

**“Bible Chronology”
and the
“Seventy Years”**

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“Bible Chronology” and the “Seventy Years”

Much has been written that shows the significance of the neo-Babylonian chronology to the Watchtower Society [WTS].

The major point of contention is the date of Jerusalem’s destruction. While the WTS dates the destruction at 607 BCE, all others set Jerusalem’s destruction at 587/586 BCE.

To arrive at its date of 607 BCE, the WTS commences with the accepted date of 539 BCE.¹ The WTS then assumes the first returnees assembled at the site of the destroyed temple on Tishri 1 (October 5) 537 BCE. The WTS then declares this event marked the conclusion of the Bible’s “Seventy Years”.

This seventy-year period is the WTS’s “*Bible Chronology*”. They say this Bible Chronology is superior to the secular uninspired chronology provided by sources such as the clay tablets and chronologists, particular Claudius Ptolemy.

The WTS says Bible Chronology teaches there was a seventy-year period in which the land remained unused and uninhabited. Seventy years before 537 BCE is 607 BCE, so that is the date when the land started its complete “Sabbath rest”. They say that the seventy-year period began two months after Jerusalem was destroyed, at the moment the last occupants of Judah entered Egypt in 607 BCE.

Purpose of this Study

The WTS promotes its explanation of the “70 years” and the destruction of Jerusalem as providing the “Bible Chronology”.

This Study contrasts the Bible writers’ explanation for the destruction of Jerusalem with the WTS’s position. It also shows that the Bible writers do not support the WTS’s explanation of the “70 years”.

These show that the WTS has no right to claim there is a “Bible Chronology” which contradicts the accepted secular neo-Babylonian chronology.

Religious reason given for Israel’s demise

While historians state that Israel was destroyed because of the overwhelming might of the Assyrians, the religious scribes stated that God actively caused that nation’s demise because the people did not obey the words of the prophets. In the book of Kings, the Judean scribes wrote that their northern neighbour Israel fell because of its failure to keep to the terms of the Covenant.

All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God. ... They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations. ... They built themselves high places in all their towns. They set up sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. At every high place they burned incense, as the nations whom the LORD had driven out before them had done. They did wicked things that provoked the LORD to anger. They worshiped idols, though the LORD had said, “You shall not do this.”²

Religious reason given for Jerusalem’s destruction

To the historian, Jerusalem was overrun and destroyed because Babylon was the region’s superpower while Judah was a minor subservient nation.

¹ Much has been written on the WTS’s acceptance of that date from secular sources while at the same time it rejects those very same sources.

² 2 Kings 17:7-12 (all Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version* [NIV])

But Judah’s religious leadership put forward a very different explanation for the destruction. They taught that God actively brought about the destruction of his city and the temple where he dwelt because for centuries no one had listened to the religious leaders.

The destruction was not the fault of the religious leaders. Their prophets³ had repeatedly warned this would happen if the royal household and the people did not heed everything that God’s prophets were telling them.

The religious leadership controlled the written record, and their religious theological explanation for Jerusalem’s destruction exonerated them from any blame. This laid the foundation for the subsequent domination by the religious elite which, in turn, prevented the resurgence of the Hebrew kings.

Centuries of warnings

The religious scribes wrote that for hundreds of years, the Hebrew prophets had repeatedly warned that if their message of religious obedience was not heeded, God would destroy the very people he had chosen and he would remove them from the land he had given. The scribes said this message had been given at the time of Moses and was continually repeated since then by God’s prophets.

But the people steadfastly ignored the prophets, so ultimately God had no option but to carry out the threatened judgement. The religious leaders could not be blamed for the calamities that befell Israel and Judah. If only the people had listened to them.

The scribes of Judah wrote that the northern nation of Israel was destroyed because every ruler of the nation was evil; they had failed to heed the prophets’ warnings. But Judah was a worse offender, for although the nation had witnessed the outcome upon Israel that resulted from their disobedience to the prophets, Judah remained determined to walk the path trodden by Israel. God’s true prophet Jeremiah therefore warned Judah that God would wipe out that nation just as one wipes out a dirty dish.

Had the people of Judah genuinely changed their ways and obeyed the prophets, wrote the scribes, God would not have carried out his threat. The threat was avoidable. It was only carried out on Jerusalem when King Zedekiah refused to heed the message from God’s true prophet Jeremiah. Thus God carried out the threat his prophets had given for centuries, and he caused the city and its temple to be destroyed.

Even after they had witnessed the execution of God’s judgement upon Jerusalem, the people who remained in Judah continued to rebel against the express instruction of God’s true prophet Jeremiah, announcing to him that they would not listen. They continued to rebel after they entered Egypt.

If the people had listened to the warnings God’s prophets uttered over the centuries, the destructions would have been avoided. That is the sole message given by the Bible writers over Jerusalem’s destruction.

Not one of the prophets’ warnings linked Jerusalem’s destruction to a chronology. The WTS has a chronology that locks the destruction of Jerusalem within a chronology, but ***none of the recorded warnings by the prophets spoke of that event in terms of a time frame.***

Leviticus

The 26th chapter of Leviticus provides the religious foundation for the Hebrew nations’ experiences at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

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 bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it.

³ A “prophet” did not necessarily predict; their primary role was preaching.

I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.

If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. ...

If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy (*kārat*) your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted (*šāmēm*).

If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. ...

If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over.

You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you.

I will turn your cities into ruins (*horbâ*) and lay waste (*šāmēm*) your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.

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 (*š^emāmâ*), and your cities will lie in ruins (*horbâ*). 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 (*šāmēm*), the land will have the rest (*šābat*) it did not have during the sabbaths (*šabbāt*) 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.⁴

Deuteronomy

The scribes recorded that God’s warning of destruction was given early, in Moses’ time. Deuteronomy tells the obligations that the Lord set before his people. Only when the nation fully obeyed the obligations set out by the prophets, would they be blessed by him.

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ... Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.⁵

⁴ Lev. 26:3 – 46

⁵ Deut 28:1,14

I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.⁶

However, if the people did not obey their message, the nation would receive God’s curses and punishment.⁷ This would ultimately result in their being removed from the land he was about to give them. As early as at Deuteronomy, the condition was thus laid out that disobedience would result in their destruction.

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.⁸

Repeated warnings by the prophets

Throughout the centuries before the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, many prophets warned the nation of the dire consequences of disobedience to God. Prophets whose messages have been preserved include Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Because Micah had earlier warned Jerusalem of its threatened destruction, Jeremiah’s life was spared when he uttered the same warning message.

Joel

Regardless of whether the prophet Joel lived in the 9th century BCE or following the Exile, his message to Judah is clear and powerful. The invasion was the “day of the LORD”.

Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? ... A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white. ... Surely the joy of mankind is withered away. ...

Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. ... Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand — a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come.

Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste— nothing escapes them.⁹

Isaiah

Calling Jerusalem by the name *Ariel*, Isaiah wrote of the city being encamped about, under siege, brought low to the dust, and almost silenced.

Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David settled! ... I will besiege Ariel; she will mourn and lament, she will be to me like an

⁶ Deut 30:15-16

⁷ Deut 28:15-68

⁸ Deut. 8:19-20

⁹ Joel 1:2, 6-7, 12, 15; 2:1-3

altar hearth. I will encamp against you all around; I will encircle you with towers and set up my siege works against you.

Brought low, you will speak from the ground; your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will come ghostlike from the earth; out of the dust your speech will whisper.¹⁰

Isaiah condemned Jerusalem for not listening to the religious leaders but to the voices of others.

The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”¹¹

O Jerusalem, ... These double calamities have come upon you—who can comfort you? —ruin and destruction, famine and sword.¹²

Zephaniah

Zephaniah came after Isaiah and was contemporary with the start of Jeremiah’s work, lending support to him as they sparked Josiah’s reforms.

“I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. ... Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation, before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD comes upon you, before the day of the LORD’S wrath comes upon you. ...

I said to the city, ‘Surely you will fear me and accept correction!’ ... But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did. ... I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger.¹³

Habakkuk

Habakkuk most likely was a contemporary of Zephaniah and Jeremiah. After Habakkuk complained about the evil state at Jerusalem (under king Jehoiakim), the Lord responded:

For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people.¹⁴

Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon at the time Jehoiachin was removed from the throne of Judah.

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations. Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. ... I myself will withdraw my favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you. ...

¹⁰ Isa. 29:1-4

¹¹ Isa. 28:13-14

¹² Isa. 51:17, 19

¹³ Zep. 1:4; 2:1-2; 3:7-8

¹⁴ Hab. 1:5-7

“I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by.”¹⁵

When Ezekiel received the report of Jerusalem’s fall five months after the event, he directed his warning to the people who remained in Judah:

In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has fallen!” ...

Then the word of the LORD came to [Ezekiel]: ... “Say this to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 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, and her proud strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them.

Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done.”¹⁶

Judah worse than Israel

Judah was considered even more evil, since its people had seen Israel’s fate yet Judah remained determined to walk the same pathway.

I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery.

Because Israel’s immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood.

In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense,” declares the LORD. The LORD said to me, “Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah.”¹⁷

Judah’s evil King Manasseh

The prophets at the time of Judah’s king Manasseh called him evil because he followed the ways of his pagan neighbours, and he had disobeyed the requirements repeatedly set out by the prophets. They warned the king what God would do.

Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. ...

Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.

I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their foes, because they have done evil in my eyes and have provoked me to

¹⁵ Eze. 5:8, 9, 11, 14

¹⁶ Eze. 33:21, 23, 27-29

¹⁷ Jer. 3:8-11

anger from the day their forefathers came out of Egypt until this day.”¹⁸

Jeremiah said the outcome could be avoided

The prophets’ message showed that the threatened destruction would happen *if the people rejected* the Lord’s message. *If the people relented* from their evil ways, *God would not carry out his threat*. The outcome depended on the people’s response to the prophets’ warning. God’s action depended on the people’s response to the prophets.

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.

And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be
built up and planted,
and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me,
then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

“Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in
Jerusalem, ‘This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a
disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your
evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your
actions.’”¹⁹

Jeremiah reiterated the repeated warning made by previous prophets that God would destroy the city, the land and its people if they continued to disobey, but the threat would not be carried out if the people obeyed. The outcome lay squarely in their hands.

Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people of Judah and to all those
living in Jerusalem: For twenty-three years ... the word of the LORD
has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you
have not listened.

And though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you
again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention.

The [prophets] said, “Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and
your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the LORD gave to
you and your fathers for ever and ever. Do not follow other gods to
serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your
hands have made. Then I will not harm you.”

“But you did not listen to me,” declares the LORD, “and you have
provoked me with what your hands have made, and you have brought
harm to yourselves.”²⁰

When Jeremiah announced that Jerusalem would be destroyed, he was seized and his life threatened. He was saved from death because the same message had been given by earlier prophets, including Micah of Moresheth and Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath Jearim²¹.

The “Elders of the Land” convinced the members of the Temple, the officials of the Royal household, and the people that this message by Jeremiah was not new. It had repeatedly been given to earlier kings of Judah.

¹⁸ 2 Kings 21: 11 – 15

¹⁹ Jer. 18:7-11

²⁰ Jer. 25:2-7

²¹ Jer. 26:1-20

Some of the **elders of the land** stepped forward and said to the entire assembly of people, “Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: “ ‘Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.’ ”²²

Jeremiah introduced a new element

While Jeremiah continued the theme from the earlier prophets (“*This whole country will become a desolate wasteland*”), he added a feature that could not be avoided:

*and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.*²³

After repeating the message that had been given for centuries by the prophets, he added the decree stating that those nations which were subservient to Babylon would remain so for 70 years.

Judah would prevent Judah becoming a “desolate wasteland” if Judah listened to God’s prophets. But the decree that the nations would “serve Babylon for seventy years” would not be revoked. The nations could not evade that feature of Jeremiah’s announcement; they would definitely serve Babylon for 70 years.

The nations included Judah, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon.²⁴ Their response to this edict determined the *severity* of the servitude, but they would serve Babylon for 70 years. They could only control the intensity of that servitude, which they could serve while they remained on their own land. *There was no need for any nation, including Judah, to be wiped out for it to serve Babylon for the decreed 70 years.*

Then **send word to the kings** of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon ... Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. ...

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.

I [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.

²² Jer. 26:18

²³ Jer. 25:11

²⁴ The Greek (LXX) of Jeremiah 25 is quite different to the Hebrew (MT). The LXX has fewer verses; it incorporates verses that appear much later in the MT version; and the MT and LXX give a different sense to the seventy years of servitude. The MT presents Judah as one of several nations that had to serve their Babylon overlord, whereas in the LXX Judah is the lone servant of Babylon.

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.²⁵

When the Seventy Years commenced

The Seventy Years of servitude to Babylon began when the Lord summoned Babylon to invade all the nations. There is no need to seek for any moment outside the context of the immediate Scripture.

“Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,” declares the LORD, “and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations.”²⁶

According to Jeremiah 25, the seventy years of servitude to Babylon started at the same time for all nations; it happened when the Lord summoned Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps it could be argued that the “Seventy Years” began at the moment the Lord made the decision to summon Babylon.

The lack of precision of the scriptures indicates that the exact moment was not an issue for them. Jer. 46:1-2 could be inferred as relevant, since the battle at Carchemish marked the event which saw Babylon defeat the region’s other super power, Egypt. The “seventy years” also ended at the same moment for all nations – at the moment Persia took over from Babylon.

All nations were going to suffer

Jeremiah told the nations that the Lord would summon “all the peoples of the north” along with Nebuchadnezzar against Judah and all its surrounding nations, to destroy them all.

I will summon all the peoples of the north AND my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,” declares the LORD, “and I will bring them against this land [Judah] 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.²⁷

The Lord was going to “**completely destroy THEM**” – not just Judah, but all those nations – and they were **ALL to become an “everlasting ruin”**, wiped out. This is expanded in the verses that immediately follow this edict.

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make **ALL THE NATIONS TO WHOM I SEND YOU** drink it.²⁸ ... All the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other—**ALL THE KINGDOMS ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH**. And after all of them, the king of Sheshach [Babylon] will drink it too.

²⁵ Jer. 27:1-3, 6-14

²⁶ Jer. 25:8-9

²⁷ Jer. 25:9

²⁸ “Jerusalem, ... Egypt; ... all the kings of Uz; ... the Philistines (those of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the people left at Ashdod); Edom, Moab and Ammon; all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; the kings of the coastlands across the sea; Dedan, Tema, Buz and all who are in distant places; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the foreign people who live in the desert; all the kings of Zimri, Elam and Media; and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other—all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. And after all of them, the king of Sheshach (Babylon) will drink it too.” (Jer. 25:18-26)

“Then tell THEM, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, get drunk and vomit, and FALL TO RISE NO MORE because of the sword I will send among you.’ But IF THEY REFUSE TO TAKE THE CUP from your hand and drink, tell them, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: YOU MUST DRINK IT!’

“See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down A SWORD UPON ALL WHO LIVE ON THE EARTH, declares the LORD Almighty.”²⁹

All nations were to be given the cup filled with the wrath of the Lord. Not just Judah.

False prophets at home

After Nebuchadnezzar removed Jehoiachin from the throne of Judah and exiled him to Babylon, false prophets in Jerusalem and in Babylon predicted a swift end to the situation, with the swift return of Jehoiachin and the restitution of the temple artefacts.

Countering the false prophet at Jerusalem, Jeremiah said the people could only control the *intensity* of the Babylonian yoke. Rebellion would see their servitude to Babylon intensify.

This was played out between Jeremiah and the false prophet Hananiah. When Hananiah broke the yoke of straps and crossbars worn by Jeremiah, he said the Lord would break the yoke of bondage to Babylon within two years. In doing this, Hananiah acknowledged that the yoke of *servitude to Babylon* was *already* in place.

Early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah ... (said) “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the LORD’S house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon.

I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘for **I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.**’ ” ...

Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it, and he said before all the people, “This is what the LORD says: ‘In the same way will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of **all the nations** within two years.’ ” ...

Jeremiah returned with a stronger yoke made of iron, thereby signifying that not only would they definitely serve Babylon, but that the servitude would worsen.

Shortly after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: “Go and tell Hananiah, ‘This is what the LORD says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of **all these nations to make them serve** Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and **they WILL serve him.**’ ”³⁰

²⁹ Jer. 25:15, 26-29

³⁰ Jer. 28:1-4, 10-14

False prophets at Babylon

Jeremiah then wrote to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, telling them not to listen to the false prophets at Babylon who were promising swift release. He instructed them to settle down in Babylon because her allocated 70 years of domination had been pronounced and the Lord’s decree would be fulfilled.

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ...

“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.”³¹

Here was a command that the previously decreed Seventy Years was in place and would definitely continue until its predetermined end. He was not speaking of the destruction that could possibly be experienced by Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord was speaking to the exiles in Babylon, and they read the letter that Jeremiah had sent.

“Jeremiah from Anathoth ... 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.’”³²

The people in Babylon understood that the balance of the “seventy years” meant their plight would continue for a “long time”. There was no way of avoiding the Lord’s decree, which was in operation before the city was destroyed or the land was destroyed. The only controllable factor that lay in the nations’ hand was the degree of their servitude, which depended on their willing acceptance of the Lord’s decree. The point of Jeremiah’s letter was that there would be no swift release, because the decreed 70 years of servitude was in place and it would continue.

The WTS “Bible Chronology” requires the destruction of Jerusalem before the period could start. But when God’s prophet Jeremiah told the people to settle down because the Seventy Years would continue to run its course, he wrote this letter years many years before Jerusalem was destroyed.

Jeremiah’s message would have had no meaning for the exiles if he gave them a 70 year timescale for the time they would be there if the 70-year period had not started or if nobody knew whether it was going to start.

Judah was “without men” before Zedekiah was dethroned

Speaking before Jerusalem fell, the people were saying that the land was already desolate and “without men” **because** Babylon controlled the country.

This is what the LORD says: ... “Once more fields will be bought in this land **of which you say, ‘It is a desolate waste, without men or animals, for it has been handed over to the Babylonians.**”³³

Speaking before Jerusalem fell, the people said that the place was already “without men”:

³¹ Jer. 29:4-6, 8-10

³² Jer. 29:27-28

³³ Jer. 32:43

This is what the LORD says: “You say about this place, ‘It is a **desolate waste, without men** or animals.’ Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, **inhabited by neither men nor animals**, there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness.” ...

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “In this place, **desolate and without men** or animals—in all its towns there will again be pastures for shepherds to rest their flocks.”³⁴

When the people of Judah said the land was already “without men”, they were speaking of the situation before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. They used that expression **because Babylon controlled the country**. The people of Judah considered that the land *already* had no “men or animals”.³⁵

An avoidable destruction and an unavoidable servitude

If the people listened to and obeyed the prophets, the city’s destruction would be avoided.

God’s prophet Jeremiah decreed that the nations, including Judah, could not avoid serving Babylon for 70 years. Their response to that edict determined the intensity of their servitude. Should a nation obey that edict, they would serve their 70 years of servitude while they remained in their own land.

The contrasts between these avoidable and unavoidable situations are demonstrated at the time when Jeremiah confronted Zedekiah while Babylon was attacking Jerusalem. Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah 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 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.’” ...

But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me: ... this city will be burned down.”³⁶

Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin (*h’rbâ*)?³⁷

However, the king did not listen to God’s prophet. Once again the religious scribes absolved the religious leaders from any blame, but laid it fully on Zedekiah’s shoulders.

The constant theme threads from Moses to Jeremiah: obey the true prophets of God or he will cause total annihilation of his people, their city, and their land. The ultimate test came with the requirement to serve Babylon for 70 years. Had Judah accepted the command to serve Babylon for 70 years, the city would not have been destroyed. The “Seventy Years” did not require destruction or desolation, and there was no need for the desolation that ultimately came to last for the full 70 years.

The WTS is thus incorrect when it says the “Seventy Years” required annihilation of city, towns, people and land before it could begin.

³⁴ Jer. 33:10 – 12

³⁵ For a detailed explanation, see pages 66 – 71 of http://www.jwstudies.com/They_would_not_listen_Version_1.pdf

³⁶ Jer. 38:17-18, 21, 23

³⁷ Jer. 27:17

The local administration

Following the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar set up a local administration with the Hebrew Gedaliah as the regional Governor. There was every intention that people would be left in Judah to be governed.

When the people heard that Judah would be directly administered by Babylon, Jews returned and joined them.

A governor was appointed, and Judah was incorporated into the administrative structure of the Babylonian empire (2 Kgs. 25:22-41). With the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 the state of Judah ceased to exist as an independent political entity, and a new and important phase in Jewish history began.³⁸

The people who remained tended the land and harvested an abundance of wine and fruit.

When all the army officers and their men who were still in the open country heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam as governor over the land and had put him in charge of the men, women and children who were the poorest in the land and who had not been carried into exile to Babylon, they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. ...

(Gedaliah) took an oath to reassure them and their men. “Do not be afraid to **serve** the Babylonians, “ he said. “**Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon**, and it will go well with you.

“*I myself will stay at Mizpah to represent you before the Babylonians who come to us, but you are to harvest the wine, summer fruit and oil, and put them in your storage jars, and **live in the towns you have taken over.**”*

When all the Jews in Moab, Ammon, Edom and all the other countries heard that the king of Babylon had *left a remnant in Judah* and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, as governor over them, they all came back to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, from all the countries where they had been scattered. And ***they harvested an abundance of wine and summer fruit.***³⁹

The people of the land had gone to the towns and they harvested the fruitage of the land, while Mizpah was the administrative capital of Judah. Given the time that would have taken, it is believed by several scholars, including Hebrew, that Gedaliah remained Babylon’s representative for four years before he was murdered.⁴⁰

The Jewish governor Gedaliah ben Ahikam, who was murdered on the 3rd of Tishrei (582 BC) by Ishmael ben Nethaniah. ... The Talmudic sages later decided to institute a fast day in his memory—to teach us that the death of a righteous man (*tzadik*) is like the burning of the house of God. (*Rosh Hashana 18:2*).⁴¹

This links the murder of Gedaliah with the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in his 23rd year. That would have provided ample reason for Babylon’s concern and intervention.

³⁸ *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, Andrew Mein, Oxford Theological Monographs, p. 53

³⁹ Jer. 40:7-12

⁴⁰ http://www.jwstudies.com/They_would_not_listen_Version_1.pdf, pages 13-14

⁴¹ *Israel Today Magazine*, <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/default.aspx?tabid=139&view=item&idx=1059>

They refused to listen

Following the assassination of Gedaliah and the attempt to flee to the Ammonites, survivors from Mizpah asked Jeremiah to find out whether the Lord wanted them to stay in Judah. Jeremiah returned to the group and told them that the Lord *commanded* them to remain in Judah. But in keeping with their long history of disobedience, these people would not listen, and they disobeyed the Lord’s explicit command to remain in Judah. Once more the religious scribes blamed others for the state of Judah.

Then all the army officers, including Johanan son of Kareah and Jezaniah son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest approached Jeremiah the prophet and said to him, “ ... Pray that **the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do.**” ...

Then they said to Jeremiah, “...**Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God,** to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for **we will obey the LORD our God.**” ...

[Jeremiah] said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition, says: ‘**If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you, for I am grieved over the disaster I have inflicted on you.** Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear. Do not be afraid of him, declares the LORD, for I am with you and will save you and deliver you from his hands. I will show you compassion so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your land.’

“ ... O remnant of Judah, the LORD has told you, ‘Do not go to Egypt.’ ...

The arrogant men said to Jeremiah, “You are lying! The LORD our God has not sent you ...”

So Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers and all the people disobeyed the LORD’S command to stay in the land of Judah. ... So they entered Egypt in disobedience to the LORD. (Jer. 42: 1 – 16, 19, 43: 1 – 4, 7)

The WTS wishes to make it appear that the people who went into Egypt were the final occupants of Judah. However, the group were some of the residents of Mizpah. They were concerned at the repercussions from Babylon at the murder of the regional governor, Gedaliah.

Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers who were with him led away all the **survivors from Mizpah whom he had recovered from Ishmael** son of Nethaniah after he had assassinated Gedaliah son of Ahikam: the soldiers, women, children and court officials he had brought from Gibeon.

And they went on, stopping at Geruth Kimham near Bethlehem on their way to Egypt to escape the Babylonians. They were afraid of them because Ishmael son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land.⁴²

⁴² Jer. 41:16-18

Babylon had to quell disturbances in Judah five years after Zedekiah was removed.

This is the number of the people Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile: in the seventh year, 3,023 Jews; in Nebuchadnezzar’s eighteenth year, 832 people from Jerusalem; *in his twenty-third year, 745 Jews* taken into exile by Nebuzaradan the commander of the imperial guard. There were 4,600 in all.⁴³

Clearly people were still living on the land, as the Lord had commanded and as Jeremiah had expected.

When the Returnees first met at the temple site, they were in fear of the people who surrounded them. The Returnees were not popular with the People of the Land, their opponent Judahites who had remained in Judah. Babylon’s strategy had been to remove the people of power and influence.

Despite their *fear of the peoples around them*, [the Returnees] built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices.⁴⁴

The Jews who went into Egypt still “would not listen”

The people who went to Egypt continued the evil practices of their fathers. The message given to God’s people throughout the centuries was still not being heeded.

This word came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews living in Lower Egypt —... “You saw the great disaster I brought on **Jerusalem and on all the towns** of Judah. Today they lie deserted and in ruins because of the evil they have done.

“They provoked me to anger by burning incense and by worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your fathers ever knew. Again and again I sent my servants the prophets, who said, ‘Do not do this detestable thing that I hate!’

“**But they did not listen or pay attention**; they did not turn from their wickedness or stop burning incense to other gods. Therefore, my fierce anger was poured out; it raged against **the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem** and made them the desolate ruins they are today. ...

“Why provoke me to anger with what your hands have made, burning incense to other gods ... Have you forgotten the wickedness committed by your fathers and by the kings and queens of Judah and the wickedness committed by you and your wives in the land of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem? To this day they have not humbled themselves or shown reverence, nor have they followed my law and the decrees I set before you and your fathers.” ...

“Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am determined to bring disaster on you and to destroy all Judah. I will take away the remnant of Judah who were determined to go to Egypt to settle there. ...

I will punish those who live in Egypt with the sword, famine and plague, as I punished Jerusalem.” ...

⁴³ Jer. 52:28-30

⁴⁴ Ezra 3:3

Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, ... said to Jeremiah, “***We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD!*** ...

“We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. ...”

The women added, “When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her?”

Then Jeremiah said ... “When the LORD could no longer endure your wicked actions and the detestable things you did, your land became an object of cursing and a desolate waste without inhabitants, as it is today. Because you have burned incense and have sinned against the LORD and have not obeyed him or followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see.”⁴⁵

The end of the “70 years”

The Seventy Years were set to end as soon as Babylon’s dominance ended. It could not end before, it could not end later. The nations’ servitude ran its course, despite the claims of false prophets at Jerusalem and Babylon who predicted an early release.

Judah and its neighbours were to willingly serve Babylon until its power was removed, with the promise that when the Seventy Years had ended (fulfilled), Babylon would receive its punishment.

“When the **seventy years are fulfilled** (Heb: כְּמֵלֵאוֹת from *mālē’*), I will **punish the king of Babylon and his nation**, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,” declares the LORD, “and will make it desolate forever.

“I will bring upon that land [Babylon] all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. **They themselves [Babylon] will be enslaved** by many nations and great kings; I will repay them [Babylon] according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”⁴⁶

The Hebrew word *mālē’*, its form rendered here as “fulfilled”, means “completed”. *mālē’* broadly means “to fill, be full, be fulfilled” and can carry either a spatial or temporal [time] sense.

The ending of the Seventy Years also meant that the Lord would “fulfil (וְהִקְמִיתִי from *qûm*)” his promise to bring them back to their homelands.

This is what the LORD says: “**When seventy years are completed** (מְלֵאוֹת from *mālē’*) for Babylon, I will come to you and **fulfill** (וְהִקְמִיתִי from *qûm*) my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.”⁴⁷

All nations will serve [Nebuchadnezzar] and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; **then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.**⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Jer. 44:1-17, 19, 20, 22, 23

⁴⁶ Jer. 25:12-14

⁴⁷ Jer. 29:10

⁴⁸ Jer. 27:7

Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields! **The LORD has stirred up the kings of the Medes, because his purpose is to destroy Babylon.** The LORD will take vengeance, vengeance for his temple. Lift up a banner against the walls of Babylon! Reinforce the guard, station the watchmen, prepare an ambush! The LORD will carry out his purpose, **his decree against the people of Babylon.**⁴⁹

The superiority of Babylon’s kingdom came to its *numbered* end when the city fell to the Medes and Persians, and Babylon ruled no longer.

“**God has numbered the days** of your reign and brought it to an end. ... **Your 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.⁵⁰

This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The LORD, the God of heaven, **has given me all the kingdoms of the earth**”.⁵¹

Thus, in accordance with the Lord’s promise, Babylon’s dominating kingdom ended. Its allotted seventy years of unchallenged supremacy was gone. The power of its kingdom passed to another kingdom.

Daniel and the end (*mālē’*) of the Seventy Years

I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last (לְמֵלֵאוֹת from *mālē’*) seventy years.⁵²

Thus when Daniel studied Jeremiah, he saw there that twice Jeremiah said God would redeem his people after Babylon’s seventy years of supremacy had *ended (mālē’)*.

But when *the seventy years are fulfilled* (כִּמְלֵאוֹת from *mālē’*), *I will punish* the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,” declares the LORD.⁵³

This is what the LORD says: “*When seventy years are completed* (מְלֵאוֹת from *mālē’*) for Babylon, I will come to you and *fulfill* (וְהִקְמֹתִי from *qûm*) my gracious promise to bring you back to this place [Jerusalem].⁵⁴

Naturally, Daniel’s focus was on the ending (*mālē’*) of the period according to Jeremiah, not on its commencement.

[When it relates to time], (*mālē’*) refers to the *completion of a particular period* of time.⁵⁵

The expression לְמֵלֵאוֹת from *mālē’* at Daniel 9:2 is concerned with its sense of “time”. Daniel used forms of the Hebrew word *mālē’* twice. On each occasion, at Daniel 9:2 and at 10:3, he used *mālē’* in its time-related meaning of “the *completion* of a particular period of time”.

⁴⁹ Jer. 51:11, 12

⁵⁰ Dan. 5:26, 28, 30-31

⁵¹ Ezra 1:2

⁵² Dan 9:2

⁵³ Jer. 25:12

⁵⁴ Jer. 29:10

⁵⁵ *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, William Mounce, Zondervan 2006, art. “Fill”, p. 250

I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were *over* (עַד נְלֵאָתָהּ from *mālē*).⁵⁶

In his third use of *mālē*,⁵⁷ Jeremiah said the leaders of the flock will be slaughtered when their allotted day arrived. Once more the word refers to the ending of a set period, not to their length.

Weep and wail, you shepherds; roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock. For *your time* (יְמֵיכֶם from *yôm*) to be slaughtered *has come* (כִּי נְלֵאָתָהּ from *mālē*); you will fall and be shattered like fine pottery.⁵⁷

The expression “*time for his land comes*” in the following verse from Jeremiah carries the sense of “has arrived”.

All nations will serve [Nebuchadnezzar] and his son and his grandson until the time for his land *comes*; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.⁵⁸

Daniel prayed after the Seventy Years had ended (*mālē*)

Jerusalem by no accounts was desolate for seventy years. ... The RSV translates the verse so that the seventy years “must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem.” This translation at least leaves open the possibility that the seventy years were completed *before* the end of Jerusalem’s desolation (i.e., that the end of the desolation of Jerusalem was understood to be contingent upon the end of the seventy years).

And again there is the question as to the text to which Daniel was referring: Was it Jer. 25:11-12 or 29:10? It would seem that Jer. 29:10 was the source, since this text was part of a letter sent to the exiles (29:1), whereas Jer. 25:11-12 was not. ...

Neither Jer. 25:11-12 nor 29:10 specifically mentions the desolation of Jerusalem, although both 25:11 (referring to the *land*) and Dan 9:2 contain forms of the root *ḥrb* (“to desolate/desolation”).

An even more crucial question (and one which is easier to answer) is whether the end of the seventy years – from the standpoint of Dan 9 – is still future or not. The evidence supports the view that it is past and not future. For one thing, “the number” (LXX: *ton arithmon*) of years in 9:2 alludes to Dan 5, where vs. 26 of the LXX states that the time of Belshazzar’s kingdom has been numbered (*ērithmētai ho chronos sou tēs basileias*)⁵⁹. The Aramaic of this verse — *m^enē’ m^enāh ’ela’ malkūtāk* (“MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom”) — means virtually the same. This fact plus the fact that *arithmeō* and *arithmos* occur only in Dan 5 and 9 becomes more significant when one realizes that: (1) the seventy years in Jeremiah—especially in 29:10—refer specifically to the end of Babylon; (2) Dan 5 refers to the end of the Babylonian empire; and (3) Dan 9 occurs shortly after its end.

⁵⁶ Dan 10:3

⁵⁷ Jer. 25:34

⁵⁸ Jer. 27:7

⁵⁹ Cf. vs. 17 (LXX).

Also, the urgent confessional nature of Daniel’s prayer in 9:3-19 makes more sense when one understands the seventy years to be in the past. With the fact that Jer. 29:10 explicitly relates the seventy years to Babylon (and Dan 5 implicitly supports this view), it is no wonder that Daniel, in the first year of Darius the Mede, prayed a prayer of confession on behalf of all the exiles. The reason for this is clear: although the seventy years for Babylon were past, the exiles were still in Babylon. Thus, Daniel understood the return of the exiles to be contingent upon the end of Babylon as an independent nation. But the sins of all Israel (vss. 4-15) had delayed the fulfillment of this part of the prophecy. Daniel was thus attempting to remove the last impediment to the return of the exiles by his prayer on behalf of Israel.

This understanding—that the seventy years were over—clarifies several things in Dan 9. First, whatever Daniel considered the relation between the seventy years and the desolation of Jerusalem to have been in Jeremiah, the fact remained that though the seventy years were over, the desolation continued. In other words, whatever should have been the case had *not* been the case, and thus Daniel’s prayer received its impetus from this fact. Second, the repetition of the phrase “in the first year” (9:2), referring to Darius’ reign, becomes understandable when one realizes that Daniel was stunned by the fact that the exiles were still in Babylon *after* the overthrow of Babylon. And third, the reason for Daniel’s plea for God to “delay not” (vs. 19) becomes apparent when one adopts a terminated framework for the seventy years, whereas the alternative—the seventy years as about to end—would, in the light of this plea, appear to portray Daniel as impatient, demanding, and distrustful of God’s promises.

From the preceding discussion, one can see that Dan 9:2 does not demand the seventy years to be related to the desolation of Jerusalem historically.⁶⁰

The Chronicler and Cyrus

The servitude to Babylon came to its end when Babylon’s kingdom ended.

[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*.⁶¹

The Chronicler then said that the rest enjoyed by the land came to its end when seventy years ended. The end of Babylon’s rule ended the land’s sabbath rest.

The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation (*šammâ*) it rested, *until the seventy years were completed* (*mālē*’) in fulfillment (*mālē*’) of the word of the LORD spoken by **JEREMIAH**.⁶²

The rendering of this verse in the NIV text does not say that the land rested for seventy years; it says that the resting ended when the Seventy Years ended.

⁶⁰ *Jeremiah’s Seventy Years for Babylon: A Re-assessment. Part 1: The Scriptural Data*, Ross E. Winkle, Andrews University Seminary Studies 1987, Vol 25, No. 2, pp. 212-213

⁶¹ 2 Chr 36:20

⁶² 2 Chr 36:21

The only thing that changed to the land was the end of its domination by Babylon. Nothing changed physically to the land with that event, but the seventy years had been completed. Babylon no longer dominated the land, so its rest had ended.

Cyrus was empowered to make his decree because Babylon’s days had ended and the nations’ servitude had already ended.

Summary

The WTS marks the end of the “70 years” at the inauguration of the altar at Jerusalem. It says this took place on Tishri 1, 537 BCE. The WTS says that since the “70-year” period required a complete absence of people, it commenced two months after Jerusalem was destroyed. Hence the city fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 607 BCE. The WTS thus directly associates the destruction of Jerusalem with the start of the “70 years”.

Bible writers tell that the warning of the city’s destruction had been made for centuries, even as early as from Moses, and it happened because no one listened to their continuous message. They promised that if the people listened, God would relent of his decision and the city would be spared.

When Jeremiah, the true prophet from God, repeated the centuries-old message of doom, he added the message that all the nations would serve Babylon for 70 years. Jerusalem could be spared its threatened fate but the servitude to Babylon would continue until the day it would taste defeat. The destruction was avoidable but the 70 years of servitude to Babylon could not be avoided.

When a nation willingly accepted Jeremiah’s command to serve Babylon for 70 years, that nation would do so while remaining on its own land. The 70-year period began at the same time for all nations, at the moment God decided he had put them all into the hands of Babylon, his “servant”.

When Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon, false prophets at Jerusalem declared that the yoke of bondage would soon be over. Wearing a stronger yoke of iron, Jeremiah illustrated that refusal to accept God’s declaration would only see their bondage intensify.

Jeremiah told the people taken to Babylon that they must not listen to the false prophets living amongst them. They would not see a swift release, for God had declared that the 70 years of servitude to Babylon would continue, and run its full course. Because of that, they were to settle down, build houses, marry and have children.

Before Jerusalem was destroyed, the people were saying that the land of Judah was already without men or animals.

The 70 years ended at the moment Babylon fell to the Persians under Cyrus. Babylon’s numbered days had come to their end, and the nations no longer served Babylon. Because the period of servitude had ended, Cyrus was able to make his decree, allowing captives to return to their homelands.

Daniel saw that the 70 years had ended, so he turned his attention to the state of the sanctuary, which was finally restored in 517 BCE, exactly 70 years after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it.

The Bible’s true chronology thus fully harmonises with the chronology provided by the tens of thousands of clay tablets from Babylon, which includes business records, astronomical tablets, and chronologies such as is provided by the lady Adda Guppi stealae.

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