

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 607 B.C.E AND 1914 A.D?

The date for the destruction of ancient Jerusalem is of paramount importance for the theology of Jehovah's Witnesses and is taken by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS) to be 607 B.C.E.; whereas all other commentators understand this date to be 586/7 B.C.E – **a difference of about 20 years**. This date of 607 B.C.E. is the starting point for the WBTS' calculation which moves forward 2,500 years (seven "times" turned into years) of "gentile times" so as to arrive at the date of October 1914 for the establishment of God's Kingdom in heaven. From this latter date the WBTS has taken the phrase "time, times and half a time" (3½ years) mentioned in both the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation so as to arrive at the year 1919 as the time that Jesus selected them to be God's only organization on earth. So the purpose of this study is to ascertain: if the "gentile times" really is a period of "seven times" amounting to 2,500 years and which is the correct date for the destruction of ancient Jerusalem. However, the WBTS as well as all other religious and secular authorities accept the year 539 B.C.E. as the certain date when the Babylonian Empire fell. This therefore is a pivotal date which can be used to calculate events in Bible history. However, 586/7 B.C.E. as the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar is a date that is even better attested.

EVIDENCE THAT JERUSALEM'S DESTRUCTION WAS NOT IN 607 B.C.E.

According to both the Bible and secular chronology the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians occurred in the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign:

- ❖ "...in the 10th year of Zedekiah the king of Judah, that is the **18th year** of Nebuchadnezzar. And at that time the military forces of the king of Babylon were *laying siege to Jerusalem*" (*Jer. 32:1*).

The WBTS and the Bible Students associations are the only bodies to have declared that this 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign was in 607 B.C.E; whereas all modern day historiographers, archaeologists, and Bible scholars acknowledge the date to have been **586/587** B.C.E. This date is proven from the following works of ancient historians; cuneiform tablets; business, administrative, and legal documents; planetary movements; and synchronous links to Egyptian chronology. It is an absolutely certain date.

THE WORKS OF ANCIENT HISTORIANS

- a) **Berosus** whose work is quoted in Josephus and Eusebius.
- b) **Ptolemy's Canon** which is the Babylonian king list known as The Royal Canon. Berosus used much older works as his sources. His work is completely independent of Ptolemy's and yet they show the same regnal dates for the Neo-Babylonian period. Although these regnal dates are confirmed by the thousands of cuneiform tablets these historical works are no longer needed to fix the regnal dates for the Neo-Babylonian period.

CUNEIFORM TABLETS (tens of thousands)

1. Chronicles, king lists, and royal inscriptions.

- a) Neo-Babylonian Chronicles including the **Nabonidus Chronicle** which is contemporary with the Neo-Babylonian dynasty and gives the whole chronology. This matches those of Ptolemy and Berosus.

b) **The Uruk king list.**

Composed 300 years after the Neo-Babylonian dynasty and gives the whole chronology. This also matches those of Ptolemy and Berossus.

c) Royal inscriptions: including:

- Nabonidus No.18. *This establishes Nabonidus' 2nd year as 554/553 because of the lunar eclipse at that time.* NOTE: Nabonidus was Belshazzar's father.
- The Hillah stele (Nabonidus No.8). *This gives the whole chronology for the Neo-Babylonian period.*
- Adad-guppi stele (Nabon No. 24). *Adad-guppi was the mother of Nabonidus. This stele gives the whole chronology for the Neo-Babylonian period except for that of Nabonidus because he was still living.*

2. Business, administrative and legal documents.

About 55,000 contemporary tablets exist (of which 5,000 have been published) that are consistently dated for each year of the Neo-Babylonian period. For these dates to be wrong by 20 years (as claimed by the WBTS) would require a conspiracy of silence on an empire-wide scale through the centuries. Such a conspiracy would have had to have involved hundreds of scribes, chroniclers, officials and astrologers. Yet there are no documents that indicate any missing period of 20 years.

3. The astronomical diaries

- **VAT 4956.** This fixes the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar to 568 B.C.E by a unique set of astronomical observations. It establishes his accession year as being in 605 B.C.E (not 625 as per the WBTS) and his 18th year being fixed at **587/586** B.C.E. (not 607 as per the WBTS). The WBTS tries to discredit this diary because it is a copy made in the 3rd century and "so it is possible that its historical information is simply that which was accepted in the Seleucid period" as if this period was somehow unreliable, which it is not. In fact the WBTS looks for support for 539 from Diodorus (1st cent BC), Africanus (3rd cent AD), and Eusebius (3rd/4th cent AD) who were all far more distant in time from the event than was the copyist of VAT 4956.
- B M 32312 + the Akitu pin
This fixes the 16th year of Shamashshumukin to 652/1. When combined with the other documents this gives Nebuchadnezzar's reign as being from 605 - 562.

4. Lunar eclipse tablets

Saros cycle texts LBAT 1417, 1419, 1420 and 1421. These provide absolute dates for the Neo-Babylonian dynasty with Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year being fixed at **587/586** B.C.E.

5. The Saturn tablet in two pieces B.M.76738 + B.M.76813.

This gives the dates of 14 successive years when Saturn disappears behind the sun. This pattern of positions is not repeated again in more than 17 centuries. The tablet fixes the regnal dates of Nabopolassar's predecessor Kandalanu as 647-627. From this the Neo-Babylonian chronology is calculated to demonstrate Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year as **587/586**.

6. Synchronous links to Egyptian chronology and contemporary Egyptian documents.

- Crown-Prince Nebuchadnezzar fought against Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish in 605 (not the WBTS date of 624/5 B.C.E); a date of 625 for this event being impossible because Necho did not begin his rule until **610** B.C.E.

- Although Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo in 609 B.C.E one year after the established date for the beginning of Necho's reign in 610 B.C.E, yet the WBTS dates his death at 629 B.C.E. some 20 years before he fought that battle.
- Immediately after Jerusalem's destruction some Jews fled to Egypt under Pharaoh Hophra [*Apries*]. Since he began to reign in 589 B.C.E, Jerusalem could not have been destroyed in 607 B.C.E.
- The WBTS claims that Nebuchadnezzar died in 582; but a fragmentary cuneiform text mentions his battle against Pharaoh Amasis whose reign began in 570 B.C.E.

The Encyclopedia Britannica Macropedia 15th Edition Volume 22 p.359A under "Jerusalem" states: "In 586 BC the city and temple were completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the captivity began."

THE WBTS REJECTS ALL THE ABOVE IRREFUTABLE FACTS

In the appendix to the book '*Let Your Kingdom Come*' pp127-40 and 186-89 the WBTS appeals to yet undiscovered material in its failed attempt to overcome the evidence for a 586/7 date and therefore against 607 B.C.E as being the date of Jerusalem's destruction. Furthermore, by their rejection of the proven date for Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year as being 586/587 the WBTS is forced to change many other dates of events, one of which is the date when Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon in 605 so that his **accession year was 604-603** and not at the date of 625 B.C.E., as given by the WBTS.

CONTRADICTORY INFORMATION WITHIN WBTS TEACHING

Interestingly some **publications** of Jehovah's Witnesses **give the following timings for rulerships of Babylonian kings**. However, when these timings are **tabulated** they give the date for Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year as 586/7 B.C.E:

Nebuchadnezzar immediately preceded Evil Merodach and reigned for **43 years**.

Evil Merodach: WT '65 Jan 1, p. 29 notes a 2 year reign and so 562-561 B.C.E

Neriglissar: " " " " " a 4 year reign and so 560-556 B.C.E

Labashi-Marduk: " " " " " a less than 9 months reign to 556 B.C.E

Nabonidus Insight Vol. 2 p.457 says he "**ruled some 17 years (556-539 B.C.E).**"

The WBTS never presents Nebuchadnezzar's 43 years as added on to the beginning of the reign of Evil Merodach in 562 because such a summation gives 605 B.C.E as the beginning of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and not the WBTS' consistently presented date of 624/5 B.C.E. This does not fit the WBTS' own information above. All authorities give 605 B.C.E as the beginning of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. (E.g. see Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol. 4, p. 1058). It was in Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year that he destroyed Jerusalem. This computes as 587 B.C.E. Quotes from 25 reliable authorities are used to prove *the absolute date* of 539 B.C.E but at least 22 of these also prove that Jerusalem fell in 586/587. However, there is actually greater scholarly support for 586/587 than for 539. So why did the WBTS not accept 586/587 as the starting point and reject 539 as the terminus? For the WBTS to reply that they are just following the Bible because 70 years back from 537 leads to 607 is entirely misleading for the following reason:

IT IS NOT 70 YEARS 'AT BABYLON' (NWT) BUT "FOR BABYLON"

Nevertheless, even the WBTS' understanding of the biblical text has proved to be faulty because of their acceptance of a faulty translation in the KJV Bible which was later corrected in all subsequent Bibles. This KJV mistranslation was repeated in their NWT leading them to teach that the 70 years applied to the total devastation of the land of Judah; whereas it applied to the Babylonian Empire as we shall see. The mistranslation of the relevant Hebrew word in the KJV and the NWT is the word "at" as

shown here in the NWT:

- ❖ “In accord with the fulfilling of 70 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” (*Jer. 29:10 NWT*).

In contrast to this the **Hebrew Interlinear**, all modern and many older translations render the phrase as “**for** Babylon” or similar as in the versions below. Hebrew scholars long ago pointed out that this verse should not be rendered ‘*at* Babylon’ as it is in the KJV and now in the NWT.

NASB renders it as: “When seventy years have been completed **for** Babylon...”

ESV, RSV, NIV and Amplified render it: “When seventy years are completed **for** Babylon...”

S&G and Moffatt render it as: “As soon as **Babylon’s seventy years** are over...”

NAB renders it as: “after seventy years have elapsed **for** Babylon...”

NJB renders it as: “When seventy years **granted to** Babylon are over,...”

REB renders it as: “When a full seventy years have **passed over** Babylon, I shall take up your cause and make good my promise to bring you back to this place.”

That Jeremiah’s 70 years applied to the period of Neo-Babylonian rule and not to Jerusalem’s desolation, which was only coincidental with part of that rule, is shown by the following authorities:

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.

...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 actual captivity. Dr. Peter R. Ackroyd, “Two Old Testament Historical Problems of the Persian Period,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. XVII (1958), p.23.

SEVENTY YEARS DURATION OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN EMPIRE 609 to 539

Historical background:

In 627 Nabopolassar drove the Assyrians from Babylon.

In 616 Nabopolassar attacked and defeated the Assyrians but retreated when Psammetichus 1st of Egypt assisted the Assyrian King.

In 612 The Medes and Babylonians attacked and destroyed the Assyrian capital Nineveh. Ashur-Uballit II fled to the city of Harran which Nabopolassar marched against and plundered in late 610/early 609.

The Assyrian empire ended with the failed attempt of Asshur-Uballit to recapture Harran in the **summer of 609 B.C.E.** This is noted by the following scholars:

In 609, the Babylonians finally routed the Assyrians and began the establishment of their control over Phoenicia, Syria and Palestine.

History of Humanity, Vol. III p.117 by Russian Assyriologist M. A. Dandamaev.

In 609 Assyria was mentioned for the last time...After that time Assyria ceased to exist.

Polish Assyriologist Stefan Zawadzki in *The Fall of Assyria*, p.16.

Assyria ceased to exist and her territory was taken over by the Babylonians. Professor Wiseman.

So it was at this time of 609 B.C.E. that the “seventy years [to be] completed **for** Babylon...” commenced and therefore terminated in October 539.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR BECOMES KING

It was in 605 B.C.E. that the remaining Egyptian influence in Palestine ended at the battle of Carchemish:

- ❖ “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 **4th year of Jehoiakim**” (*Jer. 46:2*). (*Daniel 1:2 says “3rd year” because he uses the accession year system*).

All reputable historians show that the Battle of Carchemish, when Crown-Prince Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Necho, occurred in 605 B.C.E., after which he conquered a number of countries in Palestine. The Babylonian Chronicle BM 21946 informs us that in:

The first year of Nebuchadnezzar...he marched about victoriously in Hattu. All the kings of Hattu (which included Palestine) came into his presence and he received their vast tribute.

Soon after this event Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon so that his **accession year was 604-603** and not at the date of 625 B.C.E., as given by the WBTS.

THE WBTS INCORRECTLY STATES 625 B.C.E. AS NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S ACCESSION YEAR

(Please see *All Scripture Inspired of God*, p. 296)

It was also in 605 that Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to besiege and capture Jerusalem and take King Jehoiakim (later sent back), “some of the sons of Israel and of the *royal offspring* and of the *nobles..*” ...“and the temple utensils” back to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6, 7; Dan. 1:1-3). However, Jeremiah was still in Jerusalem when he wrote his account (*Jer. 25:1*) in 605 concerning the “fulfilling of 70 years **for** Babylon” (*Jer. 29:10*). Hence the 70 years had already started before Nebuchadnezzar’s 1st year started in **604** and therefore many years before the final destruction of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Daniel was already at Nebuchadnezzar’s court in 605 as shown by his statement concerning “the second year (*accession-year system*) of the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar...” (*Dan. 2:1*). Yet the WBTS theorizes this to mean Nebuchadnezzar’s 2nd year from their theoretical date (607) for the destruction of Jerusalem rather than his second accession year, and thereby turning it into his 19th year as ruler.

THE ACTUAL CHRONOLOGY

- 627 – the beginning of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty – Nabopolassar as king.
- 609 – the beginning of the Neo-Babylonian Empire with the defeat of Assyria. Babylon’s **70 years begin**.
- 605 – the first captives are taken from Jerusalem (soon after the battle of Carchemish).
- 605 – Nabopolassar dies (c. August 16). Nebuchadnezzar becomes king.
- 604-603 – Nebuchadnezzar’s first regnal year.
- 586/7 – Nebuchadnezzar’s 18th year of kingship. Destruction of Jerusalem.
- 539 – Medes and Persians conquer Babylon. The **70 years end**.

THE ABSOLUTE CHRONOLOGY OF THE JUDEAN KINGS

Josiah	31 years	640 - 609	Killed by Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo.
Jehoahaz	3 months of	609	Exiled to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho.
Jehoiakim	11 years	609 - 598	Appointed king by Pharaoh Necho. Vassalage transferred to Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C.E.
Jehoiachin	3 months of	598/7	Deported to Babylon. Incarcerated until his 37 th year
Zedekiah	11 years	597 - 586	Appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar.

But firstly, does the prophet Jeremiah’s statement about 70 years also apply to the captivity of the Jews and the devastation of their land?

70 YEARS OF SERVITUDE OF MANY NATIONS
RATHER THAN 70 YEARS OF JUDAH'S ABSOLUTE DESOLATION

- ❖ “Here I am sending and I will take all the families of the north...I will bring them against this land and against the inhabitants and against **all these nations round about**; and I will devote them to destruction” (*Jer. 25:9*).
- ❖ “And [1] all this land [*Judah*] must become a *devastated place*, an object of astonishment, and [2] these *nations* will have to **serve** the king of Babylon **70 years**. And it must occur that [3] *when 70 years have been fulfilled* I shall call to **account against the king of Babylon** and against that nation, *their error*, even against the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite” (*Jer. 25:11, 12*).

There is no link between ‘devastation’ and the 70 years, so clearly the 70 years does not apply to the “*land [Judah] becoming a devastated place*,” but to “*these nations*” and “**the king of Babylon**.” The Hebrew *chorbah* for “devastated place” does not imply total devastation without an inhabitant.

Examples are:

- ❖ “...the **inhabitants** of these devastated places” (*Ezek. 33:24*).
- ❖ “You are seeing the bad plight in which **we** are, how Jerusalem is devastated” (*Neh. 2:17*).

Jeremiah 25:18 says “*just as at this day*” showing that some devastation had already taken place. This would be the kind of devastation after invading armies had marched through.

IT WAS NOT JEHOVAH'S WILL THAT THE LAND BE TOTALLY UNINHABITED

The devastation to Judah only occurred because they kept trying to throw off the Babylonian yoke of servitude. The Jews were told by Jehovah:

- ❖ “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**...and it will certainly cultivate it and **dwell in it**” (*Jer. 27:11*).

Jehovah promised the Jews the blessing of staying in the land if they would serve the king of Babylon:

- ❖ “Serve the king of Babylon and keep on living. Why should this city become a devastated place?” (*Jer. 27:17*) and:
- ❖ “If you will without fail keep dwelling in this land, I will also build you up...” (*Jer. 42:10*).

THE 70 YEARS ENDED WHEN CYRUS CONQUERED BABYLON
IN **539** NOT **537**

- ❖ “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 70 years. And it must occur that **when 70 years have been fulfilled** I shall call to **account against the king of Babylon** and against that nation, *their error*, even against the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite” (*Jer. 25:11, 12*).

The accounting “*against the king of Babylon and against that nation*” for their error, came in 539 when the Medo-Persian armies conquered Babylon. The WBTS does not dispute this. Yet the Scriptures show that the **70 years** ended, not in 537, as taught by the WBTS, but in 539 B.C.E.

- ❖ “He [*Nebuchadnezzar*] carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be *servants to him* and his sons **until the royalty of Persia began to reign**; to fulfil 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 fulfil 70 years**” (*2 Chron. 36:20, 21*).

The Jews could only “*be servants to him and his sons*” until they (Nabonidus and Belshazzar) were killed in 539 - “*to fulfil Jehovah’s word by the mouth of Jeremiah.*” The land had paid off its Sabbaths, not in 537, but when the royalty of Persia began to reign in 539 B.C. Please see below.

THE TIME OF CYRUS’ DECREE

The WBTS teaches that the decree of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem took effect in 537. Regarding **539 to 537 B.C.** ‘Insight’ Volume 1, p. 458 says:

...it is very probable that the decree was made by the winter of 538 or toward the spring of 537.

Although there is no biblical support for any particular date for the issuing of this decree, there are indications concerning the kingship of Darius the Mede that the decree was issued around 538-537 because Cyrus was not king until around this time. As soon as Cyrus had conquered Babylon it appears he made Darius the Mede king not only of the City of Babylon but of the entire Neo-Babylonian Empire soon after its conquest in October 539 and with his rule being reckoned from 538. William H. Shea has demonstrated that Cyrus laid no claim to being king of Babylon during the 14 months following the fall of Babylon (See *An Unrecognized Vassal King of Babylon in the Early Achaemenid Period* pp. 51-67, pp. 88-117, 147-178). This would mean that Cyrus did not become king until around early 537, a date that would make the total of captivity of Jews about 68 years from the first deportation in 605 B.C.E. So such length of captivity merely coincides with the 70 years decreed as the duration of the Babylonian Empire.

PAYING OFF THE SABBATHS

THE DIFFICULTY PRESENTED BY EZRA

❖ “He [*Nebuchadnezzar*] carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be *servants to him* and his sons **until the royalty of Persia began to reign**; to fulfil 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 fulfil 70 years**” (2 Chron. 36:20, 21).

The surface reading of verse 21 easily leads one to think that the land of Judah laid fallow to pay off its Sabbaths for a full 70 years. However, Ezra, in this verse, has not reinterpreted Jeremiah’s words to apply the 70 years to the period of Judah’s desolation because we already know that Jeremiah’s statements concerned the 70 year duration of the Babylonian Empire. In fact, **Jeremiah never spoke about any paying off Sabbaths**. The 70 years noted by Ezra is a fulfilment of “*Jehovah’s word by the mouth of Jeremiah.*”

WHY TWO SABBATH REST CLAUSES IN 2 CHRONICLES 36:21?

The phrases “*until the land had paid off its Sabbaths*” and “*all the days of lying desolated it kept Sabbath*” are direct quotes from Leviticus 26:34, 35 where the people were warned that if they did not observe the law of sabbatical years their land would be desolated. If these two clauses are left out of 2 Chron. 36:21 the text would read: “to fulfil **Jehovah’s word by the mouth of Jeremiah, to fulfil 70 years**” i.e. for Babylon’s dominance as in Jeremiah 29:10. If the land had to pay off its Sabbaths for 70 years this would mean that the nation had failed to observe any land Sabbaths for 490 (7 x 70) years, which would go right back to 1077 (or 1097 in the WBTS scheme) into the latter part of Saul’s reign. Yet it is unlikely that any years of Sabbath-keeping were missed during David’s reign; whereas 343 (7 x 49) years goes back to the time of the division of the kingdom after which it is more likely that the land Sabbaths were not kept. Jehovah, through Moses, made it clear that:

❖ “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 desolate it will keep Sabbath, for the reason it did not keep Sabbath during your Sabbath when you were dwelling upon it” (Lev. 26: 34, 35).

Moses gave no time period for paying off Sabbaths i.e. no mention of 70 years and the land was only substantially unused between 586/7 and c.537 (the likely time that some of the exiles left Babylon for the return to Judah) a total of 49 years. So the scenario harmonizing with the facts is that:

- The people of Judah suffer about 68 years of servitude to Nebuchadnezzar from 605 to 537.
- The land pays of its Sabbaths for 49 years from 586/7 to 537.

So one could speak of Judah’s 70 years of captivity, but only in approximate terms and for both the people and the land these events were coincidental with the 70 years duration of the Babylonian Empire.

FULFILLING THE DEVESTATIONS OF JERUSALEM

SEVENTY YEARS HAD TO PASS FIRST

The Hebrew *chorbah* for “devastated place” is a plural term, indicating the several devastations that had occurred to Jerusalem in 605, 597 and various times of raids on her by “Marauder bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites during the reign of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:2) before the final destruction in 586.” Daniel notes the coming to an end of these “devastations”:

- ❖ “I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books **the number of the years** concerning which the word of Jehovah had *occurred to Jeremiah* the prophet, **for fulfilling** the *devastations of Jerusalem*, [namely,] **seventy years**” (*Dan. 9:2*).

Although quite literal this is somewhat ambiguous. The ESV makes this clearer with the rendering:

- ❖ “I, Daniel, perceived in the books **the number of years that**, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, **must pass before the end** of the *desolations* of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.”

The Jerusalem Bible gives similar clarity:

- ❖ “I, Daniel, was perusing the Scriptures, counting over **the number of years** - as revealed by Yahweh to the prophet Jeremiah — **that were to pass before** the successive devastations of Jerusalem would **come to an end**, namely seventy years.”

Did Jeremiah ever speak of the devastations of Judah? No, but he did speak of “70 years for Babylon.” Jeremiah 29:10 NASB says: “**When 70 years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfil my good word to you, to bring you back to this place.**” Daniel read these words of Jeremiah and noted the connection between Babylon’s 70 year period of supremacy and *the ending of the “devastations of Jerusalem”* that had been prophesied in Leviticus 26:34. This prophecy makes no mention of length of time for such devastations. In his prayer recorded in the following verses of chapter 9 not once did Daniel mention 70 years, his prime concern being God’s stated conditions for the return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem. So Daniel is simply referring to 2 different prophecies (Jer. 29 and Lev. 26) that would be completed at the same time. Hence “**the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet**” was for Babylon’s 70 year period of supremacy, the end of which almost *coincided* with the end of **the devastations of Jerusalem in 537 BCE.**

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE DEPORTATIONS

The WBTS combines the 1st and 2nd deportations into a single event in Nebuchadnezzar’s 7th year. However, the 1st deportation is dated to “*the 3rd year of the kingship of Jehoiakim*” (Dan. 1:2) just before Nebuchadnezzar had become king and not in his 7th year. Other details also show that these

were two separate deportations:

THE FIRST DEPORTATION was when Nebuchadnezzar was still the Crown-Prince in **605** B.C.E after the battle of Carchemish. The chronicler tells us that:

- ❖ “Against him [*Jehoiakim vs 5*] Nebuchadnezzar came up...And **some of the utensils** of the house of Jehovah Nebuchadnezzar brought to Babylon” (*2 Chron. 36:6, 7*).
- ❖ *And Daniel states that:* “In the **3rd year** of the kingship of Jehoiakim ... Nebuchadnezzar...came to Jerusalem and proceeded to lay **siege** to it. In time Jehovah gave into his hand Jehoiakim...and a **part of the utensils** of the house of the true God. Then the king said to Ashpenaz his chief court official to **bring some of the sons of Israel** and of the *royal offspring* and of the *nobles*...”
(*Dan. 1:1-3*).

This may have been the deportation of only the aristocracy among whom were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Nebuchadnezzar’s second year was, according to Daniel 1:5b, when Daniel and the three Hebrews had already completed “*3 years [of training] that at the end of these they might stand before the king.*” Then:

- ❖ “...in the 2nd year of the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar, (*604 B.C.E accession-year system*) Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams...” (*Dan. 2:1*).

Apart from the fact that this first deportation is stated to have been “*in the 3rd year [605] of the kingship of Jehoiakim*” (not the 3rd year of his vassalage to Babylon as proposed by the WBTS), only “**part (some) of the utensils**” were taken in this first siege, with the rest (“**all the treasures**”) being taken in the second deportation. Possibly Jehoiakim paid off Nebuchadnezzar with these least valuable utensils. This would explain why Jehoiakim was left on the throne until 598 B.C.E when he died according to Jehovah’s pronouncement (*Jer. 36:27-32*).

THE SECOND DEPORTATION was in **597** B.C.E in Nebuchadnezzar’s 7th year and after Jehoiachin had reigned for 3 months:

- ❖ “At length Jehoiachin...went out to the king of Babylon [*597 B.C.E*]...and the king of Babylon got to take him in the 8th year of his [*Nebuchadnezzar’s*] being king. Then he brought out **all the treasures** of the House of Jehovah...And he took into exile **all Jerusalem** and **all the princes**. – *ten thousand* he was taking into exile” (*2 Kings 24:12-14*).

THE THIRD DEPORTATION was in **586/7** B.C.E in Nebuchadnezzar’s 18th year when he burned Jerusalem.

- ❖ “These are the people Nebuchadnezzar took **to exile**: in the 7th year [*597 B.C.E.*] 3,023 Jews. In the **18th year** [*586 B.C.E*] of Nebuchadnezzar, from Jerusalem there were 832 souls...23rd year [*582 B.C.E.*] into exile 745 souls” (*Jer. 52:28, 29*).

The WBTS uses these verses to argue against a 1st deportation in Nebuchadnezzar’s accession year by presupposing that they contain a complete record of the deportations, which it evidently does not. Because of the apparent conflict concerning the 10,000 in 2 Kings 24 the WBTS states regarding the figures in Jeremiah 52 that this: “...apparently refers to those of certain rank, or to those who were family heads.” *Insight Volume 1*, p. 415.

THE FOURTH DEPORTATION was in **582** B.C.E during Nebuchadnezzar’s 23rd year:

- ❖ “23rd year [*582 B.C.E.*] into exile 745 souls” (*Jer. 52:30*).

JUDAH'S OTHER 70 (68) YEARS WITHOUT GOD'S BLESSING 587 TO 519 B.C.

The 70 years mentioned in Zechariah 1:12 and 7:1-5 is not a prophetic period as is the 70 years noted by Jeremiah and Daniel. Zechariah's first mention of 70 years, in fact, amount to only 68 years showing that the 70 is just a round figure for the amount of time that had passed during which Jehovah was indignant with them:

- ❖ "In the 2nd year of Darius (520/519 B.C.E.) the word of Jehovah occurred to Zechariah...So the angel of Jehovah answered and said: 'O Jehovah of armies, how long will you yourself *not show mercy to Jerusalem* and the cities of Judah, whom you have denounced **these 70 years?**'...Therefore this is what Jehovah has said, 'I shall certainly return to Jerusalem **with mercies**. My own house will be built in her...'” (*Zech. 1:7, 12, 16*).

The WBTS applies these statements in Zechariah to the period of 607-537. However, they are not actually a reference to Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the '*devastations of Jerusalem*' for 70 years but to a more recent "denunciation" which seems to have been because of the people's sins resulting in the destruction of the temple and their more recent failure to complete the new building work of the temple, with the foundation only having recently been completed (Haggai 2:18). The lapse of 70 years stated by Zechariah clearly refers to a different and less significant non-prophetic period of 70 (68) years than the 70 years which applied to Babylon's rulership from 609-539. This 68 years cannot apply to the earlier period of 607/537 but to "**these 70 years**" that were different. To run these years from 607 would make the period **88 years** long because it was in 520/519 B.C.E. when the words of Zechariah 1:7, 12, 16 were said.

TWO YEARS LATER

- ❖ "In the 4th year (518/517 B.C.E.) of Darius the king the word of Jehovah occurred to Zechariah... 'And the word of Jehovah of armies continued to occur to me, saying: 'Say to all the people of the land and the priests, when you fasted and there was a wailing in the 5th [month] and in the 7th [month] and **this for 70 years** [lit. these 70 years as in 1:12], did you really fast to me, even me?'" (*Zech. 7:1-5*).

The Jews fasted in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem's temple in 586/587 and the assassination of Governor Gedaliah. By the 4th year of Darius they had been doing this for 70 years from 587/6 to 518/7. To run these 70 years from 607 would make the period **90 years** long because these events occurred in 518/517 B.C.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE DATE OF JERUSALEM'S DESTRUCTION

Because the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that **1919 C.E.** was the time when Christ 'the Master', having returned in **1914** (after 2,520 years since 607 B.C.E), **chose the WBTS** as the Faithful and Discreet Slave Class with full authority over all Christians it is imperative that one be certain that such dates and methods are accurate.

WBTS Claim 1: THAT 607 B.C.E. IS THE CORRECT START DATE FOR THE GENTILE TIMES

The complete lack of biblical or secular proof for a 607 B.C.E starting date and the massive amount of proof from the Scriptures combined with ancient literature and astronomical material for the destruction of Jerusalem as being 586/7 B.C.E leads one to 1935 as the end of 2,520 years. This means that Christ had not returned in 1914 and therefore he, as the Master, did not appoint anyone in 1919. So those that claim such an appointment are merely self-appointed. Unfortunately C.T. Russell learned the wrong date for the destruction of Jerusalem and then mistakenly applied the 70 years to a period of

total desolation of the land of Israel rather than to the length of time of Babylon's supremacy and the servitude (vassalage) to Babylon of many nations including Judah.

WBTS Claim 2: THAT THE "GENTILE TIMES" WERE 2,520 YEARS LONG

According to The Book of Revelation, 42 months = 1,260 days which means that with reference to prophetic matters the Bible sets out 30 day months which equal a 360 day year. Hence 7 x 360 days = 2,520 days which then become 2,520 prophetic **lunar** years in the Historicist interpretation. Yet Jehovah's Witnesses use the **solar** year measurement when counting from 607 B.C. to 1914 A.D. This makes a **34 year difference!** However, the **day/year theory** which first appeared about the middle of the 12th century C.E in the teaching of the Cathari is not a scriptural approach. It was Joachim de Floris (1202) who first assigned a day/year value to the 1,260 days of Daniel and Revelation. The principle on which the day/year theory is based comes only from the following two scriptures and **applied on these two occasions only:**

- ❖ "By the number of the days that you spied out the land, 40 days, **a day for a year**, you will answer for your error **40 years**" (*Num. 14:34*).
- ❖ "...390 days, **equal to the number of years** of their [*Israel's*] punishment...and you must carry the error of the house of Judah 40 days. **A day for a year...**" (*Ezek. 4:5, 6*).

However, the theory fails because both these events were literally fulfilled. So in Numbers 14:34 the forty year period was the **period of the prophecy** and forty years **was the period of the wandering**. In Ezekiel 4:5 the 390 years and 40 years were the **periods of the prophecies** and **their fulfilments**. Neither of these passages nor any other Scripture says that such a concept was to be *a general rule or principle in interpreting prophecy*. **If Daniel or John in Revelation had wanted to indicate 1,260 years they would not have written 1,260 days.** The theory was dropped by the WBTS as a general principle in the 1920s, but retained it only for the 2,520 years calculation from 607 to 1914. This is a major inconsistency in their position. The day/year principle is almost universally rejected by modern scholars of repute.

WBTS Claim 3: THAT NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S "SEVEN TIMES" OF THE CHOPPED DOWN TREE IS THE SAME AS THE "GENTILE TIMES" SPOKEN OF BY JESUS?

- Nothing indicates that these "seven times" had any further fulfilment than for Nebuchadnezzar's times of madness.
- There is no scriptural or logical connection between the tree dream and Luke 21:24 concerning the 'Gentile Times'.
- Nothing in the Scriptures indicates that if the trampling of Jerusalem (Luke 21:24) started on earth that it later shifts to heaven for completion.
- Why would the reign of a pagan dictatorial emperor be used by God as a symbol of God's loving rule through the Davidic dynasty? It would be more logical if David, Solomon, Hezekiah or Josiah had had the tree dream and so be representative of God's loving rule that gets chopped down.
- It seems unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar's 7 years of **powerlessness** could represent the 2,520 years of vicious domination by the gentile nations, as supposed by the WTBS.
- It is inconsistent to apply the day/year principle to the time prophecy of Daniel 4, but then to fail to apply it to the many other time prophecies in Daniel as does the WBTS.

- If, according to WBTS teaching, Daniel was not taken to Babylon until 617 (*Insight Volume 1* p. 576) how could he interpret Nebuchadnezzar's 1st dream - **the statue** in the 2nd year of the king (Dan 2:1) which according to the WBTS would have occurred in 624/23 B.C.E? In *Insight Volume 2* p.481 Jehovah's Witnesses fairly correctly date this dream as being in 605, **but by saying that "the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar"** was really the second year from the destruction of Jerusalem and therefore was actually referring to his **20th regnal year**. This false statement is for the purpose of maintaining the illusion that Jerusalem fell in 607. But Daniel 2:1 clearly says that it was "**the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar**" and not his 20th. This second year is known by all evidence to be 604 B.C.E, but Jerusalem fell in his 18th year which was 586/7. No one would normally mark the date of the beginning of the reign of a king according to some event which occurred during that reign.
- If Nebuchadnezzar's 2nd dream — **the tree** (Dan. 4) is a **prophecy**, as Jehovah's Witnesses teach, then it would have to have been given earlier than the beginning of its fulfilment (supposedly 607 B.C.E), and earlier than the 1st dream - **the statue** (Dan. 2). Yet the WBTS dates the 1st dream as 605 B.C.E. *Insight Volume 2*. p. 481.

By WBTS criteria proof for Jehovah's Witnesses to be God's organization requires all 3 of these claims to be true. If *any one* of these claims is false then the Jehovah's Witnesses' proof fails. As noted above all 3 claims are false.

SUMMARY HISTORY OF THE DAY/YEAR THEORY AND THE GENTILE TIMES

The Historicist approach to interpreting prophecy, which Jehovah's Witnesses partially use, was unknown to the early church. It first appeared about the **middle of the 12th century** in the teachings of the Cathari.

Joachim de Floris (1202 C.E.) assigned a day/year value to the 1,260 days of Revelation. From then there have been 36 different starting points up to the year of 1823 supposedly leading to the return of Christ.

John Aquila Brown (1823) gave an application of 622 A.D - 1844. He later applied the day/year rule to the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14 so that they ended in **1843** (later 1844). Next he expounded *the seven times* of Nebuchadnezzar's dream giving an application of **2,520 years** running from 604 B.C to 1917 A.D.

William Cunningham (1826) at the Albury Park Prophetic Conferences was the first to connect these sorts of calculations to the "**Gentile Times**."

Edward Bishop Elliott (early/mid 1800s), although reckoning the 2,520 years from 727 B.C to 1793 A.D in his work 'Horae Apocalypticae,' was the first to mention **1914** by considering the possibility of the calculation as being from Nebuchadnezzar's accession year of 606 B.C.E. (note the error of no 'zero year').

In 1860 **N.H. Barbour** visited the library of the British Museum and studied Elliott's 'Horae Apocalypticae' and concluded that the 2nd coming would be in **1873** (based on the 1,335 days of Daniel 12). This failed and then became 1874. This too failed, leading to the conclusion that Christ returned **invisibly**. The readership of his paper drastically dwindled. As of the June issue of his new paper 'Herald of the Morning' he introduced the calculation of *the Gentile Times* as being 2,520 years and terminating in **1914**.

In 1876 **C.T. Russell** (still believing that Christ would return visibly according to *'The Object and Manner of the Lord's return'* in the *'Proclaimers'* book, p. 47) receives *'The Herald of the Morning'* and begins to change his position on date-setting, eventually accepting all of Barbour's time setting calculations. In 1889 he wrote that the 1914 date:

will be the farthest limit of the rule of imperfect men...that the Kingdom...will have obtained full universal control...that the 'time of trouble such as never was' will reach its culmination.

This was seen as a class struggle not a war. In 1904 Russell adjusted his position so that the Great Tribulation would occur after October 1914. The error of no year 'zero' was allowed to stand until 1943 when the starting date was moved back to 607 B.C. Yet the error of the Great Tribulation as running from 1914 was not abandoned until 1969. Yet **Prior to 1993** the view was given that Russell was the first to publish a correct chronology leading to 1914 and that the Bible Students alone had predicted WWI. This had been held as proof that they had God's spirit and the Truth. However, politicians and millions of Baptists, Pentecostals and many others were predicting either war or the end of the world in that era. In 1922 **J.F. Rutherford** declared that the Kingdom had been set up in 1914 only invisibly. He also claimed that the Lord came to His temple 3½ years after 1914 in 1918 and after a period of testing the WBTS was **chosen as God's only Organization on earth**.

WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT DATE-SETTING

To the question "*Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?*" Jesus answered:

- ❖ "It does **not belong to you** to get knowledge of the times or seasons which the Father has placed in His own jurisdiction..." (*Acts 1:7*) and:
- ❖ "Concerning that day or hour nobody knows...but only the Father" (*Matt. 24:36*).

This does not refer to the day or hour for the Great Tribulation but to Christ's *parousia* – his coming to be present. This Greek term is used in verses 3, 27, 37, 39. Additionally verses 42 and 44 use the word *coming* and verse 46 has *arrival* of the master. Yet in contradiction of Matthew 24:36 Jehovah's Witnesses continue to claim October 1914 as the time when Christ's *parousia* began. Yet there is no genuine evidence at all that Christ has returned. In fact Christ himself warned Christians to:

- ❖ "Look out that you are not misled; for many will come on the basis of my name, saying, 'I am he,' and '**The due time has approached.**' *Do not go after them*" (*Luke 21:8*).

Yet one of C.T. Russell's books was entitled *The Time is at Hand*. Also the WBTS often uses phrases that lead its members to think in ways contrary to Jesus' warning.

SUMMARY

Rather than the biblical reference being to 70 years of servitude of Judah from 607 to 537, it is 70 years of **Babylonian supremacy** from **609 to 539** B.C.E. Hebrew scholars point out that both the KJV and the NWT are incorrect in their rendering of '*AT BABYLON*' (*Jer. 29:10 NWT*). The Hebrew Interlinear shows that it is "*FOR BABYLON.*"

So the 70 years ended when Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E. and not according to the WBTS in 537.

Nebuchadnezzar's accession year was 605 B.C.E and not 625 as Jehovah's Witnesses propose.

Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year was 586/7 B.C.E and therefore the destruction of Jerusalem occurred in that year and not 607 as Jehovah's Witnesses propose.

It was also 70 years of overall **servitude (vassalage) of many nations** to Babylon:

- ❖ “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 70 years. And it must occur that **when 70 years have been fulfilled** I shall call to **account against the king of Babylon** and against that nation, *their error*, even against the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite” (*Jer. 25:11, 12*).

The Bible record shows that there were 4 deportations of the Jews rather than 3 as the WBTS teaches.

The 4 deportations totalled about 68 years from 605 to 537.

- The paying off the Sabbaths was not directly connected with the 70 years but lasted 49 years when the land was substantially deserted from 586/7 to 537.
- It was not Jehovah’s will that the land be totally uninhabited as is taught by the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses: “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...**and it will certainly cultivate it and **dwell in it**” (*Jer. 27:11*).
- **WBTS Claim 1 that 607 is the correct start date for the Gentile Times is proved wrong:** All historical and archaeological evidence proves the Jerusalem was destroyed in **586 B.C.E**, in contradiction of the WBTS teaching that it occurred in 607. It occurred in: “...the **18th year** of Nebuchadnezzar. And at that time the military forces of the king of Babylon were *laying siege to Jerusalem*” (*Jer. 32:1*).
- **WBTS Claim 2 that the “Gentile Times” is 2,520 years long is proved false:** There is no genuine biblical basis for the day= a year theory. Also the WBTS use of a solar year instead of the lunar makes the concept unworkable
- **WBTS Claim 3 that Nebuchadnezzar’s “seven times” of the chopped down tree is the same as “the Gentile Times” is proved false: There is no proof that:**
 - These “seven times” had any further fulfilment beyond Nebuchadnezzar’s times of madness.
 - If the trampling of Jerusalem (Luke 21:24) started on earth that it later shifts to heaven for completion.
 - The reign of a pagan dictatorial emperor would be used by God as a symbol of God’s loving rule through the Davidic dynasty.
 - Nebuchadnezzar’s 7 years of **powerlessness** could represent the 2,520 years of vicious domination by the gentile nations.
 - There just is no logical connection between the two events.

With the above 3 claims shown to be false there is no basis for the WBTS use of 1914 for trying to establish that they were chosen by God in 1919 as His one organization.

By Raymond C. Faircloth
www.biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk

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