Critique of

When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?
Part 1: Why It Matters; What the Evidence Shows
(The Watchtower, October 1, 2011)

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The October 1, 2011 *Watchtower* carries a simplistic apology to defend the Watchtower Society’s date of 607 BCE for the destruction of Jerusalem.

This is a Critique of that *Watchtower* article. This Critique is, of necessity, far larger. It is very easy to make a series of unsubstantiated assertions, which is exactly what the *Watchtower* article does. For example:

![Image: thus, by the fall of 537 B.C.E., the Jews had returned to Jerusalem to restore true worship—Ezra 1:1-5; 2:1; 3:1-5.]

The *Watchtower* article provides no evidence that shows 537 BCE is correct. This it cannot do, since no evidence exists for that date, or indeed for any other date of that event. So it simply makes an unsubstantiated assertion. It is certainly impossible for the cited text at Ezra to provide a BCE date.

It would be just as simple to assert that the first Jews returned in 538 BCE or in 536 BCE, as many do. An alternative date could have been offered by this Critique, and it would have been yet another unsubstantiated assertion. However, this Critique provides additional information to enable a reader make a reasoned decision.

Each major subject canvassed in this Critique commences with a new page. This allows the reader to quickly identify the subject matter, and if need be, provide those pages to a Watchtower apologist.

Version 1

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Critique of *When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?: Part 1, Why It Matters; What the Evidence Shows*

After many years of silence on the date and significance of Jerusalem’s destruction, the October 1, 2011 *The Watchtower* contained the article: *When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?* (pages 27-31).

*The Watchtower, October 1, 2011, page 27*

**WHY IT MATTERS**

Although the *Watchtower* article’s heading claims Part 1 addresses *Why it Matters*, the article completely fails to address the issue. The article focuses on the date of Jerusalem’s destruction but it does not discuss its significance. This subject is deeply significant for the Watchtower Society (WTS) since they use the date of Jerusalem’s destruction in the process of providing itself with its reason for existing and for the source of its authority and control.

Having decided on 607 BCE as its date for Jerusalem’s destruction, the WTS selectively jumps to isolated texts in Luke, Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Matthew to show that God’s kingdom government was set up in 1914 CE and that Jesus anointed them in 1919 as its sole earthly representative.

If 607 BCE is not the date of Jerusalem’s destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, and if the “70 years” did not start two months after that event, then the claims made by the WTS for itself are eliminated. That is the real reason this matters to them.
HOW THE WATCHTOWER ARRIVES AT 607 BCE FOR JERUSALEM’S DESTRUCTION

To arrive at the 607 BCE date, the Watchtower Society (WTS):

1. Accepts that Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 BCE.
2. Assumes that the first Jewish returnees assembled in 537 BCE to dedicate the temple site at Jerusalem.
3. Assumes that this event marked the conclusion of the Seventy Years spoken of by Jeremiah.
4. Says that the 70 years therefore commenced in 607 BCE.
5. Assumes that the 70-year period commenced two months after Jerusalem was destroyed, when Jews entered Egypt.

Broadly, difficulties faced by the WTS include:

- The starting point of 539 BCE relies on secular records, secular chronologies, classical historians, and secular scholars.
- Although the WTS calculates the date of Babylon’s fall from secular sources, such as classical historians, business tablets, and astronomical tablets, it also denigrates those sources.
- Without any evidence (since none exists), the WTS assumes the first Returnees dedicated the temple site in 537 BCE.
- The WTS assumes that this event marked the conclusion of the “Seventy Years”.
- The WTS assumes Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar just over 70 years before the Returnees assembled at the destroyed site.
- Secular records, including contemporary business and administration tablets, astronomical tablets, chronologies, classical historians,
It assumes that when the Jews entered Egypt following Gedaliah’s murder, that this emptied Judah of every person.

The WTS assumes that the Jews entered Egypt two months after Jerusalem’s destruction.

It assumes that this event marked the start of the “70 Years”. There is no explicit Biblical statement to that effect.

Every step in the WTS’s “Bible chronology” is concerned with its primary objective of maintaining 1914 CE as the eschatologically significant date. Therefore, rather than seeking evidence and proof, the WTS seeks support for the conclusion it commences with.

**A difference of about 20 years**

The Watchtower article recognises that the commonly-held date for the destruction of 587/586 BCE is about 20 years later than its date of 607 BCE. The WTS says this difference results from the WTS accepting the inspired word of God (termed “Bible chronology”) while everyone else others depends on uninspired secular records.

(Note that this is the format used in this Critique to provide the citations from The Watchtower article.)
Scholars provide 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon using the chronology that the *Watchtower* does not accept. Further related statements from Watchtower Society (WTS) articles are available at:

http://www.jwstudies.com/WTS_support_for_the_Babylonian_king-list.pdf

The *Watchtower* article acknowledges that 539 BCE is calculated from other sources.

It is impossible for the Bible to provide BCE dates. They have to come from secular sources, which are denigrated as “uninspired” by the WTS. While the date for Babylon’s fall is generally agreed with by scholars, the WTS undermines its position when it denigrates the sources it uses to calculate that date.

**The Watchtower relies on the testimony of “ancient historical sources”**

To create its foundation date for the Fall of Babylon, the WTS says it relies on classical historians and on cuneiform tablets.
An Olympiad is a period of 4 years. Their first recorded use was some 400 years after the first Games were held to mark the start of an Olympiad period. Each year during a four-year Olympiad is designated accordingly. The expression “Ol. 55, 1” means “the first year of the 55th Olympiad”.

Citing Diodorus and others as his authorities, Africanus places the first year of Cyrus in Ol. 55, 1. ... Therefore the synchronism exists: Cyrus year 1 = Ol. 55, 1 = 560/559 BC. ...

In that same passage ... Africanus brings his reckoning to the first year of Cyrus with the words: “to the first year of the reign of Cyrus when there was an end to the captivity.” Actually ... [Cyrus] did not take Babylon and free the Jewish captives until 539 BCE. ...

Fortunately, the fragments of Africanus also preserve his dates for the life of Jesus. ... In view of the synchronism previously established for the first year of Cyrus where A.Ad. 4943 = Ol. 55, 1 = 560/559 BC, we can also establish that A.Ad. 5500 = Ol. 194,2 = 3/2 BC, which must be Africanus’s date for the birth of Christ.1

The Watchtower uses the classical historians including Diodorus and Africanus to provide it the foundation for its dates. Africanus also places the birth of Jesus Christ, which was much closer to his own time, at 3/2 BCE, a date rejected by the WTS.

Information on secular sources relied on by the WTS is available at:  
http://www.jwstudies.com/Insight_s_reliance_on_secular_sources.pdf

Complexities in synchronisms
Ol. 55, 1 ran from July 1, 560 to June 30, 559 BC (Julian).2 The Babylonian year (and the Jewish religious year) commenced with Nisan. According to Parker and Dubberstein, Nisan 1, 560 BC fell on March 26 (Julian) and Nisan 1, 559 BC fell on April 14 (Julian). Thus caution must be observed when converting from one calendar to another, as it is not simply a task of providing the date of a year.

Cyrus killed “after he had reigned twenty-nine years”

The Watchtower article says that Cyrus was killed “after he reigned twenty-nine years”, making 530 BCE his final year.

[Eusebius] shows the thirtieth and last year of the reign of Cyrus in relation to Ol. 62, 2. ... By the reckoning of Olympiadic dates which we have accepted as probably used by Eusebius, Ol. 55,1 equals 560 B.C., Ol. 62, 2 equals 531 B.C. ...

For the reign of Cyrus quite precise information is now available from the cuneiform sources and in terms of the Babylonian calendar. The latest date attested in his reign is the twenty-third day of Abu in his ninth year (mentioned on a tablet from Borsippa), which (counting his years of reign in Babylon) is equivalent to Aug 12, 530 B.C. The earliest date attested in the reign of his successor Cambyses is the twelfth day of Ululu in the latter’s accession year, and this is equivalent to Aug 31, 530. It is to be concluded that the death of Cyrus, fighting on the northeastern frontier, was reported in Babylon in August 530 B.C.

According to the Chronicle, the reign of Cyrus ended in his thirtieth and last year and this year was related to Ol. 62, 2, i.e., to 531 B.C. If the regnal year of Cyrus was considered to begin in the spring, in line

1 Finegan, pages 156, 157
with Mesopotamian custom, his year 30 could extend from Mar/Apr 531 to Mar/Apr 530, and it would end a few months ahead of his actual death as just established. But if the regnal year was counted as beginning on the following Oct 1, then year 30 extended from Oct 1, 531, to Sept 30, 530 B.C., and included the time when the death of Cyrus became known in Babylon in August 530 B.C. By the same interpretation, year 1 of Cyrus, related to Ol. 55.1 = 560 B.C., would mean more exactly the year from Oct 1, 560, to Sept 30, 559 B.C.

The biblical references to the first year of Cyrus when he made the proclamation which allowed the Jewish exiles to return from Babylon to Jerusalem (2 Chron 36:22f.; Ezra 1:1ff.) are presumably stated in terms of his reign in Babylon since they deal with an event in that city.³

These details indicate the level of uninspired support relied on by The Watchtower for its very foundation. It cannot rightly claim that it lays its foundation from inspired sources. Significantly, the Watchtower article also denigrates uninspired classical historians and chronologists, even though it is clear that the information it relies on comes from such people, including Africanus, Diodorus, and Eusebius.

“Cuneiform tablets show Cyrus ruled Babylon for nine years”

As the above passage from Finegan shows, the information relied on by the Watchtower for its foundation comes from cuneiform tablets.

Cuneiform tablets show Cyrus ruled Babylon for nine years. (The Watchtower, page 28)

This particular information is provided from a listing by Parker and Dubberstein⁴, where they identify the earliest and latest dated cuneiform tablet issued during a king’s reign. Tens of thousands of tablets written during the period have been recovered that list business transactions and administration tasks. As shown below, these tablets show that Cyrus ruled Babylon for 9 years, dying in August 530 BCE.

Parker and Dubberstein’s listing of the earliest and latest tablets commences with Nabopolassar and continues on through the neo-Babylonian rulers and on. The record for Cyrus, which the Watchtower accepts along the way, is an integral element of the list. The balance of the listing includes the following dates for the latest tablets of these kings:

Kandalanu: Oct 30, 626 BC
Nabopolassar: Aug 15, 605 BC
Nebuchadnezzar: Oct 8, 562 BC
Amel-Marduk: Aug 7, 560 BC
Nergal-shar-usur: Apr 16, 556 BC
Labashi-Marduk: June 17, 556 BC
Nabunaid: Oct 29, 539 BCE (Cyrus entered Babylon)

The final page of this Critique provides a part of the listing by Parker and Dubberstein that provides the Watchtower with its dates for Cyrus and the length of his reign. That page also shows the dates of the latest tablets for these other neo-Babylonian rulers.

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³ Finegan, age 178-179
⁴ Babylonian Chronology 626 BC – AD 75, pages 11-24
The starting date of 539 BCE

**The Watchtower relies on an astronomical tablet for confirmation**

As confirmation support for the secular sources used to provide the dates of Cyrus’ reign and death, *The Watchtower* article refers to an astronomical tablet from the Persian ruler Cambyses. He succeeded Cyrus. *The Watchtower* article thus recognises that information from an astronomical tablet can be used to correctly calculate dates in terms of the Julian calendar.

* Confirmation by a cuneiform tablet: A Babylonian astronomical clay tablet (BM 33066) confirms the date of Cyrus’ death in 530 B.C.E. Though this tablet contains some errors regarding the astronomical positions, it contains the descriptions of two lunar eclipses that the tablet says occurred in the seventh year of Cambyses II, the son and successor of Cyrus. These are identified with lunar eclipses visible at Babylon on July 16, 523 B.C.E., and on January 10, 522 B.C.E., thus pointing to the spring of 523 B.C.E. as the beginning of Cambyses’ seventh year. That would make his first regnal year 529 B.C.E. So Cyrus’ last year would have been 530 B.C.E., making 539 B.C.E. his first year of ruling Babylon.
The code “BM 33066” shows that this tablet is held at the British Museum.

The following is the relevant section from BM33066. Detailed information is available at: http://www.jwstudies.com/539_BCE_and_an_astronomical_tablet.pdf

Inschriften von Cambyses, König von Babylon,  
by J. N. Strassmaier, Leipzig, 1890, No. 400, lines 45-48

When the Watchtower article states: “these [eclipses] are identified with lunar eclipses at Babylon” it is admitting that it relies on the skills and knowledge of the secular sources who provide the Julian dates of the eclipses on these astronomical tablets.

The Watchtower article thus absolutely depends on the ability of scholars to compute dates from a lunar eclipse tablet held in the British Museum. The dates computed by these scholars from the other astronomical tablets at that Museum confirm a significant range of dates for this neo-Babylonian period, dates that the WTS rejects.

All of the surviving observations (and predictions) of lunar eclipses from earliest times (731 BC) to 609 BC - as well as many later observations down to 317 BC - are recorded on a series of five British Museum tablets. Their reference numbers are: BM 32238 (= LBAT 1414), BM 45640 + 35115 + 35789 (= LBAT 1415 + 1416 + 1417: three joining pieces) and BM 32234 (= LBAT 1419). …

BM 32238 cites eclipses from 731 to 659 BC (obverse) and from 389 to 317 BC (reverse). Tablets BM 45640 + 35115 + 35789 contain data from 703 to 632 BC (obverse) and from 415 to 360 BC (reverse), while BM 32234 extends from 609 to 537 BC (obverse) and from 519 to 447 BC (reverse).
Many names of rulers are preserved on these tablets: e.g. Nabumukin-zeri (who reigned from 731 to 726 BC), Bel-ibni (702-699 BC), Samassum-ukin (667-647 BC), Kandalanu (647-625 BC), Nebuchadrezzar II (604-562 BC), Xerxes I (485-465 BC) and Philip (323-316 BC).

From the well-defined chronological sequence on this series of texts, virtually all eclipse dates can be confidently restored.

BM 38462 (= LBAT 1420) reports lunar eclipses for almost every year from the beginning of the reign of Nebuchadrezzar II (604/3 BC) to his 29th year (576/5 BC). The damaged (but still recognisable) name of Nebuchadrezzar is given on the first line of the tablet.5

Beginning with Nabonassar, Babylonian chronology is securely established.6

**Cyrus’ first year of Babylonian rule**

The Watchtower article demonstrates its total lack of understanding when it writes: “making 539 B.C.E. his first year of ruling Babylon”, since this is impossible.

Babylon fell to the Persians shortly after Tishri 1, the start of the civil year. Under the conditions of the accession-year system, Cyrus completed the final year of his predecessor Nabonidus and he took the throne of Babylon on the first day of the following year. For a person using the religious Nisan calendar, Cyrus started his first year on the following Nisan 1, equivalent to March 24, 538 BCE. For a person using the Tishri calendar, Cyrus’ first year began on the equivalent to September 17, 538 BCE.

According to the cuneiform evidence and the Babylonian calendar, Babylon fell on Tashritu 16 = Oct 12, 539 B.C., and Cyrus entered the city two and one-half weeks later on Arahsamnu 3 = Oct 29. His Babylonian regnal years began, therefore, and his first year, in which he made the proclamation, was 538/537 B.C.7

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5 Stephenson, page 149
6 Stephenson, page 95
7 Finegan, page 179
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE “SEVENTY YEARS”

It is impossible to overrate the significance to the Watchtower Society (WTS) of its interpretation of Jeremiah’s “Seventy Years”.

The Watchtower Society (WTS) praises its own interpretation of the Bible’s “70 Years” as Bible Chronology. They contrast their interpretation with the information provided by secular sources, naming it derogatively, Secular Chronology.

The WTS’s interpretation of the 70 years controls its approach to secular sources. While the WTS accepts calculations from secular sources to provide 539 BCE as the date of the Fall of Babylon, its interpretation of the Seventy Years forces the WTS to denigrate those very same sources when they provide information that does not accommodate the WTS’s interpretation of the Seventy Years.

The WTS’s interpretation of the Seventy Years creates its own chronology for the period, including the date of 607 BCE for the destruction of Jerusalem.

The WTS confuses threat of destruction with Seventy Years’s servitude

Fundamentally, the WTS confuses the threatened destruction of Jerusalem with the 70 years of servitude to Babylon by several nations.

The WTS fails to recognise that the threat of destruction was continually being given by prophets ever since Moses when the people were about to enter the Promised Land. Continued obedience would see them flourish, but disobedience would see them obliterated. That fate lay in their hands.

The “Seventy Years”, however, was an unavoidable period of servitude to Babylon experienced by several nations. The only matter that could be controlled was the intensity of that servitude. Willing recognition would result in that nation serving its servitude from within its own borders. Obstinate disobedience would see that nation experience increased intensity of servitude.

Since the “seventy years” do not refer to Jerusalem’s destruction, the period may not be used as a measuring stick in the way that the WTS requires.

Further explanations are available at:

http://www.jwstudies.com/What_the_Bible_really_says_about_Jerusalem_s_destruction.pdf
http://www.jwstudies.com/Bible_Chrontology_and_the_Seventy_Years.pdf
**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE SEVENTY YEARS**

**WHO THE “SEVENTY YEARS” AIMED WERE AT**

As the text cited in the following passage from *The Watchtower* article clearly states, the “Seventy Years” decree was directly aimed at all of “these nations”.

The Seventy Years was a period of servitude to Babylon by several nations, including Judah.

**THE THREATENED DESTRUCTION COULD BE AVOIDED**

From the time of Moses through to Jeremiah, Hebrew prophets – their preachers – continually threatened that God would destroy the nation if they did not willingly obey his directives. Obedience would see them survive and flourish.⁸

At an early stage of his work, Jeremiah’s life was threatened when he warned that Jerusalem would be destroyed. He was saved when it was pointed out that he was only repeating the message that had been given by the previous prophets.⁹

**Threat for centuries of avoidable destruction**

Moses warned the people that disobedience would cause God to destroy the city, including its temple, and he would remove the people from the land he had given.

> If you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: ...

> I will turn your cities into ruins (ḥʾrbā) and lay waste (šāmēm) your sanctuaries. ... I will lay waste (šāmēm) the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled (šāmēm). I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you.

> Your land will be laid waste (šʾmāmā), and your cities will lie in ruins (ḥʾrbā). Then the land will enjoy its sabbath (šabbāt) [“not in Hebrew”] years all the time that it lies desolate (šāmēm) and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest (šābat) and enjoy its sabbaths (šabbāt). All the time that it lies desolate

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⁸ For example: Joel 1:2, 6-7, 12, 15; 2:1-3; Isa. 28:13-14; 51:17, 19; Zep. 1:4; 2:1-2; 3:7-8; Hab. 1:5-7; Eze. 5:8, 9, 11, 14

⁹ Jer. 25:2-7; 26:8-18
What the Bible says about the Seventy Years

(sāmēm), the land will have the rest (sābat) it did not have during the sabbaths (sabbāt) you lived in it. ...

These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the LORD established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses. 10

If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God. 11

Whenever a prophet gave this warning, he made it clear that God would not carry out his punishment if the people heeded the message. When a nation relented and amended its ways, God would relent and the threatened punishment would be avoided.

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. 12

THE 70 YEAR SERVITUDE COULD NOT BE AVOIDED

When Babylon became the region’s superpower, God’s prophet Jeremiah repeated the age-old threat of the city’s destruction. Then he gave the additional command that all the nations would serve Babylon for 70 years:

And these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (Jer. 25:11)

God decided to use Babylon as his servant, and all the nations would serve his servant for 70 years. That servitude commenced at the same time for all the nations – at the moment when God decided to use Babylon as his servant implementer.

At the same time, Jeremiah made it clear that when any nation served Babylon willingly, they would remain in their own country. Equating the expression “Seventy Years” with “him, his son and his grandson”, Jeremiah said it was a period of “serving” Babylon which could be served by a nation while remaining in its own land, without any need for destruction.

All nations will SERVE him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes. …

If, however, any nation or kingdom will not SERVE Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the LORD, until I destroy it by [Nebuchadnezzar’s] hand.

So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, “You will not SERVE the king of Babylon.” They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish.

BUT if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and SERVE him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live (yāšab) there, declares the LORD.

10 Lev. 26:3–46
11 Deut. 8:19-20; See also Deut 28:15-68
12 Jer. 18:7-8
What the Bible says about the *Seventy Years*

[Jeremiah] gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, “Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; SERVE him and his people, and you will live.

**Why will you and your people die** by the sword, famine and plague with which the LORD has threatened any nation that will not SERVE the king of Babylon? **Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, “You will not SERVE the king of Babylon”, for they are prophesying lies to you**.13

**Yoke could be intensified, but not evaded**

At Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah is recorded as telling Judah and its neighbours they would be serve Babylon for 70 years. At Jeremiah 27 to 29, the prophet is confronted by false prophets promising swift release. To Hananiah the false prophet at Jerusalem, Jeremiah showed that the yoke of Babylon was in place and its intensity would only increase if the nation refused to serve Babylon. To the exiles at Babylon, he told them that 70 years had been decreed, so they must not listen to their false prophets who were promising swift release. The servitude was in place and would run its course.

The following quotation indicates that the 70 years of punishment started when God set Nebuchadnezzar against “this land (Judah)” and against “all the surrounding nations”.

Jeremiah 25:9, which is cited here, says that this would result in **all the nations** being destroyed.

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I will bring [Nebuchadnezzar and the nations of the north] against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.
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It is absolutely mischievous for the following from the Watchtower article to suggest that *Lamentations* says there was to be a 70-year exile **following** the destruction of Jerusalem. Nor was there any need for Jerusalem to be destroyed. These verses indicate that the other nations were to suffer the same degree of punishment as Judah was to receive.

13 Jer. 27:1-3, 6-14
CONTRAST OF AVOIDABLE DESTRUCTION WITH UNAVOIDABLE SERVITUDE

The contrast between the threatened destruction of Jerusalem and the unavoidable 70 years of servitude to Babylon is demonstrated at the time when Jeremiah confronted Zedekiah while Babylon was attacking Jerusalem.

Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah, telling him that if he willingly went forward in surrender, Zedekiah would be showing his preparedness to serve Babylon, and this would prevent the Lord’s threatened destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah did not want to see the city destroyed, which could still be avoided.

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, … this city will not be burned down. …’ But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down.’” 14

But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me: … this city will be burned down.” 15

Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin (h’rbâ)?

Thus the 70 years would run its course. That could not be avoided. The intensity could be controlled and it could be served while the nation remained on its own land.

The centuries-long threatened destruction of Jerusalem and Judah, however, could have been avoided. But Zedekiah did not listen to God’s messenger.

THE START OF THE “SEVENTY YEARS”

The Bible does not state “this is when the Seventy Years” started, showing that those people were not concerned with identifying a specific moment or incident. Locating a precise starting point is a matter of concern only to the Watchtower Society (WTS). It did not matter to the ancient Bible writers; it does not concern modern scholars. Locating the undeniable starting point is therefore for the WTS to prove beyond any doubt. It is a pure red herring for it to ask others to identify their starting point. Others do not care, it is not an issue.

Jeremiah told the several nations that it would be a 70-year period of serving God’s servant, Babylon. It could be assumed the period began either when God decided to anoint Babylon, when God actually anointed Babylon as his servant, when the named nations came under Babylonian domination, or when Babylon became the region’s unquestioned super power.

The WTS presumes the expression “Seventy Years” is to be taken literally, with calendrical precision, whereas true Biblical scholarship seeks to determine what the expression meant to the people at the time they wrote it. Did their culture address the expression as idiomatic, representing an idea or a principle, rather than with mathematical precision? This the WTS has to prove, since it is their problem, and no one else’s.

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14 Jer. 38:17-18, 21, 23
15 Jer 27:17
Although the above citation from the Watchtower is headed, “When did ‘the Seventy Years’ start?” it actually opens with the statement by the Chronicler that the 70 years of servitude ended when Persia replaced Babylon. The passage says the nations were to be servants to Nebuchadnezzar and his descendants until “the kingdom of Persia came to power”. The very moment that happened, the people were no longer serving Babylon.

That passage also says that the land rested until the seventy years came to its end; it does not say that the land rested during the full seventy years. All that Leviticus required was for the people living on the land to live from what sprang spontaneously, “no sowing ... no pruning” - but they did not leave the land.

Long before Jerusalem was destroyed, while people were still living on the land, they already considered the land to be without “men and animals” – because the Babylonians were in control. Further information is available at pages 66 - 70 of:

http://www.jwstudies.com/They_would_not_listen_Version_1.pdf

**THE END OF THE “SEVENTY YEARS”**

The Scriptures consistently repeat that the Seventy Years ended at the very moment Babylon’s power ended. That happened on the night the Persians and Medes took the city (October 539 BCE, Julian).

That is not surprising; the nations were commanded to serve Babylon for 70 years and that servitude ended at the moment Babylon ceased being the region’s super power. The Seventy Years could not end one day earlier or one day later than the night when the Babylonian king was slain and his kingdom taken.

The Bible consistently says that the Seventy Years was a period when of servitude to Babylon and it ended the moment Babylon’s kingdom ended.

> All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.  
> 
> “This is what these words mean: **Mene**: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. **Peres** : Your

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16 Jer. 32:43; 33:10–12
17 Jer. 27:7
What the Bible says about the *Seventy Years*

...kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.\(^{18}\)

\[\text{Nebuchadnezzar}\] carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.\(^{19}\)

Cyrus was able to make his proclamation because the 70 years of servitude to Babylon had ended. He could not have released all the nations’ captives while the kingdom of Babylon was still subjugating the region.

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\(^{18}\) Dan. 5:26, 28, 30-31
\(^{19}\) 2 Chr. 36:20
“FOR BABYLON”

The passage that the Watchtower is concerned about reads, according to the NIV:

The God of Israel says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the LORD. This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.”

At chapter 28, Jeremiah confronted the false prophet Hananiah, who had predicted the yoke of servitude to Babylon would cease within two years with the return of the recently deported king Jehoachin and all the exiles:

“For I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

Jeremiah had previously introduced the yoke of 70 years servitude to Babylon, and Hananiah acknowledged it was in place. At chapter 29, Jeremiah turns his attention to the false prophets at Babylon, who were saying the same as Hananiah was. To counter the false prophets at Babylon, Jeremiah told them they would be waiting a long time as the decreed 70 years had not been completed. This shows that the 70 year yoke of servitude was already in place, otherwise the prophets at Jerusalem and at Babylon could not make a promise of a swift release.

The idea of 70 years “at” Babylon is meaningless, for many Jews chose to remain there after the kingdom of Babylon was replaced by Persia. Jewish descendants were still returning to Yehud 200 years after the Babylonian empire had ceased.

All that Jeremiah’s command regarding the Seventy Years required was that the nations, including Judah, serve Babylon. When the kingdom of Babylon ceased in 539 BCE, the nations ceased serving Nebuchadnezzar, his son and his grandson.

When the Jews at Babylon received the letter from Jeremiah, they understood his statement, since they said it meant they would be there for a “long time”:

He has sent this message to us in Babylon: It will be a long time. Therefore build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

It is thus correct to say that the period was “for” Babylon, and therefore, as is shown in the following, the WTS’s New World Translation in Swedish and in Danish renders the expression as “for” Babylon.

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20 Jer. 29:8-10
21 Jer. 28:4
22 Jer. 29:28
The Danish (left) and Swedish (right) *New World Translation* render Jer. 29:10 as “for” Babylon.
When did the Jews enter Egypt?

The Watchtower wishes to commence the “Seventy Years” at the moment that the party of Jews entered Egypt. For some strange reason it journeys to that date via a date for Jerusalem’s destruction. An easier path for the Watchtower would have been to argue that the “Seventy Years” began when Jews entered Egypt, which it would date as 607 BCE, and then state that Jerusalem fell earlier, perhaps in 611 BCE.

The events listed as taking place from the time of Jerusalem’s destruction until the Jews’ entry into Egypt require far more than two months. For example, it would have taken longer than two months for the information about Gedaliah to reach Jews in the neighbouring countries of Moab, Ammon, and Edom, pack their families, return to the villages and towns, and then travel to Gedaliah.\(^\text{23}\)

The above citation from page 27 of the October 1 2011 Watchtower article refers to 2 Kings 25:25, 26 this way:

**Within two months.** “all the people [who had been left behind in the land] from the least to the greatest, together with the army officers, fled to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians.” (2 Kings 25:25, 26, NIV)

However, the verses at 2 Kings 25:25-26 actually state (New World Translation):

“And it came about in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nathaniel the son of Elishama of the royal offspring came, and also ten men with him, and they got to strike down Gedaliah, so that he died, and also the Jews and the Chaldeans that happened to be with him in Mizpah. After that all the people, from small to great, and the chiefs of the military forces rose up and came into Egypt; for they had become afraid because of the Chaldeans.”

The imposition by the Watchtower of “within two months”, “who had been left behind in the land”, and “of that year” result from prejudice.

The Bible does not specify how long Gedaliah worked as the Governor before he was murdered. Many scholars, including Jewish scholars, believe Gedaliah ruled for 4 years.

The Bible states the people who went with Johanan were the survivors from Mizpah.\(^\text{24}\)

The expression “seventh month” provides no solid evidence, since it does not specify the year. This means The Watchtower is unable to get the solid answer it needs.

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\(^{23}\) Jer. 40:11-12  
\(^{24}\) Jer. 41:16
[Gedaliah] was murdered as part of a conspiracy led by a Judean royalist party under the leadership of Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, a member of the royal family. **The date of this conspiracy is unknown.** However, Jeremiah 52:30 mentions another Judean deportation to Babylonia in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar (582/581 BCE), and thus it seems reasonable to assume that it occurred after Gedaliah’s murder, which certainly would have been interpreted by the Babylonians as signalling a new rebellion. The account of the plot and its aftermath in Jeremiah 41—43 implies that this was indeed the case.\(^\text{25}\)

Two months is hardly enough to allow for the dust to settle after the destruction and mayhem of the Babylonian campaign, some administrative apparatus to be set up at Mizpah, the conspiracy to develop in Ammon (Jer 40:13-16), people to dribble back from other regions, some of them quite distant (Jer 40:7-8, 11-12), and the last harvest of the agrarian year to be gathered in (Jer 40:12). It therefore seems preferable to connect Ishmael’s terrorist act with the deportation mentioned in Jer 52:30, dated to the 23d year of Nebuchadrezzar.\(^\text{26}\)

Another problem for the [Watchtower] Society is Ezekiel 33:21-27. A messenger reached Ezekiel with the news of Jerusalem’s destruction in late December (the 10th month), and he reported that there were people living in the ruins. Since the city was destroyed in early August, this suggests a transit time between Jerusalem and Babylon of about four months; the same length of time is indicated in Ezra 7:9 as what was involved in a journey between Babylon and Judah.

The problem is this: Yahweh gives the prophet Ezekiel an oracle for the messenger to take back to the people living in the ruins. Yahweh states:

“The people living in those ruins in the land are saying, ‘Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many, surely the land has been given to us as our possession’ “ (v. 23).

This clearly states that as late as December, (1) there were still people living in the ruins, (2) they believed themselves to be still possessing the land, and (3) they were not an insignificant number but “many”. How could Yahweh say this to Ezekiel, if by that time the land had been emptied of people? According to the Society, the ‘seventy years’ of the land lying desolate began in the middle of Tishri (early October):

\[ *** w72 6/1 p. 351 Questions From Readers *** \]

The murder of Gedaliah in the month of Tishri (September/October) (“at the seventh new moon,” Byington translation) prompted those Jews left remaining in the land of Judah to flee. (Jer. 41:1, 2; 43:2-7)

By the time the fearful Jews fled to Egypt it must have been at least the middle of Tishri, to allow enough time for the events mentioned

\[^{25}\text{Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books, page 483, Arnold and Williamson, editors. See also pages 703-704.}\]

\[^{26}\text{Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period, Blenkinsopp, in Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period, page 97, editors Lipschits and Blenkinsopp}\]
in the Bible as taking place between the assassination and the flight. (Compare Jeremiah 41:4, 10–42:7.) This would place the start of the Gentile Times about Tishri 15, 607B.C.E.

Note that Yahweh gives Ezekiel an oracle for the messenger to deliver to the people living in the ruins: “Therefore say to them” (v. 25), “say this to them” (v. 27). So Yahweh expects that the people would still be living there four months later, around April of the following year. And the oracle itself presumes that the desolation still lay in the future:

“As surely as I live, those who are left in the ruins will fall by the sword, those out in the country I will give to the wild animals to be devoured, and those in strongholds and caves will die of a plague. I will make the land a desolate waste” (v. 27-28).

Unless the Society wants to say that Yahweh had no idea what was going on in Judah and was completely ignorant of what happened in Judah during the time the messenger travelled to Babylon, they cannot claim that a period of total desolation (i.e. with the land being uninhabited) was already in progress. 27

There is no explicit statement in the Scriptures that identify the moment that the Seventy Years began. The best that the Watchtower magazine can offer is that the event at Jeremiah 44:1, 2 “evidently marked” the starting point of the 70 Years.

Certainly nothing definitely, only hopefully.

WHEN DID THE FIRST JEWS RETURN?

The Scriptures do not state that the physical return of some Jewish captives, or their return to their towns and villages, or their later assembly at the dedication of the temple marked the ending of the Seventy Years. It has already been shown that the Seventy Years ended on the night that the kingdom was handed over to the Medo-Persians.

Given the criteria set by the WTS, it is impossible for them to prove that 537 BCE is the date. This is shown in the Paper: When Did the Jews Return to Jerusalem?²⁸

It is very easy to make unsubstantiated assertions, which is exactly what the Watchtower does.

The article provides no evidence that shows 537 BCE is correct. This it cannot do, since no evidence exists in support of that date, or for any other date. It is certainly impossible for those texts at Ezra to provide any BCE date.

It is just as simple to assert that the first Jews returned in 538 BCE or in 536 BCE, as many do. But these dates have no evidence as support either. The Bible writers were so uninterested in identifying the date that they provide insufficient information for a conclusive decision. In was of no interest to them.

The writer of 2 Chronicles and the writer of Ezra state that Cyrus released all captives some time during his first year. Babylon fell after the start of the civil year, which began Tishri 1 (September 27, 539 BCE, Julian). This means his First Year began on either the following Nisan 1 (March 24, 538 BCE) or on Tishri 1 (September 17, 538 BCE). Some Bible writers use the Nisan calendar while others use the Tishri calendar. Evidence from Nehemiah strongly suggests that the writer of Ezra-Nehemiah used the Tishri calendar.

Chronicles and Ezra do not state whether the decree was made by Cyrus early during his first year, or at its end. If he made it on March 24, 538, perhaps the people took off immediately for the 4-month journey, settled in their towns and then walked to Jerusalem to reach there by Tishri 1 (September 17, 538 BCE); maybe their release enabled them to meet at Jerusalem the following Tishri (October 5, 537 BCE). Perhaps Cyrus made his declaration at the very end of his first year, so that the Returnees did not get to Jerusalem until 536 BCE. No one knows, and the writers of Chronicles and Ezra show no interest in identifying the year.

Ezra’s reference to the month of Tishri has to be seen through his fundamentalist religious focus. The seventh month of Tishri marks the start of the civil year when several major religious celebrations take place, such as Yom Kippur.

Tishrei is the month richest with Jewish holidays. During this month individuals and the world are judged. Tishrei also marks the harvest season and the beginning of the rain season.²⁹

Ezra’s deep religious focus is demonstrated in the immediate context, through the names of the people who made the journey, authenticating their genealogy, identifying their religious roles, specifying their offerings towards the temple work, their sacrifices, and the several significant religious feasts that occur during that month of Tishri. The only timing provided by Ezra was to the first day of the seventh month (Tishri), and that happened because of the religious significance of that day and of that month, not because it marked the end of Babylon’s regional dominance.

²⁸ Available at: http://www.jwstudies.com/When_Did_the_Jews_Return_to_Jerusalem.pdf
²⁹ http://www.hillel.org/jewish/rituals/roshchodesh/tishrei.htm
COUNTING 70 YEARS

To understand what the ancient Hebrews meant, it is important to grasp their concept of numbers in narratives, and in this instance, the message of “seventy”. Those Scriptures in the direct context of Jeremiah’s message understood the expression “70 years” being the same as:

All nations will serve **him and his son and his grandson** until the time for his land comes.\(^{30}\);

He has sent this message to us in Babylon: **It will be a long time.** Therefore build houses and settle down.”\(^{31}\)

It is critical that a document be read through the eyes of the culture of the community that created or edited it. The idioms and ideas of a modern culture must never be impressed upon material produced by a culture that existed thousands of years ago.

The Bible must always be read through Jewish eyes. The Hebrew writings from the neo-Babylonian era must be read through their ancient Jewish eyes.

In their narratives, the Hebrews treated numbers quite differently to the way the modern Western community does. Hebrew mysticism ascribes spiritual meaning to particular numbers, such as for the numbers “7” and “10”. These spiritual meanings are intensified when those numbers are combined, such as a sum or as a product.

While contemporary Western culture applies mathematical precision to numbers, this was not always the way numbers were always used in those cultures. Each letter of the Hebrews’ 22-letter alphabet was assigned as a number. Each Hebrew word therefore has a numerical value.

To make a number, letters were selected until the required numerical value was reached. The order of the individual letters (numbers) did not matter, as long as their sum gave the required value. In other words, the position of a letter (number) in a string was of no concern or interest. In modern Western practice, the value of a numeral depends on its position in a string. For example, the numeral “1” has a different value when it is used in the number “100”. But in the Hebrew culture, “1” was always “1” no matter what its position was in the string.

**Numerical Values of Words**

Each letter in the alefbet has a numerical value. These values can be used to write numbers, as the Romans used some of their letters (I, V, X, L, C, M) to represent numbers. Alef through Yod have the values 1 through 10. Yod through Qof have the values 10 through 100, counting by 10s. Qof through Tav have the values 100 through 400, counting by 100s. Final letters have the same value as their non-final counterparts.

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\(^{30}\) Jer. 27:7

\(^{31}\) Jer. 29:28
The number 11 would be rendered Yod-Alef, the number 12 would be Yod-Bet, the number 21 would be Kaf-Alef, the word Torah (Tav-Vav-Resh-He) has the numerical value 611, etc. The only significant oddity in this pattern is the number 15, which if rendered as 10+5 would be a name of G-d, so it is normally written Tet-Vav (9+6). **The order of the letters is irrelevant to their value; letters are simply added to determine the total numerical value.**

The number 11 could be written as Yod-Alef, Alef-Yod, Heh-Vav, Dalet-Dalet-Gimmel or many other combinations of letters.

Because of this system of assigning numerical values to letters, every word has a numerical value. There is an entire discipline of Jewish mysticism known as *Gematria* that is devoted to finding hidden meanings in the numerical values of words. For example, the number 18 is very significant, because it is the numerical value of the word Chai, meaning life. Donations to Jewish charities are routinely made in denominations of 18 for that reason.\(^{32}\)

It is thus most important to seek to understand ancient Jewish mysticism as it is associated with numbers.

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\(^{32}\) [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/alephbet.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/alephbet.html) (hint: Search the www for *Gematria.*)
**Sources for Jerusalem’s Destruction in 587/586 BCE**

The *Watchtower* wishes to distinguish between its interpretation of the Scriptures, using its term *Bible Chronology*, and the Secular Chronology. Nevertheless, the foundation of the *Watchtower’s* chronology and BCE dates totally depends on these secular sources. The *Watchtower* article clearly identifies this.

- Starts its dates with data from Classical historians (such as Olympiadic dates from Diodorus, as cited by Africanus);
- The WTS then relies on the list of Babylonian tablets that are used to create the Babylonian chronology, which provide the WTS with the length of Cyrus’ reign over Babylon;
- Confirms the dates with calculations made by secular scholars of an astronomical tablet;
- Uses the secular chronology to link that tablet to the Fall of Babylon.

When the *Watchtower* denigrates such sources, it eliminates its own foundation.

The difficulty for the *Watchtower* is to prove that its date is correct without the use of secular sources, which of course it cannot do.

**False assertion on sources used to support 587 BCE**

Quite falsely, the *Watchtower* asserts that to hold 587 BCE for the date of Jerusalem’s destruction “many authorities ... lean on two sources ... classical historians and the canon of Ptolemy.

This is a complete distortion and misrepresentation of the facts, a complete lie. No authority today leans on just these two sources. The following represent some of the sources.

- Tens of thousands of economic, administrative, and legal clay tablets written at the time of the neo-Babylonian era. Each is dated according to the day and year of the current ruler. Using the earliest and latest dated business tablets, the chronology of the time can be recreated. In its book, *Insight on the Scriptures* the WTS accepts the date for the start of Cyrus’ rule from the list of earliest and latest tablets produced by Parker and Dubberstein (see also the final page of this Critique.)
- Astronomical tablets, some of which the *Watchtower* relies on. Those tablets that the WTS accepts appear to be those that produce the WTS’s desired outcome.
- Chronicles, which are dated in terms of a king’s rule, requiring relation to the accepted secular chronology.
- The Babylonian chronological tablets known as the Adda-guppi stelae. These are discussed later in this Critique under: “Information ‘left out’”.

These sources agree with the chronology of the *Royal Canon* of Ptolemy. His *Canon* leaves out Labashi-Marduk, who ruled during part of three months as shown by the economic tablets (and in agreement with the Uruk King List). The *Canon* only reckons whole years and it leaves out brief reigns that did not affect the overall chronology.

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33 Volume 1, page 453, art. “Chronology”
34 [http://www.jwstudies.com/Insight_s_reliance_on_secular_sources.pdf](http://www.jwstudies.com/Insight_s_reliance_on_secular_sources.pdf) pages 24, 27, 28
The author of the *Watchtower* article dishonestly leaves out these facts and focuses only on trying to discredit Berossus and Ptolemy. Scholars today agree that the *Royal Canon* is reliable from beginning to end, because of its agreement with the original cuneiform tablets.

**A QUICK SUMMARY**

- Secular historians usually say that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C.E.
- Bible chronology strongly indicates that the destruction occurred in 605 B.C.E.
- Secular historians mainly base their conclusions on the writings of classical historians and on the canon of Ptolemy.
- The writings of classical historians contain significant errors and are not always consistent with the records on clay tablets.

**A QUICK REBUTTAL**

No. Secular historians base their conclusions on the thousands of dated cuneiform clay tablets which establish the length of reign of each of the neo-Babylonian kings.

Errors in the writings of classical historians such as Josephus and Berossus are irrelevant because the chronology of the neo-Babylonian kings is confirmed by the thousands of dated clay tablets.

The Watchtower is disingenuous when they claim that secular historians mainly base their conclusions on the writings of classical historians and on the canon of Ptolemy.

From 1959 until as recently as November 1, 2011, the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society has repeatedly cited and quoted from Yale Professor Raymond Philip Dougherty’s 1929 book, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar*.

Professor Dougherty’s book includes charts comparing the king lists of Berossus, Polyhistor, Ptolemy, etc., just as the 10/1/2011 Watchtower does on page 29; however, Professor Dougherty also included a king list based on the dated cuneiform tablets.

Professor Dougherty strongly emphasizes on page 10 of *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* that the “ultimate criterion in the determination of Neo-Babylonian chronological questions” is the “unimpeachable standard” of the dated cuneiform documents.

Having quoted from Professor Dougherty’s 1929 book for more than fifty years from 1959 to 2011, the Watchtower Society is fully aware that secular historians do not mainly base their conclusions on the writings of classical historians and on the canon of Ptolemy.

*Marjorie Alley, 9/2/2011*

**Post at http://www.jehovahs-witness.net by “Alleymom”**

The absolute chronology of the Babylonian first group of kings is easy to establish because ... Ptolemy quotes the report of an eclipse in the time of king Mardokempados [the Biblical Merodach-Baladan II, Isaiah 39:1].

Even more important, this absolute chronology has been independently confirmed by cuneiform texts from Babylon which

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contain astronomical observations. These number more than 1000 pieces of day-to-day astronomical observations of positions and phases of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, beginning around 650 B.C. and continuing, in increasingly dense numbers, into the first century before the beginning of our era.

**Thanks to these astronomical diaries, numerous overlaps with the royal list in Theon’s Handy Tables have been established, always in agreement.**

In other cases, the lengths of the reigns of individual kings in Theon’s royal list can be confirmed by the careful study of the dates given in contemporaneous economic and administrative texts found in Babylonia; this is possible because for parts of the period covered by the royal list, we have so many of these texts that they average out to one every few days.

In this way – namely, by using Theon’s royal list, Babylonian astronomical diaries, and Babylonian dated tablets – one is able to establish with confidence the absolute chronology back to the middle of the eighth century B.C., i.e. the reign of king Nabonassar of Babylon.\(^{36}\)

Beginning with Nabonassar, Babylonian chronology is securely established.\(^{37}\)

**Classical historians**

The *Watchtower* totally depends on Classical historians for its foundation date of 539 BCE. But the WTS is intent on destroying the reliability of that source.

If their information is unreliable, the WTS is in deep trouble, since Classical Historians provide the WTS with information that enables it to arrive at 539 BCE as the date of Babylon’s fall.

The *Watchtower* article calls into question the “historical conclusions” of those Classical Historians who cited Berossus. This presumably means the WTS considers these sources as unreliable.

**Authentic Citations of Berosus**

Berosus is quoted by a number of sources, including the following:

- **Abydenus**, a disciple of Aristotle, the Greek philosopher and scientist of the 4th century BC. In that case, being younger than Aristotle, he must have been a contemporary of Berosus. His


original writings have not survived, but he is quoted by Eusebius and Syncellus.

- **Apollodorus**, 2nd century BC. He was a student of Aristarchus of Alexandria, but he left that city about 146 BC, perhaps for Pergamon, and then he went to Athens. His original writings have not survived, but he is quoted by Eusebius and Syncellus.

- **Alexander Polyhistor** (c.105 - 35 BC), Greek philosopher, geographer and historian. He was imprisoned by the Romans in the war of Sulla against Mithridates of Pontus and brought as a slave to Rome for employment as a tutor. Then he was released and lived in Italy as a Roman citizen. His original writings have not survived, but he is quoted by Eusebius, Syncellus, Josephus, Atheneus and Clement of Alexandria.

- **Flavius Josephus**, the Jewish priest and historian (37/38 - 100 AD). Quotes from Alexander Polyhistor.

- **Athenaeus** (fl. 200 AD). Greek grammarian and author. Quotes from Alexander Polyhistor.

- **Clement** (c.150 - c.215 AD). Bishop of Alexandria. Quotes from Alexander Polyhistor.


- **Syncellus** (early 9th century AD). Byzantine monk and chronographer, otherwise known as “George the Syncellus”. Quotes from Abydenus, Apollodorus and Alexander Polyhistor.

Note: It’s possible that Syncellus might have been quoting from Eusebius on some occasions, rather than directly from Abydenus and Polyhistor, but generally there are **three generations of documents**.

The first generation is the work of Berosus himself, the second is Abydenus and Polyhistor, and the third is Josephus, Athenaeus, Clement, Eusebius and Syncellus.38

So, the Watchtower discounts these sources. Which is a great pity for the organisation, since the article says its primary authority for its initial neo-Babylonian dates are classical historians. The Watchtower article lists Diodorus and Herodotus as its originating sources, and the Insight volume says it commences its dates from:

- the historian Diodorus, as well as Africanus and Eusebius.39

How does the Watchtower get its dates if it does not trust classical sources? If it trusts some dates from some classical sources but not others, how does it know which ones? If it trusts parts of some classical historians, how does it decide which parts and from which historians?

It is more than probable that the WTS accepts those dates that enable it to arrive at its predetermined significant date of 1914 CE.

**Canon of Ptolemy**

The Canon (Royal King-list) of Ptolemy appears in his Handy Tables. Ptolemy’s king-list is of concern to the Watchtower because it contradicts the WTS. Information on the Canon is provided in the following Sections of this Critique.

38 [http://www.annomundi.com/history/berosus.htm](http://www.annomundi.com/history/berosus.htm)

CHRISTOPHER WALKER ON PTOLEMY’S CANON

Although the article’s endnote says these words come from pages 17 and 18 of Christopher Walker’s presentation, they are actually two parts of a single sentence on page 18. The original sentence reads:

Ptolemy’s Canon was an artificial scheme designed to provide astronomers with a consistent chronology into which astronomical observation records might be fitted, not to provide historians with a precise record of the accession and death of kings.

Walker continues, but the Watchtower decided it would not:

Nevertheless it has served as the backbone of the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, and served reliably. … There is no difficulty in correlating Ptolemy’s chronology with the vast accumulation of data now available from cuneiform sources.40

Ptolemy’s Royal King-list (Canon)

Babylonian and Achaemenid chronology according to Ptolemy

Prior to the discovery and interpretation of the Mesopotamian cuneiform inscriptions, the fundamental source for the chronology, both relative and absolute, of the later Babylonian and Achaemenid kings (747-324 BC) was the king-list known as Canon Basileon, compiled by the astronomer Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy) of Alexandria (fl. c. AD 130-175) perhaps borrowing from the work of earlier astronomers of Alexandria. It was published in his Handy Tables, and survives in a considerably augmented form in Byzantine versions of Theon of Alexandria's revision of the Handy Tables. …

Ptolemy's Canon was compiled for astronomical purposes, to achieve consistency in citing and manipulating original astronomical data. So it deliberately uses two chronological conventions: the Egyptian year of 365 days and the era of Nabonassar (Babylonian Nabu-nasir). …

In his great astronomical treatise, the Almagest, Ptolemy explains that he uses the era of Nabonassar, 'For that is the era beginning from which the ancient observations are, on the whole, preserved down to our time' (Almagest III 7; Toomer 1984: 166). This corresponds with the fact that the earliest surviving Neo-Babylonian astronomical record apparently refers to the accession year of Nabu-nasir. This text records four lunar eclipses actually observed in the years 747-746 BC.

... Ptolemy uses in the Almagest ten different Babylonian lunar eclipse records, covering the time-span 721-382 BC. However he records that

Christopher Walker on Ptolemy’s Canon

his predecessor Hipparchus (fl. c. 150-125 BC) had also made use of Babylonian lunar eclipse observations and had described them as being ‘from the series brought over from Babylon’. These include the only eclipse record cited by Ptolemy for which we have an equivalent record surviving from Babylonia, the lunar eclipse of 16 July 523 BC (14/iv/7 Cambyses; Strassmaier 1890: no. 400); it is at first sight embarrassing that in this case Ptolemy gives (according to modern calculation) an inaccurate time for the eclipse and the Babylonians an inaccurate estimate of the eclipse magnitude, but the Cambyses test is now understood to contain a series of predictions rather than observations.

Ptolemy’s Canon was an artificial scheme designed to provide astronomers with a consistent chronology into which astronomical observation records might be fitted, not to provide historians with a precise record of the accession and death of kings. Nevertheless it has served as the backbone of the chronology of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, and served reliably. Re-adjusted to the Julian calendar, allowing for Ptolemy’s assumptions, and taking account of two short periods of confusion which Ptolemy describes as ‘having no king’, and of the inclusion in Babylonian king-lists of certain short-lived usurpers, there is no difficulty in correlating Ptolemy’s chronology with the vast accumulation of data now available from cuneiform sources. ...

The Babylonian astronomical sources

It may be more than coincidence that there is a surviving source which in a single format could have provided Hipparchus and Ptolemy with all the accurate observations and chronology which they needed: the Babylonian eclipse lists. ...

Some of the texts are effectively astronomical Diaries for a single day; others are evidently excerpted from the Diaries, and list (often describing in detail) all observed lunar and solar eclipses within the period which they individually cover, together with the dates (and often times) of eclipse ‘possibilities’ ...

Although many of the texts are poorly written and may represent little more than rough notes or memoranda, some of the tablets are beautifully written archival or library copies. ...

Among the remaining tablets formatted in Saros cycles one group stands out: Sachs et al. 1955: nos. 1414, 1415+ and 1419, ...

Each tablet had part of twelve Saros cycles on the obverse and part of twelve more on the reverse. ... In all probability each tablet dealt with five eclipses, with a final tablet covering eclipses 36-38. The chronological range of the series is proven by Sachs et al. 1955: no. 1414; although it is only the bottom left-hand corner of a tablet, its first preserved eclipse possibility (eclipse 35) is datable to 9 April 731 EC (in year 1 of Ukin-zer) and its last to 13 December 317 BC (in year 7 of Philip Arrhidaeus). While it would be presumptuous to suggest that these tablets represent Hipparchus’ and Ptolemy’s original Babylonian source, their source must have been something similar.

Two other features of this particular series of tablets are of interest. The times of eclipses are given, and, on each occasion in the
preserved text where it is noted that an eclipse was not observed at Babylon, a precise time is given for the luni-solar opposition (syzygy); in many cases this time corresponds closely to the time of an eclipse observable elsewhere on the earth's surface. The earliest attested predictions appear to be rounded (perhaps to the nearest hour); nevertheless we appear to be dealing with a surprisingly sophisticated eclipse theory already in the eighth or seventh century BC.

In addition, the tablets apparently gave details, at the appropriate points, of the death of the reigning king. Such details are a useful supplement to the deductions which one can make from changes in the dating of contemporary economic texts. 41

6-7 The lunar eclipse table fragment BM 32234 (Sachs et al. 1955: no. 1419). Parts of five columns survive on each side. The numbering of the columns reflects the proposed overall scheme of 24 cycles. The eclipse possibilities are identified by month and year of the Babylonian or Achaemenid king and by day, month and year in the Julian calendar. Each column is eighteen years later than the previous column, and reading down the columns each eclipse possibility is six months later than the previous possibility.

Achaemenid Chronology and the Babylonian Sources (in Mesopotamia and Iran in the Persian Period: Conquest and Imperialism 539-331 BC), page 20, Christopher Walker

41 Walker, pages 17-21
No stage of any study should be considered automatic or presumed. Everything needs to be proven and studied objectively, without prejudice, without looking for support of a position already held. That is a lesson the WTS needs to learn.

The outcome of the objective study of references, such as provided throughout this Critique, shows that any comparison of Ptolemy’s list of neo-Babylonian kings fully accords with the cuneiform records.

It is with interest to note that the Watchtower article does not provide the name of the article by Leo Depuydt: More Valuable than Old Gold: Ptolemy’s Royal Canon and Babylonian Chronology. At these pages from Leo Depuydt cited in the above quotation by the Watchtower, he writes:

A. Is the Canon True?

It is assumed here that the Canon is true. No one has, to my knowledge, refuted any aspect of the Canon on good grounds. ... It has long been known that the Canon is astronomically reliable. Observations dated according to it can all be authenticated. But this does not automatically mean that it is historically dependable. ...

In his work on the chronology of the Ptolemaic Dynasty in Egypt, Skeat states that the Canon is “absolutely accurate—a fact which historians have been curiously unwilling to recognise”. Only an examination of a much larger scope than the present paper might be able to allay all doubts regarding the Canon, or at least reveal what it is that we owe exclusively to the Canon and to no other source.

In the meantime, one important item of evidence in favor of the Canon’s reliability is that the Egyptian date of the eclipse of 16 July 523 BCE mentioned in the Almagest at V 14, namely Month 7 Day 17 Year 7 of Cambyses, can be matched with the Babylonian date of an eclipse mentioned in the cuneiform tablet Camb. 400, namely Month 4 Day 16 Year 7 of Cambyses.

Both texts mention that the eclipse began about an hour before midnight and what its characteristics were. The fact that this Greco-Egyptian date from the Almagest, which dates according to the Canon, can be matched with a Babylonian date in a Babylonian document adds little for the astronomer, but a great deal for the historian.

It does much to guarantee that the portion of the Canon from the Persian period onward is reliable. As regards the earlier rulers, the Canon would need to be compared with the cuneiform record on a
reign by reign basis, considering all the dates in the literary and non-literary sources, to establish if, and where, the Canon conflicts with cuneiform sources. Agreement seems to be the rule, but this would have to be confirmed.\textsuperscript{42}

That dating by scholars of the tablet from Cambyses’ 7th year is relied on by the WTS as support for its calculation for 539 BCE.

\textbf{Hipparchus (Second Century BCE)}

The great astronomer Claudius Ptolemaeus (ca 100-ca. 170 CE), a Greek-speaking Egyptian who probably spent most of his life in Alexandria, uses Babylonian observations. How did this information travel from Babylon to Alexandria, shifting from clay to papyrus, from tablet to roll, from Babylonian to Greek language, and from lunisolar calendar to Egyptian civil calendar? ...

It has even been suggested, as a probable historical scenario, that Hipparchus “must have visited Babylon, have persuaded one or more of the astronomer scribes there to communicate to him enough of their records and methods for him to grasp the extent of the first and basic principles of the second, and have spent enough time there to have his informant extract and translate for him a considerable number of observations” (Toomer 1988, 359).

Most of Hipparchus’s work is lost, but Ptolemy uses it while giving due credit. Since some of Ptolemy’s Babylonian observations are explicitly attributed to Hipparchus, Hipparchus may well have been the source of all of them. ...

For the purpose of establishing the exact Egyptian date for each Babylonian date, meticulous records of the lengths of Babylonian lunar months dating back to the beginning of Nabonassar’s reign must have been available. ... Since Ptolemy’s Babylonian observations, presented in Greco-Egyptian garb, have all been verified, the transmission must have been flawless. Meticulous cuneiform records of the required information do in fact survive.

This possible scenario makes the Canon as much Ptolemy’s work as a list of rulers compiled from various sources in a modern textbook can be considered the work of that book’s author. The Canon just happens to be preserved in Ptolemy’s Handy Tables in the layout in which Ptolemy chose to present it.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Ptolemy (Second Century CE)}

Ptolemy’s “Mathematical Composition,” better known as the Almagest, a work “superior to any ancient scientific textbook” contains all the tables necessary for computation. Ptolemy later combined these tables into a separate work, “Handy Tables,” adding the Canon and other auxiliary tables. The Canon is sometimes erroneously considered part of the Almagest. ...

Studying the Canon’s Babylonian segment has been facilitated also by Parker’s and Dubberstein’s Babylonian Chronology (1956), where it is confirmed that the Canon is, with the help of classical sources,


\textsuperscript{43} Depuydt, pages 102, 103
“[t]he general basis for the chronology of the period here treated” (1956, 10).\textsuperscript{44}

### Tables

Table 1 [following page] features an adaptation from the Greek manuscript sources of the Canon’s ancient Near Eastern segment. It begins with Year 1 of Nabonassar’s reign, the Canon’s beginning, and ends with Year 22 of Cleopatra VII’s reign. Roman and Byzantine emperors follow this segment, beginning with Augustus, who annexed Egypt in 30 BCE.

For what has been touted as “perhaps the most important single document for establishing the chronology of ancient history”, the Canon may not seem impressive at first sight. Yet it forms the backbone of the chronology of the period covered in [the following Table]. ...

The Canon’s first column contains the names of rulers. The second and third columns contain the lengths of their reigns in integer numbers of Egyptian years. ...

*Column* 2 converts the lengths of the reigns into integer numbers of Egyptian years.

*Column* 3 adds up the numbers of the regnal years in column 2.

Column 3 led a life of its own as the Era of Nabonassar, called thus after the Canon’s first king. Another era derived from the Canon is that of Philip, counting from Philip’s Year 1, Year 425 of Nabonassar.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{44} Depuydt, pages 103, 106
\textsuperscript{45} Depuydt, pages 97, 99, 100
### Table 1

Ptolemy’s Canon of Kings: The Ancient Near Eastern Segment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>King’s name</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total from beginning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Nabonassar</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Babylonian</td>
<td>Nabu-nadin-zeri (Nadinu)</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Chaldaean; Assyrian</td>
<td>Muki-zerti and Pul</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Assyrian</td>
<td>Ululayu</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Merodach-baladan</td>
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<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Sargon II</td>
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<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>First Kingless Period</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Bel-ibni</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Ashur-nadin-shumi</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>Mushezib-Marduk</td>
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<td>Nebuchadrezzar</td>
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<td>Amel-Marduk</td>
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<td>44 Roman</td>
<td>Augustus</td>
<td>43</td>
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</table>
# Leo Depuydt on Ptolemy’s Canon

## Table 2

The Canon’s Babylonian Segment: Julian Equivalents of the Egyptian Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era of Nabonassar</th>
<th>Canon’s Regnal Year</th>
<th>Extension of Wandering Year (Annum Vagus)</th>
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<td>26 Feb 747-25 Feb 746</td>
<td>44 1st Kingless Period 1 15 Feb 704-14 Feb 703</td>
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<td>26 Feb 746-25 Feb 745</td>
<td>45 1st Kingless Period 2 15 Feb 703-14 Feb 702</td>
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<td>26 Feb 745-24 Feb 744</td>
<td>46 Bel-tbni 1 15 Feb 702-14 Feb 701</td>
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<td>25 Feb 744-24 Feb 743</td>
<td>47 Bel-tbni 2 15 Feb 701-13 Feb 700</td>
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<td>25 Feb 743-24 Feb 742</td>
<td>48 Bel-tbni 3 14 Feb 700-13 Feb 699</td>
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<td>25 Feb 742-24 Feb 741</td>
<td>49 Ashur-nadin-shumi 1 14 Feb 699-13 Feb 698</td>
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<td>56 Mushezib-Marduk 1 12 Feb 692-11 Feb 691</td>
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<td>23 Feb 734-22 Feb 733</td>
<td>57 Mushezib-Marduk 2 12 Feb 691-11 Feb 690</td>
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<td>22 Feb 732-21 Feb 731</td>
<td>59 Mushezib-Marduk 4 12 Feb 689-10 Feb 688</td>
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<td>17 Muki-n-zari (and Pul) 1</td>
<td>22 Feb 731-21 Feb 730</td>
<td>60 2d Kingless Period 1 11 Feb 688-10 Feb 687</td>
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<td>22 Feb 730-21 Feb 729</td>
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<tr>
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<td>63 2d Kingless Period 4 11 Feb 685-9 Feb 684</td>
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<td>20 Feb 722-19 Feb 721</td>
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<td>70 Esarhaddon 3 9 Feb 678-8 Feb 677</td>
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<td>19 Feb 720-18 Feb 719</td>
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<td>19 Feb 717-17 Feb 716</td>
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<td>75 Esarhaddon 8 8 Feb 673-6 Feb 672</td>
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<td>221</td>
<td>2 Jan 527-1 Jan 526</td>
<td>266 Xerxes I, 1 Jan 483-21 Dec 482</td>
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One source consistently referred to by the ETS is *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* by Raymond Dougherty. The WTS’s long-standing reliance on his work is continued as recently as in the November 1, 2011 issue of *The Watchtower*.

*Dougherty is thus referred to in the November 1 issue of the *Watchtower* in support of its contention there are gaps in the secular neo-Babylonian chronology. As shown here from his book, Dougherty strongly defends the chronology accepted by scholars.*

| Neo-Babylonian Kings according to Cuneiform Texts* |  |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nabû-apal-ušur | 21 years | 626/625–605 B. C. |
| Nabû-kudurri-ušur** | 43 years | 605–562 B. C. |
| Amēl-Marduk | 2 years | 562–560 B. C. |
| Nergal-šar-ušur | 4 years | 560–556 B. C. |
| Lûbâši-Marduk | A few months | 556 B. C. |
| Nabû-nā’id | 17 years | 556–539 B. C. |

*Nabonidus and Belshazzar, page 7, Raymond Dougherty*
What the cuneiform records show

5. Neo-Babylonian Kings according to Ptolemy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neo-Babylonian Kings</th>
<th>Ptolemy's List</th>
<th>Reign</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nabopolassar</td>
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<td>Nabopolssar</td>
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<td>Nabonad</td>
<td>Nabonad</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Nabonidus and Belshazzar, page 9, Raymond Dougherty*

Raymond Dougherty made these comments on these lists.

Of the above Neo-Babylonian king-lists, the first is based upon more than two thousand dated cuneiform documents. It must therefore be accepted as the ultimate criterion in the determination of Neo-Babylonian chronological questions, the majority of which are connected with events which took place in the sixth century B.C. Judged by this unimpeachable standard, the writings of Herodotus of the fifth century B.C. and those of Xenophon of the first part of the fourth century B.C. are lacking in true historical perspective so far as an orderly enumeration of Neo-Babylonian kings is concerned. ...

It is not until the third century B.C. that the Berossus list, with a real Babylonian background and therefore of appreciable\(^46\) accuracy, appears. Polyhistor of the first century B.C. names all the kings except Lâbâshi-Marduk and states accurately how long each king reigned, barring the period assigned to Amêl-Marduk. Ptolemy of the second century A.D. differs from Polyhistor only in giving the correct number of years for Amêl-Marduk's reign.\(^47\)

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\(^{46}\) Note that Dougherty speaks of *appreciable* accuracy, not of a *precise* accuracy.

\(^{47}\) *Nabonidus and Belshazzar – A Study of the Closing Events of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*, page 10, Raymond Dougherty
For the neo-Babylonian period, Ptolemy omitted the brief reign of Labashi-Marduk, who reigned for less than a year between Neriglissar and Nabonidus. Ptolemy used the list of kings to provide a framework for his objective, his astronomical model. He was thus not interested in Labashi-Marduk’s reign since it did not extend beyond the boundaries of a calendar year.\textsuperscript{48}

The Babylonian memorial for Nabonidus’ mother Adda-guppi also omits Labashi-Marduk. She had reasons for doing so: she was banished from his court since she was a priest of the God Sin; she would thus have considered him a pretender; and her son Nabonidus was likely involved in the murder of Labashi-Marduk. Since he ruled for less than a year, the length of his reign does not affect the overall chronology produced for Adda-guppi; nor does the omission of Labashi-Marduk affect the overall chronology produced by Ptolemy. He used Hipparchus as his source.

\textbf{Information “left out”}

The issue at hand concerns the rulers from Nebuchadnezzar through to Nabonidus, so problems with rulerships before Nabopolassar are irrelevant. They do not prove or disprove the dates of Nebuchadnezzar nor of the destruction of Jerusalem.

While the \textit{Watchtower} stands on its high moral ground about things being \textit{left out} by Ptolemy, it stands accused of doing the very same thing, but far more seriously. When the \textit{Watchtower} paragraph indignantly complains “all of this is left out”, it \textit{refers to endnote number 9}, which includes this:

The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus, (H1B), I, line 30, has [Ashur-etelilani] listed just before Nabopolassar. \textit{(Anatolian Studies, Vol. VIII, 1958, pages 35, 47)}

Note the page numbers referred to from the \textit{Watchtower} article. Pages 35 and 36 of \textit{Anatolian Studies} list “four monuments of the reign of Nabonidus … found at (or near) Harran”. Page 46 to 53 of \textit{Anatolian Studies} provide a transliteration and an English translation of that Babylonian document. It is an undamaged record by “the lady Adda-guppi, mother of Nabium-na’id, king of Babylon” (lines 1 – 2, page 47).

The \textit{Watchtower} refers to line 30 at page 47 of \textit{Anatolian Studies} but it “leaves out” exactly what that line states, it “leaves out” undamaged line 29, and it “leaves out” undamaged lines 31 to 33. The following are lines 29 to 33 that are “left out” by the \textit{Watchtower}:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48} Ptolemy converted the dates of the Babylonian Nisan (March/April) calendar to the Egyptian calendar beginning in Toth (January/February).
What the cuneiform records show

29. From the 20th year of Aššurbanipal, king of Assyria, that I was born (in)
30. until the 42nd year of Aššurbanipal, the 3rd year of Aššur-etilu-ili,
31. his son, the 21st year of Nabopolassar, the 43rd year of Nebuchadrezzar,
32. the 2nd year of Awēl-Marduk, the 4th year of Nergilissar,
33. in 95 years of the god Šin, king of the gods of heaven and earth,

Anatolian Studies, Vol. VIII, 1958, page 47

Additionally, column II, lines 26 to 28 of Anatolian Studies state:

26. From the time of Aššurbanipal, king of Assyria, until the 9th year
27. of Nabu-na'id king of Babylon, the son, offspring of my womb
28. 104 years of happiness, with the reverence which Šin, king of the gods,

Anatolian Studies, Vol. VIII, 1958, page 49

Further, lines 40 to 43 of column II state:

40. endure not, (but) let him worship thy great godhead. In the 21 years
41. of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, in the 43 years of Nebuchadrezzar,

42. son of Nabopolassar, and 4 years of Nergilissar, king of Babylon,

43. (when) they exercised the kingship, for 68 years
44. with all my heart I reverenced them, I kept watch over them,

Anatolian Studies, Vol. VIII, 1958, page 51

Anatolian Studies provides the following summary of these lines:

Chronology and History

(1) The Last Kings of Assyria
   The inscription H 1 (of the royal Mother) gives, in its present more
   complete form (B), no less than three arithmetical summaries covering
   the end of Assyrian rule and almost the whole of the Chaldaean dynasty
   in Babylonia:
   Col. I, 29–35.
   The narrator was born in the 20th year of Assurbanipal.
   She survived the 42nd year of Aššurbanipal,
   3rd ” ” Aššur-etilu-ili, his son,
   21st ” ” Nabopolassar,
   43rd ” ” Nebuchadrezzar *
   2nd ” ” Evil-Merodach,
   4th ” ” Nergilissar.
   A total of 95 years.

Col. II, 26–8.
She lived from the time 2 of Aššurbanipal to the 9th year of
Nabonidus her son, 104 years.

Col. II, 40–3.
She served the kings of Babylon during
21 years of Nabopolassar,
43 ” ” Nebuchadrezzar,
4 ” ” Nergilissar.
A total of 68 years, before her son’s accession.

Anatolian Studies, Vol. VIII, 1958, page 69

It is pure hypocrisy for the Watchtower article to complain about information being “left out” when it
does the same thing, leaving out directly relevant information.
Robert R. Newton on Neo-Babylonian Dates

In 1977, Robert R. Newton published his book, *The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy*. He received advice from an active Jehovah’s Witness during its preparation. The following letters from Newton show his unquestioned support for the conventional chronology of the neo-Babylonian era, along with his support for the accepted dating of the astronomical tablet for Nebuchadnezzar’s 37th year.

---

Mr. D. Mason
Kilsyth
Victoria, Australia 3137

Dear Mr. Mason:

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

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

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

(a) In the period before Nebuchadnezzar, there are no absolute Babylonian dates known, to the best of my knowledge. There are many such dates known in and after his reign.

(b) Since Babylonian chronology is not my field, I am not acquainted with the Adad Gummi Stele that you mention.

(c) I do not know how certain the dates of the destruction of Jerusalem and the depositing of Zedekiah are, but my work has no bearing upon the question. So far as my work is concerned, the situation about dating those events is unchanged.

(d) I believe that the date of 539 B.C. for the capture of Babylon is well established, but my work has no impact upon the dating of this event, since it is after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

Sincerely yours,

R. R. Newton

---

 RRN/mjo
What the cuneiform records show
THE WATCHTOWER’S “CONCLUSIONS”

- The Bible says there was to be a 70-year period when Judah and the surrounding nations were to serve Babylon. The Bible never says the Judah (or the surrounding nations) would be exiled for 70 years. The prophet said that the nation which was prepared to serve Babylon would do so while remaining on its own land.
- There is no statement in Scripture that says the Seventy Years ended when the Jews returned to their land. There is nothing that says the Seventy Years ended for the other nations when Jews returned to their land.
- There is no evidence that Jewish exiles returned in 537 BCE. If there was any evidence, the Watchtower article would have presented it.
- The WTS accepts 539 BCE as the date of Babylon’s fall, relying solely on the evidences provided by classical historians, the chronology of the period, and on the ability of scholars to calculate astronomical data. The astronomical tablet relied on by the WTS is the most problematic. It contains admitted errors, and is likely a prediction rather than the record of an observation.
- If all that the WTS needs is “most scholars agree” to accept 537 BCE as the date Jews returned, then there is a strong argument for 587/586 BCE date of Jerusalem’s destruction, since there is universal agreement on that date. Scholars do not agree on the date of the Jews’ return.
- Scripture says that the 70 years would be spent serving Babylon, and that the power and dominion of Babylon would be removed at the end. This took place on the night that the city fell in October 539 BCE.
- The WTS says that their 70 Years started when several murderous Jews and their entourage entered Egypt, not when Jerusalem was destroyed. The WTS is incapable of proving that these Jews entered Egypt two months after Jerusalem’s destruction. The numerous events listed in the Bible as taking place between the destruction of Jerusalem and the exit of those Jews requires a far longer period, and is likely linked to the return of Nebuchadnezzar 4 years after Jerusalem’s destruction.
- It is a lie to say that the conventional date of Jerusalem’s destruction is based solely on calculations from Ptolemy’s list of kings (Royal Canon) and classical sources. There is a wide range of contemporary data, including tens of thousands of commercial and administration tablets.
- If questions must be raised on the validity of the records provided by classical historians and by Ptolemy’s list of kings, the WTS cannot arrive at 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon.
Babylonian Chronology: First and Last dates

BY PARKER AND DUBBERSTEIN

This publication by Parker and Dubberstein is cited by Insight as authoritative, and page 14 is specifically referred to.

Babylonian Chronology, 626 B.C. - A.D. 75

By Parker and Dubberstein

KING'S REIGNS

LAMADUR-Marodunu

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
1/11 acc. (May 3, 556), Uruk (unsigned text NBO 4534, ibid.).
1/11 acc. (May 25, 556), Sippar? (Ereets, op. cit., Laborovarnick, No. 2).

Evidence for End of Reign
1/11 acc. (June 17, 256), Szassar (Strasser in Acc. du bateau de Ctesiphon et d'Alexandrie, 2, partie [Leide, 1893], section sémitique [8] at end, No. 15).
1/11 acc. (June 20, 556), Sippar? (Ereets, op. cit., Laborovarnick, No. 1).
Labash-Marduk seems to have been recognized as king only in May and June, 556, and even then possibly not throughout Babylonia (see under Nabu- nadinu). Borsippa's own manuscript uses a numeral instead of the spell-out number, confusion between 8 (9) and 2 could easily have arisen; hence the original text may have said 2 months.

NABU-NADINU

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
1/11 acc. (May 25, 556), Nabu-Adadu-ana (Clay, EE VII 1, No. 39).
1/11 acc. (June 9, 556), Sippar? (YAS VI 65; see Kugler, SSB II 406-5).
1/11 acc. (June 30, 556), Sippar (Strasser, Nabunadinu, No. 1).
1/11 acc. (July 1, 558), Ur (Doughterry, GEN, No. 13).

Nabunadinu may have been a successor for the throne almost from the death of Nergal-bazar-ib. By the end of June, 556, he was sole ruler of Babylon and Sippar.

Evidence for End of Reign
VI/17 acc. to VI/23 acc. (Aug. 11 to Sept. 25, 539), chiefly from Babylon and Sippar (Strasser, Nabunadinu, Nos. 1846-52).

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
VI/21 acc. (Sept. 3, 539), Ur (Britt, 2C, XII 121; 1 line reads VI/6, but in line 1 the date is given as VI/16/7; year 18 is impossible, so we assume either a scribal error or an error by Contenau).

VI/21 acc. (Sept. 2, 539), Ur (unsigned text MLC 1018, Goetts, op. cit., p. 44).

VI/17 acc. (Sept. 30, 539), Larrus (unsigned text YBC 7385, ibid.).
VI/17 acc. (Oct. 4, 539), Ur (Doughterry, GEN, No. 199).

VI/17 acc. (Oct. 13, 539), Ur (Doughterry, GCG II 106).

Nabu-Nadinu is known from a text (MLC 408), which does not mention the OB period, and in view of known facts this date cannot be accepted. No. 1055 is dated to X (together with p. 44) double the correctness of the date.

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/1/1 (Apr. 14, 522), Nabushadu? (Strasser in ZfS IV 123-25 and 148 f., No. 2).
X/1/1 (Apr. 14, 522), Babylon (YAS VII 117 f., ibid., No. 1). X/2 (May 30, 522), Babylon (YAS VII 117 f. note 4).
X/2/1 (June 16, 522), Sippar (Strasser in ZfS IV 123-25 and 148 f., No. 5).

X/2/1 (April 17, 522), entry in the records of Sennacherib (Belostan, § 11).
On the conclusion of accession year and year 1 in this reign see Cameron in JCSL LVIII (1941) 214 f.

Evidence for End of Reign
X/2/1 (Sept. 9, 522), Babylon (Strasser in ZfS IV 123-25 and 151 f., No. 5).

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/2/1 (Sept. 22, 522), Babylon (ibid., pp. 126 and 152, No. 9).
X/2/1 (Sept. 22, 522), Babylon (ibid., No. 4).

Evidence for End of Reign
X/2/1 (Oct. 9, 522), Babylon (ibid., No. 4).

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/2/2 (Nov. 3, 522), Babylon (Strasser, Notchashdram, No. 1, gives as 4th month). O. G. Carniero in JCSL LVIII 317 f. suggests as probable an emendation to 7th; a recent collation by S. C. J. S. B. Ashby has given it as 7th.

Evidence for End of Reign
X/2/2 (Oct. 9, 522), Babylon (ibid., No. 4).

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/2/2 (Nov. 3, 522), Asipippa (Kümmel, NABPT, No. 6).

Evidence for End of Reign
X/2/2 (Dec. 1, 522), Babylon (Strasser, Notchashdram, No. 9).

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/2/2 (Dec. 1, 522), Babylon (ibid., No. 10).

Evidence for End of Reign
X/2/2 (Dec. 1, 522), Darius defeats Notchashdram III at the Tigre River (Belostan, § 18).

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/2/2 (Dec. 1, 522), Babylon (ibid., No. 9).

Evidence for End of Reign
X/2/2 (Dec. 1, 522), Darius defeats Notchashdram at the Esqueaths River near Xassu, shortly thereafter he captures and kills Notchashdram in Babylon (Belostan, §§ 19 and 20).

DARIUS I

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/2/4, 25 and X/4 acc. (Dec. 22, 522, and Jan. 9, 10, and 21, 522), Babylon (F. E. Weissenbach, Babylonische Texte, p. 15, No. 3). These four dates are mentioned in the text, which is not dated but was probably written in month XI. Hence this text does not prove conclusively that Darius already held Babylon on December 22, 522.

Evidence for End of Reign
X/2/4 acc. (Feb. 4, 521), Sippar (Strasser, Darius, No. 1).
X/3/1 acc. (Feb. 9, 521), Kutha (unpublished text, Oriental Institute A 729). Darius I continued to be recognized as king in Babylonia until X/1/1 (Sept. 8, 521). Then came the revolt of Notchashdram IV.

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/1/1 acc. (Aug. 26, 521), Babylon (ibid., No. 17).

Evidence for End of Reign
X/1/1 acc. (Aug. 26, 521), Sippar (Strasser, Darius, No. 17).

Evidence for Beginning of Reign
X/1/1 (Sept. 8, 521), Babylon (ibid., No. 18).

Evidence for End of Reign
X/1/1 (Sept. 8, 521), Sippar (ibid., No. 19).