

## WHEN DID THE JEWS RETURN TO JERUSALEM?

### ***The significance for the WTS and its Governing Body***

The date of the destruction of Jerusalem is absolutely crucial to the very existence of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and to its Governing Body. The date of that event is used to provide the timing of Christ's Parousia, which, they claim, took place in 1914 CE.

To calculate the date of Jerusalem's destruction, the GB relies on the date when the first Jews returned to their homeland, following their release from Babylon, courtesy of the decree by Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon.

The date of the Jews' return to Jerusalem following their captivity in Babylon is thus absolutely crucial to the GB. As they say:

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>1</sup>

The GB says that the first Jews returned to their homeland and were settled by Tishri 1, 537 BCE (October 5). The GB then counts back 70 full years to provide them with their (incorrect) date of 607 BCE for Jerusalem's destruction. The GB then employs the year 607 BCE to arrive at 1914 CE for Christ's Parousia.

If the first group of Jews did not return to their homeland in 537 BCE, then the GB dating structure and the source of its authority (1914 CE) have been extinguished. This would spell deep trouble for them.

### ***GB hopes Cyrus issued his Decree in time***

The GB does not know if Cyrus made his Decree in sufficient time for the Jews to return by that October 537. Consider the following statements, where the GB can offer nothing stronger than "probable", "if", and similar:

The decree of Cyrus MUST HAVE BEEN MADE toward the close of winter and the beginning of spring of 537 B.C.E. <sup>2</sup>

LIKELY (the decree) was issued in the early spring of 537 B.C.E. <sup>3</sup>

This decree was EVIDENTLY issued late in 538 B.C.E. or early in 537 B.C.E. <sup>4</sup>

It is very PROBABLE that the decree was made by the winter of 538 B.C.E. or toward the spring of 537 B.C.E. <sup>5</sup>

IF Cyrus' decree came late in his first regnal year. <sup>6</sup>

### ***GB insists Darius ruled alone at the start***

Babylon was defeated in October 539 BCE. The balance of the final year of the reign of the last king of Babylon, until March 538 BCE, was completed by the incoming king. The first year of the new king therefore commenced in March 538 BCE.

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<sup>1</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, "A Pivotal Date in History"

<sup>2</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, "A Pivotal Date in History"

<sup>3</sup> Insight on the Scriptures, vol. 1, page 800, "Ezra, Book of"

<sup>4</sup> All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial [1990], page 85, "Bible Book Number 15—Ezra"

<sup>5</sup> Insight on the Scriptures, vol. page 458, "Chronology"

<sup>6</sup> Let Your Kingdom Come, page 189, Appendix to Chapter 14

Based on its ability to interpret Scripture, the GB INSISTS that immediately following the Fall of Babylon, Darius the Mede ruled Babylon solely by himself, and that he had a “first year”. The GB says that Cyrus came to the throne after Darius reached his first year. This would mean that, at the earliest, by the GB’s reckoning, Cyrus’ “first year” commenced at the earliest in March 537.

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>7</sup>

The GB then tries its two-card trick:

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 B.C.E., to extend into the following year, 537 B.C.E. <sup>8</sup>

If Darius started his first year in 538, then Cyrus’ first year would have started in March 537. And if Darius had “possibly a part of a second year”, then Cyrus did not commence his “first year” until 536 BCE. The GB writes:

The Bible record at Daniel 9:1 refers to “the first year of Darius,” and this 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 B.C.E. 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 B.C.E. <sup>9</sup>

They can always live in hope, but this is a shaky foundation for the GB’s authority. Again from the GB:

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>10</sup>

### ***Ending of servitude to Babylon***

Why should the return of the Jews to Jerusalem mark the end of the “70 years” of servitude? Did not the servitude to Babylon, and it had to be served by several nations, finish as soon as the Babylonians were defeated in 539 BCE? (Jer 25:12 says: “When the seventy years are fulfilled, I will PUNISH the king of Babylon”.) Does this not indicate that the 70-year servitude finished as soon as Babylon was no longer the master?

### ***A long journey undertaken by thousands***

The four month journey was undertaken by many thousands. The GB lives in hope that the Jews were sufficiently prepared to start the long journey immediately Cyrus issued his decree. In hope, the GB says:

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>11</sup>

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

<sup>8</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, “A Pivotal Date in History”

<sup>9</sup> Insight on the Scriptures Vol 1, page 568, “Cyrus”

<sup>10</sup> The Watchtower August 15, 1968, page 493 “The Book of Truthful Historical Dates”

<sup>11</sup> The Watchtower, September 15 1965, page 567, “A Pivotal Date in History”

The reason for the GB's hope is clear. Thousands of Jewish families journeyed for four months, arriving in sufficient time for them to be settled by the seventh month (Tishri). By the GB method, Cyrus first year commenced in Nisan 1 (March 12) of 537. The date of Tishri 1, 537 is October 5. There is nothing to say that Cyrus made his decree early enough in his first year to suit the GB's requirements. He might have. But it is very thin ice to build a foundation on.

So, unfortunately for the GB, it cannot prove the actual year that the first group of Jews returned.

### **CTR's dates**

CTR was aware of difficulties with his dates. But while he was not prepared to move his Babylonian dates of 536 and 606, he was quite prepared to move the 1914 terminus by a full year to 1915. With its fixation at maintaining 1914, the GB 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>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Watch Tower, December 1, 1912, page 377. "The Ending of the Gentile Times".