

# ***By the Rivers of Babylon***

## **The Jews Return Home**

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## Psalm 137

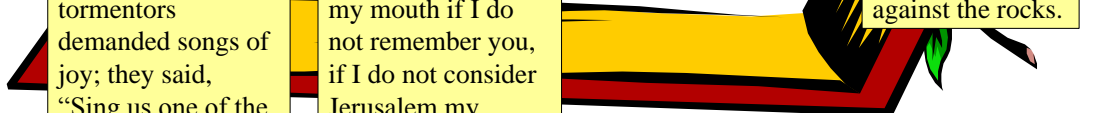
By the rivers of  
Babylon we sat and  
wept when we  
remembered Zion.

There on the  
poplars we hung  
our harps, for there  
our captors asked us  
for songs, our  
tormentors  
demanded songs of  
joy; they said,  
“Sing us one of the  
songs of Zion!”

How can we sing  
the songs of the  
LORD while in a  
foreign land?  
If I forget you, O  
Jerusalem, may my  
right hand forget its  
skill.  
May my tongue  
cling to the roof of  
my mouth if I do  
not remember you,  
if I do not consider  
Jerusalem my  
highest joy.

Remember, O  
LORD, what the  
Edomites did on the  
day Jerusalem fell.  
“Tear it down,” they  
cried, “tear it down  
to its foundations!”

O Daughter of  
Babylon, doomed  
to destruction,  
happy is he who  
repays you for  
what you have  
done to us—he  
who seizes your  
infants and  
dashes them  
against the rocks.

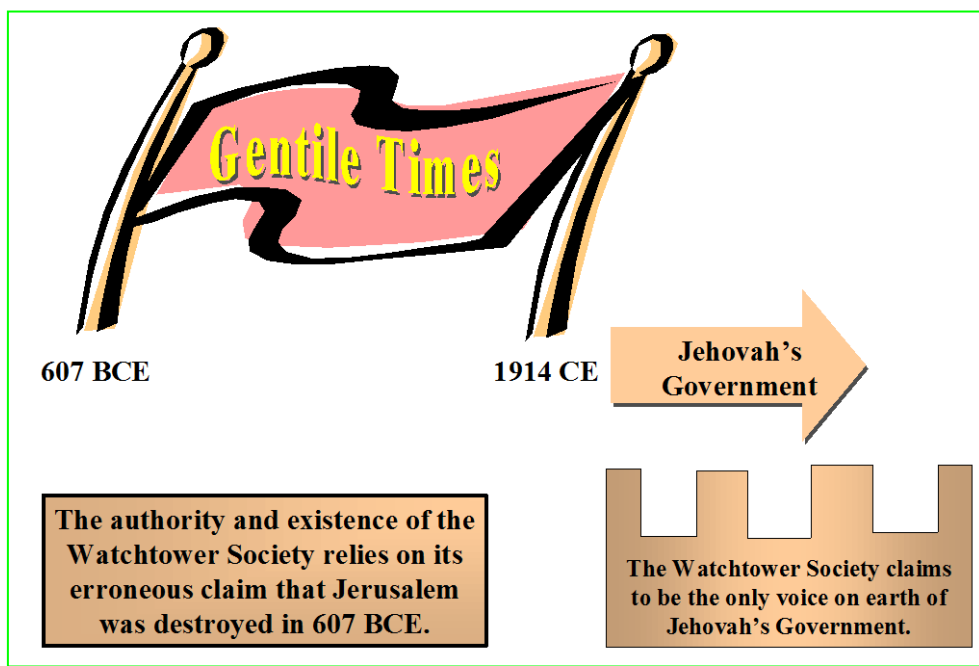


## THE WATCHTOWER SOCIETY'S FOUNDATION

What the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTS) claims took place in 1914 CE is absolutely crucial to its authority, and provides it with the only meaning for its existence.

The WTS says that Jehovah God focused his kingdom towards earth – Christ's *Parousia* – on October 1, 1914 CE. They say that this kingdom is actually God's sole government towards earth, and the WTS's ruling group is part of that government, and is its only voice upon earth.

The WTS derives this date and its significance from its interpretation of events and dates during the 6th century BCE. It says that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 BCE, and that this event marked the end of the earthly representation of God's kingdom. Following a break of 2520 years, known as the "Gentile Times", the kingdom was reinstated, but this time from heaven, with the WTS as its sole mouthpiece.



**The authority of the WTS relies on its date for Jerusalem's Destruction**

### **How the WTS arrives at 607 BCE**

The WTS uses the following method to arrive at its incorrect date of 607 BCE for the Destruction of Jerusalem during Zedekiah's 11th year.

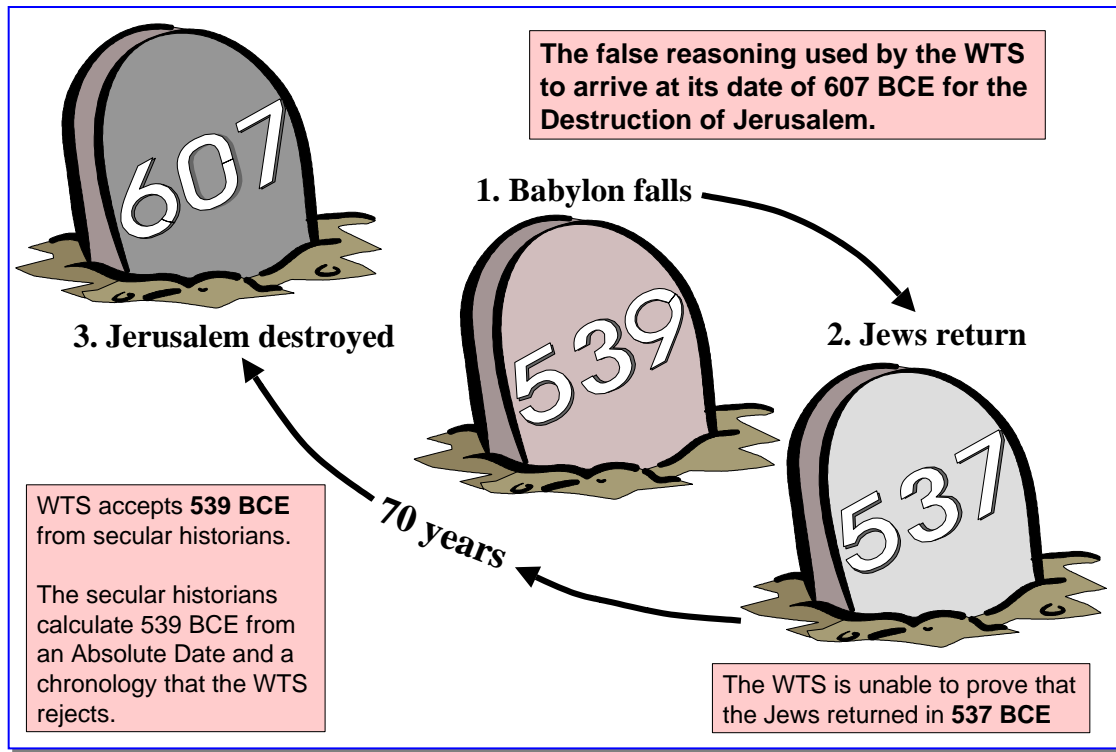
Counting back 70 years from when the Jews returned to their homeland in 537 BCE, we arrive at 607 BCE for the date when Nebuchadnezzar, in his 18th regnal year, destroyed Jerusalem, removed Zedekiah from the throne and brought to an end the Judean line of kings on a throne in earthly Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

Their reasoning thus follows these Steps

1. *Secular historians provide the date 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon.*
2. *The Persian king Cyrus issued a decree allowing the captives held at Babylon to return to their homelands.*
3. *The Jews returned to their homeland in 537 BCE.*

<sup>1</sup> *Let your Kingdom Come* (1981), page 189 Appendix to Chapter 14

4. *The prophet Jeremiah had predicted 70 years of captivity, devastation and depopulation.*
5. *Therefore Jerusalem was destroyed 70 years earlier – 607 BCE.*



The false reasoning used by the WTS

**Addressing WTS Step 1: Secular historians provide the date 539 BCE**

The Bible, in common with other documents and records of the time, provides dates in terms of the rule of a monarch. All students of the Bible rely on secular historians, astronomers, and archeologists to provide the BCE dates.

The WTS says that because secular historians, astronomers, and archaeologists accept 539 BCE for Babylon's Fall, this makes it an "Absolute Date". But general acceptance of a date does not make it "Absolute".

The tens of thousands of tablets from Babylon are dated in terms of the reign of the current king. To arrive at an Absolute Date, secular authorities apply the dated tablets that are linked to known astronomical events. There is no astronomical tablet for the year that Babylon Fell.

The date of 539 BCE is calculated from the Absolute Date of 568 BCE for the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign and the list of Babylonian kings that the WTS does not accept.

**Addressing WTS Step 2: The Persian king Cyrus issued a decree**

After defeating Babylon, the Persian King Cyrus issued a Decree, permitting captives to return to their homeland. The WTS assumes Cyrus issued his Decree very early during his First Year, but the WTS does not know that it happened that way. Ezra does not say.

**Addressing WTS Step 3: The Jews returned home in 537 BCE.**

The WTS assumes that the day the Jews met at the Temple site in Jerusalem marks the end of the "70 years". It is thus critically important for the WTS that the Jews returned home during

537 BCE, for they calculate the year of Jerusalem's Destruction from the year that the Jews returned to their homeland.

However, the WTS cannot prove that the Jews returned during 537 BCE. It is possible they returned then, but that is not good enough for the lynch pin in a foundation. It matters desperately for the WTS.

Those who have nothing that relies on the outcome, and therefore can be relied as being objective, provide dates ranging from 538 BCE to 536 BCE.

#### ***Addressing WTS Step 4: Jeremiah had predicted 70 years of captivity, devastation and depopulation***

This misrepresents Jeremiah's message. He spoke of 70 years of servitude – not captivity – to Babylon by several countries. God made Judah to be an example to the other nations, so they could witness the effects of rebelling against God's command.

The 70 years could have been completed without the land being depopulated or the city destroyed. Scripture says that servitude to Babylon ended when Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians in 539 BCE.

The WTS incorrectly believes that the "70 years" refers to a period of captivity, and that it ended when the Jews gathered at the site of their Temple in Jerusalem, following the return from Babylon of the first group of Jews to their homeland.

#### ***Addressing the WTS's conclusion: Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 BCE***

The same secular historians, astronomers, and archeologists who provide the WTS with the date 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon agree that Jerusalem fell in 587 BCE. If the widespread agreement by authorities is sufficient for the WTS to accept one date, it should be consistent and accept both dates. Particularly when the date they accept relies on the date that they do not accept.

The method used by historians to arrive at the date for Babylon's Fall includes the fact that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 BCE. If these authorities are wrong about the date of the destruction of Jerusalem, then the WTS cannot in all honesty accept from them the date of 539 BCE for Babylon's Fall.

Coincidentally, Charles Taze Russell, founder and first President of the WTS, accepted the date of 536 BCE for the Jews' return from sources who based it on the year that the Jews first came under Babylon's rule after the battle at Carchemish. This meant that Russell accepted the conclusion but did not accept the method used to arrive at that conclusion. The WTS is caught in the same bind with its acceptance of the date 539 BCE for the Fall of Babylon. They accept the 539 BCE date but do not accept the method used to arrive at that date.

#### ***The purpose of this Study***

Each of the WTS's Steps is addressed in separate Studies. The purpose of this Study is to consider these Steps:

2. *The Persian king Cyrus issued a decree allowing the captives held at Babylon to return to their homelands.*
3. *The Jews returned to their homeland in 537 BCE.*

This Study shows that while several dates are given for the Jews' return, no one knows for certain. It also shows that when the WTS's own explanations are used, it is unlikely that the Jews returned in 537 BCE.

The uncertainty and inability to prove the date of the Jews' return throws the WTS's 607 BCE date into total disarray and it removes the only source of their claimed authority.

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## THE JEWS RETURN TO JERUSALEM

The Watchtower Society (WTS) says that the “70 years” ended on the day that the Jews met at the Temple site, following their return from Babylon<sup>2</sup>. The WTS claims this key date is Tishri 1 (September) 537 BCE.

The WTS then uses that date to arrive at its incorrect date of 607 BCE for the destruction of Jerusalem. In turn, its 607 BCE date is used to provide it with the date of October 1 1914 CE for Christ’s *Parousia* and the setting up of God’s Kingdom Government. The WTS claims to be the sole representative upon Earth of God’s Kingdom.

The date of the Jew’s return is thus crucial to the Watchtower Society’s (WTS) existence and authority.

This date [537 for the return of the Jews to their homeland] plays a very important role for all Bible students [JWs], for by it we can fix the time of the beginning of the desolation of the land of Judah and the beginning of the “times of the Gentiles,” or, “the appointed times of the nations.”<sup>3</sup>

If the first group of Jews did not return to their homeland during 537 BCE, the WTS’s source of authority (1914 CE) has been extinguished. This would spell deep, deep trouble for them. Unfortunately for them, they cannot prove that the Jews returned in 537 BCE.

The **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION** of this Study is provided on Page 12

An overview of the relevant **CHRONOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES** is provided at **Appendix C**.

### ***Babylon fell during Tishri 539 BCE***

Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians about three weeks after the start of the civil Tishri New Year, 539 BCE.

#### Tishri reckoning of the Fall

Influential Jews, such as Daniel and Ezra, used the Tishri calendar when recording events, even of rulers of other nations.

- If they used nonaccession reckoning, then Cyrus’ first year ran from the time he ascended the throne, probably shortly after defeating Babylon (Oct 539 BCE) and continued until the last day before Tishri 1 (Sept) 538 BCE.
- If they used accession reckoning, then Cyrus’ first year ran from Tishri 1 (Sept) 538 BCE and continued until the last day before Tishri 1 (Sept) 537 BCE.

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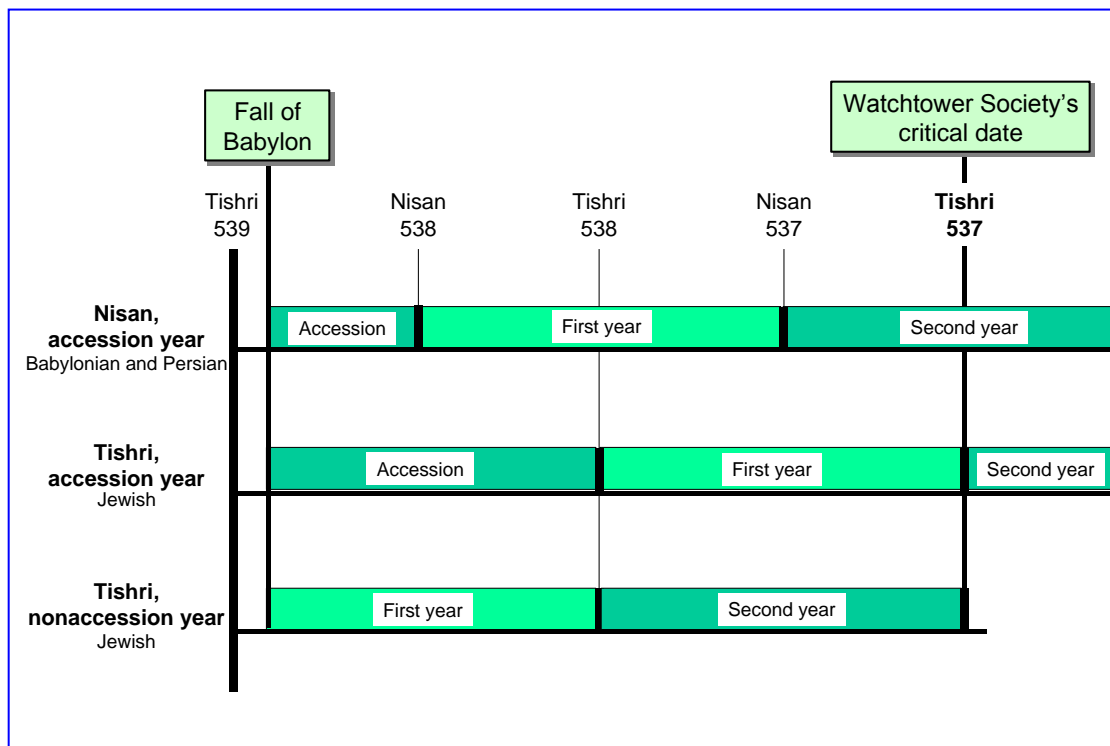
<sup>2</sup> Ezra 3:1, 6

<sup>3</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, “A Pivotal Date in History”

### Nisan reckoning of the Fall

The Babylonians used the Nisan calendar, with accession-year reckoning. For them, Cyrus’ “first year” ran from Nisan 1 (March) 538 BCE and continued until the last day before Nisan 1 (March) 537 BCE. Ezra 6 records the rediscovery of the Decree by the Persians. When the Persians speak of the “first year” they followed the Babylonian system.

The following diagram shows the relationships between these Tishri and Nisan systems.



Cyrus’ “First Year” according to various chronological systems

### ***Cyrus’ Decree***

At some point during his “first year”, Cyrus issued his Decree that permitted the captives held by Babylon to return to their homelands.

There is nothing that shows when Cyrus made his decree during his first year. If it was very early, they could have returned in 538 BCE. He might have issued it very late during his first year, thus suiting the WTS’s requirements.

Hope is thin ice for a foundation. For anyone but the WTS, the date does not matter. For the WTS, it is critical. It is for the WTS to prove their desired date.

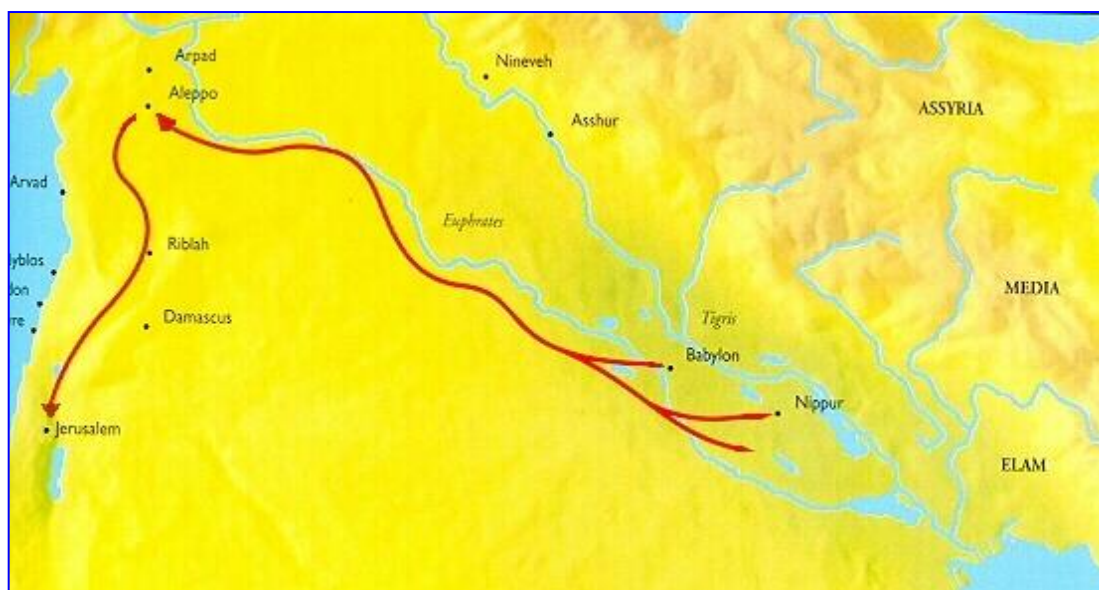
### ***A journey made by thousands***

The Jews travelled on a journey taking from two to four months. At the start of the seventh month (Tishri, September/October), the Jews congregated at the site of the Temple.

The trek from Babylon to Judah and Jerusalem, undertaken by tens of thousands, was a journey that required preparation and it is not known how long that actually took.

It would take some time to complete all preparations for 49,897 people, and it was a good four months’ journey back to the land of Judah.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, “A Pivotal Date in History”



### **Almost 50,000 people returned home**

Assuming that Cyrus' Decree had anything to do with the prophecies of Jeremiah or Isaiah, the WTS writes:

The Jews, of course, left Babylon as quickly as possible after Cyrus' decree, for, by reason of their knowledge of Jehovah's prophecies by Jeremiah and Isaiah, they had prepared in advance for departure.<sup>5</sup>

If Jews were prepared, it most likely happened because they understood that the 70 years of servitude to Babylon had already finished. They knew that it had come to its end with the downfall of the kingdom of Babylon to the Medes and Persians.

### ***The WTS follows Babylonian practice***

Without providing proof, the WTS states that the record in the Bible of Cyrus' first year<sup>6</sup> followed the Babylonian Nisan calendar, with accession-year reckoning.

The **accession year** (an incomplete lunar year) of Cyrus as king of Babylon began on October 23 of 539 BCE, when he entered the city (by day) after its capture by his troops. Hence **his first regnal year** (a full lunar year) **began on Nisan 1 of 538 BCE**, or on March 17/18 of 538 BCE, Gregorian time.<sup>7</sup>

While this was the practice in Babylon, Ezra provides the Bible record, and he used the Tishri calendar. Ezra would use the Tishri calendar for the king of another nation, regardless of the system in use by that kingdom.

Using its typical emotive and derogatory language and without providing any reasons or proof, the WTS dismisses out of hand any research that shows patriotic Jews such as Daniel and Ezra used the Jewish system of reckoning. Bluff and bluster are certain signs of insecurity and lack of tangible evidence.<sup>8</sup>

Some who have tried to explain away the problem have in a strained manner claimed that in speaking of "the first year of Cyrus" Ezra and

<sup>5</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, "A Pivotal Date in History"

<sup>6</sup> This means his "first year as ruler of Babylon". He had long been king of the Persians.

<sup>7</sup> *The Watchtower* September 15 1965, page 567 "A Pivotal Date in History"

<sup>8</sup> "Attack is the best defence"



Daniel were using some peculiar *Jewish* viewpoint that differed from the official count of Cyrus' reign. But that cannot be sustained, for both a non-Jewish governor and a document from the Persian archives agree that the decree occurred in Cyrus' first year, even as the Bible writers carefully and specifically reported.<sup>9</sup>

These examples from "a non-Jewish governor and a document from the Persian archives" only show that the Decree was issued during the time when the "first year" as recorded by the Jewish system used by Ezra overlapped the "first year" of the system used by the Persians.

To remove an opportunity for a diversion, the following discussion and diagrams are based on the WTS's assumption that the New Year began on Nisan 1 and that accession-year reckoning was used. In the end, the only impact is in the guess when the Decree might have been issued.

### ***The WTS begins Cyrus' first regnal year on Nisan 1 538 BCE***

Babylon fell during Tishri (October) 539 BCE. As the balance of the defeated Babylonian king's final year was completed by the incoming king, in accordance with Nisan reckoning the first year of the new king commenced on Nisan 1 538 BCE.

Cyrus' accession year began after his overthrow of Babylon in 539 BCE. During his first regnal year (which ran from Nisan 538 BCE to Nisan 537 BCE), Cyrus issued the decree of liberation for the Jews.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The WTS says it can calculate when the Decree was issued***

In the following, the WTS writes, once more without proof, that the Decree was issued during 537 BCE. It then agrees that in accordance with Persian and Babylonian reckoning, Cyrus' first year ran from Nisan (Sept) 538 BCE to Nisan (Sept) 537 BCE. If that were the case, to suit the WTS's needs, Cyrus had to have issued his Decree during the latter part of his first year. But the WTS does not know if that is the case.

From this known date (539 BC) we are then able quickly to understand Ezra 1:1, that **the year 537 BC was the time when the decree was issued** by King Cyrus for the return of the Jews to Palestine and that the temple was begun to be **rebuilt in the fall of this same year 537 BC**.

**How is this calculated?** In Assyria, Babylon and Persia, when a king first came to the throne, the year was usually called the king's accession year, and not until the first day of the first month of the next year did the king begin counting events in his own first regnal year.

Cyrus as a Persian ruler counted his regnal years from spring to spring or from Nisan to Nisan. **From October, 539 BC, to the spring of 538 BC would be his accession year** as the ruler of the fourth world power with the collapse of Babylon as the third world power.

Therefore, **his first regnal year as "King of Babylon and King of Lands" ran approximately from April, 538 BC, to April, 537 BC**. Actually, a clay tablet has been found dated [to] what amounts to our April 4, 538 BC, indicating Cyrus' first regnal year.<sup>11</sup>

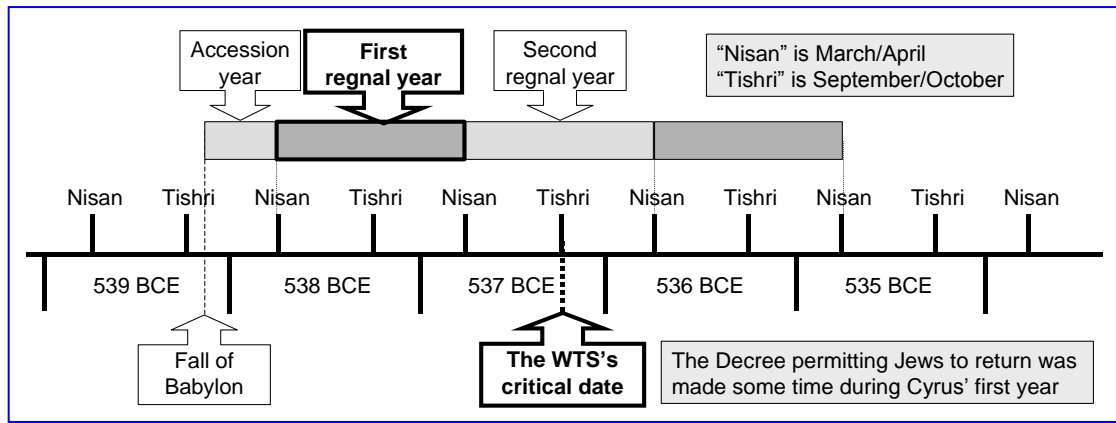
This really does not explain how the WTS "calculates" that the Decree was issued at the right time during 537 BCE.

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<sup>9</sup> *Let your Kingdom Come* (1981), page 189 Appendix to Chapter 14

<sup>10</sup> *Kingdom Ministry*, October 2004, page 7, Theocratic Ministry School Review.

<sup>11</sup> *The Watchtower* February 1 1955 page 94, "Questions from Readers"



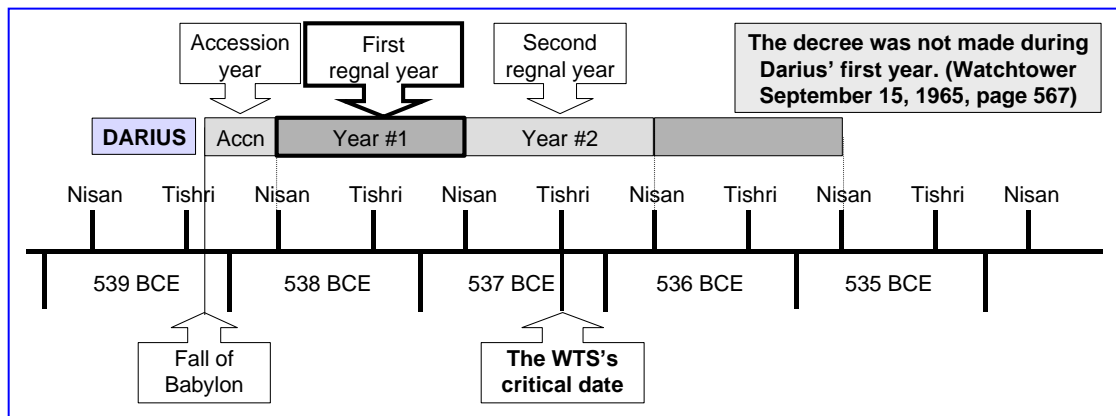
It is critical for the WTS that the Jews returned during 537 BCE

**The WTS insists Darius ruled alone at the start**

Based on its ability to interpret Scripture, the WTS insists that immediately following the Fall of Babylon, Darius the Mede ruled Babylon. Darius had a “first year”, and the WTS writes that the Decree was not issued during that year.

Darius the Mede ruled first at Babylon immediately after its fall. Daniel, at Babylon, speaks of the “first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus of the seed of the Medes” ... The liberation decree was not made in this year.<sup>12</sup>

In this scenario, again without any proof, the WTS insists that “the liberation decree was not made in” the first year of Darius, Nisan 538 BCE to Nisan 537 BCE.



The WTS insists the Decree was not made during Darius’ “first year”

**WTS insists Cyrus ruled after Darius’ “first year”**

The above references from the WTS say that Cyrus came to the throne of Babylon shortly after its defeat, that he had an *accession year* until Nisan 1 (March) 538 BCE, and his *first regnal year* ran from Nisan 538 to the last day before Nisan 537.

In the following reference, and without any proof or evidence, the WTS says that Cyrus came to the throne **after** Darius reached his “first year”. Since Darius would have reached his “first year” on Nisan 1 538 BCE, Cyrus reached the throne after Nisan 538 BCE.

Again without facts, the WTS says that Cyrus “followed” Darius by late 538 BCE. If that were so, Cyrus’ first year would have commenced on Nisan 1 537 BCE, presumably as co-regent with Darius.

<sup>12</sup> *The Watchtower* September 15 1965, page 567, “A Pivotal Date in History”

The reign of Darius I was brief; mention of “the first year” of his reign **infers** he was king FOR AT LEAST A FULL YEAR. (Dan. 9:1; 11:1) Cyrus **followed him** on the throne by late 538.<sup>13</sup>

This is not helpful to the WTS, for it creates the situation in which Cyrus’ first year would commence on Nisan 1 (March) 537 BCE.

Using reasoning that defies description, the WTS inserts at least a full year for Darius after the Fall in Tishri (Oct) 539 yet is still able to say that Cyrus’ first year started 6 months later on Nisan 1 (March) 538 BCE!

So with at least one year and **possibly** a part of a **second** year for Darius the Mede, the first year of King Cyrus the Persian **may not** have begun until the year 538 BCE to extend into the following year, 537 BCE.<sup>14</sup>

The WTS also assumes Darius and Cyrus were coregents at some time, but it does not know if that were so. It has no evidence, no facts, no dates.

### ***The WTS has no information about Darius***

The WTS does not know enough about this Darius to be able to make relevant and knowledgeable statements.

**Identification of Darius the Mede.** No reference to “Darius the Mede” has as yet been found in any non-Biblical inscription, nor is he mentioned by ancient secular historians prior to Josephus (Jewish historian of the first century C.E.). ... Efforts to associate Darius with Cyrus’ son Cambyses II do not agree with Darius’ being “about sixty-two years old” at the time of Babylon’s fall.—Da 5:31.

The view that Darius might be another name for Cyrus himself does not harmonize with Darius’ being a “Mede” and “of the seed of the Medes”.

...

Others would identify Darius with a supposed “uncle” of Cyrus, presented by Greek historian Xenophon as “Cyaxares, the son of Astyages.” ... This view is lacking in confirmation.

#### ***Who really was Darius the Mede?***

More recently, a number of reference works have favored an identification of Darius with Gubaru, ... who became governor of Babylon after the Medo-Persian conquest of that city. ...

Some scholars consider it likely that Darius the Mede was in reality a viceroy who ruled over the kingdom of the Chaldeans but as a subordinate of Cyrus, the supreme monarch of the Persian Empire.

While in many respects the information available concerning Gubaru appears to parallel that regarding Darius, and while Darius may have been a viceroy under Cyrus, still such identification cannot be considered conclusive.<sup>15</sup>

Despite having nothing to work on, the WTS finds itself able to make statements about Darius’ rule that enable Cyrus to make his Decree at the right time for them to return home during 537 BCE.

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<sup>13</sup> The Watchtower August 15, 1968, page 493 “The Book of Truthful Historical Dates”

<sup>14</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, “A Pivotal Date in History”

<sup>15</sup> *Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 1, pages 581 – 582, “Darius”

**WTS: “Cyrus’ first year started on Nisan 1, 538 BCE”**

Apart from demonstrating what WTS scholarship looks like, their reference to Darius is a diversion, because the WTS states that regardless of anything, Cyrus’ “first regnal year” commenced on Nisan 1 (March) 538 BCE.<sup>16</sup>

“The first year of Darius,” ... **may** have intervened between the fall of Babylon and “the first year of Cyrus” over Babylon. **If** it did, this would mean that the writer was **perhaps** viewing Cyrus’ first year as having begun late in the year 538 BCE. However, **if** Darius’ rule over Babylon were to be viewed as that of a viceroy, so that his reign ran concurrent with that of Cyrus, Babylonian custom would place Cyrus’ first *regnal* year as running from Nisan of 538 to Nisan of 537 BCE.<sup>17</sup>

That is the strength of its foundation – “may”, “if”, “perhaps” and “if”. The WTS **does not know**. It provides no supporting evidence to show:

- Cyrus reigned concurrently with Darius
- When that supposed coregency commenced
- The “Babylonian custom” that operated in the way it claims.

Why did they introduce a problem for themselves, then have to try and wriggle out of it? And it was all so unnecessary.

**WTS: “Decree might have been issued late in Cyrus’ first year”**

Cyrus’ “first year” ran from Nisan 1 (March) 538, but at what point during his first year did Cyrus issue his Decree? If he issued it at the start, the Jews returned during 538 BCE. If he issued it late during the year, the Jews returned during 537 BCE. That is the most that can be said, since there is no evidence.

This, however, is **the** vital issue for the WTS. All they can do is hope, guess and assume. There is nothing else available but to hope that maybe one day some archaeologist might unearth the find that answers the WTS’s wishes. But that find might do the exact opposite and dash the WTS’s reasoning and hopes to pieces.

Naturally, the WTS wants Cyrus to issue his Decree late during his first year.

Cyrus’ decree freeing the Jews to return to Jerusalem **likely** was made **late** in the year 538 or early in 537 BCE.<sup>18</sup>

Historians accept that Cyrus conquered Babylon in October 539 BCE and that Cyrus’ first regnal year began in the spring of 538 BCE. **If** Cyrus’ decree came **late** in his first regnal year, the Jews could easily be back in their homeland by the seventh month (Tishri) as Ezra 3:1 says; this would be October 537 BCE.<sup>19</sup>

This decree was **evidently** issued **late** in 538 BCE or early in 537 BCE.<sup>20</sup>

It is **very probable** that the decree was made by the winter of 538 BCE or toward the spring of 537 BCE.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Which is not in contest (Babylonian reckoning, of course)

<sup>17</sup> *Insight on the Scriptures* Vol 1, page 568 “Cyrus”

<sup>18</sup> *Insight on the Scriptures* Vol 1, page 568 “Cyrus”

<sup>19</sup> *Let your Kingdom Come* (1981), page 189 Appendix to Chapter 14

<sup>20</sup> *All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial* page 85 para. 3 Bible Book Number 15—Ezra

<sup>21</sup> *Insight on the Scriptures* vol 1, page 458, “Chronology”

The decree was **likely** made **late** in 538 BCE or toward the spring of 537 BCE.<sup>22</sup>

Comments have been inserted in italics into the following quotation from the WTS<sup>23</sup>. These insertions are shown by square brackets [*like this*].

**Cyrus' decree must have been issued late in 538 BCE or early in 537 for two reasons.** [*At last, the WTS provides the reasons for the Decree being late in the year*]

**The desolation had to last until the 70th year ended** [*This is their "first reason". The logic is faulty, as it presumes the conclusion.*]

and the released Israelites would **not be expected to travel in the winter rainy season**, as would have been the case if the decree had been made a few months earlier. [*The Jews would not have traveled during Winter if the Decree was issued early in 538 BCE, allowing them to return during that year.*]

**Likely** it was issued in the **early spring of 537 BCE** in order to give the Jews a chance to travel during the dry season, [*This would also be valid if the Jews traveled in 538. By "likely" they really mean "we hope".*]

Here is that quotation again, without the inserted comments:

Cyrus' decree must have been issued **late** in 538 BCE or early in 537 **for two reasons**. **The desolation had to last until the 70th year ended**, and the released Israelites would **not be expected to travel in the winter rainy season**, as would have been the case if the decree had been made a few months earlier. **Likely** it was issued in the **early spring of 537 BCE** in order to give the Jews a chance to travel during the dry season, arrive in Jerusalem, and set up the altar on the first day of the seventh month (Tishri) of the year 537 BCE, September 29 according to the Gregorian calendar.

### **The WTS guesses**

Consider the following statements, where the WTS can offer **nothing more than guesses**, such as "probable", "if", or similar:

The decree of Cyrus **MUST HAVE BEEN MADE** toward the close of winter and the beginning of spring of 537 BCE.<sup>24</sup>

**LIKELY** (the decree) was issued in the early spring of 537 BCE.<sup>25</sup>

This decree was **EVIDENTLY** issued late in 538 BCE or early in 537 BCE.<sup>26</sup>

It is very **PROBABLE** that the decree was made by the winter of 538 BCE or toward the spring of 537 BCE.<sup>27</sup>

**IF** Cyrus' decree came late in his first regnal year.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial* page 283 par. 29 Study Number 2—Time and the Holy Scriptures

<sup>23</sup> *Insight on the Scriptures* vol 1, page 800 "Ezra, Book of"

<sup>24</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, "A Pivotal Date in History"

<sup>25</sup> *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 1, page 800, "Ezra, Book of"

<sup>26</sup> *All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial* [1990], page 85, "Bible Book Number 15—Ezra"

<sup>27</sup> *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. page 458, "Chronology"

Cyrus' issuing of the decree for the return of the Jews **MUST HAVE TAKEN PLACE** before April, 537 BC<sup>29</sup>

They can live in hope, but that is no real foundation for the WTS's claimed authority.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The WTS's existence, authority and meaning rely on the date that the Jews returned to their homeland. For the WTS, it is imperative this took place in 537 BCE. This Study has shown:

- Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians during Tishri (October) 539 BCE.
- During his "first year" as king of Babylon, Cyrus issued his decree that freed the captives held by Babylon, allowing them to return to their homes.
- The Jewish calendars and the Babylonian calendar considered Cyrus' first year differently. The WTS dismisses out of hand that Jews such as Daniel and Ezra used the Jewish system of reckoning.
- The Babylonian system reckons that Cyrus' "first year" ran from Nisan 1 (March) 538 BCE to the last day before Nisan 1 (March) 537 BCE.
- Although the WTS presents the Darius mentioned in the book of Daniel, the WTS removes any impact of Darius on the date of Cyrus' first year. (Darius is thus a diversionary smokescreen in the shape of a red herring.) The WTS eliminates Darius by declaring that the first year of Cyrus began on Nisan 1 538 BCE. This is not disputed, when the Nisan/accession-year system is applied.
- Cyrus issued his Decree some time during his first year (Nisan 1 538 BCE to the last day before Nisan 1 537 BCE).
  - If Cyrus issued his Decree at the start of his first year, the Jews returned during 538 BCE.
  - If Cyrus issued his Decree towards Winter or late during his first year, the Jews returned during 537 BCE. For this reason, the WTS hopes this is what happened. This shows the weakness of this lynch pin in its foundation. The WTS does not know the timing of Cyrus' decree.
- All that the WTS can call on is "if", "maybe" and "likely". They rely on hope and guesses. They do not have the facts that they need. This is devastating.

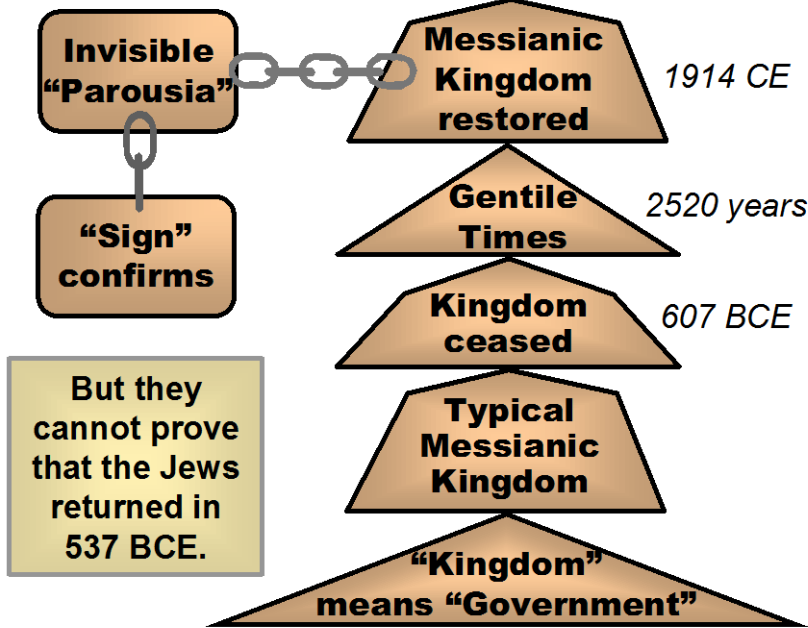
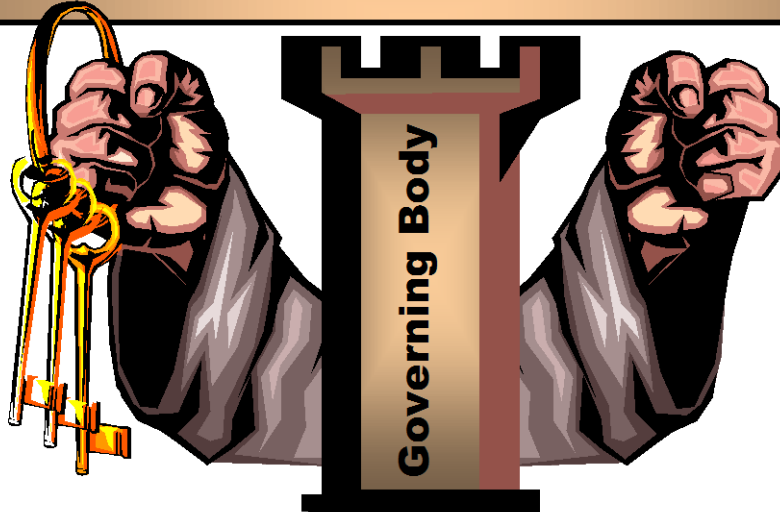
Jehovah God has not found it necessary to reveal the information that the WTS so desperately needs. He knows that the date when the Jews returned is not important. This event is a crucial piece in the WTS's foundation, but it is not part of any foundation for Jehovah God. – see Matthew 22: 36 - 40; Galatians 5: 14

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<sup>28</sup> Let Your Kingdom Come, page 189, Appendix to Chapter 14

<sup>29</sup> *The Watchtower* February 1, 1955, page 94 "Questions From Readers"

# Power and Privilege



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## APPENDIX A: CHARLES TAZE RUSSELL'S DATES

### **CTR fixed on 536 BC**

Charles Taze Russell (CTR) was aware of difficulties with his dates. While he was not prepared to move his Babylonian dates of 538 (Babylon's Fall), 536 (Jews' return), and 606 (destruction of Jerusalem), he was quite prepared to move the 1914 terminus by a full year to 1915.

Later, with its fixation at maintaining the new significance being given to 1914, the WTS shifted CTR's Babylonian dates back by one year, to 537 and 607 respectively. But Russell was not so concerned with the accuracy of 1914 and was quite prepared to move the terminus to 1915. He wrote the following in 1912:

Coming now to a very critical examination of the date 536 B.C., there is an open question: Shall we call it 536 full years to A.D., or 535 full years? The difference in time between October 1st and January 1st would be the fourth of a year; hence our query is respecting 536-1/4 or 535-1/4 years B.C. What is the proper method of calculation, is in dispute. If we count the first year B.C. as 0, then the date 536-1/4 B.C. is the proper one for the end of the seventy years of captivity. But if we begin to reckon it by counting the first year before the Christian era as B.C. 1, then evidently the desolation ended 535-1/4 years B.C.

As to the methods of counting, Encyclopaedia Britannica says, "Astronomers denote the year which preceded the first of our era as 0 and the year previous to that as B.C. 1--the previous year B.C. 2, and so on."

Whichever of these ways we undertake to calculate the matter the difference between the results is one year. The seventy years of Jewish captivity ended October, 536 B.C., and if there were 536-1/4 years B.C., then to complete the 2,520 years' cycle of the Times of the Gentiles would require 1913-3/4 years of A.D., or to October, 1914. But if the other way of reckoning were used, then there were but 535-1/4 years of the period B.C., and the remainder of the 2,520 years would reach to A.D., 1914-3/4 years, otherwise October, 1915.

Since this question is agitating the minds of a considerable number of the friends, we have presented it here in some detail. We remind the readers, however, that nothing in the Scriptures says definitely that the trouble upon the Gentiles will be accomplished before the close of the Times of the Gentiles, whether that be October, 1914, or October, 1915.<sup>30</sup>

When the WTS altered the year of the Fall of Babylon from 538 BCE to 539 BCE<sup>31</sup> and the year of the Destruction of Jerusalem from 606 BCE to 607 BCE, it incorrectly blamed Russell for not knowing about the lack of a zero year. The above shows this is not exactly true.

### **Russell's source for 536 BC**

The following is from "*1914: The Touchstone of the Watchtower, The Summary of an Investigation*", by Max Hatton (used by permission).

Russell demonstrated his dependence upon Ptolemy's Canon on page, 51 of Vol 2, [Studies in the Scriptures](#). "The period from the time of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon at the close of the seventy years desolation of their land in the first year of Cyrus, down to the date

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<sup>30</sup> Watch Tower, December 1, 1912, page 377. "The Ending of the Gentile Times".

<sup>31</sup> At the time *Parker and Dubberstein* released their study.



known as AD1 is not covered by Bible history. But, as before stated; it is well established by secular history as a period of 536 years. Ptolemy, a learned Greek-Egyptian, a geometer and astronomer, has well established these figures. They are generally accepted by scholars, and known as Ptolemy's Canon."

The unfortunate part about all this is that Ptolemy's Canon does NOT give 536 BC as the first year of Cyrus. Now if Russell had commenced his 2520 years from 538 BC, he obviously would not have arrived at 1914 AD Why did Russell say that the year was 536 BC?

On page 67 of the same Volume of Russell's writings, he mentions "Dr. Hales work on chronology." Dr. Hales work is entitled A New Analysis of Chronology and Geography, History and Prophecy. The second edition of four volumes was published in 1830.

Hales gives considerable information on the Canon of Ptolemy, and on page 168 he comments, "the Canon dates the accession of Cyrus ... 538 BC".

On pages 166 and 167 Hales discussed an adjustment made by historians to Ptolemy's Canon to make Cyrus' first year 536 BC. This was performed out of respect for the Scriptures. Hales explains this on his page 166. "It must, however, be acknowledged, that accurate as authentic copies of the Canon unquestionably are every where else, in this single period a small correction is necessary to accommodate it to Scripture; for, according to the Canon, from the first of Nabokolassar or Nebuchadnezzar, BC 604, to the first of Cyrus, BC 538, is an interval of only 66 years; and therefore, if the Captivity began in the end of the third, or commencement of the fourth year of Jehoiakim, BC 605, Dan,1:1; 2KingsXXIV:1; Jer XXV:1; from thence, to the accession of Cyrus, was only 67 years complete, or 68 current."

On page 167 Hales says, "chronologers Scalinger, Petavius, Usher, Prideaux, Jackson &c have adopted this interpolation as indispensably necessary to reconcile the Canon to Holy Writ, which is effectually done thereby; for from the commencement of .the Captivity, BC 605, to the corrected first of Cyrus, BC 536, is 69 years complete, or 70 years current."

The interesting point here is that Cyrus' 1st year was changed to 536 BC to make it 70 years current from 605 BC, which was regarded as the beginning of the 70 years. A perusal of Dan. 1:1, 2Kings 24:1 and Jer. 25:1 as cited by Hales makes it obvious that the 70 years were regarded by these Chronologists as commencing at the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign and not in his 19th year, as insisted on by Russell and the Society today.

The ironical part is that Russell utilized the date 536 BC, which was calculated from the date 605 BC, which Russell positively would not accept.

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## APPENDIX B: CYRUS' DECREE

### ***From The Kurash Prism:***

I am Kurash [ "Cyrus" ], King of the World, Great King, Legitimate King, King of Babilani, King of Kiengir and Akkade, King of the four rims of the earth, Son of Kanbujiya, Great King, King of Hakhamanish, Grandson of Kurash, Great king, King of Hakhamanish, descendant of Chishpish, Great king, King of Hakhamanish, of a family which always exercised kingship; whose rule Bel and Nebo love, whom they want as king to please their hearts. When I entered Babilani as a friend and when I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord, induced the magnanimous inhabitants of Babilani to love me, and I was daily endeavoring to worship him.... As to the region from as far as Assura and Susa, Akkade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which used to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned them to their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Kiengir and Akkade whom Nabonidus had brought into Babilani to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their former temples, the places which make them happy.<sup>32</sup>

### ***From the Hebrew Bible***

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “ ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.’ ”<sup>33</sup>

They searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon. A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it:

Memorandum:

In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem: Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Charles F. Horne, ed., *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, (New York: Parke, Austin, & Lipscomb, 1917), Vol. I: Babylonia and Assyria, pp. 460-462; Scanned by: J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Prof. Arkenberg has modernized the text.

<sup>33</sup> Ezra 1: 1 – 4

<sup>34</sup> Ezra 6:1 – 5

## APPENDIX C: CHRONOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

### ***Two dating systems***

The people used calendars that began with Nisan (March/April) and with Tishri (September/October). The Babylonians used the Nisan calendar, while Daniel and Ezra used the Jewish Tishri calendar.<sup>35</sup>

Even though a calendar began with Tishri, it was still called the “seventh month” of the year, the earlier months of the year come after the seventh month (Tishri – September/October).

It was affirmed as certain that the numbering of the months always commences with Nisan.<sup>36</sup>

We find ourselves concerned chiefly with two Jewish years, one beginning in the spring on Nisan 1, one beginning in the fall on Tishri 1. Regardless of which year is used, numbering of the months is normally in sequence from Nisan. The two Jewish Years therefore appear as in [the following] Tables.<sup>37</sup>

<b>The Jewish New Year with Nisan 1 as New Year's Day</b>			<b>The Jewish New Year with Tishri 1 as New Year's Day</b>		
1	Nisan	Mar/Apr	7	Tishri	Sep/Oct
2	Iyyar	Apr/May	8	Marheshvan	Oct/Nov
3	Sivan	May/Jun	9	Kislev	Nov/Dec
4	Tammuz	Jun/Jul	10	Tebeth	Dec/Jan
5	Ab	Jul/Aug	11	Shebat	Jan/Feb
6	Elul	Aug/Sep	12	Adar	Feb/Mar
7	Tishri	Sep/Oct	1	Nisan	Mar/Apr
8	Marheshvan	Oct/Nov	2	Iyyar	Apr/May
9	Kislev	Nov/Dec	3	Sivan	May/Jun
10	Tebeth	Dec/Jan	4	Tammuz	Jun/Jul
11	Shebat	Jan/Feb	5	Ab	Jul/Aug
12	Adar	Feb/Mar	6	Elul	Aug/Sep

### ***Accession-year reckoning***

At the time, the Babylonians used the accession-year system, in which the period following a king’s accession until the following New Year’s Day was reckoned as his “Accession Year”. The “first year” of the new king’s reign began on that New Year’s Day. In effect, he completed the last year of the previous monarch’s reign.

Since the Babylonians used the Nisan calendar, the “first year” of the incoming king began on Nisan 1.

In Assyria, Babylon and Persia, when a king first came to the throne, the year was usually called the king’s **accession year**, and not until **the first**

<sup>35</sup> Even though the calendar began with Tishri, it was still called the “seventh month” of the year.

<sup>36</sup> *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Jack Finegan, para 167, page 91

<sup>37</sup> *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Jack Finegan, para 107, page 92

day of the first month of the next year did the king begin counting events in his own first regnal year. Cyrus as a Persian ruler counted his regnal years from spring to spring or from Nisan to Nisan.

From October, 539 BC, to the spring of 538 BC would be his accession year as the ruler of the fourth world power with the collapse of Babylon as the third world power. Therefore, his first regnal year as “King of Babylon and King of Lands” ran approximately from April, 538 BC, to April, 537 BC.<sup>38</sup>

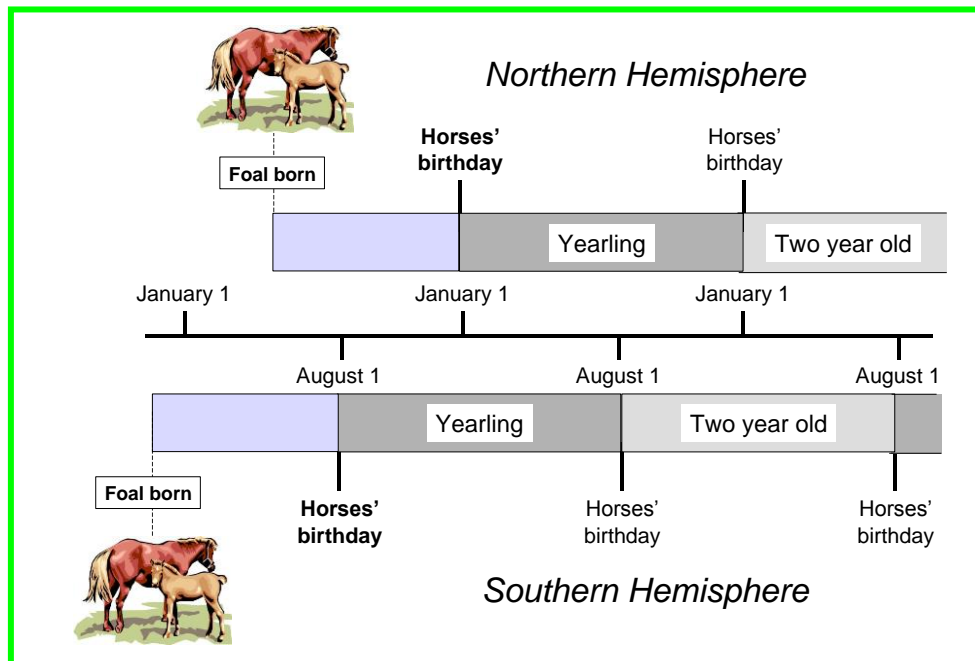
### ***A modern illustration of these chronological principles***

The method used today to calculate the age of a racehorse illustrates the use of two calendars and the accession year system.

All racehorses share the same birthday, regardless of when they were born during a year.

In the Northern Hemisphere (Canada, Europe and USA) horses have their birthday on January 1. In the Southern Hemisphere (Australia, New Zealand and Japan) horses have their birthday on August 1. This illustrates the use of *two calendars*.

The time from a horse’s birth until the start of the New Year (either January or August) corresponds to an *Accession Year*. The foal becomes a “yearling” on the first day of the New Year (January reckoning, or August reckoning), regardless of its biological age.



### ***Nonaccession year reckoning***

At the same time, some were using the nonaccession system, where the incoming ruler’s first year commenced as soon as he ascended to the throne.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *The Watchtower* February 1, 1955, page 94 “Questions From Readers”

<sup>39</sup> “According to the accession-year method, that portion of the last calendar year during which a king reigned was assigned to him as his last year, and the balance of that year - the period during which the succeeding king reigned - was termed the accession year of the new king. Not until the termination of the calendar year during which the previous king died and the beginning of the new year did the new king begin reckoning his first year of reign. ...

### **Recording the rulers of other nations**

Even though the Babylonians used Nisan/accession-year reckoning, the Biblical record is provided by Ezra. A writer using, for example, the nonaccession system for their own rulers would use that same system for rulers of another nation, even though that other nation employed the accession-year system. Ezra therefore applied his system to the rulers of any nation, including the Babylonians and the Persians.

In regard to the method of expressing synchronistic years, it will be found that both Judah and Israel **used their own systems for the years of the neighboring kings.**

Thus in Judah the lengths of reign of Judean kings were at this time expressed in terms of the accession-year system, and the synchronisms with the Israelite kings were also expressed in terms of that system, although in Israel itself the nonaccession-year system was used. In Israel the synchronisms with Judah as well as the lengths of reign of Israelite kings were both expressed in terms of the nonaccession-year system.

The rule throughout the history of the two nations is that whichever system was in use in either nation was the system employed for the lengths of reign of its own kings and the synchronisms with its neighbor, regardless of the system the neighbor employed.<sup>40</sup>

The books attributed to Nehemiah and Ezra were originally a single book. Since Nehemiah employed the Tishri calendar, even for Persian kings, it is clear that Ezra did the same.

It is clear from Neh. 1: 1 and 2: 1 that Nehemiah reckoned the years of the Persian king Artaxerxes from Tishri to Tishri, for a certain month Kislev fell within the twentieth year of the king, and the following Nisan was still in the same twentieth year.

But why would Nehemiah do this, when it was the custom in Persia to reckon the year from Nisan to Nisan? Is it not reasonable to suppose that Nehemiah was acquainted with the custom formerly followed by the kings of Judah to begin their regnal years with Tishri and, in a spirit of intense nationalism, applied the customary Jewish practice even to a Persian king? In the double-dated Aramaic papyri from Elephantine of the fifth century D.C., the reigns of the Persian kings were also dated according to Judean Tishri years rather than Persian Nisan years.

Perhaps the strongest argument for the use of a Tishri-to- Tishri regnal year in Judah is that this method works, giving us a harmonious pattern of the regnal years and synchronisms, while with a Nisan-to-Nisan regnal year the old discrepancies would be retained.<sup>41</sup>

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“When, however, the non-accession-year system was used, that portion of the final calendar year during which a king reigned was assigned to him as his last year, and the remaining portion of the year during which his successor reigned was termed that king's first year. Consequently, that particular calendar year was assigned to two kings, being counted both as the last year of the old king and the first year of the new king.” (*Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, E. R. Thiele, page 23)

<sup>40</sup> *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, E. R. Thiele, page 25

<sup>41</sup> *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, E. R. Theile, page 30