babylon is referred to several times in the Bible, the event is not dated to any specific regnal year, neither that of Nabonidus (who is not even mentioned) nor of Cyrus. Isaiah (chapters 13, 14, 21, 45, 47, 48) and Jeremiah (chapters 25, 27, 50, 51) both predicted the fall of Babylon, but *neither of them gave any date for the event*. Daniel, in chapter 5, verses 26-28, predicted that the fall of Babylon was imminent. Then, in verses 30 and 31, he states that “in that very night” Belshazzar (the son of Nabonidus) was killed and was succeeded by “Darius the Mede.” But who was “Darius the Mede”? The Watch Tower Society admits that the historical identification of this figure “is uncertain.” The suggestion (of Professor D. J. Wiseman) that “Darius the Mede” is but another name for Cyrus himself is rejected. (*Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988, pp. 581-583.) Further, although Daniel 6:28 mentions “the reign of Darius” and “the reign of Cyrus the Persian,” and although Daniel 9:1 mentions the “first year” of “Darius the Mede,” the Bible neither gives the length of the reign of “Darius the Mede” nor does it indicate if his reign should be inserted between the fall of Babylon and the first year of Cyrus or not. Thus, although the Bible (in 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23 and Ezra 1:1-4) states that the Jewish exiles were released “in the first year of Cyrus,” it does not show *how long after the fall of Babylon* this occurred. The Bible, then, does not give even a *relative* date for the fall of Babylon.

it is equally meaningless and misleading to state that the secular date for the desolation of Jerusalem, 587 or 586 B.C.E., *disagrees* with the chronology of the Bible, since the absolute date for that event is not given in the Bible either.

What of the 70 years of Jeremiah 25:11,12 and 29:10, on which Witnesses rely so heavily in their chronology? Witnesses quite naturally hold to the Watch Tower Society's claim that these 70 years refer to the period of Jerusalem's desolation, reckoned from the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar to the return of the Jewish exiles in the 1st year of Cyrus (that is, his first full or *regnal* year, following his *accession* year, which began in 539 B.C.E.). As a result of this view, the time interval between the dates historians have established for these two events—587/86 and 538/37 B.C.E.—appears too short, by some 20 years. The Watch Tower Society, therefore, chooses to reject one of the two dates. They could reject the date for Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year (587/86 B.C.E.) or reject the date for Cyrus' first regnal year (538/37 B.C.E.). They reject the first date, 587/86 B.C.E. On what basis do they reject *that* date and not the *other*?

There is no *Biblical* reason for this choice. As pointed out earlier, the Bible itself neither agrees nor disagrees with either of these two dates, dates stated in terms of the Christian era reckoning. The Bible, therefore, simply does not provide the means for deciding which of the two dates is the better one, in terms of being firmly established. On what grounds, then, should the choice be made—provided that the Society's interpretation of the 70 years is correct?

The most logical, sound and scholarly method would be to accept the date that is most clearly established by the extra-Biblical historical sources. This is because these sources **do** supply the data needed to link up with our Christian era reckoning. And, as will be demonstrated in the next two chapters, these sources show very definitely that, of the two dates just considered, the chronology of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is much better established by astronomical and other documents than is the chronology of Cyrus' reign. If a choice were really necessary, and a Bible-believing Christian were faced with choosing, the natural choice, then, should be to retain the 587/86 B.C.E. date and reject the 538/37 B.C.E. date.

Yet the Watch Tower Society prefers the *opposite* choice. Since the reason for this is not because the Bible itself favors one of these dates over the other, and it is certainly not because the historical evidence does so, what is the *real* reason for their choice?

Loyalty to the Bible—or to a prophetic speculation?

If, according to their claims, the 70-year period of Jeremiah's prophecy really should be reckoned from the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar to the 1st year of Cyrus, the Watch Tower Society should logically have started with 587/86 B.C.E. as historically *the more reliable* of the two dates. Counting 70 years forward from that date would point to 518/17 B.C.E. as the first year of Cyrus instead of 538/37. This would be *as Biblical* and actually *more scholarly* than to retain 538/37 B.C.E. and reject 587/86 (the date having the stronger documentary and astronomical support).

Why, then, does the Watch Tower Society reject 587/86 B.C.E. instead of rejecting 538/37?

The answer is obvious. The 587/86 B.C.E. date is in direct conflict with the Watch Tower Society's chronology for the "times of the Gentiles." In that chronology, their 607 B.C.E. date for the desolation of Jerusalem is the indispensable starting-point. Without the date of 607 B.C.E. the Society could not arrive at 1914 C.E. as the ending point. And as this date is the very *cornerstone* of the prophetic claims and message of the Watch Tower organization, nothing is allowed to upset it, *neither the Bible nor historical facts*. At heart, therefore, it is neither a question of loyalty to the Bible nor loyalty to historical facts. The choice of date has quite another motive: *Loyalty to a chronological speculation that has become a vital condition for the divine claims of the Watch Tower organization*.

In the next two chapters it will be demonstrated that the whole Neo-Babylonian chronology is firmly established by at least *seventeen different lines of evidence*. Thus the 587/86 date for the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar (and the desolation of Jerusalem) and the 538/37 date for the first year of Cyrus are *both* correct. That none of these dates are in conflict with the 70 years of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:11, 12 and 29:10) will be demonstrated in a subsequent chapter.

The collapse of the original starting-point

To repeat: *Without secular sources there is no absolute chronology for dating events in the Scriptures*. The Watch Tower Society has itself had to yield to this inevitable, though embarrassing, fact. The very first thing the Society has been forced to do, therefore, *in order to have any Bible chronology at all*, is to turn to the *secular* sources and select a date on which its chronology can be based. The

date they have chosen is the date historians have established for the fall of Babylon, 539 *B.C.E.* This secular date, therefore, is the very foundation of what the Society presents as its “Bible chronology.” Why did the Society choose this date as the basis for its chronology? And how did the historians arrive at this date?

When Charles Taze Russell first adopted Nelson H. Barbour’s “Bible chronology,” 536 *B.C.E.*—not 539 *B.C.E.*—was the secular basis on which that chronology had been established. This date was believed to be, not that of Babylon’s fall, but *the first year of Cyrus*. By adding the “seventy years” to 536 they got 606 *B.C.E.* as the date for the desolation of Jerusalem, and by subtracting 606 from 2,520 (the supposed number of years in the Gentile times) they arrived at 1914.

Originally Barbour claimed that the 536 *B.C.E.* date was derived from the ancient kinglist known as “Ptolemy’s Canon.”⁴ In time, however, it was discovered that this was not the case. This kinglist not only points to 538 *B.C.E.* as the first full year of Cyrus, but also to 587 *B.C.E.* as the date for the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar, the year of Jerusalem’s desolation. When these facts dawned upon Russell he rejected the kinglist and started to attack its supposed originator, Claudius Ptolemy. He still believed, however, that 536 *B.C.E.* was a generally accepted date for the first year of Cyrus, stating:

All students of chronology may be said to be agreed that the first year of Cyrus was the year 536 before the beginning of our *Anno Domini* era.⁵

- 4 On page 194 of his book *Three Worlds, or Plan of Redemption* (Rochester, N.Y., 1877), for instance, Barbour asserted: “The fact that the first year of Cyrus was *B.C.* 536, is based upon Ptolemy’s canon, supported by the eclipses by which the dates of the Grecian and Persian era have been regulated. And the accuracy of Ptolemy’s canon is now accepted by all the scientific and literary world.”
- 5 *Zion’s Watch Tower*, May 15, 1896, pp. 104, 105, 113 (= *Reprints*, pp. 1975, 1980. Emphasis added). — It is true that many earlier Christian chronologers, including archbishop James Ussher and Sir Isaac Newton, dated the first year of Cyrus to 536 instead of 538 *B.C.E.* The reason for this was their application of the “seventy years” of Jeremiah 25:11,12 and Daniel 9:2 to the period from the first year of Nebuchadnezzar to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus. This seemed to conflict with “Ptolemy’s Canon,” which gives only 66 years to this period (604-538 *B.C.E.*). To arrive at 70 years, Nebuchadnezzar’s first year was often moved back from 604 to 606 *B.C.E.*, while the first year of Cyrus was moved forward to 536 *B.C.E.* The two years from 538 to 536 *B.C.E.* were allotted to “Darius the Mede.” The discovery of the thousands of cuneiform tablets from the Neo-Babylonian era in the 1870’s completely overthrew these theories, as was pointed out already as far back as 1876 by Mr. George Smith. (See S. M. Evers, “George Smith and the Egibi Tablets,” *Iraq*, Vol. LV 1993, p. 113.)

As time went by, some Bible Students discovered that this statement was not true, either. In a private letter to Russell dated June 7, 1914, one of his closest associates, Paul S. L. Johnson, pointed out to him that nearly all historians held 538 B.C.E. to be the first year of Cyrus. "I have consulted a dozen encyclopedias," he wrote, "and all except three give 538 B.C. as the date."⁶ Russell, however, ignored this information, and so did Joseph F. Rutherford, his successor as president of the Watch Tower Society.

Not until 1944, in the book "*The Kingdom Is at Hand*," did the Watch Tower Society finally abandon the 536 B.C.E. date. By steps, Cyrus' first year was moved backwards, first to 537 B.C.E. and then, five years later, to 538 B.C.E., the date pointed to by "Ptolemy's Canon."⁷

To retain 1914 as the termination date of the Gentile times, other "adjustments" had to be made. To begin with, even though the first year of Cyrus started in the spring of 538 B.C.E., the *Watchtower* argued that his edict permitting the Jews to return home from the exile (Ezra 1:1-4) was issued *towards the end* of his first regnal year, that is, early in 537 B.C.E. In that case the Jews departing from Babylon could not have reached Jerusalem until the autumn of that year. By adding 70 years to 537 the desolation of Jerusalem was then fixed to 607 B.C.E. instead of 606. Next, the fact that no "zero year" is included at the beginning of our Christian era was finally acknowledged.⁸ So from the autumn of 607 B.C.E. to the beginning of our era was only 606 years and three months; and if this period is subtracted from the 2,520 years, 1914 is still arrived at as the termination date. Hence, three separate "errors" were made to cancel each other out, and the upshot was the same! Each adjustment was made with the retention of 1914 as its goal.

Yet, to have the secular basis of the Watch Tower Society's "Bible chronology" moved around in this arbitrary way was hardly confidence-inspiring. For the future, therefore, Cyrus' first regnal year (538 B.C.E.) was not stressed as the "firmly established" starting-point. Instead, the stress was transferred to the date historians had established for the fall of Babylon, 539 B.C.E. This date was soon to

6 This letter was published as an Appendix to Paul S. L. Johnson's reprint of the second volume of *Studies in the Scriptures* (Philadelphia, PA., U.S.A., 1937), pp. 367-382. See especially p. 369.

7 "*The Kingdom Is at Hand*" (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1944), p. 175; *The Watchtower*, Nov. 1, 1949, p. 326.

8 This problem had been noted as early as in 1904, but the error had never been corrected. See *The Watch Tower* of December 1, 1912, p. 377 (= *Reprints*, pp. 5141, 5142). See also above, page 53.

be termed an “absolute date” in the Watch Tower publications. But *why* was this particular date viewed as an “absolute date”?

539 B.C.E.—the “Absolute date for the Hebrew Scriptures”?

At first, beginning in 1952, the Watch Tower Society explained that the date 539 B.C.E. for the fall of Babylon had been “firmly established” by the cuneiform tablet known as the *Nabonidus Chronicle*.⁹ Evidently for this reason it was felt that this date could be used as the new basis for the Society’s B.C.E. chronology. In the next two decades, therefore, the year 539 B.C.E. was not only described as an “absolute date,” but as “*the outstanding Absolute date for the B.C. period of the Hebrew Scriptures.*”¹⁰ What is the reality in this regard? Does the historical evidence justify this impressive language and what does it show as to the Watch Tower writers’ understanding of secular chronology?

The Nabonidus Chronicle: This cuneiform document dates the fall of Babylon to the “16th day” of “the month of Tashritu,” evidently in the 17th year of Nabonidus. Unfortunately, the text is damaged, and the words for “17th year” are illegible. But even if these words had been preserved, the chronicle would not have told us anything more than that Babylon was captured on the 16th day of Tishri (Babylonian *Tashritu*) in Nabonidus’ 17th year. *This information in itself cannot be translated to 539 B.C.E.* It requires *additional* secular evidence to place Nabonidus’ 17th year within our era reckoning and allow for our assigning it a date within that reckoning.

In spite of this, Watch Tower publications continued to give the impression that the Nabonidus Chronicle of itself fixed the *absolute* date for the fall of Babylon.¹¹ Not until 1971, in an article entitled “Testimony of the Nabonidus Chronicle,” was it finally conceded that this tablet did not fix the year for the fall of Babylon. Quoting the

9 See *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1952, p. 271. “This date,” said *The Watchtower* of February 1, 1955, on page 94, “is made Absolute by reason of the archaeological discovery and deciphering of the famous *Nabonidus Chronicle*, which itself gives a date for the fall of Babylon and which figure specialists have determined equals October 13, 539 B.C., according to the Julian calendar of the Romans.”

10 *The Watchtower*, February 1, 1955, p. 94. (Emphasis added.) The book “*All Scripture Is Inspired by God and Beneficial*” (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1963) similarly designated 539 B.C.E. as the “Absolute Date for the Hebrew Scriptures.” (p. 282)

11 *The Watchtower* of August 15, 1968, p. 490, for instance, stated: “The fixing of 539 B.C.E. as *the year* when this historical event occurred is based on a stone document known as the Nabonidus (Nabonaid) Chronicle.” (Emphasis added.) Compare also *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1968, p. 268.

date given in the chronicle (the 16th day of Tashritu), the writer of the article frankly states: “But does the Nabonidus Chronicle of itself provide the basis for establishing *the year* for this event? No.”¹²

Although the principal witness in support of the “absolute date for the Hebrew Scriptures” was thus retracted, the Society was not prepared to make yet another change in the secular basis of its “Bible chronology.” Other witnesses, therefore, had to be searched out and summoned to the stand. In the very same *Watchtower* article quoted above, a reference was made to two new sources which in the future would “sustain” the absolute date 539 B.C.E.:

Also other sources, including Ptolemy’s Canon, point to the year 539 B.C.E. as the date for Babylon’s fall. For example, *ancient historians such as Diodorus, Africanus and Eusebius* show that Cyrus’ first year as king of Persia corresponded to *Olympiad 55, year 1* (560/59 B.C.E.), while Cyrus’ last year is placed at *Olympiad 62, year 2* (531/30 B.C.E.). . . . Cuneiform tablets give Cyrus a rule of nine years over Babylon. This would harmonize with the accepted date for the start of his rule over Babylon in 539 B.C.E.¹³

Thus the new validating sources consisted of (1) *Ptolemy’s Canon*, and (2) *dates from the Greek Olympiad Era quoted by ancient historians*. Can any of these sources establish 539 B.C.E. as an “absolute date” to which the Biblical chronology may be firmly fixed?

Ptolemy’s Canon: As was shown earlier, Russell at first buttressed his chronology by reference to Ptolemy’s Canon. But when he discovered that the 536 B.C.E. date for Cyrus’ first year was not supported by it, he rejected the Canon. And although the Watch Tower finally pushed back Cyrus’ 1st year to 538 B.C.E. in agreement with Ptolemy’s Canon, the Society’s chronology is still in conflict with the Canon at other points.

The sum total of the lengths of reign given by the Canon for the Neo-Babylonian kings prior to Cyrus, for example, point to 587

12 *The Watchtower*, May 15, 1971, p. 316 (emphasis added). When it was discovered that the Nabonidus Chronicle did not establish 539 B.C.E. as an “absolute date,” this term was dropped in the Watch Tower publications. In *Aid to Bible Understanding*, 539 is called “a pivotal point” (p. 333), a term also used in the 1988 revised edition. (*Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 458) At other times it is just stated that “historians calculate” or “hold” that Babylon fell in 539 B.C.E.—See “*Let Your Kingdom Come*” (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1981), pp. 136, 186.

13 *The Watchtower*, May 15, 1971, p. 316. (Emphasis added.) This statement was also included in the Watch Tower Society’s Bible dictionary, *Aid to Bible Understanding* (1971), p. 328. It is still retained in the revised 1988 edition (*Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 454).

B.C.E., not 607 B.C.E., as the date for the desolation of Jerusalem in Nebu-chadnezzar's 18th regnal year. Further, the Watch Tower Society also rejects the figures given by Ptolemy's Canon for the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes I.¹⁴ To use the Canon in support of the 539 B.C.E. date while at the same time *rejecting* its chronology for periods falling *prior to* and *after* this date would be totally inconsistent.

Evidently realizing this, the Watch Tower Society in the very next year once again rejected Ptolemy's Canon, declaring that "the very purpose of the Canon makes absolute dating by means of it impossible."¹⁵ If this were true, the Society could not, of course, use the Canon in support of the 539 B.C.E. date.

With Ptolemy's Canon thus removed, the secular basis of the Society's "Bible chronology" now wholly depended on the trustworthiness of the second witness, *the Greek Olympiad Reckoning*. How about this era reckoning? In what way does it fix Babylon's fall to 539 B.C.E., and to what an extent can Olympic dates quoted by ancient historians be relied upon?

The Olympiad Era: The first year assigned to this era is 776 B.C.E. This year, therefore, is designated as "Ol. I,1," that is, the first year of the first Olympiad. Now this does not mean that the first Olympic *games* took place in 776 B.C.E. Ancient sources indicate that these games began to be held much earlier. Nor does it mean that already back in 776 B.C.E. the Greeks had started an era founded upon the Olympic games. *As a matter of fact no reference to the Olympiad era may be found in all ancient literature until the third century B.C.E.!* As Professor Elias J. Bickerman points out,

14 According to Ptolemy's Canon, Xerxes ruled for 21 years (485-464 B.C.E.) and Artaxerxes I for 41 years (464-423 B.C.E.). In order to have the 20th year of Artaxerxes I fixed to 455 instead of 445 B.C.E., the Society sets the beginning of his reign 10 years earlier, thus making it 51 years instead of 41. As this would displace *all dates prior to Artaxerxes I by 10 years*, including the date for the fall of Babylon, the Society has *subtracted 10 years from Xerxes' sole reign, making it 11 years instead of 21!* The only reason for these changes is that they are necessitated by the Society's particular application of the "seventy weeks" of Daniel 9:24-27. This application was originally suggested by the Jesuit theologian Dionysius Petavius in *De Doctrina Temporum*, a work published in 1627. Many others picked up the idea, including the Anglican archbishop James Ussher in the same century. In 1832 the German theologian E. W. Hengstenberg included a lengthy defense of it in his well-known work *Christologie des Alten Testaments*. Since then, however, the idea has been completely demolished by archaeological findings. This has been demonstrated in a separate study published on the web: <http://user.tninet.se/~oof408u/fkfl/english/artaxerxes.htm>

15 *Awake!*, May 8, 1972, p. 26.

“the numbering of Olympiads was introduced by Timaeus or by Eratosthenes.”¹⁶ And Dr. Alan E. Samuel specifies: “The Olympiad reckoning system, originated by Philistus, was subsequently used in an historical context by Timaeus, and from then on we find historical chronologies based on Olympiads.”¹⁷ Timaeus Sicilus wrote a history of Sicily, his native country, in 264 B.C.E., and Eratosthenes, a librarian at the famous library in Alexandria in Egypt, published his *Chronographiae* some decades later.

The Olympiad reckoning, then, like the Christian era, was introduced *more than 500 years* after the year that was chosen as the starting-point for that era! How did the Greek historians manage to fix the date for the first Olympiad as well as other dates (for example, the first year of Cyrus) hundreds of years later? What kind of sources were at their disposal?

They studied *lists of victors* in the quadrennial games kept at Olympia. But unfortunately such lists had not been kept continuously all the way from the beginning. As Dr. Samuel points out, the first list was “drawn up by Hippias at the end of the fifth century B.C.,” that is, around 400 B.C.E.¹⁸ “By Hellenistic times the list of victors was complete and reasonably consistent and the framework for chronology was established and accepted.”¹⁹ But was the list reliable? Samuel continues: “Whether all this was right, or whether events were assigned to years correctly, is another matter.” Pointing out that “the shrewd Plutarch [c. 46—c. 120 C.E.] had his doubts,” he goes on to caution that “we too should be very dubious about chronographic evidence from Olympiads much before the middle or beginning of the fifth century [i.e., before 450 or 500 B.C.E.].”²⁰

The Watch Tower Society’s confidence in the Olympiad reckoning is even more illusory, however. This is because, while they accept the Olympiad dates given by ancient historians for the reign of Cyrus, they reject the Olympiad dates given by these historians for the reign of Artaxerxes I, despite the fact his reign fell *much closer* to our time. Thus, when Julius Africanus, in his *Chronography* (published c. 221/22 C.E.), dates the 20th year of Artaxerxes to the “4th year

16 Elias J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, revised edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), p. 75.

17 Alan E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology* (München: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1972), p. 189.

18 A. E. Samuel, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 190.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 190. Bickerman (*op. cit.*, p. 75) agrees: “The trustworthiness of the earlier part of the list of Olympic victors, which begins in 776 BC, is doubtful.”

of the 83rd Olympiad,” corresponding to 445 B.C.E., this date is rejected by the Watch Tower Society in preference of 455 B.C.E., as was noted earlier (footnote 14).²¹ As in the case of Ptolemy’s Canon, then, the Society again uses a witness that at other times is completely rejected, and this for the sole reason that in those areas the evidence is unfavorable to its teachings.

Aside from the Watch Tower Society’s inconsistency, the Olympiad datings preserved by Diodorus, Africanus and Eusebius indicating 539 B.C.E. to be the date for the fall of Babylon, cannot alone be used to establish that date as an absolute date on which the chronology of the Hebrew Scriptures can be based. This is due to the simple fact, already presented, that the Olympiad reckoning system was not actually instituted until the third century B.C.E.—or three centuries *after* the fall of Babylon.

Astronomy and the year 539 B.C.E.

The preceding discussion of the Society’s fruitless attempts to establish a secular basis for its particular “Bible chronology” epitomizes the content of a booklet published in 1981, *The Watch Tower Society and Absolute Chronology*.²² Perhaps it was this exposure that—directly or indirectly—incited the Society’s writers to make another attempt to establish the 539 B.C.E. date. At any rate, a new discussion of the date was published in 1988 in the Society’s revised Bible dictionary, *Insight on the Scriptures*, in which the authors now try to fix the date *astronomically*.

As explained earlier (in footnote 2), an absolute chronology is usually best established with the assistance of astronomically-fixed dates. In the 1870s and 1880s, excavations in Babylonia unearthed a great number of cuneiform texts containing descriptions of astronomical events dating from the Babylonian, Persian and Greek eras. These texts provide numerous absolute dates from these periods.

The most important astronomical text from the Neo-Babylonian era is a so-called astronomical “diary,” a record of about *thirty* astronomical observations dated to the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. This tablet, which is kept in the Berlin Museum (where it is designated *VAT 4956*), establishes 568/67 B.C.E. as the absolute date for the 37th year

21 *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, Vol. VI (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprint of 1978), p. 135.

22 Karl Burganger, *The Watch Tower Society and Absolute Chronology* (Lethbridge, Canada: Christian Koinonia International, 1981), pp. 7-20. See above, p. 70, note 100.

of Nebuchadnezzar. This date obviously implies that his *18th year*, during which he desolated Jerusalem, corresponds to 587/86 B.C.E. That is 20 years later than the 607 B.C.E. date assigned to that event by the Watch Tower Society. A detailed discussion of this and other astronomical texts is given in chapter four.

The Watch Tower Society's concern, then, is somehow to bypass the use of any such unfavorable ancient text and find a way to establish the date of 539 B.C.E. *independently* of it, thereby avoiding conflict with the corollary evidence the text supplies that undermines a 607 B.C.E. date for Jerusalem's fall. To what astronomical evidence do they resort?

Strm. Kambys. 400: The astronomical text, designated *Strm. Kambys. 400*, is the text now used by the Watch Tower Society to establish the 539 B.C.E. date. It is a tablet dated to the seventh year of Cambyses, the son of Cyrus.²³ Referring to two lunar eclipses mentioned in the text—eclipses which modern scholars have “identified with the lunar eclipses that were visible at Babylon on July 16, 523 B.C.E., and on January 10, 522 B.C.E.,”—the Society concludes:

Thus, this tablet establishes the seventh year of Cambyses II as beginning in the spring of 523 B.C.E. This is an astronomically confirmed date.²⁴

To what does this lead? If 523/22 B.C.E. was the seventh year of Cambyses, his *first year* must have been 529/28 B.C.E. and the preceding year, 530/29 B.C.E., must have been the *last year* of his predecessor, Cyrus. To arrive at the date for the fall of Babylon, however, we also need to know the length of Cyrus' reign. For this, the Society is forced to accept the information found in another type of cuneiform texts, the *contract tablets*, that is, dated business and administrative documents. Of these they state:

The latest tablet dated in the reign of Cyrus II is from the 5th month, 23rd day of his 9th year. . . . As the ninth year of Cyrus II as king of Babylon was 530 B.C.E., his first year according to that reckoning was 538 B.C.E. and his accession year was 539 B.C.E.²⁵

23 This text, which is designated *Strm. Kambys. 400*, is not exactly a “diary” in the strict sense, although it is closely related to this group of texts.

24 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1988), p. 453.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 453.

To establish the date 539 B.C.E., then, the Society unreservedly accepts several ancient secular sources: (1) a Babylonian astronomical tablet, and (2) Babylonian contract tablets dated to the reign of Cyrus. Yet, on the following pages of the same article (pages 454-456) other documents *of the very same type*—astronomical texts and contract tablets—*are rejected because of their support for the date 587 B.C.E. for the destruction of Jerusalem!*

If the Society's criticism of these astronomical diaries (mainly their being later copies of an original) were valid, that criticism would apply with equal force to their favored *Strm. Kambys. 400*. Like VAT 4956, *Strm. Kambys. 400* is a copy of an earlier original. In fact, it may hardly even be termed a copy. The eminent expert on astronomical texts, F. X. Kugler, pointed out as early as 1903 that this tablet is only partly a copy. The copyist was evidently working from a very defective text, and therefore tried to fill in the *lacunae* or gaps in the text by his own calculations. Thus only a portion of *Strm. Kambys. 400* at best contains observations. The rest are additions by a rather unskilled copyist from a much later period. Kugler commented that "*not one of the astronomical texts I know of offers so many contradictions and unsolved riddles as Strm. Kambys. 400.*"²⁶

By contrast, VAT 4956 is one of the best preserved diaries. Although it is also a later copy, experts agree that it is a faithful reproduction of the original.

There is some evidence that the lunar eclipses shown on *Strm. Kambys. 400*, referred to in the book *Insight on the Scriptures* were calculated rather than observed.²⁷ The point here made, though, is not the validity or lack of validity of those particular observations, but that, while applying certain criteria as a basis for *rejecting* the evidence of VAT 4956, the Watch Tower Society does not let *the same criteria* affect its *acceptance* of *Strm. Kambys. 400* because it views

26 Franz Xaver Kugler, "Eine rätselvolle astronomische Keilinschrift (Strm. Kambys. 400)," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, Vol. 17 (Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1903), p. 203. For a transcription and translation of the text, see F. X. Kugler, *Sternkunde und Sterndienst in Babel*, Buch I (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1907), pp. 61-75.

27 Dr. John M. Steele summarizes the present scholarly view of *Strm. Kambys. 400* in the following words: "It is also unwise to base any conclusions concerning the Babylonian records on this tablet alone, since it does not fall into any of the common categories of text. In particular, it is not certain whether this text contains observations or calculations of the phenomena it records. . . . There is also debate concerning whether the two lunar eclipses were observed or calculated."—John M. Steele, *Observations and Predictions of Eclipse Times by Early Astronomers* (= *Archimedes*, Vol. 4. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 98.

this document as giving apparent support to its claims. This repeated inconsistency results from the same “hidden agenda” of seeking to protect a historically unsupported date.

Actually, to fix the date for the fall of Babylon, it is much safer to start with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and count *forward*, instead of beginning with the reign of Cambyses and counting *backward*. The date 539 B.C.E. for the fall of Babylon was, in fact, first determined this way, as pointed out by Dr. R. Campbell Thompson in *The Cambridge Ancient History*:

The date 539 for the Fall of Babylon has been reckoned from the latest dates on the contracts of each king in this period, counting from the end of Nabopolassar’s reign in 605 B.C., viz., Nebuchadnezzar, 43: Amel-Marduk, 2: Nergal-shar-usur, 4: Labashi-Marduk (accession only): Nabonidus, 17 = 66.²⁸

The Watch Tower Society, however, accepts only *the end product* of this reckoning (539 B.C.E.), but rejects the reckoning itself and its starting point, because these contradict the date 607 B.C.E. The Society rejects the astronomical texts in general and *VAT 4956* in particular; on the other hand, it is forced to accept the most problematic one—*Strm. Kambys. 400*. Surely, it would be difficult to find a more striking example of inconsistent, misleading scholarship.

As has been demonstrated above, 539 B.C.E. is not a logical starting-point for establishing the date for the desolation of Jerusalem. The most reliable dates in this period (in the 6th century B.C.E.) that may be established as absolute fall much earlier, within the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, a reign that is directly fixed to our era by *VAT 4956* and other astronomical texts.

Further, the Bible provides a *direct synchronism* between the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and the desolation of Jerusalem. As pointed out earlier, 2 Kings 25:8 explicitly states that this desolation occurred in the “nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar.”²⁹ By contrast, no such

28 R. Campbell Thompson, “The New Babylonian Empire,” *The Cambridge Ancient History*, ed. J.B. Bury, S.A. Cook, F.E. Adcock, Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. 224, fn. 1.

29 The “19th” year here evidently corresponds to the “18th” year according to the Babylonian system of reckoning the regnal years of kings. In Assyria and Babylonia, the year in which a king came to power was reckoned as his “accession-year,” while his first year always started on Nisan 1, the first day of the next year. As will be discussed later, Judah at this time did not apply the “accession-year system,” but counted the accession-year as the first year. See the Appendix for Chapter 2.

direct synchronism is given in the Bible for the fall of Babylon.³⁰

But this is not all. The lengths of reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings (as quoted from the contract tablets by Dr. R. Thompson above) from the first king, Nabopolassar, to the last one, Nabonidus, may be firmly established in a number of different ways. In fact, the chronology of this period may be established by at least *seventeen* different lines of evidence! This evidence will be presented in the next two chapters.

30 See earlier footnote 3.

THE LENGTH OF REIGNS OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN KINGS

PEOPLE MAY believe the most peculiar ideas, not because there is any evidence to show that they are *true*, but because there is little or no evidence to show that they are *false*. For many centuries people believed that the earth was flat, simply because this view could not easily be tested and falsified. Many ideas that have been tied to prophecies in the Bible also definitely belong to this category. These clearly include some appended to Jesus' statement about the "times of the Gentiles" at Luke 21:24.

For example, the Bible nowhere explicitly states:

- 1) that Jesus, in speaking of these "Gentile times," had in mind the "seven times" of Nebuchadnezzar's madness mentioned in the book of Daniel, chapter 4;
- 2) that these "seven times" were seven *years*;
- 3) that these "years" were not ordinary Babylonian calendar years, but "prophetic years" of 360 days each, and therefore should be summed up as 2,520 days;
- 4) that these 2,520 days not only applied to the period of Nebuchadnezzar's madness, but also would have a *greater* fulfillment;
- 5) that in this greater fulfillment *days* should be counted as *years*, so that we get a period of 2,520 years; and
- 6) that this 2,520-year period started when Nebuchadnezzar, in his 18th regnal year, desolated the city of Jerusalem.

None of these six assumptions can be verified by clear Biblical statements. They are, in fact, nothing but a *chain of guesses*. Yet, since the Bible does not discuss or even mention any of these ideas, it nowhere explicitly says they are false either.

However, when it is further claimed (7) that Nebuchadnezzar's desolation of Jerusalem took place in 607 B.C.E., we have reached a point in the train of thought that *can* be tested and falsified.

This is because the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian period does not fall within the area of unverifiable assumptions.

As will be demonstrated in this and the subsequent chapter, the length of the Neo-Babylonian period has been firmly established today by at least seventeen different lines of evidence, *fourteen* of which will be discussed in some detail in these two chapters.

In the previous chapter it was shown that the validity of the Watch Tower Society's prophetic interpretation of the 1914 date is intimately connected with the length of the Neo-Babylonian period.¹ That period ended when Babylon was captured by the armies of the Persian king Cyrus in 539 B.C.E., an acknowledged, reliable date.

In the first year of his reign over Babylon, Cyrus issued an edict which permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1-4) According to the Watch Tower Society this ended the seventy-year period mentioned at Jeremiah 25:11, 12; 29:10; Daniel 9:2, and 2 Chronicles 36:21.

If, as the Society maintains, the Jewish remnant returned to Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E., the period of Babylonian domination would have begun seventy years earlier, or in 607 B.C.E.² And since the

1 The term "*Neo-Babylonian*" usually refers to the period that began with the reign of Nabopolassar (dated to 625–605 B.C.E.) and ended with Nabonidus (555–539 B.C.E.). It should be noticed, however, that many scholars use the term "*Neo-Babylonian*" of a more extended period. *The Assyrian Dictionary* (eds. I. J. Gelb et al., Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–), for example, starts the period in 1150 B.C.E. and ends it somewhere in the fourth century B.C.E. In the present work the term is confined to the Babylonian dynasty that began with Nabopolassar and ended with Nabonidus.

2 The first year of Cyrus extended from the spring (Nisanu 1) of 538 to the spring of 537 B.C.E. If Ezra followed the Jewish method of counting the accession-year as the first year, he may have reckoned 539/38 as the first year of Cyrus. However that may be, the evidence is that Cyrus issued his edict not long after the fall of Babylon. The so-called *Cyrus Cylinder* shows that Cyrus, soon after the conquest of Babylon, issued a decree that allowed the different peoples that had been deported to Babylonia to return to their respective home countries. (James B. Pritchard [ed.], *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [ANET], Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 316.) Most likely the edict permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem was a part of this general release of exiled peoples. As shown by the book of Ezra, the Jews who responded to the edict immediately began to organize themselves for the homeward journey (Ezra 1:5-2:70), and in "the seventh month" (Tishri, corresponding to parts of September and October) they had settled in their home cities. (Ezra 3:1) The context seems to imply that this was still in the "first year of Cyrus" (Ezra 1:1-3:1). Most authorities, therefore, conclude that this was in the autumn of 538 B.C.E. and *not* in 537 as the Watch Tower Society insists. (See for example Dr. T. C. Mitchell's discussion in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., Vol. III:2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 430-432; also the thorough discussion of the historicity of Cyrus' edict by Elias Bickerman in *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976, pp. 72-108.) The Watch Tower Society, however, cannot accept the 538 B.C.E. date for the return, as that would move the beginning of their seventy-year period back to 608 B.C.E. This, of course, would destroy their Gentile times calculation.

Watch Tower Society holds this seventy-year period to be a period of *complete desolation* of Judah and Jerusalem, we are told that it was in the year 607 B.C.E. that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, in his eighteenth regnal year. (2 Kings 25:8; Jeremiah 52:12, 29) This event, it is assumed, started the 2,520 years, called the Gentile times, beginning in the year 607 B.C.E.

This starting-point, however, is incompatible with a number of historical facts.*

A. ANCIENT HISTORIANS

Up to the latter part of the nineteenth century the only way to determine the length of the Neo-Babylonian period was by consulting ancient Greek and Roman historians. Those historians lived hundreds of years after the Neo-Babylonian period, and unfortunately their statements are often contradictory.³

Those held to be the most reliable are 1) *Berosus* and 2) the compiler(s) of the kinglist commonly known as *Ptolemy's Canon*, sometimes also, and more correctly, referred to as the *Royal Canon*.

It seems appropriate to begin our discussion with a brief presentation of these two historical sources since, although neither of them *by themselves* provides conclusive evidence for the length of the Neo-Babylonian period, their ancient testimony certainly merits consideration.

3 These ancient historians include *Megasthenes* (3rd century B.C.E.), *Berosus* (c. 250 B.C.E.), *Alexander Polyhistor* (1st century B.C.E.), *Eusebius Pamphilus* (c. 260-340 C.E.), and *Georgius Syncellus* (last part of the 8th century C.E.). For a convenient overview of the figures given by these ancient historians, see Raymond Philip Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 8-10; cf. also Ronald H. Sack, *Images of Nebuchadnezzar* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1991), pp. 31-44.

* What follows in this and the subsequent chapter, in many cases involves information of a technical nature, accompanied by detailed documentation. While this contributes to the firm foundation of the dates established, it is also made necessary by attempts on the part of some sources to counteract the historical evidence, offering information that has an appearance of validity, even of scholarlyness, but which, on examination, proves invalid and often superficial. Some readers may find the technical data difficult to follow. Those who do not feel they need all the details may turn directly to the summaries at the end of each of these two chapters. These summaries give a general idea of the discussion, the evidence presented, and the conclusions drawn from it.

A-1: Berossus

Berossus was a Babylonian priest who lived in the third century B.C.E.

In about 281 B.C.E. he wrote a history of Babylonia in Greek known as *Babyloniaca* or *Chaldaica* which he dedicated to the Seleucid king Antiochus I (281–260 B.C.E.), whose vast empire included Babylonia. Later Berossus abandoned Babylon and settled on the Ptolemaic island of Cos.⁴

His writings, unfortunately, have been lost, and all that is known about them comes from the twenty-two quotations or paraphrases of his work by other ancient writers and from eleven statements about Berossus made by classical, Jewish, and Christian writers.⁵

The longest quotations deal with the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings and are found in Flavius Josephus' *Against Apion* and in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, both written in the latter part of the first century C.E.; in Eusebius' *Chronicle* and in his *Preparation for the Gospel*, both from the early fourth century C.E., and in other late works.⁶ It is known that Eusebius quoted Berossus indirectly via the Greco-Roman scholar Cornelius Alexander Polyhistor (first century B.C.E.).

Although some scholars have assumed that Josephus, too, knew Berossus only via Polyhistor, the evidence for this is lacking. Other scholars have concluded that Josephus had a copy of Berossus' work at hand, and recently Dr. Gregory E. Sterling has strongly argued that Josephus quoted directly from Berossus' work.⁷ Scholars agree

4 Erich Ebeling and Bruno Meissner (eds.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, Vol. II (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1938), pp. 2, 3.

5 A translation with an extensive discussion of these fragments was published by Paul Schnabel in *Berossos und die Babylonisch-Hellenistische Literatur* (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1923). The first complete English translation of the surviving fragments of Berossus' work has been published by Stanley Mayer Burstein in *The Babyloniaca of Berossus. Sources from the Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, fascicle 5 (Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1978).

6 See Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book I:19-21; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X:XI, 1. The *Chronicle* of Eusebius is preserved only in one Armenian and one Latin version, except for the excerpts preserved in the *Chronographia* of the Byzantine chronicler Georgius Syncellus (late eighth and early ninth centuries C.E.).

7 Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition* (Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1992), pp. 106, 260, 261.

that the most reliable of the preserved quotations from Berossus' work are those of Flavius Josephus.⁸

Where did Berossus get his information on the Neo-Babylonian kings?

According to his own words he "translated many books which had been preserved with great care at Babylon and which dealt with a period of more than 150,000 years."⁹ These "books" included accounts of legendary kings "before the Flood" with very exaggerated lengths of reign.

His history of the dynasties after the Flood down to the reign of the Babylonian king Nabonassar (747–734 B.C.E.) is also far from reliable and evidently contained much legendary material and exaggerated lengths of reign.

Berossus himself indicates that it was impossible to give a trustworthy history of Babylonia *before Nabonassar*, as that king "collected and destroyed the records of the kings before him in order that the list of Chaldaean kings might begin with him."¹⁰

Despite these problems, however, for later periods, *and especially for the critical Neo-Babylonian period*, it has been established that Berossus used the generally very reliable Babylonian chronicles, or sources similar to these documents, and that he

- 8 Burstein, for example, says: "The earliest are those made by Josephus in the first century A.D. from the sections concerning the second and particularly the third book of the *Babyloniaca*, the latter indeed *providing our best evidence for Berossus' treatment of the Neo-Babylonian period*." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 10, 11; emphasis added.) Josephus' lengthy quotation on the Neo-Babylonian era in *Against Apion* is best preserved in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*, Book IX, chapter XL. (See the discussion by H. St. J. Thackeray in *Josephus*, Vol. I [Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 38:1], London: William Heinemann, and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926, pp. xviii, xix.) The deficient textual transmission of Eusebius' *Chronicle*, therefore, is of no consequence for our study. The Watch Tower Society, in its Bible dictionary *Insight on the Scriptures* (Vol. I, p. 453), devotes only one paragraph to Berossus. Almost the whole paragraph consists of a quotation from A. T. Olmstead's *Assyrian Historiography* in which he deplors the tortuous survival history of Berossus' fragments via Eusebius' *Chronicle* (cf. note 6 above). Although this is true, it is, as noted, essentially irrelevant for our discussion.
- 9 Burstein, *op. cit.*, p. 13. The Armenian version of Eusebius' *Chronicle* gives "2,150,000 years" instead of "150,000," the figure preserved by Syncellus. None of them is believed to be the original figure given by Berossus. (Burstein, p. 13, note 3.)
- 10 Burstein, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

carefully reported their contents in Greek.¹¹ The figures he gives for the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings substantially agree with the figures given by those ancient cuneiform documents.

A-2: The Royal Canon

Ptolemy's Canon or, more correctly, the *Royal Canon* is a list of kings and their lengths of reign beginning with the reign of Nabonassar in Babylon (747–734 B.C.E.), through the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine rulers.

The kinglist had been included in the *Handy Tables* prepared by the famous astronomer and geographer *Claudius Ptolemy* (70–165 C.E.), who ended the list with the contemporary Roman ruler Antoninus Pius (C.E. 138-161).¹² That is why it has become known as *Ptolemy's Canon*. (See the facing page.) There is, however, evidence that kinglists of this type must have been in use long before the time of Claudius Ptolemy.

The reason why the kinglist could not have originated with Claudius Ptolemy is that a table of this kind was a prerequisite for the research and calculations performed by the Babylonian and Greek astronomers. Without it they would have had no means for dating the astronomical events their calculations showed as occurring in the distant past.

Ancient fragments of such kinglists written on papyrus have been found.¹³ The renowned expert on Babylonian astronomy, F. X. Kugler,

11 Burstein points out that, although Berossus made a number of surprising errors and exercised little criticism on his sources, “the fragments make it clear that *he did choose good sources, most likely from a library at Babylon, and that he reliably reported their contents in Greek.*” (Burstein, *op. cit.*, p. 8. Emphasis added.) Robert Drews, in his article “The Babylonian Chronicles and Berossus,” published in *Iraq*, Vol. XXXVII, part 1 (Spring 1975), arrives at the same conclusion: “That the chronicles were among these records cannot be doubted.” (p. 54) This has been demonstrated by a careful comparison of Berossus’ statements with the Babylonian chronicles. Paul Schnabel, too, concludes: “That he everywhere has used cuneiform records, above all the chronicles, is manifest at every step.” — Schnabel, *op. cit.* (see note 5 above), p. 184.

12 The three oldest manuscripts of Ptolemy’s *Handy Tables* containing the kinglist date from the eighth to tenth centuries. See Leo Depuydt, “More Valuable than all Gold’: Ptolemy’s Royal Canon and Babylonian Chronology,” in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 47 (1995), pp. 101-106. The list of kings was continued by astronomers after Ptolemy well into the Byzantine period.

13 G. J. Toomer, *Ptolemy’s Almagest* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1984), p. 10, fn. 12. The fragments, however, are later than Ptolemy.

Namen der Régenten		ἔτη [Jahre]	ἰσιου- αγωγή [Summe]
1.	Ναβονασσάρου	ισ (14)	ισ (14)
	Ναβίου	β (2)	ισ (16)
	Χινθόσε και Πάρου	ϛ (5)	κα (21)
	Πουλαίου	ε (5)	κz (26)
	Μαροδομιάδου	ιβ (12)	λη (38)
	Δοκίανου	ε (5)	μγ (43)
	(ἄβασιλευτα)	β (2)	μz (45)
	Βαλίου	γ (3)	μη (48)
	Απαρναδίου	z (6)	νθ (54)
	Πηγεβήλου	α (1)	νε (55)
	Μεσημμορδάκου	δ (4)	νθ (59)
	(ἄβασιλευτα)	η (8)	ξz (67)
	Λακαδίνου	ιγ (13)	π (80)
	Λασοδονίου	κ (20)	ρ (100)
	Κινυλαδίου	κβ (22)	ρκβ (122)
	Ναβοπολασσάρου	κα (21)	ρμγ (143)
	Ναβοκολασσάρου	μγ (43)	ρπz (186)
Μλοακρουδάμου	β (2)	ρπη (188)	
Νηογασολασσάρου	δ (4)	ρzβ (192)	
Ναβοναδίου	ιz (17)	σθ (209)	
2.	Κύρου	θ (9)	σιη (218)
	Καμβύσου	η (8)	σκz (226)
	Δαρείου πρώτου	λz (36)	σξβ (262)
	Ξέρξου	κα (21)	σπη (283)
	Αртаξέρξου πρώτου	μα (41)	τad (324)
	Δαρείου δευτέρου	ιδ (19)	τμγ (343)
	Αртаξέρξου δευτέρου	μz (46)	τπθ (389)
	Βγου	κα (21)	υι (410)
	Αρωγοῦ	β (2)	υιβ (412)
Δαρείου τρίτου	δ (4)	υιz (416)	
Αλεξάνδρου Μακεδόνα	η (8)	υκδ (424)	
3.	Φίλιππου τοῦ μετ' Αλέξανδρον τὸν κτιστήν	z (7)	υλα (431)
	Αλεξάνδρου ἑτέρου	ιβ (12)	υμγ (443)
	Πτολεμαίου Α΄	κ (20)	υξγ (463)
	Φιλαδέλφου	λη (38)	φα (501)
	Εὐεργέτου	κε (25)	φκz (526)
	Φιλοπάτορος	ιz (17)	φμγ (543)
	Επιφάνους	κδ (24)	φξz (567)
	Φιλομήτορος	λε (35)	ζβ (602)
	Εὐεργέτου δευτέρου	κθ (29)	ζλz (631)
Σωτήρος	λz (36)	ζξz (667)	
Μονύσου υἱου	κθ (29)	ζzε (696)	
Κλεοπάτρας	κβ (22)	φηη (718)	
4.	Αύγουστου	μγ (43)	φξz (761)
	Τιβερίου	κβ (22)	ψπη (783)
	Γαίου	δ (4)	ψπz (787)
	Κλαυδίου	ισ (14)	ωz (801)
	Νέρωνος	ιδ (14)	ωιε (815)
	Οκταβιανού	ι (10)	ωκz (825)
	Τίτου	γ (3)	ωκη (828)
	Δομτιανού	ιε (15)	ωμγ (843)
	Νέρβα	α (1)	ωμδ (844)
	Τραϊανού	ιδ (19)	ωξγ (863)
Αδριανού	κα (21)	ωπθ (884)	
Αίλιου Αντωνίνου	κγ (23)	ωτδ (907)	

The Royal Canon ("Ptolemy's Canon")

The kinglist begins with the reign of Nabonassar in Babylon (747-734 BCE) and ends with the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE). From F. K. Ginzel, *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie*, Vol. I (Leipzig 1906), p. 139.

concluded that the so-called Ptolemy's Canon "had evidently been worked out by one or more experts on the Babylonian astronomy and chronology, and through the use in the Alexandrian school successfully had passed scrupulous indirect tests."¹⁴ Dr. Eduard Meyer wrote in a similar vein about the canon in 1899, pointing out that, "as it belonged to the traditional material of knowledge of the astronomers, it was inherited from scholar to scholar; *not even Hipparchus* [2nd century B.C.E.] *could have gone without the Babylonian list.*"¹⁵

This is the reason why Professor Otto Neugebauer termed the expression "Ptolemy's Canon" a *misnomer*:

It is a misnomer to call such chronological tables 'Ptolemaic canon.' Ptolemy's 'Almagest' never contained such a canon (in spite of assertions to the contrary often made in modern literature), but we know that a *βασιλεπν χρονογραφια* [chronicle of kings] had been included in his 'Handy Tables' On the other hand, there is no reason whatsoever to think that royal canons for astronomical purposes did not exist long before Ptolemy.¹⁶

The canon, or kinglist, was therefore in use centuries before Claudius Ptolemy. It was inherited and brought up-to-date from one generation of scholars to the next.

It should be observed that the canon not only presents a running list of kings and their reigns; in a separate column there is a *running summary* of the individual reigns all the way from the first king, Nabonassar, to the end of the list. This system provides a double check of the individual figures, ensuring that they have been correctly copied from one scholar to the next. (See "The Royal Canon" on the preceding page.)

From what source did the compiler(s) of the Royal Canon get the kinglist? It was evidently compiled from sources similar to those used by Berossus. Friedrich Schmidtke explains:

14 Franz Xaver Kugler, *Sternkunde und Sterndienst in Babel*, II. Buch, II. Teil, Heft 2 (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924), p. 390. Translated from the German.

15 Eduard Meyer, *Forschungen zur alten Geschichte*, Zweiter Band (Halle a. S.: Max Niemeyer, 1899), pp. 453-454. Translated from the German. Emphasis added.

16 Otto Neugebauer, "'Years' in Royal Canons," *A Locust's Leg. Studies in honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*, ed. W. B. Henning and E. Yarshater (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., 1962), pp. 209, 210. Compare also J. A. Brinkman in *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia, 1158-722 B.C.* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1968), p. 22.

With respect to the dependence of the sources, the Canon of Ptol[emy] has certainly to a great extent taken its stuff from the Bab[ylonian] Chron[icles]. This is clear from the characteristic *αβασιλευτα ετη* [years of interregnum] 688-681, which is also found in the Chronicle (III, 28), while the King List A at this place introduces Sennacherib instead, as well as for the two *αβασιλευτα ετη* 704-703. The Canon of Ptol. like the Chronicle reproduces here the Babylonian tradition, which did not recognize Sennacherib as the legitimate king, as he had sacked and destroyed Babylon.¹⁷

There is also some evidence that the Royal Canon reflects not only Babylonian chronicles, but also ancient Babylonian kinglists compiled by Babylonian scribes. Thus scholars have concluded that it was based upon Babylonian chronicles and kinglists, probably through intermediary sources, *but evidently independent of Berossus*.¹⁸ This is a very important conclusion, as the figures given in the canon for the Neo-Babylonian kings are in substantial agreement with Berossus' earlier figures.

Thus we have two independent witnesses reflecting the length of the Neo-Babylonian era set out in the ancient chronicles, and even if those chronicles are only partially preserved on cuneiform tablets, their figures for the lengths of reign of the Neo-Babylonian kings have to all appearances been correctly transmitted to us via Berossus and the Royal Canon.¹⁹

- 17 Friedrich Schmidtke, *Der Aufbau der Babylonischen Chronologie* (Münster, Westf.: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1952), p. 41. Translated from the German.
- 18 Burstein, for example, points out that the canon "represents a Babylonian tradition about the first millennium B.C. that is independent of Berossus as can be seen from the order and forms of the names of the kings." (*Op. cit.*, p. 38) On the same page Burstein gives a translation of the canon which, unfortunately, contains a couple of errors. The regnal years shown for Nebuchadnezzar, "23", is a misprint for "43"; and the name "Illoaroudamos" in the canon corresponds to "Awel-Marduk", not "Labashi-Marduk". For a reliable publication of the canon, see, for example, E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, revised edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), pp. 109-111.
- 19 Of the two sources, the Royal Canon is clearly the better witness. As Professor J. A. Brinkman points out, the canon "is of known and praiseworthy accuracy." (*Op. cit.* [note 16 above], p. 35) Modern discoveries of Babylonian chronicles, kinglists, astronomical texts, etc., written in cuneiform may be shown to be in complete agreement with the canon all the way from the eighth century to the first century B.C.E. The evidence of this is briefly discussed in C. O. Jonsson, "The Foundations of the Assyro-Babylonian Chronology," *Chronology & Catastrophism Review*, Vol. IX (Harpenden, England: Society for Interdisciplinary Studies, 1987), pp. 14-23.

TABLE 1: THE REIGNS OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN KINGS
ACCORDING TO BEROSSUS AND THE ROYAL CANON

NAME	BEROSSUS	ROYAL CANON	B.C.E.
Nabopolassar	21 years	21 years	625-605
Nebuchadnezzar	43 years	43 years	604-562
Awel-Marduk*	2 years	2 years	561-560
Neriglissar	4 years	4 years	559-556
Labashi-Marduk	9 months	—	556
Nabonidus	17 years	17 years	555-539

*Called Evil-Merodach at 2 Kings 25:27 and Jeremiah 52:31.

The Royal Canon omits Labashi-Marduk, as it always reckons *whole* years only. Labashi-Marduk's short reign of only a few months fell in Neriglissar's last year (which was also the accession-year of Nabonidus).²⁰ The Royal Canon, therefore, could leave him out.

If these lists are correct, the first year of Nebuchadnezzar would be 604/603 B.C.E. and his eighteenth year, when he desolated Jerusalem, would be 587/86 B.C.E., not 607 B.C.E. as in Watch Tower chronology.

But even if these lists give a true representation of the lengths of reign given in the original Neo-Babylonian chronicles, how do we know that the chronological information originally contained in these chronicles is reliable? How can the lengths of reign of the kings be turned into an "absolute chronology"?²¹

20 As shown by contemporary cuneiform documents, Neriglissar died in the first month of his fourth regnal year (in late April or early May). His son and successor, Labashi-Marduk, was killed in a rebellion after a reign of about two months. The figure given by Berossus via Josephus, "9" months, is commonly regarded as a transmission error for an original "2" months, the Greek signs (=letters) for "9" (θ) and "2" (β) being quite similar. (R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.-A.D. 75*, Providence: Brown University Press, 1956, p. 13.) The *Uruk King List* (discussed below) indicates a rule of three months for Labashi-Marduk, which undoubtedly refers to the city of Uruk, where he was recognized as king for parts of three months (Nisanu, Ayyaru, and Simanu) according to the contract tablets.—Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556-539 B.C.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 86-90.

21 As pointed out in the previous chapter, an absolute chronology is best established by the aid of astronomically fixed dates. Claudius Ptolemy, in his famous work *Almagest*, records a large number of ancient astronomical observations, many of which are detailed descriptions of lunar eclipses. One of these is dated to the fifth year of Nabopolassar and has been identified with one that took place in 621 B.C.E. If this was the fifth year of Nabopolassar, his 21 years of reign would be fixed to 625-605 B.C.E. The first year of his

B. THE CUNEIFORM DOCUMENTS*

Today, historians do not need either Berossus or the Royal Canon in order to fix the length of the Neo-Babylonian period. Its length may be firmly established in many other ways, thanks to the numerous cuneiform documents discovered from this period.

It is a remarkable fact that more cuneiform documents have been excavated from the Neo-Babylonian period than from any other pre-Christian era. Literally *tens of thousands* of texts have been found, primarily consisting of business, administrative, and legal documents, but there are also historical documents such as chronicles and royal inscriptions.

Most important are the discovery of *astronomical* cuneiform texts recording dated observations of the moon and the planets from the period. Most of this material is written in the Akkadian language and has been unearthed in Mesopotamia since the middle of the nineteenth century.

The first group of documents of interest to us fall within the category shown on the following page, with others on subsequent pages.

son and successor, Nebuchadnezzar, would then have begun in 604 B.C.E. and his 18th year (when he desolated Jerusalem) in 587. Some scholars, however, have questioned the reliability of the astronomical observations recorded by Ptolemy. In his sensational book, *The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), Dr. Robert R. Newton claimed that Ptolemy fudged, not only a large body of the observations he says he made himself, but also a number of the observations he records from earlier periods. (The evidence is, though, that all observations from earlier periods recorded by Ptolemy were taken over from the Greek mathematician Hipparchus [second century B.C.E.], who in turn got them directly from Babylonian astronomers. See G. J. Toomer's article, "Hipparchus and Babylonian Astronomy," in *A Scientific Humanist. Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs*, eds. E. Leitchy, M. deJ. Ellis, & P. Gerardi, Philadelphia, 1988, pp. 353-362.) On the assumption that Ptolemy was the originator of "Ptolemy's Canon," Newton also felt that Ptolemy's supposed forgery may have extended to *inventing* the lengths of reign in this kinglist. But as the kinglist was not a creation of Ptolemy, Newton was mistaken in this. In earlier editions of the present work Newton's claims and the ensuing debate they have caused in scholarly journals were discussed at some length. This digression from the main subject has been left out in this edition not only for reasons of space, but also because the observations recorded by Ptolemy really are of little importance for our discussion. It should be noted, however, that "very few historians of astronomy have accepted Newton's conclusions in their entirety." — Dr. James Evans in the *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, Vol. 24 Parts 1/2, 1993, pp. 145, 146. (Dr. Newton died in 1991.) An article on R. R. Newton and the Royal Canon is published on the web: <http://user.tninet.se/~oof408u/fkf/english/epage.htm>

* "Cuneiform" refers to the "wedge-shaped" script used on these ancient clay tablets. The signs were impressed on the damp clay with a pointed stick or reed (stylus).

B-1: Chronicles, kinglists, and royal inscriptions

a) *Neo-Babylonian Chronicles*

A chronicle is a form of historical narrative covering a sequence of events.

Several cuneiform chronicles covering parts of Neo-Babylonian history have been discovered, all of which are kept in the British Museum, London. Most of them are probably copies of (or extracts from) original documents written contemporary with the events.²²

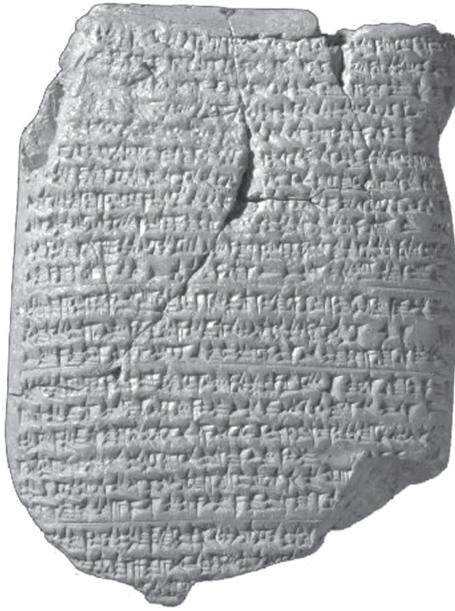
The most recent translation of them has been published by A. K. Grayson in *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*.²³ Grayson subdivides the Babylonian chronicles into two parts, the first of which is called the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle Series (*Chronicles 1–7*). *Chronicle 1* (= B.M. 92502) begins with the reign of Nabonassar (747–734 B.C.E.) and ends with the accession-year of Shamash-shuma-ukin (668 B.C.E.). *Chronicles 2–7* begin with the accession-year of Nabopolassar (626 B.C.E.) and continue into the beginning of the reign of Cyrus (538 B.C.E.).

What do these “chronicles” consist of? With respect to the contents of the chronicles, Grayson explains:

The narrative is divided into paragraphs with each paragraph normally devoted to one regnal year. The text is concerned only with matters related to Babylonia and, in particular, her king, and the events, which are almost exclusively political and military in character, are narrated in an objective and laconically dry manner.²⁴

- 22 Professor D. J. Wiseman says: “The Neo-Babylonian Chronicle texts are written in a small script of a type which does not of itself allow any precise dating but which can mean that they were written from any time almost contemporary with the events themselves to the end of the Achaemenid rule [331 B.C.E.]” (*Chronicles of Chaldean Kings* [London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1961], p. 4) Professor J. A. Brinkman is a little more specific, stating that the extant copies of the Neo-Babylonian chronicles are “slightly antedating the *Historiai* of Herodotus,” which was written c. 430 B.C.E. (J. A. Brinkman, “The Babylonian Chronicle Revisited,” in *Lingering Over Words. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, ed. T. Abusch, J. Huehnergard, and P. Steinkeller [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], pp. 73, 85.) Dr. E. N. Voigtlander says that the copies of the Neo-Babylonian chronicles seem to come from the reign of Darius I (Voigtlander, *A Survey of Neo-Babylonian History* [unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Michigan, 1963], p. 204, note 45.) Chronicle 1A has a colophon in which it is explicitly stated that the text was copied (from an earlier original) in the 22nd year of Darius I (500/499 B.C.E.).
- 23 A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, New York: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1975). The work will hereafter be referred to as *ABC*.
- 24 A. K. Grayson in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie* (henceforth abbreviated *RLA*), ed. D. O. Edzard, Vol. VI (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), p. 86.

Obverse



Reverse



The Babylonian Chronicle BM 21946

This chronicle covers the period from Nabopolassar's 21st year (605/04 B.C.E.) to Nebuchadnezzar's 10th year (595/94 B.C.E.). Photo used courtesy of D. J. Wiseman (shown in his *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, Plate VI).

Most of these chronicles are incomplete. The extant (actually existing) parts of Chronicles 2-7 cover the following regnal years:

TABLE 2: EXTANT PARTS OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN CHRONICLES 2-7

CHRONICLE NO.	RULER	REGNAL YEARS COVERED
No.2 = B.M. 25127	Nabopolassar	acc.-year – 3
3 = B.M. 21901	Nabopolassar	10 – 17
4 = B.M. 22047	Nabopolassar	18 – 20
5 = B.M. 21946	Nabopolassar	21
” ” ”	Nebuchadnezzar	acc.-year – 10
6 = B.M. 25124	Neriglissar	3
7 = B.M. 35382	Nabonidus	1 – 11
” ” ”	Nabonidus	17

In all, the Neo-Babylonian period (625–539 B.C.E.) includes a total of eighty-seven regnal years. As is seen in the preceding table, less than half of these years are covered by the preserved parts of the chronicles. Yet some important information may be gathered from them.

Chronicle 5 (B.M. 21946) shows that Nabopolassar ruled Babylon for twenty-one years, and that he was succeeded by his son Nebuchadnezzar. That part of the text says:

For twenty-one years Nabopolassar ruled Babylon. On the eighth day of the month Ab he died. In the month of Elul Nebuchadnezzar (II) returned to Babylon and on the first day of the month he ascended the royal throne in Babylon.²⁵

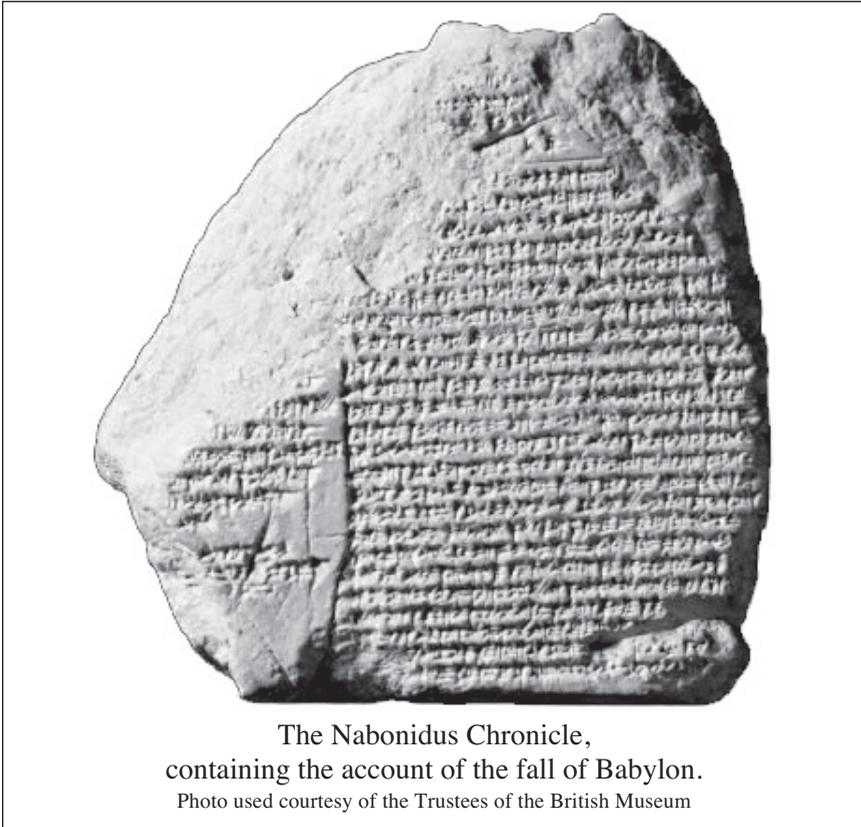
The last chronicle (B.M. 35382), the famous *Nabonidus Chronicle*, covers the reign of Nabonidus, who was the father of Belshazzar. This chronicle unfortunately is damaged. The portion covering Nabonidus' twelfth year to his sixteenth year of rule is lacking, and the portion where the words for "seventeenth year" no doubt originally could be read, is damaged.²⁶

Notably, however, for the sixth year it is stated that Cyrus, king of Anshan, defeated the Median king Astyages and captured Ecbatana, the capital of Media.²⁷ If Nabonidus ruled for seventeen years and if he

25 Grayson, *ABC* (1975), pp. 99, 100.

26 *Ibid.* p. 109.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 107. "The sixth year," too, is missing, but as the record for each year is separated from the next year by a horizontal line, and as the account of Astyages' defeat immediately precedes the record for the seventh year, it is quite evident that it refers to the sixth year. – *Anshan* was a city and also an archaic name of the province in which it was situated, Parsa (Persis), which lay at the Persian Gulf southeast of Babylonia. At the time of Cyrus' rise to power, Anshan (Parsa) was a Median tributary kingdom.



was dethroned by Cyrus in 539 B.C.E., his first year must have been 555/54 B.C.E. and his sixth year, when Cyrus conquered Media, must have been 550/49 B.C.E.

The Watch Tower Society, in fact, agrees with these datings. The reason is that the secular basis of its chronology, 539 B.C.E. as the date for the fall of Babylon, is directly connected with the reign of Cyrus. The Greek historian Herodotus, in the fifth century B.C.E., says that Cyrus' total rule was twenty-nine years.²⁸ As Cyrus died in 530 B.C.E., in the ninth year of his rule over Babylonia, his first year as king of Anshan must have begun in c. 559 B.C.E., or about three years before Nabonidus acceded to the throne of Babylon.

Suppose now that twenty years have to be added to the Neo-Babylonian era, which is required if the destruction of Jerusalem is

28 Herodotus' *Historiai* I:210-216. Other ancient historians such as Ktesias, Dinon, Diodorus, Africanus, and Eusebius roughly agree with this length of reign for Cyrus. — See *Insight on the Scriptures* (1988), Vol. 1, p. 454.

set at 607 rather than 587 B.C.E., and that we add these twenty years to the reign of Nabonidus, making it thirty-seven years instead of seventeen. Then his first year must have been 575/74 B.C.E. instead of 555/54. Nabonidus' sixth year, when Astyages was defeated by Cyrus, would then be moved back from 550/49 to 570/69 B.C.E.

Those dates, however, are impossible, as Cyrus did not come to power until c. 559 B.C.E., as was shown above. He clearly could not have defeated Astyages ten years before he came to power! This is why the Society correctly dates this battle in 550 B.C.E., thereby indicating Nabonidus' reign of seventeen years to be correct, as is held by all authorities and classical authors.²⁹

Though the chronicles available do not furnish a complete chronology for the Neo-Babylonian period, the information which they do preserve supports the dates for the lengths of the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings given by Berossus and the Royal Canon.

As the earlier-presented evidence strongly indicates that *both* of these sources derived their information from the Babylonian chronicles *independent* of each other, and as their figures for the Neo-Babylonian reigns *agree*, it is logical to conclude that the chronological information originally given in the Neo-Babylonian chronicles has been preserved unaltered by Berossus and the Royal Canon.

Even if this is agreed upon, however, can the information given by these Babylonian chronicles be trusted?

It is often pointed out that the Assyrian scribes distorted history in order to glorify their kings and gods. "It is a well known fact that in Assyrian royal inscriptions a serious military set-back is never openly admitted."³⁰ Sometimes scribes garbled the narration by

29 *Insight on the Scriptures* (1988), Vol. 1, pp. 454, 566; Vol. 2, p. 612. That Astyages was defeated in 550 B.C.E. may also be argued on other grounds. If, as stated by Herodotus (*Historiai* I:130), Astyages ruled Media for thirty-five years, his reign would have begun in 585 B.C.E. (550+35=585). He was the successor of his father Cyaxares, who had died shortly after a battle with Alyattes of Lydia, which according to Herodotus (*Historiai* I:73, 74) was interrupted by a solar eclipse. Actually, a total solar eclipse visible in that area took place on May 28, 585 B.C.E., which is commonly identified with the one mentioned by Herodotus.—I. M. Diakonoff, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 112, 126; cf. M. Miller, "The earlier Persian dates in Herodotus," *Klio*, Vol. 37 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959), p. 48.

30 A. K. Grayson, "Assyria and Babylonia," *Orientalia*, Vol. 49, Fasc. 2, 1980, p. 171. See also Antti Laato in *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. XLV:2, April 1995, pp. 198-226.

changing the date of a defeat and weaving it into an account of a later battle.³¹ Do the Neo-Babylonian chronicles treat history in this way, too?

Dr. A. K. Grayson, a well-known authority on the Assyrian and Babylonian chronicles, concludes:

Unlike the Assyrian scribes the Babylonians neither fail to mention Babylonian defeats nor do they attempt to change them into victories. The chronicles contain a reasonably reliable and representative record of important events in the period with which they are concerned.³²

We have reason for assurance, then, that the figures for the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings given by these chronicles and preserved to our time—thanks to Berossus and the Royal Canon—represent the actual reigns of these kings. This conclusion will be confirmed, over and over again, in the further discussion.

b) Babylonian king lists

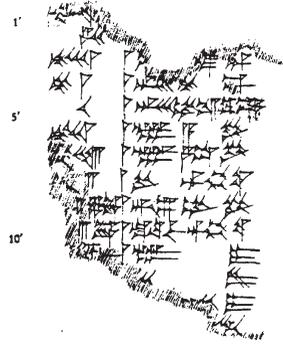
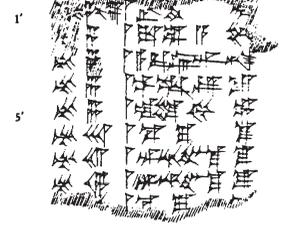
A cuneiform *king list* differs from a chronicle in that it is usually a list of royal names with the addition of regnal years, similar to the later Royal Canon.

Although a number of king lists both from Assyria and Babylonia have been unearthed, only one of them covers the Neo-Babylonian era: the *Uruk King List*, shown on the following page. Unfortunately, as can be seen, it is badly preserved, and some portions of it are missing. Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated, it has definite historical value.

The preserved portions cover the periods from Kandalanu to Darius I (647–486 B.C.E.) and, on the reverse side, from Darius III to Seleucus II (335–226 B.C.E.). It was evidently composed from older sources sometime after the reign of Seleucus II.

31 Grayson, *ibid.* (1980), p. 171.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 175. This does not mean that the chronicles are infallible records. As Dr. J. A. Brinkman points out, “lack of nationalistic prejudice does not insure factual reliability; and the Babylonian chronicles have their share of proven errors.” Still, he agrees that the chronicles contain an essentially reliable record of events and dates for the period between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C.E.: “For the period from 745 to 668, these documents list rulers and exact dates of reign in Babylonia, Assyria, and Elam. Coverage thereafter is spotty, in part because of lacunae in the record; but these texts still furnish most of the precise chronological background for present knowledge of the downfall of the Late Assyrian Empire, the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the reign of Nabonidus, and the transition to Persian rule.”—Brinkman in *Lingering Over Words* (see note 22 above), pp. 74 and 100, note 148. For additional comments on the reliability of the Neo-Babylonian chronicles, see Chapter 7: “Attempts to overcome the evidence.”

		(Obverse)	
		Lacuna	
		(1) MU x x x	[. . .]
		(2) šá-niš	x(?) [(. . .)]
		(3) MU 21	=K[an-da]-la-an
		(4) MU 1	=Šin ₂ -šumu-išir ₂
		(5) u	=Šin ₂ -šarra-iš-ku-un
		(6) MU 21	=Nabū-apla-ušur
		(7) [MU] 43	=Nabū-kudurri-ušur (II)
		(8) [MU] 2	=Amil- ^a Marduk
		(9) [MU] '3' 8 ITI	=Nergal ₂ -šarra-ušur
		(10) [(. . .)] 3 ITI	=La-ba-ši- ^a Marduk
		(11) [MU] '17(?)'	=Nabū-nā'id
		(12) [MU] x	[K]ur-raš (II)
(13) [MU] x	[Kambu-2]i-i		
(14) [MU] x	[Daria-m]uš (I)		
		(Reverse)	
		Lacuna	
		Lacuna	
		(1) [š]u(?)-[m]u šá-nu-ú	=Ni-din- ^a B[š(?)]
		(2) [MU] 5	=Da-ra-a-mu[š] (III)
		(3) MU 7(?)	=A-lik-sa-an-šar (III)
		(4) MU 6	=Pi-il-ip-su (III)
		(5) MU 6	=At-tu-gu-ur
		(6) MU 31	=Si-lu-ku (I)
		(7) MU 22	=An-ti-'u-ku-su (I)
(8) MU 15	=An-ti-'u-ku-su (II)		
(9) [MU] '20'	=Si-lu-ku (II)		
Lacuna			

The Uruk King List (W 20030, 105)

As reproduced by J. van Dijk in *UVB* 18 (Berlin 1962), tablet 28a. The transcription to the right is that of A. K. Grayson in *RLA* VI (1980), page 97.

The Uruk King List was discovered during the excavations at Uruk (modern Warka in southern Iraq) in 1959–60 together with about 1,000 other cuneiform texts (mostly economic texts) from different periods.³³

The preserved portion of the obverse (front or principal side), which includes the Neo-Babylonian period, gives the following chronological information (damaged or missing portions are indicated by quotation marks or parentheses):³⁴

33 The first transcription and translation of the text, which included an extensive discussion by Dr. J. van Dijk, was published in 1962.—J. van Dijk, *UVB* (= *Vorläufiger Bericht über die von dem Deutschen Archäologischen Institut unter der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft aus Mitteln der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft unternommenen Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka*), Vol. 18, Berlin, 1962, pp. 53-60. An English version of van Dijk's translation (of the kinglist) is published by J. B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 566. Another, more recent transcription by A. K. Grayson was published in 1980.—A. K. Grayson, *RLA* (see note 24 and the picture above), Vol. VI (1980), pp. 97, 98.

34 Based upon Grayson's transcription in *RLA* VI (1980), p. 97.

THE URUK KING LIST

(obverse)

21 years	K(anda)lanu
1 year	Sin-shum-lishir and Sin-shar-ishkun
21 years	Nabopolassar
43 (ye)ars	Nebuchadnezzar
2 (ye)ars	Awel-Marduk
‘3’ (years) 8 months	Neriglissar
(. . .) 3 months	Labashi-Marduk
‘17[?]’ (years)	Nabonidus

As is seen, the royal names and the preserved figures for the Neo-Babylonian period agree with those of Berossus and the Royal Canon: Nabopolassar is given 21 years, Nebuchadnezzar 43 years, and Awel-Marduk (Evil-merodach) 2 years. The only deviation is the length of Labashi-Marduk’s reign, which is given as 3 months against Berossus’ 9 months. The smaller figure is without doubt correct, as is proved by the economic documents unearthed.³⁵

In contrast to the Royal Canon, which always gives *whole* years only, the Uruk King List is more specific in also giving months for the reigns of Neriglissar and Labashi-Marduk. The damaged figures for Neriglissar and Nabonidus may be restored (reconstructed) as “3 years, 8 months,” and “17 years,” respectively. The economic texts also indicate Neriglissar’s reign to have been three years and eight months (August 560-April 556 B.C.E.).³⁶

Thus, once again, we find the figures of Berossus and the Royal Canon confirmed by this ancient document, the Uruk King List. Admittedly, this king list was composed (from older documents) more than 300 years after the end of the Neo-Babylonian era. On this basis it might be argued that scribal errors may have crept into it.

35 See note 20 above. At any rate, Labashi-Marduk’s reign was swallowed up by Neriglissar’s fourth year, which was also Nabonidus’ accession-year, and the total length of the era is not affected.

36 J. van Dijk, *UVB* 18 (see note 33 above), page 57. As Neriglissar died in his fourth regnal year, his reign would normally have been counted chronologically as four years, according to the Babylonian accession-year system. The Uruk King List deviates from this method at this point by giving more specific information. As van Dijk points out, “the list is more precise than the [Royal] Canon and confirms throughout the results of the research.”—*Archiv für Orientforschung*, ed. E. Weidner, Vol. 20 (Graz, 1963), p. 217. For further information on the month of Neriglissar’s accession and the Uruk King List, see the Appendix for Chapter 3.

So it is important to ask: Are there then no historical records preserved *from the Neo-Babylonian era itself* which establish its chronology? Yes, there are, as is immediately evident.

c) *Royal inscriptions*

Royal inscriptions of different kinds (building inscriptions, votive inscriptions, annals, etc.) from the Assyrian and Babylonian eras themselves have been found in great numbers.

In 1912 a German translation of the then-known Neo-Babylonian inscriptions was published by Stephen Langdon, but since then many new ones from the period in question have been unearthed.³⁷ A new translation of all the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions is therefore being prepared.³⁸

This is an enormous task. Paul-Richard Berger estimates that about *1,300 royal inscriptions*, one third of which are undamaged, have been found from the Neo-Babylonian period, most of them from the reigns of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar.³⁹

For the chronology that we are concerned with, three of the inscriptions are especially valuable. All of them are original documents from the reign of Nabonidus.⁴⁰ How do they aid in establishing the critical date for Jerusalem's destruction?

We have seen that in advocating a 607 B.C.E. date, the Watch Tower Society questions the reliability of the duration of the Neo-Babylonian period as presented by both Berossus and the Royal Canon (often called Ptolemy's Canon), finding the total 20 years too short. The first of the royal inscriptions to be discussed, called

37 Stephen Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (=Vorderasiatische Bibliothek, Vol. IV) (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1912).

38 The first of the three planned volumes was published in 1973 as Paul-Richard Berger, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (=Alter Orient und Altes Testament, Vol. 4/1) (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973).

39 About 75 percent of these documents were found in Babylon during the detailed excavations of R. Koldewey in 1899-1917. (Berger, *ibid.*, pp. 1-3) As explained by Dr. Ronald Sack, "a virtual mountain" of royal inscriptions have survived from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar alone. (*Images of Nebuchadnezzar* [Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1991], p. 26.) Six of the inscriptions are from the reign of Awel-Marduk, eight from the reign of Neriglissar, and about thirty from the reign of Nabonidus. (Berger, *op. cit.*, pp. 325-388.)

40 In 1989 Paul-Alain Beaulieu, in his doctoral thesis *The Reign of Nabonidus*, included a new catalogue with detailed descriptions of the royal inscriptions from the reign of Nabonidus. — Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 1-42.

Nabonidus No. 18, confirms the length of reign for that king as found in those ancient sources.

The second cuneiform tablet, Nabonidus No. 8, clearly establishes the *total length* of the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings up to Nabonidus, and enables us to know both the beginning year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and the crucial year in which he desolated Jerusalem.

The third, Nabonidus No. 24, provides the length of the reign of each Neo-Babylonian king from the first ruler, Nabopolassar, onward and down to the ninth year of the last ruler, Nabonidus (Belshazzar was evidently a coregent with his father Nabonidus at the time of Babylon’s fall).⁴¹

Following are the details for each of these cuneiform tablets:

(1) *Nabon. No. 18* is a cylinder inscription from an unnamed year of Nabonidus. Fulfilling the desire of Sin, the moon-god, Nabonidus dedicated a daughter of his (named En-nigaldi-Nanna) to this god as priestess at the Sin temple of Ur.

The important fact here is that an *eclipse of the moon*, dated in the text to Ulûlu 13 and observed in the morning watch, led to this dedication. Ulûlu, the sixth month in the Babylonian calendar, corresponded to parts of August and September (or, sometimes, parts of September and October) in our calendar. The inscription explicitly states that the moon “set while eclipsed,” that is, the eclipse began before and ended after sunrise.⁴² Its end, therefore, was invisible at Babylon.

41 Unfortunately, scholars have arranged or numbered the inscriptions differently, which may cause some confusion. In the systems of Tadmor, Berger, and Beaulieu the three inscriptions are listed as follows:

	<u>Tadmor 1965:</u>	<u>Berger 1973:</u>	<u>Beaulieu 1989:</u>
(1)	Nabon. No. 18	Nbd Zyl. II, 7	No. 2
(2)	Nabon. No. 8	Nbd Stl. Frgm. XI	No. 1
(3)	Nabon. No. 24	(missing)	(Adad-guppi’ stele)

Beaulieu’s arrangement is chronological: No. 1 was written in Nabonidus’ first year, No. 2 in his second year, and No. 13 after year 13, possibly in year 14 or 15. (Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, p. 42.) In Tadmor’s list Nabonidus’ inscriptions are numbered in the order of their publication, starting with the fifteen texts published by Langdon in 1912. (Hayim Tadmor, “The Inscriptions of Nabonaid: Historical Arrangement,” in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* [= *Assyriological Studies*, No. 16], ed. H. Güterbock & T. Jacobsen, Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1965, pp. 351-363.) The systems of Tadmor, Berger, and Beaulieu, in turn, differ from that of H. Lewy in *Archiv Orientalní*, Vol. XVII, Prague, 1949, pp. 34, 35, note 32. In the discussion here presented Tadmor’s numbers will be used.

42 This part of the text says, according to Beaulieu’s translation: “On account of the wish for an *entu* priestess, in the month Ulûlu, the month (whose Sumerian name means) ‘work of the goddesses,’ on the thirteenth day the moon was eclipsed and set while eclipsed. Sîn requested an *entu* priestess. Thus (were) his sign and his

Of what significance is all this?

When sufficient details about a lunar eclipse are available and it is known that the eclipse occurred within a certain limited time period in the past, astronomical movements are so precise that the date of a specific eclipse in a particular area can be determined accurately. Since the details here meet the requirement, when during Nabonidus' reign did the eclipse described on the ancient tablet take place?

In 1949 Hildegard Lewy examined the eclipse and found that only once during Nabonidus' reign did such an eclipse take place at this time of the year, that is, on September 26, 554 B.C.E. (Julian calendar).⁴³ The eclipse began about 3:00 a.m. and lasted for about three hours. If Nabonidus ruled for seventeen years and his first year was 555/54 B.C.E., as is generally held, the eclipse and the dedication of Nabonidus' daughter took place in his second regnal year (554/53 B.C.E.).

A remarkable confirmation of this dating was brought to light twenty years later, when W. G. Lambert published his translation of four fragments of an inscription from Nabonidus's reign which he named the *Royal Chronicle*. The inscription establishes that the dedication of Nabonidus' daughter took place shortly before his third year, and obviously in his second, precisely as Lewy had concluded.⁴⁴

The lunar eclipse of Ulûlu 13, then, definitely fixes the second year of Nabonidus to 554/53 B.C.E. and his first year to 555/54, thus

decision." (Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, p. 127) The conclusion that this lunar eclipse indicated that Sin requested a priestess was evidently based on the astrological tablet series *Enuma Anu Enlil*, the "Holy Writ" of the Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers, who regularly based their interpretations of astronomical events on this old omnia collection. A lunar eclipse seen in the morning-watch of Ulûlu 13 is expressly interpreted in these tablets as an indication that Sin desires a priestess.—See H. Lewy, "The Babylonian Background of the Kay Kâûs Legend," *Archiv Orientalní*, Vol. XVII (ed. by B. Hrozný, Prague, 1949), pp. 50, 51.

43 H. Lewy, *op. cit.*, pp. 50, 51.

44 W. G. Lambert, "A New Source for the Reign of Nabonidus," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Vol. 22 (ed. by Ernst Weidner, Graz, 1968/69), pp. 1-8. Lewy's conclusion has been confirmed by other scholars. (See for example Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.) The eclipse of September 26, 554 BCE, was examined in 1999 by Professor F. Richard Stephenson at Durham, England, who is a leading expert on ancient eclipses. He says:

"My computed details are as follows (times to the nearest tenth of an hour):
(i) Beginning at 3.0 h[our] local time, lunar altitude 34 deg[rees] in the SW.
(ii) End at 6.1 h[our] local time, lunar altitude -3 deg[rees] in the W.

The eclipse would thus end about 15 minutes after moonset. A deep penumbral eclipse may possibly be visible for a very few minutes and there is always the possibility of anomalous refraction at the horizon. However, I would judge that the Moon indeed set eclipsed on this occasion."—Letter Stephenson-Jonsson, dated March 5, 1999.

giving a very strong confirmation to the figures for Nabonidus' reign set forth by Berossus and the Royal Canon.⁴⁵

(2) *Nabon. No. 8*, or the *Hillah stele*, was discovered at the end of the 19th century in the neighborhood of Hillah, about four miles southeast of the ruins of Babylon.⁴⁶

The inscription "consists of a report on the accession year and the beginning of the first regnal year of Nabonidus" and may be shown, on the basis of internal evidence, to have been written toward the middle of his first regnal year (in the autumn of 555 B.C.E.).⁴⁷

The information given on this stele alone helps us to establish the *total length of the period from Nabopolassar to the beginning of the reign of Nabonidus*. How does it do this?

In several of his royal inscriptions (No. 1, 8, 24, and 25 in Tadmor's list) Nabonidus says that in a dream in his *accession year*, he was commanded by the gods Marduk and Sin to rebuild *Éhulhul*, the temple of the moon god Sin in Harran. In connection with this, the text under discussion (*Nabon. No. 8*) provides a very interesting piece of information:

(Concerning) Harran (and) the *Éhulhul*, which had been lying in ruins for 54 years because of its devastation by the Medes (who) destroyed the sanctuaries, with the consent of the gods the time for reconciliation approached, 54 years, when *Sîn* should return to his place. When he returned to his place, *Sîn*, the lord of the tiara, remembered his lofty seat, and (as to) all the gods who left his chapel with him, it is Marduk, the king of the gods, who ordered their gathering.⁴⁸

45 Someone might claim it is possible to find another lunar eclipse setting heliacally on Ulûlu 13 a number of years earlier that fits the description given by Nabonidus, perhaps about twenty years earlier, in order to adapt the observation to the chronology of the Watch Tower Society. However, modern astronomical calculations show that no such lunar eclipse, visible in Babylonia, took place at this time of the year within twenty years, *or even within fifty years* before the reign of Nabonidus! The closest lunar eclipse of this kind occurred fifty-four years earlier, on August 24, 608 B.C.E. The lunar eclipse of *Nabon. No. 18*, therefore, can only be that of September 26, 554 B.C.E. For additional information on the identification of ancient lunar eclipses, see the Appendix for Chapter 4: "Some comments on ancient lunar eclipses."

46 A translation of the text was published by S. Langdon in 1912, *op. cit.* (note 37 above), pp. 53-57, 270-289. For an English translation, see *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (hereafter referred to as *ANET*), ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), pp. 308-311.

47 Col. IX mentions Nabonidus' visit to southern Babylonia soon after a New Years' festival. This visit is also documented in archival texts from Larsa dated to the first two months of Nabonidus' first year. — Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 22, 117-127.

48 Translated by Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

The date when the temple Éhulhul in Harran was ruined by the Medes is known to us from two different reliable sources:

The Babylonian *Chronicle 3* (B.M. 21901) and the Harran inscription *Nabon. H 1, B*, also known as the *Adad-guppi' stele* (Nabon. No. 24 in Tadmor's list). The chronicle states that in the "sixteenth year" of Nabopolassar, in the month Marheshwan (parts of October and November), "the Umman-manda (the Medes), [*who*] had come [to *hel*]p the king of Akkad, put their armies together and marched to Harran [against Ashur-uball]it (II) who had ascended the throne in Assyria. . . . The king of Akkad reached Harran and [. . .] he captured the city. He carried off the vast booty of the city and the temple."⁴⁹ The Adad-guppi' stele gives the same information:

Whereas in the 16th year of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, Sin, king of the gods, with his city and his temple was angry and went up to heaven—the city and the people that (were) in it went to ruin.⁵⁰

Thus it is obvious that Nabonidus reckons the "fifty-four years" from the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar to the beginning of his own reign when the gods commanded him to rebuild the temple.⁵¹

This is in excellent agreement with the figures for the Neo-Babylonian reigns given by Berossus and the Royal Canon. As

49 Grayson, *ABC* (1975), p. 95. The exact month for the destruction of the temple is not given, but as the chronicle further states that the king of Akkad went home in the month of Adar (the twelfth month, corresponding to February/March), the destruction must have occurred some time between October, 610 and March, 609 B.C.E., probably towards the end of this period.

50 C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," in *Anatolian Studies*, Vol. VIII, 1958, p. 47. That the temple Éhulhul was *laid in ruins* at this time is confirmed by other inscriptions, including the *Sippar Cylinder* (No. 1 in Tadmor's list) which says: "(Sîn) became angry with that city [Harran] and temple [Éhulhul]. He aroused the Medes, who destroyed that temple and turned it into ruins."—Gadd, *ibid.*, pp. 72, 73; Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

51 The rebuilding of the temple Éhulhul is referred to in a number of texts which are not easily harmonized. Owing to some vagueness in the inscriptions, it is not clear whether the Harran temple was completed early in Nabonidus' reign or after his ten year stay at Teima in Arabia. The problem has been extensively discussed by a number of scholars. Most probably, the project was started in the early years of Nabonidus' reign, but could not be completely finished until after his return from Teima, perhaps in his thirteenth regnal year or later. (Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 137, 205-210, 239-241.) "The different texts surely refer to different stages of the work," says Professor Henry Saggs in his review of the problem. (H. W. F. Saggs, *Peoples of the Past: Babylonians*, London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1995, p. 170) Anyway, all scholars agree that Nabonidus reckons the fifty-four years from the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar until his own accession-year when the "wrath" of the gods "did (eventually) calm down," according to the Hillah stele (col. vii), and Nabonidus "was commanded" to rebuild the temple. For additional comments on the Hillah stele, see the Appendix.

Nabopolassar reigned for twenty-one years, *five years* remained from his sixteenth year to the end of his reign. After that Nebuchadnezzar ruled for *forty-three years*, Awel-Marduk for *two*, and Neriglissar for *four years* before Nabonidus came to power (Labashi-Marduk's few months may be disregarded).

Summing up these regnal years (5+43+2+4) we get *fifty-four years*—exactly as Nabonidus states on his stele.

If, as has been established, Nabonidus' first year was 555/554 B.C.E., Nabopolassar's sixteenth year must have been 610/609, his first year 625/624 and his twenty-first and last year 605/604 B.C.E. Nebuchadnezzar's first year, then, was 604/603, and his eighteenth year, when he desolated Jerusalem, was 587/586 B.C.E.—not 607 B.C.E. These dates agree completely with the dates arrived at from Berossus' figures and the Royal Canon.

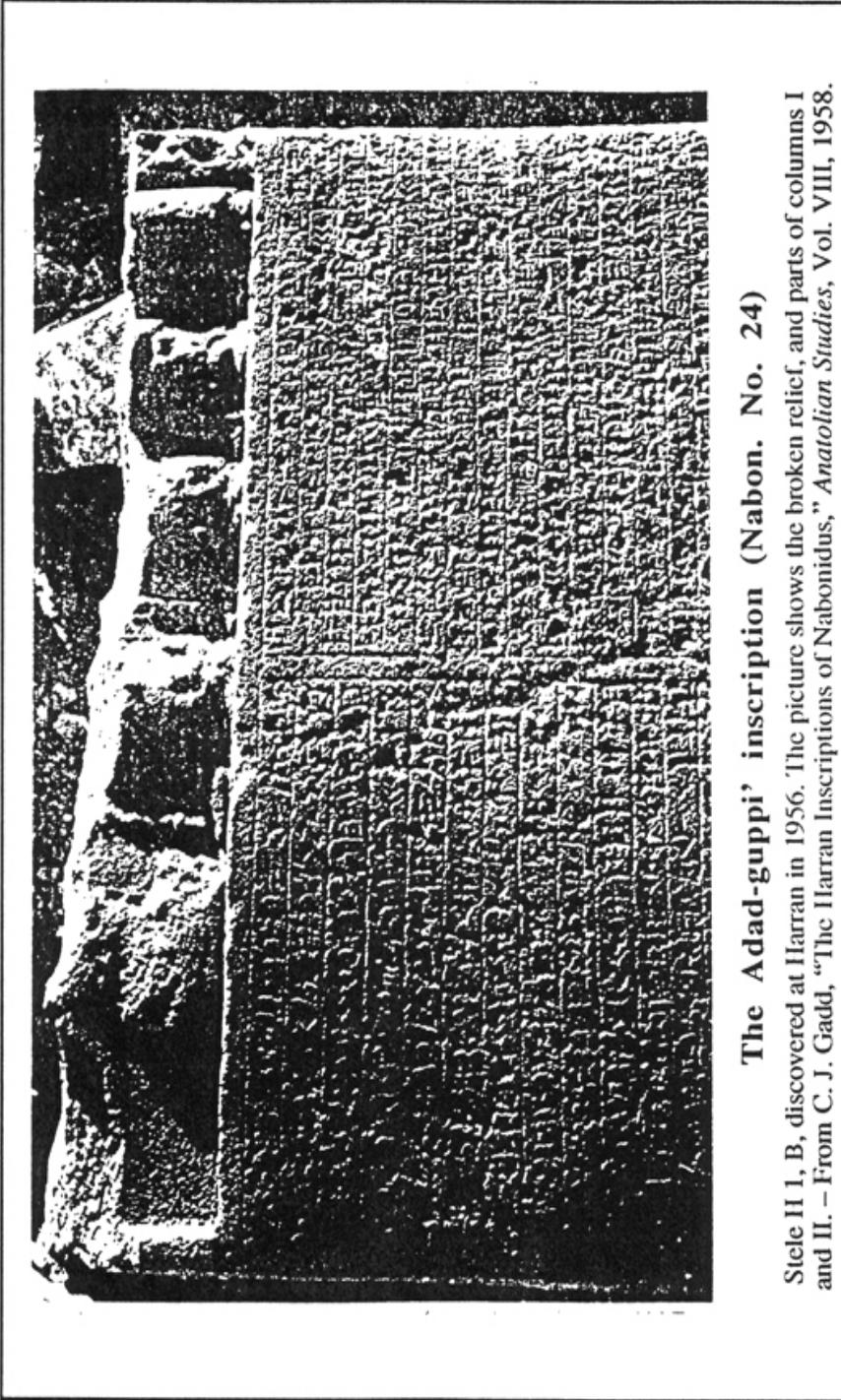
Consequently, this stele adds its testimony in establishing the total length of the reigns of all the Neo-Babylonian kings prior to Nabonidus. The strength of this evidence—produced right during the Neo-Babylonian era itself—cannot be insisted upon too strongly.

(3) *Nabon. No. 24*, also known as the *Adad-guppi' inscription*, exists in two copies. The first was discovered in 1906 by H. Pognon at Eski Harran in south-eastern Turkey, in the ruins of the ancient city of Harran (known as Haran in Abraham's time). The stele, now in the Archaeological Museum at Ankara, is a grave inscription, evidently composed by Nabonidus for his mother, Adad-guppi'.

The text not only includes a biographical sketch of Nabonidus' mother from the time of Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and on to the ninth year of Nabonidus (when she died), but also gives the length of reign of each of the Neo-Babylonian kings except, of course, of Nabonidus himself, who was still living. Unfortunately, in the first copy the portion of the text setting out the reigns is damaged, and the only readable *figures* are the forty-three years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign and the four years of Neriglissar's reign.⁵²

However, in 1956 Dr. D. S. Rice discovered three other stelae at Harran from the reign of Nabonidus, *one of which bore a duplicate inscription of the one discovered in 1906!* Fortunately, the sections

52 For an extensive discussion of the inscription, see B. Landsberger, "Die Basaltstele Nabonids von Eski-Harran," in *Halil-Edhem Hâtira Kitabı*, Kilt I (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1947), pp. 115-152. An English translation is included in Pritchard's *ANET*, pp. 311, 312. In *ANET* the translation of stele H 1, A, col. II says "6th" year of Nabonidus, which is an error for "9th". The original text clearly has "9th" year'.



The Adad-guppi' inscription (Nabon. No. 24)

Stele II I, B, discovered at Harran in 1956. The picture shows the broken relief, and parts of columns I and II. — From C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," *Anatolian Studies*, Vol. VIII, 1958.

of the new stele containing the chronological information were *not* damaged. The first of these sections reads as follows:

From the 20th year of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, when I was born, until the 42nd year of Ashurbanipal, the 3rd year of his son Ashur-etil-ili, the 21st year of Nabopolassar, the 43rd year of Nebuchadnezzar, the 2nd year of Awel-Merodach, the 4th year of Neriglissar, during (all) these 95 years in which I visited the temple of the great godhead Sin, king of all the gods in heaven and in the nether world, he looked with favor upon my pious good works and listened to my prayers, accepted my vows.⁵³

It should be observed that the first two kings, Ashurbanipal and his son Ashur-etil-ili, were *Assyrian* kings, while the following kings were *Neo-Babylonian* kings. This indicates that Adad-guppi' first lived under Assyrian rule but then, in connection with Nabopolassar's revolt and liberation of Babylonia from the Assyrian yoke, was brought under Babylonian rule.⁵⁴ Nabonidus' mother lived to be a centenarian, and further on in the text a complete summary of her long life is given:

He [the moon god Sin] added (to my life) many days (and) years of happiness and kept me alive from the time of Ashurbanipal, *king of Assyria*, to the 9th year of Nabonidus, *king of Babylon*, the son

53 C. J. Gadd, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-56. Gadd translated the inscription in 1958 and titled the new stele *Nabon. H 1, B*, as distinguished from Pognon's stele which he titled *Nabon. H 1, A*. The quotation here is from the translation of A. Leo Oppenheim in James B. Pritchard (ed.), *The Ancient Near East. A New Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, Vol. II (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 105, 106, col. I:29-33. As this passage is used as the basis for the calculation of Adad-guppi's age in col. II:26-29, the number of kings and their reigns are evidently meant to be complete. In a second portion the chronological information is repeated (col. II:40-46), but the reign of Awel-Marduk is left out, evidently because the purpose of this section is different, viz., to explain which of the Neo-Babylonian kings Adad-guppi' had *served* as an obedient subject. This is clearly indicated in the beginning of the section, which says: "I have obeyed with all my heart and have done my duty (as a subject) during . . ." etc. As suggested by Gadd "she was banished, or absented herself," from the court of Awel-Marduk, "no doubt for reasons, whatever they were, which earned that king an evil repute in the official tradition." (Gadd, *op. cit.*, p. 70)

54 Nabonidus and his mother descended from the *northern* branch of the Aramaeans, who earlier had been so thoroughly assimilated into the Assyrian society that even their moon-god Sin "came to be honored among the Assyrians on an equal plane with their native god Assur." (M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984, pp. 36-39.) In one of his inscriptions (Nabon. No. 9 in Tadmor's arrangement), Nabonidus explicitly speaks of the Assyrian kings as "my royal ancestors." — H. Lewy, *op. cit.* (cf. note 42 above), pp. 35, 36.

whom I bore, (i.e.) one hundred and four happy years (spent) in that piety which Sin, the king of all gods, has planted in my heart.⁵⁵

This queen died in the ninth year of Nabonidus, and the mourning for the deceased mother is described in the last column of the inscription. Interestingly, the same information is also given in the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (B.M. 35382):

The ninth year: . . . On the fifth day of the month Nisan the queen mother died in Dur-karashu which (is on) the bank of the Euphrates upstream from Sippar.⁵⁶

*All the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings are given in this royal inscription, from Nabopolassar and on to the ninth year of Nabonidus, and the lengths of reign are in complete accordance with the Royal Canon—a very significant fact, because the corroboration comes from a witness contemporary with all these Neo-Babylonian kings and intimately connected with all of them!*⁵⁷ More so than the individual testimony of any one source, it is the harmony of all these sources which is most telling.

55 Oppenheim in Pritchard, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 107, col. II:26-29. For additional comments on the Adad-guppi' inscription, see the Appendix for Chapter 3.

56 Grayson, *ABC*, p. 107. Until the last column (III 5ff.), the Adad-guppi' stele is written in the first person. But it is evident that the inscription was chiselled out after her death, undoubtedly by order of Nabonidus. That is why Dr. T. Longman III would like to classify it as a "fictional autobiography" (a literary method known also from other Akkadian texts), although he adds: "This, however, does not mean that the events and even the opinions associated with Adad-guppi' are unauthentic." (Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography*, Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1991, pp. 41, 101, 102, 209, 210; cf. Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, p. 209.) But it is questionable if the Adad-guppi' inscription, even in this sense, can be classified as a "fictional autobiography." In his review of Longman's work Dr. W. Schramm points out that the text "essentially is a genuine autobiography. The fact that there is an addition in col. III 5ff. composed by Nabonidus (so already Gadd, *AnSt* 8, 55, on III 5), does not give anyone the right to regard the whole text as fictional. The inscription, of course, was chiselled out after the death of Adad-guppi'. But it cannot be doubted that an authentic *Vorlage* on the story of Adad-guppi's life was used."—*Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vol. LII, No. 1/2 (Leiden, 1995), p. 94.

57 The *Royal Canon*, of course, does not give the reigns of the Assyrian kings Ashurbanipal and Ashur-etil-ili. For the earliest period (747–539 B.C.E.) the Canon gives a kinglist for *Babylon*, not for contemporary Assyria. The reigns of Assyrian kings are given only in so far as they also ruled directly over Babylon, which was true, for example, of Sennacherib, who ruled over Babylon twice (in 704/03–703/02 and 688/87–681/80 B.C.E.), and of Esarhaddon, who ruled over Babylon for thirteen years (680/79–668/67 B.C.E.). For the period of Ashurbanipal's reign in Assyria, the Canon gives the reigns of the contemporary vassal kings in Babylon, Shamash-shum-ukin (20 years) and Kandalanu (22 years).—Compare Gadd, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 71.

The results from our discussion of the Neo-Babylonian historical records are summarized in the following table.

TABLE 3: THE REIGNS OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN KINGS
ACCORDING TO THE NEO-BABYLONIAN HISTORICAL RECORDS

ROYAL NAME	THE NEO-BAB. CHRONICLES	THE URUK KING LIST	THE ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS	B.C.E. DATES
Nabopolassar	21 years	21 years	21 years	625-605
Nebuchadnezzar	43 years*	43 (ye)ars	43 years	604-562
Awel-Marduk	2 years*	2 (ye)ars	2 years	561-560
Neriglissar	4 years*	'3' (y's)+8 m's	4 years	559-556
Labashi-Marduk	some months*	3 months	—	556
Nabonidus	'17 years'	'17?' (years)	17 years	555-539

* These figures in the chronicles are preserved only via Berossus and/or the Royal Canon. See discussion.

As may be seen from the table, the Neo-Babylonian chronology adopted by secular historians is very strongly supported by the ancient cuneiform sources, some of which were produced during the Neo-Babylonian era itself. Three different lines of evidence in support of this chronology are provided by these sources:

(1) Although important parts of the *Neo-Babylonian Chronicles* are missing and some figures in the *Uruk kinglist* are partially damaged, the *combined* witness of these documents strongly supports the Neo-Babylonian chronologies of *Berossus* and the *Royal Canon*, both of which were actually—independently of each other—derived from Neo-Babylonian chronicles and kinglists.

(2) The royal inscription *Nabon. No. 18* and the *Royal Chronicle* fix the second year of Nabonidus astronomically to 554/53 B.C.E. The whole length of the Neo-Babylonian period prior to Nabonidus is given by *Nabon. No. 8*, which gives the elapsed time from the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar up to the accession-year of Nabonidus as fifty-four years. The stele thus fixes the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar to 610/09 and his first year to 625/24 B.C.E. These three inscriptions, therefore, establish the length of the whole Neo-Babylonian era.

(3) The *Adad-guppi' inscription* gives the reigns of all the Neo-Babylonian kings (except for Labashi-Marduk's brief, months-long reign, which may be disregarded) from Nabopolassar up to the ninth year of Nabonidus. As the Watch Tower Society indirectly accepts a seventeen-year rule for Nabonidus, this stele of itself overthrows their 607 B.C.E. date for the desolation of Jerusalem.

Thus the Babylonian chronicles, the Uruk kinglist, and the royal inscriptions firmly establish the length of the Neo-Babylonian era. *And yet this is just a beginning*. We must still wait to be introduced to the strongest lines of evidence in support of the chronology presented in the table above. Their added testimony should establish beyond any reasonable question the historical facts of the matter.

B-2: Economic-administrative and legal documents

Literally hundreds of thousands of cuneiform texts have been excavated in Mesopotamia since the middle of the nineteenth century.

The overwhelming majority of them concern economic-administrative and private legal items such as promissory notes, contracts (for the sale, lease, or gift of land, houses, and other property, or for the hiring of slaves and livestock), and records of law suits.

These texts are to a great extent *dated* just as are commercial letters, contracts, receipts and other vouchers today. The dating is done by giving the *year of the reigning king*, the *month*, and the *day of the month*. A text concerning ceremonial salt from the archives of the temple Eanna in Uruk, dated in the first year of Awel-Marduk (the Evil-merodach of 2 Kings 25:27-30, written Amel-Marduk in Akkadian but postvocalic m was pronounced w), is given here as an example:

Ina-sillâ has brought one and one-half talents of salt,
the regular *sattukku* offering of the month of Siman
for the god Usur-amassu.
Month of Simanu, sixth day, first year of Amel-Marduk,
the king of Babylon.⁵⁸

Tens of thousands of such dated texts have been unearthed from the Neo-Babylonian period. According to the well-known Russian Assyriologist M. A. Dandamaev, over *ten thousand* of these texts had been published prior to 1991.⁵⁹ Many others have been published since, but the majority of them are still unpublished. Professor D. J. Wiseman, another leading Assyriologist, estimates that “there are

58 Ronald H. Sack, *Amel-Marduk 562-560 B.C.* (Neukirchen-Vluy: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), p. 79.

59 Dr. M. A. Dandamaev states: “The period of less than ninety years between the reign of Nabopolassar and the occupation of Mesopotamia by the Persians is documented by tens of thousands of texts concerning household and administrative economy and private law, over ten thousand of which have been published so far.”—*The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., Vol. III:2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 252.

probably some 50,000 texts published and unpublished for the period 627-539” B.C.E.⁶⁰

Thus there exist large numbers of dated tablets *from every year during the whole Neo-Babylonian era*. Dr. Wiseman’s estimate would give an average of nearly 600 dated texts from each of the eighty-seven years from Nabopolassar to Nabonidus, inclusive.

It is true that among these texts there are many that are damaged or fragmentary, and that dates are often illegible or missing. Further, the texts are not evenly distributed throughout the period, as the number gradually increases and culminates in the reign of Nabonidus.

Nonetheless, *every single year throughout the whole period* is covered by numerous, often *hundreds* of tablets that are datable.

Because of this abundance of dated texts modern scholars are able to determine not only the length of reign of each king, but also the *time of the year when each change of reign occurred*, sometimes almost to the day!

The last known texts from the reign of Neriglissar, for example, are dated I/2/4 and I?/6/4 (that is, month I, day 2 and day 6, year 4, corresponding to April 12 and 16, 556 B.C.E., Julian calendar), and the earliest one from the reign of his son and successor, Labashi-Marduk, is dated I/23/acc. (May 3, 556).⁶¹ The last text from the reign of Nabonidus is dated VII/17/17 (October 13, 539), or one day after the fall of Babylon (given as VII/16/17 in the *Nabonidus*

60 Private letter Wiseman-Jonsson, dated August 28, 1987. This is probably a very conservative estimate. The most extensive collection of Neo-Babylonian texts is held in the British Museum, which includes some 25,000 texts dated to the period 626–539 B.C.E. Most of these belong to the “Sippar collection,” which contains tablets excavated by Hormuzd Rassam at the site of ancient Sippar (present Abu Habbah) in the years 1881 and 1882. This collection has recently been catalogued. (E. Leichty et al, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, Vols. VI–VIII, London: British Museum Publications Ltd, 1986–1988. These catalogues will hereafter be referred to as *CBT*.) Substantial collections are also in Istanbul and Baghdad. Many other collections of Neo-Babylonian documents are held in museums and at universities in the U.S.A., Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, and other parts of the world. It is true that many of the tablets are damaged and the dates are often illegible. Yet, there are still *tens of thousands* of Neo-Babylonian tablets with legible dates extant today. As a result of the continuous archaeological excavations that are being carried out in the Mesopotamian area, “the body of written sources expands significantly every year. For example, in the space of a single season of excavations in Uruk, about six thousand documents from the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods were discovered.” — M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp. 1, 2.

61 R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology: 626 B.C.–A.D.* 75 (Providence: Brown University Press, 1956), pp. 12, 13.

Chronicle). The reason for the overlap of one day beyond Babylon's fall is easily explained:

Interestingly enough, the last tablet dated to Nabunaid from Uruk is dated the day after Babylon fell to Cyrus. News of its capture had not yet reached the southern city some 125 miles distant.⁶²

In view of this immense amount of documentary evidence, the question must be asked: If twenty years have to be added to the Neo-Babylonian era in order to place the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E., *where are the business and administrative texts dated in those missing years?*

Quantities of dated documents exist for **each** of Nebuchadnezzar's forty-three years, for **each** of Awel-Marduk's (Evil-Merodach's) two years, for **each** of Neriglissar's four years, and for **each** of Nabonidus' seventeen regnal years. In addition, there are many dated texts from Labashi-Marduk's reign of only about two months.

If any of these kings' reigns had been longer than those just mentioned, large numbers of dated documents would certainly exist for *each* of those extra years. Where are they? Twenty years are about one fifth of the whole Neo-Babylonian period. Among the tens of thousands of dated tablets from this period, many *thousands* ought to have been found from those missing twenty years.

If one casts one die (of a pair of dice) tens of thousands of times without ever getting a 6, he must logically conclude: "There is no number 6 on this die." The same is true of the Watch Tower's twenty missing "ghost years" for which one must look in vain during the Neo-Babylonian period.

But suppose that a number of missing years really existed, and that, by some incredible chance, the many thousands of dated tablets that ought to be there have not been found. Why is it, then, that the lengths of reign according to the dated tablets *which have been unearthed* happen to agree with the figures of Berossus, those of the Royal Canon, of the Uruk King List, of the contemporary royal inscriptions,

62 *Ibid.*, p. 13. One text from the reign of Nabonidus, published by G. Contenau in *Textes Cuneiformes, Tome XII, Contrats Néo-Babyloniens*, I (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste, 1927), Pl. LVIII, No. 121, apparently gives him a reign of *eighteen* years. Line 1 gives the date as "VI/6/17," but when it is repeated in line 19 in the text it is given as "VI/6/18." Parker and Dubberstein (p. 13) assumed "either a scribal error or an error by Contenau." The matter was settled by Dr. Béatrice André, who at my request collated the original at the Louvre Museum in Paris in 1990: "The last line has, like the first, the year 17, and the error comes from Contenau."—Letter André-Jonsson, March 20, 1990.

as well as the figures of all the other evidence that is yet to be presented below? Why should it be that, *whatever type of historical source is considered*, the supposedly “missing” years consistently amount to exactly twenty years? Why not a period of, in one case, seventeen years, in another case thirteen, in yet another seven years, or perhaps different isolated years distributed throughout the Neo-Babylonian period?

Each year new quantities of dated tablets are unearthed, and catalogues, transliterations, and translations of such texts are frequently published, but the twenty missing years never turn up. Even improbability has a limit.⁶³

The importance of the economic-administrative and legal texts for the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian period can hardly be overestimated. The evidence provided by these dated texts is simply overwhelming. The reigns of all the Neo-Babylonian kings are copiously attested by tens of thousands of such documents, all of which were written during this era. As shown by the table below, these reigns are in full agreement with the Royal Canon and the other documents discussed earlier.

TABLE 4: THE NEO-BABYLONIAN CHRONOLOGY ACCORDING TO THE ECONOMIC-ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Nabopolassar	21 years	(625 - 605 BCE)
Nebuchadnezzar	43 years	(604 - 562 BCE)
Awel-Marduk	2 years	(561 - 560 BCE)
Neriglissar	4 years	(559 - 556 BCE)
Labashi-Marduk	2-3 months	(556 BCE)
Nabonidus	17 years	(555 - 539 BCE)

B-3: Prosopographical evidence

Prosopography (from the Greek word *prósopon*, meaning “face, person”) may be defined as “the study of careers, especially of individuals linked by family, economic, social, or political relationships.”⁶⁴

63 As a matter of course, defenders of the Watch Tower Society’s chronology have made great efforts to discredit the evidence provided by these enormous quantities of dated cuneiform tablets. On perusing modern catalogues of documents dated to the Neo-Babylonian era, they have found a few documents that seemingly give longer reigns to some Babylonian kings than are shown by the Royal Canon and other sources. A fresh check of the original tablets, however, has shown that most of these odd dates simply are modern copying, transcription, or printing errors. Some other odd dates are demonstrably scribal errors. For a detailed discussion of these texts, see Appendix for chapter 3: “Some comments on copying, reading, and scribal errors.”

64 *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 3rd college edition, eds. V. Neufeldt & D. B. Guralnik (New York: Webster’s New World Dictionaries, 1988), p. 1080.

As the names of many individuals often recur in the business and administrative documents — sometimes hundreds of times during the entire Neo-Babylonian period — scholars usually apply the *prosopographical* method in their analysis of these texts. Such an approach not only contributes to the understanding of the structure and social life of the Neo-Babylonian society, but it also provides additional, internal evidence in support of the established chronology of the period.

Of the tens of thousands of documents from the Neo-Babylonian era, more than half are the results of temple activities and have been found in *temple archives*, particularly in the archives of the Eanna temple in Uruk (the temple of the goddess *Ishtar*) and the Ebabbar temple in Sippar (the temple of *Shamash*, the sun god). But many thousands of texts also come from *private archives and libraries*.

The richest private archives are those of the *Egibi* and *Nur-Sîn* houses, centered in the Babylon area. Other private archives have been found, for example, in Uruk (the sons of Bel-ushallim, Nabû-ushallim, and Bel-supê-muhur), in Borsippa (the Ea-ilûta-bâni family), in Larsa (Itti-Shamash-balatu and his son Arad-Shamash), and in Ur (the Sîn-uballit family).

No *state archives* have been found from the Neo-Babylonian period, the reason being that at this time such documents are known to have been written (in Aramaic) on leather and papyrus, materials that were easily destroyed by the climatic conditions in Mesopotamia.⁶⁵

Consider now how a study of certain of the available archives can yield valuable information of a chronological nature.

a) The Egibi business house

By far the largest private archive of the Neo-Babylonian period is that of the *Egibi* business house. Of this enterprise Bruno Meissner says:

From the firm *the Sons of Egibi* we possess such an abundance of documents that we are able to follow nearly all business transactions and personal experiences of its heads from the time of Nebuchadnezzar up to the time of Darius I.⁶⁶

65 For a survey of the Neo-Babylonian archives, see M. A. Dandamaev's article in *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries*, ed. K. R. Veenhof (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1986), pp. 273-277.

66 Bruno Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, Vol. II (Heidelberg, 1925), p. 331. The quotation is translated from the German.

The business documents from the Egibi house were discovered by Arabs during the wet season of the year 1875-76 in a mound in the neighbourhood of Hillah, a town about four miles southeast of the ruins of Babylon. Some *three or four thousand tablets* were discovered enclosed in a number of earthen jars, resembling common water jars, covered over at the top with a tile, and cemented with bitumen.

The discoverers brought the tablets to Baghdad and sold them to a dealer there. In that same year George Smith visited Baghdad and acquired about 2,500 of these important documents for the British Museum.

The tablets were examined during the following months by W. St. Chad Boscawen, and his report appeared in 1878 in the *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*.⁶⁷ Boscawen states that the tablets “relate to the various monetary transactions of a Babylonian banking and financial agency, trading under the name of Egibi and Sons.” The tablets “relate to every possible commercial transaction; from the loan of a few shekels of silver, to the sale or mortgage of whole estates whose value is thousands of *manas* of silver.”⁶⁸

Boscawen soon realized the importance of following the *sequence* of the heads of the Egibi firm, and after a more careful analysis he ascertained the main lines of the succession to be as follows:

From the third year of Nebuchadnezzar a person named Shula acted as head of the Egibi firm, and continued in that capacity for a period of twenty years, up to the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar when he died and was succeeded by his son, Nabû-ahhê-iddina.⁶⁹

The son, Nabû-ahhê-iddina, continued as the head of affairs for a period of thirty-eight years, that is, from the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar to the twelfth year of Nabonidus when he was succeeded by his son Itti-Marduk-balatu.⁷⁰

67 W. St. Chad Boscawen, “Babylonian Dated Tablets, and the Canon of Ptolemy,” in *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, Vol. VI (London, January 1878), pp. 1-78. As Boscawen points out (*ibid.*, pp. 5, 6), George Smith himself, during his stay at Baghdad in 1876, had begun a systematic and careful examination of the tablets, a study that was interrupted by his untimely death in Aleppo in August that year. Boscawen’s study was evidently based on Smith’s notebooks.—Sheila M. Evers, “George Smith and the Egibi Tablets,” *Iraq*, Vol. LV, 1993, pp. 107-117.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 6. A “mana” (mina) weighed about 0.5 kg.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10. Shula died between the dates VII/21/23 (month/day/year) and IV/15/24 of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (between October, 582 and July, 581 B.C.E.).—G. van Driel, “The Rise of the House of Egibi,” *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap*, No. 29 (Leiden, 1987), p. 51.

70 Nabû-ahhê-iddina evidently died in the thirteenth year of Nabonidus, the year after his son had taken over the affairs. See Arthur Ungnad, “Das Haus Egibi,” *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Band XIV (Berlin, 1941), p. 60, and van Driel, *op. cit.*, pp. 66, 67.

Itti-Marduk-balatu in his turn remained head of the firm until the first year of Darius I (521/20 B.C.E.), which was the twenty-third year of his headship of the firm.

Boscawen epitomizes these findings as follows:

Now, summing up these periods, we get the result that from the 3rd year of Nebuchadnezzar II to the 1st year of Darius Hystaspis was a period of eighty-one years:

Sula at the head of the firm	20 years
Nabu-ahi-idina	38 years
Itti-Marduk-balatu	<u>23 years</u>
	81 years

This would give an interval of eighty-three years from the 1st year of Nebuchadnezzar to the 1st year of Darius Hystaspis.⁷¹

The significant fact is that this agrees exactly with Berossus, the Royal Canon, and the Neo-Babylonian historical records. Counting backwards eighty-three years from the first year of Darius I (521/20 B.C.E.) brings us to 604 B.C.E. as the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, which agrees completely with the other lines of evidence presented above.

The archive of the Egibi-house alone would suffice to establish the length of the Neo-Babylonian period. With this extensive set of dated commercial tablets from the archive of one of the “Rothschilds” of Babylon “there ought to be but little difficulty in establishing once and for ever the chronology of this important period of ancient history,” wrote Boscawen already back in 1878.⁷²

The evidence of these documents leaves no room for a gap in Neo-Babylonian history from Nebuchadnezzar onward, certainly not one of twenty years! The archive, containing tablets dated up to the forty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, the second year of Awel-Marduk, the fourth year of Neriglissar and the seventeenth year of Nabonidus, gives a complete confirmation of the chronology of Berossus and the Royal Canon.

Since the last century still other collections of tablets belonging to the Egibi family have been discovered.⁷³ A number of studies on

71 Boscawen, *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 24. This conclusion had also been arrived at previously by George Smith in his study of the tablets.—S. M. Evers, *op. cit.* (note 67 above), pp. 112-117.

72 Boscawen, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

73 During excavations at Uruk in 1959-60, for example, an archive belonging to members of the Egibi family was unearthed, containing 205 tablets dating from the sixth year of Nabonidus to the thirty-third year of Darius I. Most of the tablets were dated as from the reign of Darius. See J. van Dijk, *UVB* 18 (cf. note 33 above), pp. 39-41. The earliest known text of the Egibi family is dated to 715 B.C.E. *Business documents of the family then appear regularly between 690 and 480 B.C.E.*—M. A. Dandamaev, *op. cit.* (1984; see note 60 above), p. 61.

the Egibi family have been produced, all of which confirm the general conclusions drawn by Boscawen.⁷⁴ Thanks to the enormous amount of texts from this family, scholars have been able to trace the history, not only of the heads of the firm, but also of many other members of the Egibi house, and even family trees have been worked out that extend through the whole Neo-Babylonian period and into the Persian era!⁷⁵

The pattern of intertwined family relations that has been established in this way for several generations would be grossly distorted if another twenty years were inserted into the Neo-Babylonian period.

b) Life expectancy in the Neo-Babylonian period

(1) Adad-guppi':

As was shown above in the discussion of the Harran stele (*Nabon. H I, B*), Adad-guppi', the mother of Nabonidus, was born in the 20th year of powerful Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, 649/648 B.C.E. She died in the ninth year of Nabonidus, in 547/546 B.C.E. at an age of 101 or 102 years, a remarkable life span.⁷⁶

What would happen to her age if we were to add twenty years to the Neo-Babylonian era? This would necessarily increase the age of

74 Some of the most important works are: Saul Weingart, *Das Haus Egibi in neubabylonischen Rechtsurkunden* (Berlin: Buchdruckerei Viktoria, 1939), 64 pages; Arthur Ungnad, "Das Haus Egibi," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Band XIV, Heft 1/2 (Berlin, 1941), pp. 57-64; Joachim Krecher, *Das Geschäftshaus Egibi in Babylon in neubabylonischer und achämenidischer Zeit* (unpublished "Habilitationsschrift," Universitätsbibliothek, Münster in Westfalen, 1970), ix + 349 pages.; and Martha T. Roth, "The Dowries of the Women of the Itti-Marduk-balatu Family," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 111:1, 1991, pp. 19-37.

75 See, for example, J. Kohler & F. E. Peiser, *Aus dem Babylonischen Rechtsleben, IV* (Leipzig: Verlag von Eduard Pfeiffer, 1898), p. 22, and M. T. Roth, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 21, 36. Another private enterprise, the *Nur-Sîn family*, which through intermarriage became annexed to the Egibi family, has been thoroughly studied by Laurence Brian Shiff in *The Nur-Sîn Archive: Private Entrepreneurship in Babylon (603-507 B.C.)* (Ph. D. dissertation; University of Pennsylvania, 1987), 667 pages.

76 The Adad-guppi' inscription itself stresses that her age was extreme: "I saw my [great] great-grandchildren, up to the fourth generation, in good health, and (thus) had my fill of *extreme old age*." — A. Malamat, "Longevity: Biblical Concepts and Some Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Beiheft 19: *Vorträge gehalten auf der 28. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Wien, 6.–10. Juli 1981* (Horn, Austria: Verlag Ferdinand Berger & Söhne Gesellschaft M.B.H., 1982), p. 217. Dr. Malamat also refers to a tablet found at Sultantepe which "categorizes the stages of life from age 40 through age 90 [as follows]: 40 – *lalātu* ('prime of life'); 50 – *umu kurātu* ('short life'); 60 – *metlutu* ('maturity'); 70 – *umu arkātu* ('long life'); [80] – *shibutu* ('old age'); 90 – *littutu* ('extreme old age')." — A. Malamat, *ibid.*, p. 215.

Adad-guppi' to *121 or 122 years*. The only way to avoid this consequence would be to add the twenty extra years to the reign of her surviving son Nabonidus *after her death*, making his reign thirty-seven instead of seventeen years, something the contemporary documents simply do not allow us to do.

This is not the only problem of this kind that confronts those who would defend the Watch Tower Society's chronology. Many people, whose names appear in the business and administrative texts from the Neo-Babylonian period, can be traced from text to text almost during the entire period, sometimes even into the Persian era. We find that some of these people—businessmen, slaves, scribes—must have been eighty or ninety years old or more at the end of their careers. But if we were to add twenty years to the Neo-Babylonian era, we would also be forced to add twenty years to the lives of these people, making them 100 to 110 years old—and still active in their occupations. A few examples will follow.

(2) *Apla, son of Bel-iddina:*

A scribe named *Apla, son of Bel-iddina*, who belonged to the trading house of Egibi, appears for the first time as a scribe in a text dated to the twenty-eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (577 B.C.E.). Thereafter, his name recurs in many texts dated in the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Awel-Marduk, Neriglissar, Nabonidus, Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius I.

He appears for the last time as a witness in a document, a promissory note, dated to the thirteenth year of Darius, 509 B.C.E. That means the career of this scribe may be followed for a period of sixty-eight years, from 577 to 509 B.C.E. The Russian Assyriologist M. A. Dandamaev comments:

He should have been, at least, twenty years old when he became a scribe. Even if we assume that *Apla* died even in the same year when he was referred to for the last time or soon after, he must have lived about 90 years.⁷⁷

But if we allow twenty years to be added to the Neo-Babylonian era, we would not only increase *Apla's* age to 110 years or more—we would also be forced to conclude that at this old age he was still active as a scribe.

⁷⁷ Muhammad A. Dandamaev, "About Life Expectancy in Babylonia in the first Millennium B.C.," in *Death in Mesopotamia* (= *Mesopotamia. Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology, Vol. 8*), ed. Bendt Alster (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), p. 184.

(3) Iddina-Marduk and his wife Ina-Esagila-ramât

Two other examples are the businessman *Iddin-Marduk, son of Iqisha, of the family of Nur-Sin, and his wife Ina-Esagila-ramât*. Iddin-Marduk appears as director of his business activities for the first time in a text that earlier had been dated to the *eighth* year of Nebuchadnezzar (597 B.C.E.). But a recent collation of the original tablet revealed that the year number is damaged and probably should be read as the 28th year (577 B.C.E.). Iddin-Marduk then appears in hundreds of dated documents, the last of which is from the third year of Cambyses, 527 B.C.E. Other documents indicate that he died shortly before the fifth year of Darius I (517 B.C.E.). If we assume that he was only twenty years old when he first appears as director, he must have been about eighty years old at the time of his death.

Iddin-Marduk's wife, Ina-Esagila-ramât, survived her husband. She, too, was involved in business activities. Documents show that she got married to Iddin-Marduk no later than the 33rd year of Nebuchadnezzar (572 B.C.E.). We must assume, therefore, that she was at least twenty years old when she first appears as a contracting party in a text dated to Nebuchadnezzar's 34th year (571 B.C.E.). She appears for the last time in a text dated to the 15th year of Darius I (507 B.C.E.), at which time she must have been at least 84 years old.⁷⁸

Again, if we were to add twenty years to the Neo-Babylonian era, we would increase the age of Iddina-Marduk to about 100 years, and the age of Ina-Esagila-ramât to at least 104 years. We would also be forced to hold that she, at this age, was still actively involved in the businesses.

(4) Daniel the prophet:

The Bible also provides some examples of its own. In the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar (605 B.C.E.), *Daniel*, then a youth of perhaps 15-20 years, was brought to Babylon (Daniel 1:1, 4, 6). He served at the Babylonian court until after the end of the Neo-Babylonian period, being still alive in the third year of Cyrus, in 536/35 B.C.E. (Daniel 1:21; 10:1). At that time he must have been close to ninety years old. If another twenty years were added to this period, Daniel would have been nearly 110 years old.

Is it really likely that people during the Neo-Babylonian period frequently reached ages of 100, 110, or even 120 years? True, we

⁷⁸ Cornelia Wunsch, *Die Urkunden des baylonischen Geschäftsmannes Iddin-Marduk*, 1 (Groningen: STYX Publications, 1993), pp. 19, 10 fn. 43, 12, 66.

sometimes have heard of people in southern Russia or northern India who are said to be 150 years old or more. But on close examination, all such statements have been proved to be false.⁷⁹ The oldest known individual in modern times has been a French woman, Jeanne Calment, who was born on February 21, 1875, and died on August 4, 1997, at an age of 122 years.⁸⁰ This Frenchwoman's record would have been equalled by Adad-guppi', had that Babylonian woman been 122 years old when she died, instead of about 102, as the ancient records indicate.

Considering these cases of exceptionally long age already presented, we rightly ask if we have any reason to believe that the life span of people at that time surpassed that of people of today?

The Russian Assyriologist M. A. Dandamaev has examined the life span of people in Babylonia from the seventh through to the fourth century B.C.E., using tens of thousands of business and administrative texts as the basis for his research. His conclusion is that the life span of people at that time was not different from what it is now. In his discussion, Dandamaev refers to Psalms 90:10: "As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years. Or if due to strength, eighty years" (*NASB*). These words were as true in the Neo-Babylonian era as they are today.⁸¹

Consequently, the extremely old ages which would be created by dating the destruction of Jerusalem to 607 instead of 587 B.C.E. provides one more argument weighing against the Watch Tower Society's chronology.

As has been shown in this section, a *prosopographical* examination of the cuneiform texts strongly supports the chronology established for the Neo-Babylonian period. The careers of business men, scribes, temple administrators, slaves, and others may be followed for decades, in some cases through almost the whole Neo-Babylonian period and on into the Persian era. Thousands of dated documents give a profound insight into their everyday activities. Notably, however, the lives and activities of these people never contain reference to any year lying outside the recognized time frame of the Neo-Babylonian period, never overlap or extend beyond this at any time so as to point to a single year of the twenty-year period required by the Watch Tower Society's chronology.

79 S. Jay Olshansky et al, "In Search of Methuselah: Estimating the Upper Limits of Human Longevity," *Science*, Vol. 250, 2 November 1990. p. 635.

80 *The Guinness Book of Records 2004*. According to some media reports, this record may have been beaten by a woman in El Salvador, Cruz Hernandez, who is said to have been born on May 3, 1878, and died on March 9, 2007, at an age of 128 years.

81 M. A. Dandamaev, *op. cit.* (1980), p. 183.

B-4: Chronological interlocking joints

There are only two possible ways of extending the Neo-Babylonian period to include the twenty extra years required by the Watch Tower chronology:

Either the *known Neo-Babylonian kings had longer reigns* than indicated by all the documents discussed above, or there were other, *unknown kings* who belonged to the Neo-Babylonian era in addition to those known to us from these documents.

Both of these possibilities, however, are completely excluded, not only by the several lines of evidence presented so far and the astronomical evidence that will be discussed in the next chapter, but also by a series of texts that *inseparably interlock* each reign with the next throughout the whole Neo-Babylonian period. Eleven such chronological interlocking joints will be discussed below.

a) Nabopolassar to Nebuchadnezzar

(1) In the earlier discussion of the *Neo-Babylonian chronicles*, one of them (*Chronicle 5*) was quoted as saying that Nabopolassar, the first Neo-Babylonian king, ruled “for *twenty-one years*,” that he died “on the *eighth day of the month Ab* [the fifth month],” and that on the *first day of the next month* (Elul) his son Nebuchadnezzar “ascended the royal throne in Babylon.”

At this point, then, there is no room for a longer reign of Nabopolassar beyond the recognized span of twenty-one years, nor for an “extra king” between him and Nebuchadnezzar.

b) Nebuchadnezzar to Awel-Marduk

(2) That Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Awel-Marduk (the Biblical Evil-Merodach) in the forty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign is confirmed by a business document, *B.M. 30254*, published by Ronald H. Sack in 1972.

This document mentions both the forty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar and the accession year of Awel-Marduk. A girl, Lit-kaidi, the slave of Gugua, “was placed at the disposal of Nabû-ahheiddina, the son of Shulâ, the descendent of Egibi *in the month of Ajaru* [the second month], *forty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar*, king of Babylon, and (for whom) twelve shekels of silver served as security.” Later in the same year, “*in the month of Kislimu* [the ninth month], *accession year of [Amel]-Marduk*, king of Babylon, . . . Gugua of her own will

sold Lit-ka-idi to Nabû-ahhe-iddina for the full price of nineteen and one-half shekels of silver.”⁸²

This document gives no room for a longer reign of Nebuchadnezzar, or for an “extra king” between him and Awel-Marduk.

(3) In the Neo-Babylonian period the yield of a field or garden was often estimated before harvest time. After the harvest the workers of the field were to turn over the estimated amount to the owners or buyers. Quite a number of documents recording such procedures have been found.

One of them, designated *AO 8561*, not only includes estimated yields of numerous fields for three successive years, the forty-second and forty-third years of Nebuchadnezzar and the first year of Awel-Marduk, but “is also a record of what portions of that yield were received by and distributed to various persons . . . in the month of Kislimu [the ninth month], accession year of Neriglissar.”⁸³

This document, then, provides another joint or dovetail between the forty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar and the reign of Awel-Marduk.

(4) Another, similar text, *YBC 4038*, dated to the “month of Addaru [the twelfth month], 15th day, accession year of Amel-Marduk,” describes the monthly portioning out of “500 bushels of barley” at the Eanna temple in Uruk from “the 43rd year of Nabû-kudurri-usur [Nebuchadnezzar]” to the “1st year of Amel-Marduk.”⁸⁴ Again, this text ties together the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and his successor Awel-Marduk in a way that gives no room for any additional years between the two.

The Bible itself confirms that Awel-Marduk’s accession year fell in the forty-third year of his father Nebuchadnezzar. This may be inferred from the datings given in 2 Kings 24:12; 2 Chronicles 36:10,

82 Ronald Herbert Sack, *Amel-Marduk 562-560 B.C.* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1972), pp. 62, 63.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 116-118. The time interval from a harvest to the distribution of the yield was normally brief, a few years at the most. In the present case the yields of the three years’ harvests were distributed in the accession year of Neriglissar, that is, three years after the harvests of the first year. The insertion of twenty extra years somewhere between Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar would increase this time interval to *twenty-three years*—an extremely long wait for the yields, to say the least.

84 Ronald H. Sack, “The Scribe Nabû-bani-ahi, son of Ibnâ, and the Hierarchy of Eanna as seen in the Erech Contracts,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, Band 67 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), pp. 43-45.

and Jeremiah 52:28, 31. A brief discussion of this evidence is included in the “Appendix for Chapter 3” (page 325).

c) Nebuchadnezzar to Awel-Marduk to Neriglissar

(5) In the Neo-Babylonian period, bookkeeping was already an ancient, highly complex and formalized business.⁸⁵ An interesting example of this is a tablet known as *NBC 4897*. The document is, actually, a *ledger*, tabulating the annual growth of a herd of sheep and goats belonging to the Eanna temple at Uruk *for ten consecutive years, from the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar to the first year of Neriglissar*.

In the entries for each year the number of lambs and kids born during the year is added, and the number of animals killed (documented by their hides) or paid to the herdsman as wages, are subtracted. The grand totals are then given in the column farthest to the right. Thus it is possible to follow the numerical increase of the herd year by year. The text shows that the herdsman responsible for the herd, Nabû-ahhe-shullim, during the ten years succeeded in enlarging the herd from 137 sheep and goats to 922 animals.⁸⁶

True, the Babylonian scribe made a few miscalculations and mathematical mistakes which partially hampers the interpretation of the document.⁸⁷ There is no doubt, however, that it is an *annual* record, as year numbers are given for each successive year. In the entry for the first year of Neriglissar, for example, the grand total column contains the following information:

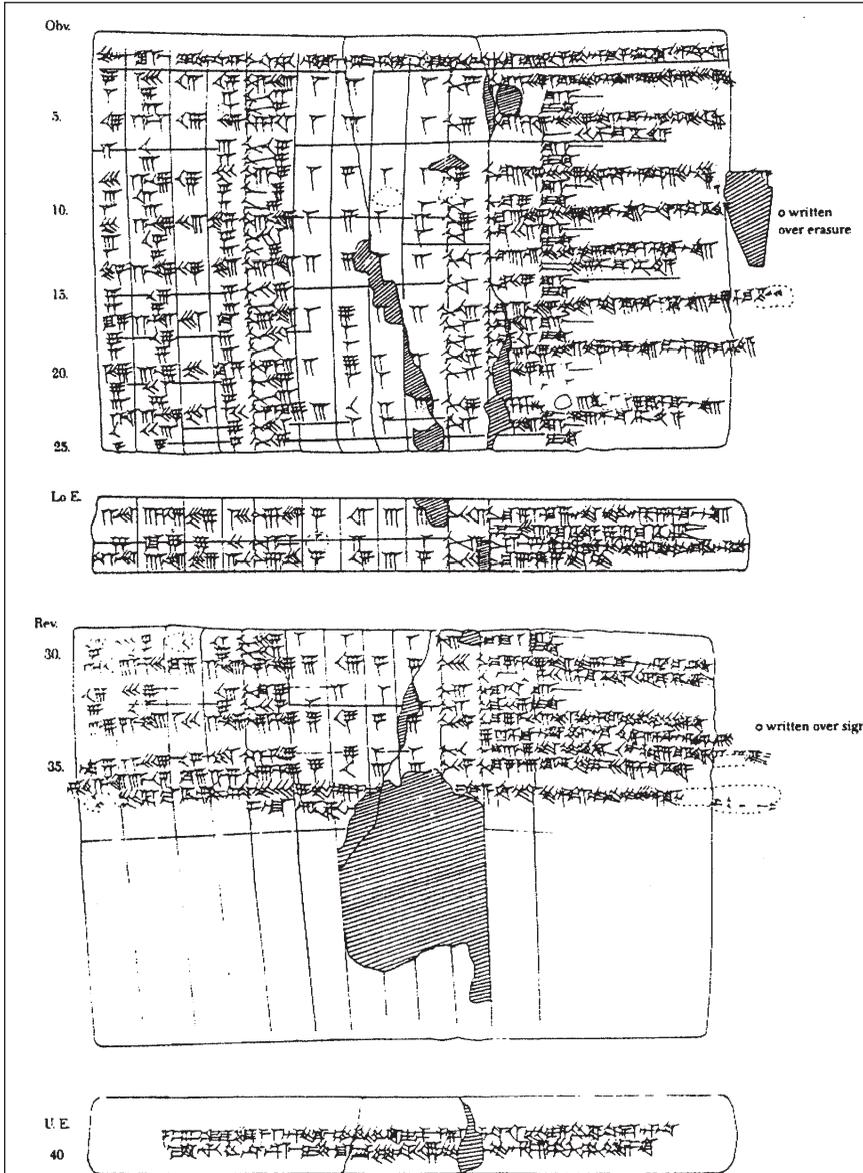
Grand total: 922, 1st year of Nergal-sharra-usur, king of Babylon, 9 lambs in Uruk were received (and) 3 lambs for shearing.

Similar information is given for each year from the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar to his forty-third year, for the first and second

85 Bookkeeping is as old as the art of writing. In fact, the oldest known script, the *proto-cuneiform script*, which emerged at Uruk (and usually is dated to about 3200 B.C.E.), “was almost exclusively restricted to bookkeeping; it was an ‘accountant’s script’.” —H. J. Nissen, P. Damerow, & R. K. Englund, *Archaic Bookkeeping* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 30.

86 G. van Driel & K. R. Nemet-Nejat, “Bookkeeping practices for an institutional herd at Eanna,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 46:4, 1994, p. 47. The form of record-keeping used in the text “involves accumulating data with cross-footing the accounts in order to prove that all entries are accounted therein.” —*Ibid.*, p. 47, note 1.

87 The errors occur in the totals, probably because the scribes had difficulties in reading the numbers in their ledgers. —*Ibid.*, pp. 56, 57.



The "ledger" NBC 4897

The document tabulates the annual growth of a herd of sheep and goats belonging to the Eanna temple at Uruk for ten successive years, from the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar to the 1st year of Neriglissar (568-559 B.C.E.). - From G. van Driel & K. R. Nemet-Nejat, "Bookkeeping practices for an institutional herd at Eanna," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 46:4, 1994, pp. 48, 49.

years of Awel-Marduk, and, as cited, for the first year of Neriglissar.⁸⁸

This document, then, not only provides an additional confirmation of the lengths of reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Awel-Marduk, but it also demonstrates that *no extra kings or extra years* can be inserted between Nebuchadnezzar and Awel-Marduk, or between Awel-Marduk and Neriglissar.

d) Neriglissar to Labashi-Marduk

(6) A cuneiform tablet in the Yale Babylonian collection, *YBC 4012*, not only shows that Labashi-Marduk succeeded Neriglissar as king, but also that he did this *early in the fourth year* of his father's short reign.

The document records that "in the month of Addaru [the twelfth month], 3rd year of Nergal-[sharra-usur], king of Babylon" (March-April, 556 B.C.E.), Mushezib-Marduk, the overseer of the Eanna temple in Uruk, carried a considerable amount of money to Babylon, partly as payment for work and material for the Eanna temple. This document was drawn up about two months later, evidently at Babylon before Mushezib-Marduk's return to Uruk, and is dated to the "month of Ajaru [the second month of the next year], 22nd day, accession year of Labashi-Marduk, king of Babylon" (June 1, 556 B.C.E.).⁸⁹

According to this document, Labashi-Marduk succeeded to the throne sometime in the first or second month of Neriglissar's fourth year of reign. This is in good agreement with the evidence given by the contract tablets, which show that the demise of the crown occurred in the first month of Neriglissar's fourth year. (See "Appendix for Chapter 3", pages 326, 327.)

88 For Nebuchadnezzar, only the year numbers are given. The royal names only appear with the first year of each king. There are two entries each for the thirty-seventh, thirty-eighth, and forty-first years (of Nebuchadnezzar), and no entries for his thirty-ninth and fortieth years. As pointed out by van Driel and Nemet-Nejat, "these errors can be easily explained: the outcome of the count for the previous year is the starting point for the inventory of the next year. That is, if the 'accountant' had a complete file, he would find the same data in tablets dealing with consecutive years: once at the end of one text and again at the beginning of the succeeding text." (*Op. cit.*, p. 54.) From the forty-first year of Nebuchadnezzar until the first year of Neriglissar, though, the dates follow a regular pattern.

89 Ronald H. Sack, "Some Remarks on Sin-Iddina and Zerija, *qipu* and *shatammu* of Eanna in Erech . . . 562-56 B.C.," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, Band 66 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), pp. 287, 288. As mentioned earlier, in the Babylonian system the accession year of a king was the same as the last year of his predecessor. According to our text the accession year of Labashi-Marduk *followed upon* the third year of Neriglissar. Labashi-Marduk's accession year, therefore, was also the fourth and last year of Neriglissar.

e) Neriglissar to Labashi-Marduk to Nabonidus

(7) That Neriglissar was succeeded by his son Labashi-Marduk is plainly stated by Nabonidus in one of the royal inscriptions discussed earlier, *Nabon. No. 8* (the *Hillah stele*). In column iv of this stele, Nabonidus relates that the cult of the goddess Anunitum in Sippar had been renewed by Neriglissar. Then he goes on saying:

After (his) days had become full and he had started out on the journey of (human) destiny *his son Labashi-Marduk*, a minor (who) had not (yet) learned how to behave, *sat down on the royal throne* against the intentions of the gods and [three lines missing here].⁹⁰

After the three missing lines Nabonidus, in the next column, goes on to speak of his own enthronement, evidently as the immediate successor of Labashi-Marduk. In doing so, he also names the last four of his royal predecessors: Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar (whom he regarded as legitimate rulers), and their sons Awel-Marduk and Labashi-Marduk (whom he regarded as illegitimate usurpers). He states:

They carried me into the palace and all prostrated themselves to my feet, they kissed my feet greeting me again and again as king. (Thus) I was elevated to rule the country by the order of my lord Marduk and (therefore) I shall obtain whatever I desire — there shall be no rival of mine!

I am the real executor of the wills of Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar, my royal predecessors! Their armies are entrusted to me, I shall not treat carelessly their orders and I am (anxious) to please them [i.e. to execute their plans].

Awel-Marduk, son of Nebuchadnezzar, and Labashi-Marduk, son of Neriglissar [called up] their [troo]ps and . . . their . . . they dispersed. Their orders (7-8 lines missing).⁹¹

90 James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 309.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 309. Berossus, whose Neo-Babylonian history was shown to be based on the Babylonian chronicles, gives a similar account of these events: "After Eveil-maradouchos had been killed, Neriglissaros, the man who had plotted against him, succeeded to the throne and was king for four years. Laborosoarchodos [Labashi-Marduk], the son of Neriglissaros, who was only a child, was master of the kingdom for nine [probably an error for "2"; see note 20 above] months. Because his wickedness became apparent in many ways he was plotted against and brutally killed by his friends. After he had been killed, the plotters met and jointly conferred the kingdom on Nabonnedus, a Babylonian and a member of the conspiracy." — Stanley Mayer Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus. Sources from the Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, fascicle 5 (Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1978), p. 28.

This inscription, then, interlinks the reigns of Neriglissar and Labashi-Marduk, and evidently also those of Labashi-Marduk and Nabonidus. The possibility of inserting an “extra king” somewhere between these three kings is ruled out by this text.

(8) Some *legal* documents, too, contain information that spans the reigns of two or more kings. One example is *Nabon. No. 13*, which is dated to “the 12th day of (the month) Shabatu [the eleventh month], the accession year of Nabonidus, king of Babylon [February 2, 555 B.C.E.]” The inscription tells about a woman, Belilitu, who brought up the following case before the royal court:

Belilitu daughter of Bel-ushezib descendant of the messenger declared the following to the judges of Nabonidus, king of Babylon: ‘In the month of Abu, *the first year of Nergal-shar-usur* [Neriglissar], *king of Babylon* [August-September, 559 B.C.E.], I sold my slave Bazuzu to Nabu-ahhe-iddin son of Shula descendent of Egibi for one-half mina five shekels of silver, but he did not pay cash and drew up a promissory note.’ The royal judges listened (to her) and commanded that Nabu-ahhe-iddin be brought before them. Nabu-ahhe-iddin brought the contract that he had concluded with Belilitu and showed the judges (the document which indicated that) he had paid the silver for Bazuzu.⁹²

Reference is thus made to the reigns of Neriglissar and that of Nabonidus. The generally accepted chronology would indicate that about *three and a half years* had passed since Belilitu had sold her slave in the first year of Neriglissar until she, in the accession year of Nabonidus, made a fraudulent but futile attempt to receive double payment for the slave. But if twenty years were to be added somewhere between the reigns of Neriglissar and Nabonidus, then Belilitu waited for *twenty-three and a half years* before she brought her case before the court, something that appears extremely unlikely.

f) Nabonidus to Cyrus

That Nabonidus was the king of Babylon when Cyrus conquered Babylonia in 539 B.C.E. is clearly shown by the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (B.M. 35382).⁹³ The chronicle evidently dated this event to the

92 M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp. 189, 190.

93 As early as 1877, W. St. Chad Boscawen found a document among the Egibi tablets dated to the reign of Cyrus, “which stated that money was paid in the reign of ‘Nabunahid the former king’.” — *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, Vol. VI (London, 1878), p. 29.

“seventeenth year” of Nabonidus, but as was pointed out earlier, this portion of the chronicle is damaged and the year number is illegible. Nonetheless, a whole group of economic texts has been found that provides chronological interlocking connections between Nabonidus’ seventeenth year and the reign of Cyrus. These include the tablets with the catalogue numbers *CT 56:219*, *CT 57:52.3*, and *CT 57:56*.⁹⁴

(9) The first of the three documents (*CT 56:219*) is dated to the *accession year* of Cyrus, and the next two (*CT 57:52.3* and *CT 57:56*) are dated to his *first year*. But all three tablets also refer to the preceding king’s “year 17,” and since it is accepted as fact that Nabonidus was the final king of the Neo-Babylonian line, preceding Cyrus the Persian’s rule, this confirms that Nabonidus’ reign lasted 17 years.⁹⁵

(10) One of the more graphic examples of a chronological linkage between two reigns is a cuneiform tablet in the archaeological museum at Florence known as *SAKF 165*. As Professor J. A. Brinkman points out, this document “presents a unique year-by-year inventory of wool stuffs made into garments for the cult statues of the deities in Uruk. . . . Furthermore, it covers the vital years before and after the Persian conquest of Babylonia.”⁹⁶

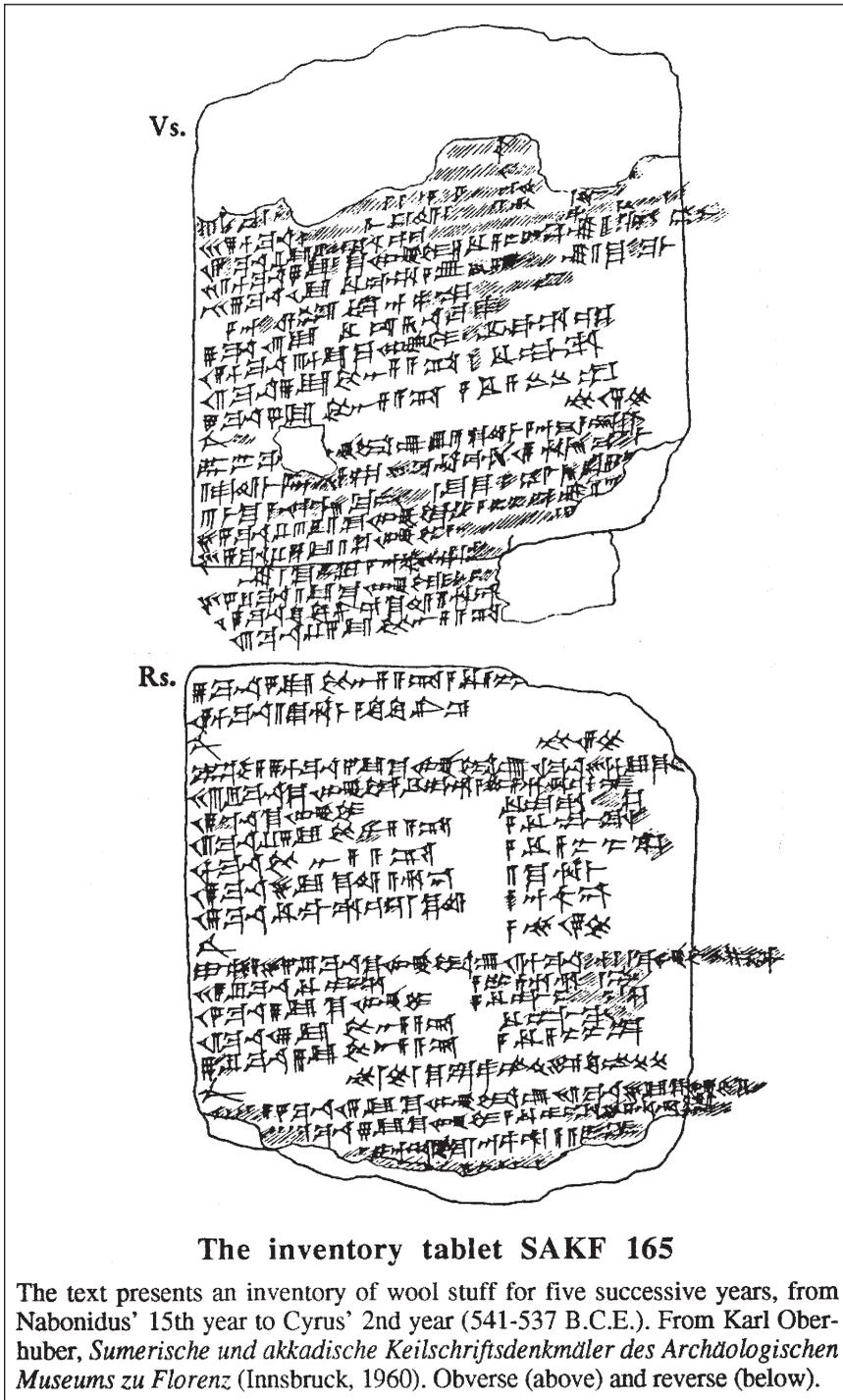
The inventory is arranged chronologically, and the preserved portion of the text covers five successive years, from the fifteenth year of Nabonidus to the second year of Cyrus, with year numbers given at the end of the inventory for each year:

Lines 3 - 13:	year 15 [of Nabonidus]
14 - 25:	year 16 [of Nabonidus]
26 - 33:	year 17 [of Nabonidus]
34 - 39:	year 1 of Cyrus
40 - :	[year 2 of Cyrus]

94 “CT 55-57” refers to the catalogues *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, Parts 55-57, containing economic texts copied by T. G. Pinches during the years 1892 to 1894 and published by British Museum Publications Limited in 1982.

95 Stefan Zawadzki, “Gubaru: A Governor or a Vassal King of Babylonia?,” *Eos*, Vol. LXXV (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdansk, Łódz, 1987), pp. 71, 81; M. A. Dandamayev, *Iranians in Achaemenid Babylonia* (Costa Mesa, California and New York: Mazda Publishers, 1992), p. 91; Jerome Peat, “Cyrus ‘king of lands,’ Cambyses ‘king of Babylon’: the disputed co-regency,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 41/2, Autumn 1989, p. 209. It should be noted that one of the three tablets, *CT 57:56*, is dated to Cambyses as *co-regent* with Cyrus in his first year.

96 J. A. Brinkman, “Neo-Babylonian Texts in the Archaeological Museum at Florence,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. XXV, Jan.-Oct. 1966, p. 209.



The royal name was evidently given only for the first year of each ruler. But as the immediate predecessor of Cyrus was Nabonidus, “year 15”, “year 16”, and “year 17” clearly refer to his reign. The inventory of the year following upon “year 17” ends with the words, “year 1, Cyrus, King of Babylon, King of the Lands” (line 39). The last lines of the entry for the fifth year of inventory are damaged, and “year 2” (of Cyrus) can only be understood as implied.⁹⁷

(11) In ancient Mesopotamia, in the various temples the presence of the deities was represented by their statues. In times of war, when a city was taken, the temples were usually looted and the divine statues were carried away as “captives” to the land of the conquerors.

As such captures were seen by the citizens as an omen that the gods had abandoned the city and called for its destruction, they often tried to protect the statues by moving them to a safer place at the approach of a military force.

This is what happened shortly before the Persian invasion of northern Babylonia in 539 B.C.E., when according to the *Nabonidus Chronicle* Nabonidus ordered a gathering of the gods of several cities into Babylon. The same chronicle also tells that Cyrus, after the fall of Babylon, returned the statues to their respective cities.⁹⁸

As discussed by Dr. Paul-Alain Beaulieu, there are several documents from the archive of the Eanna temple of Uruk which confirm that, in the *seventeenth* year of Nabonidus, the statue of Ishtar (referred to in the documents as “Lady-of-Uruk” or “Lady of the Eanna”) was brought upstream by boat on the river Euphrates to Babylon. Further, these documents also show that the regular offerings to this statue of Ishtar were not interrupted during her temporary stay at Babylon. Cargoes of barley and other kinds of foodstuff for her cult were sent from Uruk to Babylon.

One example of this is given by a tablet in the Yale Babylonian Collection, *YOS XIX:94*, which is dated to the seventeenth year of Nabonidus and records a deposition before the assembly of the noblemen of Uruk:

(These are) the *mar banî* [noblemen] in whose presence Zeriya, son of Ardiya, has thus spoken: Bazuzu, son of Ibni-Ishtar, descendant of

97 *Ibid.*, p. 209. A transliteration of the tablet is given by Karl Oberhuber in his *Sumerische und akkadische Keilschriftdenkmäler des Archäologischen Museums zu Florenz* (= *Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft*, Sonderheft 8, Innsbruck, 1960), pp. 111-113.

98 A. K. Grayson, *ABC* (1975), pp. 109, 110.

Gimil-Nanaya, has brought a boat from Babylon to lease it fo[r the sum of], and he said thus: "I will take the barley for the regular offerings of the Lady-of-Uruk to Babylon."

City of the quay of Nanaya, domain of the Lady of Uruk: *Month Abu [the fifth month] - Day 5 - Seventeenth year of Nabonidus, king of Babylon* [= August 4, 539 B.C.E., Julian calendar].⁹⁹

These documents clearly demonstrate that Cyrus' conquest of Babylon occurred in the *seventeenth* year of Nabonidus, which thus once again is proved to have been the last year of his reign.

The many examples cited above demonstrate that the activity recorded in a text at times spans over and ties together two successive reigns. They also demonstrate that it is possible to establish the length of the entire Neo-Babylonian era by the aid of such "chronological joints" alone. In fact, the lengths of reign of some kings (Nebuchadnezzar, Nabonidus) are established by more than one text of this kind.

C. SYNCHRONIC LINKS TO THE CHRONOLOGY OF EGYPT

An excellent proof of the correctness of a chronology is when it is in agreement with the chronologies of *other* contemporary nations, provided that these other chronologies are independently established and there are *synchronisms*, that is, dated connecting links that serve to join the two or more chronologies together at one or more points.

The reason why it is important that they be independently established is to rule out any attempt to discredit their worth by claiming that the chronology of a certain period in one nation has been established simply by the aid of the chronology of the contemporary period in another nation.

During the Neo-Babylonian period there are at least *four* such synchronisms between Egypt and the kingdoms of Judah and Babylon. Three of these are given in the Bible, in 2 Kings 23:29 (where Egyptian pharaoh Necho and Judean king Josiah appear), Jeremiah 46:2 (Necho, Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiakim all appearing), and Jeremiah 44:30 (pharaoh Hophra, kings Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar listed).

99 Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "An Episode in the Fall of Babylon to the Persians," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 52:4, October 1993, pp. 244, 245; cf. also Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556-539 B.C.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 221, 222.

The fourth is given in a cuneiform text, *B.M. 33041*, which refers to a campaign against Amasis, king of Egypt, in Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh regnal year.¹⁰⁰ The meaning of these synchronisms will be unravelled further on.

C-1: The chronology of the Saite period

The kings reigning in Egypt during the Neo-Babylonian period belonged to the *Twenty-Sixth Dynasty* (664-525 B.C.E.). The period of this dynasty is also referred to as the *Saite period*, as the pharaohs of this dynasty took the city of Sais in the Delta as their capital.

If the four synchronisms mentioned above are to be of any definitive help to our study, it first needs to be shown that the chronology of that twenty-sixth dynasty of Egypt is fixed independently from the *contemporary* Neo-Babylonian chronology, and can thus stand on its own, as it were.

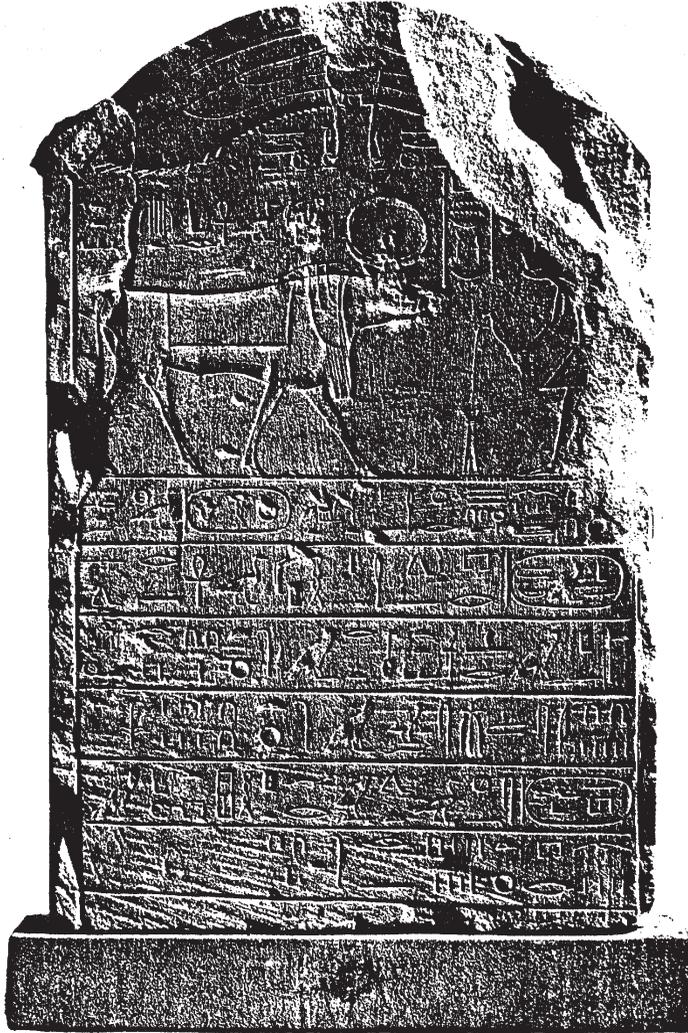
This can be determined in a quite unusual way, of which Dr. F. K. Kienitz writes:

The chronology of the kings of the 26th dynasty, from Psammetichus I onwards, is completely established through a series of death stelae and stelae of holy Apis bulls, which list the birth date in 'Day x, Month y, Year z, of King A' and the death date in 'Day x, Month y, Year z, of King B', and also the length of life of the [bull or person] in question in years, months, and days.¹⁰¹

This means that, if a death stele says that a sacred Apis bull or a person was born in the *tenth year* of King A and died at the age of twenty-five in the *twentieth year* of King B, we know that King A ruled for *fifteen years*.

100 B.M. 33041 was first published by T. G. Pinches in *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, Vol. VII (London, 1882), pp. 210-225.

101 Friedrich Karl Kienitz, *Die politische Geschichte Ägyptens vom 7. bis zum 4. Jahrhundert vor der Zeitwende* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953), pp. 154, 155. (Translated from the German.) The Apis cult was practiced already in the First Dynasty of Egypt. At death the Apis bulls were mummified and buried in a coffin or (from the reign of Amasis onwards) in a sarcophagus made of granite. The burial place from the reign of Ramesses II onwards—a vast catacomb known as the "Serapeum" in Saqqara, the necropolis of Memphis—was excavated by A. Mariette in 1851. From the beginning of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty and on the burials were marked by grave stelae with biographical data on the Apis bulls such as dates of installation and death and the age at death. — László Kákosy, "From the fertility to cosmic symbolism. Outlines of the history of the cult of Apis," *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debrecenienses*, Tomus XXVI 1990 (Debreceni, 1991), pp. 3-7.



Grave stele of the 1st Apis of the 26th dynasty

The inscription shows that the first Apis of the 26th dynasty was born in the 26th year of Taharqah and died in the 20th year of Psammetichus I at an age of 21 years, which shows that Taharqah ruled for 26 years. This is also confirmed by other inscriptions. – From Aug. Mariette, *Le Sérapeum de Memphis* (Paris: Gide, Libraire-Éditeur, 1857)

This is the kind of contemporary evidence to which Dr. Kienitz refers. A translation of Kienitz' survey of this material is given here.¹⁰²

1. GRAVE STELE OF THE 3RD APIS OF THE 26TH DYNASTY

Date of Birth: Year 53 of Psammetichus I, Month 6, Day 19

Installation: Year 54 of Psammetichus I, Month 3, Day 12

Date of Death: Year 16 of Necho II, Month 2, Day 6

Date of Burial: Year 16 of Necho II, Month 4, Day 16

Length of Life: 16 years, 7 months, 17 days

Result: Length of reign of Psammetichus = 54 years.

2. GRAVE STELE OF THE 4TH APIS OF THE 26TH DYNASTY

Date of Birth: Year 16 of Necho II, Month 2, Day 7

Installation: Year 1 of Psammetichus II, Month 11, Day 9

Date of Death: Year 12 of Apries, Month 8, Day 12

Date of Burial: Year 12 of Apries, Month 10, Day 21

Length of Life: 17 years, 6 months, 5 days

Result: As the date of Psammetichus II's death is elsewhere attested as Year 7, Month 1, Day 23,¹⁰³ the length of Necho's reign amounts to 15 years, that of Psammetichus II to 6 years.

3. TWO GRAVE STELAE OF A PRIEST NAMED PSAMMETICHUS

Date of Birth: Year 1 of Necho II, Month 11, Day 1

Date of Death: Year 27 of Amasis, Month 8, Day 28

Length of Life: 65 years, 10 months, 2 days

Result: The sum of the lengths of reign of Necho II, Psammetichus II, and Apries = 40 years. As Necho II reigned for 15 years, and Psammetichus II for 6 years, Apries' reign amounts to 19 years.

4. GRAVE STELE OF ANOTHER PSAMMETICHUS

Date of Birth: Year 3 of Necho II, Month 10, Day 1 or 2

Date of Death: Year 35 of Amasis, Month 2, Day 6

Length of Life: 71 years, 4 months, 6 days

Result: The same as under 3.

5. GRAVE STELE OF ONE BESMAUT

Year of Birth: Year 18 of Psammetichus I

Year of Death: Year 23 of Amasis

Length of Life: 99 years

Result: The total of 94 years for the lengths of reign from Psammetichus I to Apries inclusive is once more confirmed.

102 Kienitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 155, 156. The grave stelae under no. 1, 2, and 3 were translated and published by James Henry Breasted in *Ancient Records of Egypt*, Vol. IV (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1906), pp. 497, 498, 501-503, 518-520. For no. 4 and 5, see the references by Kienitz, *op. cit.*, p. 156, notes 1 and 2.

103 Lines 5/6 of the Ank-nes-nefer-ib-Re Stele. See G. Maspero, *Ann. Serv.* 5 (1904), pp. 85, 86, and the translation by J. H. Breasted, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 505.

Consequently, these contemporary death stelae conclusively establish the lengths of reign of the first four kings of the twenty-sixth dynasty of Egypt as follows:

Psammetichus I	54 years
Necho II	15 years
Psammetichus II	6 years
Apries (= Hophra)	19 years

For the last two kings of the twenty-sixth dynasty, Amasis and Psammetichus III, material of this kind unfortunately is lacking. However, both Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484-425 B.C.E.) and the Graeco-Egyptian priest and historian Manetho (active c. 300 B.C.E.) give forty-four years to Amasis and six months to Psammetichus III.¹⁰⁴ And these lengths of reign have been confirmed by modern discoveries, as follows:

In the papyrus *Rylands IX* (also called “Petition of Petiese”) dating from the time of Darius I (521-486 B.C.E.), the *forty-fourth year* of Amasis is mentioned in a context indicating it was his last full year. Each year, a prophet of Amun of Teuzoi (Psammetkmenempe by name) who lived in the Nile Delta, used to send a representative to fetch his stipend. This he did until the *forty-fourth year* of Amasis. This, in itself, is not decisive. But in the “Demotic Chronicle,” a report on the compilation of Egyptian laws written under Darius I, there are also two mentions of the forty-fourth year of Amasis as some sort of terminal point. Finally, the same figure is given in an inscription from Wâdi Hammâmât.¹⁰⁵ The figure given by Herodotus and Manetho, therefore, is strongly supported by this combination of inscriptions.

104 Manetho’s *Egyptian History*, which was written in Greek and probably was based on the temple archives, is preserved only in extracts by Flavius Josephus and Christian chronographers, especially by Julius Africanus in his *Chronographia* (c. 221 C.E.) and by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Chronicon* (c. 303 C.E.). Africanus, who transmits Manetho’s data in a more accurate form, gives forty-four years to Amasis and six months to Psammetichus III. This agrees with Herodotus’s figures.—W. G. Waddell, *Manetho* (London: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. xvi-xx, 169-174.

105 W. Spiegelberg, *Die Sogenannte Demotische Chronik* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1914), p. 31; Kienitz, *op. cit.*, p. 156; and Richard A. Parker, “The Length of Reign of Amasis and the Beginning of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Kairo Abteilung*, XV, 1957, p. 210. For some time it was held that Amasis died in his forty-fourth regnal year, and because of the Egyptian nonaccession year system, whereby a king’s accession year was reckoned as his first regnal year, they gave Amasis only forty-three full years. But in 1957, in the article referred to above, R. A. Parker demonstrated conclusively that Amasis reigned for forty-four full years. This, of course, moved the reigns of the earlier kings of the Saite dynasty one year backwards. The beginning of the dynasty, therefore, was re-dated to 664 instead of 663 B.C.E., as had been held previously. (R. A. Parker, *op. cit.*, 1957, pp. 208-212.) Since 1957, Parker’s conclusions have obtained general acceptance among scholars.—For additional information on the nonaccession year reckoning, see Appendix For Chapter Two: “Methods of reckoning regnal years.”

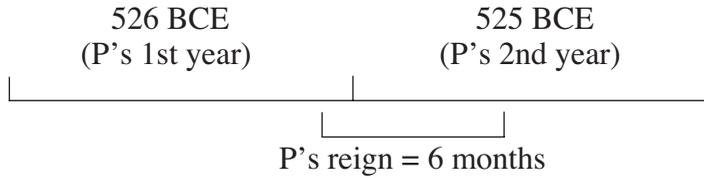
As to Psammetichus III, the highest date available for this king is Year Two. Three documents (papyri) dated to the third, fourth, and fifth months of his second year have been discovered. And yet, this is no contradiction to the statement made earlier that the rule of this king actually covered only *six months*. How so?

The Egyptians used a nonaccession year system. According to this system *the year in which a king came to power* was reckoned as his first regnal year. Psammetichus III was dethroned by the Persian king Cambyses during his conquest of Egypt, generally dated to 525 B.C.E. by the authorities.¹⁰⁶ At this time the Egyptian civil calendar year almost coincided with the Julian calendar year.¹⁰⁷ If the conquest of Egypt occurred in the sixth month of the reign of Psammetichus III, this must have been in May or June, 525 B.C.E.¹⁰⁸ With this prerequisite, his six months of rule began at the end of the previous year, 526 B.C.E., quite possibly only a few days or weeks before the end of that year. Though he ruled for only a fraction of that year, this fraction of a few days or weeks was reckoned as his *first* regnal year according to the Egyptian *nonaccession* year system. Thereby his *second* regnal year began to count only a few days or weeks after his accession to the throne. Thus, although he ruled for only six months, documents dated up to the fifth month of his second year are, in view of the supporting evidence, only what we should expect to find. The following illustration makes the matter plain:

106 Kienitz, *op. cit.*, p. 157, note 2. This date is also accepted by the Watch Tower Society, as can be seen from *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (1988), pp. 698, 699.

107 In the two years 526 and 525 B.C.E. the Egyptian civil calendar year began on January 2 in the Julian calendar.—Winfried Barta, “Zur Datierungspraxis in Ägypten unter Kambyzes und Dareios I,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, Band 119:2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), p. 84.

108 The *exact* time of the year for Cambyses’ capture of Egypt is not known. (Compare Molly Miller, “The earlier Persian dates in Herodotus,” in *Klio*, Band 37, 1959, pp. 30, 31.)—In the nineteenth century E. Revillout, one of the founders of the scholarly journal *Revue Égyptologique* in the 1870’s, claimed that Psammetichus III ruled for at least two years, as one document dated to the *fourth* year of a king Psammetichus seemed to be written at the end of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty. (*Revue Égyptologique*, Vol. 3, Paris, 1885, p. 191; and Vol. 7, 1896, p. 139.) But since then many new documents have been discovered that make Revillout’s theory untenable. The document evidently refers either to one of the earlier kings known by the name of Psammetichus, or to one of the later vassal kings by that name. There were three kings by the name Psammetichus during the Saite period, and also two or three vassal kings by that name in the fifth century, and sometimes it has been difficult to decide which of them is referred to in a text. Some documents that an earlier generation of Egyptologists dated to the reign of Psammetichus III have later had to be re-dated.—Wolfgang Helck & Wolfhart Westendorf (eds.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Band IV (Wiesbaden, 1982), pp. 1172-75.



As demonstrated by the discussion above, the chronology of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty of Egypt is soundly and independently established. The results are summarized in the following table:

CHRONOLOGY OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH DYNASTY:

Psammetichus I	54 years	664 – 610 B.C.E.
Necho II	15	610 – 595
Psammetichus II	6	595 – 589
Apries (= Hophra)	19	589 – 570
Amasis	44	570 – 526
Psammetichus III	1	526 – 525

C-2: Synchronisms to the chronology of the Saite period

Does the chronology of the Egyptian Saite period square with that of the Neo-Babylonian era as established above? Or, instead, does it harmonize with the chronology of the Watch Tower Society as presented, for example, in its Bible dictionary *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, pages 462-466?

The four synchronisms to the Egyptian chronology mentioned earlier (the first three of these coming from the Scriptures) decide the matter:

First synchronism—2 Kings 23:29: In his [king Josiah's] days Pharaoh Nechoh the king of Egypt came up to the king of Assyria by the river Euphrates, and King Josiah proceeded to go to meet him; but he put him to death at Megiddo as soon as he saw him. (NW)

Here it is clearly shown that Judean king Josiah died at Megiddo in the reign of Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. According to the chronology of the Watch Tower Society, Josiah's death took place in 629 B.C.E. (See *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, pp. 118, 483.) But according to clear historical evidence, Necho's reign *did not begin until nineteen years later*, in 610 B.C.E. (see table above).¹⁰⁹ So Josiah's death did not take place in 629 B.C.E. but twenty years later, in 609.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Helck & Westendorf, *op. cit.*, Band IV, pp. 369-71. Necho succeeded to the throne at the death of his father Psammetichus I in the spring or summer of 610 B.C.E., but according to the Egyptian antedating method his first year was counted from the beginning of the Egyptian civil calendar year, which this year began on January 23 of the Julian calendar. — W. Barta, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the exact date of Josiah's death, see the final section of the Appendix: "Chronological tables covering the seventy years."

Second synchronism—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 Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah. (NW)

This battle in the “fourth year of Jehoiakim” is placed in the year 625 B.C.E. by the Watch Tower Society (*Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, p. 483.), which again cannot be harmonized with the contemporary chronology of Egypt. But if this battle at Carchemish took place twenty years later, in the accession-year of Nebuchadnezzar, that is, in June, 605 B.C.E. according to all the lines of evidence presented earlier, we find this date to be in perfect harmony with the recognized reign of Pharaoh Necho, 610–595 B.C.E.

Third synchronism—Jeremiah 44:30: This is what Jehovah has said: ‘Here I am giving Pharaoh Hophra, the king of Egypt, into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of those seeking for his soul, just as I have given Zedekiah the king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, his enemy and the one seeking for his soul.’ (NW)

As the context shows (verses 1ff.) these words were uttered not long after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, when the rest of the Jewish population had fled to Egypt after the assassination of Gedaliah. At that time Egypt was ruled by Pharaoh Hophra, or Apries, as he is named by Herodotus.¹¹¹

If Apries ruled Egypt at the time when the Jews fled there some months after the desolation of Jerusalem, this desolation cannot be dated to 607 B.C.E., for Apries *did not begin his reign until 589 B.C.E.* (see table above). But a dating of the desolation of Jerusalem to 587 B.C.E. is in good agreement with the years of reign historically established for him: 589–570 B.C.E.

Fourth synchronism—B.M. 33041: As mentioned earlier, this text refers to a campaign against king Amasis ([Ama]-a-su) in Nebuchadnezzar’s thirty-seventh year. A. L. Oppenheim’s translation of this scanty fragment reads as follows: “. . . [in] the 37th year, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Bab[ylon], mar[ched against] Egypt (*Misir*) to deliver a battle. [Ama]sis (text: [. . .]-a(?)-su), of Egypt, [called up his a]rm[y] . . . [. . .]ku from the town *Putu-Iaman* . . .

¹¹¹ His name in the Egyptian inscriptions is transcribed as *Wahibre*. In the Septuagint version of the Old Testament (LXX), his name is spelled *Ouaphre*.

distant regions which (are situated on islands) amidst the sea . . . many . . . which/who (are) in Egypt . . . [car]rying weapons, horses and [chariot]s . . . he called up to assist him and . . . did [. . .] in front of him . . . he put his trust”¹¹²

This text is badly damaged, but it does definitely state that the campaign into Egypt took place in Nebuchadnezzar’s “thirty-seventh year,” and while it is true that the name of the pharaoh is only partly legible, the cuneiform signs that are preserved seem only to fit Amasis, and no other pharaoh of the twenty-sixth dynasty.

The Watch Tower Society dates the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar to 588 B.C.E. (*Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 698), but this was during the reign of Apries (see the table). On the other hand, if Nebuchadnezzar’s thirty-seventh year was 568/67 B.C.E., as is established by all the lines of evidence presented earlier, this date is in excellent agreement with the reign of Amasis (570–526 B.C.E.).

Consequently, not one of the four synchronisms with the independently established chronology of Egypt agrees with the chronology developed by the Watch Tower Society. The discrepancy in that Society’s reckoning is consistently about twenty years out of harmony.

Interestingly, however, all four synchronisms are in perfect harmony with the dates arrived at from the other lines of evidences that have been discussed. These synchronisms to the Egyptian chronology, therefore, add *yet another* line of evidence to the others, which point consistently to 587 B.C.E. as the definitive date for the destruction of Jerusalem.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Seven lines of evidence have been presented above against any possible dating of the destruction of Jerusalem to the year 607 B.C.E., all of which lines of evidence agree in dating that event twenty years later. At least *four* of these lines of evidence are clearly *independent of each other*.

Consider first the three which give evidence of interdependence:

(1) Early historians, the Neo-Babylonian chronicles, and the Uruk kinglist

We first saw that in the third century B.C.E., Babylonian priest *Berosus* wrote a history of Babylonia, quoted from by later historians, both in the B.C.E. and early C.E. periods. The validity of the

112 Translated by A. Leo Oppenheim in Pritchard’s *ANET* (see note 2 above), p. 308.

dates presented by Berossus in his history is evidenced by their accurate reflection of historical material now available on ancient cuneiform tablets unearthed in Babylon, particularly the *Neo-Babylonian Chronicles* (a series of historical vignettes setting out certain episodes relating to the Babylonian empire, notably records of kingly succession and of military campaigns waged), and also the *Babylonian kinglists* (particularly the one known as the Uruk kinglist) which list the Babylonian rulers by name along with the years of their reign.

Likewise with the source known as the *Royal Canon*, a list of Babylonian rulers, which, though only fully extant in manuscripts of Ptolemy's *Handy Tables* dated to the eighth century C.E. and in later manuscripts, seems clearly to have been the common source relied upon by astronomer Claudius Ptolemy (70-161 C.E.) and by earlier scholars, such as Hipparchus of the second century B.C.E., when these dealt with and dated events of the Neo-Babylonian period. Though the Royal Canon evidently drew upon sources common to those employed by Berossus—that is, the ancient *Neo-Babylonian chronicles and kinglists*—the order and forms of the names of kings found in it differ from his presentation sufficiently to indicate that it is a record developed independently of his writings.

It is acknowledged that the *Neo-Babylonian chronicles* unearthed up to this point are still incomplete, and also that some of the figures in the *Uruk kinglist* for the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings are damaged and only partially legible. However, the figures that *are* there and *are* legible on these cuneiform tablets all agree with the corresponding figures found both in the writings of Berossus and in the listing of the Royal Canon.

There is, then, strong reason to believe that the chronological information originally given in those Neo-Babylonian sources has been preserved unaltered by Berossus and the Royal Canon. Both of these agree as to the overall length of the Neo-Babylonian era. In the crucial area here under investigation, their figures point to 604/03 B.C.E. as the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and 587/86 B.C.E. as his eighteenth year when he desolated Jerusalem.

Though this evidence is substantial, it remains true that Berossus and the Royal Canon are secondary sources, and even those ancient tablets known as the Babylonian Chronicles and the Uruk kinglist are evidently copies of earlier originals. What supporting evidence is there, then, to believe the records involved were actually written *contemporaneously* with the times and events described?

(2) Inscriptions Nabon. No. 18 and Nabon. No. 8 (the Hillah stele)

Aside from the Babylonian Chronicles and kinglists there are other ancient documents which give evidence of being, not copies, but originals. The royal inscription *Nabon. No. 18*, dated by the aid of another inscription known as the *Royal Chronicle* to the second year of Nabonidus, fixes this year astronomically to 554/53 B.C.E. As Nabonidus' reign ended with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., the total length of his reign is shown by this inscription to have been seventeen years (555/54—539/38 B.C.E.).

The *whole length of the Neo-Babylonian period prior to Nabonidus* is given by *Nabon. No. 8* (the *Hillah stele*), which gives the time elapsed from the sixteenth year of initial ruler Nabopolassar up to the accession-year of final ruler Nabonidus as *fifty-four years*. The stele thus fixes the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar to 610/09 B.C.E.

If this was Nabopolassar's sixteenth year, his twenty-first and last year was 605/04 B.C.E. Nebuchadnezzar's first year, then, was 604/03 B.C.E. and his eighteenth year was 587/86, during which Jerusalem was destroyed.

(3) Nabon. H 1, B (the Adad-guppi' stele)

Nabon. H 1, B (the *Adad-guppi' stele*) gives the reigns of all the Neo-Babylonian kings (except for that of Labashi-Marduk, as his brief reign does not affect the chronology presented) from Nabopolassar up to the ninth year of Nabonidus. Since the Watch Tower Society indirectly accepts a seventeen-year rule for Nabonidus (as was shown above in the discussion of the *Nabonidus Chronicle*), this stele of itself overthrows their 607 B.C.E. date for the desolation of Jerusalem and shows this event to have taken place twenty years later, in 587 B.C.E.

These three lines of evidence may logically be grouped together because it cannot be clearly established that the various documents involved are wholly independent of one another. Reasons for believing that Berossus and the Royal Canon both got their information from Babylonian chronicles and kinglists have already been pointed out. It is also possible that the chronological information given in the royal inscriptions was derived from the chronicles (although this is something that cannot be proved).¹¹³ Grayson's suggestion, that the chronicles themselves may have been composed with the help of the

113 A. K. Grayson, "Assyria and Babylonia," *Orientalia*, Vol. 49 (1980), p. 164.

information given in the astronomical “diaries” has been strongly argued against by other scholars.¹¹⁴

This possible interdependence of some of these sources, however, does not nullify their conclusive power. As the *ancient royal inscriptions* preserve chronological information that is *contemporary with* the Neo-Babylonian era itself, we have every reason to accept it as *factual* and *true* information. This would be true even if this information was based upon contemporary Babylonian chronicles. For, although the chronology of these chronicles is preserved only in a few fragmentary copies, in a late kinglist, and by Berossus and the Royal Canon, the *agreement* between these later sources and the ancient royal inscriptions is striking. This agreement confirms that the figures of the original Neo-Babylonian chronicles have been correctly preserved in these later sources.

There remain four lines of evidence which have sound claim to independence.

(4) *Economic-administrative and legal documents*

Tens of thousands of economic, administrative and legal texts, dated to the year, month, and the day of the reigning king, have come down to us from the Neo-Babylonian period. A large number of dated tablets are extant *from each year* during this whole period. The length of reign of each king may, then, be established by these documents, *sometimes almost to the day*.

The results arrived at are in good agreement with the figures given by Berossus, the Royal Canon, the chronicles, and the contemporary royal inscriptions from the reign of Nabonidus.

The twenty years demanded by the chronology of the Watch Tower Society are totally missing.

The business and administrative documents are *original* documents, *contemporary with* the Neo-Babylonian era itself, which makes this line of evidence exceedingly strong. These documents definitely point to 587/86 B.C.E. as Nebuchadnezzar’s eighteenth regnal year, when he desolated Jerusalem.

(5) *Prosopographical evidence*

The *prosopographical study* of the cuneiform tablets provides various checks on the accuracy of the Neo-Babylonian chronology.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174. Cf. John M. Steele, *Observations and Predictions of Eclipse Times by Early Astronomers* (Dordrecht, etc: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), pp. 127, 128. The astronomical observations recorded in these diaries must anyway be treated as separate and independent lines of evidence.

The careers of scribes, temple administrators, slaves, business men, and others may be followed for decades, in some cases through almost the whole Neo-Babylonian period and on into the Persian era. Thousands of dated documents give insight into the business, legal, religious, family and other activities of these individuals. Many texts deal with matters that extend over weeks, months, or even years, such as inventories, lease of land or houses, instalments of debts, hire of slaves and livestock, run-away slaves, court proceedings, and so on.

The activities of some individuals may be followed through almost their whole lives. But never do we find that their activities cross the established chronological borders of the period into some unknown twenty-year period that the Watch Tower Society would add to the Neo-Babylonian era. The insertion of these twenty years would, in fact, not only distort the understanding of the careers, activities, and family relations of many individuals, but it would also give many of them abnormal life spans.

(6) Chronological interlocking joints

Sometimes a text may contain activities and dates that intersect two or more consecutive reigns in a way that chronologically ties them together and excludes every possibility of inserting extra kings and years between them.

As was demonstrated in this particular section, quite a number of such documents exist that interlock each reign with the next *throughout the whole Neo-Babylonian period*. Although eleven documents of this kind were presented earlier, a close examination of the tens of thousands of unpublished tablets from the Neo-Babylonian period would probably multiply the number. Those presented, however, suffice to show that the length of the whole Neo-Babylonian era may be securely established by the aid of such “chronological joints” alone.

(7) Synchronisms with the contemporary Egyptian chronology

The chronology of contemporary Egyptian kings provides an excellent test of Neo-Babylonian chronology, as there are four synchronisms tied to it, three of which are given in the Bible.

These synchronisms are of the utmost importance, as the contemporary chronology of Egypt has been established *independently* of the chronologies of other nations of that time. Yet it was shown that the Egyptian chronology is in complete harmony with the data given by Berossus, the Royal Canon, and all the cuneiform documents

discussed above, while a comparison with the chronology of the Watch Tower Society shows a consistent difference of about twenty years.

These four synchronisms to Egyptian chronology all refute the 607 B.C.E. date for the desolation of Jerusalem and once again uphold 587/86 B.C.E. as the correct date for that event.

The evidence from all this material is overwhelming and should certainly be *conclusive*. For most scholars, just *two or three* of these seven lines of evidence would be sufficient proof of the accuracy of the Neo-Babylonian chronology. For the leaders of the Watch Tower Society, however, not even *seven* lines of evidence are enough to change their minds, as shown by their consistent rejection of such evidence presented to them earlier.

Since the chronology constitutes the very foundation for the major claims and message of the organization, they evidently feel that too much is at stake for abandoning their Gentile times chronology, not least of this being their own claimed position of divine authority. It is extremely unlikely, therefore, that even *twice* the number of lines of evidence will have any influence on their minds.

For the sake of completeness, however, *another seven lines* of evidence will be presented in detail in the next chapter, and a few others will be briefly described. As all of them are based on ancient Babylonian *astronomical* texts, they will be shown to turn the chronology of the whole Neo-Babylonian era into what is termed an *absolute chronology*.

THE ABSOLUTE CHRONOLOGY OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN ERA

AS EXPLAINED earlier in chapter 2, an absolute chronology is usually best established by the aid of ancient astronomical observations.

Although no observations usable for dating purposes are recorded in the Bible, it was pointed out that at 2 Kings 25:2, 8 the dating of the desolation of Jerusalem to “the eleventh year of King Zedekiah,” the last king of Judah, is synchronized with “*the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar,*” the Babylonian desolator of the city. If the reign of Nebuchadnezzar could be fixed astronomically to our era, it would be possible to establish the B.C.E. date for the desolation of Jerusalem.

In this chapter it will be demonstrated that the *whole* Neo-Babylonian period, including the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, may be established as an *absolute chronology* by the aid of astronomical cuneiform documents found in Mesopotamia.

The study of the Babylonian astronomical documents

The study of the astronomical cuneiform texts started more than one hundred years ago. One of the leading Assyriologists at that time was J. N. Strassmaier (1846-1920). He was a diligent copyist of the cuneiform texts that from the 1870's onwards were being brought from Mesopotamia to the British Museum in enormous quantities.

Strassmaier found that a great number of the texts contained astronomical data. He sent copies of these texts to his colleague J. Epping, who taught mathematics and astronomy in Falkenburg, Holland. Thus Epping (1835-1894) was to become the pioneer in the

study of the Babylonian astronomical texts. After his death another of Strassmaier's colleagues, Franz Xaver Kugler (1862-1929), took over the work of Epping.

Few, if any, have contributed as much to the study of the astronomical texts as Kugler. He published his results in a series of monumental works, such as *Die Babylonische Mondrechnung* (1901), *Sternkunde und Sterndienst in Babel*, Vol. I and II (1907-1924), and *Von Moses bis Paulus* (1922). The last two works include detailed studies of ancient chronology, in which the astronomical texts are fully developed and studied in depth.¹

After Kugler's death in 1929 some of the key names in the study of the Babylonian astronomy have been P. J. Schaumberger (deceased 1955), Otto Neugebauer (1899-1990), and Abraham J. Sachs (1914-1983). Many other modern scholars have contributed much to the understanding of the astronomical texts, some of whom have been consulted for the following discussion.

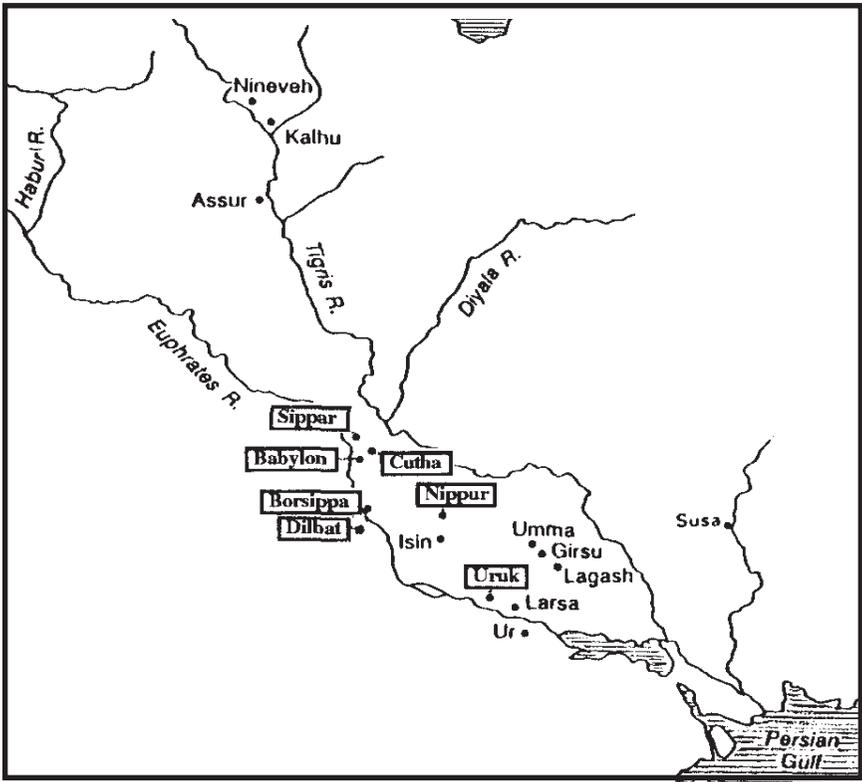
Ancient astronomy

As can be deduced from the Babylonian astronomical tablets, a regular and systematic study of the sky began in the mid-eighth century B.C.E., perhaps even earlier. Trained observers were specifically employed to carry out a regular watch of the positions and movements of the sun, the moon and the planets, and to record from day to day the phenomena observed.

This regular activity was performed at a number of observational sites in Mesopotamia, located in the cities of Babylon, Uruk, Nippur, Sippar, Borsippa, Cutha, and Dilbat.² (See the accompanying map.)

As a result of this activity, the Babylonian scholars at an early stage had recognized the various cycles of the sun, the moon and the five planets visible to the naked eye (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), enabling them even to predict certain phenomena, such as lunar eclipses.

- 1 Kugler's results are of lasting value. Dr. Schaumberger states that Kugler "on all essential points has fixed the chronology for the last centuries before Christ, having thus performed an invaluable service to the science of history."—P. J. Schaumberger, "Drei babylonische Planetentafeln der Seleukidenzeit," *Orientalia*, Vol. 2, Nova Series (Rome, 1933), p. 99.
- 2 In Assyrian times, such observations were also performed in the cities of Assur and Nineveh. The observations in Babylonia were possibly performed on top of temple-towers, *ziggurats*, such as the ziggurat of Etemenanki in Babylon.



Astronomical Observation Sites in Babylonia

Finally, in the Persian and Seleucid eras, they had developed a very high level of scientific and mathematical astronomy that had never been reached by any other ancient civilization.³

*The nature of the Babylonian astronomical texts**

Although astronomical cuneiform texts have been found also in the ruins of Nineveh and Uruk, the bulk of the texts — about 1,600 — comes from an astronomical archive somewhere in the city of Babylon. The

3 It has often been pointed out that the Babylonian interest in the sky to a great extent was *astrologically* motivated. Although this is correct, Professor Otto Neugebauer points out that the main purpose of the Babylonian astronomers was not astrology, but the study of calendaric problems. (Otto Neugebauer, *Astronomy and History. Selected Essays*. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983, p. 55.) For further comments on the astrological motive, see the Appendix for chapter four, section 1: “Astrology as a motive for Babylonian astronomy.”

* Consideration of astronomical evidence inescapably involves much technical data. Some readers may prefer to bypass this and go to the summary at the end of this chapter. The technical data is nonetheless there for corroboration.

archive was found and emptied by local inhabitants from nearby villages, and the exact finding spot within the city is not known today. Most of the texts were obtained for the British Museum from dealers in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

About 300 of the texts are concerned with scientific mathematical astronomy and belong to the last four centuries B.C.E. Most of them are *ephemerides*, that is, tables with calculations of the positions of the moon and the five naked-eye planets.

The greater part of the remaining texts, however, about 1,300 in number, are non-mathematical and principally *observational* in nature. The observations date from about 750 B.C.E. to the first century of the Christian era.⁴ The great number of observational texts are of the utmost moment for establishing the absolute chronology of this whole period.

With respect to content, the non-mathematical texts may be subdivided into various categories. By far the largest group are the so-called *astronomical "diaries."* These record on a regular basis a large number of phenomena, including the positions of the moon and the planets. It is generally accepted that such "diaries" were kept continuously from the mid-eighth century B.C.E. onwards. The other categories of texts, which include *almanacs* (each recording astronomical data for one particular Babylonian year), texts with *planetary observations* (each giving data for one specific planet), and texts recording *lunar eclipses*, were apparently excerpts from the "diaries."

Thus, although only a handful of diaries from the four earliest centuries are extant, quite a number of the observations recorded in other diaries compiled in this early period have been preserved in these excerpts.

A comprehensive examination of all the non-mathematical texts was started several decades ago by Dr. A. J. Sachs, who devoted the last thirty years of his life to the study of these texts.⁵ After his death in 1983, Sachs' work has been continued by Professor Hermann Hunger (in Vienna, Austria), who today is the leading expert on the astronomical observational texts. Both of these authorities were consulted for the following discussion.

4 Asger Aaboe, "Babylonian Mathematics, Astrology, and Astronomy," *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. III:2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 277-78. The observational texts may also occasionally contain descriptions of eclipses calculated in advance.

5 The various kinds of texts were classified by A. J. Sachs in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 2 (1948), pp. 271-90. In the work *Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1955), Sachs presents an extensive catalogue of the astronomical, astrological, and mathematical cuneiform texts, most of which had been copied by T. G. Pinches and J. N. Strassmaier in the late nineteenth century. The catalogue lists 1520 astronomical texts, but many more have been discovered since.

A. THE ASTRONOMICAL DIARIES

A “diary” usually covers the six or seven months of the first or second half of a particular Babylonian year and records, often on a day-to-day basis, the positions of the moon and the planets in relation to certain stars and constellations, and also gives details of lunar and solar eclipses. Much additional information is added, such as meteorological events, earthquakes, market prices, and similar data. Sometimes also historical events are recorded.⁶ Over 2,000 years old, it is only to be expected that these clay tablets are often fragmentary.

More than 1,200 fragments of astronomical diaries of various sizes have been discovered, but because of their fragmentary condition only about a third of the number are datable.

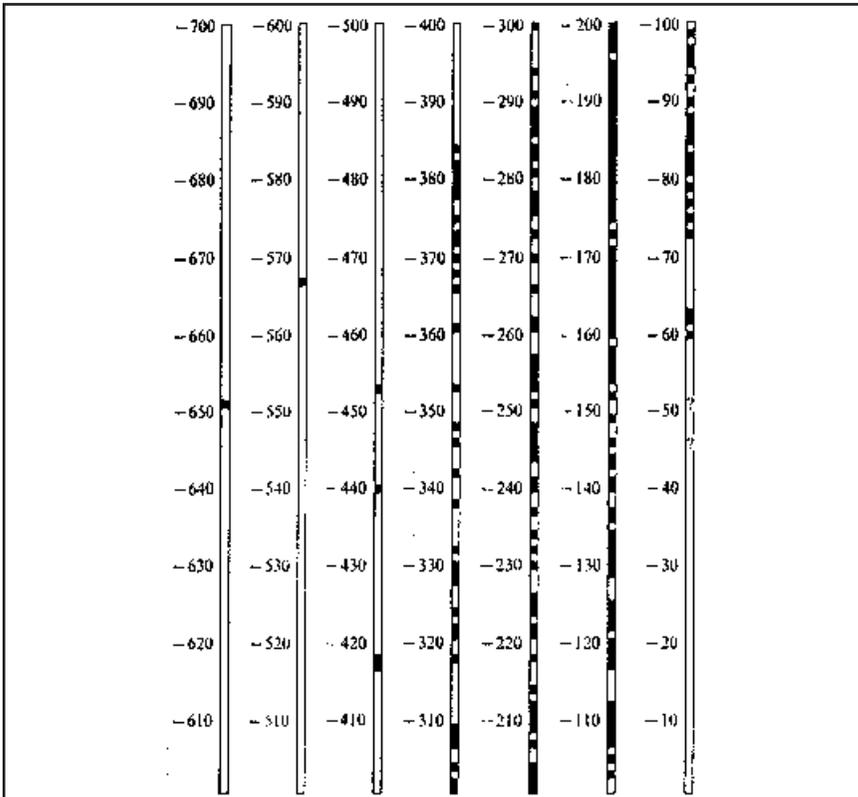
Most of these cover the period from 385 to 61 B.C.E. and contain astronomical information from about 180 of these years, thus firmly establishing the chronology of this period.⁷

Half a dozen of the diaries are earlier. The two oldest are *VAT 4956* from the sixth and *B.M. 32312* from the seventh centuries B.C.E. Both provide absolute dates that firmly establish the length of the Neo-Babylonian period.

A-1: The astronomical diary VAT 4956

The most important astronomical diary for our discussion is designated *VAT 4956* and is kept in the Near Eastern department (“Vorderasiatischen Abteilung”) in the Berlin Museum. This diary is dated from Nisanu 1 of Nebuchadnezzar’s thirty-seventh regnal year to Nisanu 1 of his thirty-eighth regnal year, recording observations from five months of his thirty-seventh year (months 1, 2, 3, 11 and 12). The most recent transcription and translation of the text is that of Sachs and Hunger, published in 1988.⁸

- 6 The scribes evidently kept running records of their day-to-day observations, as may be seen from smaller tablets that cover much shorter periods, sometimes only a few days. From these records the longer diaries were compiled.—A. J. Sachs & H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*, Vol. I (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988), p. 12.
- 7 Otto Neugebauer, for example, explains: “Since planetary and lunar data of such variety and abundance define the date of a text with absolute accuracy—lunar positions with respect to fixed stars do not even allow 24 hours of uncertainty which is otherwise involved in lunar dates—we have here records of Seleucid history [312-64 B.C.E.] which are far more reliable than any other historical source material at our disposal.”—*Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 52 (1957), p. 133.
- 8 Sachs–Hunger, *op.cit.* (1988), pp. 46-53. The first translation of the text, which also includes an extensive commentary, is that of P. V. Neugebauer and Ernst F. Weidner, “Ein astronomischer Beobachtungstext aus dem 37. Jahre Nebukadnezars II. (–567/66),” in *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig: Philologisch-Historische Klasse*, Band 67:2, 1915, pp. 29-89.



The extant datable astronomical diaries

The earliest diary is from 652/51 B.C.E. Then follows VAT 4956 from 568/67 B.C.E. Most cover the period from 385 to 61 B.C.E., containing astronomical information from about 180 of these years. – The chart is reproduced from A. J. Sachs, “Babylonian observational astronomy,” in F. R. Hodson (ed.), *The Place of Astronomy in the Ancient World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 47.

Among the many observed positions recorded on VAT 4956, there are about thirty which are so exactly described that modern astronomers can easily fix the precise dates when they were seen. By doing so they have been able to show that all these observations (of the moon and the five then known planets) must have been made during the year 568/67 B.C.E.

If Nebuchadnezzar’s thirty-seventh regnal year was 568/67 B.C.E., then it follows that his first year must have been 604/03 B.C.E., and his eighteenth year, during which he desolated Jerusalem, 587/86

B.C.E.⁹ This is the same date indicated by all the *seven lines of evidence* discussed in the previous chapter!

Could all these observations also have been made twenty years earlier, in the year 588/87 B.C.E., which according to the chronology of the Watch Tower Society's Bible dictionary *Insight on the Scriptures* corresponded to Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh regnal year?¹⁰ The same dictionary (page 456 of Vol. 1, where VAT 4956 is obviously alluded to) acknowledges that "Modern chronologers point out that such a combination of astronomical positions would not be duplicated again in thousands of years."

Let us consider one example. According to this diary, on Nisanu 1 of Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh year the planet Saturn could be observed "in front of the Swallow," the "Swallow" (*SIM*) referring to the south-west part of the constellation of the Fishes (Pisces) of the Zodiac.¹¹ As Saturn has a revolution of c. 29.5 years, it moves through the whole Zodiac in 29.5 years. This means that it can be observed in each of the twelve constellations of the Zodiac for about 2.5 years on the average. It means also that Saturn could be seen "in front of the Swallow" 29.5 years previous to 568/67 B.C.E., that is, in 597/96 B.C.E, but certainly not 20 years earlier, in 588/87 B.C.E., the date the Watch Tower would like to assign for Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh regnal year. That is simply an astronomical impossibility, even in the case of this one planet. But there are *five planets* that figure in the diary's astronomical observations.

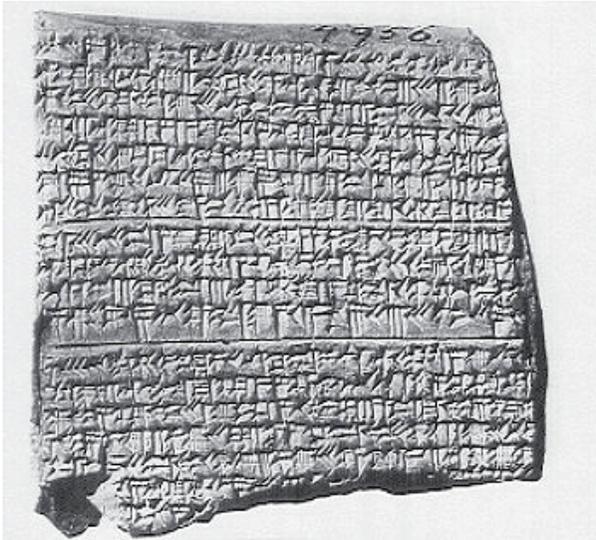
Add, therefore, the different revolutions of the *other four planets*, the positions of which are specified several times in the text, along with the positions given for the *moon* at various times of the year, and it becomes easily understood why such a *combination* of observations could not be made again in thousands of years. The observations recorded in VAT 4956 must have been made in the year 568/67 B.C.E., because they fit no other situation which occurred either thousands of years before or after that date!

9 The diary clearly states that the observations were made during Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh year. The text opens with the words: "Year 37 of Nebukadnezar, king of Babylon." The latest date, given close to the end of the text, is: "Year 38 of Nebukadnezar, month I, the 1st."—Sachs–Hunger, *op. cit.*, pp. 47, 53.

10 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2 (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), p. 481, under the subheading "Takes Tyre."

11 Sachs–Hunger, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–49. The expression "in front of" in the text refers to the daily westward rotation of the celestial sphere and means "to the west of". (*Ibid.*, p. 22) For a discussion of the Babylonian names of the constellations, see Bartel L. van der Waerden, *Science Awakening*, Vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974),

Obverse



Reverse



The astronomical diary VAT 4956

VAT 4956, now in the “Vorderasiatischen Abteilung” in the Berlin Museum, gives details on about 30 positions of the moon and the five then known planets from the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar (568/67 B.C.E.), *establishing that year as the most reliable absolute date in the sixth century B.C.E.*—Reproduced from A. J. Sachs & H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*, Vol. I (Wien: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988), Plate 3. Photo used courtesy of the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin.

Thus VAT 4956 gives very strong support to the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian era as established by the historians. Attempting to overcome this evidence, the Watch Tower Society, in the above-mentioned Bible dictionary, goes on to state that, “While to some this might seem like incontrovertible evidence, there are factors greatly reducing its strength.”

What are these factors? And do they genuinely reduce the strength of the evidence in this ancient tablet?

(a) The first is that the observations made in Babylon may have contained errors. The Babylonian astronomers showed greatest concern for celestial events or phenomena occurring close to the horizon, at the rising or setting of the moon or the sun. However, the horizon as viewed from Babylon is frequently obscured by sandstorms.

Then Professor Otto Neugebauer is quoted as saying that Ptolemy complained about “the lack of reliable planetary observations [from ancient Babylon].”¹²

However, many of the observations recorded in the diaries were not made close to the horizon, but higher up in the sky. Further, Babylonian astronomers had several means of overcoming unfavorable weather conditions.

As noted earlier, the observations were performed at *a number* of sites in Mesopotamia. What could not be observed at one place due to clouds or sandstorms, could probably be observed somewhere else.¹³

One method used to get over the difficulty of observing stars close to the horizon due to dust was to observe, instead, “the simultaneously occurring of other stars, the so-called *ziqpu*-stars,” that is, stars crossing the meridian higher up on the sky at their culmination.¹⁴

Finally, the horizon as viewed from Babylon was not obscured by sandstorms every day, and some planetary events could be observed many days or weeks in succession, also higher up in the sky, for example, the position of Saturn which, according to our text, could be observed “in front of the Swallow [the south-west part of the Fishes].” As was pointed out above, Saturn can be observed in each of the twelve constellations of the Zodiac for about 2.5 years on the average.

12 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 456.

13 See the comments by Hermann Hunger (ed.) in *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992), p. XXII.

14 B. L. van der Waerden, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 78. *ziqpu* is the Babylonian technical term for culmination. The procedure is explained in the famous Babylonian astronomical compendium MUL.APIN from about the seventh century B.C.E. (van der Waerden, *ibid.*)

Saturn's position in the vicinity of the southern Fish, then, could have been observed for several months in succession, which would have made it impossible for Babylonian astronomers in their regular observations of the planets to make any mistake as to where this planet could be seen during the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, *in spite of frequent sandstorms*. Our text, in fact, directly states that Saturn was observed "in front of the Swallow" not only on the first day of Nisanu (the first month), but also on the first day of Ayyaru (the second month)!

That the observations recorded in VAT 4956 are substantially correct may be seen from the fact that all of them (except for one or two containing scribal errors) fit the same year. This would not have been the case if the observations were erroneous.¹⁵

The next factor brought up in the Watch Tower Society's Bible dictionary that is held to reduce the strength of VAT 4956 is the fact that some diaries are not original documents but later copies:

(b) Second, the fact is that the great majority of the astronomical diaries found were written, not in the time of the Neo-Babylonian or Persian empires, but in the Seleucid period (312-65 B.C.E.), although they contain data relating to those earlier periods. Historians assume that they are copies of earlier documents.

There is nothing to show that most diaries are later copies, but *some* are, as indicated by writing conventions used in the text. The earliest dated diaries frequently reflect the struggle of the copyists to understand the ancient documents they were copying, some of which were broken or otherwise damaged, and often the documents used an archaic terminology which the copyists tried to "modernize." This is clearly true of VAT 4956, too. Twice in the text the copyist added the comment "broken off," indicating he was unable to decipher a word in the copy. Also, the text reflects his attempt to change the archaic

15 Some events recorded in the diaries are actually not observations, but events calculated in advance. Thus VAT 4956 records an *eclipse of the moon* which occurred on the 15th day of the month Simanu (the third month). That this eclipse had been calculated in advance is evident from the expression AN-KU₁₀ *sin* (also transcribed *atalû Sin*), which denotes a *predicted* lunar eclipse. It is further pointed out in the text that the eclipse "was omitted" (literally, "passed by"), that is, it was invisible in Babylon. (Sachs-Hunger, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 1988, pp. 23, 48, 49) This does not mean that the prediction failed. The expression implied that the eclipse was *expected not to be seen*. According to modern calculations, the eclipse took place on July 4, 568 B.C.E. (Julian calendar), but as it took place in the afternoon it was not visible at Babylon. The method that may have been used by the Babylonian astronomers for predicting this eclipse is discussed by Professor Peter Huber in B. L. van der Waerden (*op. cit.*, note 11 above), pp. 117-120.

terminology. But did he also change the *content* of the text?

On this the first translators of the text, P. V. Neugebauer and E. F. Weidner, concluded: “As far as the contents are concerned the copy is of course a faithful reproduction of the original.”¹⁶ Other scholars, who since have examined the document, agree. Professor Peter Huber states:

It is preserved only in a copy of much later date, but that appears to be a faithful transcript (orthographically somewhat modernized) of an original of NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S time.¹⁷

Suppose that some of the material in the about thirty completely received observations recorded in VAT 4956 had been distorted by later copyists. How great is the possibility that *all* these “distorted” observations would fit into one and the same year—the very one corroborated by Berossus, the Royal Canon, the chronicles, the royal inscriptions, the contract tablets, the Uruk kinglist, and many other documents—that is, Nebuchadnezzar’s thirty-seventh regnal year? Accidental errors of this kind do not “cooperate” to such a great extent. So there is no sound reason to doubt that the original observations have been correctly preserved in our copy.

(c) Finally, as in the case of Ptolemy, even though the astronomical information (as now interpreted and understood) on the texts discovered is basically accurate, this does not prove that the historical information accompanying it is accurate. Even as Ptolemy used the reigns of ancient kings (as he understood them) simply as a framework in which to place his astronomical data, so too, the writers (or copyists) of the astronomical texts of the Seleucid period may have simply inserted in their astronomical texts what was then the accepted, or “popular,” chronology of that time.¹⁸

What is suggested by the Watch Tower organization is that the later copyists changed the dates found in the “diaries” in order to adapt them to their own concepts of the ancient Babylonian and Persian chronology. Thus a writer in the *Awake!* magazine imagines that “the copyist of ‘VAT 4956’ may, in line with the chronology accepted

16 P. V. Neugebauer and E. F. Weidner, *op. cit.* (see note 8), p. 39.

17 Peter Huber in B. L. van der Waerden, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

18 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 456. As pointed out in chapter 3 above (section A-2), the so-called “Ptolemy’s Canon” (or, Royal Canon) was not worked out by Claudius Ptolemy. Further, as his quotations from ancient Babylonian astronomical texts available to him show that these were already dated to specific regnal years of ancient kings, he cannot have used the canon “as a framework in which to place his astronomical

in his time, have inserted the ‘thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar’.”¹⁹ Is this a plausible theory?

As was pointed out above, VAT 4956 is dated from Nisanu 1 of Nebuchadnezzar’s thirty-seventh year to Nisanu 1 of his thirty-eighth year. Further, almost all events mentioned in the text are dated, with the *month*, the *day* and—when necessary—the *time of the day* given. About *forty* dates of this kind are given in the text, though the year, of course, is not repeated at all these places. All known diaries are dated in a similar way.

In order to change the years in the text, the copyists would also have been forced to change the name of the reigning king. Why? Nebuchadnezzar died in his forty-third year of rule. If his thirty-seventh year fell in 588/87 B.C.E., as the Watch Tower Society holds, he must have been dead for many years by 568/67 B.C.E. when the observations of VAT 4956 were made.

Is it really likely that the Seleucid copyists devoted themselves to such large-scale forgeries? What do we know about the “popular” chronology of their time, which is proposed in the Watch Tower’s publication as the motive for this deliberate fraud?

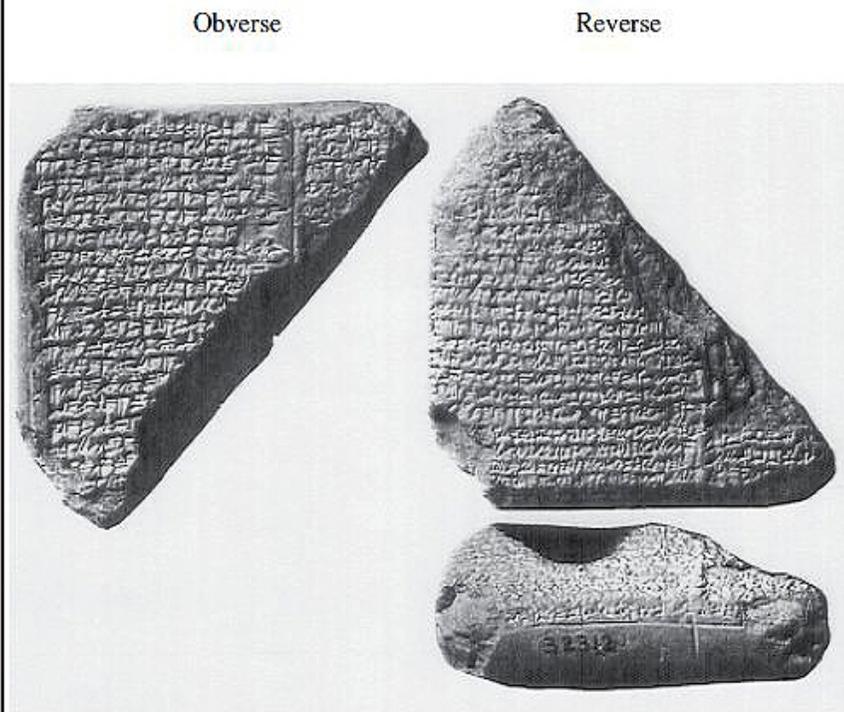
The chronology for the Neo-Babylonian era composed by Berossus early in the Seleucid period evidently represents the contemporary, “popular” concept of Neo-Babylonian chronology.²⁰ If counted backwards from the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., Berossus’ figures for the reigns of Neo-Babylonian kings place Nebuchadnezzar’s thirty-seventh year in 568/67 B.C.E. as does VAT 4956.

More importantly, Berossus’ Neo-Babylonian chronology, as shown earlier in chapter three, *is of the same length as that given by the many documents contemporary with the Neo-Babylonian era itself* such as chronicles, royal inscriptions, business documents, as well as with contemporary Egyptian documents!

The “popular” Neo-Babylonian chronology as presented in the Seleucid era, then, was not something based on mere supposition, but meets the qualifications of a true and correct chronology, and there was no need for copyists to alter the ancient documents in order to adapt them to it. The theory that they falsified these documents, therefore, is groundless. Besides, it is refuted completely by *other* astronomical texts, including the next diary to be discussed.

19 *Awake!*, May 8, 1972, page 28.

20 As explained in chapter 3 above (section A-1), Berossus’ chronology was composed about 281 B.C.E. The Seleucid era began in 312 B.C.E.



The astronomical diary B.M. 32312

This diary gives details on the positions of Mercury, Saturn, and Mars, which date it to the year 652/51 B.C.E. An historical notice, also repeated in the *Akitu Chronicle* and there dated to the 16th year of Shamash-shumukin, fixes that year to 652/51 B.C.E., which prevents any extension of the Neo-Babylonian era backwards in time. Photo used courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

A-2: The astronomical diary B.M. 32312

In an article published in 1974, Professor Abraham J. Sachs gives a brief presentation of the astronomical diaries. Mentioning that the oldest datable diary contains observations from the year 652 B.C.E., he explains how he was able to fix its date:

When I first tried to date this text, I found the astronomical contents to be just barely adequate to make this date virtually certain.

It was a great relief when I was able to confirm the date by matching up a historical remark in the diary with the corresponding statement for –651 in a well-dated historical chronicle.²¹

As this diary seemed to be of great importance for the question of Babylonian chronology, I wrote to Professor Sachs back in 1980 and asked two questions:

1. What information in the diary makes the date –651 [=652 B.C.E.], “virtually certain”?
2. What kind of historical remark in the diary corresponds with what statement in which well-dated chronicle?

In his answer Professor Sachs enclosed a copy of a photograph of the diary in question, *B.M. 32312*, and added information which fully answered my two questions. The astronomical contents of the diary clearly establish the year as 652/51 B.C.E. when the observations were made. Sachs writes that “the preserved astronomical events (Mercury’s last visibility in the east behind Pisces, Saturn’s last visibility behind Pisces, both around the 14th of month I; Mars’ stationary point in Scorpio on the 17th of month I; Mercury’s first visibility in Pisces on the 6th of month XII) *uniquely determine the date.*”²²

Interestingly, it cannot be claimed that this diary was redated by later copyists, because the name of the king, his regnal year, and month names *are broken away*. Yet these data may justifiably be supplied because of a historical remark at the end of the diary. For “the 27th” of the month (the month name is broken away) the diary states that at the site of “Hiritu in the province of Sippar the troops of Babylonia and of Assyria fou[ght with each] other, and the troops

21 A. J. Sachs, “Babylonian observational astronomy,” in F. R. Hodson (ed.), *The Place of Astronomy in the Ancient World (Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London, ser. A, 276, London: Oxford University Press, 1974)*, p. 48. – For the purpose of facilitating astronomical computations, the year preceding 1 C.E. is called 0 instead of 1 B.C.E. and the year preceding 0 is called –1 instead of 2 B.C.E. The year 652 B.C.E., therefore, is astronomically written as –651.

22 Letter Sachs-Jonsson, dated February 10, 1980. The diary has since been published in Sachs-Hunger, *op. cit.*, Vol. I (1988; see note 6 above), pp. 42-47. Of the first two events, the scribe says: “I did not watch because the days were overcast.” (*Ibid.*, p. 43) This statement does not make the astronomically fixed date of the positions less certain. As pointed out earlier, the Babylonian scholars not only knew the various cycles of the visible planets, but they also regularly watched their daily motions and positions relative to certain fixed stars or constellations along the ecliptic. Thus, even if a planet could not be observed for some days due to clouds, its position could easily be deduced from its position when it was last seen.

of Babylonia withdrew and were heavily defeated.”²³ Fortunately, it is possible to place the time of this battle since it is also mentioned in a well-known Babylonian chronicle.

The chronicle is the so-called *Akitu Chronicle*, B.M. 86379, which covers a part of Shamashshumukin’s reign, especially his last five years (the sixteenth to the twentieth). The battle at Hiritu is dated in his sixteenth year as follows:

The sixteenth year of Shamash-shuma-ukin: ... On the twenty-seventh day of Adar [the 12th month] the armies of Assyria and Akkad [Babylonia] did battle in Hirit. The army of Akkad retreated from the battlefield and a major defeat was inflicted upon them.²⁴

The astronomical events described in the diary fix the battle at Hiritu on Adaru 27 to 651 B.C.E.²⁵ The *Akitu Chronicle* shows that this battle at this place on this day was fought in the sixteenth year of Shamashshumukin. Thus Shamashshumukin’s sixteenth year was 652/51 B.C.E. His entire reign of twenty years, then, may be dated to 667/66 – 648/47 B.C.E.

Now this is the way historians have dated Shamashshumukin’s reign for a long time, and that is why Professor Sachs concluded his letter by saying: “I should perhaps add that the absolute chronology of the regnal years of Shamash-shuma-ukin was never in doubt, and it is only confirmed again by the astronomical diary.”

Shamashshumukin’s reign has been known, for example, through the Royal Canon which gives him twenty years and his successor Kandalanu twenty-two years. Thereafter Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar’s father, succeeded to the throne.²⁶ These figures are in good agreement with the ancient cuneiform sources. Business documents, as well as the *Akitu Chronicle*, show that Shamashshumukin ruled for twenty years. Business documents, supported by the Uruk King List, also show that from the first year of Kandalanu to the first year of Nabopolassar was a period of twenty-two years. Thus the

23 Sachs-Hunger, *op. cit.*, p. 45. For a discussion of this battle, see Grant Frame, *Babylonia 689-627 B.C.* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1992), pp. 144-45, 289-92.

24 A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), pp. 131-32.

25 As the first month, Nisanu, began in March or April, 652 B.C.E., Adaru, the twelfth month, began in February or March, 651 B.C.E.

26 That Kandalanu was succeeded by Nabopolassar is directly stated in the *Akitu Chronicle*: “After Kandalanu, in the accession year of Nabopolassar.”—Grayson, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

chronology of that era, supplied by these sources, is as follows:

Shamashshumukin	20 years	667 - 648 B.C.E.
Kandalanu	22 years	647 - 626 B.C.E.
Nabopolassar	21 years	625 - 605 B.C.E.
Nebuchadnezzar	43 years	604 - 562 B.C.E.

The diary B.M. 32312, although establishing a date *prior to* the Neo-Babylonian period (which began with Nabopolassar), again coincides with and helps corroborate the chronology of that era.

This diary, then, adds yet another witness to the increasing amount of evidence against the 607 B.C.E. date. A change of Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year from 587 to 607 B.C.E. would also change Shamashshumukin's sixteenth year from 652 to 672 B.C.E. But the diary B.M. 32312 rules out such a change.

And, as already pointed out, no one can claim that later copyists inserted "the 16th year of Shamashshumukin" in this diary, because the text is damaged at this point and that datum is broken away! It is the unique historical information in the text, information repeated in the Akitu Chronicle, that fixes the diary to Shamashshumukin's sixteenth year.

This diary, therefore, may be regarded as an independent witness which upholds the authenticity of the dates given in VAT 4956 and other diaries.²⁷

27 A catalogue of business documents compiled by J. A. Brinkman and D. A. Kennedy that includes the reigns of Shamashshumukin and Kandalanu is published in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (JCS), Vol. 35, 1983, pp. 25-52. (Cf. also JCS 36, 1984, pp. 1-6, and the table of G. Frame, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-68.) Cuneiform texts show that Kandalanu evidently died in his twenty-first regnal year, after which several pretenders to the throne fought for power, until Nabopolassar succeeded in ascending to the throne. Some business documents span the period of interregnum by artificially carrying on Kandalanu's reign after his death, the last one (B.M. 40039) being dated to his "22nd year" ("the second day of Arahsamnu [the 8th month] of the 22nd year *after Kandalanu*"). This method is also used by the Royal Canon, which gives Kandalanu a reign of twenty-two years. Other documents span the period differently. The Uruk King List gives Kandalanu twenty-one years, and gives the year of interregnum to two of the combatants, Sin-shumlishir and Sin-shar-ishkun. (See chapter three above, section B-1-b.) The Babylonian chronicle B.M. 25127 states of the same year: "For one year there was no king in the land." (Grayson, *op. cit.*, p. 88) All documents agree, however, to the total length of the period from Shamashshumukin to Nabopolassar. (For additional details on Kandalanu's reign, see the discussion by G. Frame, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-96, 209-13, 284-88.)

B. THE SATURN TABLET (B.M. 76738 + B.M. 76813)

One of the most important astronomical texts from the seventh century B.C.E. is the Saturn tablet from the reign of the Babylonian king Kandalanu (647-626 B.C.E.), predecessor of Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father.

This text consists of two broken pieces, B.M. 76738 and B.M. 76813.²⁸ The text was first described by C. B. F. Walker in 1983 in the *Bulletin of the Society for Mesopotamian Studies*.²⁹ A transcription and a translation with a full discussion of the text by Mr. C.B.F. Walker has recently been published.³⁰

As explained earlier (section A-1 above), the planet Saturn has a revolution of c. 29.5 years. Due to the revolution of the earth round the sun, Saturn disappears behind the sun for a few weeks and reappears again at regular intervals of 378 days.

The Saturn tablet gives the dates (regnal year, month, and day in the Babylonian calendar) and the positions of the planet Saturn at its first and last appearances for a period of fourteen successive years, specifically, the first fourteen years of Kandalanu (647-634 B.C.E.). The name of the king, given only in the first line, is partially damaged, but may be restored as [*Kand*]alanu. The name of the planet is nowhere mentioned in the text, but the observations fit Saturn and no other planet.

As Mr. Walker explains:

The name of the planet Saturn is not given on the tablet, and the name of Kandalanu is to be restored from only a few traces in the first line. It is, however, certain that we are dealing with Saturn and Kandalanu. Saturn is the slowest moving of the visible planets, and only Saturn would move the distances indicated between successive first visibilities.³¹

The text is damaged in several places, and many of the *year numbers* are illegible. Years 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 13 are undamaged, however.

28 Listed as AH 83-1-18, 2109+2185 in E. Leichty et al, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, Vol. VIII (London: British Museum Publications Ltd, 1988), p. 70.

29 C. B. F. Walker, "Episodes in the History of Babylonian Astronomy," *Bulletin of the Society for Mesopotamian Studies*, Vol. 5 (Toronto, May 1983), pp. 20, 21.

30 C. B. F. Walker, "Babylonian observations of Saturn during the reign of Kandalanu," in N. M. Swerdlow (ed.), *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 2000), pp. 61-76.

31 Walker, *ibid.*, p. 63.

Besides this, each year is covered by two lines in the text, one for the last appearance of the planet and the other for its first, the total number of lines covering the fourteen years, therefore, being twenty-eight. With this framework there is no problem in restoring the year numbers that are damaged.

Most of the *positions* given for Saturn at its first or last appearance are legible.³² The entry for year eight, which is almost wholly preserved, is quoted here as an example:

Year 8, month 6, day 5, behind the Furrow (α + Virginis), last appearance.

[Year 8], month 7, day 5, ‘between’ the Furrow (α + Virginis) and the Balance (Libra), first appearance.³³

What is the implication of this astronomical tablet for the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian era?

As noted, Saturn has a revolution of 29.5 years, which also means that the planet moves through the whole ecliptic in this period.

But for the planet to be seen again at a specific point (close to a certain fixed star, for example) of the ecliptic *at the same time of the year*, we have to wait for 59 solar years (2x 29.5). This interval, actually, is much longer in the Babylonian *lunar* calendar. As C. B. F. Walker explains:

A complete cycle of Saturn phenomena in relation to the stars takes 59 years. But when that cycle has to be fitted to the lunar calendar of 29 or 30 days then identical cycles recur at intervals of rather more than 17 centuries. Thus there is no difficulty in determining the date of the present text.³⁴

In other words, the absolute chronology of Kandalanu’s reign is definitely fixed by the Saturn tablet, because the pattern of positions described in the text and fixed to specific dates in the Babylonian lunar calendar *is not repeated again in more than seventeen centuries!* The first fourteen years of his reign mentioned in the document are thus fixed to 647-634 B.C.E. As Kandalanu’s total reign may chronologically be counted as twenty-two years (twenty-one years plus one

32 In three cases the dates given for the first or last appearance are followed by the comment “not observed”, the reason in two cases being said to be clouds; and in another case it is said to have been “computed” (for the same reason). As suggested by Walker, “in these cases the date of theoretical first or last visibility was deduced from the planet’s position when first or last actually seen.” —*Ibid.*, pp. 64, 65, 74.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

year “after Kandalanu”; see section A-2 above), our tablet establishes the absolute chronology of his reign as 647-626 B.C.E.³⁵

Like the previous text discussed earlier (B.M. 32312), the Saturn tablet puts a definite block to the attempts at lengthening the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian period. If twenty years were to be added to this period, the reign of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, would have to be moved from 625-605 back to 645-625 B.C.E., and this in turn would mean moving the reign of his predecessor, Kandalanu, from 647-626 back to 667-646 B.C.E. The astronomical data on the Saturn tablet makes such changes completely impossible.

C. THE LUNAR ECLIPSE TABLETS

Many of the Babylonian astronomical tablets contain reports of consecutive lunar eclipses, dated to the year, month, and often also the day of the reigning king. About forty texts of this type, recording several hundreds of lunar eclipses from 747 to about 50 B.C.E., were catalogued by Abraham J. Sachs in 1955.³⁶

In about a third of the texts the eclipses are arranged in 18-year groups, evidently because the Babylonians knew that the pattern of lunar eclipses is repeated at intervals of approximately 18 years and 11 days, or exactly 223 lunar months (= 6585 1/3 days). This cycle was used by the Babylonian astronomers “to predict the dates of possible eclipses by at least the middle of the 6th century B.C. and most probably long before that.”³⁷

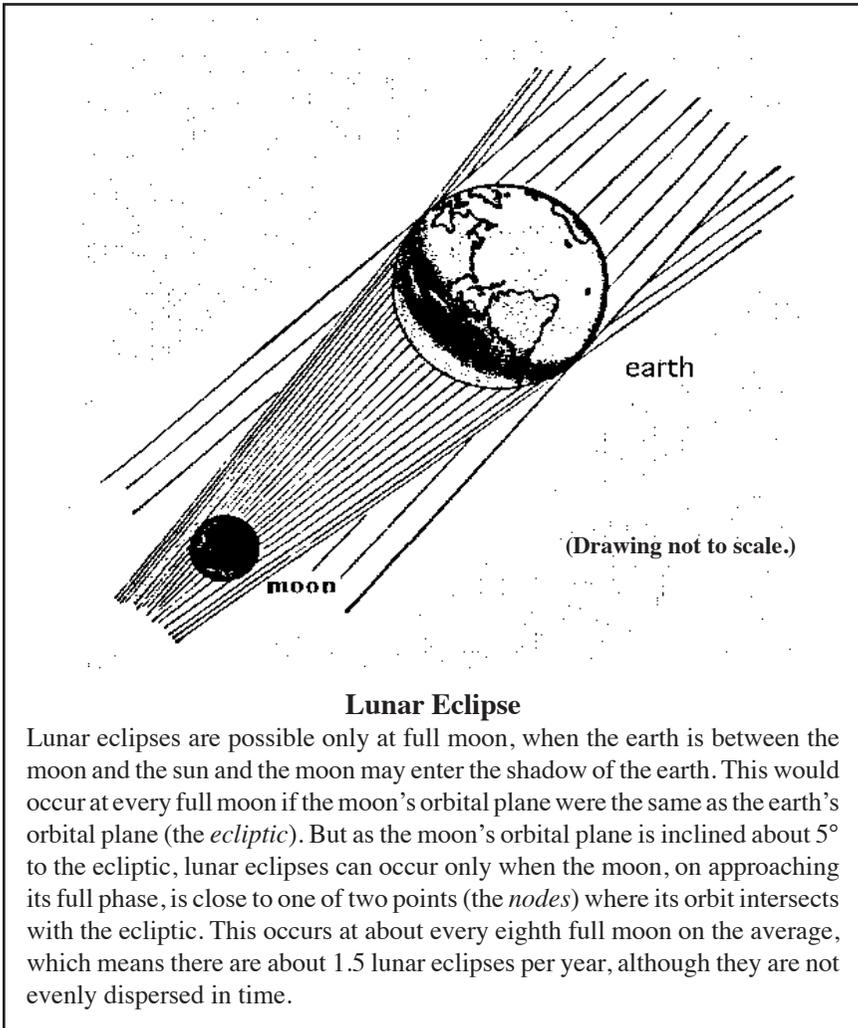
As modern scholars call this cycle the *Saros cycle*, the 18-year texts are often referred to as the *Saros cycle texts*.³⁸ Some of these texts record series of 18-year intervals extending over several centuries.

35 In his earlier discussion of the tablet, Walker points out that the pattern of Saturn phenomena described in this text, dated in terms of the phase of the moon, “will in fact occur approximately every 1770 years.”—C. B. F. Walker, “Episodes in the History of Babylonian Astronomy,” *Bulletin of the Society for Mesopotamian Studies*, Vol. 5 (Toronto, May 1983), p. 20.

36 Abraham J. Sachs, *Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1955), pp. xxxi-xxxiii. See nos. 1413-30, 1432, 1435-52, and 1456-57. For translations of most of these, see now H. Hunger et al., *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia* (ADT), Vol. V (Vienna, 2001).

37 Paul-Alain Beaulieu and John P. Britton, “Rituals for an eclipse possibility in the 8th year of Cyrus,” in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 46 (1994), p. 83.

38 The Greek word *saros* is derived from the Babylonian word *SAR*, which actually denoted a period of 3,600 years. “The use of the term ‘Saros’ to denote the eclipse cycle of 223 months is a modern anachronism which originated with Edmund Halley [*Phil. Trans.* (1691) 535-40] ... The Babylonian name for this interval was simply ‘18 years’.” —



Most of the lunar eclipse texts were compiled during the Seleucid era (312-64 B.C.E.). The evidence is that the eclipse records were extracted from astronomical diaries by the Babylonian astronomers, who evidently had access to a large number of diaries from earlier centuries.³⁹ Thus, even if most of the diaries from the earliest centuries

³⁹ "It is all but certain that these eclipse records could have been extracted only from the astronomical diaries." — A. J. Sachs, "Babylonian observational astronomy," in F. R. Hodson (ed.), *The Place of Astronomy in the Ancient World* (*Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, ser. A. 276, 1974), p. 44. See also the comments by F. Richard Stephenson and Louay J. Fatoohi, "Lunar eclipse times recorded in Babylonian history," in *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, Vol. 24:4, No. 77 (1993), p. 256.

are missing, many of their entries on eclipses have been preserved in these excerpts.

Many of the eclipse texts were copied by T. G. Pinches and J. N. Strassmaier in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and these copies were published by A. Sachs in 1955.⁴⁰ Translations of a few of the texts appeared in print in 1991.⁴¹ The rest of the texts, translated by H. Hunger, were published in ADT V, 2001. (See footnote 36 above.)

A preliminary typescript with transliterations and translations of most of the lunar eclipse texts was prepared in 1973 by Professor Peter Huber, but he never brought it into a form ready for publication, although it has been unofficially circulated among scholars for a long time. Huber's memoir has been consulted in the following discussion, but every passage used has been checked, and in several cases improved upon or corrected, by Professor Hermann Hunger, whose transliterations and translations of these eclipse texts have since been published.

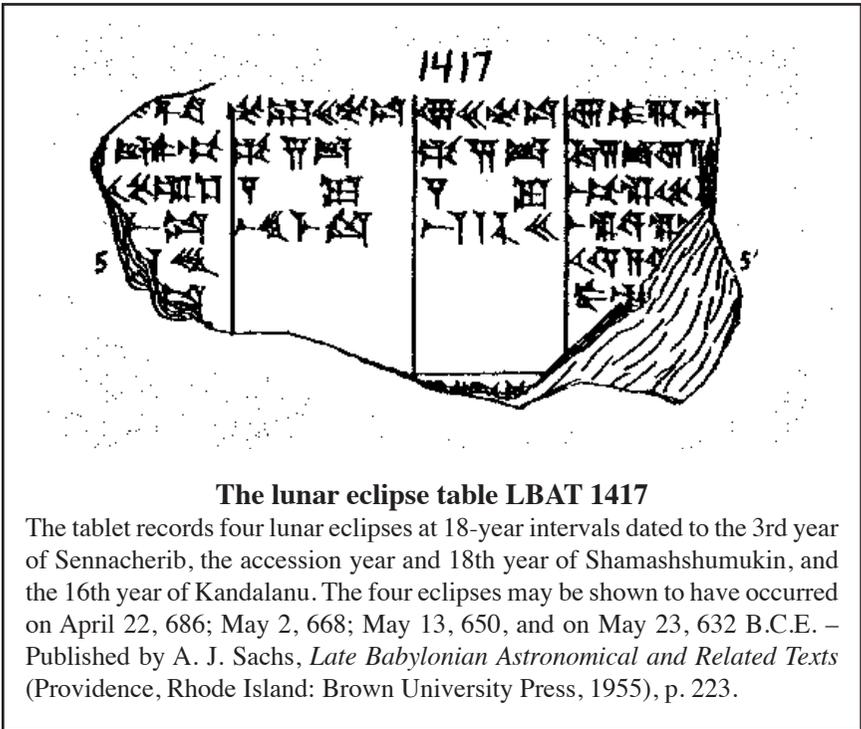
The texts recording the earliest lunar eclipses are LBAT 1413–1421 in Sachs' catalogue. Only the last four of these, nos. 1418–1421, contain eclipses from the Neo-Babylonian period. But as LBAT 1417 contains eclipses from the reigns of Shamash-shum-ukin and Kandalanu, the last two Babylonian kings prior to the Neo-Babylonian period (cf. sections A-2 and B above), this text, too, is an important witness to the length of the Neo-Babylonian period.

A discussion of four of these texts and their implications for the Neo-Babylonian chronology of the Watch Tower Society is presented in the following section.⁴²

40 A. J. Sachs, *op. cit.* (1955; see note 36 above), pp. 223ff.

41 A. Aaboe, J. P. Britton, J. A. Henderson, O. Neugebauer, and A. J. Sachs, "Saros Cycle Dates and Related Babylonian Astronomical Texts," in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 81:6 (1991), pp. 1-75. The Saros cycle texts published are those designated LBAT 1422, 1423, 1424, 1425, and 1428 in Sachs catalogue. As these texts belong to a separate small group of *theoretical* texts, none of them are used in the present study. (See J. M. Steele in H. Hunger, ADT V, 2001, p. 390.)

42 A discussion of LBAT 1418 is not included here, as this is one of the theoretical texts referred to in note 41 above. It contains no royal names, just year numbers. (Royal names are usually mentioned only with a ruler's first year.) Still, as pointed out by Professor Hermann Hunger, "the records of lunar eclipses are detailed enough that they can be dated." The preserved part of the text gives years and months of lunar eclipse possibilities at 18-year intervals from 647 to 574 B.C.E. The eclipses dated in the text at 18-year intervals to years "2", "20", "16", and "13", for example, correspond to eclipses in years "2" and "20" of *Kandalanu* (646/45 and 628/27 B.C.E.), year "16" of *Nabopolassar* (610/09), and year "13" of *Nebuchadnezzar* (592/91). Thus LBAT 1418 strongly supports the chronology established for the reigns of these kings.—A transliteration and translation of this tablet is published by Hunger, ADT V (2001), pp. 88, 89.



The lunar eclipse table LBAT 1417

The tablet records four lunar eclipses at 18-year intervals dated to the 3rd year of Sennacherib, the accession year and 18th year of Shamashshumukin, and the 16th year of Kandalanu. The four eclipses may be shown to have occurred on April 22, 686; May 2, 668; May 13, 650, and on May 23, 632 B.C.E. – Published by A. J. Sachs, *Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1955), p. 223.

C-1: The lunar eclipse tablet LBAT 1417

LBAT 1417 records four lunar eclipses at 18-year intervals from 686 to 632 B.C.E. It seems to be a part of the same tablet as the previous two texts in the series, LBAT 1415 and 1416. The first entry records an eclipse from Sennacherib’s third year of reign in Babylonia,⁴³ which may be identified with the eclipse that took place on April 22, 686 B.C.E. Unfortunately, the year number is damaged and only partially legible.

The next entry, dated to the accession year of Shamashshumukin, gives this information:

Accession year Shamash-shum-ukin,
 Ayyaru, 5 months,
 which passed by.
 At 40° after sunrise.

43 Babylonian chronicles and king lists show that the Assyrian king Sennacherib also, for two periods, was the actual ruler of Babylonia, the first time for two years (dated to 704-703 B.C.E.), and the second time for eight years (dated to 688-681 B.C.E.). Our text evidently refers to the second period.

At a cursory glance this report seems to give very little information. But there is more in the few brief lines than one might possibly imagine.

The Babylonian astronomers had developed such an abbreviated technical terminology in describing the various celestial phenomena that their reports assumed an almost stenographic character. The Akkadian phrase translated “which passed by” (*shá DIB*), for example, was used in connection with a *predicted* eclipse to indicate that it *would not be observable*.

As Hermann Hunger explains, “the eclipse was known to the Babylonians as occurring at a time when the moon could not be observed. It does *not* show that they looked for an eclipse and were disappointed that it did not occur.”⁴⁴ The Babylonians had not only computed this eclipse some time in advance by means of a known cycle (perhaps the Saros cycle); their computation also showed it would not be observable from the Babylonian horizon.

This is also implied in the next line, “At 40° after sunrise.” 40° is a reference to the movement of the celestial sphere, which, due to the rotation of the earth, is seen to make a full circle in 24 hours. The Babylonians divided up this period into 360 time units (degrees) called *USH*, each of which corresponded to four of our minutes. The text, therefore, tells us that the eclipse had been calculated to begin 160 minutes (40 *USH* x 4) after sunrise, which means it would take place in the daytime and thus not be observable in Babylonia.

Modern astronomical calculations confirm this. If Shamash-shumukin’s first year was 667/66 B.C.E. as is generally held (see above, section A-2), his accession year was 668/67. The eclipse is dated to Ayyaru, the second month, which began in April or May. (The “5 months” indicates the time interval from the previous eclipse.)

Was there an eclipse of the type described in our text at that time of the year in 668 B.C.E.? Yes, there was.

Modern lunar eclipse catalogues show that such an eclipse took place on May 2, 668 B.C.E. (Julian calendar). It began at about 9:20 local time*, which only roughly agrees with the Babylonian computation that it would begin 160 minutes—2 hours and 40 minutes—after

44 Letter Hunger–Jonsson, dated October 21, 1989. (Cf. also note 15 above.) In a later letter (dated June 26, 1990) Hunger adds: “The technical expression if the observer waits for an eclipse and finds that it does not occur is ‘not seen when watched for’.”

* Note: Times listed in this discussion are according to a 24-hour format, rather than the 12 hour a.m./p.m format.

sunrise. As sunrise occurred at about 5:20, the error in computation was ca. 1 hour and 20 minutes.⁴⁵

In the chronology of the Watch Tower Society the accession year of Shamashshumukin is moved back twenty years to 688/87 B.C.E. No lunar eclipses occurred in April or May that year, but there was a total one on June 10, 688 B.C.E. Contrary to the eclipse recorded in our text, however, this one *was observable* in Babylonia. It is, therefore, an impossible alternative.

The next entry in the text is dated to the eighteenth year of Shamashshumukin, that is, 650/49 B.C.E. This eclipse, too, was a computed one, predicted to “pass by” in the second month. It would begin about four hours (60 USH) “before sunset”. According to modern calculations the eclipse took place on May 13, 650 B.C.E. The canon of Liu and Fiala shows it began at 16:25 and ended at 18:19, about half an hour before sunset at that time of the year.⁴⁶

According to the chronology of the Watch Tower Society this eclipse occurred twenty years earlier, in 670 B.C.E. No lunar eclipses took place in April or May that year, but there was a total one on June 22, 670 B.C.E. However, it *did not* occur “before sunset”, as did the one recorded in our text, but early in the forenoon, beginning about 7:30. So, again, it does not fit.

The next and last entry in LBAT 1417 is dated to the sixteenth year of Kandalanu. The eclipse recorded was observed in Babylonia and several important details are given:

(Year) 16 Kandalanu
 (month) Simanu, 5 months, day 15. 2 Fingers (?)
 on the northeast side covered (?)
 On the north it became bright. The north wind [blew]
 20° onset, maximal phase, [and clearing.]
 Behind Antares (α Scorpio) [it was eclipsed.]

As indicated by the question marks and the square brackets, the text is somewhat damaged at places, but the information preserved is

45 See Bao-Lin and Alan D. Fiala, *Canon of Lunar Eclipses 1500 B.C.—A.D. 3000* (Richmond, Virginia: Willman-Bell, Inc., 1992), p. 66, No. 2010. As demonstrated in Dr. J. M. Steele's detailed study of the Babylonian lunar eclipses, the accuracy of Babylonian timings of *observed* eclipses was within about half an hour as compared to modern calculations, while the accuracy of the timings of *predicted* eclipses usually was about an hour and half. It should be noted that before about 570 B.C.E. the Babylonians also rounded off their timings to the nearest 5-10 USH (20-40 minutes). Although rough, these timings are close enough for the eclipses to be identified. (See John M. Steele, *Observations and Predictions of Eclipse Times by Early Astronomers*, Dordrecht, etc: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000, pp. 57-75, 231-235.) For further comments on the identification of ancient lunar eclipses, see the Appendix for chapter four: “Some comments on ancient lunar eclipses”.

46 Liu/Fiala, *op. cit.*, p. 67, No 2056. Steele's computation shows it began at 16:45.

sufficient for identifying the eclipse. It took place on “day 15” of Simanu, the third month, which began in May or June. “2 fingers” means it was partial, with only two twelfths of the moon’s diameter being eclipsed. The total duration of the eclipse was 20°, that is, 80 minutes.

If Kandalanu’s sixteenth year began on Nisan 1, 632 B.C.E., as is generally held (compare above, sections A-2 and B), we want to know if there was a lunar eclipse of this type in the third month of that year.

Modern calculations show there was. According to the eclipse canon of Liu and Fiala the eclipse began on May 23, 632 B.C.E. at 23:51 and lasted until 1:07 on May 24, which means its total duration was about 76 minutes, that is, very close to the period given in the text. The same canon gives the magnitude as 0.114.⁴⁷

These data are in good agreement with the ancient record. In the chronology of the Watch Tower Society, however, this eclipse should be looked for twenty years earlier, in May, June, or possibly July, 652 B.C.E. It is true that there was an eclipse on July 2 that year, but in contrast to the *partial* one recorded in our text it was *total*. But as it began about 15:00 no phase of it was observable in Babylonia.

In summary, LBAT 1417 records four lunar eclipses at successive 18-year intervals (18 years and nearly 11 days), all of which may be easily identified with those of April 21, 686; May 2, 668; May 13, 650, and May 23, 632 B.C.E. The four eclipse records are interlaced by the successive Saros cycles into a pattern that fit no other series of years in the seventh century B.C.E.⁴⁸

The last three dates are thus established as the absolute dates of the accession year and the eighteenth year of Shamashshumukin and the sixteenth year of Kandalanu, respectively. The Watch Tower Society’s attempt to add twenty years to the Neo-Babylonian era, in that way moving the reigns of the earlier kings twenty years backwards in time, is once again effectively blocked by a Babylonian astronomical tablet, this time by the lunar eclipse text LBAT 1417.

C-2: The lunar eclipse tablet LBAT 1419

LBAT 1419 records an uninterrupted series of lunar eclipses at

47 Liu/Fiala, *op. cit.*, p. 68, No. 2103.

48 It is to be noted that the Saros cycle does not comprise an *even* number of days; it consists of 6585 1/3 days. The excess third part of a day (or c:a 7.5 hours) implies that the subsequent eclipses in the series are not repeated *at the same time of the day*, but about 7.5 hours later after each successive cycle. The duration and magnitude, too, are changing from one eclipse to the next in the cycle. An eclipse, therefore, cannot be mixed up with the previous or the next ones in the series. — See the discussion by Beaulieu and Britton, *op. cit.* (note 37 above), pp. 78-84.

18-year intervals from 609/08 to 447/46 B.C.E. The first entries, which evidently recorded eclipses that occurred in September 609 and March 591 B.C.E., are damaged. Royal names and year numbers are illegible. However, two of the following entries are clearly dated to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (the words in parentheses are added to elucidate the laconic reports):

14th (year of) Nebukadnezar,
month VI, (eclipse) which was omitted [literally, “passed by”]
at sunrise,

.....
32nd (year of) Nebukadnezar,
month VI, (eclipse) which was omitted.
At 35° (= 35 USH, i.e. 140 minutes) before sunset.

The royal name in the original text is written as “Kudurri”, which is an abbreviation of *Nabu-kudurri-usur*, the transcribed Akkadian form of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar’s fourteenth and thirty-second years are generally dated to 591/90 and 573/72 B.C.E., respectively. The two eclipses recorded, one Saros cycle apart, both took place in the sixth month (Ululu), which began in August or September. Both eclipses had been calculated in advance, and the Babylonians knew that none of them would be observable in Babylonia. The first eclipse began “at sunrise”, the second 140 minutes (35 USH) “before sunset.” Thus both of them occurred in the daytime in Babylonia.

This is confirmed by modern calculations. The first eclipse occurred on September 15, 591 B.C.E. It began about 6:00. The second took place in the afternoon on September 25, 573 B.C.E.⁴⁹ Both eclipses, then, fit in very well with the chronology established for the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

In the chronology of the Watch Tower Society, however, the two eclipses should be sought for twenty years earlier, in 611 and 593 B.C.E. But no eclipses that fit those described in the text occurred in the autumn of any of those years.⁵⁰

The next entry, which records the subsequent eclipse in the 18-year cycle, gives the following detailed information:

49 Liu and Fiala, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70, Nos. 2210 and 2256. The entries also record eclipses in the twelfth month of both years, but the text is severely damaged at both places.

50 On Sept. 26, 611 and Oct. 7, 593 B.C.E. there were so-called *penumbral* eclipses, i.e., the moon passed through the half-shadow (*penumbra*) outside the shadow (*umbra*) of the earth. (Liu & Fiala, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69, nos. 2158 and 2205.) Such passages are hardly observable even at night, and the Babylonians evidently recorded them as “passed by”. The first eclipse (Sept. 26, 611 B.C.E.) began *well after sunset, not at sunrise* as is explicitly stated in the text. The penumbral phase of the second eclipse (Oct. 7, 593 B.C.E.) began *well before sunrise, not before sunset* as stated in the text. Both alternatives, therefore, are definitely out of question anyway.

Month VII, the 13th, in 17° on the east side
all (of the moon) was covered. 28° maximal phase.
In 20° it cleared from east to west.
Its eclipse was red.
Behind the rump of Aries it was eclipsed.
During onset, the north wind blew, during clearing, the west wind.
At 55° before sunrise.

As stated in the text, this eclipse took place on the thirteenth day of the seventh month (Tashritu), which began in September or October. The royal name and the year number unfortunately are missing.

Yet, as Professor Hunger points out, “the eclipse can nevertheless be identified with certainty from the observations given.”⁵¹ The various details about the eclipse—its *magnitude* (total), *duration* (the total phase lasting 112 minutes), and *position* (behind the rump of Aries)—clearly identify it with the eclipse that took place in the night of Oct. 6-7, 555 B.C.E.⁵²

According to the generally established chronology for the Neo-Babylonian period, this eclipse took place in the first year of Nabonidus, which began on Nisan 1, 555 B.C.E. Although the royal name and year number are missing, it is of the utmost importance to notice that the text places this eclipse *one Saros cycle after* the eclipse *in the thirty-second year of Nebuchnezzar*. As the last eclipse may be securely dated in 555 B.C.E., it at once also places Nebuchadnezzar’s thirty-second year eighteen years earlier, in 573 B.C.E.

Consequently, all three eclipses in our text concur in establishing 591 and 573 B.C.E. as the absolute dates of Nebuchadnezzar’s 14th and 32nd regnal years, respectively.

The Saros cycle text LBAT 1419 thus provides yet another independent evidence against 607 B.C.E. as the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. If, as is established by the text, his thirty-second year was 573/72 B.C.E. and his fourteenth year was 591/90 B.C.E., then his first year was 604/03, and his eighteenth year, in which he desolated Jerusalem, was 587/86 B.C.E.

51 Letter Hunger-Jonsson, dated October 21, 1989.

52 According to the calculations of Liu and Fiala the eclipse, which was total, began on October 6 at 21:21 and ended on October 7 at 1:10. The total phase lasted from 22:27 to 0:04, i.e. for 97 minutes, which is not far from the figure given in the text, 28 USH (112 minutes).—Liu and Fiala, *op. cit.*, p. 70, no. 2301.

C-3: The lunar eclipse tablet LBAT 1420

Instead of recording eclipses at 18-year intervals, LBAT 1420 contains *annual* eclipse reports. All eclipses in the text are from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, dating from his first year (604/03 B.C.E.) to at least his twenty-ninth year (576/75 B.C.E.).

The first entry, which records two eclipses that “passed by” (that is, though correctly predicted would not be observable), is damaged and the year number is illegible. But the last part of Nebuchadnezzar’s name is preserved:

[(Year) 1 Nebuchadn]ezzar, (month) *Simanu*.

The name of the king is not repeated in the subsequent entries, indicating that the king is the same during the whole period. This is also confirmed by the continuous series of increasing year numbers right until the last year preserved in the text, “(Year) 29”.

The entries recording eclipses in the period 603-595 B.C.E. are very damaged, too, and the year numbers for this period are missing. The first entry in which the year number is preserved records two eclipses from the eleventh year:

(Year) 11, (month) Ayyaru [... ...] 10(?) *USH* after sunset and it was total. 10 [+x ...] (Month) Arahsamnu, which passed by. Addaru₂.

The eleventh year of Nebuchadnezzar began on Nisan 1, 594 B.C.E. “Addaru₂” is added to indicate that there was an intercalary month at the end of the year.

There is no problem in finding both of these eclipses. Ayyaru, the second month, began in April or May, and Arahsamnu, the eighth month, began in October or November. The first eclipse occurred on May 23, and the second one on November 17. The eclipse canon of Liu and Fiala confirms that the first eclipse was total and was observable in Babylonia, as stated in the text. It began at 20:11 and ended at 23:48. The second eclipse “passed by” (was unobservable) as it occurred in the daytime. According to the canon of Liu and Fiala it began at 7.08 and ended at 9:50.⁵³

Most of the year numbers from the twelfth to the seventeenth year (593/92-588/87 B.C.E.) are legible.⁵⁴ Thirteen lunar eclipses are de-

53 Liu & Fiala, *op. cit.*, p. 69, nos. 2201 and 2202.

54 In the entries for the fourteenth and fifteenth years the year numbers are damaged and only partially legible. But as these entries stand between those for years “13” and “16”, the damaged numbers obviously were “14” and “15”.

scribed and dated in this period, eight of which “passed by” and five were observed. Modern calculations confirm that all these eclipses occurred in the period 593–588 B.C.E.

After the seventeenth year there is a gap in the record until the twenty-fourth year. The entry for that year records two eclipses, but the text is damaged and most of it is illegible. From then on, however, year numbers and also most of the text are well preserved.

These entries contain annual records of a total of nine eclipses (five observable and four that “passed by”) dating from the twenty-fifth to the twenty-ninth year (580/79–576/75 B.C.E.). There are no difficulties in identifying any of these eclipses. They all occurred in the period 580–575 B.C.E. It would be tiresome and useless to expose the reader to a detailed examination of all these reports. The entry for year “25” may suffice as an example:

(Year) 25, (month) Abu, 1 1/2 *beru* after sunset.
(Month) Shabatu, it occurred in the evening watch.

Abu, the fifth Babylonian month, began in July or August. The Babylonians divided our 24-hour day into twelve parts called *beru*. One *beru*, therefore, was two hours. The first eclipse is said to have occurred 1 1/2 *beru*, that is, three hours, after sunset. As Nebuchadnezzar’s twenty-fifth year is dated to 580/79 B.C.E., this eclipse should be found in July or August that year, about three hours after sunset.

The eclipse is not difficult to identify. According to the canon of Liu and Fiala it was a total eclipse which began on August 14, 580 B.C.E. at 21:58 and ended at 1:31 on August 15.⁵⁵

The next eclipse occurred six months later in Shabatu, the eleventh month, which began in January or February. It is said to have occurred “in the evening watch” (the first of the three watches of the night).

This eclipse, too, is easy to find. It took place on February 8, 579 B.C.E. and lasted from 18.08 to 20.22. according to the canon of Liu and Fiala.⁵⁶

In the chronology of the Watch Tower Society the twenty-fifth year of Nebuchadnezzar is dated twenty years earlier, in 600/599 B.C.E. But no lunar eclipses observable in Babylonia occurred in 600 B.C.E. And although there was an eclipse in the night of February 19–20, 599 B.C.E., it did not occur “in the evening watch” as the one reported in our text.⁵⁷

55 Liu & Fiala, *op. cit.*, p. 69, no. 2238. Sunset occurred at ca. 19:00.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 69, no. 2239.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 69, no. 2188. The eclipse began at 23:30 and ended at 2:25. There were four eclipses in 600 B.C.E. (Liu & Fiala, nos. 2184–87), but all these were *penumbral* and thus not observable (see note 50 above).

Details on some *two dozens of lunar eclipses*, dated to specific years and months in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, are preserved on LBAT 1420. Not one of them is found to agree with the Watch Tower Society's chronology for the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

Together these lunar eclipses form an irregular but very distinct pattern of events scattered over the first twenty-nine years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Only on the assumption that his reign began in 604 B.C.E. do we find a far-reaching correspondence between this pattern and the celestial events that gave rise to it. But if Nebuchadnezzar's reign is moved back one, two, five, ten, or twenty years, this correlation between the records and reality *immediately dissolves*. LBAT 1420 alone, therefore, suffices to disprove completely the idea that the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar should be dated to 607 B.C.E.

C-4: The lunar eclipse tablet LBAT 1421

The preserved part of LBAT 1421 records two eclipses observed in Babylonia in the sixth and twelfth month of year "42", evidently of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar:

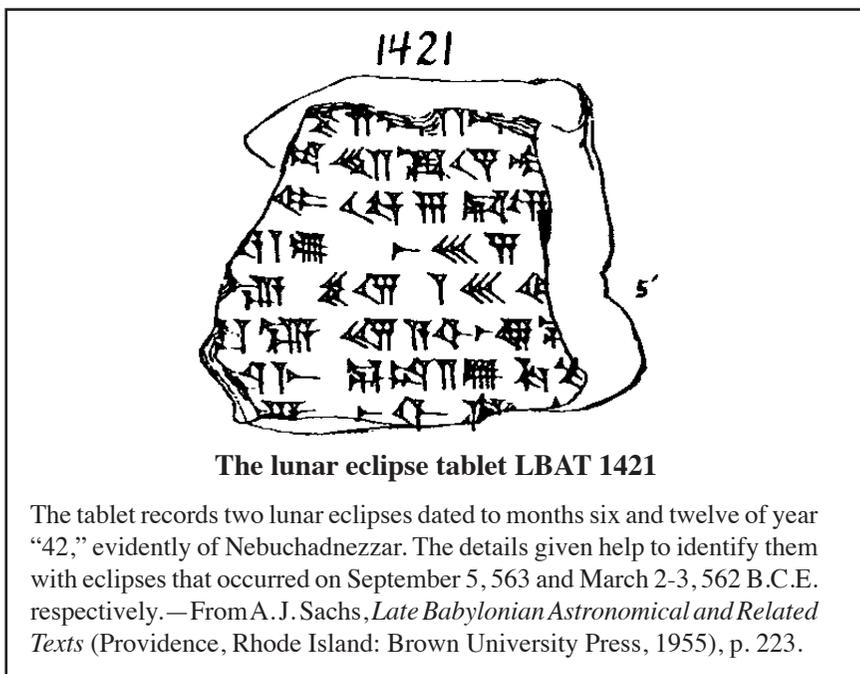
(Year) 42, (month) Ululu, (day) 14. It rose eclipsed [...] and became bright. 6 (USH) to become bright.
At 35° [before sunset].

(Month) Addaru, (day) 15, 1,30° after sunset [...].
25° duration of maximal phase. In 18° it [became bright.]
West(wind) went. 2 cubits below
γ Virginis eclipsed
[... ...]

Provided that these eclipses occurred in the forty-second year of Nebuchadnezzar—and there was no other Babylonian king ruling that long in the sixth, seventh, or eighth centuries B.C.E.—they should be looked for in 563/62 B.C.E. And there is no difficulty in identifying them: The first, dated in the sixth month, occurred on September 5, 563 B.C.E., and the second one, dated in the twelfth month, occurred on March 2-3, 562 B.C.E.

The first eclipse "rose eclipsed", meaning that it began some time before sunset, so that when the moon rose (at about 18:30 at that time of the year), it was already eclipsed. This agrees with modern calculations, which show that the eclipse began about 17:00 and lasted until about 19:00.⁵⁸

58 Liu & Fiala, *op. cit.*, p. 70, no. 2281.



The canon of Liu and Fiala confirms that the second eclipse was total. “1,30° [six hours] after sunset” probably refers to the beginning of the total phase, which began after midnight, at 0:19, and lasted until 2:03, i.e. it lasted for 104 minutes.⁵⁹ This is in good agreement with our text, which gives the duration of the maximal phase as 25 USH, that is, 100 minutes.

In the chronology of the Watch Tower Society, Nebuchadnezzar’s forty-second year is dated to 583/82 B.C.E. But no eclipses of the type described in our text occurred in that year.

A possible alternative to the first one might have been that of October 16, 583 B.C.E., had it not began too late—at 19:45 according to Liu and Fiala—to be observed at moonrise (which occurred at about 17:30). And as for the second eclipse, there were no eclipses at all that could be observed in Babylonia in 582 B.C.E.⁶⁰

The lunar eclipse texts presented above provide four additional independent evidences for the length of the Neo-Babylonian period.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70, no. 2282. Sunset began ca. 18:00.

⁶⁰ In 582 B.C.E. there were four lunar eclipses, but all of them were penumbral. — Liu & Fiala, *op. cit.*, p. 69, nos. 2231-34.

The first text (LBAT 1417) records lunar eclipses from the accession year and eighteenth year of Shamash-shum-ukin and the sixteenth year of Kandalanu, turning these years into absolute dates that effectively block any attempt to add even one year to the Neo-Babylonian period, far less twenty.

The other three texts (LBAT 1419, 1420, and 1421) records dozens of lunar eclipses dated to various years within the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, thus time and again turning his reign into an absolute chronology. It is like fastening a painting to a wall with dozens of nails all over it, although but one would suffice.

Similarly, it would have sufficed to establish only one of Nebuchadnezzar's regnal years as an absolute date to overthrow the idea that his eighteenth year began in 607 B.C.E.

Before concluding this section on the lunar eclipse texts, it seems necessary to forestall an anticipated objection to the evidence provided by these texts. As the Babylonian astronomers as early as in the seventh century B.C.E. were able to *compute in advance* certain astronomical events such as eclipses, could it be that they also, in the later Seleucid era, were able to *retrocalculate* lunar eclipses and attach them to the chronology established for the earlier centuries? Could the lunar eclipse texts simply be the results of such a procedure?⁶¹

It is certainly true that the various cycles used by the Babylonians for *predicting* eclipses just as well could be used for *retrocalculating* eclipses, and there is a particular small group of tablets showing that Seleucid astronomers did extrapolate such cycles backwards in time.⁶²

However, the observational texts record a number of phenomena that were impossible for the Babylonians to predict or retrocalculate. Of the records in the diaries and planetary texts Professor N. M.

61 This idea was held by A. T. Olmstead, who in an article published back in 1937 (in *Classical Philology*, Vol. XXXII, pp. 5f.) criticized Kugler's use of some of the eclipse texts. As explained later by A. J. Sachs, Olmstead "completely misunderstood the nature of a group of Babylonian astronomical texts which Kugler used. He was under the misapprehension that they were *computed* at a later date and hence of dubious historical value; in reality, they are compilations of extracts taken directly from authentic, contemporary Astronomical Diaries and must therefore be handled with great respect."—A. J. Sachs & D. J. Wiseman, "A Babylonian King List of the Hellenistic Period," *Iraq*, Vol. XVI (1954), p. 207, note 1.

62 These texts do not record any observations at all and are, therefore, classified as *theoretical texts*. They are quite different from the diaries and the eclipse texts discussed above. Five such theoretical texts are known, four of which were published by Aaboe *et al* in 1991 (see note 41 above). Two of these are known as the "Saros Canon" (LBAT 1428) and the "Solar Saros" (LBAT 1430). The fifth tablet is LBAT 1418, described in note 42 above.—See J. M. Steele in Hunger, ADT V (2001), p. 390.

Swerdlow points out that, although the distances of planets from normal stars could be predicted, “Conjunctions of planets with the moon and other planets, with their distances, could neither be calculated by the ephemerides nor predicted by periodicities.”⁶³ With respect to lunar eclipses, the Babylonians could predict and retrocalculate their occurrences, “but none of the Babylonian methods could have allowed them to calculate circumstances such as the direction of the eclipse shadow, the visibility of planets during the eclipse, and certainly not the direction of the wind during the eclipse, which we find in early reports.”⁶⁴

Thus, although the Babylonians were able to calculate certain astronomical phenomena, the observational texts record a number of details connected with the observations that they were unable to predict or retrocalculate. This disproves conclusively the idea proposed by some that the data may have been calculated backwards from a later period.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter the length of the Neo-Babylonian era was firmly established by seven different lines of evidence. All of them were based upon ancient Babylonian cuneiform texts such as chronicles, kinglists, royal inscriptions, and tens of thousands of economic, administrative, and legal documents from the Neo-Babylonian period.

In this chapter *another seven independent evidences* have been presented. All of these are based on ancient Babylonian *astronomical* texts, which provide a whole string of absolute dates from the sixth and seventh centuries B.C.E. These tablets establish—over and over again—the *absolute chronology* of the Neo-Babylonian era:

63 N. M. Swerdlow, *The Babylonian Theory of the Planets* (Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 23, 173.—The diaries also record a number of other phenomena that could not be calculated, such as solar halos, river levels, and bad weather—clouds, rain, fog, mist, hail, lightning, winds, etc. Some data in the diaries were computed because of bad weather, but most are observations. This is also evident from the Akkadian name of the diaries engraved at the end of their edges: *natsaru sha ginê*, “regular watching”.

64 Communication J. M. Steele-Jonsson, dated March 27, 2003. As pointed out in footnote 45 above, there is also a clear difference of accuracy in the timings given for observed and predicted eclipses.

(1) *The astronomical diary VAT 4956*

The diary VAT 4956 contains about thirty completely verified observed astronomical positions from Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh regnal year.

Such a combination of astronomical positions is not duplicated again in thousands of years. Consequently, there is only one year which fits this situation: 568/67 B.C.E.

If this was Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh regnal year, as is twice stated on this tablet, then 587/86 B.C.E. must have been his eighteenth year, in which he desolated Jerusalem.

(2) *The astronomical diary B.M. 32312*

B.M. 32312 is the *oldest preserved astronomical diary*. It records astronomical observations that enable scholars to date this tablet to 652/51 B.C.E.

A historical remark in the text, repeated in the Babylonian chronicle B.M. 86379 (the "Akitu Chronicle") shows this to have been the sixteenth year of Shamashshumukin. The diary, then, fixes his twenty-year reign to 667-648 B.C.E., his successor Kandalanu's twenty-two-year reign to 647-626, Nabopolassar's twenty-one-year reign to 625-605, and Nebuchadnezzar's forty-three-year reign to 604-562 B.C.E.

This, again, sets Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year and the destruction of Jerusalem at 587/86 B.C.E.

(3) *The Saturn tablet B.M. 76738+76813*

The Saturn tablet records *a successive series of positions of the planet Saturn at its first and last appearances*, dated to the first fourteen years of Kandalanu.

Such a pattern of positions, fixed to specific dates in the Babylonian lunar calendar, is not repeated again in more than seventeen centuries.

This text, then, again fixes Kandalanu's twenty-two-year reign to 647-626 B.C.E., Nabopolassar's twenty-one-year reign to 625-605, and Nebuchadnezzar's reign to 604-562 B.C.E.

(4) *The lunar eclipse tablet LBAT 1417*

LBAT 1417 records *four lunar eclipses*, each succeeding the other at intervals of 18 years and nearly 11 days, an eclipse period known as the *Saros cycle*.

The eclipses are dated to the third year of Sennacherib's reign in Babylonia, to the accession year and the eighteenth year of Shamashshumukin, and to the sixteenth year of Kandalanu, respectively.

The four interrelated eclipses may be clearly identified with a series of eclipses that occurred in 686, 668, 650 and 632 B.C.E. This tablet, therefore, once again fixes the absolute chronology for the reigns of Shamashshumukin and Kandalanu, and also—indirectly—for the reigns of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar.

(5) The lunar eclipse tablet LBAT 1419

LBAT 1419 contains reports of an *uninterrupted series of lunar eclipses* at 18-year intervals *directly from the Neo-Babylonian era itself*.

Two of the eclipses are dated to the fourteenth and thirty-second years of Nebuchadnezzar. They may be identified with eclipses that occurred in 591 and 573 B.C.E., respectively, confirming again at these points the chronology established for the reign of this king.

Although the royal name and year number are missing in the report on the next eclipse in the 18-year series, the very detailed information makes it easy to identify it with the eclipse that occurred on October 6-7, 555 B.C.E. This date, therefore, confirms and adds further strength to the two earlier dates in the 18-year series, 573 and 591 B.C.E.

As these years correspond to Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-second and fourteenth years, respectively, his eighteenth year is, of course, once again fixed to 587/86 B.C.E. by this tablet.

(6) The lunar eclipse tablet LBAT 1420

LBAT 1420 gives an *annual record of lunar eclipses* from the first to the twenty-ninth years of Nebuchadnezzar, except for a gap between his eighteenth and twenty-third years. The entries in which regnal year numbers are preserved—about a dozen—give details on some *two dozens of eclipses*, all of which are found exactly in the B.C.E. years that has been established earlier for the regnal years mentioned in the text.

As this specific compound of dated lunar eclipses does not tally with any corresponding series of eclipses that occurred in the immediate preceding decades, this tablet alone suffices to establish the absolute chronology of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.⁶⁵

65 This tablet "was probably compiled shortly after -575 [576 BCE]."—J. M. Steele in Hunger, ADT V, p. 391.

(7) *The lunar eclipse tablet LBAT 1421*

LBAT 1421 records *two eclipses* dated in the sixth and twelfth months of year “42”, evidently of Nebuchadnezzar, generally dated to 563/62 B.C.E. And both eclipses are also actually found in these months of that year. But no eclipses of the type recorded in the text occurred in 583/82 B.C.E.—the date of Nebuchadnezzar’s forty-second year in the chronology of the Watch Tower Society. This tablet, therefore, provides an additional proof of the falsity of that chronology.

(8-11) *Another four astronomical tablets*

The seven astronomical texts discussed above provide more than enough evidence against the Watch Tower Society’s 607 B.C.E. date. And yet this is not all. Another four texts have recently been published that will be described only briefly here. Translations of three of these are published in Hunger, ADT V (2001).

The first is LBAT 1415 which, as mentioned on page 174 above, is part of the same tablet as LBAT 1417. It records lunar eclipses dated to year 1 of Bel-ibni (702 B.C.E.), year 5, evidently of Sennacherib (684 B.C.E.), and year 2, evidently of Shamash-shum-ukin (666 B.C.E.).

The second is lunar eclipse text no. 5 in Hunger, ADT V. It is badly damaged and the royal name is missing, but some historical remarks in the text shows it is from the reign of Nabopolassar. One of the eclipses described is dated to year 16 and may be identified with the eclipse of September 15, 610 B.C.E.

The third is text no. 52 in Hunger, ADT V. This is a planetary text containing over a dozen legible records of the positions of Saturn, Mars, and Mercury dated to years 14, 17, and 19 of Shamash-shum-ukin (654, 651, and 649 B.C.E.), years 1, 12, and 16 of Kandalanu (647, 636, and 632 B.C.E.), and years 7, 12, 13, and 14 of Nabopolassar (619, 614, 613, and 612 B.C.E.). Like some of the previous texts discussed above, these three texts effectively prevent all attempts at lengthening the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian period.

The fourth is a planetary tablet, SBTU IV 171, which records first and last appearances and stationary points of Saturn in years 28, 29, 30, and 31 of an unknown king.⁶⁶ However, as Professor Hermann Hunger has demonstrated, the year numbers combined with the position of Saturn in the constellation of Pabilsag (roughly Sagittarius)

66 Hermann Hunger, “Saturnbeobachtungen aus der Zeit Nebukadnezars II.,” *Assyriologica et Semitica* (=AOAT, Band 252), (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), pp. 189-192.

exclude all alternatives in the first millennium B.C.E. except years 28-31 of Nebuchadnezzar, fixing these to 577/76– 574/73 B.C.E. Again, this establishes his 18th year as 587/86 B.C.E.

As has been clearly seen, the Watch Tower Society's interpretation of the "Gentile Times" requires that these have a starting date of 607 B.C.E., their claimed date for the fall of Jerusalem. Since that event took place in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year, that regnal year must also be dated as of 607 B.C.E. This creates a gap of twenty years when compared with all existing ancient historical records, since these place the start of Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year in 587 B.C.E. How can this twenty-year gap possibly be explained?

In this chapter it has been demonstrated that the ten astronomical texts presented establish the absolute chronology of the Neo-Babylonian period at a number of points, especially within the 43-year-reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Their combined witness proves beyond all reasonable doubt that his reign cannot be moved backwards in time even one year, far less twenty.

Together with the evidence presented in Chapter 3, therefore, we now have *seventeen different evidences*, each of which in its own way overthrows the Watch Tower Society's dating of Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year to 607 B.C.E., showing it to have begun twenty years later, that is, in 587 B.C.E.

Indeed, few reigns in ancient history may be dated with such conclusiveness as that of the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.

Suppose for a moment that *Berosus'* figures for the reigns of the Neo-Babylonian kings contain an error of twenty years, as is required by the chronology of the Watch Tower Society. Then the compiler(s) of the *Royal Canon* must have made exactly the same mistake, evidently independently of Berosus!

It might be argued, though, that both simply repeated an error contained in the *sources* they used, namely the Neo-Babylonian chronicles. Then the scribes of Nabonidus, too, who possibly used the same sources, would have had to have dropped twenty years from the reign of the same king (or kings) when they made the inscriptions of the *Hillah stele* and the *Adad-guppi' stele*.

Is it really likely, however, that those scribes, who *wrote right during the Neo-Babylonian era*, did not know the lengths of the reigns of the kings under whom they lived, especially since those reigns also functioned as calendar years by which they dated different events?

If they really made such a strange mistake, how is it possible that contemporary scribes *in Egypt* also made the same mistake, dropping the same period of twenty years when making inscriptions on *death*

stelae and other documents?

Curiously then, the Babylonian astronomers must also have regularly made similar “mistakes” when dating the observations recorded in VAT 4956, LBAT 1420, SBTU IV 171, and also other tablets from which later astronomers abstracted their *Saros cycle eclipse records*—unless of course changes were purposely made by copyists in the Seleucid era, as the Watch Tower Society posits.

Still more incredible is the idea that scribes and astronomers could remove twenty years from the Neo-Babylonian era several years *prior to* that era—as is shown by the oldest diary, *B.M. 32312*, the lunar eclipse tablets *LBAT 1415+1416+1417* and *ADT V, no. 5*, the *Saturn tablet B.M. 76738+76813*, and the planetary tablet *ADT V, no. 52*—all the five of which inexorably block all attempts at lengthening the Neo-Babylonian period.

But the most remarkable “coincidence” is this: *Tens of thousands* of dated economic, administrative and legal documents have been excavated from the Neo-Babylonian period, covering every year of this period—except, as the Watch Tower Society would have it, for a period of twenty years from which *not one tablet has been found*.

Again, most curiously, according to this logic, that period happens to be exactly the same as that lost through a series of other “mistakes” by scribes in Babylon and Egypt, and by later copyists and historians.

Either there was an international agreement during several centuries to erase this twenty-year period from the recorded history of the world—or it never existed! If such an international “plot” ever took place it was so successful that of all the tens of thousands of documents unearthed from the Neo-Babylonian era there is *not one, not even a line in any of them*, that indicates that such a twenty-year period ever existed. We can safely conclude, then, that the Watch Tower Society’s chronology is unquestionably in error.

But if this is the conclusion of our study, how are we to harmonize this fact with the Biblical prophecy of the seventy years, during which the land of Judah and Jerusalem would lay desolate according to the Watch Tower Society? And how are we to view the year 1914, the supposed terminal date for the times of the Gentiles according to the prophetic time scale of the Watch Tower Society? Do not world events clearly show that Bible prophecies have been fulfilled since that year? These questions will be dealt with in the following chapters.

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.

THE 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*.¹

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.²

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 1913.³ 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.⁴

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.⁵

- 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.⁶ 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.⁷

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)⁸

- 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*.”⁹

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*.”¹⁰ 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. Weinfeld (eds.), *History, Historiography and Interpretation* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1984), p. 97.

first of all meant *vassalage*.¹¹ 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*.¹² 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*.¹³

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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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:¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

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.²⁰

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.

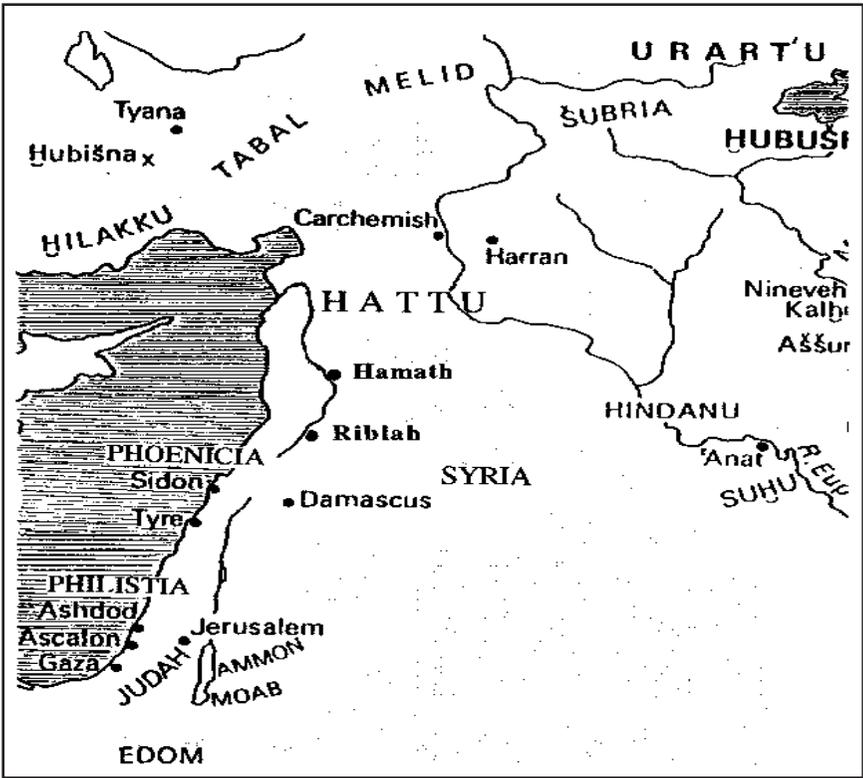
Early in his first regnal year (in June, 604 B.C.E.) Nebuchadnezzar led another campaign to Hattu to maintain his rule over the conquered territories. Similar campaigns are also recorded for the following years. Clearly, the nations in the Hattu area became vassals to Babylon very soon after the battle 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.²¹

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.²²

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.²³

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.²⁴ 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*.²⁵

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	נֹאמַר	יְהוָה:	כִּי	כֹה	אָמַר	יְהוָה	כִּי	וְהָיָה	כִּי
when	Yahweh	he-says	this	indeed	(10)	Yahweh	declaration-of	I-sent-them	
לִפִּי	מְלֵאת	לְבַבְךָ	שִׁבְעִים	שָׁנָה	אֶפְקֹד	אֲתֶכֶם			
to-you	I-will-come	<u>year</u>	<u>seventy</u>	<u>for-Babylon</u>	to-be-completed	by-mouth-of-me			
וְהִקְמַתִּי	עֲלֵיכֶם	אֶת-	דְּבַרִּי	הַטּוֹב	לְהָשִׁיב	אֲתֶכֶם	אֶל-		
to	you	to-bring-back	the-gracious	promise-of-me	***	for-you	and-I-will-fulfill		
הַמָּקוֹם	הַזֶּה:	כִּי	אֲנֹכִי	יְדַעְתִּי	אֶת-	הַמַּחְשְׁבָה	אֲשֶׁר	אֲנֹכִי	חָשַׁב
for-you	planning	I	that	the-plans	***	I-know	I	for	(11)
the-this	the-place								

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.²⁶

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”.²⁷

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*^e (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 12th and 13th 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.”²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.³⁰

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.³¹

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.³²

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 19th 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.³³

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.³⁴

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.³⁵ 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."³⁶ 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 36:20.³⁷

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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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 29:10.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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.⁴³

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).⁴⁴

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)⁴⁵

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)”⁴⁶

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.!⁴⁷

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.”⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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.⁵² 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.”⁵³ (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.⁵⁴ Ashur-uballit fled, and the city was captured and plundered either late in 610 or early in 609 B.C.E.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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*.⁵⁷

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)⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

- 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.

THE “SEVEN TIMES” OF DANIEL 4

IN THE PREVIOUS chapter it was shown that the prophecy of the seventy years may be given an application that is in full agreement with a dating of the desolation of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. Would this mean, then, that a period of 2,520 years of Gentile times started in 587 B.C.E. and ended—not in 1914—but in 1934 C.E.? Or could it be that the 2,520-year calculation is not founded on a sound biblical basis after all? If not, what meaning should be attached to the outbreak of war in 1914—a year that had been pointed forward to decades in advance?

These are the questions discussed in this chapter. We will first take a look at the attempts made to end the Gentile times in 1934.

A. THE 1934 PROPHECY

Ending the times of the Gentiles in 1934 would not be a new idea. As far back as 1886 the British expositor Dr. Henry Grattan Guinness pointed to 1934 in his book *Light for the Last Days*.¹ Dr. Guinness made use of three different calendars in his calculations and thus succeeded in giving the Gentile times three time periods of different lengths: 2,520, 2,484, and 2,445 years respectively. In addition, he also used several starting-points, the first in 747 and the last in 587 B.C.E.² This provided a series of terminal dates, extending from 1774 C.E. to 1934 C.E., all of which were regarded as important dates in God’s prophetic timetable.

With the 1934 date, however, the Gentile times would definitely end, reckoned according to Dr. Guinness’ longest scale and from his last starting-point. The four most important dates in his scheme were 1915, 1917, 1923 and 1934.

1 H. Grattan Guinness, *Light for the Last Days* (London, 1886).

2 The others were 741, 738, 727, 713, 676, 650-647, and 598.

Dr. Guinness had predicted that the year 1917 would be perhaps the most important year in the termination of the trampling of Jerusalem. When the British general Edmund Allenby on December 9 that year captured Jerusalem and freed Palestine from the Turkish domination, this was seen by many as a confirmation of his chronology. Quite a number of people interested in the prophecies began to look forward to 1934 with great expectations.³ Among these were also some of the followers of Pastor Charles Taze Russell.

A-1: Pastor Russell's chronology emended

At the climax of the organizational crisis in the Watch Tower Society following the death of Russell in 1916, many Bible students left the parent movement and formed the *Associated Bible Students*, in 1918 chartered as *The Pastoral Bible Institute*.⁴

In the same year Paul S. L. Johnson broke away from this group and formed *The Laymen's Home Missionary Movement*, today one of the strongest groups to grow out of the Bible Student movement aside from the parent organization.

Early in the 1920s the Pastoral Bible Institute *changed* Russell's application of the Gentile times, which caused an interesting debate between that movement, the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement, and the Watch Tower Society.

An article entitled "Watchman, What of the Night?" published in the Pastoral Bible Institute's periodical *The Herald of Christ's Kingdom*, April 15, 1921, marked a significant break with Pastor Russell's chronological system. Mainly responsible for this re-evaluation was R. E. Streeter, one of the five editors of the *Herald*. His views, accepted by the other editors, reflected a growing concern on the part of many Bible Students (as evidenced from letters received from nearly every part of the earth) who had experienced deep perplexity "as to the seeming failure of much that was hoped for and expected would be realized by the Lord's people by this time."⁵ Some of the questions which had arisen were:

- 3 Most of these expositors seemed to be unaware of the fact that Guinness himself back in 1909, in his book *On the Rock*, had revised his chronology and "had calculated that the end would occur in 1945 instead of 1934."—Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 90-91.
- 4 The Pastoral Bible Institute (P.B.I.) was headed by former board members of the Watch Tower Society who were illegally dismissed by J. F. Rutherford in 1917 together with other prominent members.
- 5 *The Herald of Christ's Kingdom*, April 15, 1921, p. 115.

Why has not the Church realized her final deliverance and reward by this time? . . . Why is not the time of trouble over with by now — why has not the old order of things passed away, and why has not the Kingdom been established in power before this? Is it not possible that there may be an error in the chronology?⁶

Calling attention to the fact that Pastor Russell's predictions for 1914 had not been fulfilled, it was concluded that there was evidently an error in the former reckoning. This error was explained to be found in the calculation of the times of the Gentiles:

Careful investigation has resulted in our locating the point of difficulty or discrepancy in what we have considered our great chain of chronology. It is found to be in connection with the commencement of the 'Times of the Gentiles'.⁷

First, it was argued, the seventy years, formerly referred to as a period of desolation, more properly should be called "the seventy years of servitude." (Jeremiah 25:11) Then, referring to Daniel 2:1, 37-38, it was pointed out that Nebuchadnezzar was the "head of gold" already in his second regnal year, and actually dominated the other nations including Judah, beginning from his very first year, according to Daniel 1:1. Consequently, the era of seventy years commenced eighteen to nineteen years *before* the destruction of Jerusalem. This destruction, therefore, had to be moved forward about nineteen years, from 606 to 587 B.C.E.

But the 606 B.C.E. date could still be retained as a starting-point for the times of the Gentiles, as it was held that the *lease of power* to the Gentiles started with Nebuchadnezzar's rise to world dominion. Thus 1914 marked the end of *the lease of power*, but not necessarily the full end of *the exercise of power*, nor the complete fall of the Gentile governments, even as the kingdom of Judah did not fall and was not overthrown in the final and absolute sense until Zedekiah, a vassal king under Nebuchadnezzar, was taken captive nineteen years after the period of servitude began. The *Herald* editors concluded:

Accordingly it was 587 B.C. when Zedekiah was taken captive, and not 606 B.C., and hence while the 2520 years' lease of Gentile power starting in Nebuchadnezzar's first year, 606 B.C., would run out in 1914; yet the full end of the Gentile Times and the complete fall

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 116.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

of Gentile governments is not indicated as taking place till nineteen years later, or in about 1934.⁸

So what could be expected to take place in 1934? *The Herald of Christ's Kingdom* indicated:

The reasonable deduction is that the great changes and events which we have heretofore expected to take place in 1914 would, in view of the foregoing, be logically expected to be in evidence somewhere around 1934.⁹

Other articles followed in the issues of May 15 and June 1 of the *Herald*, giving additional evidence for the necessity of these changes and answering questions from the readers. The changes evoked much interest among the Bible Students:

Many have freely written us that they have heartily accepted the conclusions reached. . . .

It has been of special interest to us to receive advice from brethren in several different quarters telling of how for some months or years before receiving our recent treatment of the subject, they had been led to make an exhaustive examination of the chronology and had arrived at exactly the same conclusions as those presented in the *HERALD* with regard to the 19 years difference in the starting of the Gentile Times, and found that all the evidences showed that Nebuchadnezzar's universal kingdom began in his first year instead of his nineteenth.¹⁰

A-2: The Bible Student controversy on the Gentile times chronology

However, most Bible Student groups rejected the conclusions of the Pastoral Bible Institute. The first counterattack came from P. S. L. Johnson, the founder of the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement and editor of its periodical *The Present Truth*.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *The Herald of Christ's Kingdom*, June 1, 1921, p. 163. Interestingly, the November 1, 1921 issue of the *Herald* published an article prepared by another Bible Student in 1915, in which he presented evidence and conclusions practically identical to those of R. E. Streeter, although he dated the destruction of Jerusalem in 588 instead of 587 B.C.E. The 588 date was adopted by P.B.I. in subsequent issues of the *Herald*. As this man had no connection with P.B.I., he preferred to be anonymous, signing the article with the initials J.A.D. *The Beraean Bible Institute*, a Bible Student group with headquarters in Melbourne, Australia, also accepted the conclusions of the P.B.I. editors, as seen from their *People's Paper* of July 1 and September 1, 1921, pp. 52, 68.



Periodicals published by the three principal Bible Student groups involved in the controversy in the early 1920's about the application of the Gentile times.

In the issue of June 1, 1921, he published a critical article entitled "Watchman, What of the Night? — Examined" (pages 87-93), in which he defended Pastor Russell's understanding of Daniel 1:1 and 2:1 and the seventy years of desolation, also adding some arguments of his own. This was followed by other articles in the issues of July 1 and September 1.¹¹

In 1922, the Watch Tower Society, too, plunged into the debate. Evidently the chronological changes in the *Herald* rapidly came to the knowledge of many Bible Students from different quarters, and seem to have caused no little agitation among the readers of *The Watch Tower* magazine, too. This was openly admitted in the first article on the subject, "The Gentile Times," published in the May 1, 1922, issue of *The Watch Tower*:

About a year ago there began some agitation concerning chronology, the crux of the argument being that Brother Russell was wrong concerning chronology and particularly in error with reference to the Gentile times. . . .

Agitation concerning the error in chronology has continued to increase throughout the year, and some have turned into positive opposition to that which has been written. This has resulted in some of the Lord's dear sheep becoming disturbed in mind and causing them to inquire, Why does not THE WATCH TOWER say something?¹²

Consequently, beginning with this article, the Watch Tower Society started a series in defense of Pastor Russell's chronology. The second article, entitled "Chronology," published in *The Watch Tower* of May 15, 1922, opened with a reaffirmation of belief in Russell's dates, and added the date 1925:

We have no doubt whatever in regard to the chronology relating to the dates of 1874, 1914, 1918, and 1925. Some claim to have found new light in connection with the period of "seventy years of desolation" and Israel's captivity in Babylon, and are zealously seeking to make others believe that Brother Russell was in error.

11 "Ancient Israel's Jubilee Year' Examined" in the July 1, 1921 issue of *The Present Truth*, pp. 100-104, and "Further P.B.I. Chronology Examined" in the September 1 issue, pp. 134-136.

12 *The Watch Tower*, May 1, 1922, pp. 131-132. Other articles published during 1922 were "Chronology" (May 15, pp.147-150), "Seventy Years' Desolation (Part I)" (June 1, pp. 163-168), "Seventy Years' Desolation (Part II)" (June 15, pp. 183-187), "The Strong Cable of Chronology" (July 15, pp. 217-219), "Interesting Letters: Mistakes of Ptolemy, the Pagan Historian" (August 15, pp. 253-254; this was written by Morton Edgar), and "Divinely-given Chronological Parallelisms (Part I)" (November 15, pp. 355-360).

The arguments put forth in this and subsequent articles were much the same as those earlier published by Paul S. L. Johnson. Johnson, who involuntarily had to side with the Watch Tower Society in this “battle,” supported *The Watch Tower* with a series of new articles in the *Present Truth*, running parallel with the articles in *The Watch Tower*.¹³

These responses were not long left unanswered. The *Herald* of June 15, 1922, contained the article “The Validity of Our Chronological Deductions,” which was a refutation of the arguments put forth in support of Pastor Russell’s interpretation of Daniel 1:1 and 2:1. In the July 1 issue, a second article “Another Chronological Testimony” considered the evidence from Zechariah 7:5, and the July 15 issue contained a third on the desolation period, again signed by J.A.D. (See note 10.)

Gradually the debate subsided. The Pastoral Bible Institute editors summarized their arguments and published them in a special double number of the *Herald*, August 1-15, 1925, and, again, in the May 15, 1926 issue. Then they waited to see what the 1934 date would bring.

As 1934 approached the Institute’s editors assumed a very cautious attitude:

If the nineteen years was intended to indicate the exact length of time of the running out of the Gentile Times from 1915 onward, then that would carry us to approximately 1933-1934; but we do not *know* that this was so intended, nor do we have positive evidence as to the exact length of the closing out of the Gentile Times beyond 1915.¹⁴

This cautiousness proved to be wise, and when the 1934 date had passed, they could assert:

Brethren who have perused carefully the pages of this journal, are well aware that much cautiousness and conservatism have been urged upon all in the direction of setting dates and fixing the time for various occurrences and events; and this continues to be the editorial policy of the ‘Herald’.¹⁵

As to the question of why 1934 did not see the passing away of the

13 *The Present Truth*, June 1, 1922: “Some Recent P.B.I. Teachings Examined” (pp. 84-87); July 1: “Some Recent P.B.I. Teachings Examined” (pp. 102-108); August 1: “Further P.B.I. Chronology Examined” (pp. 117-122); November 1: “Some Mistakes in Ptolemy’s Canon” (pp. 166-168).

14 *The Herald of Christ’s Kingdom*, May 1, 1930, p. 137.

15 *The Herald of Christ’s Kingdom*, May, 1935, p. 68.

Gentile nations, it was explained that 1934 should be looked upon as an *approximate* date, and that “we believe the progress of events and all the facts as we see them unfolding before us in this day of the Lord, lead us to look for the running out of the present order more by degrees or stages rather than that of the sudden crash and passing away of everything at one point of time, as the Apostle Paul suggests—‘As travail upon a woman’.”¹⁶ The worsening situation in the world leading to The Second World War seemed to give support to this way of looking at the matter.¹⁷

The years 1914 and 1934 have come and gone, and the Gentile nations still rule the earth. In fact, the number of independent nations has *tripled* since 1914, from 66 in that year to about 200 at present. Thus, instead of *ending* in 1914, the times for the majority of nations on earth today have *begun* after that year!

Some proper questions to ask now surely are: Is the 2,520-year period really a well-founded biblical calculation? Was Jesus’ mention of the “Gentile times” at Luke 21:24 a reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s “seven times” of madness? And should these “seven times” be converted into 2,520 years?

B. ARE THE GENTILE TIMES “SEVEN TIMES” OF 2,520 YEARS?

When Jesus, at Luke 21:24, referred to the “times of the Gentiles,” or, according to the *New World Translation*, “the appointed times of the nations,” did he then have in mind the “seven times” of madness that fell upon the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in fulfillment of his dream about the chopped-down tree, as recorded in the book of Daniel, chapter four? And were these “seven times” of madness meant to have a greater fulfillment beyond that upon Nebuchadnezzar, representing a period of 2,520 years of Gentile dominion?

In spite of the many arguments put forth in support of these conjectures, positive proof is missing, and some serious objections may be raised against them. A critical examination of the Watch Tower Society’s chief arguments, as presented in its Bible dictionary *Insight on the Scriptures*, will make this clear.¹⁸

16 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

17 The year 1934 was still held to be an important date, occupying “a prominent place in chronological prophecy.” In support of this conclusion, the P.B.I. editors referred to a statement by Edwin C. Hill, a press reporter of international reputation, to the effect that “the year 1934 had been a most remarkable one. There had been many important occurrences and developments, he said, affecting the destinies of all the nations of the earth and marking the year as *one of the most significant of history*.”—*The Herald of Christ’s Kingdom*, May, 1935, pp. 71-72. (Emphasis added)

18 See the article “Appointed times of the nations,” in *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), pp. 132-135.

B-1: The supposed connection between Luke 21:24 and Daniel 4

It is true that in his last great prophecy (Matthew 24-25; Luke 21, and Mark 13), Jesus “at least twice” referred to the book of Daniel.¹⁹

Thus, when mentioning the “disgusting thing that causes desolation” (*NW*) he directly states that this was “spoken of through Daniel the prophet.” (Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9:27; 11:31, and 12:11) And when speaking of the “great tribulation [Greek *thlipsis*] such as has not occurred since the world’s beginning until now” (Matthew 24:21, *NW*), he clearly quotes from Daniel 12:1: “And there will certainly occur a time of distress [the early Greek translations—the *Septuagint* version and Theodotion’s version—use the word *thlipsis*, in the same way as in Matthew 24:21] such as has not been made to occur since there came to be a nation until that time.” (*NW*)

However, *no such clear reference to chapter four of Daniel may be found at Luke 21:24*. The word “times” (Greek *kairoí*, the plural form of *kairós*) in this text is no clear reference to the “seven times” of Daniel 4 as the Watch Tower Society maintains.²⁰

This common word occurs many times in both its singular and plural forms in the Greek Scriptures, and about 300 times in the Greek *Septuagint* translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In Daniel 4 and Luke 21 the word “times” is explicitly applied to two quite different periods—the “seven times” to the period of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness, and the “times of the Gentiles” to the period of the trampling down of Jerusalem—and the two periods may be equalized only by giving them a greater application beyond that given in the texts themselves. Therefore, the supposed connection between the “times of the Gentiles” at Luke 21:24 and the “seven times” at Daniel 4:16, 23, 25, and 32 appears to be no more than a conjecture.

B-2: The greater application of the “seven times”

Several arguments are proposed by the Watch Tower Society to support the conclusion that Nebuchadnezzar’s “seven times” of madness prefigured the period of Gentile dominion up to the establishment of Christ’s Kingdom, viz., a) the *prominent element of time* in the book of Daniel; b) the *time* at which the vision of the chopped-down tree was given; c) the *person* to whom it was given, and d) the *theme* of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

the vision. Let us have a closer look at these arguments.

a) *The element of time in the book of Daniel*

To prove that the "seven times" of Daniel 4 are related to the "times of the Gentiles," the Watch Tower Society argues that "an examination of the entire book of Daniel reveals that the element of time is everywhere prominent in the visions and prophecies it presents," and that "the book repeatedly points toward the conclusion that forms the theme of its prophecies: the establishment of a universal and eternal Kingdom of God exercised through the rulership of the 'son of man'."²¹

Although this is true of *some* of the visions in the book of Daniel, it is not true of all of them. And as far as can be seen, no other vision or prophecy therein has more than *one* fulfillment.²² There is nothing to indicate, either in the book of Daniel or elsewhere in the Bible, that Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the chopped-down tree in Daniel 4 has more than one fulfillment. Daniel clearly says that the prophecy was fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: "All this befell Nebuchadnezzar the king" (Daniel 4:28, NW). And further, in verse 33: "At that moment the word itself was fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar." (NW) Dr. Edward J. Young comments:

lit., *was ended*, i.e., it came to an end in that it was completed or fulfilled *with respect to Neb.*²³

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 133-34.

22 When Jesus, in his prophecy on the desolation of Jerusalem, twice referred to the prophecies of Daniel (Matthew 24:15, 21), he did not give these prophecies a second and "greater" fulfillment. His first reference was to the "disgusting thing that is causing desolation," a phrase found in Daniel 9:27; 11:31, and 12:11. The original text is that of Daniel 9:27, which contextually (verse 26) seems to point forward to the crisis culminating with the desolation of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The same holds true of his reference to the "great tribulation" of Daniel 12:1. Jesus applied, not *reapplied*, both of these prophecies to the tribulation on the Jewish nation in 67-70 C.E.

Phrases and expressions used by earlier prophets are often also used, or alluded to, by later prophets, not because they gave a second and greater application to an earlier, fulfilled prophecy, but because they readily reused the "prophetic language" of earlier prophets, using similar phrases, expressions, ideas, symbols, metaphors, etc. in their prophecies of events to come. Thus, for example, it has often been pointed out that the apostle Paul, in his description of the coming "man of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-5), borrows some of the expressions used by Daniel in his prophecies about the activities of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (cf. Daniel 8:10-11; 11:36-37).

23 Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1949), p. 110.

Actually, most of the chapters in the book of Daniel do *not* contain material that could be said to point forward toward “the establishment of a universal eternal kingdom of God through the rulership of the ‘son of man’”: *chapter 1* deals with Daniel and his companions at the court of Babylon; *chapter 3* tells the story about the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace; *chapter 5* deals with Belshazzar’s feast, which ended with the fall of Babylon; *chapter 6* tells the story of Daniel in the den of lions, and *chapter 8* contains the vision of the ram and the he-goat, which culminates with the end of the tyrannical rule of Antiochus IV, in the second century before Christ’s coming.²⁴

And although the prophecy of the “seventy weeks” in *chapter 9* points forward to the coming of Messiah, it does not say anything about the establishment of his kingdom. Not even the lengthy prophecy in the final chapters, *Daniel 10-12*, which end with the “great tribulation” and the resurrection of “many of those asleep in the ground” (Daniel 12:1-3), explicitly connects this with the establishment of the kingdom of Christ.

The fact is that the only *clear* and *direct* references to the establishment of the kingdom of God are found in chapters 2 and 7 (Daniel 2:44-45 and 7:13-14, 18, 22, 27).²⁵

Thus any precedent which would call upon us to give a greater application to Nebuchadnezzar’s “seven times” of madness simply does not exist.

b) The time of the vision

If, as claimed, the *time* at which this vision was given should indicate a greater fulfillment, pointing to a 2,520-year break in the royal dynasty of David, it should have been given close to, or preferably

24 This is how the vision is understood by most commentators. The statements at Daniel 8:17 and 19 that “the vision pertains to the time of the end” should not automatically be understood as a reference to a final, eschatological “End of Time.” In the Old Testament words and phrases such as “the day of the Lord,” the “end” (Hebrew *qetz*) and the “time of the end” (compare Amos 5:18-20, Ezekiel 7:1-6; 21:25, 29; Daniel 11:13, 27, 35, 40) “do not refer to an End of Time but rather to a divinely appointed crisis, a turning point in history, i.e., a point within historical time and not a post- or supra-historical date.” (Shemaryahu Talmon, *Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible*, Jerusalem-Leiden: The Magnes Press, 1993, p. 171) The attempt of Antiochus IV to destroy the Jewish religion, as predicted in Daniel 8:9-14, 23-26, was certainly such a “crisis” and has often been described as a “turning point in history.” See, for example, the comments by Al Walters in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 55:4, 1993, pp. 688-89.

25 Compare the careful study of this question by Dr. Reinhard Gregor Kratz, “*Reich Gottes und Gesetz im Danielbuch und im werdenden Judentum*,” in A. S. van der Woude (ed.), *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1993), pp. 433-479. (See especially pp. 441-442, and 448.)

in the same year as the dethronement of Zedekiah. Often, when the *time* a prophecy is given is important and has a connection with its fulfillment, the prophecy is dated. This is, for example, the case of the prophecy of the seventy years. (Jeremiah 25:1)²⁶ The visions and prophecies in the book of Daniel are usually dated: the dream of the image in the *second year* of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:1), the vision of the four beasts in the *first year* of Belshazzar (Daniel 7:1), the vision of the ram and the he-goat in the *third year* of Belshazzar (Daniel 8:1), the prophecy of the seventy weeks in the *first year* of Darius the Mede (Daniel 9:1), and the last prophecy in the *third year* of Cyrus (Daniel 10:1).²⁷

But no such date is given for the vision of the chopped-down tree in Daniel 4, which should logically have been done if this was important. The only information concerning time is given in verse 29, where the fulfillment of the dream is stated to have occurred twelve months later. Although no regnal year is given, it seems probable that Nebuchadnezzar’s “seven times” of madness took place somewhere near the close of his long reign. The reason for this conclusion is the boastful statement that triggered off the fulfillment of his dream:

Is not this Babylon the Great, that I myself have built for the royal house with the strength of my might and for the dignity of my majesty?—Daniel 4:30, *NW*.

When could Nebuchadnezzar possibly have uttered these words? Throughout most of his long reign he engaged in numerous building projects at Babylon and many other cities in Babylonia. The cuneiform inscriptions demonstrate that Nebuchadnezzar was primarily a

26 See chapter 5 above, section A-3.

27 That at least some dates given for the visions of Daniel are closely related to their contents may be seen from chapters 7 and 8, dated to the 1st and 3rd years of Belshazzar, respectively. According to the “Verse Account of Nabonidus” (B.M. 38299), Nabonidus “entrusted the kingship” to his son Belshazzar “when the third year was about to begin.” (J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950, pp. 312-13) As the 1st year of Nabonidus was 555/54 BCE, his 3rd year—and thus the 1st year of Belshazzar—was 553/52 BCE. Now, according to the *Sippar Cylinder*, it was in this very year, the 3rd year of Nabonidus, that the god Marduk “aroused” Cyrus in a rebellion against his Median overlord, king Astyages. As stated in the *Nabonidus Chronicle*, Astyages was finally defeated three years later, in the 6th year of Nabonidus, that is, in 550/49 BCE. It can hardly be a coincidence that Daniel shortly before this, in Belshazzar’s 3rd year (Daniel 8:1), that is, in 551/50 BCE, was transferred in a vision to Susa, the future administrative capital of Persia, to be shown the emergence of the Medo-Persian empire in the form of a two-horned ram “making thrusts to the west and to the north and to the south.” (Daniel 8:1-4, 20) His vision, then, began to be fulfilled probably just a few months after it was given!



Nebuchadnezzar's madness

as depicted in the book *"The Truth Shall Make You Free"*, (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1943), page 237.

builder, not a warrior. He renovated and restored sixteen temples in Babylon including the two temples of Marduk, completed the two great walls of the city, built a network of canals across the city, embellished the streets of Babylon, rebuilt the palace of Nabopolassar, his father, and constructed another palace for his own use that was finished about 570 B.C.E., in addition to many other architectural achievements.²⁸

It was evidently at the close of this building activity that the vision of the chopped-down tree was given, as is indicated by Nebuchadnezzar’s proud words in Daniel 4:30. This points towards the close of his forty-three-year-long reign, and consequently many years *after* the destruction of Jerusalem in his eighteenth regnal year.

A prophecy is, by definition, *forward* looking. How then could the *time* at which the vision was given indicate anything about a greater fulfillment, one beginning with the dethronement of Zedekiah many years *earlier*? Should not the *fulfillment* of a prophecy start, not before, but *subsequent to* the time at which the prophecy is given? The *time* of this particular dream, therefore, does not only seem to be unimportant, as the prophecy is not dated, but can actually be used as an argument *against* an application to a period starting with the destruction of Jerusalem, as the dream evidently was given many years *after* that event.

c) The person to whom the vision was given

Does the *person* to whom this vision was given, that is Nebuchadnezzar, indicate it has to be applied to a supposed 2,520-year break in the royal dynasty of David?

It is true that Nebuchadnezzar was instrumental in causing the break in this dynasty. But is it not improbable that Nebuchadnezzar’s oppressive exercise of sovereignty would be a symbol of Jehovah’s sovereignty expressed through the Davidic dynasty, while contemporaneously during the “seven times” of madness his total powerlessness was a symbol of world dominion exercised by Gentile nations? Or did he play *two* roles during his “seven times” of madness—(1) his *powerlessness*, representing the break in the dynasty of David during the 2,520-year period; and (2) his *beastlike state*, picturing the Gentile rule of the earth?

28 D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 42-80.

As may be seen, the parallels between the literal fulfillment and the claimed greater application are strained, and the greater application, therefore, becomes quite complicated and confusing. Would not this application have been far more probable if the vision had been given to one of the last kings of *Judah* instead of to Nebuchadnezzar? Would not a king of the royal dynasty of David be a more *natural* figure of that dynasty, and the “seven times” of loss of power experienced by such a king a more natural figure of the loss of sovereignty in the Davidic line?

Evidently, then, the *person* to whom the vision was given is no clear indication of another application beyond that one given directly through Daniel the prophet.

d) The theme of the vision

The *theme* of the vision of the chopped-down tree is expressed in Daniel 4:17, namely, “*that people living may know that the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind and that to the one he wants to, he gives it and he sets up over it even the lowliest one of mankind.*”

Does this stated intent of the vision indicate it pointed forward to the time for the establishment of God’s kingdom by his Christ?²⁹

To draw such a conclusion would be to read more into this statement than it actually says. Jehovah has always been the supreme ruler in the kingdom of mankind, although his supremacy has not always been recognized by everyone. But David did realize this, saying:

Jehovah himself has firmly established his throne in the very heavens; and *over everything* his own kingship has held dominion.—Psalms 103:19, *NW*.

Your kingship is a kingship *for all times indefinite*, And your dominion is throughout all successive generations.—Psalms 145:13, *NW*.

Thus Jehovah has always exercised control over the history of mankind and maneuvered the events according to his own will:

And he is changing times and seasons, removing kings and setting up kings, giving wisdom to the wise ones and knowledge to those knowing discernment.—Daniel 2:21, *NW*.

This was a lesson that Nebuchadnezzar—as well as kings before and after him—had to learn. The period that followed upon Nebuchadnezzar’s desolation of Judah and Jerusalem represented no ex-

29 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (1988), p. 134.

ception or interruption to Jehovah’s supreme rule, in spite of the break in the royal dynasty of David. The Gentile nations during this period did not rule supremely. Jehovah took action against the Babylonian empire by raising up Cyrus to capture Babylon in 539 B.C.E. (Isaiah 45:1), and later Alexander the Great destroyed the Persian empire.

Further, the expression “lowliest one of mankind” at Daniel 4:17 is no clear indication that Jesus Christ is intended, as Jehovah in his dealings with mankind many times has overthrown mighty and haughty kings and exalted lowly ones.³⁰ This was stressed centuries later by Mary, the mother of Jesus:

He [God] has performed mightily with his arm, he has scattered abroad those who are haughty in the intention of their hearts. He has brought down men of power from thrones and *exalted lowly ones*.
—Luke 1:51-52, NW.

Therefore, when the holy watcher in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream announced that “the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind and that to the one he wants to, he gives it and he sets up over it the lowliest one of mankind,” he simply seems to be stating a *universal principle* in Jehovah’s dealing with mankind. There is no indication that he is giving a *prophecy* concerning the establishment of the Messianic kingdom with Jesus Christ on the throne. The *theme* of this vision—that the Most High is ruler in the kingdom of mankind—is demonstrated by Jehovah’s dealing with the haughty Nebuchadnezzar who through his experience came to realize this universal principle. (Daniel 4:3, 34-37) By reading about Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliating experience, people living in every generation may come to realize this same truth.

B-3: The collapsed foundation of the 2,520-year calculation

As was shown in Chapter 1, the calculation that the “seven times” represented a period of 2,520 years is founded upon the so-called “year-day concept.”

This concept is no longer accepted as a *general principle* by the Watch Tower Society. It was taken over by Pastor Russell from the Second Adventists, but was abandoned by the Society’s second presi-

30 Commenting on the statement at Daniel 4:17 that God gives the kingdom “to the one whom he wants to,” the Watch Tower Society states: “We know that this ‘one’ to whom the Most High chooses to give the ‘kingdom’ is Christ Jesus.”—*True Peace and Security—From What Source?* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society,

dent, J. F. Rutherford, in the 1920's and early 1930's.³¹ The 2,300 evenings and mornings (Dan. 8:14), and the 1,260, 1,290, and 1,335 days (Daniel 12:7, 11, 12; Revelation 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14), earlier held to be as many *years*, have since then been interpreted to mean *days* only.

The two texts in the Bible which earlier were quoted in proof of the year-day principle (Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6) are no longer understood as stating a *universal principle of interpretation*, although they are still cited in support of this particular 2,520-year calculation. As was shown in Chapter 1, note 2, it is not even likely that the year-day rule should be applied to the "seventy weeks" of Daniel 9:24-27. That prophecy does not speak of days, but "weeks" or, literally, "sevens." So, rather than calling for a conversion of the "weeks" into days and then applying a "year-day principle," the contextual connection with the "seventy years" at verse 2 strongly supports the prevalent conclusion that the angel was simply multiplying those seventy years by seven: "Seven times [or: sevenfold] seventy [years] are decreed."

Even the adherents of the year-day theory themselves find it impossible to be consistent in their application of the supposed "principle" that in biblical time-related prophecies *days* always mean *years*. For example, when God told Noah that "after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights" (Genesis 7:4, *NASB*), they do not interpret this to mean that "after seven more *years*, I will send rain on the earth forty *years*." Or when Jonah told the inhabitants of Nineveh that "yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4), they do not understand this to mean that Nineveh should be overthrown after forty *years*. Many other examples could be given.³²

To apply the year-day principle to the "seven times" of Daniel 4, then, is evidently quite arbitrary, and this is especially true if those doing the applying no longer apply that principle to other prophetic time periods.

Like other adherents of the 2,520-year calculation, the Watch Tower Society argues that the "seven times" (the period of Nebuchadnezzar's madness) are 2,520 days, because at Revelation 12:6, 14 "a time and times and half a time" (3 1/2 times) are equated with 1,260

31 For a thorough refutation of the year-day concept, see pp. 111-126 of Samuel P. Tregelles, *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel*, originally published in 1852. Reference here is to the seventh edition (London: The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 1965).

32 For additional examples, see Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1974; reprint of the 1883 edition), pp. 386-90.

days. (The validity of this reasoning will be discussed in the section below.) But while the 2,520 days are interpreted to mean a period of 2,520 *years*, the 1,260 days are understood to mean just 1,260 literal *days*. As the interpretation of the “seven times” is derived from the three-and-a-half times (1,260 days), why is not a consistent interpretation given to both periods? How do we know that the supposed 2,520 days mean *years*, but that this is not the case with the 1,260 days?³³

Obviously there is no real basis for the conclusion that “seven times” mean 2,520 *years*.

B-4: Were the “seven times” really seven years?

Nebuchadnezzar’s “seven times” of madness are often understood as a period of seven *years*. However, anyone acquainted with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar knows there are great problems with this understanding. It is difficult to find a period of seven years within his reign of 43 years when he was absent from his throne or inactive as ruler.

Where, then, during Nebuchadnezzar’s 43 years of rule, can we find a period of seven years when he was absent from the throne and not involved in royal activities of any kind? The accompanying table on the following page lists the years when the Biblical and extra-Biblical sources show Nebuchadnezzar still actively ruling on his throne.

As can be seen, the documented activities of Nebuchadnezzar appear to exclude an absence from the throne for any period of seven years. The longest period for which we have no evidence of his activity is from his thirty-seventh to his forty-third and last year, a period of about six years. This period ended with his death. It should be remembered, however, that Nebuchadnezzar, after his “seven times” of madness, was re-established on his throne and evidently ruled for some time afterward.—Daniel 4:26, 36.

So what about the “seven times”? Do they necessarily refer to *years*, as is often held?

Actually, the word for “times” in the original Aramaic text of Daniel (sing. *‘iddan*) commonly means “time, period, season” and may refer to any fixed and definite period of time.³⁴ Admittedly, the view

33 C. T. Russell was at least consistent in claiming that both periods were *years*, “for if three and a half times are 1260 days (years), seven times will be a period just twice as long, 2520 years.”—*Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. II (originally published in 1889), p. 91.

34 Compare the use of the same word in Daniel 2:8 (“*time* is what you men are trying to gain”), 2:9 (“until the *time* itself is changed”), 2:21 (“he is changing *times* and seasons”), 3:5, 15 (“at the *time* that you hear the sound”), 7:12 (“there was a lengthening in life given to them for a time and a *season*”), and 7:25 (“they will be given into his hands

Documented activity of Nebuchadnezzar's rule

Events	References	N, on the throne	
Battle at Carchemish. Invasion of Judah and first deportation	Jer. 46:2; Jer. 25:1; Dan. 1:1f., BM 21946	accession-year	605
Campaign to Hattu	BM 21946	accession-year	605/604
N's dream of the image	Dan. 2:1f.	1st year	604/603
Campaigns to Hattu	BM 21946	2nd year	603/602
Building activity of N.	Royal inscription (Berger, AOAT 4:1, p. 108)*	2nd-6th years	603-599/98
Second deportation. Jehoiachin brought to Babylon	2 Ki. 24:11-12; 2 Chron. 36:10; Jer. 52:28; BM 21946	7th year	598/97
Campaigns to Hattu and Tigris	BM 21946	8th-9th years	597-596/95
Rebellion in N's army. Revolt plans among exiles spread to Judah. Jeremiah's letters to exiles. N. marches to Hattu	BM 21946; Jer. 28:1f.; Jer. 29:1-3, 4-30	10th year	595/04
Campaign to Hattu	BM 21946	11th year	594/03
Building activity of N.	Royal inscription (Berger, AOAT 4:1, p. 108)*	12th year	593/92
Jerusalem besieged for 2.5 years, desolated. Third deportation	2 Ki. 25:1f., Jer. 32:1-2; 52:4-16	15th-18th years	589/587
Ezekiel predicts siege of Tyre	Ez. 26:1, 7	18th year	587
N. besieges Tyre for 13 years	Josephus' Ant. X:xi,1; Ap. 1:21	19th-32nd years	586-573/72
Ezekiel confirms siege ended	Ez. 29:17-18	33rd year	572/71
N. attacks Egypt as predicted	BM 33041 (Jer. 43:10f.; Ez. 29:1-16, 19-20)	37th year	568/67
N. dies. Evil-merodach's accession-year	Jer. 52:31-34; 2 Ki. 25:27-30	43rd year	562/61

* AOAT 4:1 = *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, Vol. 4:1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973)

that at Daniel chapter four, verses 16, 23, 25, 32 it refers to years is not restricted to the Watch Tower Society. This understanding can be found in ancient sources.

Thus, the *Septuagint* (LXX) version of Daniel translated the word as "years," and so does Josephus in *Antiquities* X:x,6. But the LXX text of Daniel was rejected by early Christians in preference of the Greek version of Theodotion (usually dated to about 180 C.E.) which says "times" (Greek *kairoi*), not "years" in Daniel chapter four.³⁵

That some Jews at an early stage interpreted the "times" of Daniel chapter four as "years" can also be seen in the so-called "Prayer of Nabonidus," a fragmentary Aramaic document found among the Dead Sea scrolls at Qumran, Cave 4, and dating from ca. 75-50 B.C.E. This document says that Nabonidus was stricken with a "pernicious inflammation . . . for seven years" in the Teman oasis.³⁶

What are the other alternatives? Realizing that the literal meaning of the Aramaic word 'iddan is not "year" but "period" or "season," Hippolytus of the third century says that some viewed a "time" as one of the four seasons of the year. Hence "seven seasons" would be less than two years. Bishop Theodoret of the fifth century, however, noted that people of ancient times, such as the Babylonians and Persians, spoke of only *two* seasons a year, summer and winter, the rainless and the rainy seasons.³⁷ This was also the custom among the Hebrews. In the Bible there are no references to spring and autumn, only to the summer and winter seasons. According to this line of reasoning, the "seven seasons" of Nebuchadnezzar's madness meant three and one-half years.

35 As a number of citations from Daniel in the New Testament agree with Theodotion's Greek text of Daniel against LXX, Theodotion's translation is thought to have been based on an earlier, pre-Christian textual tradition, which may have been either independent of or a revision of LXX.—John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 2-11. See also Peter W. Coxon, "Another look at Nebuchadnezzar's madness," in A. S. van der Woude, *op. cit.* (see note 25 above), pp. 213-14.

36 For a recent reconstruction and translation of the text, see Baruch A. Levine and Anne Robertson in William W. Hallo (ed.), *The Context of Scripture*, Vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 285-86. Most scholars suppose that the story about the "seven times" of madness originally dealt with Nabonidus and that the "Prayer of Nabonidus" reflects an earlier state of the tradition. The book of Daniel, it is held, attributes the experience to Nebuchadnezzar because he was better known to the Jews. However, there is no evidence in support of this theory, and it is quite as likely that the "Prayer of Nabonidus" is a late, distorted version of Daniel's narrative.—Compare the comments by D. J. Wiseman, *op. cit.* (see note 28 above), pp. 103-105.

37 E. J. Young, *op. cit.* (see note 23 above), p. 105. Dr. H. Neumann confirms that in Mesopotamia there are only two seasons: "a cloudless and dry summer from May to October, and a cloudy and rainy winter from November to April."—Heinz Neumann in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, Vol. 85 (Wien 1995), p. 242.

Some of the most highly regarded conservative Bible scholars of recent times, such as Carl F. Keil and Edward J. Young, either reject or feel strong doubts about the theory that the “seven times” of Daniel chapter four refer to seven *years*. The Assyriologist Donald J. Wiseman even suggests that the “seven times” should be understood as “seven months.”³⁸ Any of these last-mentioned viewpoints would be in acceptable agreement with the information we have on the rule of Nebuchadnezzar.

Some, of course, will point to Revelation chapter twelve, arguing that since the 3 1/2 “times” in verse 14 correspond to the 1260 days (= 3 1/2 years) of verse 6, seven times must mean 2520 days, or seven years.

There is, however, no reason to conclude that the way “times” is used in Revelation chapter twelve must automatically apply also in other contexts. The fact remains that, since the Aramaic word *'iddan* simply means “time, period, season,” it could refer to periods of different lengths. It does not refer to the same, fixed period everywhere it is used. The context must always decide its meaning. And even if it could be shown that the “time, and times and half a time” at Daniel chapter seven, verse 25, mean three and a half years, this still would not prove that the “seven times” or “periods” (*New American Standard Bible*), or “seasons” (*Rotherham, Tanakh*), at Daniel chapter four, verses 16, 23, 25 and 32, mean “seven years.” The two chapters deal with two very different events and periods and therefore should not be confused.

In the discussion above it has been shown that the Gentile times of Luke 21:24 cannot be proved to be an allusion to the “seven times” of Daniel 4. Nor is there any evidence to show that Nebuchadnezzar’s “seven times” of madness prefigured another period, amounting to 2,520 years of Gentile dominion. Finally, it was demonstrated that the “seven times” cannot even be proved to mean seven *years*. These identifications are obviously no more than a guesswork without solid foundation in the Bible itself.

38 Donald J. Wiseman in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1982), p. 821. Dr. Wiseman explains that this understanding of *'iddan* at Daniel 4 “arose from my view that a ‘month’ might be an appropriate ‘period’ since the nature of Nebuchadnezzar’s illness . . . is unlikely to have been a recurrent one.”—Letter Wiseman-Jonsson, dated May 28, 1987. Compare Wiseman’s discussion of Nebuchadnezzar’s illness in B. Palmer (ed.), *Medicine and the Bible* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1986), pp. 26-27.

C. THE SETTING UP OF CHRIST’S KINGDOM

As was pointed out in Chapter 1 of this work, Pastor Russell’s predictions for 1914 were not fulfilled. When the First World War ended, the Gentile nations still ruled the earth instead of Christ’s Kingdom, and Jerusalem in Palestine was still occupied by a Gentile nation. Evidently, the *time* for the events expected could not be right. But to draw this simple conclusion was not an easy thing. Additionally, *something* had happened: the World War. So it was felt that the time was right after all. Russell’s followers, therefore, concluded that they had been expecting the “wrong thing at the right time.”³⁹

C-1: Failed expectations—wrong things at the right time?

Gradually a new apocalyptic pattern emerged. The World War with the many crises following it came to be regarded merely as a *beginning* of the overthrow of the Gentile nations. In 1922 J. F. Rutherford, the new president of the Society, explained:

God granted to the Gentiles a lease of dominion for a term of 2520 years, which term or lease ended about August, 1914. Then came forward the Landlord, the rightful Ruler (Ezekiel 21:27), and began ouster proceedings. *It is not to be expected that he would suddenly wipe everything out of existence*, for that is not the way the Lord does things; but that he would overrule the contending elements, causing these to destroy the present order; and that while this is going on he would have his faithful followers give a tremendous witness in the world.⁴⁰

This reminds us of later explanations of the 1934 failure by the Pastoral Bible Institute editors discussed above. The setting up of Christ’s kingdom had earlier been seen as a process which began in 1878 and which would culminate in 1914 with the destruction of the Gentile nations.⁴¹ But in 1922 the starting-point of this process was moved forward to 1914 and the overthrow of the Gentile nations was expected to take place in the near future. This new view was presented by J. F. Rutherford at the Cedar Point Convention of September 5-13, 1922 in his address, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand.”

39 A. H. Macmillan, *Faith on the March* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), pp. 48-49.

40 *The Watch Tower*, May 1, 1922, p. 139; also published in the booklet *The Bible on Our Lord’s Return* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: International Bible Students Association, 1922), pp. 93-94. Emphasis added.

41 See the article “The Setting Up of Christ’s Kingdom” in *The Watch Tower* of June 1, 1922, which still has the 1878 date.

Three years later, in the article “Birth of the Nation” in *The Watch Tower*, March 1, 1925, a new interpretation of Revelation 12:1-6 was presented in accordance with the new understanding of the setting up of Christ’s kingdom, to the effect that the kingdom had been “born” in heaven in 1914. That year Jesus Christ “took unto himself his great power and began his reign: the nations were angry, and the day of God’s wrath began.—Ezekiel 21:27; Revelation 11:17, 18.”⁴²

C-2: The “downtrodden” city of Jerusalem relocated

But what about the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles? At the end of 1914 the city of Jerusalem was still occupied by a Gentile nation, the Turkish Empire. In an attempt to “explain” this embarrassing fact, Pastor Russell argued that the persecution of the Jews at that time seemed to have practically stopped all around the world, and he saw in this a confirmation of his belief that the Gentile times had expired.⁴³

However, in December, 1917, more than one year after Russell’s death, an interesting thing happened. On December 9, 1917, the British under General Allenby in alliance with the Arabs captured Jerusalem and thus made an end of the nearly seven-centuries-long Turkish occupation. This event was looked upon by many Christians as a very important sign of the times.⁴⁴

The deliverance of Jerusalem from the Turks in 1917, together with the so-called Balfour declaration of November 2, 1917 which proclaimed that the British Government supported the establishment

42 *The Bible on Our Lord’s Return* (1922), p. 93.

43 *The Watch Tower*, November 1, 1914, pp. 329-30; *Reprints*, p. 5568.

44 Christian commentators of several different denominations regarded this event as a sign of the times. It will be remembered that as early as 1823, John A. Brown, in his *The Even-Tide*, ended the “seven times” in 1917. In his opinion 1917 would see “the full glory of the kingdom of Israel . . . perfected.” (Vol. 1, pp. xliii f.) Later in the same century the British expositor Dr. Henry Grattan Guinness, too, pointed forward to 1917 as a very important date: “There can be no question that those who live to see this year 1917 will have reached one of the most important, perhaps the most momentous, of these terminal years of crisis.”—*Light for the Last Days*, London, 1886, pp. 342-46. Aware of these predictions, eight well-known English clergymen, among whom were Dr. G. Campbell Morgan and Dr. G. B. Meyer, issued a manifesto which among other things declared: “FIRST. That the present crisis points towards the close of the times of the Gentiles. . . . FIFTH. That all human schemes of reconstruction must be subsidiary to the second coming of our Lord, because all nations will be subject to his rule.” The manifesto was published in the London magazine *Current Opinion* of February 1918 and subsequently republished by other papers throughout the world. Although this manifesto has been cited several times in Watchtower publications in support of the 1914 date, it was actually issued in support of the 1917 date and resulted from Allenby’s “liberation” of Jerusalem in the latter year.

of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, drastically accelerated Jewish immigration to Palestine. Thus, from October, 1922, to the spring of 1929 the Jewish population of Palestine doubled from 83,794 to about 165,000.

At that time Palestine was still administered by a non-Jewish or Gentile nation (England) and the Jews still constituted only a minority (about twenty percent) of the population in Palestine. To all appearances, Palestine and the city of Jerusalem were still controlled by the Gentiles. Yet the Watch Tower Society’s president, J. F. Rutherford, in his book *Life*, published in 1929, insisted that the Gentile times spoken of by Jesus at Luke 21:24 had expired in 1914, arguing that the accelerating Jewish immigration to Palestine was the tangible proof of the conclusion that this prophecy had been fulfilled.

But shortly after the publication of *Life*, this whole idea was abandoned; the return of the Jews to the Promised Land was no longer seen as a fulfillment of Bible prophecies. Since 1931 such prophecies have been applied to *spiritual* Israel.⁴⁵ The logical consequence of this change could only be that the end of the treading down of Jerusalem was no longer applicable to the *literal* city of Jerusalem:

The present-day city of Jerusalem over in Palestine is not the city of the Great King Jehovah God, even though Christendom calls certain places over there “holy”. That city is doomed to destruction at the end of this world. But the true Jerusalem will live forever as the capital of Jehovah’s universal organization. We mean the New Jerusalem, of which Jesus Christ gave a symbolic vision to the apostle John on the isle of Patmos. . . .

Jesus Christ is the “King of kings and Lord of lords” over that true Jerusalem. At the close of the Gentile times in 1914 he was enthroned as acting Ruler in the “city of the great King”, Jehovah. Thus, after an interruption of 2,520 years by Gentile powers, Theocratic Government over earth rose again to power in the New Jerusalem, never to be trodden down by the Gentiles.⁴⁶

What, exactly, was this “New Jerusalem”? The Watchtower book *Your Will Be Done On Earth* (1958) explains on page 94:

Back in 607 B.C. the Jerusalem that was overthrown stood for the kingdom of God because it had the typical throne of Jehovah on which the anointed one of Jehovah sat as his king. Likewise, the

45 *The Watch Tower*, 1931, pp. 253-54; J. F. Rutherford, *Vindication*, Vol. II (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1932), pp. 258, 267-69.

46 *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1949, pp. 330-31.

Jerusalem that is trampled upon by worldly nations stands for the kingdom of God. . . . So the end of the trampling down of Jerusalem at the complete fulfillment of the “appointed times of the nations” would mean the rising again of the symbolic Jerusalem, namely, *the kingdom of God*.

Thus the end of the trampling down of Jerusalem was interpreted to mean the installation of Jesus Christ on Jehovah’s throne in the *heavenly Jerusalem* in 1914.⁴⁷ But this relocation of the “downtrodden Jerusalem” from earth to heaven created other questions, discussed below, which never have been satisfactorily answered.

C-3: Have two “kingdoms of Christ” been set up?

In the publications of the Watch Tower Society it is constantly stressed that Jesus Christ was “enthroned” and his kingdom “set up” or “established” in heaven at the end of the Gentile times in 1914. At that time, it is held, he began to rule “in the midst of his enemies” in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1-2. Thereafter, as an initial action against these enemies, Jesus Christ is thought to have thrown Satan and his demon angels out of heaven and down to the earthly realm, in fulfillment of Revelation 12:1-10.⁴⁸

One problem with this scenario is that a number of texts in the Bible clearly show that Jesus Christ was enthroned in heaven already at the time of his resurrection and exaltation. For example, in his revelation to the apostle John, Jesus said:

To the one that conquers I will grant to sit down with me on my throne, *even as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne*.—Revelation 3:21, *NW*.

That the kingdom of Christ existed already back in the first century is also confirmed by the apostle Paul, who in his letter to the Christians in Colossae stated:

He [the Father] delivered us from the authority of the darkness and *transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love*, by means of whom we have our release by ransom, the forgiveness of our sins. —Colossians 1:13-14, *NW*.

47 See “*Babylon the Great Has Fallen!*” *God’s Kingdom Rules!* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1963), pp. 452-53; “*The Nations Shall Know that I Am Jehovah*” — *How?* (1971), pp. 232-35; *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (1988), pp. 132-33.

48 Recent presentations of these views may be found, for example, in the books *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (1982), pp. 134-41, and *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* (1995), pp. 90-97. Both books are published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

If Jesus Christ was enthroned at his resurrection and exaltation and has been reigning in his heavenly kingdom since then, how can it be claimed that he was enthroned and his kingdom set up *in 1914*?

In order to resolve this problem the Watch Tower Society has been forced to conclude that *two* kingdoms of Christ have been set up: 1) the "Kingdom of the Son of His Love" (Colossians 1:13), which was set up at Christ's resurrection and exaltation, and 2) the "Kingdom of Our Lord and of His Christ" (Revelation 11:15), which is held to have been set up in 1914.

Note how the Watch Tower Society, in its Bible dictionary *Insight on the Scriptures*, attempts to tell the difference between these two "kingdoms of Christ." Commenting on Paul's statement at Colossians 1:13-14 quoted above, this dictionary states:

Christ's kingdom from Pentecost of 33 C.E. onward has been a spiritual one ruling over spiritual Israel, Christians who have been begotten by God's spirit to become the spiritual children of God. (Joh 3:3, 5, 6)⁴⁹

This *first* kingdom of Christ, then, is explained to have been a *limited* kingdom, with Jesus Christ ruling only over his congregation of followers from Pentecost onward.

The *second* kingdom of Christ, on the other hand, is *much greater in scope* and was not set up until 1914. In support of this view the above-cited dictionary refers to Revelation 11:15, where the apostle John heard loud voices in heaven proclaiming that, "The kingdom of the world did become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will rule as king forever and ever." (NW) In explanation of this vision, the Society's dictionary states:

This Kingdom is of greater proportions and bigger dimensions than "the kingdom of the Son of his love," spoken of at Colossians 1:13. "The kingdom of the Son of his love" began at Pentecost 33 C.E. and has been over Christ's anointed disciples; "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" is brought forth at the end of "the appointed times of the nations" and is over all mankind on earth.⁵⁰

But even on the supposition that Christ's rule from Pentecost onward was limited to his rule over his anointed disciples ("spiritual

49 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2 (1988), p. 169.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 169. Similarly, on page 136 of the book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (1982), the Watch Tower Society refers to "the kingdom of the Son of [God's] love" mentioned at Colossians 1:13 and states: "But this rule, or 'kingdom,' over Christians with the hope of heavenly life is *not the Kingdom government for which Jesus taught his followers to pray.*" (Emphasis added.)

Israel”), as the Watch Tower Society holds, the consequence of this view is that Christ, as the legal heir to the throne of David, since Pentecost onward has been sitting on the throne of Jehovah (Revelation 3:21) in *heavenly* Jerusalem and ruling over *spiritual* Israel, just as David and his son Solomon were said to be sitting upon the “throne of Jehovah” in *earthly* Jerusalem, reigning over *fleshly* Israel.⁵¹

In view of this first-century restoration of the “kingdom of David,” *how can it be held that “Jerusalem”, understood as being the Kingdom of God, went on to be trodden down by the Gentile nations on earth during the whole subsequent period, from Pentecost onward right up to 1914?*

The Gentile nations, of course, could not “ascend into heaven” (John 3:13) in order to interfere with Christ’s rule during this period. Nor can the treading down of “Jerusalem” refer to the persecution of “spiritual Israel” (Christ’s followers), as such persecution did not stop in 1914. So what did the treading down of “Jerusalem” really mean, and how did it stop in 1914? In spite of the theory of the two kingdoms of Christ, this question still calls for an answer.

C-4: The universal power of the resurrected Christ

Does the Bible really support the view that there are *two* kingdoms of Christ entrusted him at two different occasions? Was Christ’s “first” kingdom limited to a rule over his anointed disciples from Pentecost onward?

This idea seems clearly to be contradicted by a number of Bible passages which emphasize the *universal* scope of the authority given to Jesus Christ at his resurrection and exaltation. Even some time before his ascension Jesus stated to his disciples:

All authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth.
—Matthew 28:18, *NW*.

The past tense, “has been given,” shows that Jesus Christ *already at that time was in possession of all authority or power in heaven*

51 The angel Gabriel told Mary that the son she was to bear “will be called the Son of the Most High; and *the Lord will give him the throne of His father David.*” (Luke 1:32, *NASB*) That Christ was given “the throne of his father David” at his resurrection and exaltation was later confirmed by James, the half brother of Jesus, when he at Acts 15:13-18 explained to his fellow believers that “the tabernacle of David which has fallen” had been erected again, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Amos 9:11f. As pointed out by Dr. F. F. Bruce, “James’ application of the prophecy finds the fulfillment of its first part (the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David) in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the Son of David, and the reconstitution of His disciples as the new Israel, and the fulfillment of its second part in the presence of believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews in the Church.”—F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980 reprint), p. 310.

and on the earth. What additional power, then, could possibly have remained to be given him in 1914?

Jesus' position of power after his resurrection was also accentuated by the apostle Paul at Ephesians 1:20-23:

He [God] raised him up from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, *far above every government and authority and power and lordship and every name named, not only in this system of things, but also in that to come. He also subjected all things under his feet, and made him head over all things to the congregation, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills up all things in all.* (NW)

Notice that Paul in this passage declares that Christ's dominion at that time was not limited to a rule over his congregation only, but embraced "all things," "every government and authority and lordship and every name named." Similarly, at Colossians 2:10 Paul states that Christ "is the head of all government and authority" (NW). And at Revelation 1:5 the apostle John sent greetings to "the seven congregations that are in the [district of] Asia" from Jesus Christ, "*The Ruler of the kings of the earth*" (NW).

Strangely enough, the Watch Tower Society, in the article on "Jesus Christ" in its Bible dictionary *Insight on the Scriptures*, seems to *contradict* its idea of a limited kingdom of Christ from Pentecost onward by stating that he since his resurrection "*heads a government of universal domain.*" Notice the following remarkable statements on page 61 of Volume 2:

Following his resurrection, Jesus informed his disciples, "All authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth," thereby showing that he *heads a government of universal domain.* (Mt 28:18) The apostle Paul made clear that Jesus' Father has "left nothing that is not subject to him [Jesus]," with the evident exception of "the one who subjected all things to him," that is, Jehovah, the Sovereign God. (1Co 15:27; Heb 1:1-14; 2:8) Jesus Christ's "name," therefore, is more excellent than that of God's angels, in that his name embraces or stands for *the vast executive authority that Jehovah has placed in him.* (Heb 1:3, 4) [Emphasis added.]

If Jesus Christ already at his resurrection and exaltation was given "all authority . . . in heaven and on the earth," and if he since then has been "the head of all government and authority" and "the Ruler of the kings of the earth" and therefore, from then on, "heads a government of universal domain" as even the Watch Tower Society admits, how, then, can it be claimed that Christ's kingdom from Pentecost onward

was limited to a rule over his congregation of followers, and that the “kingdom of the world” did not become “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” until the year 1914?

C-5: Waiting “at the right hand of God”—for what?

On the last day of his earthly life Jesus explained to the members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, that his kingdom rule was now due to begin, stating that, “*from now on the Son of man will be sitting at the powerful right hand of God.*”—Luke 22:69, NW.⁵²

That Christ after his resurrection was elevated to “the right hand of God” is repeatedly emphasized by the New Testament writers. The phrase “sitting at the powerful right hand of God” is a reference to Psalm 110:1, a text quoted or alluded to in the New Testament more often than any other passage of the Old Testament.⁵³ This psalm is consistently interpreted by the New Testament writers as depicting Christ’s exaltation to the throne of God after his resurrection.⁵⁴ The first two verses say:

The utterance of Jehovah to my Lord is: “Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet.” The rod of your strength Jehovah will send out from Zion, [saying:] “Go subduing in the midst of your enemies.”—Psalm 110:1-2, NW.

- 52 The parallel passage at Matthew 26:64 adds another feature to Jesus’ statement: “From henceforth you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and *coming on the clouds of heaven.*” (Compare Mark 14:62) The last part of the statement is an allusion to Daniel 7:13-14, where Daniel in his vision saw “with the clouds of the heavens someone like a son of man happened to be coming; and to the Ancient of Days he gained access, and they brought him up close even before that One. And to him there were given rulership and dignity and kingdom”. It should be noticed that in this vision the “son of man” did not come from heaven to earth. Rather, his “coming” is in the opposite direction, to the “Ancient of Days” on the heavenly throne, to be given rulership, dignity, and kingdom. This passage, therefore, does not seem to be dealing with Christ’s second coming, but rather with his enthronement at his resurrection and exaltation.
- 53 Professor Martin Hengel finds that Psalm 110:1 is used in twenty-one passages in the New Testament, seven of which are direct quotations. The passages are: Matt. 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42f.; 22:69; Acts 2:33; 2:34f.; 5:31; 7:55f.; Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12f.; 12:2; and 1 Pet. 3:22. —M. Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1995), p. 133.
- 54 To sit “at the right hand of God” obviously means to sit with God *on his throne*, in view of Jesus’ statement at Rev. 3:21. This enthronement of Christ is not nullified by the fact that the letter to the Hebrews twice presents him as being seated “at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 8:1; 12:2) The language here, of course, is figurative. God is not sitting on a literal throne. At Matthew 5:34 Jesus says that “*heaven . . . is God’s throne.*” A “throne” is a symbol of *rulership*. Whether Christ is pictured as being seated on God’s throne or on a separate throne to the right of it, the meaning is the same, viz., that he is *ruling*. Besides, as Professor Hengel argues, the sense of the text at Heb. 8:1 and 12:2 is “at the right hand of God *on his throne*,” rather than “at the right hand of the throne of God.”—M. Hengel, *op. cit.*, pp. 142, 148-49. Compare also Revelation 22:1, 3, which speaks of “the throne of God and of the Lamb” as one common throne only.



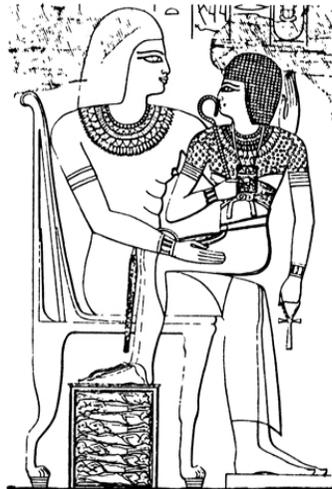
Thutmosis III (c. 1490-1436 BCE) at the right hand of his god Amon.



Pharaoh Horemheb (c. 1332-1305 BCE) at the right hand of his god Horus.



Amenophis II (c. 1427-01 BCE) and Amenophis III (1391-53 BCE) pictured on Egyptian paintings as enfans on their nurses' laps, with Egypt's enemies placed as a footstool beneath the feet of the future kings.



The image of the king as sitting on the throne of his god was also used in the Biblical world outside the Bible, as was also the image of subjugated enemies being placed as a footstool under his feet. – R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien* (Berlin 1849-58), Vol. 5, Bl. 62 and 69a; L. Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten* (Berlin, 1925), Bl. 93:554; O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 255,263.

To overcome the problem created by the Scriptural evidence for Christ's universal rule "in the midst of his enemies" to have begun at the time of his resurrection and exaltation, the Watch Tower Society explains that Christ's sitting "at the right hand of God" means, not that he has been *ruling* from then on, but rather that he has been sitting there *waiting for his rulership to begin*. Support for this view is found in the way Psalm 110:1-2 is referred to at Hebrews 10:12-13:

When Christ returned to heaven after his resurrection, he did not start ruling then as King of God's government. Rather, there was to be a time of waiting, as the apostle Paul explains: "This man [Jesus Christ] offered one sacrifice for sins perpetually and sat down at the right hand of God, *from then on awaiting* until his enemies should be placed as a stool for his feet." (Hebrews 10:12, 13) When the time came for Christ to begin to rule, Jehovah told him: "Go subduing [or, conquering] in the midst of your enemies."⁵⁵

This explanation of the word "awaiting" at Hebrews 10:12-13, however, creates other problems. In his outline of the reign of Christ at 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, the apostle Paul concludes by stating that "when all things will have been subjected to him [Christ], then the Son himself will also subject himself to the One who subjected all things to him, that God may be all things to everyone." This statement gives rise to the following question:

1. If Christ would have to wait until God had put all enemies under his feet *before his rulership could begin*, and if he then, "when all things will have been subjected to him," would hand over the kingdom to God, *what becomes of his reign?* When the time has come for him to start ruling, it is time for him to hand over the kingdom to God!

Another question occasioned by the Watch Tower Society's explanation is this:

2. If Christ could not *start ruling* until God had placed all his enemies as a stool for his feet, and if Christ's rule began in 1914, how can it be held that all enemies—including "the last enemy, death" (1 Corinthians 15:25)—had been put under his feet at that time?

55 *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (1982), pp. 136-37. The more recent book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995), similarly explains that Christ's sitting at the right hand of God "indicates that *Jesus' rulership would not begin immediately after his ascension to heaven*. Rather, he would wait" for this rulership to begin, that is, until 1914. (Pages 96-97. Emphasis added.)

Strangely, the Watch Tower Society admits that these enemies *were still active* at the time of Christ's enthronement in 1914, so that his rule began "in the midst of his enemies." In fact, his very first action as king is stated to have been an attack on his chief enemies, Satan and his angels, whom he is supposed to have thrown out of heaven in 1914!⁵⁶

A third question to ask, therefore, is:

3. If Christ could not *start ruling* until God had put all his enemies *under his feet*, how can his rule have begun "in the midst of his enemies," and why did he have to start his reign with a war against them?

Obviously, an interpretation that is so patently inconsistent cannot be correct. Christ's "awaiting" at the right hand of God cannot have been a waiting for his rulership *to begin*. Instead, as shown by other parallel passages, it has been a waiting for his rule "in the midst of his enemies" *to end*, to reach its conclusive stage.

Christ's sitting at the right hand of God cannot have been a period of passively waiting for God to put his enemies under his feet. To be sure, God is repeatedly pictured as the one who puts the enemies under the feet of Christ. But as shown already at Psalm 110:1-2, it is Christ himself who takes action against these enemies, though in the power given him by God. Jehovah's inviting him to sit down at his right hand is followed by the words:

The rod of your strength Jehovah will send out from Zion, [saying:] '*Go subduing in the midst of your enemies.*'

The text clearly indicates that this active ruling in the midst of the enemies would begin as soon as Christ had sat down at the right hand of God, not after a waiting period of some 1900 years. Christ's "waiting," therefore, is best explained as *his looking forward with expectation to the end result of his own active exercise of rule*, the final and complete victory over his enemies.⁵⁷

This is evidently also how the apostle Paul understood Christ's sitting at the right hand of God, namely, as a period of active reigning on his part until he has put all enemies under his feet. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul explains:

Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, *after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and*

56 *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (1982), pp. 136-38, 141.

57 The Greek word for "awaiting" at Hebrews 10:13, *ekdechomai*, means to "await, wait for, expect."—Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2 (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1976), pp. 244-245.

power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.—1 Corinthians 15:24-25, NRSV.

Notice that Paul is saying that Christ must reign *until*—not *from the time when*—the enemies have been put under his feet. According to Paul, Christ has been ruling as king ever since his resurrection and exaltation. Christ’s enemies, of course, existed also at that time. His reign from that time onward, therefore, of necessity has been a ruling “in the midst of his enemies.”

Paul’s statement indicates that the very purpose of Christ’s reign is to conquer and subjugate these enemies. When this purpose has been accomplished, he is to hand over the kingdom to God. As Bible commentator T. C. Edwards aptly remarks in his comment on this passage:

This verse means that Christ reigns until He has put, after long protracted warfare, all enemies under His feet. The reign of Christ, therefore, is not a millennium of peace, but a perpetual conflict ending in a final triumph.⁵⁸

Thus, invested with “all authority in heaven and on the earth,” Christ has been *ruling*, even “*subduing* in the midst of his enemies,” ever since his resurrection and exaltation to the throne of God. Who are these “enemies” and in what way has Christ been “subduing” them since then?

C-6: Ruling “in the midst of his enemies”

At Psalm 110:5-6 the enemies to be subjugated are portrayed as earthly kings and nations:

Jehovah himself at your right hand will certainly break kings to pieces on the day of his anger. He will execute judgement among the nations; he will cause a fullness of dead bodies. He will certainly break to pieces the head one over a populous land.⁵⁹

58 T. C. Edwards, *Commentary on the First Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979; reprint of the 1885 edition), p. 417.

59 Daniel, too, in explaining Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the image, pictures the enemies of God’s kingdom as earthly kingdoms. The four metals of the image are explained to mean four successive kingdoms or empires, starting with Nebuchadnezzar’s own kingdom. (Dan. 2:36-43) Then in verse 44 Daniel states that God’s kingdom would be set up “in the days of *those* kings.” Contextually, “those kings” can only be a reference to the kings existing at the time of the *fourth* kingdom described in the preceding verses (40-43). This supports the identification of the fourth kingdom with *Rome*, which held power at the time of the setting up of Christ’s kingdom. As Daniel further explains, God’s kingdom would then “crush and put an end to all these kingdoms.” As this evidently is a parallel to Christ’s “subduing in amidst his enemies” following his enthronement at the right hand of God, as described in Psalm 110 and the New Testament, the “crushing” of the kingdoms should be understood as a *protracted* warfare.

In the New Testament, however, the attention is turned from the visible enemies to the hostile powers of the spiritual world. Undoubtedly, the reason for this is that destruction of earthly kings and nations hostile to Christ's kingdom will not free the universe from the real enemies—the spiritual powers, who by means of sin and its consequence, death, keep men in slavery. As Paul explains, our wrestling is "not against blood and flesh, but against *the governments, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the wicked spirit forces in the heavenly places.*"—Ephesians 6:12, *NW*.

It is these spiritual powers that the New Testament writers, at 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 and elsewhere, identify as Christ's primary enemies, which he has been combatting and finally will bring "to nothing."⁶⁰

Empowered with "all authority in heaven and on earth" it would, of course, have been an easy matter for Christ to instantly bring to nothing all these hostile powers. Some Bible passages actually present the warfare as already won at Christ's resurrection and exaltation, and the powers as already conquered and subjected. (Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22) Such language, however, is evidently used to describe Christ's all-embracing power and elevated position since his resurrection, "far above every government and authority and power." (Ephesians 1:21-22) As the author of the letter to the Hebrews clarifies, there is more involved, as "we do not yet see all things in subjection to him."—Hebrews 2:8, *NW*.

If Christ's principal enemies are the hostile spiritual powers, his "subduing" in amidst them can hardly mean that he is subjugating them in a protracted *physical* or *literal* warfare. As explained by the apostle Paul, Satan, "the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit that now operates in the sons of disobedience," is able to hold men in slavery only because of their trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1-2, *NW*) Through Christ's death, however, God provided a "release by ransom, the forgiveness of our sins," by which it was made possible for man to be "delivered . . . from the authority of the darkness and transferred . . . into the kingdom of the Son of his love."—Colossians 1:13-14, *NW*.

Throughout the centuries, millions upon millions of people, by their faith in Christ have been delivered from the "authority of dark-

60 According to Colossians 1:15-16, the spiritual powers were originally created by means of Christ. Later a number of them, headed by Satan, "the ruler of the authority of the air," "did not keep their original position" but became enemies of God. (Jude, verse 6)—Compare Dr. G. Dellinger's discussion of these powers in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co.,

ness.” By such conquests “in amidst his enemies” Christ’s kingdom has been increasing and truly been proved to be victorious.

The Bible, therefore, presents Christ’s death for our sins as a turning-point for mankind and as a decisive victory over Satan, the head of the hostile powers in the spiritual world. (Hebrews 2:14-15) Though still active, their power and influence since then are restricted and curbed. They have not been able to prevent the good news about Jesus Christ to reach growing numbers of people around the world, making it possible for them to be delivered from the “authority of darkness” and brought under the authority of Christ.

C-7: The “casting out” of Satan

In the metaphorical language of the Bible, someone’s elevation to a high position may be spoken of as his being “exalted to heaven” or “to the skies,” where he may be likened to a shining star.⁶¹ Correspondingly, someone’s humiliation, defeat or fall from a high position may be likened to a throwing down or falling “from heaven.”⁶² In his prediction of the fall of the proud and arrogant king of Babylon, Isaiah the prophet used this imagery:

O how you have fallen from heaven, you shining one, son of the dawn! . . . As for you, you have said in your heart, “To the heavens I shall go up. Above the stars of God I shall lift up my throne, and I shall sit down upon the mountain of meeting, in the remotest parts of the north. I shall go up above the high places of the clouds; I shall make myself resemble the Most High.” However, down to Sheol you will be brought, to the remotest parts of the pit.—Isaiah 14:12-15, *NW*.⁶³

Jesus, too, used similar language in speaking of the town of Capernaum, which he had chosen as his dwelling-place and where he had performed many of his miracles. (Matthew 4:13-16) This, however, would not become a reason for the town to boast:

And you, Capernaum, will you perhaps be exalted to heaven? Down to Hades you will come!—Luke 10:15, *NW*.

61 Similarly, in the English language we may speak of someone being “praised to the skies.”

62 The same metaphors are also found in extra-Biblical sources from ancient times. For example, Cicero and Horace (1st century B.C.E.) both likened a fall from a great political height to a “fall from heaven.”—See Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2nd ed. 1972), p. 440, note 77.

63 Compare Daniel 8:9-12, which uses the same figurative language in describing the presumptuous actions of the “little horn,” usually understood as referring to the attempt of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.) to root out the worship of Jehovah at the temple of the Jews.

Another example of this manner of speech is found in the subsequent verses, which tell of the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus, who now returned with joy, saying: “Lord, even the demons are made subject to us by the use of your name.” Their joyful report was evidently owing to their success in expelling demons, thanks to the power bestowed upon them by Jesus at his sending them out. (Luke 10:1, 19) In answer, Jesus said: “I began to behold Satan already fallen like a lightning from heaven.”—Luke 10:17-18, *NW*.

It does not seem likely that Jesus meant he saw Satan literally falling from heaven. Rather, his statement vividly expressed the excitement he felt at the disciples’ report, as he knew that their successful ministry (as well as his own) portended the imminent fall of Satan from his position of power.

That the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ would mean a decisive defeat for Satan is also indicated by what he said to the Jews at his arrival in Jerusalem a few days before his death:

Now there is a judging of this world; *now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*—John 12:31, *NW*.

It is evidently this victory over Satan and his angels that is depicted in symbolic scenes at Revelation 12:1-12. In a vision the apostle John



The woman arrayed with the sun, the seven-headed dragon, and the child caught away to the throne of God as pictured in *The Watchtower* magazine of May 1, 1981, page 20. According to the present Watch Tower teaching, this prophetic scene was fulfilled in 1914, when Christ’s kingdom (the child) is said to have been established (born) in heaven by “God’s heavenly organization” (the woman), despite the effort of Satan (the dragon) to prevent Christ’s enthronement.

saw “in heaven” a pregnant woman, “arrayed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet, and on her head was a crown of twelve stars.” A great seven-headed dragon, later identified as “the original serpent, the one called Devil and Satan,” was seen standing before the woman ready to devour her child. The woman “gave birth to a son, a male, who is to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod. And her child *was caught away to God and to his throne.*”—Revelation 12:1-5, *NW*.

This cannot possibly picture the setting up of Christ’s kingdom in heaven *in 1914*, as the Watch Tower Society holds. How could Christ’s kingdom have been so weak in 1914 that it ran the risk of being devoured by Satan and therefore had to be “caught away” from his gaping jaws to God’s throne? Such a view is in the most pointed contrast to the New Testament teaching that Christ ever since his resurrection is in possession of “all authority in heaven and on earth” and is exalted “far above every government and authority and power and lordship.”—Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:21, *NW*.

There was only one time when Jesus Christ apparently was in such a vulnerable situation that Satan felt he could “devour” him, and that was during his earthly life. It was during this period that Satan attempted to thwart the “birth” of Christ as the ruler of the world. From the child-murders in Bethlehem to Jesus’ final execution under Pontius Pilate, Jesus was his chief target. Satan did not succeed, however, as Christ was resurrected and “caught away to God and to his throne.”

As has often been noticed, the presentation of Christ’s enthronement as a “birth” at Revelation 12:5 is an allusion to Psalm 2:6-9:

“I, even I, have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain.”

Let me refer to the decree of Jehovah; He has said to me: “You are my son; I, today, I have become your father. Ask of me, that I may give nations as your inheritance and the end of the earth as your own possession. You will break them with an iron scepter, as though a potter’s vessel you will dash them to pieces.” (*NW*)

The New Testament writers repeatedly apply this psalm to Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of God. (Acts 13:32-33; Romans 1:4; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5)⁶⁴ This Messianic psalm also, like Revelation 12:5, speaks of Christ as been given the power to crush the nations “with

64 Notice also how the “wrath” of “the kings of the earth” against “Jehovah and against his anointed one” at Psalm 2:1-3 is directly applied by the apostle Peter at Acts 4:25-28 to the actions taken against Jesus by the Jewish and Roman authorities. The same passage is also alluded to at Revelation 11:15-18, which first refers to the beginning of Christ’s universal reign in the midst of his wrathful enemies and then about God’s “wrath” upon these enemies.

an iron scepter."⁶⁵

At Revelation 12:7-12 another scene "in heaven" is presented to John, a war scene: "Michael and his angels battled with the dragon, and the dragon and its angels battled" with them. The battle ended in a complete defeat for Satan and his angels:

So down the great dragon was hurled, the original serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, who is misleading the entire inhabited earth; he was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come to pass the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ, because the accuser of our brothers has been hurled down, who accuses them day and night before our God."—Revelation 12:9-10, *NW*.

The exclamation following the "casting out" of Satan and his angels, that "now has come to pass the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ," clearly points to the time of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ, who at that time was given all authority in heaven and on earth.

That the "war in heaven" hardly is meant to be taken as a *literal* war is indicated by the subsequent verses. When Satan had been hurled down to the earth, he persecuted the heavenly "woman" and then "went off to *wage war* with the remaining ones of her seed" who "have the work of bearing witness to Jesus" (Revelation 12:13-17). Verse 11 states that followers of Christ who became martyrs in this war "conquered him [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their witnessing".

This explains the nature of the "war": Through his death as a sacrificial lamb, Christ conquered Satan and brought about his "fall from heaven". Christian martyrs are shown to be partakers in this victory, being enabled to conquer Satan "because of the blood of the Lamb." Satan, the "accuser," is no longer able to accuse them "day and night before our God" because, through the death of Christ, their sins are forgiven. To all appearances, then, the "war in heaven" is a figurative presentation of Christ's victory over Satan through his sacrificial death as a Lamb. Obviously, this "war" has nothing to do with the year 1914.

65 As Christ explained to the congregation in Thyatira, he was already at that time in possession of this "iron rod" and could, therefore, promise to share his "authority over the nations" with the one "that conquers and observes my deeds down to the end."—Revelation 2:26-27, *NW*.

As was shown above, the failed prediction that the trampling down of Jerusalem would end in 1914 necessitated a reinterpretation of this idea. When the year 1914 had passed and the city of Jerusalem continued to be controlled by Gentile nations, the Watch Tower Society finally changed the location to *heavenly* Jerusalem, arguing that the trampling down ended by the the setting up of Christ's kingdom *in heaven* in 1914.

This idea, however, was shown to be contradicted by several texts in the Bible, which unequivocally establish that Christ's universal kingdom was set up at his resurrection and exaltation, when he also began to rule "in the midst of his enemies."

Finally, the claim that Satan was hurled down from heaven in 1914 was examined and found to be biblically untenable. The Bible brings it out clearly that the "fall of Satan" was occasioned by Christ's death and resurrection.

Thus, a number of events that the Watch Tower Society claims to have taken place in 1914 are actually shown by the Bible to have occurred at Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation.

What, then, about 1914? Does this year have any prophetic meaning at all?

D. 1914 IN PERSPECTIVE

As discussed in Chapter 1, the upheavals in Europe and other parts of the world brought about by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars impelled many to believe that the "time of the end" had begun in 1798 or thereabouts, and that Christ would return before the end of that generation. Numerous schedules for the end-time events were worked out, which later on either had to be abandoned or revised.

When, finally, the nineteenth century was gone and the chaotic events that inaugurated that century became increasingly remote, the prophetic significance attached to the period faded away and was soon forgotten by most people.

The chaotic events of 1914-18, too, now belong to the early part of a past century. Is it possible that the interpretations attached to the 1914 date will also fade away and finally be abandoned and forgotten? There are reasons to believe that this date will not so easily be done away with.

It is not just a question of an erroneous chronology that has to be corrected. The unique claims of the Watch Tower movement are closely connected with the year 1914.

If the leaders of the Watch Tower organization would admit that Christ’s kingdom *was not* set up in 1914 and that Christ *did not* come invisibly that year, they would also have to admit that Christ *did not* make any specific inspection of the Christian denominations at that time and *did not* appoint the members of the Russellite movement “over his domestics” in 1919. Then they would have to admit that their claim of being God’s sole “channel” and “mouthpiece” on earth *is false*, and that they for almost a whole century have appeared on the world scene *in a false role with a false message*.

So much of the movement’s identity is “invested” in the 1914 date that it would be a tremendous step to admit that the sophisticated system of prophetic explanations infused into that date is nothing but a figment of the imagination. To openly confess this would require a great measure of courage and humility. It does not seem likely that the present leaders of the organization are prepared to defuse the prophetically loaded date in this way.

Besides, the Watch Tower Society insists that not only its *chronology*, but also the *events* since 1914 prove that this date marked the beginning of the “time of the end.”⁶⁶ Referring to Jesus’ prophecy at Matthew 24, it is held that wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, lawlessness, and other calamities since 1914 constitute the “sign” of Christ’s “invisible presence” since that year. Although it is admitted that earlier generations, too, have had their share of such calamities, the Watch Tower Society claims that they have been increasing *on an unprecedented scale* since 1914. Is this true?

To be able to check if this claim is correct, it is necessary to examine the extent of these calamities in earlier centuries, something that so far has never been done in the Watchtower publications. As most people to a great extent are strangers to the past, they are usually easy to convince that the period since 1914 has been more disastrous than earlier periods. Most people may find it difficult to believe that this conclusion *is disproved by a careful examination of the extent of the calamities in the past*.

An examination of history shows that most of the calamities mentioned by Jesus at Matthew 24 *have not* increased since 1914, and that some of them, such as famines and pestilences, even have *decreased markedly* since that year! The historical evidence of this is discussed

66 On p. 95 of the book *Reasoning from the Scriptures* (1985) the Watch Tower Society summarizes these “two lines of evidence” as follows: “Why do Jehovah’s Witnesses say that God’s Kingdom was established in 1914? *Two lines of evidence point to that year*: (1) Bible chronology and (2) the events since 1914 in fulfillment of prophecy.”

in the work *The Sign of the Last Days—When?*⁶⁷

If 1914 did not mark the end of the Gentile times, nor the beginning of Christ's invisible presence, why did the First World War break out at a date predicted thirty-nine years in advance? This may seem very remarkable. But it must first be remembered that none of the things predicted to occur on that date actually happened. Secondly, an endless number of dates have been set for the second coming of Christ, and also for the end of the Gentile times. A predicted date sometimes *accidentally* happens to coincide with some important historical event, although the event itself was not predicted. Such a coincidence may be almost unavoidable if *nearly every year* during a certain period have been pointed to in advance by various expositors!

Of the many dates fixed for the expiration of the Gentile times, some were put very near to the 1914 date: 1915 (Guinness, 1886), 1917 (J. A. Brown, 1823), 1918 (Bickersteth, 1850), 1919 (Habershon, 1844), 1922 (*The Prophetic Times*, December 1870), and 1923 (Guinness, 1886).⁶⁸

The Watch Tower Society made many predictions regarding 1914, but the outbreak of a major war in Europe was not one of them. It did not lead to the “universal anarchy” that *had* been predicted. That a major event happened to take place in that year is not remarkable. Somewhat more remarkable is when a predicted date produces an event that *does* have some apparent relation to the events foretold for the date in question. This, too, has happened. For example, 1917 would, according to John Aquila Brown in 1823, see “the full glory of the kingdom of Israel . . . perfected.”⁶⁹ Although this did not happen in 1917, an important step was taken that year toward the establishment of the state of Israel.⁷⁰

67 C. O. Jonsson & W. Herbst, *The Sign of the Last Days—When?* (Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1987). xv+271 pages. Available from Commentary Press, P.O. Box 43532, Atlanta, Georgia 30336, USA.

68 See Table 2 of Chapter 1.

69 See Chapter 1, note 24.

70 See note 44 above. Another example is the predictions that pointed forward to 1941 as the culmination of the “time of trouble.” A number of expositors of the prophecies, including John Bacon (in 1799), George Stanley Faber (in 1811), Edward D. Griffin (in 1813), Joseph Emerson (in 1818), George Duffield (in 1842), and E. B. Elliott (in 1862), ended the 1260 year-days in 1866 and the 1335 year-days in 1941, arguing that the “time of the end” was a period of 75 years (the difference between 1335 and 1260). This “time of trouble” would culminate in 1941 and be followed by the millennium. 1941 was certainly a “time of trouble” as it was in this year that the United States joined the war that had started in 1939 and it was turned into a world war. The millennium, however, did not follow. —See LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. III (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), pp. 721-22; Vol. IV (1954), pp. 73, 105-06, 174, 262, 337.

More remarkable still was Robert Fleming’s prediction that the French monarchy would fall towards the end of the eighteenth century, a prediction made *nearly a hundred years prior to that event!*

Fleming’s book *The Rise and Fall of Papacy* was first published in 1701. Commenting upon the fourth vial at Revelation 16:8-9, he identifies the “sun” as the Papacy, and France as instrumental in pouring out the fourth vial. After that, France itself will be humbled:

We may justly suppose that *the French monarchy*, after it has scorched others, will itself consume by doing so—its fire, and that which is the fuel that maintains it, wasting insensibly, till it be exhausted at last towards the end of this century.⁷¹

I cannot but hope that some new mortification of the chief supporters of Antichrist will then happen; and perhaps the French monarchy may begin to be considerably humbled about that time; that whereas the present French king takes the sun for his emblem, and this for his motto, “Nec pluribus impar,” he may at length, or rather his successors, and the *monarchy itself (at least before the year 1794)* be forced to acknowledge that, in respect to neighbouring potentates, he is even “Singulis impar.” But as to the expiration of this vial, I do fear it will not be until the year 1794.⁷²

Shortly after the Republic had been proclaimed in 1792, when the horrors of the French Revolution were at their most extreme and Louis XVI was about to die on the scaffold, Fleming’s remarkable “predictions” were recalled to memory. Thus his book began to be reprinted both in England and America. The sensation his predictions produced was great and caused much excitement; and their (partial) fulfillment was a strong incentive to increased study of biblical prophecies after the French Revolution.

Fleming’s calculation of the 1,260 year-days (552-1794) was taken over by many others, although the termination date for them was soon changed by many from 1794 to 1798, the year when the Pope was deposed as ruler of the Papal States and banished by French troops.

Thus the 1798 date came to be regarded as marking the beginning of the “time of the end” by Adventist groups. The calculation was later adopted also by C. T. Russell and his followers but changed slightly (in the 1880’s) to the following year, 1799. The Seventh-Day Adventists still believe that the “time of the end” began in 1798.

71 Robert Fleming, Jr., *The Rise and Fall of Papacy* (London, 1849; reprint of the 1701 edition), p. 68. Emphasis added.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 64. Emphasis added.

Should not “fulfilled” predictions of this kind help us to take a more sober view of the 1914 date?

In Chapters 3 and 4 of this work much strong evidence was presented against the 607 B.C.E. date as the year of the destruction of Jerusalem and the starting-point of the 2,520 year Gentile times calculation.

In Chapter 5 it was demonstrated that the seventy-year prophecy is in good agreement with the 587 B.C.E. date for the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, the 2,520 years *could not have ended in 1914*.

Then, in this chapter, it has been shown that a change of the expiration date of those times from 1914 to 1934 resulted in just another failed prophecy. Next, the question was raised, “Is the 2,520-year calculation really founded on a sound biblical basis?” The examination that followed demonstrated it is not. Finally, the re-evaluation of the meaning of the 1914 date in the Watch Tower publications since 1922 was examined and found to be deficient.

For all these reasons, should not the 1914 date be wholly and entirely discarded as the pivotal point in the application of Bible prophecies to our time? The answer should be evident.

E. SOME NOTES ON THE “GENTILE TIMES” OF LUKE 21:24

What, then, about the period called “times of the Gentiles”? If it does not refer to a period of 2,520 years, to what period may this expression refer?

The phrase “times of the Gentiles” (“appointed times of the nations,” *NW*) occurs in the lengthy prophecy of Jesus known as the *Olivet discourse*. This discourse is recorded by all the three Synoptics (Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21). Only Luke, however, uses the expression “times of Gentiles” (*kairoí ethnôn*). The phrase is used in connection with Jesus’ prediction of the coming judgment upon Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. Stating that there would be “great distress in the land and wrath against this people,” Jesus went on to explain how this “wrath” would be vented on the people:

They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until *the times of the Gentiles* (*kairoí ethnôn*) are fulfilled. — Luke 21:24, *NIV*.

Following normal English usage, translators have usually employed the definite article when rendering the words *kairoí ethnôn* as, “the times of the Gentiles.” In Greek, the use of the definite article would point to a definite and well-known period. Since, however, the definite article is not found in the Greek text, the phrase “times of Gentiles” can refer to an imprecise period rather than one specific period already known to the readers (or listeners).

The words *kairoí ethnôn* have been variously interpreted throughout the centuries. Bible commentator Dr. Alfred Plummer observed:

The “seasons of the Gentiles” or “opportunities of the Gentiles” cannot be interpreted with certainty. Either (1) *Seasons* for executing the Divine judgements; or (2) for lording it over Israel; or (3) for existing as Gentiles; or (4) for themselves becoming subject to Divine judgements; or (5) *Opportunities* of turning to God; or (6) of possessing the privileges which the Jews had forfeited. The first and last are best, and they are not mutually exclusive.⁷³

A few comments may be necessary to clarify what may be implied in each of these alternatives:

(1) Seasons for executing the divine judgments

A number of expositors understand the “times of Gentiles” as the period allotted to the Gentile armies of Rome for executing the divine judgment upon the Jewish nation and its capital. As the period required for crushing the Jewish rebellion and recapturing Jerusalem lasted for about three and a half years — from the arrival of Vespasian’s armies in Galilee in the spring of 67 until the desolation of Jerusalem by Titus’ armies in the autumn of 70 C.E. — these expositors usually also equate the “times of Gentiles” with the “42 months” of Revelation 11:2, during which period the Gentiles would “trample on the holy city.”⁷⁴

(2) Seasons for lording it over Israel

In this view the “times of Gentiles” are understood as referring to the period of Gentile domination of Jerusalem, dating either from 70 C.E. or from an earlier point of time.

73 Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), p. 483.

74 Dr. Milton S. Terry, for example, who adopted this view, states: “These ‘times of the Gentiles’ are obviously the period allotted to the Gentiles to tread down Jerusalem, and those times are fulfilled as soon as the nations shall have accomplished their work of treading down the holy city.” — M. S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988. Reprint of the 1898 edition), p. 367.

It is certainly true that Jerusalem, after the destruction of the city in the year 70 C.E., was controlled by a successive number of non-Jewish nations: Rome (up to 614 C.E.), Persia (up to 628 C.E.), the Byzantine Empire (up to 638 C.E.), the Saracen Empire (up to 1073 C.E.), the Seljuks (up to 1099), the Christian Crusader Kingdom (up to 1291 C.E., interrupted by brief periods of Egyptian control), Egypt (up to 1517 C.E.), Turkey (up to 1917 C.E.), Great Britain (up to 1948 C.E.), and Jordan (up to 1967, when Israel gained control of the old walled city of Jerusalem).⁷⁵

Many expositors regard this long period of Gentile domination as the “times of Gentiles,” or at least as a part of this period, arguing that the restoration of the state of Israel marks the end of the “times of Gentiles.” For this reason, many of these expositors believe that the “times of Gentiles” ended either in 1948 or in 1967.⁷⁶

(3) Seasons for existing as Gentiles

According to this view, Jesus was saying that Jerusalem would be trampled upon by Gentile nations as long as there are any Gentile nations on earth. The “times of Gentiles” are simply regarded as referring to the whole period of human history during which there have been and will be nations on earth.

If the Jews can be said to have resumed full control of Jerusalem in 1967, it has to be concluded that the Gentile nations have continued to exist on earth after the end of the “Gentile times.” This, of course, would invalidate the view under discussion.

However, it may also be argued that, although the Jews have been in control of Jerusalem since 1967, the most central part of the city, the old temple site, is still in the hands of the Arabs, and this site is still occupied by the Muslim “Dome of the Rock” edifice. For this reason it may be held that Jerusalem is still being “trampled on” or desecrated by “Gentiles.”

75 A detailed history of the long period of foreign control of Jerusalem is included in Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem. One City, Three Faiths* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996).

76 An excellent overview of the applications of Luke 21:24 and other Biblical prophecies given by various expositors to Israel’s conquest of Jerusalem in 1967 and the subsequent events is found in Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991; reprint of the 1977 edition), pp. 188-214. An update since 1977 is included in the Foreword on pp. xxv-xlii. A very thorough discussion of the various aspects of the significance of Jerusalem in Jesus’ prophecy can be found in the book *Jesus and the Holy City*, by P. W. L. Walker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann’s, 1996).

(4) Seasons for the Gentiles becoming subject to divine judgments

Advocates of this view argue that the “times of Gentiles” refer to the period for a judgment of the Gentile nations. This period, therefore, is still future. As the Roman war against the Jews in the period 67-70 C.E. was a time for the judgment of the Jewish nation, so there will also be a time for the judgment of the Gentile nations. Until these “times of Gentiles” arrive, the Gentiles will continue to trample on Jerusalem.⁷⁷

(5) Opportunities of turning to God

Those holding this view connect the “times of Gentiles” with Paul’s statement at Romans 11:25 that “a partial hardening has happened to Israel until *the fullness of Gentiles* has come in” (*NASB*). It is argued that the “times of Gentiles” are related to this “fullness of Gentiles” and refer to the times of Gentile mission. This understanding evidently implies that the “times of Gentiles” began with the conversion of Cornelius. (Acts 10:1-48) These times of Gentile mission, as well as the times of trampling on Jerusalem by Gentile nations, will continue “until the fullness of Gentiles has come in.”⁷⁸

(6) Opportunities of possessing the privileges which the Jews had forfeited

This view is related to the previous one. Due to unfaithfulness the Jewish nation was judged and the privileges were taken away from the Jews and offered to the Gentiles. (Matthew 21:43) The period during which these privileges are made available to the Gentiles is regarded as the “times of Gentiles.”

As may be seen, there are various possible interpretations of the phrase “times of Gentiles,” even without the application of the “year-day principle” to the period. It must be recognized that the phrase itself is stated in Scripture without any specific accompanying qualification. To determine which view or views give greater evidence of validity would require a detailed and extensive discussion

77 For a recent exposition of this view, see Dr. John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*. Word Biblical Commentary 35c (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), pp. 1002-1003.

78 The note to Luke 21:24 in *The NIV Study Bible* reflects this view: “The Gentiles would have both spiritual opportunities (Mk 13:10; cf. Lk 20:16; Ro 11:25) and domination of Jerusalem, but these times will end when God’s purpose for the Gentiles has been fulfilled.” Compare also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 1680-1681.

of each of the various alternatives. Such an analysis is beyond the scope of this work, the main purpose of which has been to examine the Watch Tower Society's interpretation of the "times of Gentiles" and to demonstrate why that interpretation is both historically and Biblically untenable. Any further discussion of the factors involved in the meaning of the phrase "times of Gentiles," therefore, will have to be reserved for another occasion.

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

(continued on page 289)

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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lem 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.

APPENDIX

For Chapter One:

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE SECOND ADVENT MOVEMENT

As noted on page 43, along with intense interest in time prophecies, the Second Advent movement was also characterized by a number of other distinctive factors.

Many of the Second Adventist splinter groups that branched off from the original Millerites rejected the immortal soul and hell doctrines (and even the trinity doctrine). This was due largely to the articles and tracts published in the 1820's, 1830's, and 1840's by a former Baptist pastor, *Henry Grew* of Hartford, Connecticut and later of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.¹

The doctrine of “conditional immortality” was first introduced among the Millerites by George Storrs. It was the reading of one of Grew's tracts in 1837 that turned Storrs against the immortal soul and hell doctrines, and he was later to become the leading champion in the United States of conditionalism.

Typical of many Second Adventist periodicals, the *World's Crisis* advocated *conditionalism*, the doctrine of the conditional—not inherent—immortality of the human soul, with its corollary tenet that the ultimate destiny of those who are rejected by God is destruction or annihilation, not conscious torment. The *World's Crisis* had advocated the date of 1854 for Christ's second coming and when, like all the preceding dates, this date failed, the “immortality question” came strongly to the fore and caused a second major division within the original movement.

1 LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1965, pp. 300-315. Grew's anti-trinitarian position, too, was adopted by a majority of the Second Adventists, including the three major Adventist groups that branched off from the “original” Adventists: 1) the Seventh-Day Adventists, 2) the Advent Christians, and 3) the “age to come” Adventists. In 1898 the SDA Church, on the authority of Ellen G. White, the “prophetess” of this movement, changed its position on the question. (Erwin Roy Gane, *The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-Day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer*, unpublished M.A. thesis, Andrews University, June 1963, pp. 1-110) Some decades later, the Advent Christian Church, too, began to reconsider its anti-trinitarian position.—See David Arnold Dean, *Echoes of the Midnight Cry: The Millerite Heritage in the Apologetics of the Advent Christian Denomination, 1860-1960* (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1976) pp. 406-416.

Although the doctrine of conditional immortality eventually was adopted by a majority of the Second Adventists, it was never accepted by the *leadership* of the original movement, which increasingly began to condemn it as a heresy in their periodical, the *Advent Herald*. Finally, in 1858, the original Second Adventists, or the “Evangelical Adventists,” as they now called themselves, openly broke with the “conditionalist” Adventists and formed a separate organization, *The American Evangelical Advent Conference*. The Evangelical Adventists, however, soon became a minority, as their members in increasing numbers sided with the “conditionalist” Adventists. The association finally died out in the early years of the 20th century.²

After the break with the Evangelical Adventists, the supporters of the *World's Crisis*, too, formed a separate denomination in 1860, *The Advent Christian Association* (later “The Advent Christian Church”), today the most important Adventist denomination aside from the Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses.³

Many “conditionalist” Adventists did not join this association, however, partly because they were strongly opposed to all forms of structured church organization and would accept no names of their church but the “Church of God,” and partly also because of their distinctive “age to come” views, that is, that the Jews would be restored to Palestine before the coming of Christ, that his coming would usher in the millenium, and that the saints would reign with Christ for a thousand years, during which period his kingdom would be set up on earth. By the early 1860’s, these Adventists had been separated

- 2 David Tallmadge Arthur, “*Come out of Babylon*”: A Study of Millerite Separatism and Denominationalism, 1840-1865 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1970), pp. 291-306; Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message* (Yarmouth [Maine], Boston, New York, London, 1874), pp. 597-600, 609, 610. See also the excellent overview by D. A. Dean, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-129. Even *Joshua V. Himes*, editor of the *Advent Herald* and the most influential leader of the original movement after the death of Miller in 1849, adopted the “conditionalist” position in 1862 and left the Evangelical Adventists.
- 3 Numerically, the membership of this church has remained at about 30,000-50,000 throughout its history. The two most influential leaders and writers at the formation of the association were H. L. Hastings and Miles Grant, the latter being editor of the *World's Crisis* from 1856 to 1876. Hastings left the association in 1865 and remained independent of all associations for the rest of his life, although he continued to advocate conditionalism and other teachings of the Advent Christian denomination. (See Dean, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-135, 142, 210-294.)

from the Advent Christians.⁴

In 1863 another group of “conditionalist” Adventists, headed by Rufus Wendell, George Storrs, R. E. Ladd, W. S. Campbell, and others, broke with the Advent Christian Association and formed a new denomination, *The Life and Advent Union*. This group promulgated the view that only the righteous would be resurrected at Christ’s coming. The wicked dead would remain in their graves forever. They also denied the personality of the holy spirit and even of the devil. For the promotion of these teachings, they started a new paper, *Herald of Life and of the Coming Kingdom*, with Storrs as editor.⁵ Storrs later changed his view of the resurrection and left the group in 1871, resuming the publishing of his earlier *Bible Examiner* magazine.

For Chapter Two:

METHODS OF RECKONING REGNAL YEARS

The accession and nonaccession year systems

Babylon, and later Medo-Persia, applied the *accession year system*, in which the year during which a king came to power was reckoned as his accession year, and the next year beginning on Nisan 1 (spring), was reckoned as his first year.

In Egypt the opposite method was applied: the year in which a king came to power was counted as his first year. There is evidence to show that the latter method, the *nonaccession year system*, was also applied in the kingdom of Judah. The evidence is as follows:

1. The battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.E., when the army of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, is stated at Jeremiah 46:2 as having occurred “in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim the

4 The leading advocate of these views was *Joseph Marsh* in Rochester, N.Y., editor of the *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate* (in 1854 changed to *Prophetic Expositor and Bible Advocate*). See also D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-227, 352-371. Henry Grew as well as Bible translator Benjamin Wilson both associated with this group. (*Historical Waymarks of the Church of God*, Oregon, Illinois: Church of God General Conference, 1976, pp. 51-53) Due to their opposition to all church organization, the “age to come” Adventists were very loosely associated. A more stable organization was not formed until 1921, when the *Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith* was organized with headquarters in Oregon, Illinois. – D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

5 D.A. Dean, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-138; D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-351. The Life and Advent Union lived on until 1964, when it merged again with the Advent Christian Church.

son of Josiah, king of Judah.” According to Jeremiah 25:1 “the fourth year of Jehoiakim . . . was the *first* year of Nebuchadnezzar.” But the Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle 5* (B.M. 21946) clearly states that this battle took place in Nebuchadnezzar’s *accession year*, not in his first year.⁶ The reason why Jeremiah reckons Nebuchadnezzar’s accession year as his first year seems to be that Judah did not apply the accession year system. Jeremiah, therefore, applied the Jewish non-accession year system not only to Jehoiakim, but also to Nebuchadnezzar.

2. In 2 Kings 24:12; 25:8, and Jeremiah 52:12 Jehoiachin’s deportation and the destruction of Jerusalem are said to have taken place in Nebuchadnezzar’s *eighth* and *nineteenth* regnal years, while Jeremiah 52:28-30 seems to put these events in Nebuchadnezzar’s *seventh* and *eighteenth* years, respectively. The difference in both cases is one year. The Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle 5* is in agreement with Jeremiah 52:28 in stating that Nebuchadnezzar seized Jerusalem and captured Jehoiachin in his seventh year.

There is evidence to show that the last chapter of Jeremiah, chapter 52, was not authored by Jeremiah himself. This is clearly indicated by the concluding statement of the preceding chapter (Jeremiah 51:64): “Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.” Chapter 52, in fact, is almost word for word taken from 2 Kings 24:18—25:30, *the only exception being Jeremiah 52:28-30*, the verses containing the divergence of one year in the reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s regnal years.⁷ Professor Albertus Pieters in all probability gives the correct explanation of this difference when he states:

This difference is perfectly explained if we assume that the section in question was added to the prophecies of Jeremiah by someone in Babylon who had access to an official report or record, in which the date would, of course, be set down according to the Babylonian reckoning.⁸

- 6 The Neo-Babylonian chronicles are discussed in Chapter Three, section B-1.
- 7 It cannot be determined whether chapter 52 was added by Jeremiah himself, his scribe Baruch, or some other person. The reason why this section from 2 Kings was included may have been “to show how Jeremiah’s prophecies were fulfilled.”—Dr. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 773, 774.
- 8 Albertus Pieters, “The Third Year of Jehoiakim,” in *From the Pyramids to Paul*, ed. by Lewis Gaston Leary (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1935), p. 186. That the information in Jeremiah 52:28-30 may have been added to the book of Jeremiah in *Babylonia* is also supported by the fact that the Greek *Septuagint* (LXX) version of Jeremiah, which was produced in *Egypt* (perhaps from a manuscript preserved by the Jews in that country), does not include these verses.

The compiler of Jeremiah 52, then, faithfully reproduced the dates found in his two sources, even if those sources reflected two different ways of reckoning regnal years: the accession year system used by the Babylonians, and the nonaccession year system used by the Jews.

The last four verses of chapter 52 of Jeremiah (verses 31-34), although taken verbatim from 2 Kings 25:27-30, also reflects the accession year system, which may be explained by the fact that the passage reproduces information that originally must have been received from Babylonia. As stated in this passage, Evil-merodach (Awel-Marduk), “in the year of his becoming king,” released the Judean king Jehoiachin from prison in the 37th year of his exile. According to Professor Pieters the clause “in the year of his becoming king” (Jeremiah 52:31) “is the technically correct term for the year of the monarch’s accession,”⁹ the Babylonian documents using a similar expression when referring to the accession year.

That the writer of the passage in Jeremiah 52:28-34 used the accession year system is thus the conclusion of a number of modern Biblical scholars.¹⁰

3. The accession year system is most probably also employed by the prophet Daniel at Daniel 1:1, where he dates the first deportation of Jewish exiles to the “*third year*” of Jehoiakim. This deportation, however, must have followed upon the battle of Carchemish, the victory there paving the way for Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion and conquest of the countries in the west, including Judah.

As noted above, this battle is dated at Jeremiah 46:2 to the “*fourth year*” of Jehoiakim, not to his third. Most commentators, therefore, choose to regard the “*third year*” of Daniel 1:1 as a historical blunder by the author of the book, and as indicating that he was not contemporary with the event, but was writing hundreds of years afterwards. Some, including the Watch Tower Society, argue that the deportation mentioned in the text was identical with the one that occurred eight years later, after the end of Jehoiakim’s 11th year of reign, when his son and successor Jehoiachin was exiled to Babylon.¹¹

9 Pieters, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

10 See, for example, John Bright, *The Anchor Bible: Jeremiah* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), p. 369; J. A. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 782, and J. Philip Hyatt, “New Light on Nebuchadnezzar and Judean History,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 75 (1956), p. 278.

11 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1988), p. 1269. A detailed examination of this theory is presented in the Appendix for Chapter Five: “The ‘third year of Jehoiakim’ (Daniel 1:1, 2).”

However, if it is accepted that Daniel was living in Babylon in the Neo-Babylonian period and was occupying a high rank in its administration, it would have been natural for him to apply the Babylonian calendar and their system of reckoning regnal years, and to do this as well when referring to the reigns of non-Babylonian kings, including Jehoiakim, just as Jeremiah, living in Judea, conversely applied the Jewish nonaccession year system in referring to Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

4. The Babylonian calendar was also used (alongside the Egyptian civil calendar) by the Jewish colony at Elephantine in s. Egypt from the 5th century onward, as has been established by Dr. Bezalel Porten and others. Dr. Sacha Stern concludes that, "Non-Jewish or 'official' calendars were routinely used by Diaspora Jews throughout the whole of Antiquity."¹²

Several difficult problems in Biblical chronology are easily solved if the accession and nonaccession year systems are taken into consideration. A study of the chronological tables in the final section of this Appendix ("Chronological tables covering the seventy years") will make this clear.

Nisan and Tishri years

It is well established that the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian calendar started on Nisan 1 (the first day of the month Nisan in the spring), which was also the beginning of the regnal years. The Jews, in later times, had two beginnings of their calendar years: Nisan 1 in the spring and Tishri 1 six months later in the autumn—Tishri 1 being the older new-year day.¹³ Although Nisan was the beginning of the *sacred* calendar year, and the months were always numbered from it,¹⁴ Tishri was retained as the beginning of the *secular* calendar year.

The problem is: Did the kings of Judah follow the custom of Babylon and other countries in reckoning the regnal years from Nisan 1, or did they reckon them from Tishri, the beginning of their secular year? Although scholars disagree on this, there is evidence to show that the kings of Judah reckoned their regnal years on a Tishri-to-Tishri basis.

12 Sacha Stern, "The Babylonian Calendar at Elephantine," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Band 130 (2000), p. 159.

13 J. D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, England : Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 159; compare *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 391.

14 "In the Hebrew Scriptures the months are numbered from Nisan, regardless of whether the reckoning of the year was from spring or fall." – Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 52. In footnote 11 on the same page he gives many examples of this.

1. Jeremiah 1:3 states that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, after the desolation of the city, “went into exile in the *fifth* month,” which is also in agreement with the record in 2 Kings 25:8-12. Yet this fifth month is said to have been at “the *end* of the eleventh year of Zedekiah.”¹⁵ Only if the regnal years were reckoned as beginning from Tishri (the seventh month) could the fifth month be said to be at “the end of” Zedekiah’s eleventh regnal year, which then ended with the next month, Elul, the sixth month.

2. According to 2 Kings 22:3–10 King Josiah of Judah, in his *eighteenth* year, began repairs on the temple of Jerusalem. During these repairs High Priest Hilkiah found “the book of the law” in the temple.¹⁶ This discovery resulted in an extensive campaign against idolatry throughout the whole land. After that Josiah reinstated the passover on Nisan 14, two weeks after the beginning of the new year according to the sacred calendar. Very interestingly, this passover is said to have been celebrated “in the *eighteenth* year of King Josiah.” (2 Kings 23:21-23) As the repairs of the temple, the cleansing of the land from idolatry and many other things recorded in 2 Kings 22:3—23:23 could not reasonably have occurred within just two weeks, it seems obvious that Josiah’s eighteenth regnal year was not counted from Nisan 1, but from Tishri 1.

3. Another indication of a Tishri reckoning of regnal years in Judah is given in Jeremiah 36. In “the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim” (verse 1), Yahweh told Jeremiah to write in a book all the words he had spoken to him against Israel, Judah, and all the nations (verse 2). This Jeremiah did through Baruch, his secretary (verse 4). When Baruch had finished the work, Jeremiah asked him to “go, and from the scroll you wrote at my dictation, read all the words of Yahweh to the people in his Temple on the day of the fast.” (Jeremiah 36:5, 6, *JB*). Which fast?

This was evidently a special fast proclaimed for some unspecified reason. Most probably the reason was the battle of Carchemish in May-June that same year, “in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim” (Jeremiah 46:2), and the subsequent events, including the siege laid

15 *KJV, ASV, NASB*, and other versions. The *New World Translation (NW)* uses the word “completion”: “until the *completion* of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, until Jerusalem went into exile in the *fifth* month.”

16 As argued by many commentators, the “book of the law” probably was the book of Deuteronomy, which may have been lost for some time, but was now rediscovered. Cf. Professor Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), pp. 294-296.

against Jerusalem in the same year according to Daniel 1:1. Though Nebuchadnezzar by now, due to the death of his father, had returned to Babylon (as recorded in the Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle 5*), the Jews had good reasons for fearing that he soon would return and continue his operations in Judah and the surrounding areas. Against this background, a “summons to a fast in the presence of Yahweh for the whole population of Jerusalem and for all the people who could come to Jerusalem from the towns of Judah” (Jeremiah 36:9, *JB*) is quite understandable. Very interestingly, this fast, at which Baruch was to read aloud from the scroll he had written, took place “in the *fifth* year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, *in the ninth month*,” according to the same verse.

If Jehoiakim’s regnal years were counted from Nisan, the first month, Baruch began to write down Jeremiah’s prophecies about a year prior to this fast. Besides, it seems to have been *proclaimed* already in in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (verses 1, 6), and thus about nine months before it was held. All this seems very improbable. But if Jehoiakim’s regnal years were counted from Tishri, the seventh month, his fourth year ended with Elul, the sixth month (corresponding to parts of August-September, 605 B.C.E.), and the fast in the ninth month (parts of November-December, 605 B.C.E.) took place a little more than two months after the beginning of Jehoiakim’s fifth year.

Baruch’s writing down of Jeremiah’s prophecies, then, took only a few months, which is more probable, and the fast could have been proclaimed only two months before it was held, and not long after the battle of Carchemish and the subsequent Babylonian operations in Syria and Palestine in the summer and autumn of 605 B.C.E.¹⁷

4. There is evidence, too, that Jewish writers, when referring to foreign kings, at least sometimes reckoned their regnal years according to the Tishri year. This is done by Nehemiah for example. In Nehemiah 1:1 he refers to the month Chislew (November-December)

17 According to the Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle 5* Nebuchadnezzar was enthroned in Babylon “on the first day of the month Elul,” corresponding to September 7, 605 B.C.E., Julian calendar. After that, and still in his accession year, “Nebuchadnezzar returned to Hattu [the Syro-Palestinian area in the west]. Until the month Shebat [parts of January-February, 604 B.C.E.] he marched about victorious in Hattu.” – A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, (Locust Valley, New York: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), p. 100. Thus Nebuchadnezzar may already have returned to the Hattu area at the time of the fast in November or December, 605 B.C.E. The danger of another invasion of Judah, therefore, seemed impending.

in the *twentieth* year of Artaxerxes. But the month of Nisan of the next year is still referred to as in Artaxerxes' *twentieth* year of rule. (Nehemiah 2:1) If Nehemiah reckoned Artaxerxes' regnal years from Nisan 1, he should have written *twenty-first* year at chapter 2, verse 1. Nehemiah, therefore, obviously reckoned the regnal years of the Persian king Artaxerxes according to the Jewish Tishri-to-Tishri calendar, not according to the Persian Nisan-to-Nisan count. This is also supported in the Watch Tower Society's Bible dictionary, *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2 (1988), pages 487, 488.¹⁸

That Judah followed a Tishri-to-Tishri reckoning of the regnal years, at least in this period of its history, is the conclusion of some of the best scholars and students of Bible chronology, for example, Sigmund Mowinckel, Julian Morgenstern, Friedrich Karl Kienitz, Abraham Malamat, and Edwin R. Thiele.¹⁹ Although this way of reckoning regnal years makes the synchronisms between Judah and Babylon somewhat more complicated, it clears up many problems when applied. In the chronological tables on pages 350-352 of this book, both kinds of regnal years are paralleled with our modern calendar.

18 Few scholars seem to hold that Judah in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. employed this combination of *both* the nonaccession year system *and* the Tishri-to-Tishri count of the regnal years, as advocated in this work. Those who opt for the nonaccession year system usually hold that Judah applied the Nisan-to-Nisan reckoning, and those who argue that Tishri-to-Tishri regnal years were used generally believe that the accession year system was employed.

19 See for example J. Morgenstern's review of Parker and Dubberstein's *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.-A.D. 45* in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 2 (1943), pp. 125-130, and Dr. A. Malamat's article, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom," in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. XXVII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), p. 124, including note 2; also K. S. Freedy and D. B. Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 90 (1970), pp. 464, 465. Dr. Edwin R. Thiele, however, assumes that while the books of Kings reckon the regnal years from Tishri, Jeremiah and Ezekiel both reckon them from Nisan. (E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983, pp. 51-53, 182-191.) This seems a rather far-fetched speculation, and there is not need for it, if we allow for both Tishri regnal years and the nonaccession year system for this period.

For Chapter Three:

SOME COMMENTS ON COPYING, READING, AND SCRIBAL ERRORS IN CUNEIFORM TABLETS

If twenty years are to be added to the Neo-Babylonian era, *considerable numbers* of texts dated to *each* of these years should have been found. It would never do to come up with one or two oddly dated documents from the era. Like modern clerks, secretaries, and bookkeepers, the Babylonian scribes now and then made errors in writing. As the writing had to be done while the clay tablet was soft, some of the errors could be corrected before the tablet dried out. Many tablets bear traces of crossings-out and corrections. Usually, the errors found on the tablets concern minor details, repetitions, omissions, etc. Although the errors sometimes also concern the date, it is remarkable that most of the odd dates found in modern catalogues of Babylonian tablets turn out to be *modern* reading, copying, or printing errors, including misreading or misprinting of royal names.

In their attempts at defending the Watch Tower Society's chronology, some Witnesses, both in the United States and Norway, have exploited not only such copying, reading, and scribal errors in cuneiform texts, but also the dates on some documents that seem to create overlaps of a few weeks or months between the reigns of some of the Neo-Babylonian rulers. For this reason it seems necessary to take a closer look at these problems.

Modern copying and reading errors

As Mr. C. B. F. Walker at the British Museum points out, "modern readers frequently incorrectly read numbers and month names on Babylonian tablets."²⁰ Royal names, too, are sometimes misread by modern scholars. Since dating within the Babylonian period is based on *regnal years* (rather than an *era* dating) the name of the king involved is obviously crucial.

Thus on one published text the translation referred to Babylonian ruler "*Labashi-Marduk's 4th year.*"²¹ Later scholars realized that the

20 Letter Walker-Jonsson, October 1, 1987. This is also reflected in the *CBT* catalogues on the Sippar collection at the British Museum, referred to in chapter 3, note 60, which list some 40,000 texts. Quite a number of the odd dates are just printing errors, while many others on collation turn out to be reading errors. A list with corrections and additions is kept at the museum by Mr. Walker.

21 R. Campbell Thompson, *A Catalogue of the Late Babylonian Tablets in the Bodleian Library, Oxford IV* (London: Luzac and Co., 1927), tablet no. A 83.

text actually referred to Assyrian king *Shamash-shum-ukin*.²² (There is a wide difference in our *alphabetical* spelling of the two names, but one must remember these were written in *cuneiform signs* which, in this case, were much more easily mistakable.) A similar error in reading another tablet resulted in reference to the 21st year of Sinshar-ishkun, the next to the last Assyrian king.²³ Later reexamination of this damaged section led to the conclusion the reference was more probably to Babylonian king Nabu-apla-usur (Nabopolassar).²⁴

Scribal errors

Not all the odd dates are modern errors, however. It is well established that the Persian king *Cambyses*, the son of Cyrus, ruled for eight years (529/28-522/21 B.C.E.). Yet one text from his reign (BM 30650) seemed to be dated to Cambyses' "11th year". At first the text caused much discussion among scholars, but it was finally concluded that it refers to Cambyses' *first* year. The number "1" had been written over an original "10," which the scribe had not been able to completely erase, resulting in a number that easily could be misread as "11".²⁵

Another document was dated to the "10th year" of *Cyrus*, although it is known from all ancient sources that Cyrus ruled for nine years only. The problem was soon resolved. In the period involved, the scribes commonly made duplicate copies of an agreement, one for

22 Letter Dr. D. J. Wiseman-Jonsson, June 19, 1987.

23 G. Contenau in *Textes Cunéiformes, Tome XII, Contrats Néo-Babyloniens*, I (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste, 1927), p. 2 + Pl. X, tablet no. 16; *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Vol. 16, 1952-53, p. 308; *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 35:1-2, 1983, p. 59.

24 Letter from Dr. Béatrice André of the Louvre Museum to C. O. Jonsson, March 20, 1990. As Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, ruled for 21 years, this reading of the royal name creates no problem. — In the early days of Assyriology the reading of royal names was an even more arduous task. In 1877, for example, Wt. St. Chad Boscawen found two tablets in the archive of the Babylonian Egibi banking house, which seemed to mention two previously unknown Neo-Babylonian kings: *Marduk-shar-uzur* and *La-khab-ba-si-kudur*. Later, however, it turned out that the two names were misreadings for *Nergal-shar-uzur* [Neriglissar] and *Labashi-Marduk*. According to the banker Bosanquet, who financially supported Boscawen's work on the tablets, there was also a tablet in the Egibi archive dated to the 11th year of Nergal-shar-uzur. However, no such tablet has since been found in the collection at the British Museum. It was most probably another misreading, and Bosanquet himself did not refer to it again when he later presented his own speculative and wholly untenable chronology of the Neo-Babylonian era.—*Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, Vol. 6 (London 1878), pp. 11, 78, 92, 93, 108-111, 262, 263; S. M. Evers, "George Smith and the Egibi Tablets," *Iraq*, Vol. LV, 1993, p. 110.

25 F. H. Weissbach in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Vol. LV, 1901, pp. 209, 210, with references.

each party. Numbers of such duplicates have been found, including one for this text. But instead of being dated to the *tenth year* of Cyrus, this copy is dated to the “*2nd year*” of Cyrus. The first copy evidently contained a scribal error.²⁶

The two above-mentioned examples are from the Persian era. What about the Neo-Babylonian period?

A few documents from this era with unusual dates have been found that create some problems. It is remarkable, however, that the problems have to do with *month numbers only, not with year numbers*. Some defenders of Watch Tower chronology in their extreme efforts to find at least some support for their position have illogically sought to transform these overlaps of *months* into evidence for differences involving *years*. As the evidence will show, none of the documents can be used in a valid way to question the chronology of the period.

Overlap Nebuchadnezzar/Awel-Marduk?

Two of the tablets containing problematic dates are from the accession-year of Awel-Marduk, the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar.

The latest document from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar is dated VI/26/43 (month 6, day 26, year 43, corresponding to Oct. 8, 562 B.C.E.). According to Parker & Dubberstein’s *Babylonian Chronology*, published in 1956, the first text from the reign of his son and successor, Awel-Marduk, is dated VI/26/acc. (month 6, day 26, accession year), that is, *on the same day*.²⁷

Since 1956, however, a couple of tablets from Sippar have been found that are dated to Awel-Marduk’s accession-year *one month earlier*, that is in the *fifth month*. On one tablet (BM 58872) the day number is damaged and illegible, but the other tablet (BM 75322) is clearly dated V/20/acc.²⁸ These texts, then, indicate that there was an *overlap* of over one month between the reigns of the two kings:

26 Weissbach, *ibid.*, p. 210.

27 R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology: 626 B.C.-A.D. 75* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1956), p. 12.

28 A translation of the first text (BM 58872) was published by R. H. Sack in 1972 (no. 79 in Ronald H. Sack, *Amel-Marduk 562-560 B.C.*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972, pp. 3, 106). For the second text (BM 75322), see *CBT* (cf. p. 321, note 20), Vol. VIII, p. 31. Two other texts published by Sack (numbered 56 and 70 in his work) seem to be dated to the “*4th month*” of Awel-Marduk’s accession-year, which would imply an overlap of *two months* with the reign of his father. However, Mr. Walker, on collation, confirmed that no. 56 (= BM 80920) is dated to the “*7th month*”, as shown also in *CBT* VIII, p. 245. In Sack no. 70 (= UCBC 378), too, the month is damaged, and may be 7, not 4. (Collated by Prof. Niek Veldhuis at Berkeley, California, on October 2, 2007.) Also on BM 65270 (listed in *CBT* VII) the month name is difficult to read, and “it is perhaps most likely that the month is 7 rather than 4.” – Letter Walker-Jonsson, November 13, 1990. Cf. also D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 113, 114.

Nebuchadnezzar's 43rd year: _____ last text: VI/26/43
 Months: | month 4 | month 5 | month 6 | month 7 |
 Awel-Marduk's accession-year: first text: V/20/acc. _____

An explanation for this overlap may be that Nebuchadnezzar died earlier than October (the sixth month of the Babylonian calendar year included part of October) and that some scribes continued to date documents to his reign for a few weeks until it was fully clear who his successor would be. Berossus states that his son and successor Awel-Marduk “managed the affairs in a lawless and outrageous fashion,” and therefore “was plotted against and killed by Neriglisaros [Neriglissar], his sister’s husband,” after only two years of reign.²⁹ As argued by the Polish Assyriologist Stefan Zawadzki, the wicked character of Awel-Marduk was probably evident already before his becoming king, which may have provoked opposition to his succession to the throne in some influential quarters. This may have been the reason why some scribes for a few weeks continued to date their documents to the reign of his deceased father.³⁰ (It has been pointed out earlier that Nabonidus evidently viewed Awel-Marduk as a usurper.)

In order to add some years to the Neo-Babylonian period, someone might argue, as did one Norwegian source, that the dates above, rather than indicating an overlap, show that Nebuchadnezzar’s forty-third year was not the same as Awel-Marduk’s accession-year, and that either Nebuchadnezzar ruled for more than forty-three years or there was another, unknown king between them.

29 Stanley Mayer Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus. Sources from the Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, fascicle 5 (Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1978), p. 28.

30 Stefan Zawadzki, “Political Situation in Babylonia During Amel-Marduk’s Reign,” in J. Zablocka and S. Zawadzki (eds.), *Shulmu IV: Everyday Life in Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the International Conference, Poznan, 19-22 September, 1989* (Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 1993), pp. 309-317. That Nebuchadnezzar probably had died before the sixth month of the 43rd year is also supported by a Neo-Babylonian text from Uruk, YBC 4071, dated to the 15th of Abu (the fifth month), 43rd year of “The Lady of Uruk, King of Babylon” (the “Lady of Uruk” being Ishtar, the goddess of war and love, a great temple of whom was located in Uruk). Dr. David B. Weisberg, who published this text in 1980, concludes that Nebuchadnezzar evidently was dead at this time, although “cautious scribes continued to date to him even after his death, waiting prudently to see who his successor would be. One, however, may have tipped his hand and opted for a dating to The Lady-of-Uruk, ‘King’ of Babylon.”—D. B. Weisberg, *Texts from the Time of Nebuchadnezzar*, Yale Oriental Series, Vol. XVII (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. xix. Cf. Zawadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

Such assumptions, however, are disproved by the Bible itself. A comparison of 2 Kings 24:12 and 2 Chronicles 36:10 with Jeremiah 52:28 shows that Jehoiachin's exile began toward the end of Nebuchadnezzar's seventh regnal year. This would mean that at the death of Nebuchadnezzar in his forty-third year Jehoiachin had spent almost thirty-six years in exile ($43-7=36$), and that the *thirty-seventh* year of exile began later in that same year, in the accession-year of Awel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach). And this is *exactly* what we are told in Jeremiah 52:31:

But in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year he came to the throne, pardoned Jehoiachin king of Judah and released him from prison.—
Jerusalem Bible. (Compare 2 Kings 25:27.)

Clearly, the Bible does not allow for any additional years between the forty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar and the accession-year of Awel-Marduk.

Overlap Awel-Marduk/Neriglissar?

Before the publication of the *CBT* catalogues in 1986-88 (see p. 321, note 20), the *latest tablet* known from the reign of Awel-Marduk was dated V/17/2 (Aug. 7, 560 B.C.E.), while the *first tablet* from the reign of his successor Neriglissar was dated V/21/acc. (Aug. 11, 560 B.C.E.). Only four days, then, separated the latest tablet from Awel-Marduk's reign from the first tablet dated to Neriglissar.³¹

In the *CBT* catalogues, however, there are two texts that seem to create a considerable overlap between the reigns of Awel-Marduk and Neriglissar. The first (BM 61325) is from the reign of Awel-Marduk and is dated to the *tenth* month of his second regnal year (X/19/2), or about *five months later* than the latest tablet previously known from his reign.³²

This overlap of five months with the reign of Neriglissar is further extended by the second text, BM 75489, which is dated to the *second* month of Neriglissar's accession-year (II/4/acc.), or about *three months and a half earlier* than the earliest tablet previously known

31 Ronald H. Sack, "Nergal-sharra-usur, King of Babylon as seen in the Cuneiform, Greek, Latin and Hebrew Sources," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, Vol. 68 (Berlin, 1978), p. 132.

32 *CBT* VII, p. 36. The catalogue has day "17", which is corrected to "19" in Walker's

from his reign.³³ Together, these two texts seem to create an overlap of eight and a half months:

Awel-Marduk's 2nd year:		last text: X/19/2
Months:	month 1 month 2 months 3-9 month 10	
Neriglissar's accession-year:		first text: II/4/acc.

How can this overlap be explained? Again, someone might argue that the dates above, rather than showing an overlap, indicate that Awel-Marduk's second year was *not* the same as Neriglissar's accession-year, and that either he ruled for *more* than two years or that there was *another, unknown ruler* between the two.

Any evidence, however, in support of such assumptions is completely lacking. It should be kept in mind that each of their *known* regnal years are covered by numerous dated tablets, both published and unpublished. If Awel-Marduk ruled for more than two years, we would have a large number of tablets, economic and other types, dated to each of those additional years.

It is of considerable interest in this connection that the *Uruk King List* (discussed in chapter 3, section B-1b) specifies the reign of Neriglissar as “‘3’ (years) 8 months”. As Neriglissar's reign ended in the first month (Nisanu) of his fourth year (see below), he acceded to the throne in the fifth month (Abu) three years and eight months earlier, according to this kinglist. *This is the same month as that established earlier for his accession, before the two odd dates mentioned above were discovered.*

There are good reasons to believe that the information given in the *Uruk King List* was based upon sources that go back to the Neo-Babylonian period itself, including the chronicles. The preserved figures are all in good agreement with those established by the contemporary documents. This seems to be true even when—in two cases—the number of *months* is given.

Thus the *Uruk King List* gives Labashi-Marduk a reign of only three months, and the contracts from Uruk dated to his reign also show that he was recognized in that city as king for (parts of) three months. When the same kinglist, therefore, indicates that Neriglissar

33 *CBT VIII*, p. 35. Walker, who collated both tablets on several occasions, points out that “the months are very clearly written in both cases.” — Letter Walker-Jonsson, October 26, 1990.

acceded to the throne in the month of Abu, this, too, may very well be correct. At this point of time he had firmly established his rule and was recognized as king in most parts of Babylonia.³⁴

If the two odd dates referred to earlier are not simply scribal errors, the reason for the overlap they create at the end of Awel-Marduk's reign may be the same as that suggested above for the overlap at the *beginning* of his reign, namely, the prevailing opposition against his rule, which culminated with Neriglissar's seizure of power through a *coup d'état*. This explanation has recently been argued in some detail by R. H. Sack in his book *Neriglissar-King of Babylon*.³⁵

Overlap Neriglissar/Labashi-Marduk?

The two last tablets known from the reign of Neriglissar are dated I/2/4 (April 12, 556 B.C.E.) and I?/6/4 (April 16). The first tablet known from the reign of his son and successor, Labashi-Marduk NBC 4534, is dated I/23/acc. (May 3, 556 B.C.E.), that is, twenty-one, or possibly only seventeen days later. These dates create no overlap between the two.

Overlap Labashi-Marduk/Nabonidus?

The latest tablet known from the reign of Labashi-Marduk is dated III/12/acc. (June 20, 556 B.C.E.), while the first tablet known from the reign of his successor, Nabonidus, is dated one month earlier, II/15/acc. (May 25, 556 B.C.E.). This overlap of somewhat less than a month is a real one.

It may be easily accounted for, however, by the *circumstances* that brought Nabonidus to the throne. As explained by Berossus, Labashi-Marduk was “only a child” at the time of Neriglissar's death.

34 Documents from Uruk show that Labashi-Marduk was recognized as king in that city in the months of Nisanu, Ayyaru, and Simanu.—Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 86-88. The critical comments on the Uruk King List by Ronald H. Sack on page 3 of his work, *Neriglissar-King of Babylon* (= *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, Band 236, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1994), are mistaken, as they are based on an inadequate presentation of the list, which also disagrees with the sources referred to in his footnote.

35 R. H. Sack, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-31. There is some evidence that Neriglissar, before his seizure of power, held the highest office (*qipu*) at the Ebabbara temple in Sippar, and that his revolt started in that city. This would explain why the earliest texts dated to his reign are from Sippar, indicating he was first recognized in that area while Awel-Marduk was still recognized elsewhere for several months.—S. Zawadzki, *op. cit.* (note 30 above), also J. MacGinnis in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 120:1 (2000), p. 64.

“Because his wickedness became apparent in many ways he was plotted against and brutally killed by his friends. After he had been killed, the plotters met and jointly conferred the kingdom on Nabonnedus [Nabonidus], a Babylonian and a member of the conspiracy.”³⁶ This account agrees with the Hillah-stele, where Nabonidus gives a similar description of Labashi-Marduk’s character and of his own enthronement.³⁷

The evidence is that the rebellion that brought Nabonidus to power broke out almost immediately after Labashi-Marduk’s accession, and that both of them ruled simultaneously for a few weeks, *but at different places*. It should be noted that all tablets known from the reign of Labashi-Marduk are from three cities only, Babylon, Uruk, and Sippar, and that there was no overlap between the two reigns at any of these cities:

	Nippur	Babylon	Uruk	Sippar
Labashi-Marduk, latest tablet:	—	June 1	June 19	June 20
Nabonidus, earliest tablet:	May 25	July 14?	July 1	June 26

Dr. Paul-Alain Beaulieu discusses the available data at some length, concluding that, “In consideration of all this evidence the usual reconstruction of Nabonidus’ accession seems correct. He was probably recognized as king as early as May 25 in central Babylonia (Babylon and Nippur), but outlying regions would have recognized Labâshi-Marduk until the end of June.”³⁸

Thus, there is a well-founded explanation for the brief overlap between the reigns of Labashi-Marduk and Nabonidus. The accession of the young and—at least in some influential circles—unpopular Labashi-Marduk caused a rebellion and Nabonidus, strongly supported by leading strata in Babylonia, seized power and established a rival kingship. For a brief period there was a double kingship, although in different parts of the kingdom, until Labashi-Marduk finally was murdered and Nabonidus could be officially crowned as king.

In conclusion, the odd dates on a few tablets from the Neo-Babylonian period create no major problems. None of them add any *years*

36 Burstein, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

37 *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [ANET], ed. by James B. Pritchard (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 309. For additional details, see chapter 3 above, section B-4-e.

38 Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *op. cit.* (note 34 above), pp. 86-88. Cf. also W. Röllig in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, ed. D. O. Edzard, Vol. VI (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), p. 409.

to the period, as the “overlaps” created by the odd dates concern *months only, not years*. And as has been shown above, it is possible to find reasonable explanations for all the three overlaps without giving oneself up to farfetched and demonstrably untenable theories about extra years and extra kings during the period.³⁹

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS

The Hillah stele (Nabon. No. 8)

According to the Hillah stele, fifty-four years had passed from the desolation of the temple Éhulhul in Harran in the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar (610/609 B.C.E.) until the accession-year of Nabonidus (556/555 B.C.E.).

In an attempt to undermine the confidence in the information on this stele, at least one of the defenders of the Watch Tower Society’s chronology has claimed that the fifty-four years referred to the period of *desolation* of the Éhulhul temple, and that Nabonidus states it was rebuilt immediately after the end of this period. As the rebuilding of the temple was not actually completed until several years after the Hillah stele had been inscribed, the fifty-four year period is claimed to be a fiction.

Such an interpretation of the stele is a gross distortion of the matter. Although it is true that the temple had lain desolate for fifty-four years when Nabonidus, in his accession-year, concluded that the gods had commanded him to rebuild it, he does not say that it was rebuilt

39 If defenders of the Watch Tower Society’s chronology insist that such an “overlap” of some months between two Neo-Babylonian rulers indicates there were more years or maybe even an extra king between the two, they should—for the sake of consistency—give the same explanation to similar “overlaps” found between rulers of the *Persian* era. For example, the latest tablet from the reign of Cyrus is dated VIII/20/9 (December 5, 530 B.C.E.), while the earliest text from the reign of his successor, Cambyses, is dated VI/12/acc. (August 31, 530 B.C.E.). This would mean there was an overlap between the two rulers of over three months! (Jerome Peat, “Cyrus ‘king of lands,’ Cambyses ‘king of Babylon’: the disputed co-regency,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 41/2, Autumn 1989, p. 210; M. A. Dandamayev, *Iranians in Achaemenid Babylonia*, Cosa Mesa, California and New York: Mazda Publishers, 1992, pp. 92, 93.) As the Watch Tower Society dates the fall of Babylon to 539 B.C.E. *by counting backwards from the reign of Cambyses*, they would certainly not like to have any additional years inserted between Cyrus and Cambyses, as that would move the date for the fall of Babylon as many years backwards in time! (See *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, 1988, p. 453.) Dandamayev (*op. cit.*, 1992, p. 93) gives the following very plausible explanation of the overlap: “It seems that Cyrus appointed Cambyses as joint ruler before his expedition against the Massagetae.” This is in agreement with Herodotus’ statement (VII, 3) that it was the custom of Persian kings to appoint their successors to the throne before they went out to war, in case they would be killed in the battles.

immediately. As indicated by a number of texts the restoration of the temple was evidently a drawn-out process that lasted for several years, perhaps until the thirteenth year of Nabonidus.

The fifty-four years, on the other hand, clearly ended in the accession-year of Nabonidus, when, according to the Adad-guppi' inscription, "the wrath of his [Sin's] heart calmed. Towards E-hul-hul the temple of Sin which (is) in Harran, the abode of his heart's delight, he was reconciled, he had regard. Sin, king of the gods, looked upon me and Nabu-na'id (my) only son, the issue of my womb, to the kingship he called."⁴⁰

The statement on the Hillah stele that Sin at this time "returned to his place" should not be taken to mean that the temple was rebuilt at this time. Rather, it may mean that Sin, the moon god, "returned to his place" *in the sky*, as suggested by Tadmor. The Babylonians not only knew that lunar phenomena such as eclipses often recurred after a period of eighteen years (the so-called "Saros cycle"), but that they also, and with a much higher degree of reliability, recurred after a period of *fifty-four* years (three "Saros cycles"). The Babylonian astronomers even used these and other cycles for predicting lunar eclipses. At the time Nabonidus acceded to the throne a complete cycle of the moon had passed since the destruction of the moon temple at Harran, and Nabonidus may have seen this as a remarkable coincidence and a favorable omen. As Sin had now "returned to his place" in the sky, had not the time arrived for him to return also to his earthly abode in Harran? So Nabonidus concluded that the temple had to be rebuilt.⁴¹

The Adad-guppi' inscription (Nabon. No. 24)

It is well known that the Adad-guppi' inscription at one point contains *an error of calculation*. As defenders of the Watch Tower Society's chronology have emphasized this error in an attempt to undermine the value of the inscription, a few comments on the problem seem necessary.

40 C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," *Anatolian Studies*, Vol. VIII, 1958, pp. 47-49.

41 Hayim Tadmor, "The Inscriptions of Nabunaid: Historical Arrangement," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* [*Assyriological Studies*, No. 16], ed. H. Güterbock & T. Jacobsen (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1965), p. 355.—For the superiority of the 54-year cycle, see Dr. W. Hartner, "Eclipse Periods and Thales' Prediction of a Solar Eclipse. Historical Truth and Modern Myth," in *Centaurus*, Vol. 14, 1969, pp. 60-71.

Ashurbanipal is generally believed to have begun his reign in Assyria in 668 B.C.E. His twentieth year, therefore, is dated to 649/48 B.C.E. If Adad-guppi' was born in that year, and if she lived on until the beginning of Nabonidus' ninth year, 547 B.C.E., she would have been 101 or 102 years old at her death, not 104 years as stated in the inscription. Scholars who have examined the inscription, therefore, have concluded that the stele contains a miscount of about two years. "All agree on this point," say scholars P. Garelli and V. Nikiprowetsky.⁴²

Further, the inscription seems to give the Assyrian king Assur-etil-ili a reign of three years, which has been regarded as a problem as there is a contract tablet dated to the fourth year of this king.⁴³ Since C. J. Gadd published his translation of the text, other scholars have examined these problems. Dr. Joan Oates offers a solution which has been accepted by other scholars as most probably the correct one:⁴⁴

As is evident from the inscription, Adad-guppi' first lived in Assyrian territory (perhaps in Harran) serving under Assyrian kings until the third year of Assur-etil-ili, when she moved to Babylon, serving under Babylonian kings from that time on. As Oates explains, this does not mean that Assur-etil-ili's third year was his last. If Assur-etil-ili began his rule in Assyria after his father's death in 627 B.C.E., his third year was 624/23 B.C.E. His second and third regnal years in Assyria, then, overlapped the first and second years of Nabopolassar in Babylon (625/24 and 624/23 B.C.E.). In calculating the age of Adad-guppi', Nabonidus (or the scribe who made the inscription) simply summed up the regnal years without taking into account this overlapping of Assur-etil-ili's reign with that of Nabopolassar.⁴⁵

Oates' solution was supported in 1983 by Erle Leichty. Discussing a new inscription from Assur-etil-ili's reign, he pointed out its agreement with Oates' conclusion that "the third year of Assur-etilli-ilani is the same as the second year of Nabopolassar," adding, "I believe

42 P. Garelli and V. Nikiprowetsky, *Le Proche-Orient Asiatique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), p. 241. One exception is M. Gerber in *ZA* 88:1 (1998), pp. 72-93.

43 C. J. Gadd, *op. cit.*, pp. 70ff.

44 Joan Oates, "Assyrian Chronology, 631-612 B.C.," *Iraq*, Vol. 27, 1965, pp. 135-159.

45 Evidently Dr. Paul-Alain Beaulieu, in his discussion of these problems, was not aware of Oates' solution. His comments, therefore, are confusing, and his questioning of the accuracy of the chronological data of the stele clearly is unwarranted.—Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 139, 140.

that the Oates chronology will probably turn out to be the correct one, but final judgement must await the rest of the evidence."⁴⁶

Whatever the case, the error in the inscription is a minor problem that does not affect the reigns of the *Neo-Babylonian* kings as given in the Adad-guppi' inscription. It arose in the attempt to establish Adad-guppi's age, which had to be *calculated*, because, as pointed out by Rykle Borger, the Babylonians (like Jehovah's Witnesses today!) "never celebrated their birthdays, and hardly knew how old they were themselves."⁴⁷

For Chapter Four:

1. ASTROLOGY AS A MOTIVE FOR BABYLONIAN ASTRONOMY

In order to depreciate the value of the astronomical texts, some defenders of the Watch Tower chronology have emphasized that the Babylonians' interest in the celestial phenomena was *astrologically motivated*. Although it is true that this was an important object of their study of the sky, it actually contributed to the exactness of the observations.

In the great collection of ancient omens called *Enuma Anu Enlil* (the final form of which dates from the Neo-Assyrian period) the observer is given this instruction:

When the Moon is eclipsed you shall observe exactly month, day, night-watch, wind, course, and position of the stars in whose realm the eclipse takes place. The omens relative to its month, its day, its night-watch, its wind, its course, and its stars you shall indicate.

For the Babylonian "astrologers" eclipses played the most prominent role, and all details, therefore, were highly important. Dr. A. Pannekoek concludes that "the astrological motive, by demanding greater attention in observing the moon, provided for better foundations in chronology."⁴⁸

Further, it would be a mistake to think that "astrology" in the sense this word is used today was practiced in the Neo-Babylonian period or earlier. The idea that a man's fate is determined by the positions of the stars and planets at the date of birth or conception originated much later, during the Persian era. The oldest horoscope discovered dates to 410 B.C.E.⁴⁹ As pointed out by B. L. van der Waerden, the earlier

46 Erie Leichty in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 103, 1983, p.220, note 2.

47 Rykle Borger, "Mesopotamien in den Jahren 629-621 v. Chr.," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, Vol. 55, 1959, p. 73.

48 A. Pannekoek, *A History of Astronomy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1961), pp. 43, 44.

49 A. J. Sachs, "Babylonian horoscopes," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 6 (1952), p. 49.

astrology “had a quite different character: it aimed at *short-range predictions of general public events*, such as wars and harvests, from *striking phenomena* such as eclipses, clouds, annual rising and setting of planets, whereas the [later] Hellenistic ‘Chaldeans’ predicted *individual fates from positions of planets and zodiacal signs* at the date of *birth or conception*.”⁵⁰

Professor Otto Neugebauer, therefore, explains that “Mesopotamian ‘astrology’ can be much better compared with weather prediction from phenomena observed in the skies than with astrology in the modern sense of the word.” He also emphasizes that the origin of astronomy was not astrology but calendaric problems: “Determination of the season, measurement of time, lunar festivals—these are the problems which shaped astronomical development for many centuries,” and “even the last phase of Mesopotamian astronomy . . . was mainly devoted to problems of the lunar calendar.”⁵¹

2. SOME COMMENTS ON ANCIENT LUNAR ECLIPSES

How reliable are modern identifications of lunar eclipses described in ancient Babylonian astronomical texts from the eighth century B.C.E. onward? Pointing out one of the pitfalls, the Watch Tower Society quotes *The Encyclopædia Britannica* as saying that a particular town or city would, on the average, experience about forty lunar eclipses in fifty years.⁵² Although this is true, the frequency of eclipses falling in a specific month is much lower. Other factors, too, set limits to the alternatives.

Even when a lunar eclipse recurs in the same month one year later, it will not occur *at exactly the same time* of the day or be of *the same magnitude*. If it occurs during the daylight hours it will, of course, be invisible from that part of the earth. As the Babylonian astronomers often give specific data on lunar eclipses, such as date (regnal year, month, day),⁵³ time of the onset relative to sunrise or sunset, duration

50 B. L. van der Waerden, “History of the Zodiac,” *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Vol. 16 (1952/53), p. 224.

51 Otto Neugebauer, *Astronomy and History. Selected Essays* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983), p. 55.—For an extensive discussion of the nature of Babylonian astrology, see Francesca Rochberg-Halton, *Aspects of Babylonian Celestial Divination: The Lunar Eclipse Tablets of Enuma Anu Enlil* (= *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Beiheft 22), (Horn, Austria: Verlag Ferdinand Berger & Söhne Gesellschaft M.B.H., 1988), pp. 2-17.

52 *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 454.

53 The day number is often omitted in the texts, because, as each Babylonian month began at new moon, the full moon and therefore also any possible lunar eclipse always fell in or near to the middle of the month.

of partial and total phases, sometimes also magnitude and position relative to stars or constellations, the identification of the eclipses described in such texts usually creates no problems, provided that the texts are well preserved.

The Watchtower of March 15, 1969, pages 184 onward, refers to another factor, which, it is held, makes it difficult to identify ancient eclipses. It is pointed out that astronomers for a long time (for centuries, actually) have been aware of the fact that the tides produced by the moon and the sun in the oceans and body of the earth create a retardation of the earth's rotation, causing a gradual lengthening of the day. This, it is said in the article, affects the ancient records.

However, when it comes to identifying ancient lunar eclipses from the eighth century B.C.E. onward, this is not a major problem today. The great number of observations recorded on cuneiform tablets have, in fact, enabled modern astronomers to measure the exact rate of this change of the earth's rotation. It is known today that the length of the day increases at a rate of 1.7 milliseconds per century. The day in Late Babylonian time was thus about 43-44 milliseconds shorter than present.⁵⁴

Today astronomers, of course, make allowance for the variation in the earth's rotation in their calculations of the dates of ancient eclipses. *The Watchtower* article discussed *solar* eclipses only. But as very few reliable observations of *solar* eclipses are preserved from ancient times, and as none of them are connected with the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian period, they are irrelevant to our discussion.

As I wanted to know how ancient records of *lunar* eclipses are affected by this increasing of the solar day, I wrote to Professor Robert R. Newton, who at that time (in 1981) was a leading authority on this problem.⁵⁵ I wanted to know how much the lengthening of the solar day has affected ancient records of lunar eclipses and if we can still rely upon the older tables of calculations of lunar eclipses published by Oppolzer in 1887 and Ginzell in 1899.

54 This most recent value is the result of the very careful research performed by Richard Stephenson of the University of Durham and Leslie Morrison, formerly of the Royal Greenwich Observatory in Cambridge.—See *New Scientist*, January 30, 1999, pp. 30-33.

55 Newton's research in this area has since been improved upon by other scholars. See, now, the exhaustive discussion by F. Richard Stephenson in *Historical Eclipses and Earth's Rotation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Newton, in his answer said:

I have not used Ginzler's canon much, and cannot speak specifically of the errors in it. However, I expect that his errors are about the same as those in Oppolzer's *Canon der Finsternisse*, which I have used extensively. The earliest lunar eclipse in his canon, for example, is that of -1206, April 21, which came at 20H 17M, Greenwich Mean Time, with a magnitude of 2.6 digits, according to his calculations. According to my calculations, it came on that date at 20H 32M, with a magnitude of 2.4 digits. *Thus it is perfectly safe to use Oppolzer's Canon in identifying ancient eclipses; his greatest errors are probably something like half an hour.*⁵⁶

As far as *lunar* eclipses are concerned, then, the argument that the lengthening of the solar day caused by tides makes it difficult to identify ancient eclipses is not valid. In modern eclipse catalogues, of course, the errors in the canons of Oppolzer and Ginzler have been corrected.⁵⁷

For Chapter Five:

THE "THIRD YEAR OF JEHOIAKIM" (DANIEL 1:1, 2)

Daniel 1:1f. dates the first deportation of Jewish prisoners by Nebuchadnezzar to the "third year of the reign of Jehoiakim." As was shown in the appendix for chapter two ("Methods of reckoning regnal years"), in this passage Daniel seems to follow the Babylonian method of counting regnal years, employing an accession year even for kings outside Babylon, including Jehoiakim. This makes Jehoiakim's fourth year (Jeremiah 46:2) his third year in the accession-year system, and this third year of Jehoiakim in turn corresponds to Nebuchadnezzar's accession year.

Thus it is seen that this first deportation took place in the same year as the famous battle at Carchemish, and evidently shortly after that battle, in the year 605 B.C.E. Daniel 1:1f., therefore, strongly supports

56 Letter Newton-Jonsson, dated May 11, 1981. Other scholars agree. Jean Meeus & Hermann Mucke, for example, in their *Canon of Lunar Eclipses — 2002 to + 2526* (Wien: Astronomisches Büro, 1979), page XII, explain that Oppolzer's monumental work "is accurate enough for historical research." This, of course, refers to ancient *lunar* eclipses, not ancient *solar* eclipses, on which the *Canon* is far from correct. See, for instance, the comments by Willy Hartner in *Centaurus*, Vol. 14 (1969), p. 65.

57 See, for example, Bao-Lin Liu and Alan D. Fiala, *Canon of Lunar Eclipses 1500 B.C.—A.D. 3000* (Richmond, Virginia: Willman-Bell, Inc., 1992).

the conclusion that Judah became a vassal to Babylon eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., in confirmation of the conclusion that the seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10) should be understood as a period of *servitude*, not of desolation.

Reinterpretations of the “third year of Jehoiakim”

In order to undermine the strength of Daniel 1:1 several arguments have been advanced in the publications of the Watch Tower Society against a natural reading of this text. As early as 1896 Pastor Charles T. Russell, in writing in *Zion’s Watch Tower* of May 15, page 106 (*Reprints*, pp. 1975-76) argued against those who quoted Daniel 1:1 in support of the secular dates for Nebuchadnezzar’s reign:

For instance, they adopt the uncertain secular date for the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign; and then referring to Dan. 1:1, they *thus* fix the date of Jehoiakim’s reign and alter other matters to suit. Then again, they apply the “seventy years” as years of *captivity* and begin them in the third year of Jehoiakim; whereas the Scriptures unequivocally declare, repeatedly, that those were years of “desolation of the land,” “without an inhabitant.” (Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10; 2 Chron. 36:21; Dan. 9:2.)

Several years later two prominent members of Russell’s movement, the Scottish brothers John and Morton Edgar, published the two-volume *Great Pyramid Passages*.⁵⁸ On page 31 of Volume II, they summarize their arguments against a natural reading of Daniel 1:1:

[1] It cannot be admitted that the 70 years desolation of Jerusalem and the land began in the 3rd year of Jehoiakim, for according to the Scriptures “desolation” implies “without an inhabitant,” and Jerusalem and the land were not without inhabitants until after the dethronement of Zedekiah. . . .

[2] [A natural reading of Daniel 1:1] conflicts with Daniel 2:1. In reading over the 1st chapter of Daniel it would appear that the Hebrew children were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in the 3rd year of Jehoiakim. They were trained in the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans for three years (verses 4, 5), and yet, according to Dan. 2:1, 25, they were brought into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar in

58 John and Morton Edgar, *Great Pyramid Passages* (London: The Marshall Press, Ltd., 1923-24). The first edition was published in 1912 and 1913 and was distributed by the Watch Tower Society. It was reissued with some additions in 1923 and 1924 by Morton Edgar, who also added a Vol. III. (His brother John Edgar died in 1910.) The quotations here are from the 1924 edition of Vol. II.

or before his *second* year, though verse 18 of the 1st chapter shows that the three years had completely expired.

How, then, is Daniel 1:1 to be understood? The Edgar brothers pointed out that “a number of commentators suggest that the 3rd year of Jehoiakim in Daniel 1:1 should be understood as meaning the 3rd year of his vassalage to Nebuchadnezzar,” which in effect was his eleventh and last regnal year.⁵⁹ In this way the deportation of Daniel and other Hebrew captives was made identical with the deportation of Jehoiachin in the *seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar*.

But this explanation did not negate the seeming conflict with Daniel 2:1, which dates the image dream of Nebuchadnezzar to his second year; in fact, that conflict was exacerbated. If Daniel was not deported to Babylon until the *seventh* year of Nebuchadnezzar, how could he be at his court interpreting his dreams in his *second* year, five years earlier?

So, in addition to the interpretation placed on Daniel 1:1 to explain its reference to the third year of Jehoiakim, there was also need for another interpretation of Daniel 2:1 to explain its reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s second year. The Edgar brothers suggested that the number “2” is an error, which “has evidently risen out of the number 12.”⁶⁰ Later these arguments were adopted by the Watch Tower Society. They were, for example, incorporated into the 1922 edition of the booklet *The Bible on Our Lord’s Return*, pages 84-88.

But the explanation that Daniel 1:1 refers to Jehoiakim’s third year of *vassalage* to Nebuchadnezzar, corresponding to Nebuchadnezzar’s seventh regnal year, creates yet another problem.

If this vassalage ended in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, it must have begun *three years earlier* according to 2 Kings 24:1, or in Nebuchadnezzar’s *fourth* year, which was the eighth year of Jehoiakim. As is stated in 2 Kings 23:34-37, Jehoiakim was a tributary king *of Egypt* before he became a vassal to Babylon. If we accept the Watch Tower explanation, this would mean that his vassalage to

59 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 29 (fn. 4) and 31. This “solution,” found already in Josephus’ *Ant. X*, 6:1-3, was adopted by a number of later writers. Dr. E. W. Hengstenberg refers to it in his work *Die Authentie des Daniel und die Integrität des Sacharjah* (Berlin, 1831), p. 54. Hengstenberg rejects the idea because (1) there is no evidence indicating that Jehoiakim’s regnal years were counted in this curious way, (2) it is an unfounded hypothesis with no support in the Bible, or elsewhere, that Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Jerusalem occurred in Jehoiakim’s eighth year, and (3) the “solution” is in inextricable conflict with Daniel 2:1.

60 John and Morton Edgar, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 32. This, too, is an old idea, suggested, for example, by Chrysostom in the fourth century. One ancient manuscript of the LXX version of Daniel (Papyrus 967), dating from the early third century C.E., also reads “twelfth” at Dan. 2:1. The reading is best explained as a scribal “correction”.—John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 154.

Egypt continued up to his eighth year. Yet both Jeremiah 46:2 and the Babylonian chronicle B.M. 21946 indicate that Jehoiakim's vassalage changed from Egypt to Babylon in the same year as the battle of Carchemish, or in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim.

In the book *Equipped for Every Good Work*, published by the Watch Tower Society in 1946, the arguments against a natural reading of Daniel 1:1 are repeated on pages 225-227. But interestingly, the Egyptian vassalage is now discussed:

Jehoiakim was put on the throne by Egyptian decree and was tributary to Egypt for several years, but *when Babylon defeated Egypt Jehoiakim came under Babylonian control and so remained for three years*, after which three-year period as tributary to Babylon the Judean king rebelled.⁶¹

Here it is admitted that Jehoiakim's vassalage changed from Egypt to Babylon *when Babylon defeated Egypt*. The real problem, however, is concealed, as it is not mentioned that Egypt was defeated in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 46:2), and not in his *eighth* year as the Watch Tower explanation would require!

Another interesting change may also be noted in *Equipped for Every Good Work*. Instead of holding to the earlier guess that the "second year" in Daniel 2:1 originally read "twelfth year," the following interpretation is presented:

The time of this dream and its interpretation is stated as the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. . . . In the nineteenth year of his reign Nebuchadnezzar was used as God's executioner to destroy faithless Jerusalem and end Israel's history as an independent Theocratic nation. Then Nebuchadnezzar began reigning in a unique way, as the first of the world rulers of the Gentile times. In the second year of his reign *in this special capacity* the dream showing the end of Satan's organization and rule and the taking over of power by Christ's kingdom came to Nebuchadnezzar, as recorded at chapter 2.⁶²

According to this explanation, the "second year" of Daniel 2:1, or the second year of the Gentile times, reckoned from 607 B.C.E., was actually Nebuchadnezzar's *twentieth* regnal year! Why would

61 *Equipped for Every Good Work* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1946), pp. 225-226.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227. This, too, was an earlier idea, suggested already in the Jewish Talmud (*Seder 'Olam Rabbah*; see John J. Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 154). Hengstenberg (*op. cit.*, p. 54) rejects it because there is "not the slightest trace" of any such reckoning of Nebuchadnezzar's regnal years anywhere.

Daniel use this curious way of reckoning regnal years only in this passage of his book? No other arguments are proposed for this new position except this statement:

Here again, as at Daniel 1:1, the peculiarity which the writer of this book has of making a secondary reckoning of the years of a king's reign is demonstrated. He reckons by counting from epochal events within the reign that put the king in a new relationship.⁶³

There could hardly be a more obvious example of circular reasoning.

The date of Jehoiakim's rebellion

The latest discussion of these problems is found in the Watch Tower Society's Bible dictionary *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (1988), pages 1268-69. Daniel 1:1 is still interpreted as meaning the third year of Jehoiakim's *vassalage* to Babylon, beginning at the end of his eighth year of reign and ending in his eleventh and last year. On page 480 of Vol. 2 of the same work, an attempt is made to find support for this in the Babylonian chronicle B.M. 21946. After recording the battle of Carchemish in Nebuchadnezzar's accession year, this chronicle refers to several succeeding campaigns in the Hattu-area by Nebuchadnezzar, in his first, second, third and fourth years. Mentioning these campaigns, the Society's dictionary says that "evidently in the fourth year he made Judean King Jehoiakim his vassal. (2 Kings 24:1)"

This conclusion, however, is *not* supported by the Babylonian Chronicle. On the contrary, this chronicle indicates that Jehoiakim's vassalage to Babylon began in Nebuchadnezzar's accession-year, or possibly in his first year, and that in the fourth year Jehoiakim was already in open revolt against Babylon. To demonstrate this, it is necessary to quote important parts of the Babylonian Chronicle, from the accession year to the fourth year of Nebuchadnezzar:

Events from c. Sept./Oct. 605 to Jan./Feb. 604 B.C.E.:

"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."

From May/June to Nov./Dec. 604:

"The first year of Nebuchadnezzar (II): In the month of Sivan he mustered his army and marched to Hattu. Until the month Kislev he

63 *Equipped for Every Good Work*, p. 227.

marched about victoriously in Hattu. All the kings of Hattu came into his presence and he received their vast tribute.”

From April/May 603 onwards:

“The se[cond year]: In the month of Iyyar the king of Akkad strenghtened his large army and [*marched to Hattu*]. He encamped [. . .] . . . large siege towers he moved acr[oss from the month] Iyyar until the month [. . . *he marched about victoriously in Hattu*].”

In 602:

“[The third year: In the month . . . , on] the thirteenth [day] Nabu-shumu-lishir [. . .] [*In the month . . . the king of Akka*]d mustered his army and [*marched*] to Hattu. [.] He brought the vast [*booty*] of Hattu into Akkad.”

In 601 (march against Egypt in Kislev = Nov./Dec.):

“The fourth year: The king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to Hattu. [*He marched about victoriously*] in Hattu. In the month Kislev he took his army’s lead and marched to Egypt. [*When*] the king of Egypt heard (the news) he *m[ustered]* his army. They fought one another in the battle-field and both sides suffered severe losses (literally, they inflicted a major defeat upon one another). The king of Akkad and his army [*went back*] to Babylon.”⁶⁴

From this chronicle it is seen that the *whole* Hattu-territory (primarily Syria-Lebanon but extending to Phoenicia and Palestine) became tributary to Nebuchadnezzar as of his accession year. And in Nebuchadnezzar’s first year it is explicitly stated that “all the kings of Hattu” were tributary to him, which reasonably cannot have excepted Jehoiakim.

Many scholars conclude that Nebuchadnezzar’s fourth year, in which *Insight on the Scriptures* supposes that Jehoiakim’s Babylonian vassalage *began*, was probably the year in which Jehoiakim *revolted* against Nebuchadnezzar, because in that year Nebuchadnezzar battled with Egypt, and both seem to have suffered great losses. Nebuchadnezzar had to return to Babylon, where he remained in the fifth year and “refitted his numerous horses and chariotry.”⁶⁵ This unsuccessful battle with Egypt may have encouraged Jehoiakim to throw off

64 A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (New York: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), pp. 100-101. The square brackets indicate damages in the text.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

the Babylonian yoke, thus *ending* his three years of vassalage to Babylon.⁶⁶

2 Kings 24:1-7 seems to support the above conclusion. Verse 1 states that “in his (Jehoiakim’s) days Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and so Jehoiakim became his servant for three years. However, he turned back and rebelled against him.” As a result, Jehovah (through Nebuchadnezzar) “began to send against him marauder bands of Chaldeans and marauder bands of Syrians and marauder bands of Moabites and marauder bands of the sons of Ammon, and he kept sending them against Judah to destroy it, according to Jehovah’s word that he had spoken by means of his servants the prophets.”—2 Kings 24:1-2, *NW*.

The wording of this passage indicates that these marauder bands kept on raiding the territory of Judah for quite a time, evidently for some years. Jehovah “began” to send them, and, according to the *New World Translation*, “he *kept* sending them” against Judah. This was not one attack only, like that mentioned in Daniel 1:1, but it evidently came upon Judah in waves, time and again. Consequently, they could not have begun these attacks in the last year of Jehoiakim’s reign, and this also calls for an earlier beginning of Jehoiakim’s rebellion.

The three deportations to Babylon

Another line of evidence supporting a natural reading of Daniel 1:1, is that according to 2 Chronicles, chapter 36, verses 7, 10 and 18 the vessels of the temple were brought to Babylon in *three* successive installments:

(1) The first time, during *Jehoiakim’s* reign, “*some*” of the vessels were brought to Babylon. (Verse 7)

(2) The second time, together with *Jehoiachin*, the “*desirable*” (*NW*) or “*valuable*” (*NASB*) vessels were brought to Babylon. (Verse 10)

(3) The third time, together with *Zedekiah*, “*all*” the vessels were brought to Babylon. (Verse 18)

66 “This battle,” says J. P. Hyatt, “must lie back of Jehoiakim’s change of allegiance, when he withheld tribute from Babylonia, probably making an alliance with Egypt.” (“New Light on Nebuchadnezzar and Judean History,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 75, 1956, p. 281.) It is also possible that this change of allegiance occurred *some time before* Nebuchadnezzar’s war with Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar’s decision to march to Egypt in 601 B.C.E. may have been *caused* by the alliance between the Egyptians and Jehoiakim.—See Mark K. Mercer, “Daniel 1:1 and Jehoiakim’s three years of servitude,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 27:3 (Autumn 1989), pp. 188-191.

From these texts we learn that *some* of the vessels were brought to Babylon *during Jehoiakim's reign*, the *valuable* vessels were brought *at the deportation of Jehoiachin*, and *all the rest* of the vessels were taken to Babylon *at the end of Zedekiah's reign*. Of the three deportations of vessels, the first is clearly referred to at Daniel 1:1, 2, as this text states that during the third year of Jehoiakim "*some*" of the vessels were brought to Babylon.⁶⁷

Again, this indicates that Daniel 1:1-2 refers to a deportation *different from and earlier than* that which took place at the end of Jehoiachin's short reign. This gives additional support to the conclusion that the phrase "the third year of the kingship of Jehoiakim" means what it says—Jehoiakim's third regnal year, not his eleventh.

Finally, if the deportation mentioned at Daniel 1:1-4 is equated with the one that took place at the end of Jehoiachin's three months of reign, why does Daniel state that "Jehovah gave into his hand *Jehoiakim*," instead of *Jehoiachin*? (Daniel 1:2) When Jehoiachin was taken captive, Jehoiakim had been dead for over three months. (2 Kings 24:8-17; 2 Chronicles 36:9-10) There is even evidence to show that Jehoiakim was already dead when Nebuchadnezzar, in his seventh year, left Babylon for the siege of Jerusalem that ended up in Jehoiachin's deportation. The evidence is as follows:

Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem during the reign of Jehoiachin is also described in the Babylonian chronicle B.M. 21946. For the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar this chronicle says:

From Dec. 598 (or Jan. 597) to March 597 B.C.E.:

"The seventh year: In the month Kislev the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to Hattu. He encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month Adar he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice he appointed in the city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon."⁶⁸

67 It is interesting to note that in this first deportation Nebuchadnezzar brought only "some" of the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem to Babylon, and these were not even the "valuable" vessels. This strongly supports the conclusion that the siege of Jerusalem at this time did not end in the capture of the city. If it did, why did he not take the *valuable* vessels from the temple? If, on the other hand, the siege was raised because Jehoiakim capitulated and paid a tribute to Nebuchadnezzar, it is quite understandable that Jehoiakim did not include the most valuable vessels in the tribute.

68 A. K. Grayson, *op. cit.*, p. 102. The chronicle is in complete agreement with the description of this siege given in the Bible. (2 Kings 24:8-17; 2 Chronicles 36:9-10.)

Nebuchadnezzar's army left Babylon "in the month of Kislev," which was the *ninth* month, and seized Jehoiachin "on the second day of the month Adar," that is, the *twelfth* month.⁶⁹ This means that even if the army left Babylon in the *beginning* of Kislev (which this year began on December 18, 598 B.C.E., Julian calendar), the interval between the day it left Babylon until the city was captured and its king (Jehoiachin) seized, on the second Adar (which corresponded to March 16, 597), was *three months at the most*.⁷⁰

As Jehoiachin ruled for "three months and ten days" (2 Chronicles 36:9), he evidently had been ruling for some days *already when Nebuchadnezzar left Babylon in the month of Kislev!* If the siege of Jerusalem described at Daniel 1:1f. referred to this siege during the reign of Jehoiachin, how could it be said that it took place *during the reign of Jehoiakim* (Daniel 1:1), that Nebuchadnezzar came up "against *him*" (2 Chronicles 36:6), and that "Jehovah gave into his hand *Jehoiakim*" (Daniel 1:2), when Jehoiakim was already dead when Nebuchadnezzar left Babylon?

Equating the siege described at Daniel 1:1f. with the one that took place during the reign of Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:10-12; 2 Chronicles 36:10) is clearly impossible. Daniel and the Chronicler at 2 Chronicles 36:6 both obviously describe an *earlier* siege and an *earlier* deportation, during the reign of *Jehoiakim*. There is no reason to believe that the "third year" of Daniel 1:1 means anything else but his third year of reign. There is no evidence at all, either in the book of Daniel, in the other books in the Bible or in the contemporary Neo-Babylonian historical texts, that regnal years were reckoned from a king's vassalage, or from Nebuchadnezzar's rise to world dominion. Such theories are nothing more than unfounded guesses, adopted only in an attempt to defend an erroneous application of the seventy years of servitude predicted by Jeremiah.

69 The Babylonians had a second Ululu (an intercalary month) in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, thus making Kislev and Adar the tenth and thirteenth months respectively that year, although they were normally the ninth and twelfth calendar months. This fact does not affect the discussion above.

70 If the Babylonian army left Babylon some time after Jehoiachin had ascended the throne, the siege was of very short duration, two months at most and probably less, as the time the army needed to march from Babylon to Jerusalem has to be subtracted from the three months from Kislev to Adar. Such a march took at least one month. It is possible, however, that a part of the army had left Babylon earlier, as 2 Kings 24:10-11 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem some time after the siege had begun. The reason for the short duration of the siege was Jehoiachin's surrender to Nebuchadnezzar on Adar 2 or March 16, 597 B.C.E., Julian calendar. (2 Kings 24:12) For an excellent discussion of this siege, see William H. Shea, "Nebuchadnezzar's Chronicle and the Date of the Destruction of Lachish III," in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, No. 111 (1979), pp. 113f.

The three years of training

But what about the three years of training referred to in Daniel 1:5, 18, which seem to conflict with a natural reading of Daniel 1:1 and 2:1? Is there no simpler way to solve this seeming conflict than to suppose that the prophet in Daniel 1:1 reckoned Jehoiakim's regnal years from the beginning of his *vassalage* to Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar's regnal years in Daniel 2:1 from the year of his *rise to world dominion*? Why should Daniel reckon the regnal years of these two kings in such a confusing, abnormal manner when he knew that his readers no doubt would misunderstand him? And why does he not reckon the regnal years in this peculiar way *elsewhere* in his book, for instance in 7:1, 8:1, 9:1, and 10:1, where he follows the customary method of reckoning regnal years? Before such strained explanations are adopted, should not a simpler and more natural solution be sought?

It has already been demonstrated in the appendix for chapter two ("Methods of reckoning regnal years") that there is no real discrepancy between the *third* year of Jehoiakim in Daniel 1:1, and his *fourth* year in Jeremiah 25:1 and 46:2. When the existing accession and nonaccession year systems are taken into consideration, this difference of one year is easily understood.⁷¹

This solution also has bearing upon the seeming conflict between the three years of training and Daniel 2:1. If Daniel 1:1 refers to Nebuchadnezzar's accession year (in agreement with the Babylonian Chronicle), his "second year" at Daniel 2:1 may be regarded as the third year of the training of the Jewish captives. According to the Hebrew way of reckoning time periods, whereby fractions of time were reckoned as full units, this would make three years.⁷² The three

71 A brilliant discussion of this problem may be found in the article by Professor Albertus Pieters, "The Third Year of Jehoiakim," in *From the Pyramids to Paul*, a miscellany in honour of Dr. G. L. Robinson (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1935), pp. 180-193. Pieters concludes: "The 'third year' of Jehoiakim in Dan. 1:1 is the same as the 'fourth year' of Jehoiakim in Jer. 25:1 and 46:2, the former being reckoned according to the Babylonian and the latter according to the Palestinian method of computing the years of the king's reign."—*Ibid.*, p. 181.

72 This way of counting time periods is often termed "inclusive reckoning." The best example is the period of Jesus' death, from Friday afternoon to his resurrection on Sunday morning. Although, chronologically, this period was a little more than two nights and one day, Bible writers refer to it as "three days" (Matt. 27:63; Mark 10:34), even "three days and three nights." (Matt. 12:40) The Watch Tower Society correctly applies it to mean "a portion of each of three days." (*Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 593) Another example is the period of the siege of Samaria, stated at 2 Kings 18:9-10 to have lasted from the seventh to the ninth year of Hoshea; yet the siege is said to have lasted for "three years." For additional examples, see Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, new revised edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 52, fn. 12.

years are not necessarily three full years. Dr. Young presents the following table:⁷³

<i>Years of training:</i>	<i>Nebuchadnezzar:</i>
First year	Year of accession
Second year	First year
Third year	Second year

Applying this simple and biblical method to the problem solves the seeming conflict without unfounded theories and strained explanations. Many modern Biblical scholars, who regard the book of Daniel as authentic, have adopted this simple solution. Gerhard F. Hasel, for one, says:

It is no longer necessary to explain the difficulty between Dan. 2:1 and 1:1, 18 through textual emendation (H. Ewald, A. Kamphausen, J. D. Prince, K. Marti, and J. Jahn) or double reckoning (C. B. Michaelis, G. Behrmann). The practice of inclusive reckoning, together with the recognition of the Babylonian usage of the king's accession year as not being counted, removes all difficulties.⁷⁴

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLES COVERING THE SEVENTY YEARS

The subsequent tables have been developed in order to facilitate an examination of the arguments set forth in this work. The Babylonian and Persian Nisan-to-Nisan regnal years and the Judean Tishri-to-Tishri regnal years have been paralleled with our modern calendar. Also, the Babylonian accession years and the Judean nonaccession years have been duly considered. The guiding principle has been to take the biblical dates as they stand, if nothing else is indicated by the context. The tables intend to demonstrate how the different biblical dates may be brought into a natural harmony with each other, and also with the Babylonian chronicles. A few points require special comments:

A. Josiah's death at Megiddo, summer 609 (2 Kings 23:29)

As related in Chapter 5 above (section G-2), the city of Harran, the last Assyrian stronghold, was captured and plundered by Babylonian and Median forces, either late in 610 or early in 609 B.C.E. Ashur-uballit, the last Assyrian king, fled. In the summer of 609 a large Egyptian

73 Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 55-56; cf. pp. 267-70.

74 Gerhard F. Hasel in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. XV, No. 2, 1977, p.

force headed by Pharaoh Necho marched up to the Euphrates to help Ashur-uballit recapture Harran. For some unknown reason, the Judean king Josiah tried to stop the Egyptian forces at Megiddo, but was defeated and mortally wounded.—2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-25.

At one time it was debated whether Josiah's death took place in 609 or 608 B.C.E.⁷⁵ This question is now settled, since the Babylonian chronicle B.M. 21901 (first published by D. J. Wiseman, 1956) shows that the unsuccessful attempt to recapture Harran took place between Tammuz and Elul (c. July-September) in Nabopolassar's seventeenth regnal year (609/08).⁷⁶ As the Egyptian army needed almost a month to travel from Megiddo up to the Euphrates, the battle at Megiddo and Josiah's death took place early in the summer of 609 B.C.E.⁷⁷

As may be seen from the tables, this date is in good agreement with a Judean Tishri-to-Tishri reckoning of regnal years.

B. Jehoahaz' three months of reign and Jehoiakim's succession

After the death of Josiah, the Jews made Jehoahaz the son of Josiah king in Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 36:1) After only three months of reign, Pharaoh Necho, on his return from the Euphrates, removed Jehoahaz and put his brother Jehoiakim on the throne in Jerusalem. From then on Judah was a vassal to Egypt. As the failed Egyptian-Assyrian attempt to recapture Harran ended in Elul (August-September), and the Egyptian retreat from Harran to Jerusalem took almost a month, the removal of Jehoahaz and installation of Jehoiakim must have occurred in the next month, Tishri (September-October).

According to the Judean nonaccession year system, Jehoiakim's first regnal year, then, should be counted from Tishri 1, 609 B.C.E. Jehoahaz' three months of reign were evidently included in Josiah's reign of 31 years, instead of being counted as a separate regnal year. (Jehoiachin's three months of reign, which ended on March 16,

75 Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. New revised edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1983), pp. 205-206.

76 D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1961; first published in 1956), pp. 63-67. See also Hayim Tadmor's article "Chronology of the Last Kings of Judah" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. XV (1956), p. 228.

77 A. Malamat, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom" in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. XXVIII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), p. 125, fn. 5.

597 B.C.E., was evidently treated in a similar way, being a part of Zedekiah's first regnal year.)

C. Zedekiah's first year, 598/97 B.C.E.

As was shown in the first section of the Appendix for Chapter 5, "The 'third year of Jehoiakim' (Daniel 1:1-2)," the Babylonian chronicle B.M. 21946 dates Jehoiachin's removal from the throne to the second Adar of Nebuchadnezzar's seventh regnal year, corresponding to March 16, 597, Julian calendar, after which Zedekiah was appointed king. Following the nonaccession year system, Zedekiah's first year, then, was reckoned from Tishri, 598, to Tishri, 597 B.C.E. Zedekiah's first regnal year was the same as Jehoiachin's first year of *exile*, which is seen from a comparison of Ezekiel 24:1-2 (the dates in Ezekiel are those of Jehoiachin's exile) with 2 Kings 25:1.

This is quite natural, as Jehoiachin's three months of reign began after Tishri 598. His first regnal year, therefore, would have been reckoned from Tishri 1, 598, had he not been removed from the throne. Now his three months had to be included in Zedekiah's first regnal year.

D. Hananiah's "prophecy", July-August 594 B.C.E. (Jeremiah 28:1)

In Nebuchadnezzar's tenth year a rebellion broke out in his army from the month of Kislev to the month of Tebet (c. November 595–January 594 B.C.E.), according to the Babylonian Chronicle B.M. 21946.⁷⁸ If this rebellion caused the revolt plans among the Jewish exiles, which also spread to Judah as reflected in Jeremiah, chapters 27-29, these plans must have developed soon after the Babylonian rebellion. The "prophecy" of Hananiah, that the yoke of Babylon would be broken and the exiles brought back within two years, is dated to the *fifth* month of the *fourth* year of Zedekiah. (Jeremiah 28:1-4) This fifth month (Ab, corresponding to July-August), therefore, must have fallen in July-August, 594 B.C.E., a few months after Nebuchadnezzar had crushed the rebellion. A look at the table shows that the fifth month of Zedekiah's fourth year actually fell in July-August, 594 B.C.E., thus indicating that the chronological system presented in the tables is correct.

78 Wiseman, *op. cit.*, p. 73. Cf. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, New York: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), p. 102.

E. The siege of Jerusalem, 589-587 B.C.E.

It has been debated whether the siege lasted for eighteen months, or for about two-and-a-half years.⁷⁹ According to a Nisan-to-Nisan regnal year the siege lasted for eighteen months (2 Kings 25:1-4), but this conflicts with the statement in Ezekiel 33:21, which says that an escapee from the destruction of Jerusalem reached Ezekiel “in the *twelfth year*, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month.” This would mean that the escapee reached Ezekiel with the message that the city had been taken about *one-and-a-half years after* the destruction of Jerusalem. This seems incredible.

Therefore, it is often argued that Ezekiel 33:21 originally read “*eleventh year*,” which is supported by the Syriac Version, the Greek *Septuagint* Version, and a few Hebrew manuscripts.⁸⁰ But if a Tishri-to-Tishri regnal year is applied, the well-attested reading of “*twelfth year*” may be retained, with the escapee reaching Ezekiel about six months after the capture of Jerusalem, which seems more natural. Further, it is shown by this reckoning that the siege lasted for about two-and-a-half years, instead of eighteen months.

F. Jehoiachin’s 37th year of exile, 562/61 B.C.E.

In 2 Kings 25:27 (=Jeremiah 52:31), Jehoiachin’s 37th year is equated with the accession year of Evil-Merodach. Here we have an excellent confirmation of the conclusion that the Judean kings applied a Tishri-to-Tishri regnal year.

Evil-Merodach ascended to the throne in the autumn of 562 B.C.E., and his accession-year ran to Nisan, 561 B.C.E. Jehoiachin’s release from prison took place in the *twelfth* month of Evil-Merodach’s accession year (Jeremiah 52:31), on the twenty-fourth day. This corresponded to March 30, 561 B.C.E. (Julian calendar).

If Nisan-to-Nisan regnal years are applied to Jehoiachin’s exile, his 37th year cannot be counted from Nisan, 561 B.C.E., as this month fell *after* his release from prison. But if his 37th year of exile is reckoned from Nisan, 562 B.C.E., in order to retain the synchronism to Evil-Merodach’s accession year, his *first* year of exile has to be reckoned from Nisan, 598, to Nisan, 597 B.C.E. Is this likely?

79 “*The Nations Shall Know that I Am Jehovah*”—*How?* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971), pp. 285-287, argues for a siege of eighteen months.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 286.

As his deportation took place around Nisan 1, 597 B.C.E. (2 Kings 24:10-17; 2 Chronicles 36:10, and the Babylonian Chronicle B.M. 21946:11-13), this would mean that his first year of exile fell nearly exactly one year before he was deported! As this is impossible, his years of exile must have been reckoned according to Tishri-to-Tishri years.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE SEVENTY YEARS

	Tishri		Nisan			Fall of Nineveh, July-Aug., 612.	The capture of Harran, c. Oct. 610–March 609. End of Assyria, 609.			First deportation of captives. (Daniel 1:1-2)		
	Nabopolassar —										Nebuchadnezzar —	
BABYLON	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21/acc.	1	2
B.C.E.	614	613	612	611	610	609	608	607	606	605	604	603
JUDAH	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Josiah —					Jehoiakim —					The battle of Carchemish in summer, 605 BCE.	
						Josiah's death at Megiddo, summer, 609.						
						Jehoahaz, 3 months.						

THE 70 YEARS "FOR BABYLON" BEGIN —

	Tishri		Nisan			Second deportation of captives (2 Kings 24:10-17), "at the return of the year" (2 Chron. 36:10), i.e. end of Adar or beginning of Nisan, in spring, 597. (Cf. BM 21946)						
	Nebuchadnezzar —											
BABYLON	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
B.C.E.	602	601	600	599	598	597	596	595	594	593	592	591
JUDAH	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Jehoiakim —					Zedekiah — and years of Jehoiachin's exile — Jerusalem seized on March 16, 597. (2 Kings 24:10-12; BM 21946)						
						Jehoiachin, 3 months.						

	Tishri		Nisan			An escaped one reaches Ezekiel "in the twelfth year," i.e. in January, 586 BCE. (Ez. 33:21)			Fourth deportation of captives. (Jer. 52:30)			
	Nebuchadnezzar —											
BABYLON	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
B.C.E.	590	589	588	587	586	585	584	583	582	581	580	579
JUDAH	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	Zedekiah — Jehoiachin's exile —					Years of Jehoiachin's exile — Jerusalem captured in July, 587 BCE. (2 Kings 25:2-4; Jer. 39:2; 52:5-11)						
	Jerusalem besieged, January, 589 BCE. (2 Kings 25:1)					Temple burned and Jerusalem destroyed in August, 587 BCE. (2 Kings 25:8-10) Third deportation of captives.						

	Tishri		Nisan										Nebuchadnezzar —		Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year astronomically fixed. (VAT 4956)	
BABYLON	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38				
B.C.E.	578	577	576	575	574	573	572	571	570	569	568	567				
JUDAH	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31				

Years of Jehoiachin's exile —

	Tishri		Nisan										Cyrus king of Anshan.		Labashi-Marduk (c. 2 months)	
	Nebuchadnezzar —										Evil-Merodach —		Neriglissar —		Nabonidus —	
BABYLON	39	40	41	42	43/acc.	1	2/acc.	1	2	3	4/acc.	1				
B.C.E.	566	565	564	563	562	561	560	559	558	557	556	555				
JUDAH	32	33	34	35	36	37	49	50	51	52	53	54				

Years of Jehoiachin's exile — Years "for Babylon" (from 609 BCE) —

Jehoiachin released from prison in March, 561. (2 Kings 25:27)

	Tishri		Belshazzar coregent with Nabonidus. (BM 38299)		Cyrus of Anshan defeats Astyages of Media. (BM 35382)			Cyrus defeats Lydia.			Nabonidus —			
BABYLON	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
B.C.E.	554	553	552	551	550	549	548	547	546	545	544	543		
JUDAH	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66		

Years "for Babylon" (from 609 BCE) —

For Chapter Seven:

A REVIEW OF:

ROLF FURULI, *PERSIAN CHRONOLOGY AND THE LENGTH OF THE BABYLONIAN EXILE OF THE JEWS* (OSLO: ROLF FURULI A/S, 2003)

Persian Chronology and the Length of the Babylonian Exile of the Jews is the first of two volumes in which Rolf Furuli attempts to revise the traditional chronology for the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. Furuli states that the reason for this venture is that this chronology is in conflict with the Bible. He insists that the Bible “unambiguously,” “explicitly,” and “definitely” shows that Jerusalem and the land of Judah were desolate for 70 years, until the Jewish exiles in Babylon returned to Judah as a result of the decree Cyrus issued in his first regnal year, 538/37 B.C.E. (pp. 17, 89, 91). This implies that the desolation of Jerusalem in Nebuchadnezzar’s 18th regnal year took place 70 years earlier, in 607 B.C.E. As has been amply documented in the present work, this is contrary to modern historical research, which has fixed the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar in 587/86 B.C.E. Furuli does not explicitly mention the 607 B.C.E. date in this volume, perhaps because a more detailed discussion of the Neo-Babylonian chronology is reserved for his not-yet-published second volume.

Most of the ten chapters in this first volume, therefore, contain a critical examination of the reigns of the Persian kings from Cyrus to Darius II. The principal claim of this discussion is that the first year of Artaxerxes I should be moved 10 years backward, from 464 to 474 B.C.E. Furuli does not mention that this is an old idea that can be traced back to the noted Jesuit theologian Denis Petau, better known as Dionysius Petavius, who first presented it in a work published in 1627. Petavius’ revision had a theological basis, because, if the “seventy weeks [of years],” or 490 years, of Daniel 9:24-27 are to be counted from the 20th regnal year of Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:1ff.) to 36 C.E. (his date for the end of the period), Artaxerxes’ 20th year must be moved from 445 back to 455 B.C.E. Furuli says nothing about this underlying motive for his proposed revision.

The hidden agenda

Furuli published this book at his own expense. On the back cover of the book he presents himself this way:

Rolf Furuli is a lecturer in Semitic languages at the University of Oslo. He is working on a doctoral thesis which suggests a new understanding of the verbal system of Classical Hebrew. He has for many years worked with translation theory, and has published two books on Bible translation; he also has experience as a translator. The present volume is a result of his study of the chronology of the Ancient world for more than two decades.

Furuli does not mention that he is a Jehovah's Witness, and that for a long time he has produced apologetic texts defending Watchtower exegesis against criticism. His two books on Bible translation are nothing more than defenses of the Witnesses' *New World Translation* of the Bible. He fails to mention that for many years he has tried to defend Watchtower chronology and that his revised chronology is essentially a defense of the Watchtower Society's traditional chronology. (See above, pages 308, 309.) He describes his chronology as "a new chronology," which he calls "the Oslo Chronology," (p. 14) when in fact the 607 B.C.E. date for the destruction of Jerusalem is the chronological foundation for the claims and apocalyptic messages of the Watchtower organization, and the 455 B.C.E. date for the 20th year of Artaxerxes I is its traditional starting point for its calculation of the "seventy weeks" of Daniel 9:24-27.

Despite these facts, Furuli nowhere mentions the Watchtower Society or its chronology. Nor does he mention my detailed refutation of this chronology in various editions of the present work, *The Gentile Times Reconsidered* (GTR), first published in 1983, despite the fact that in circulated "organized collections of notes" he has tried to refute the conclusions presented in its earlier editions. Furuli's silence on GTR is noteworthy because he discusses R. E. Winkle's 1987 study of the Biblical 70-year period which presents mostly the same arguments and conclusions as are found in the first edition of GTR (1983). (See above, p. 235, note 57.) As a Jehovah's Witness, Furuli is forbidden to interact with former members of his organization. If this is the reason for his feigned ignorance of my study, he is acting as a loyal Witness – not as a scholar.

Clearly, Furuli has an agenda, and he is hiding it.

ATTEMPTS TO REVISE THE NEO-BABYLONIAN CHRONOLOGY

Although Volume I of Furuli's work principally is an attempt at revising the Persian chronology, some parts of it also contain arguments for a lengthening of the Neo-Babylonian chronology:

(A) In chapter 6 Furuli claims there are dated business tablets from the 17th regnal year of Nabonidus that *overlap* Cyrus' reign, which, if they are correct, "suggest that Nabonid reigned longer" (p. 132).

(B) As the chronology of the Neo-Nabylonian period is fixed by a number of astronomical tablets, Furuli devotes much space on trying to undermine the reliability of these tablets, including the astronomical diary VAT 4956 from the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. In Chapter 1 he claims there are only two principal astronomical sources for the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. In the same chapter he describes nine "potential sources of error" in the Babylonian astronomical tablets.

(C) In Chapter 2 Furuli argues that the astronomical texts probably mainly contain, not actual observations, but backward calculations performed during the Seleucid era (after 312 B.C.E.).

(D) In Chapter 4, finally, Furuli discusses Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70 years, arguing that the writers of Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:21 "unambiguously" applied the 70 years to the period of the desolate state of Jerusalem.

In this review I will critically examine these claims one by one. As the Persian chronology is not the subject of the present work, Furuli's chronological revision of that period will not be examined here. A more detailed review of Furuli's book that includes comments on his revised Persian chronology is found on this site: <http://user.tninet.se/~oof408u/fkf/english/furulirev.htm> .

For some works often referred to in the discussion below the following abbreviations are used:

ADT Abraham J. Sachs and Hermann Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Vol. I – 1988, II – 1989, III – 1996, V – 2001).

CBT Erle Leichty et al, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, Vols. 6, 7, and 8 (1986, 1987, and 1988). These volumes list the tablets from Sippar held at BM.

LBAT Abraham J. Sachs (ed.), *Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts. Copied by T. G. Pinches and J. N. Strassmaier* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1955).

PD Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C. – A.D. 75* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1956).

(A) The supposed “overlap” between the reigns of Nabonidus and Cyrus

An argument repeatedly used by Furuli is that the existence of dated business documents showing chronological “overlaps” of some days, weeks, or months between a king and his successor proves that “something is wrong with our chronological scheme. In that case it is likely that the successor did not succeed the previous king in the year when he died. There may be one or more years in between, or there may even be another ruler between the two kings in question. This way to test a chronology is very important because there are discrepancies between all the kings of the New Babylonian Empire and several of the early kings of the Persian Empire.” (p. 132)

This argument is critically examined and disproved in the Appendix of the present work, where the conceivable “overlaps” between the reigns of all the kings of the Neo-Babylonian period are examined in detail. (See above, pp. 321-329.) The only suggested “overlap” not discussed is that between the 17th year of Nabonidus and the accession-year of Cyrus. The reason for this is not just that there are no dated texts that show such an overlap between the two reigns, but also because there are a number of tablets that definitely prove that Cyrus succeeded Nabonidus in his 17th year. Five such texts are discussed in the present work on pages 135-139 above.

Nevertheless, Furuli claims that some business tablets show an overlap between Nabonidus’ 17th year and Cyrus’ accession-year. His “Table 18” on p. 132 shows that the earliest tablet extant from the reign of Cyrus (CT 57:717) is dated to day 19, month VII (Tishri) of his accession-year, i.e., three days after the fall of Babylon. This date is correct. But then Furuli goes on to list three tablets in his table that seem to be dated to Nabonidus *after* the earliest tablet dated to Cyrus, indicating an overlap of five months between the two kings:

<u>Month-day-year:</u>	<u>King:</u>
VII --19 – acc.	Cyrus
VIII -- 10 – 17	Nabonidus
IX -- xx – 17	Nabonidus
XII -- 19 –17	Nabonidus

Furuli concludes:

If one or more of the three tablets dated in months 8 and 12 of Nabonid are correct, this suggests that Nabonid reigned longer than 17 years. (p. 132)

But none of the three “overlapping dates” are real.

(A-1) Nabonidus “VIII – 10 – 17” (BM 74972):

As Furuli explains, PD rejected this date because “the month sign is shaded” in J. N. Strassmaier’s copy of the text published in 1889.⁸¹ They had good reasons for doing this because F. H. Weissbach, who collated the tablet in 1908, explained that the month name was highly uncertain and “in any case not Arahsamnu” (month VIII).⁸²

Actually, there is an even more serious error with the date. Back in 1990 I asked C. B. F. Walker at the British Museum to take another look at the date on the original tablet. He did this together with two other Assyriologists. They all agreed that the year is 16, not 17. Walker says:

On the Nabonidus text no. 1054 mentioned by Parker and Dubberstein p. 13 and Kugler, SSB II 388, I have collated that tablet (BM 74972) and am satisfied that the year is 16, not 17. It has also been checked by Dr. G. Van Driel and Mr. Bongenaar, and they both agree with me.⁸³

(A-2) Nabonidus “IX – xx – 17” (No. 1055 in Strassmaier, Nabonidus):

This text does not give any day number, the date above just being given as “Kislimu [= month IX], year 17 of Nabonidus”. The text, in fact, contains four different dates of this kind, in the following chronological disorder: Months IX, I, XII, and VI of “year 17 of Nabonidus”. None of these dates refers to the time when the tablet was drawn up. Such a date is actually missing on the tablet. As F. X.

81 PD (Parker & Dubberstein’s *Babylonian Chronology*, 1956), p. 13. The tablet is listed as No. 1054 in J. N. Strassmaier, *Inschriften von Nabonidus, König von Babylon* (Leipzig, 1889).

82 See F. X. Kugler, *Sternkunde und Sterndienst in Babel* [SSB], Vol. II:2 (1912), p. 388

83 Letter Walker to Jonsson, November 13, 1990.

Kugler explained, the tablet belongs to a category of texts containing installment dates or delivery dates (*mashshartum*).⁸⁴ Such dates were given at least one month, and often several months in advance. That is why PD states (p. 14) that “this tablet is useless for dating purposes.” As shown by its contents, No. 1055 is an administrative text giving the dates for deliveries of certain amounts of barley in year 17 of Nabonidus.⁸⁵

(A-3) Nabonidus “XII – 19 – 17” (BM 55694):

This tablet was copied by T. G. Pinches in the 1890’s and was finally published in 1982 as CT 57:168.⁸⁶ It is also listed in CBT 6, p. 184, where the date is given as “Nb(-) 19/12/13+” (= day 19, month 12, year 13+).⁸⁷ Evidently the royal name and the year number are both damaged and only partially legible. “Nb(-)” shows that the royal name begins with “Nabu-”. This could refer to either Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar, or Nabonidus. If it is Nabonidus, the damaged year number, “13+”, may refer to any year between his 13th and 17th year. An examination of the original tablet might perhaps give some clues.

None of the three tablets listed by Furuli, then, can be used to prove that Nabonidus’ 17th year overlapped the accession-year of Cyrus, suggesting that “Nabonid reigned longer than 17 years.”

(B) Attempts at undermining the reliability of the astronomical tablets

(B-1) Only three principal sources for the chronology of the ancient world?

Furuli is well aware that the most damaging evidence against his so-called “Oslo Chronology” is provided by the astronomical cuneiform tablets. He therefore strives to belittle the importance of most of these tablets, stating that there are only two principal astronomical sources on which the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods can be based. (Pages 15, 24, 45) At least one of these, he claims, contradicts the third principal chronological source—the Bible:

84 F. X. Kugler, SSB II:2 (1912), pp. 388, 389.

85 P.-A. Beaulieu in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 52:4 (1993), pp. 256, 258.

86 CT 57:168 = *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, Part 57 (1982), No. 168.

87 Erle Leichty, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* (CBT), Vol. 6 (1986), p. 184 (82-7-14, 51).

There are three principal sources with information regarding the chronology of the New Babylonian and Persian kings, namely, *Strm Kambys 400*, *VAT 4956* and the Bible. The information in these three sources cannot be harmonized. (p. 21)

Furuli knows, of course, that for the fixing of the absolute date for the fall of Babylon to 539 B.C.E., at least one astronomical text is needed. As the diary *VAT 4956* is disastrous for his Oslo Chronology, he is forced to choose *Strm Kambys 400* for this purpose, claiming that this is “the tablet that is most important for Persian chronology” (p. 128) and “the only source on the basis of which an absolute chronology can be made regarding the year Cyrus conquered Babylon.” (p. 134)

The poor quality of this tablet has already been pointed out in the present work. As was noticed already by F. X. Kugler in 1903, it is probably the least reliable of all astronomical tablets. (See above, pp. 84-88.) Modern scholars even question whether it contains any observations at all. Dr. John M. Steele, for example, explains:

It is also unwise to base any conclusions concerning the Babylonian records on this tablet alone, since it does not fall into any of the common categories of text. In particular, it is not certain whether this text contains observations or calculations of the phenomena it records. At least some of the data must be calculated. For instance, the full run of lunar six timings for the 7th year of Cambyses cannot all have been measured; clouds would surely have prevented their observation on at least some occasions. The lunar six data must therefore have been either all calculated, as suggested by Kugler (1907: 61-72), or be a mixture of observation and calculation. There is also debate concerning whether the two lunar eclipses were observed or calculated.⁸⁸

The fact is that the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian eras is fixed by nearly 50 astronomical observational tablets (diaries, eclipse texts, and planetary texts). Many of them are quite extensive and detailed and serve as principal sources for the absolute chronology of this period. Most of these tablets are published in vol-

88 John M. Steele, *Observations and Predictions of Eclipse Times by Early Astronomers* (Dordrecht-Boston-London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 98. C. B. F. Walker refers, for example, to the inaccurate magnitude reported for one the two eclipses in the text, “but,” he adds, “the Cambyses text is now understood to contain a series of predictions rather than observations.” – Walker in John Curtis (ed.), *Mesopotamia in the Persian Period* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1997), p. 18.

umes I and V of Sachs & Hunger's ADT.⁸⁹ For example, there are about 25 diaries from the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-359 BCE), 11 of which have the royal name and regnal dates preserved. Most, if not all, of these appear to be, not later copies, but original compilations from the 46-year reign of Artaxerxes II.⁹⁰ Therefore, to fix the absolute chronology of the reign of Artaxerxes II or any other Persian king, *Strm Kamby's 400* is needless and irrelevant. Nor is it needed to fix the reigns of Cambyses and Cyrus, which can be more securely fixed by other texts.

(B-2) Potential "sources of errors" in the Babylonian astronomical tablets

Attempting to further weaken the reliability of the astronomical texts, Furuli, on pages 29-37, describes nine "potential sources of error" that might undermine the trustworthiness of tablets that conflict with his Oslo Chronology, such as VAT 4956. On closer inspection, however, the supposed "sources of error" turn out to be either (a) trivial and immaterial, (b) not applicable to the tablets used for fixing the Neo-Babylonian and Persian chronology and therefore irrelevant, or (c) mere figments of imagination. All of Furuli's "potential sources of errors" fall into one of these three categories. Some examples are given below.

(B-2a) Trivial and immaterial sources of error:

An example of (a) is Furuli's description of "the process of writing down the data." His discussion of this focuses on the astronomical diary VAT 4956, dated to the 37th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Furuli explains:

The tablet itself is a copy made a long time after the original was made, but even the original was not made at the time the observations were made. The tablet covers a whole year, and because clay hardly can be kept moist for 12 months, the observations must have been written down on quite a lot of smaller tablets, which were copied when the original was made. (pp. 30, 31)

As far as the *copying* and *compilation* procedure is concerned, Furuli's description is correct and well known to Assyriologists. Copying errors do exist, but they usually create few problems in tablets that are fairly well preserved and detailed enough to be useful

89 ADT = *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*.

90 Communication H. Hunger to C. O. Jonsson, dated January 26, 2001.

for chronological purposes. As discussed in chapter 4 of the present work (p. 162 above), the dated lunar and planetary positions recorded in VAT 4956 evidently contain a couple of scribal errors. These errors, however, are minor and easily detected by modern computations of the observations recorded.

Thus, on the obverse (front) side, line 3 has day “9”, which already P.V. Neugebauer and E. F. Weidner pointed out is a scribal error for day “8”.⁹¹ Similarly, obverse, line 14, has day “5”, which is obviously an error for day “4”. The remaining legible records of observed lunar and planetary positions, about 30, are correct, as is demonstrated by modern calculations. In their recent examination of VAT 4956, Professor F. R. Stephenson and Dr. D. M. Willis conclude:

The observations analyzed here are sufficiently diverse and accurate to enable the accepted date of the tablet—i.e. 568-567 B.C.—to be confidently confirmed.⁹²

(B-2b) Inapplicable and therefore irrelevant “sources of error”:

An example of (b) is Furuli’s reference to the gradual change in the speed of the earth’s rotation. (p. 33) As is pointed out in the present work (p. 334 above), this is no problem for the period under discussion, as the rate of the decrease in the earth’s rotation has been established back to, and even over a century beyond the Neo-Babylonian period. From the middle of the 8th century B.C.E. and on, therefore, we are on “safe ground” with respect to this source of error.

(B-2c) Imaginary “source of error”, no. 1:

An example of (c) is Furuli’s reference to the supposed “crudeness of observations” recorded on the astronomical tablets. On page 32 he claims:

One problem is the crudeness of the observations. Because the tablets probably were made for astrological reasons, it was enough to know the zodiacal sign in which the moon or a certain planet was found at a particular point of time. This does not give particularly accurate observations.

By this statement Furuli creates a false impression that the lunar and planetary positions recorded on the Babylonian astronomical tablets are given *only* in relation to zodiacal signs of 30 degrees each. He

91 A translation and discussion of the tablet by Neugebauer & Weidner was published in 1915. See above, p. 157, note 8.

92 F. R. Stephenson & D. M. Willis in J. M. Steele & A. Imhausen [eds.], *Under One Sky. Astronomy and Mathematics in the Ancient Near East* (Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), pp. 423-428. (Emphasis added)

supports this by quoting a scholar, Curtis Wilson, who in a review of a book by R. R. Newton made such a claim, stating that, “The position of the planet is specified only within an interval of 30°.”⁹³

But anyone with even a cursory acquaintance with the Babylonian astronomical tablets knows that Wilson’s claim – repeated by Furuli – is false. Although it is true that many positions recorded on the tablets are given with reference to constellations along the zodiacal belt, the great majority of the positions, even in the earliest diaries, are given with reference to stars or planets. The division of the zodiacal belt into signs of 30 degrees each took place later, during the Persian era, and it is not until “toward the end of the 3rd century B.C.” that “diaries begin to record the dates when a planet moved from one zodiacal sign to another.”⁹⁴ During the entire 800-year period from ca. 750 BCE to ca. 75 CE the Babylonian astronomers used a number of stars close to the ecliptic as reference points. As Professor Hermann Hunger explains in a work also used by Furuli:

In order to give the position of the moon and the planets *a number of stars close to the ecliptic are used for reference*. These have been called “Normalsterne” [*Normal Stars*] by Epping, and the term has remained in use ever since. (ADT, Vol. I, p. 17; emphasis added.)

On pages 17-19 of the same work, Hunger lists 32 such *normal stars* known from the tablets. Noel Swerdlow states: “By far the most numerous observations of planets in the Diaries are of their distances ‘above’ or ‘below’ and ‘in front of’ or ‘behind’ normal stars and each other, measured in cubits and fingers.”⁹⁵

Such detailed observations are shown by *VAT 4956*, in which about two-thirds of the lunar and planetary positions recorded are given *in relation to normal stars and planets*. And, in contrast to positions related to constellations, where the moon or a planet usually is just said to be “in front of,” “behind,” “above,” “below,” or “in” a certain constellation, the records of positions related to normal stars also give the *distances* to these stars in “cubits” (of ca. 2–2.5 degrees each) and “fingers” (1/24 of the cubit), as Swerdlow points out. Although the measurements are demonstrably not mathematically

93 C. Wilson in *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 15:1 (1984), p. 40.

94 H. Hunger in N. M. Swerdlow [ed.], *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination* (London: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 77. Cf. B. L. Van der Waerden, “History of the Zodiac,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 16 (1952/1953), pp. 216-230.

95 N. M. Swerdlow, *The Babylonian Theory of the Planets* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1998), p. 39.

exact, they are considerably more precise than positions related only to constellations.

By parsing all the astronomical diaries in the first two volumes of Sachs/Hunger's ADT, Professor Gerd Grasshoff "obtained descriptions of 3285 events, of which 2781 are complete without unreadable words or broken plates. Out of those are 1882 topographical events [i.e., positions related to stars and planets], 604 are lunar observations called *Lunar Six* ... and 295 are locations of a celestial object in a constellation."⁹⁶ Thus, two-thirds of the positions are related to stars or planets, whereas only about 10 percent are related to constellations.

(B-2c) Imaginary "source of error", no. 2:

Another example of (c) is Furuli's claim that the 12,000-foot mountain range to the east of Babylon might prevent or preclude observations:

To the east of Babylon there is a mountain range rising to about 12,000 feet above sea level, while the area to the west of the city is a flat desert. ... it is obvious that the high mountains to the east of Babylon would prevent some observations. (p. 29)

But the Zagros mountains to the east of Babylon create no serious problems. The higher parts of the range begin about 230 kilometers east of Babylon with *Kuh-e Varzarin* at about 9500 feet above sea level. Mountains "about 12,000 feet above sea level" lie considerably farther away. Due to the distance and the curvature of the earth, the Zagros mountains are not visible from Babylon, at least not from the ground, as can be testified by anyone who has been there. Professor Hermann Hunger, for example, says:

I have been there [in Iraq], three years, of which two months were spent in Babylon. There are no mountains visible from Babylon.⁹⁷

It is possible, of course, that an observer atop the 90-meter-high Etemenanki ziggurat in Babylon (if the observations could have been made from there) could have seen a very thin, irregular line of mountains far to the east, although this, too, is doubtful. This might have affected the *arcus visionis* to some degree (the smallest angular distance of the sun below the horizon at the first or last visibility of a

96 Gerd Grasshoff, "Normal Stars in Late Astronomical Babylonian Diaries," in Noel M. Swerdlow [ed.], *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination* (London: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 107.

97 Communication Hunger to Jonsson, December 4, 2003.

heavenly body above the horizon), which in turn could have changed the date of the first and last visibility of a heavenly body by a day or two.

It should be emphasized that this might possibly be a problem with astronomical texts that report only phenomena close to the horizon. Observations of lunar and planetary positions related to specific stars and constellations higher in the sky would not be affected, and it is usually these that are the most useful for chronological purposes. Most of the about 30 lunar and planetary positions recorded on the astronomical tablet *VAT 4956* belong to this category.

None of Furuli's "potential sources of error" weakens the reliability of *VAT 4956*. I am aware of only one scholar who has tried to overcome the evidence provided by this diary, namely, E. W. Faulstich, founder and director of the Chronology-History Research Institute in Spencer, Iowa, USA. Faulstich believes it is possible to establish an absolute Bible chronology without the aid of extra-Biblical sources, based solely on the cyclical phenomena of the Mosaic law (sabbath days, sabbath and jubilee years) and the cycle of the 24 sections of the levitical priesthood. One consequence of his theory is that the whole Neo-Babylonian period has to be moved backward one year. Because this conflicts with the absolute dating of the period based on the astronomical tablets, Faulstich argues that *VAT 4956* contains information from two separate years mixed into one. This idea, however, is based on serious mistakes. I have thoroughly refuted Faulstich's thesis in the unpublished article, "A critique of E.W. Faulstich's Neo-Babylonian chronology" (1999), available from me upon request.

(C) Are most astronomical positions calculated rather than observed?

The "most acute problem for making an absolute chronology based on astronomical tablets," Furuli claims, is that many, "perhaps most positions of the heavenly bodies on such tablets, are calculated rather than observed." (p. 15) Is this true?

As discussed in chapter 4 of the present work (pp. 154-156 above), Babylonian astronomers at an early stage were able to predict certain astronomical phenomena, such as the occurrences of lunar eclipses and certain planetary positions. These calculations presuppose that they had worked out theories for dating and locating such phenomena. In fact, about 300 texts have been found containing lists of lunar and

planetary positions at regular intervals. (See above, p. 156.) Such arithmetical tables were termed “ephemerides” by Professor Otto Neugebauer, who published all extant tablets of this kind in his three-volume work, *Astronomical Cuneiform Texts* (1955). All these tablets are late, almost all dating from the 3rd to the 1st centuries B.C.E.

Does this mean, then, that all or most of the phenomena recorded on the astronomical tablets might have been computed rather than observed, as Furuli claims? Were the Babylonian astronomers able to do this? Are there indications in the recorded data that they did just that?

(C-1) Phenomena the Babylonian astronomers were unable to calculate

Although the Babylonian astronomers were able to calculate and predict certain astronomical events, the observational texts – diaries, planetary texts, and eclipse texts – contain reports of several phenomena and circumstances connected with the observations that could not have been calculated.

That the diaries usually record *real observations* is shown by their reports of climatological phenomena. For example, the scribes repeatedly report when bad weather *prevented* astronomical observations. We often find reports about “clouds and rain of various sorts, described in detail by numerous technical terms, as well as fog, mist, hail, thunder, lightning, winds from all directions, often cold, and frequent ‘*pisan dib*’, of unknown meaning but always associated with rain.”⁹⁸ Other recorded phenomena were rainbows, solar halos and river levels. None of these could have been retrocalculated much later. What, then, about the astronomical phenomena?

As discussed in chapter 4 of the present work (p. 185 above), there were a number of *planetary phenomena* recorded in the texts that the Babylonian astronomers were unable to calculate. These included conjunctions of planets with the moon and other planets, with their distances. *VAT 4956* records a number of such – for the Babylonian astronomers – unpredictable and incalculable phenomena.

With respect to *lunar eclipses*, the Babylonian astronomers were certainly able to predict and retrocalculate the *occurrences* of lunar

98 N. M. Swerdlow, *The Babylonian Theory of the Planets* (1998), p. 18.

eclipses, but they were unable to predict or calculate a number of important details about them. (See above, p. 185.) This has been discussed in detail by Dr. John M. Steele.⁹⁹ Commenting on the claim that the eclipse records on the lunar eclipse tablets might be retrocalculations by Babylonian astronomers in the Seleucid era, Steele explains:

You were absolutely right when you argued that the Babylonians could not have retrocalculated the early eclipse records. The Saros cycle could have been used to determine the date of eclipses, even centuries earlier, but none of the Babylonian methods could have allowed them to calculate circumstances such as the direction of the eclipse shadow, the visibility of planets during the eclipse, and certainly not the direction of the wind during the eclipse, which we find in early reports ...

Although the Babylonians could calculate the time of the eclipses, they could not do so to the same level of accuracy as they could observe – there is a clear difference of accuracy between eclipses they said were observed and those they say were predicted (this is discussed in my book), which proves that the “observed” eclipses really were observed.¹⁰⁰

(C-2) Most of the contents of the observational texts are observations

Although the observational texts, due to particular circumstances such as bad weather, occasionally contain calculated events, most of the entries are demonstrably based on actual observations. That this is the case with the Diaries is directly indicated by the Akkadian name engraved at the end and on the edges of these tablets: *natsaru sha ginê*, which means “regular watching.” (ADT, Vol. I, p. 11)

Scholars who have examined these tablets in detail agree that they contain mostly genuine observations. Professor Hermann Hunger gives the following description of the various kinds of astronomical data recorded in the Diaries:

Lunar Six [i.e., the time differences between the settings and risings of the sun and the moon just before and after conjunction and opposition]; planetary phases, like first and last visibility ... conjunctions between planets and the so-called Normal Stars ... eclipses; solstices and equinoxes; phenomena of Sirius. Toward the end of the 3rd century B.C., Diaries begin

99 John M. Steele, *Observations and Predictions of Eclipse Times by Early Astronomers* (Dordrecht-Boston-London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000); also in his article, “Eclipse Prediction in Mesopotamia,” *Archive for History of Exact Sciences*, Vol. 54 (2000), pp. 421-454.

100 Communication Steele to Jonsson, March 27, 2003.

to record the dates when a planet moved from one zodiacal sign into another. The rest of the Diaries' contents is non-astronomical.

Hunger adds:

Almost all of these items are observations. Exceptions are the solstices, equinoxes, and Sirius data, which were computed according to a scheme ... furthermore, in many instances when Lunar Sixes, lunar or solar eclipses, or planetary phases could not be observed, a date or time is nevertheless given, marked as not observed. Expected passages of Normal Stars by the moon are sometimes recorded as missed because of bad weather, but never is a distance between moon and Normal Star given as computed.¹⁰¹

In summary, Furuli's claim that "perhaps most positions of the heavenly bodies on such tablets, are calculated rather than observed" is groundless. It is refuted by statements in the tablets themselves and by the fact that they contain data that the Babylonians were unable to calculate. These circumstances are diametrically opposed to the suggestion that the data in the astronomical diary VAT 4956 might have been calculated later so that possibly "there never was an 'original tablet'." (Furuli, p. 30)

(C-3) A theory of desperation

If the entries on the observational tablets – diaries, and lunar and planetary tablets – record mostly demonstrably genuine observations, and if the Babylonian astronomers were unable to compute and retrocalculate many of the astronomical and other data reported, how, then, is it possible for anyone to wriggle out of the evidence provided by these tablets?

Because the tablets often contain so many detailed observations dated to specific regnal years that they can be safely fixed to particular Julian years, the only escape is to question the authenticity of the *regnal year numbers* found on the tablets.

This is what Furuli does. He imagines that "a scribe could sit down in the 2nd century and make a tablet partly of some phenomena covering many years, partly on the basis of theory (the three schemes) and partly on the basis of tablets from a library" that might show real observations. Then, upon discovery that the dates on the library tablets conflicted with the theoretical data, "these erroneous data could be used to 'correct' the correct data of his library tablet,

101 H. Hunger in Swerdlow (ed.), *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination* (1999), pp. 77, 78. (Emphasis added)

to the effect that the tablet he was making would contain wrong data of regnal years.” (Furuli, p. 41)

Furuli indicates that not only the dates on the lunar and planetary tablets but also the dates on the diaries might have been tampered with by the Seleucid scholars in the same way. Referring again to the fact that the earliest extant diaries are copies, he says:

But what about the regnal year(s) of a king that are written on such tablets? Have they been calibrated to fit an incorrect theoretical chronological scheme, or have they been copied correctly? (Furuli, p. 42)

Furuli realizes, of course, that his Oslo Chronology is thoroughly contradicted by the Babylonian astronomical tablets. That is the reason he proposes, as a last resort, the theory that these tablets might have been redated by Seleucid scholars to bring them into agreement with their own supposed theoretical chronology for earlier times. Is this scenario likely? What does it imply?

(C-4) The scale of the supposed Seleucid chronological revisions

To what extent does Furuli’s Oslo Chronology differ from the traditional chronology? In a chronological table on pages 219-225 covering the 208 years of the Persian era (539–331 BCE), Furuli shows, reign by reign, the difference between his chronology and the traditional one. It turns out that the only agreement between the two is the dating of the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses – the period from the fall of Babylon (539 BCE) to 522 BCE, a period of 17 years. By giving the usurper Bardiya one full year of reign after Cambyses, Furuli moves the whole 36-year reign of Darius I one year forward. Then he moves the reigns of Darius’ successors Xerxes and Artaxerxes I 10 years backward by adding 10 years to the reign of the latter, creating a coregency of 11 years between Darius I and Xerxes.

But Furuli also assigns a one-year reign to the usurper Sogdianus between Artaxerxes I and his successor Darius II. The effect of this is that the remaining reigns up to 331 BCE are all moved one year forward. The end result is that Furuli’s Oslo Chronology is at variance with the traditional chronology for the Persian era for 191 of its 208 years, or for 92 percent of the period.

But this is not all. As mentioned in the introduction, Furuli wants to add 20 extra years to the Neo-Babylonian period somewhere after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar – between 562 and 539 BCE. The effect of this – what Furuli calls the “domino effect” – is that not only the

reign of Nebuchadnezzar but all the reigns of his predecessors are moved backward 20 years.

Because the Babylonian astronomical archive starts with the reign of Nabonassar, 747-734 BCE, Furuli's Oslo Chronology is at variance with the traditional chronology for most, if not the whole, of the Babylonian era from 747 to 539 BCE. This means that the disagreement between the two runs to *more than 90 percent* of the 416-year period from 747 to 331 BCE. This also means that the Oslo Chronology is contradicted by more than 90 percent of the astronomical observational texts – diaries, eclipse texts, and planetary texts – dated to this period. Because these tablets record thousands of observations dated to particular regnal years, months, and days within this period, we begin to get some idea of the scale of the chronological revisions the Seleucid scholars must have engaged in – according to Furuli's theory. Yet, this is only a fraction of the full scope of the necessary revisions.

(C-5) The scope of the original astronomical archive

It should be kept in mind that the extant archive of ca. 1300 non-mathematical and principally observational astronomical cuneiform tablets is only a fraction of the scope of the original archive available to the Seleucid scholars. In a lecture held at a conference in 1994, Professor Hunger explained:

To give you an idea of how much was originally contained in that archive, and how much is still preserved, I made a few rough estimates. From well preserved Diaries, I found that in each month about 15 lunar and 5 planetary positions, both in relation to Normal Stars, are reported. Also, every month the so-called lunar Six are recorded. Each year will in addition contain 3 Sirius phases, 2 solstices and 2 equinoxes, at least 4 eclipse possibilities or eclipses, and about 25 planetary phases. Together, this results in about 350 astronomical observations per year. In 600 years, 210,000 observations are accumulated. Now I do not know whether the archive was ever complete to this extent. Sometimes copies of older Diaries indicate that things were missing in the original. *But on the whole, this is the order of magnitude.* By counting the number of reasonably (i.e., not completely, but more than half) preserved months, I arrived at ca. 400 months preserved in dated Diaries (undated fragments do not help for the purposes of this lecture). If we compare this to a duration of 600 years for the archive, we see that *we have preserved ca. 5% of the months in Diaries.*¹⁰²

102 H. Hunger in Swerdlow (ed.), *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination* (1999), p. 82. (Emphasis added)

If only five percent of the original Babylonian astronomical archive is preserved today, the scale of the chronological revisions Furuli thinks Seleucid copyists engaged in becomes apparent. To bring their whole archive into harmony with their supposed theoretical chronology, they would have had to redate thousands of tablets and tens of thousands of observations. Is it likely that they believed so strongly in a supposed theoretical chronology that they bothered to redate four centuries' worth of archives containing thousands of tablets? The idea is absurd.

We can also ask why the Seleucid scholars would work out a theoretical chronology for earlier centuries when a reliable chronology for the whole period back to the middle of the 8th century could easily be extracted from the extensive astronomical archive at their disposal. Is it not much more realistic to conclude that their chronology was exactly the one found in the inherited archive of tablets, an archive that had been studied and expanded by successive generations of scholars up to and including their own?

It should be noted that, to make any claims at all about dates in his Oslo chronology, Furuli must rely on the dating of the tablets that the Seleucids supposedly revised. But if one assumes that his chronology is valid, then so must be the dates recorded on the tablets – which destroys his claim that the Seleucids revised the tablets. Thus, Furuli's argument is internally inconsistent and cannot be correct.

Another problem is what became of the original pre-Seleucid tablets. A necessary consequence of Furuli's theory is that almost all extant tablets should reflect only the erroneous theoretical chronology of the Seleucid scholars, not what Furuli regards as the original and true chronology – the Oslo Chronology. In his view, therefore, all or almost all extant tablets can only be the late revised copies of the Seleucid scholars. Thus, on page 64, he claims:

As in the case of the astronomical diaries on clay tablets, we do not have the autographs of the Biblical books, but only copies.

This is certainly true of the Biblical books, but is it true of the astronomical diaries? Is there any evidence to show that all the astronomical tablets preserved today are only copies from the Seleucid era?

(C-6) *Are all extant tablets late copies from the Seleucid era?*

It is certainly true that some of the earliest diaries, including *VAT 4956*, are later copies. As discussed in chapter 4 of the present work, they frequently reflect the struggle of the copyist to understand the ancient documents they were copying, some of which were broken or otherwise damaged. Twice in the text of *VAT 4956*, for example, the copyist added the comment “broken off,” indicating he was unable to decipher some word in the original. Often the documents used archaic terminology that the copyists tried to modernize. What about diaries from later times?

As an example, there are about 25 diaries from the 46-year reign of Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.E.), 11 of which not only preserve the dates (year, month, day) but also the name of the king. (ADT, Vol. I, pp. 66-141) Some of them are extensive and contain numerous observations (e.g., nos. –372 and –366). None of these tablets show any of the above-mentioned signs of being later copies. Is it likely, then, that they, or at least some of them, are originals?

This question was sent to Professor Hunger a few years ago. He answered:

In my opinion, the diaries from the time of Artaxerxes II can all be from his reign. You know that the larger diaries are all copies in the sense that they are collections of smaller tablets which covered shorter periods. But that does not mean that they were copied much later. To me it would make most sense if after every half a year the notes were copied into one nice exemplar. I had a quick look through the edition and did not find any remarks like “broken” which are an indication that the scribe copied an older original. So I would answer your question “is it likely” by “Yes”.¹⁰³

These tablets, therefore, do not reflect any “theoretical chronology” supposedly invented by the later Seleucid scholars. The tablets might very well be original documents. We cannot take it for granted that they are late copies from the Seleucid era. And the same holds true, not only for the diaries from the reign of Artaxerxes II but for most of the observational tablets dating from before the Seleucid era. Even if some of the diaries and other tablets dated to the earliest centuries are later copies, it is usually not known how late these copies are, or whether they were copied in the Seleucid period or earlier.

103 Communication Hunger to Jonsson, January 26, 2001.

In conclusion, the theory that Seleucid scholars worked out an erroneous hypothetical chronology for earlier times that they systematically embodied into the astronomical tablets they were copying cannot be supported by the available facts. It is not based on historical reality and is a desperate attempt to save cherished but false dates.

(D) Unfounded claims about the Biblical 70 years

As is discussed in chapter 5 of the present work, the prophet Jeremiah directly applies the 70 years to *the length of Babylon's dominion over the nations*, not to the length of the desolation of Jerusalem and the Jewish exile:

... these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (Jeremiah 25:11, NIV)

When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come back to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. (Jeremiah 29:10, NIV)

These texts clearly apply the 70-year period to Babylon, not to Jerusalem. Quoting the above NIV rendering of the two verses, Furuli even admits this, stating that “the text does not say explicitly that it refers to an exile for the Jewish nation. If we make a grammatical analysis in 25:11, we find that ‘these nations’ is the grammatical subject, and in 29:10, ‘Babylon’ is the patient, that is, the nation that should experience the period of 70 years.” (p. 75)

(D-1) Is Furuli's view of the 70 years really supported by Daniel and the Chronicler?

Attempting to evade this undesirable conclusion, Furuli turns to the 70-year passages at Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21, stating that “the writers of Daniel and 2 Chronicles understood the words of Jeremiah to imply a 70-year exile for the Jewish nation.” After quoting the NIV for these two texts, he claims:

As the analysis below shows, the words of Daniel and the Chronicler are unambiguous. They show definitely that Daniel and the Chronicler understood Jeremiah to prophesy about a 70-year period for the Jewish people when the land was desolate. (p. 76)

The discussion of the two passages in chapter 5 above (pp. 215-225) shows this claim to be groundless. Both passages may easily be harmonized with the clear statements of Jeremiah.

Although Daniel links or ties the 70 years to the desolate state of Jerusalem, this does not mean that he *equated* the two periods. To *link* and to *equate* are two different things. This was noticed, for example, by Dr. C. F. Keil, who in his grammatical analysis of Daniel 9:2 concluded that Daniel connected and yet distinguished the two periods, just as is done in Jeremiah's prophecy. Only after the completion of the 70 years "for Babylon," JHWH would visit the Jewish exiles and bring them back to Jerusalem to end its period of desolation. This is what had been predicted at Jeremiah 29:10, and Daniel's statement fully agrees with this, according to Keil. (See above, p. 219, note 31.)¹⁰⁴

In his discussion of 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21 Furuli ignores verse 20 and quotes only verse 21:

to fulfill Jehovah's words by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had paid off its sabbaths. All the days of lying desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

It may be noted that this verse starts with a subordinate clause and, more specifically, with a purpose clause: to fulfill Furuli quotes the verse out of context. To know what event would fulfill "Jehovah's words by the mouth of Jeremiah," it is necessary to examine the main or principal clause, which is found in verse 20. This verse says:

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*;

The Chronicler states that the service to the kings of Babylon ended when "the royalty of Persia began to reign." This event took place, he goes on to say in the next verse (21), "to fulfill Jehovah's words by the mouth of Jeremiah, . . . to fulfill seventy years."

The obvious meaning is that the cessation of the servitude under Babylon by the Persian takeover in 539 BCE fulfilled the 70-year prophecy of Jeremiah. The Chronicler does not reinterpret Jeremiah's statements to mean 70 years of desolation for Jerusalem, as Furuli claims. On the contrary, he sticks very closely to Jeremiah's description of the 70 years as a period of servitude under Babylon, and he ends this period with the fall of Babylon, exactly as Jeremiah

¹⁰⁴ The rather free Bible translation by Eugene H. Peterson well expresses the distinction made in Jeremiah 29:10 between the end of the two periods, the 70 years for Babylon and Jerusalem's period of desolation: "As soon as Babylon's seventy years are up and not a day before, I'll show up and take care of you as I have promised and bring you back home." (*The Message. The Prophets*, 2000, p. 230)

had predicted at Jeremiah 25:12 and 27:7. (See chapter 5 above, pp. 220, 221.)

(D-2) Jeremiah 25:9-12: 70 years of servitude – for whom?

Returning to Jeremiah’s prophecy, Furuli first focuses on Jeremiah 25:11, which says:

And all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and *these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.* (NIV)

As was pointed out earlier, Furuli starts his discussion of the 70-year prophecy by admitting that Jeremiah applies the 70 years to Babylon, not to Jerusalem. Having concluded (falsely, as has been shown above and in chapter 5) that Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:21 unambiguously state that Judah and Jerusalem lay desolate for 70 years, Furuli realizes that the meaning of Jeremiah 25:11 has to be changed to be brought into agreement with his conclusion.

The clause “these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years” is very clear in Hebrew:

weâbdû haggôyîm hâlleh et-melech bâbel shivîm shânâh
and-will-serve-they the-nations these king [of] Babel seventy year[s]

As Furuli points out (p. 82), the particle *et* before *melech bâbel* (“king of Babel”) is a marker indicating that *melech bâbel* is the object. The word order is typical in Hebrew: verb-subject-object. There are no grammatical problems with the clause. It simply and unambiguously says that “these nations will serve the king of Babel seventy years.” Furuli, too, admits that “this is the most natural translation.” (p. 84) How, then, can Furuli force it to say something else?

Furuli first claims that “the subject (‘these nations’) is vague and unspecified.” Actually, it is not. It simply refers back to “all these nations round about” referred to in verse 9. Furuli goes on to state that the subject in the clause might not be “these nations” in verse 11 but “this land” (Judah) and “its inhabitants” in verse 9. Verse 11, therefore, really says that it is only the inhabitants of Judah, not “these nations,” that will serve the king of Babylon 70 years. How, then, is the occurrence of “these nations” in the clause to be explained? Furuli suggests that they might be part of the object, the king of Babel, who “would be a specification of” these nations. The clause could

then be translated:

and they will serve these nations, the king of Babel, seventy years (p. 84)

Furuli also suggests that the particle *et* might not here be used as an object marker but as a preposition with the meaning “with.” Based on this explanation, the clause could even be translated:

and they will serve these nations *together with* the king of Babel seventy years (p. 84)

These reconstructions are not supported by any Bible translations. Not only are they far-fetched, they are refuted by the wider context. The prediction that the nations surrounding Judah would serve the king of Babylon is repeated in Jeremiah 27:7 in a way that is impossible to misunderstand:

And all the nations must serve him and his son and his grandson until the time even of his own land comes.

The immediate context of the verse proves conclusively that “the nations” referred to include all the non-Jewish nations in the Near East. Furuli’s linguistic acrobatics, therefore, are unnecessary, mistaken, and a case of special pleading.

Furuli’s far-fetched and forced reconstruction of the verse seems to be an attempt to bring it in agreement with the wording of the Septuagint version (LXX), to which he then refers in support. (p. 84) Some of the problems with the LXX version of Jeremiah are discussed in chapter 5 above, fn. 8 on pp. 195, 196.

(D-3) Jeremiah 29:10: The meaning of the 70 years for Babylon

Jeremiah 29:10 is discussed in chapter 5 above, pp. 209-214. The verse explicitly states that the 70 years refer to Babylon, not Jerusalem:

This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed *for Babylon* [*ʿbâbel*] I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place’ [i.e., to Jerusalem]. (NIV)

Furuli notes that most Bible translations render the preposition *le* as “to” or “for” and that only a very few (usually older) translations render it as “at” or “in.” (Furuli, p. 85) Of the latter, he mentions six: NWT, KJV, Harkavy, Spurrell, Lamsa, and the Swedish Church Bible of 1917.

Alexander Harkavy’s edition from 1939 contains the Hebrew text together with an English translation. Furuli does not seem to have

noticed that Harkavy states in the preface that the English text is that of the *Authorized Version*, that is, the KJV. George Lamsa's translation has been strongly criticized because of its heavy dependence on the KJV. Also in Jeremiah, chapter 29, he almost slavishly follows KJV. His "at Babylon," therefore, means nothing. I have not been able to check Helen Spurrell's translation. It was published in London in 1885, not 1985, as Furuli's Bibliography erroneously shows, so it is not a modern translation.

The Swedish Church Bible of 1917 has recently been "replaced" by two new translations, *Bibel-2000* and *Folkbibeln* (1998). Both have "for Babylon" at Jeremiah 29:10. In answer to my questions, the translators of both translations emphasized that *l'bâbel* at Jeremiah 29:10 means "for Babylon" not "at" or "in" Babylon. Remarkably, even the new revised Swedish edition of the NWT has changed the earlier "in Babylon" (Swedish "i Babylon") in the 1992 edition to "for Babylon" (Swedish: "för Babylon") in the 2003 edition. (See above, p. 211, fn. 26)

Because the rendering "for Babylon" contradicts the theory that the 70 years refer to the period of Jerusalem's desolation, Furuli needs to defend the notably infrequent rendering "at" or "in" Babylon. He even claims that the preposition "for" gives the 70 years "a fuzzy meaning:"

If "for" is chosen, the result is fuzziness, because the number 70 then loses all specific meaning. There is no particular event marking their beginning nor their end, and the focus is wrong as well, because it is on Babylon rather than on the Jews. (p. 86)

This is an incredible statement and another example of Furuli's special pleading. It is difficult to believe that Furuli is totally ignorant of the fact that both the beginning and the end of Babylon's supremacy in the Near East were marked by revolutionary events – the beginning by the final crushing of the Assyrian empire and the end by the fall of Babylon itself in 539 BCE. Surely he must know that, according to secular chronology, exactly 70 years passed between these two events. Modern authorities on the history of this period agree that the definite end of Assyria occurred in 610/609 BCE. In the box on page 234 of chapter 5 above, for example, four leading scholars are quoted to this effect: viz. Professor John Bright and three leading Assyriologists, Donald J. Wiseman, M. A. Dandamaev, and Stefan Zawadzki. It would be easy to multiply the number. Another example is Professor Klas R. Veenhof. He describes how the last king

of Assyria, Assurballit II, after the destruction of the capital Nineveh in 612 BCE, retreated to the provincial capital Harran, the last Assyrian stronghold, where he succeeded in holding out for another three years, supported by Egypt. Veenhof writes:

It was to no advantage that Egypt supported Assyria; the Babylonian and Median armies took the city in 610 B.C., and in the following year [609] they warded off their last defensive attempt. Therewith a great empire was dissolved.¹⁰⁵

The same historical information is given by Professor Jack Finegan on page 252 (§430) in the new revised edition of his well-known *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*. Quoting Jeremiah 29:10 he concludes:

The “seventy years ... for Babylon,” of which Jeremiah speaks are therefore the seventy years of Babylonian rule, and the return of Judah from exile is contingent upon the end of that period. Since the final fall of the Assyrian empire was in 609 B.C. (§430), and the New Babylonian empire endured from then until Cyrus the Persian took Babylon in 539, the period of Babylonian domination was in fact seventy years (609 – 539 = 70).¹⁰⁶

Certainly, no one acquainted with Neo-Babylonian history can honestly claim that the 70 years “for Babylon” have a “fuzzy meaning” because no particular events mark the beginning and end of the period.

(D-4) Jeremiah 29:10: The Septuagint and Vulgate versions

Furuli next points out that “the Septuagint has the dative form *babylōni*” but with “the most natural meaning being ‘at Babylon.’” The statement reveals a surprising ignorance of ancient Greek. As every Greek scholar will point out, the natural meaning of the dative form *babylōni* is “for Babylon.” It is an exact, literal translation of the original Hebrew *lʿbâbel*, which definitely means “for Babel” in this text, as discussed on pp. 213, 214 above. True, at Jeremiah 29:22 (LXX 36:22) the dative form *babylōni* is used in the local sense, “in Babel,” but it gets this sense only because of the preceding Greek preposition *en*, “in”:

And from them a malediction will certainly be taken on the part of the entire body of exiles of Judah that is in Babylon (*en babylōni*)

Furuli further refers to the rendering of the Latin Vulgate, *in Babylone*, which means, as he correctly explains, “in Babylon.” This

¹⁰⁵ Klas R. Veenhof, *Geschichte des Alten Orients bis zur Zeit Alexanders des Grossen* (Göttingen, 2001), pp. 275, 276. (Translated from German)

¹⁰⁶ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 255.

translation most probably influenced the KJV of 1611, which in turn has influenced several other earlier translations. The point is that all translations derived from or influenced by the Vulgate, such as the KJV, are not independent sources.

(D-5) Jeremiah 29:10: The Hebrew preposition *l̄* (lamed)

The preposition *l̄* is the most common preposition in the Hebrew Old Testament. According to a recent count, it occurs 20,725 times, 1352 of which are found in the book of Jeremiah.¹⁰⁷ What does it mean at Jeremiah 29:10? Since the first edition of the present work was published in 1983, this question has been asked of dozens of qualified Hebraists around the world. I contacted some and so did some of my correspondents. Although some of the Hebraists explained that *l̄* in a few expressions has a local sense (“in, at”), in most cases it does not, and they unanimously reject this meaning at Jeremiah 29:10. Some of them are quoted in chapter 5 above, pp. 213, 214.

Furuli disagrees with their view. He believes that because *l̄* is used in a local sense in some expressions at a few places it is likely used in this sense also in Jeremiah 29:10. He argues:

Can it really be used in the local sense “at”? It certainly can, and *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* lists about 30 examples of this meaning, one of which is Numbers 11:10, “each man *at* (*le*) the entrance of his tent”. So, in each case when *le* is used, it is the context that must decide its meaning. For example, in Jeremiah 51:2 the phrase *lebâbel* means “to Babylon”, because the preceding verb is “to send”. But *lirûshâlâm* [the letters *li* at the beginning of the word is a contraction of *le+yod*] in Jeremiah 3:17 in the clause, “all the nations will gather *in Jerusalem*” has the local meaning “*in Jerusalem*”, and the same is true with the phrase *lihûdâ* in Jeremiah 40:11 in the clause, “the king of Babylon had left a remnant *in Judah*”. (p. 86)

Well and good, but do these examples allow *l̄bâbel* at Jeremiah 29:10 to be translated “in” or “at Babylon”? Is this really a likely translation? Is it even a possible one? This question was sent to Professor Ernst Jenni in Basel, Switzerland, who is undoubtedly the leading authority today on Hebrew prepositions. So far, he has written three volumes on three of the most common Hebrew prepositions, *b̄* (beth), *k̄* (kaph), and *l̄* (lamed). In the volume on *l̄* (lamed) he devotes 350 pages to the examination of this preposition.¹⁰⁸ His

107 Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Prepositionen. Band 3: Die Präposition Lamed* (Stuttgart, etc.: Verlag Kohlhammer, 2000), p. 17.

answer of October 1, 2003, quoted on page 214 above, is worth repeating here:

My treatment of this passage is found in the *Lamed*-book p. 109 (heading 4363). 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). At Jer. 51,2 *l* is a personal dative (“and send to Babel [as personified world power] winnowers, who will winnow it and empty its land [the land of the Babylonians]” (*Lamed* pp. 84f., 94)). On Jer. 3,17 “to Jerusalem” (local terminative), everything necessary is in *Lamed* pp. 256, 270 and ZAH 1, 1988, 107-111.

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.

I hope to have served you with these informations and remain with kind regards,

E. Jenni.

[Translated from the German. Emphasis added.]

In view of this specific and authoritative information, Furuli’s arguments for a local meaning of *l^e* at Jeremiah 29:10 can be safely dismissed.

(D-6) What about the 70 years at Zechariah 1:12 and 7:5?

That the 70-year texts at Zechariah 1:12 and 7:5 refer to a period different from the one in Jeremiah, Daniel, and 2 Chronicles is demonstrated in detail in chapter 5 above, pp. 225-229. There is no need to repeat the argumentation here. Furuli’s attempt to equate the 70 years in Zechariah with the 70 years of Jeremiah, Daniel, and the Chronicler evades the real problem.

According to Zechariah 1:12, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah had been denounced for “these seventy years.” If this denunciation ended when the Jews returned from the exile after the fall of Baby-

lon, as Furuli holds, why does our text show that the cities still were being denounced in the second year of Darius, 520/519 BCE? Furuli has no explanation for this, and he prefers not to comment on the problem.

The same holds true of Zechariah 7:4, 5. How can the 70 years of fasting have ended in 537 BCE, as Furuli claims, when our text clearly shows that these fasts were still being held in the fourth year of Darius, 518/517 BCE? Furuli again ignores the problem. He just refers to the fact that the Hebrew verbs for “denounce,” “fast,” and “mourn” are all in the Hebrew perfect, stating that, “There is nothing in the verbs themselves which demands that the 70 years were still continuing at speech time.” (p. 88) True, but they do not demand the opposite, either. The verb forms in the passage prove nothing.

But the context does. It clearly shows that the cities were still being denounced “at speech time,” in 519 BCE, and that the fasts were still being held “at speech time,” in 517 BCE, about 70 years after the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 589-587 BCE. That is why this question was raised in 519 BCE: Why is Jehovah *still* angry at Jerusalem and the cities? (Zechariah 1:7-12) And that is also why this question was raised in 517 BCE: Shall we *continue* to hold these fasts? (Zechariah 7:1-12) Furuli’s interpretation (which echoes the Watchtower Society’s) implies that the denunciation of the cities and the keeping of the fasts had been going on for about 90 – not 70 – years, directly contradicting the statements in the book of Zechariah.

Summary

In this review of Furuli’s book, we have seen a number of insurmountable difficulties that his Oslo Chronology creates not only with respect to the extra-Biblical historical sources but also with the Bible itself.

The amount of evidence against Furuli’s revised chronology provided by the cuneiform documents – in particular the astronomical tablets – is enormous. Furuli’s attempts to explain away this evidence are of no avail. His idea that most, if not all, of the astronomical data recorded on the tablets might have been retrocalculated in a later period is demonstrably false. Furuli’s final, desperate theory that the Seleucid astronomers – and there were many – systematically redated almost the whole astronomical archive inherited from earlier generations of scholars is divorced from reality.

With respect to the Biblical passages on the 70 years, we have seen to what extremes Furuli has been forced to go in his attempts to bring them in agreement with his theory. He has been unable to prove his repeated claim that the 70-year passages in Daniel and 2 Chronicles *unambiguously* state that Jerusalem was desolate for 70 years. His linguistic interpretation of 2 Chronicles 36:21 is misconstrued because he ignores the main clause in verse 20, which plainly makes the servitude end at the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE. Furuli's linguistic renderings of the passages in Jeremiah are no better. To reconcile Jeremiah 25:11 with his theory, he admits that he must discard "the most natural translation" of the verse. And to bring Jeremiah 29:10 into agreement with his theory, he must reject the near-universal rendering "for Babylon" in favor of the unsupported "in Babylon" or "at Babylon" – translations rejected by all competent modern Hebraists.

Furuli's approach, then, is not Biblical as he claims, but *sectarian*. As a conservative Jehovah's Witness scholar, he is prepared to go to any length to force the Biblical passages and the historical sources into agreement with the Watchtower Society's Gentile times chronology – a chronology that is the foundation cornerstone of the movement's claim to God-given authority. As I have amply documented in this review, this sectarian agenda forces Furuli to invent incredible explanations of the relevant sources, Biblical as well as extra-Biblical.

Addendum:

A critical essay review by this author of Rolf Furuli's attempt to revise the Persian chronology has been published in the British interdisciplinary journal *Chronology & Catastrophism Review* (www.knowledge.co.uk/sis/): "Can the Persian Chronology be Revised?" Part I is published in the volume of 2006, pp. 25-40, and Part II in the volume of 2007, pp. 38-57.

Rolf Furuli's second volume in defence of the chronology of the Watch Tower Society was published in 2007 as *Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian Chronology* (Awatu Publishers, Oslo), 368 pages. A critical review in several parts is being published on the web:

Part I: <http://kristenfrihet.se/kf2/review.htm>

Part II: <http://kristenfrihet.se/kf2/review2.htm>

and subsequent parts.

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The Gentile Times Reconsidered, by Swedish author Carl Olof Jonsson, is a scholarly treatise based on careful and extensive research, including an unusually detailed study of Assyrian and Babylonian records relative to the date of Jerusalem's destruction by Babylonian conqueror Nebuchadnezzar.

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