

A critique of why the Jehovah's Witnesses are incorrect teaching that the Second Coming of Christ (*parousia*) occurred in 1914, and that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E.

©

A. Introduction

B. Historical Overview

C. Overview of the Controversy

D. Servitude

E. The seventy-year prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 did not apply to Jerusalem and Judah alone but to all nations which fell under the domination of the Babylonian Empire. These nations as a unit, comprising the Babylonian Empire collectively, served the king(s) of Babylon seventy years.

F. The servitude referred to at Jeremiah 25:11 whereby the nations which fell under the domination of the Babylonian Empire would serve the king of Babylon seventy years included a) vassalage, b) willing exile, and/or c) forced captivity and exile.

G. The nations' seventy years of servitude ended in 539 B.C.E. when Babylon fell to the Persians and Medes while the exiles were still in Babylon, thus bringing to a conclusion the servitude prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11, before the Jews returned home.

H. The seventy years could not have ended when the exiles returned to Judah in 537 B.C.E. because there existed no king of Babylon to serve for two years between 537 B.C.E. and 539 B.C.E., after Persia began its reign in 539 B.C.E..

I. The phrase "and all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment" at Jeremiah 25:11 does not mean a) the land Judah, and Jerusalem, would exist without a single inhabitant, b) for a period of exactly 70 years, c) beginning with Jerusalem's destruction.

J. The devastated condition of Judah does not mean it existed in that state without a single inhabitant.

K. The devastation of Judah and Jerusalem at Jeremiah 25:11 referred to its devastated condition after Jerusalem's destruction and during the many years before that city fell.

L. The Bible shows that Judah was "a devastated place, an object of astonishment" during the years leading up to Jerusalem's destruction.

M. The fulfillment of the "devastations of Jerusalem [namely,] seventy years" at Daniel 9:2 refers to the end of Babylon's seventy years of world domination and the technical end of Jerusalem's devastated condition. It does not mean that Jerusalem - and by extension Judah - was devastated (without inhabitant) exactly seventy years.

N. Further Reading and Acknowledgments.

A. Introduction

The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E. Mainstream Christian theologians, archeologists and historians take the position that it was destroyed in 587 or 586 B.C.E., a view supported by the overwhelming weight of archeological and historical evidence, and an objective reading of the Bible. The Jehovah's Witnesses reject this archeological and historical evidence because it does not harmonize with their religious beliefs. Instead, they essentially confine their evidence to their interpretation of Scripture. Accordingly, this paper confines itself primarily to scriptural interpretation, and logic, and proves that Jerusalem was not, and could not have been, destroyed in 607 B.C.E., but was destroyed in either 587 or 586 B.C.E., a view which harmonizes with substantial and persuasive archeological and historical facts.

The year 607 B.C.E. plays a crucial role in the religious tenets of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In accordance with their interpretation of Scripture, 607 B.C.E. is fundamental, a watershed which serves as a foundation for their faith and philosophy. Based upon mathematical calculations derived primarily from the book of Daniel, the Jehovah's Witnesses count forward 2,520 years from the fall of 607 B.C.E. to arrive at the fall of A.D. 1914 - the onslaught of World War I and the year in which they believe the End Times commenced. 1914 is also believed to be the year Jesus Christ was enthroned in heaven as ruling king of the Kingdom of God, which is yet another false teaching. This author is primarily concerned with whether Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E.

The Jehovah's Witnesses insist they are God's only true prophet, writing: "So does Jehovah have a prophet to help them, to warn them of dangers and to declare things to come? These questions can be answered in the affirmative. Who is this prophet?...This "prophet" was not one man, but was a body of men and women. It was the small group of footstep followers of Jesus Christ, known at that time as International Bible Students. Today they are known as Jehovah's Christian Witnesses...Of course, it is easy to say that this group acts as a 'prophet' of God. It is another thing to prove it," (*Watchtower*, Apr. 1, 1972, p. 197). (See Deut. 18:21.)

With respect to 1914, the Jehovah's Witnesses regard this year, and the method by which they arrive there, as prophecy. If, however, Jerusalem did not fall in 607 B.C.E. and if it fell in 587/6 B.C.E. their prophetic date is off by twenty years, and false, and would cause other critical dates in their belief structure to fail. The Jehovah's Witnesses regard this enthronement of Christ to be the long-awaited Second Coming of Christ, whereas mainstream Christians believe the Second Coming and His *parousia* (presence) are in the future as heralded at Matthew 24:30,31 and Mark 13:24-32. The fact that the Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Second Coming and *parousia* have already occurred is cause for serious reflection and concern.

B. Historical Overview

For those unfamiliar with the issues, a very brief historical overview is in order. We are basically dealing with events that span roughly 125 years, from 625 B.C.E. to 500 B.C.E. It includes the end, or fall, of the Assyrian Empire to Babylon in 609 B.C.E. followed by the rise and subsequent end, or fall,

of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (Babylonian Empire) which lasted seventy years, followed by the rise and early years of the combined empires of the Persians and Medes which ended Babylon's reign in October 539 B.C.E.

We are especially concerned with the Jews of Jerusalem and Judah during this time who were caught between these rising and falling empires, particularly the seventy-year period defined here as the Babylonian Empire. These Jews would come to serve Babylon in various capacities, as did all the surrounding nations that fell under the dominion of the Babylonians, or Chaldeans.

There were numerous Babylonian kings during this era, beginning with Nabopolassar who presided over the final demise of Assyria in 609 B.C.E., followed by his son Nebuchadnezzar (or Nebuchadrezzar), the great warrior king who consolidated the empire through numerous military campaigns. It was Nebuchadnezzar who enslaved the Jews, forced them to become vassals, dispersed them to other nations, exiled them to Babylon and annihilated or devastated Jerusalem and Judah. The end of the Babylon Empire was presided over by Nabonidus who was then king, though his son Belshazzar was co-ruler of Babylon when the Persians and Medes conquered them in October 539 B.C.E.

Our attention is basically focused on three Jewish kings:

a) Jehoiakim: He ruled eleven years, and had been in power when Nebuchadnezzar ruled in his first year as king of Babylon. Jehoiakim became a vassal to Babylon in his eighth year, rebelled against Babylon, and depending upon which Bible one reads, and other factors, was exiled to Babylon with other Jews (2 Kings 24:1-4).

b) Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah): His reign replaced Jehoiakim's but lasted only three months at which time he, and 10,000 others - all of Jerusalem - were exiled to Babylon roughly 800 miles away (2 Kings 24:8 - 17).

c) Zedekiah: He replaced Jehoiachin, ruled eleven years, became a vassal to Babylon early on, and steadfastly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar who then utterly destroyed Jerusalem and Judah in Zedekiah's eleventh year; he either slaughtered, dispersed or exiled the remaining Jews to Babylon. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe this destruction of Jerusalem occurred in 607 B.C.E., while everyone else for the most part agrees it occurred in 587/6 B.C.E. See generally Jeremiah chapters 24 and 25.

After the Persians and Medes conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E. the Jews were set free and roughly 50,000 of them returned home to Judah in the fall of 537 B.C.E.

C. Overview of the Controversy

The Jehovah's Witnesses' task of proving that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E. and not 587/6 B.C.E. is no easy feat in light of strong archeological, historical and scriptural evidence to the contrary. Notwithstanding this uphill battle, the Jehovah's Witnesses have gone to elaborate lengths to rationalize their position, regrettably causing a dizzying smoke-screen of complexity when the answers and issues, as will be detailed below, are relatively simple and straightforward as the Almighty intended them to be

- in order to reach as many people as possible.

At the heart of the controversy is a seventy-year prophetic period of time. The Jehovah's Witnesses simply count backward seventy years from the fall of 537 B.C.E., the year Jews returned to Judah after being exiled to Babylon, to arrive at 607 B.C.E. Therefore, they reason, Jerusalem must have been destroyed in 607 B.C.E.

The problem is that they have completely misinterpreted and misapplied the prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 and accompanying verses because they desperately need 607 B.C.E. in order to arrive at 1914. An abbreviated form of this seventy-year prophecy, unfortunately taken out of context, and reproduced in the article *Setting the Record Straight* - a fierce and very comprehensive defense of the Jehovah's Witnesses' pro-607 stance - provides:

The word that occurred to Jeremiah . . . concerning all the people of Judah and concerning all the inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years. —Jeremiah 25:1a, 2, 11.

According to *Setting the Record Straight* this prophecy has two parts equal in length, both parts beginning and ending at exactly the same time:

A) The land of Judah, and Jerusalem, would be devastated and remain so without a single inhabitant exactly seventy years commencing with Jerusalem's destruction and not before, and this period of devastation ended seventy years later only when the exiled Jews physically returned to their homeland Judah from Babylon in 537 B.C.E. The opposing view is that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587/6 B.C.E. and the period of complete devastation lasted only 48 - 50 years.

B) All exiled Jews that fell within the scope of the prophecy were removed at Jerusalem's destruction, and not before, and remained as exiles serving Babylon a full seventy years until their actual return to Judah in 537 B.C.E. Again, the opposing view is that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587/6 B.C.E. and those exiles removed at that time to Babylon served only 48 - 50 years in captivity.

It should be pointed out that should either prong of this composite two-prong approach fail, the entire prophecy, or their version of it, fails.

As such, we are essentially dealing with two primary areas of interest related to a) when Judah's devastation began and ended, and the extent of that devastation, and b) when servitude to the king of Babylon began and ended, what servitude meant, and to whom it applied. *Saving the Record Straight* frames the Jehovah's Witnesses' position as follows:

While some critics argue that Jeremiah 25:11 only refers to seventy years of servitude, Daniel 9:2 confirms that the prophecy also entailed seventy years of devastation for the land of Judah. Second Chronicles 36:20, 21 further shows that it was the composite effect of exiling the remaining ones who "came to be servants to [Nebuchadnezzar]" and the resulting devastation and desolation of the land of Judah that began to fulfill the prophecy concerning the seventy years.

The Watchtower Society in its publication *Let Your Kingdom Come* and elsewhere confirms that the seventy-year period ended only upon the Jews' return to Judah, and not before.

The 70 years expired when Cyrus the Great, in his first year, released the Jews and they **returned** to their homeland. (Chronicles 36:17 - 23)

The Bible prophecy does not allow for the application of the 70-year period to any time other than that between the desolation of Judah, accompanying Jerusalem's destruction, and the return of the Jewish exiles to their homeland as a result of Cyrus' decree," - *Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 1, p. 463.

This paper begins with an analysis of the underlying issues presented by the phrase a) “and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (servitude), followed by a discussion of issues pertaining to the phrase b) “all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment” (devastation).

Please, weigh all of the evidence; place it on a scale and see where it tilts.

D. Servitude

“... and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.” Jeremiah 25:11

Quite frankly, it is unclear exactly what the Watchtower Society's interpretation of Jeremiah 25:11 is today since it appears to have undergone significant modification from earlier times. The Society's founder Charles Taze Russell who, in *The Time Is At Hand* (Studies in the Scriptures, Series 2, 1912 edition, p. 52), argued that the seventy years of serving the king of Babylon only referred to seventy years of desolation of the land and not seventy years of captivity, exile and servitude.

Usher dates the seventy years desolation eighteen years earlier than shown above—i.e., before the dethronement of Zedekiah, Judah's last king—because the king of Babylon took many of the people captive at that time. (2 Chron. 36:9, 10, 17, 21; 2 Kings 24:8-16.) **He evidently makes the not uncommon mistake of regarding those seventy years as the period of captivity, whereas the Lord expressly declares them to be seventy years of desolation of the land, that the land should lie “desolate, without an inhabitant.”** Such was not the case prior to Zedekiah's dethronement. (2 Kings 24:14.) But the desolation which followed Zedekiah's overthrow was complete; for, though some of the poor of the land were left to be vine-dressers and husbandmen (2 Kings 25:12), shortly even these—“all people, both small and great”—fled to Egypt for fear of the Chaldees. (Verse 26.) There can be no doubt here; and therefore in reckoning the time to the desolation of the land, all periods up to the close of Zedekiah's reign should be counted in, as we have done.

Russell's strained rendering of Jeremiah 25:11 whereby the prophetic phrase “... and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years” does not apply to anyone actually serving the king of Babylon has evidently been cast aside, as it should have been, for many Jehovah's Witnesses 607-

defenders reject such a narrow interpretation and recognize that the prophecy does entail servitude after all. That is where the bulk of the intellectual debate seems to be taking place, and where the authors of *Setting the Record Straight* have taken a strong, though misguided, stand.

In all fairness to the Jehovah's Witnesses, seventy-year theories abound. All such theories, except one, have the difficult, if not impossible, task of fitting the seventy years into a workable framework or slot. These flawed theories fail because they generally fall short of seventy years, or exceed it. In the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses, they both fall short and exceed seventy years and thus fail at both ends of the chronological spectrum with respect to devastation and servitude.

This paper takes the position that although it is helpful to understand when "these nations" (not only Judah) began to serve the king of Babylon it does so in order to establish the beginning of the Babylonian Empire as it relates to Jeremiah 25:11, which was 609 B.C.E., because the only acceptable and workable seventy-year theory is the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory. It is a very simple and straightforward concept. The seventy years began in 609 B.C.E. when the king of Babylon brought to an end the Assyrian Empire at the final battle of Haran; it ended seventy years later in 539 B.C.E. when Babylon fell to the Persians and Medes. During this seventy-year period the affected nations of the earth collectively served, and were dominated by, the Babylonian Empire.

With this in mind it is important to understand why this paper argues that the Jews began serving the king of Babylon long before Jerusalem's destruction - it is to prove that the Jehovah's Witnesses' theory fails because it exceeds seventy years under their interpretation, although the exact number of those excessive years of servitude is not important. It is not necessary to prove a full seventy years of Jewish servitude to Babylon either as vassals or captive exiles because that is not required to disprove the Jehovah's Witnesses' 607 theory. As a matter of fact, proving that Judah's Jews served Babylon a full seventy years is irrelevant under the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory, a concept difficult for many people to grasp.

Equally important is the year in which the seventy-year prophecy ended, namely 539 B.C.E., when Babylon fell to the Persians and Medes, and not upon the Jews' return to Judah. The scriptural basis for this conclusion is also solid - reasonable minds cannot draw any other conclusion. And because the seventy-year period of servitude ended in October of 539 B.C.E., and not as the Jehovah's Witnesses claim in 537 B.C.E. upon the exiles' return to Judah, their theory fails at this end of the chronological spectrum as well. It bears repeating - the date the nations' seventy years of servitude ended in 539 B.C.E. when Babylon fell is an extremely important point to remember because Jerusalem could not have been destroyed in 607 B.C.E. since that amounts to 68 - 69 years only, a fatal shortfall of one or two years.

E. The seventy-year prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 did not apply to Jerusalem and Judah alone but to all nations which fell under the domination of the Babylonian Empire. These nations as a unit, comprising the Babylonian Empire collectively, served the king(s) of Babylon seventy years.

The meaning and scope of Jeremiah 25:11 can only be understood in the context of other highly relevant verses of chapter 25 and elsewhere. Regrettably, much of the Jehovah's Witnesses' confusion stems in large part from excising, or separating, Jeremiah 25:11 from other pertinent verses and presenting it in isolation. The Jehovah's Witnesses' truncated rendering of Jeremiah 25:11 is just one part of the prophecy and greatly mischaracterizes the sweeping scope of foretold events since the seventy years of servitude was unquestionably directed to all nations that eventually came under the domination of the Babylonian Empire, and not merely the Jews of Judah. For the sake of clarity and to better understand the reach of Jeremiah 25:11 additional integral verses 8 - 29 are reproduced in their entirety:

8 “Therefore this is what Jehovah of armies has said, “For the reason that YOU did not obey my words, 9 here I am sending and I will take all the families of the north,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “even [sending] to Neb·u·chad·rez‘zar the king of Babylon, my servant, **and I will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about;** and I will devote them to destruction and make them an object of astonishment and something to whistle at and places devastated to time indefinite. 10 And I will destroy out of them the sound of exultation and the sound of rejoicing, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the hand mill and the light of the lamp. 11 And all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and **these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.**”

12 “‘And it must occur that when seventy years have been fulfilled I shall call to account against the king of Babylon and against that nation,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘their error, even against the land of the Chal·de‘ans, and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite. 13 And I will bring in upon that land all my words that I have spoken against it, **even all that is written in this book that Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations.** 14 For even they themselves, many nations and great kings, have exploited them as servants; and I will repay them according to their activity and according to the work of their hands.’”

15 For this is what Jehovah the God of Israel said to me: “Take this cup of the wine of rage out of my hand, and you must make all the nations to whom I am sending you drink it. 16 And they must drink and shake back and forth and act like crazed men because of the sword that I am sending among them.”

17 And I proceeded to take the cup out of the hand of Jehovah and to make all the

nations drink to whom Jehovah had sent me: 18 **namely, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and her kings, her princes, to make them a devastated place, an object of astonishment, something to whistle at and a malediction, just as at this day; 19 Phar'aoth the king of Egypt and his servants and his princes and all his people; 20 and all the mixed company, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Phi-lis'tines and Ash'ke-lon and Ga'za and Ek'ron and the remnant of Ash'dod; 21 E'dom and Mo'ab and the sons of Am'mon; 22 and all the kings of Tyre and all the kings of Si'don and the kings of the island that is in the region of the sea; 23 and De'dan and Te'ma and Buz and all those with hair clipped at the temples; 24 and all the kings of the Arabs and all the kings of the mixed company who are residing in the wilderness; 25 and all the kings of Zim'ri and all the kings of E'lam and all the kings of the Medes; 26 and all the kings of the north who are near and far away, one after the other, and all the [other] kingdoms of the earth that are on the surface of the ground; and the king of She'shach himself will drink after them.**

27 “And you must say to them, ‘This is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said: “Drink and get drunk and puke and fall so that YOU cannot get up because of the sword that I am sending among YOU.”’ 28 And it must occur that in case they refuse to take the cup out of your hand to drink, you must also say to them, ‘This is what Jehovah of armies has said: “YOU will drink without fail. 29 For, look! it is upon the city upon which my name is called that I am starting off in bringing calamity, and should YOU yourselves in any way go free of punishment?”’”

““ YOU will not go free of punishment, **for there is a sword that I am calling against all the inhabitants of the earth,**’ is the utterance of Jehovah of armies.

Obviously, the Jehovah’s Witnesses left much out, no doubt an inadvertent oversight. Nonetheless, the following observations are in order. First, Jeremiah’s prophetic words in verse 13 were directed “against all the nations” and not just Judah.

“ And I will bring in upon that land all my words that I have spoken against it, even all that is written in this book **that Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations.**”

Secondly, service to the king of Babylon was not limited to Judah because Jeremiah used the plural “these nations” at Jeremiah 25:11. Third, verse 9 dictates a broader reading because Jehovah was going to send Nebuchadnezzar “... against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about ...,” not only against Judah.

Fourth, to make it perfectly clear which nations Jeremiah directed the prophecies to they are listed in the same chapter at verses 15-26. Jeremiah was instructed to take the cup of the wine of rage out of the Lord’s hand and make all the nations, who would succumb to the Babylonian Empire, drink it. These nations included Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, Egypt, the Medes, and roughly 20 other nations and/or kingdoms, and “all the [other] kingdoms of the earth that are on the surface of the ground; ...” (Jeremiah 25:15,16). Even though Judah was one of these nations that would serve, or fall, under the dominion of the Babylonian Empire which spanned seventy years from 609 B.C.E. to 539 B.C.E., it was by no means the only nation to whom the seventy-year prophecy was directed.

Fifth, additional evidence that Jeremiah 25:11 did not apply only to Judah and Jerusalem is found at Jeremiah 27:6,7, also written during the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign. There, Jehovah stated in no uncertain terms with respect to nations surrounding and including Judah that he had "given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon" and that "all the nations must serve even him, and his son and his grandson until the time even of his own land comes"

1 In the beginning of the kingdom of Je·hoi'a·kim the son of Jo·si'ah, the king of Judah, this word occurred to Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying: 2 "This is what Jehovah has said to me, 'Make for yourself bands and yoke bars, and you must put them upon your neck. 3 And you must send them to the king of E'dom and to the king of Mo'ab and to the king of the sons of Am'mon and to the king of Tyre and to the king of Si'don by the hand of the messengers who are coming to Jerusalem to Zed·e·ki'ah the king of Judah. 4 And you must give them a command for their masters, saying:

""This is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said; this is what YOU should say to YOUR masters, 5 **'I myself have made the earth, mankind and the beasts that are upon the surface of the earth by my great power and by my stretched-out arm; and I have given it to whom it has proved right in my eyes. 6 And now I myself have given all these lands into the hand of Neb·u·chad·nez'zar the king of Babylon, my servant; and even the wild beasts of the field I have given him to serve him. 7 And all the nations must serve even him and his son and his grandson until the time even of his own land comes, and many nations and great kings must exploit him as a servant.'**

This statement of Jehovah's sweeping grant of authority to Nebuchadnezzar, whereby those lands and beasts of the field had been given to serve him and that all the nations must serve the king of Babylon, generally mirrors the prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 and related verses.

Sixth, if Judah alone was to serve the king of Babylon seventy years it would nullify the prophecy with respect to almost every other nation because not all nations would have been able to serve Babylon seventy years. The king of Babylon in 609 B.C.E, Nabopolassar, brought Assyria to its end at the final battle at Haran. If the seventy years of servitude applied to only one nation, it could only apply to the conquered nation Assyria when Haran fell (and any other nations conquered by the Babylonians (Chaldeans) in that year). All other nations could logically only serve less than seventy years, including Judah. If Judah was the only nation to whom the prophecy applied, and it applied only to Judah and Jerusalem commencing with their destruction in the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, all other nations conquered by Nebuchadnezzar in the preceding 18 years would have served Babylon in excess of seventy years, and those conquered after Jerusalem and Judah fell would have served less than seventy years. Such an interpretation would nullify Jehovah's word which directed the prophecy to all the nations and which could only be satisfied if the seventy-year period of servitude was a composite, an epoch of time that applied collectively to all conquered or dominated nations as a whole. A parallel can be drawn with the military campaign of Hitler's Third Reich which spanned six years between 1939 and 1945, even though not all of the nations conquered by the Nazis fell under its domination the entire six year period. Czechoslovakia was under Hitler's domination longer than France.

Seventh, if Jerusalem and Judah as one nation among “these nations” served seventy years, history, even according to the Jehovah’s Witnesses would be turned on its head because it would imply that Babylon conquered no other nations before destroying Jerusalem and Judah; that is, Jerusalem and Judah would have to be the first to succumb to the Babylonian expansion in Nebuchadnezzar’s 18th year as king. The implication would be that Nebuchadnezzar conquered no other nations during his first 18 years as king, but that simply is not the case.

Eighth, sometimes the phrase “king of Babylon” refers to the kings of Babylon as a whole or whoever the king might have been at any particular time without specifically identifying him by name. Such is the case with respect to the prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 whereby Judah and the nations of the earth would serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Service to this king however was not limited to Nebuchadnezzar or even his son or grandson as stated at Jeremiah 27:7 but included Nebuchadnezzar’s father Nabopolassar who finished off Assyria in 609 B.C.E., and other kings besides Nebuchadnezzar’s blood relatives.

And all the nations must serve even him and his son and his grandson until the time even of his own land comes, and many nations and great kings must exploit him as a servant (Jeremiah 27:7).

This is not an all-encompassing list of the kings of Babylon which the nations served seventy years. Even 607- defenders in *Setting the Record Straight* are of the same view:

In fulfillment of Jeremiah 27:7, the exiled Jews did in fact literally serve Nebuchadnezzar’s son (Evilmerodach) and Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson (co-regent Belshazzar, whose mother was reportedly Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter, Nitocris). However, the captive Jews also served other kings of Babylon, including Neriglissar, Labashi-Marduk and Nabonidus, none of whom bore any blood relation to Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, the words at Jeremiah 27:7, though indisputably true, were obviously not meant to be an all-encompassing list of rulers whom the Jews would serve during the seventy years.

As mentioned, to this more encompassing list should be added another king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar’s father Nabopolassar whose final destruction of his nemesis Assyria at Haran in 609 B.C.E. gave rise to the Babylonian Empire and the commencement of the seventy years of servitude. Servitude began with Nebuchadnezzar’s father Nabopolassar and ended with the death of Belshazzar in 539 B.C.E. In accord with the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory the nations of the earth collectively served the many kings of Babylon from 609 B.C.E. to 539 B.C.E. for a total of seventy years in fulfillment of the prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11.

Ninth, in chapter 25 of the book of Jeremiah, with respect to Judah and Jerusalem, Jeremiah foretold what lay in their future beginning in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar onward. The land of Judah would become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, which it was. However, determining the exact year the devastation began is not necessary because proving a full seventy years of devastation is irrelevant in as much as the seventy years pertained to servitude, not devastation. They are separate concepts.

As explained in detail below, there is no valid “seventy years of devastation” theory and therefore the fact that the Babylonian Empire commenced in 609 B.C.E. - three or four years before Jeremiah delivered the prophecy - is not material. As it pertained to devastation, yes, that was in Judah’s future, but the seventy-year duration of that devastation is a non-issue.

As stated, the many nations which served Babylon a collective seventy years described in Jeremiah 25:11 began to serve in 609 B.C.E. when Assyria was overcome at the final battle of Haran. The fact that Jeremiah said that “these nations **will** serve the king of Babylon” does not mean the beginning of the full seventy years of servitude was still in the future, which some 607-defenders argue, would disprove the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory. Their confusion stems from an incorrect understanding of the word “will” which they insist only applies to future events, but that is not the case.

“Will” has multiple meanings. It is frequently employed to connote occurrences, conditions, events or actions which do not lie in the future. The dictionary offers numerous examples.

People will do right. You will not have forgotten him. This will be right. People will talk.
You will often see him sitting there. Boys will be boys.

Even though servitude of many nations to Babylon was a future event, some nations had already been serving since 609 B.C.E. and the “will” of Jeremiah 25:11 therefore could not be strictly limited to all the nations’ future servitude. Assyria had already been serving when Jeremiah spoke the prophecy, and Nebuchadnezzar conquered countries from Hattu to Babylon before he dealt with Judah. Therefore, since nations which were among those listed at Jeremiah 25:17-26, who tasted the cup of Jehovah’s rage, had already been serving when the prophecy was delivered, the “will” of Jeremiah 25:11 referred to past events, conditions or occurrences (servitude) as well as future servitude.

To illustrate further, a man has served five years in prison and believes, mistakenly, that he is scheduled to be released, but the prison warden says “No, you will have to serve ten years.” The warden is not saying he would serve ten more years, but that he would serve five more years in addition to the previous five years. The prisoner will serve the full ten years.

The same reasoning applies to Jeremiah 25:11. “Will have to serve” does not foreclose prior servitude of Assyria and other conquered nations. The seventy years of collective servitude commenced in 609 B.C.E. This is the only proper rendering which harmonizes comfortably with the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory. “Will” does not always refer to future events, but can include past and current events.

Finally, even if the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory were to be proven wrong, that does not mean the Jehovah’s Witnesses are right by default. Their theories must stand or fall on their own merits.

F. The servitude referred to at Jeremiah 25:11 whereby the nations which fell under the domination of the Babylonian Empire would serve the king of Babylon seventy years included a) vassalage, b) willing exile, and/or c) forced captivity and exile.

Before determining whether Judah began serving the king of Babylon at any time prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, or only began to serve upon Jerusalem's destruction, it is first necessary to understand how Scripture defines the word "serve" or "servitude." Establishing the correct meaning of "servitude" goes a long way toward answering the underlying question of when Judah began its servitude. The Bible provides a straightforward answer which seems to have been lost on the 607-defenders whose failure to mention certain verses, specifically all of Jeremiah 27:11 which is directly on point, is disturbing to say the least. As mentioned above, Judah's years of vassalage or exile and captivity before Jerusalem's destruction does not have to satisfy a full seventy-year period under the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory. The commencement of Judah's vassalage or earlier exile however is relevant to show that the Jehovah's Witnesses' version of the seventy years of servitude and captivity exceeds seventy years and therefore fails.

The Jehovah's Witnesses' viewpoint set forth in *Setting the Record Straight* is unequivocal. They contend that to "serve" is limited only to those Jews taken captive when Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah desolated and its inhabitants forced into Babylonian exile, and not before. It does not, they claim, apply to Judah and Jerusalem who served as tribute-paying vassals to the king of Babylon at any time, let alone before Jerusalem and Judah were destroyed. And, it does not apply to the very large number of Jews removed into exile at various intervals starting with, at a minimum, the recorded exile under Jehoiachin years prior to Jerusalem's destruction. But according to Scripture, nothing could be further from the truth. Though a long quote, relevant provisions taken from *Setting the Record Straight* are set forth here:

Thus, at Jeremiah 27:11, Jehovah could rightly extend favor toward any nation that would bring their necks "under the yoke of the king of Babylon and actually serve him."

Even in the minds of the false prophets of Zedekiah's day, it was clear that the inhabitants of Judah were not yet bound by servitude to Babylon:

"And as for you men, do not listen to your prophets and to your practicers of divination and to your dreamers and to your practicers of magic and to your sorcerers, who are saying to you: "You men will not serve the king of Babylon." . . . Even to Zedekiah the king of Judah I spoke according to all these words, saying: "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people and keep on living. Why should you yourself and your people die by the sword, by the famine and by the pestilence according to what Jehovah has spoken to the nation that does not serve the king of Babylon? And do not listen to the words of the prophets that are saying to you men, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon,' because falsehood is what they are prophesying to you."—Jeremiah

27:9, 10, 12- 14.

So, how exactly was Zedekiah to bring his neck “under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him”? The answer is found at Jeremiah 38:17, 18:

“ Jeremiah now said to Zedekiah: “This is what Jehovah, the God of armies, the God of Israel, has said, ‘ If you will without fail go out to the princes of the king of Babylon, your soul will also certainly keep living and this city itself will not be burned with fire, and you yourself and your household will certainly keep living. But if you will not go out to the princes of the king of Babylon, this city must also be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they will actually burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape out of their hand.’”—Jeremiah 38:17, 18.

Jeremiah 15:2 explains what this voluntary “going out” would require:

And it must occur that should they say to you, ‘Where shall we go out to?’ you must also say to them, ‘ This is what Jehovah has said: . . . whoever is for the captivity, to the captivity!’”—Jeremiah 15:2.

As long as Jehoiakim, and later, Zedekiah, refused to “go out to the princes of the king of Babylon,” the nation of Judah could not be said to be serving the king of Babylon. Furthermore, Jeremiah 1:1-3 tells us that the prophetic warnings continued right down to the “eleventh year of Zedekiah . . . until Jerusalem went into exile in the fifth month.”

First, with respect to what it means to serve under the yoke of Babylon, the 607-defenders strictly limit the definition to forced captivity. Their misunderstanding stems from the fact that they omit all of Jeremiah 27:10 and 11 which specifically defines what that yoke of servitude is, yet, they include the surrounding verses. Jeremiah 27:11 makes it abundantly clear that the yoke of servitude includes vassalage.

9 ““““And as for YOU men, do not listen to YOUR prophets and to YOUR practicers of divination and to YOUR dreamers and to YOUR practicers of magic and to YOUR sorcerers, who are saying to YOU: “YOU men will not serve the king of Babylon.” 10 For falsehood is what they are prophesying to YOU, for the purpose of having YOU taken far away from off YOUR ground; and I shall have to disperse YOU, and YOU will have to perish.

11 ““““And as for the nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and actually serve him, I will also let it rest upon its ground,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘and it will certainly cultivate it and dwell in it.’”””

Jehovah offered all nations the option of becoming vassals to the Babylonian Empire and thereby rest upon its ground and cultivate it and dwell in it. It was His preferred alternative to annihilation. The nations, including Judah, could exercise this option and become vassals - which coincidentally also meant that some would become exiles taken peacefully (relatively speaking) to Babylon, or, they would be conquered by the sword and forcibly removed as captives or become dispersed. Either way,

peacefully or by force, the nations, including Judah, would serve Babylon. A careful reading of relevant portions of Chapter 27 clarifies this:

1 In the beginning of the kingdom of Je-hoi'a-kim the son of Jo-si'ah, the king of Judah, this word occurred to Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying: 2 "This is what Jehovah has said to me, 'Make for yourself bands and yoke bars, and you must put them upon your neck. 3 And you must send them to the king of E'dom and to the king of Mo'ab and to the king of the sons of Am'mon and to the king of Tyre and to the king of Si'don by the hand of the messengers who are coming to Jerusalem to Zed-e-ki'ah the king of Judah. 4 And you must give them a command for their masters, saying:

“““This is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said; this is what YOU should say to YOUR masters, 5 'I myself have made the earth, mankind and the beasts that are upon the surface of the earth by my great power and by my stretched-out arm; and I have given it to whom it has proved right in my eyes. 6 And now I myself have given all these lands into the hand of Neb-u-chad-nez'zar the king of Babylon, my servant; and even the wild beasts of the field I have given him to serve him. 7 And all the nations must serve even him and his son and his grandson until the time even of his own land comes, and many nations and great kings must exploit him as a servant.'

8 ““““And it must occur that the nation and the kingdom that will not serve him, even Neb-u-chad-nez'zar the king of Babylon; and the one that will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, with the sword and with the famine and with the pestilence I shall turn my attention upon that nation,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'until I shall have finished them off by his hand.'

9 ““““And as for YOU men, do not listen to YOUR prophets and to YOUR practicers of divination and to YOUR dreamers and to YOUR practicers of magic and to YOUR sorcerers, who are saying to YOU: "YOU men will not serve the king of Babylon." 10 For falsehood is what they are prophesying to YOU, for the purpose of having YOU taken far away from off YOUR ground; and I shall have to disperse YOU, and YOU will have to perish.

11 ““““And as for the nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and actually serve him, I will also let it rest upon its ground,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'and it will certainly cultivate it and dwell in it.'”””

12 Even to Zed-e-ki'ah the king of Judah I spoke according to all these words, saying: "Bring YOUR necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people and keep on living. 13 Why should you yourself and your people die by the sword, by the famine and by the pestilence according to what Jehovah has spoken to the nation that does not serve the king of Babylon? 14 And do not listen to the words of the prophets that are saying to YOU men, 'YOU will not serve the king of Babylon,' because falsehood is what they are prophesying to YOU.

15 ““For I have not sent them,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'but they are prophesying in my name falsely, to the end that I shall disperse YOU, and YOU will have to perish,

YOU men and the prophets that are prophesying to YOU.’”

16 And to the priests and to all this people I spoke, saying: “This is what Jehovah has said, ‘Do not listen to the words of YOUR prophets that are prophesying to YOU, saying: “Look! The utensils of the house of Jehovah are being brought back from Babylon soon now!” For falsehood is what they are prophesying to YOU. 17 Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon and keep on living. Why should this city become a devastated place?

Secondly, because serving under the yoke of Babylon included vassalage, Judah began serving the king of Babylon in that capacity years before Jerusalem’s fall, beginning at a minimum in the eighth year of Jehoiakim’s reign.

In his days Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up, and so Jehoiakim became his servant for three years. (2 Kings 1:1).

After three years as a vassal Jehoiakim rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar came up against him, removed to Babylon utensils from the house of Jehovah and according to a literal translation in the Interlinear Bible, “bound him in bronze fetters to take him away to Babylon.” (2 Chronicles 36:5-7). The point is, because Judah's Jews began serving the king of Babylon as vassals at least by Jehoiakim’s eighth year, the Jehovah’s Witnesses' theory fails because it actually amounts to at least 80+ years of servitude even assuming their seventy-year period of servitude ended upon the Jews' return to Judah in 537 B.C.E., which it did not.

Third, the 607-defenders in *Setting the Record Straight* also omitted Jeremiah 29:10 where it was made clear that destruction and captivity was not Jehovah’s preferred method of punishing his people, but a consequence of not submitting as vassals; i.e., they would suffer the sword, the famine, pestilence and captivity. Verse 10 also makes it clear that false prophets who pacified the populace by stating they would not serve Babylon did so for the purpose of having Judah destroyed and the people removed from off the ground. Jehovah’s desire on the other hand was for Judah to serve as vassals; he did not “purpose,” as did the false prophets, that his people perish by the plague, sword, famine and captivity.

Fourth, even Jeremiah and the false prophet Hananiah believed that the exiles numbering in excess of ten thousand and removed to Babylon during the reign of Jehoiachin served under the yoke of Babylon years before Jerusalem was destroyed. Jeremiah described the mass exodus as follows:

"And he took into exile all Jerusalem and all the princes and all the valiant, mighty men - ten thousand he was taking into exile - and also every craftsman and builder of bulwarks. No one had been left behind except the lowly class of the people of the land. Thus he took Jehoiachin into exile to Babylon; and the king's mother and the king's wives and his court officials and the foremost men of the land he led away as exiled people from Jerusalem to Babylon." (2 Kings 24:14, 15).

The 607-defenders in *Setting the Record Straight* argue that none of these exiles, including craftsmen and artisans, peacefully removed from off their soil served the king of Babylon in accordance with the seventy-year prophecy of Jeremiah 25:11. Furthermore, they contend that the false prophets of Zedekiah’s time, years later, did not believe that any Jews had begun to serve Babylon even though all

of Jerusalem was exiled during the previous king Jehoiachin's reign. They argue that the yoke of servitude lay in the future. Scripture proves otherwise. The answer can be found in large part in chapter 28 of the book of Jeremiah, likewise omitted by the 607-defenders.

1 Then it came about in that year, in the beginning of the kingdom of Zed·e·ki'ah the king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, that **Han·a·ni'ah the son of Az'zur, the prophet who was from Gib'e-on, said to me in the house of Jehovah before the eyes of the priests and of all the people:** 2 **“This is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said, ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.** 3 **Within two full years more I am bringing back to this place all the utensils of the house of Jehovah that Neb·u·chad·nez'zar the king of Babylon took from this place that he might bring them to Babylon.”** 4 **“‘And Jec·o·ni'ah the son of Je·hoi'a·kim, the king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who have come to Babylon I am bringing back to this place,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘for I shall break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”**

5 And Jeremiah the prophet proceeded to say to Han·a·ni'ah the prophet before the eyes of the priests and before the eyes of all the people who were standing in the house of Jehovah; 6 yes, Jeremiah the prophet proceeded to say: “Amen! Thus may Jehovah do! May Jehovah establish your words that you have prophesied by bringing back the utensils of the house of Jehovah and all the exiled people from Babylon to this place! 7 However, hear, please, this word that I am speaking in your ears and in the ears of all the people. 8 As regards the prophets that happened to be prior to me and prior to you from long ago, they also used to prophesy concerning many lands and concerning great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence. 9 As regards the prophet that prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes true the prophet whom Jehovah has sent in truth will become known.”

10 At that Han·a·ni'ah the prophet took the yoke bar from off the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke it. 11 And Han·a·ni'ah went on to say before the eyes of all the people: “This is what Jehovah has said, ‘Just like this I shall break the yoke of Neb·u·chad·nez'zar the king of Babylon within two full years more from off the neck of all the nations.’” And Jeremiah the prophet proceeded to go his way.

12 Then the word of Jehovah occurred to Jeremiah, after Han·a·ni'ah the prophet had broken the yoke bar from off the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 13 “Go, and you must say to Han·a·ni'ah, ‘This is what Jehovah has said: **“Yoke bars of wood you have broken, and instead of them you will have to make yoke bars of iron.”**”

14 For this is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said: **“A yoke of iron I will (have) put upon the neck of all these nations, to serve Neb·u·chad·nez'zar the king of Babylon; and they must serve him. And even the wild beasts of the field I will give him.”**”

15 And Jeremiah the prophet went on to say to Han·a·ni'ah the prophet: “Listen, please, O Han·a·ni'ah! Jehovah has not sent you, but **you yourself have caused this people to trust in a falsehood.** 16 Therefore this is what Jehovah has said, ‘Look! I am sending

you away from off the surface of the ground. This year you yourself must die, for you have spoken outright revolt against Jehovah.””

17 So Han·a·ni´ah the prophet died in that year, in the seventh month. (Parenthetical added).

The 607-defenders are entirely correct in stating that the yoke of servitude includes “captivity.” Where they have gone astray in their understanding is limiting it to “forced” captivity applicable to only those removed at Jerusalem’s destruction when chapter 28 makes it very clear that it applies to captives peacefully removed as well; they are the basket of “good figs” referenced in chapter 24.

Chapter 28 chronicles the acrimonious dual between Jeremiah and Hananiah over the current and future status of Jews already serving in exile under the Babylonian yoke in the fourth year of the kingdom of Zedekiah, in addition to all other nations who were serving and would continue to serve under the yoke of the Babylonian king. Hananiah falsely prophesied that Jehovah said that he would break the yoke of the king of Babylon and within two years bring back the utensils of the house of Jehovah which Nebuchadnezzar had carted off, and return the many thousands of exiles removed to Babylon. Hananiah went on to claim that Jehovah would within two full years more break the yoke from off the neck of all the nations. And to make his point, Hananiah took the symbolic wooden yoke off the neck of Jeremiah and broke it.

Please note that Jeremiah never disagreed that the exiles were serving under the yoke of Babylon and he wholeheartedly embraced the idea that the utensils should be returned. But he vehemently disagreed that the yoke of servitude on exiled Judah or all the other nations would be broken. Rather, the wooden yoke would become in reality a much more onerous yoke of iron which would saddle the Jews for years to come, which it did.

A significant point of departure exists in verse 14 of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Bible, the New World Translation, which attempts to push the yoke of servitude into the future by stating that Jehovah “will” put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations. A literal translation of that same verse in the Interlinear Bible uses the past tense: “I **have** put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations.”

The difference is very important; “have” instead of “will” completely undermines the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ position that the yoke of servitude was a future event, but a simple unbiased reading of chapter 28 shows that Judah had already been serving under Babylon’s yoke. Jeremiah said that instead of a wooden yoke there is an iron yoke, indicating an increase in the intensity and length of servitude which had been ongoing, and which in fact happened when Jerusalem and Judah were destroyed and the remaining nations also fell to Babylon. Jeremiah never stated, and it cannot be implied, that Judah had not been serving under the Babylonian yoke or that a yoke would rest on the neck of Judah for the first time beginning with Jerusalem’s destruction even though all of Jerusalem had already been taken into exile under Jehoiachin.

Do not be distracted by the fact that Hananiah was a false prophet. His falsehood dealt specifically with whether or not the yoke of servitude would be broken off the exiles and the nations, not whether they were serving under the yoke in the first place. Jeremiah and Hananiah were in accord in this regard.

Hananiah, being a false prophet, had deceived the people and caused them to trust in falsehood and lies.

By building a foundation of trust, he, and other false prophets, were able to sell the lie for the truth, the falsehood being what the people wanted to hear.

Fifth, the Jehovah's Witnesses' statement therefore in *Setting the Record Straight*, that "Even in the minds of the false prophets of Zedekiah's day, it was clear that the inhabitants of Judah were not yet bound by servitude to Babylon," is manifestly false and a gross mischaracterization of the events surrounding the false prophetic statements and the context within which they were spoken.

The false prophetic warning to Zedekiah that "You will not serve the king of Babylon" at Jeremiah 27:9 and 14 was delivered in the beginning of the kingdom of Zedekiah in his fourth year (Jeremiah 27:1). The warning delivered to him **at that time** in verse 12 was limited to him:

Even to Zedekiah the king of Judah I spoke according to all these words, saying: "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people and keep on living."

He was the last king to rule Judah before Jerusalem and Judah were destroyed. Zedekiah had steadfastly refused to continue as vassal to Babylon. Chapter 27 explains how Jeremiah was commissioned as early as the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign to warn other nations to submit to the yoke of Babylon. That warning, and offer to serve as vassal, was repeated to Zedekiah in the beginning of his reign as well. He preferred the lie, the counsel of the false prophets who said he would not serve. He stubbornly refused and rebelled. Eventually Jehovah's generous offer of serving as a vassal was taken off the table. Judah was dismantled and suffered the sword, pestilence, famine and the yoke of captivity. Judah ended up serving the hard way as symbolized by the basket of bad figs of Jeremiah chapters 24 and 29:17.

Nowhere in chapter 27 does it read or can it be implied that the false prophets believed that Judah had not already started to serve under Judah's previous kings. The above discussions prove the exact opposite, that servitude had been a long ongoing-affair. The false prophets' warning to Zedekiah in verse 12 was directed to him and was not a sweeping historical statement of the Jewish condition from the days of Jehoiakim onward. Jeremiah chapter 27 puts the false prophets' statements into proper context.

Sixth, Jeremiah's letter to those earlier exiles unequivocally corroborates the fact that the seventy years of servitude of Jeremiah 25:11 had already begun long before Jerusalem's destruction seven or eleven years later. In his letter at Jeremiah 29:4-18, written before Jerusalem was destroyed, Jehovah, through Jeremiah, informed the exiles they were in for a long stay, and they should settle in, build houses, plant gardens and raise families. Then, at the end of seventy years, when seventy years had been fulfilled - that is, when the seventy year prophecy of Jeremiah 25:11 ended at the fall of Babylon while the exiles were still in Babylon, Jehovah would turn his attention to the exiles and bring them back to Judah.

4 "This is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said to all the exiled people, whom I have caused to go into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, 5 'Build houses and inhabit [them], and plant gardens and eat their fruitage. 6 Take wives and become father to sons and to daughters; and take wives for YOUR own sons and give YOUR own daughters to husbands, that they may give birth to sons and to daughters; and become many there, and do not become few. 7 Also, seek the peace of the city to which I have

caused YOU to go into exile, and pray in its behalf to Jehovah, for in its peace there will prove to be peace for YOU yourselves. 8 For this is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, has said: “Let not YOUR prophets who are in among YOU and YOUR practicers of divination deceive YOU, and do not YOU listen to their dreams that they are dreaming. 9 For ‘it is in falsehood that they are prophesying to YOU in my name. I have not sent them,’ is the utterance of Jehovah.””

10 “For this is what Jehovah has said, ‘In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at Babylon I shall turn my attention to YOU people, and I will establish toward YOU my good word in bringing YOU back to this place.’

11 “‘For I myself well know the thoughts that I am thinking toward YOU,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘thoughts of peace, and not of calamity, to give YOU a future and a hope. 12 And YOU will certainly call me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to YOU.’

13 “‘And YOU will actually seek me and find [me], for YOU will search for me with all YOUR heart. 14 And I will let myself be found by YOU,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘And I will gather YOUR body of captives and collect YOU together out of all the nations and out of all the places to which I have dispersed YOU,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘And I will bring YOU back to the place from which I caused YOU to go into exile.’

15 “But YOU have said, ‘Jehovah has raised up for us prophets in Babylon.’

16 “For this is what Jehovah has said to the king sitting on the throne of David and to all the people dwelling in this city, YOUR brothers that have not gone forth with YOU into exile, 17 ‘This is what Jehovah of armies has said: “Here I am sending against them the sword, the famine and the pestilence, and I will make them like the burst-open figs that cannot be eaten for badness.”’

18 “‘And I will pursue after them with the sword, with the famine and with the pestilence, and I will give them for a quaking to all the kingdoms of the earth, for a curse and for an object of astonishment and for a whistling at and for a reproach among all the nations to which I shall certainly disperse them, 19 due to the fact that they have not listened to my words,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘that I have sent to them with my servants the prophets, getting up early and sending [them].’

It is simply not reasonable to believe that the seventy-year period mentioned in his letter had not yet begun. It was unmistakably already in progress. Otherwise, why bother mentioning it in the first place? Why insert it between the admonition to settle in and the promise of their return? The seventy years was directly connected to those earlier exiles and not later exiles who arrived in the wake of Jerusalem’s destruction eleven, or seven, years in the future. Jeremiah’s reminder that they were in for a long stay was not directed to those later exiles captured under Zedekiah’s rule, but he directed the letter specifically to the Jehoiachin exiles who were also included in the group of captives that Jehovah caused to return. He did not state that when seventy years had been fulfilled “81 years from now, beginning eleven years in the future” he would turn his attention to the Jehoiachin exiles. He did not

tell them the seventy years he was referring to applied only to a future generation of exiles, for if that was his intent he surely would have told them to wait the full 81 or 77 years, which is what their stay would have amounted to.

No credible inference to the contrary can be drawn. Under the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory, or any other theory for that matter which recognizes that Judah's exiles began serving Babylon years before the final destruction of Zedekiah's Jerusalem, the seventy-year period of servitude was already in progress.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are quick to point out Jeremiah 29:10 in support of their position:

10 "For this is what Jehovah has said, 'In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at (for) Babylon I shall turn my attention to YOU people, and I will establish toward YOU my good word in bringing YOU back to this place.'" (Parenthetical added).

A cursory reading of the phrase "In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at Babylon ..." might suggest that the seventy years entailed the entire nation being exiled at Babylon seventy years which could only happen if the period began at Jerusalem's destruction. Under the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory, "at Babylon" is more properly rendered "for Babylon." The difference is significant. Either rendering is linguistically permissible, but only "for Babylon" is probable and proper, and is the translation employed by nearly every other Bible including a literal translation in the Interlinear Bible. The Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation (NWT) and the King James Bible (KJV) - routinely vilified by the Jehovah's Witnesses for its lack of credibility - use "at Babylon." In other words, the Hebrew word "*le*" can be rendered "at" or "for."

This is a serious point of contention. The question is whether Jeremiah 29:10 may properly read "In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at Babylon?" As will be demonstrated in the following sections, "at Babylon" is not a proper translation and more importantly it cannot logically be used because it fails numerous tests. The question of what the correct interpretation is will be revisited later because employing the correct interpretation requires drawing a conclusion; it is a judgment call derived after a process of scriptural analysis and the application of common sense.

Before undertaking this inquiry one critical definition is in order pertaining to the word "fulfill" or "fulfillment." The Jehovah's Witnesses routinely imply that "fulfill" means "equal" when referring to the seventy-year period. This incorrect definition is essential to their seventy-year theory. Perhaps it is the notion of "fullness" that confuses them. To them, "fulfillment of seventy years" means "equal to seventy years" or any similar concept that equates fulfillment with these controversial seventy years.

But their understanding is wrong. Because it refers to a prophetic period of time, fulfillment means the "end" of seventy years of servitude, the conclusion of it, the accomplishment of it - the end of serving the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C.E. The Random House Collegiate Dictionary explains:

Fulfill 1. To carry out, or bring to realization, as a prophecy, promise, etc. ... 4. To bring to an end; finish or complete, as a period of time."

Please keep this in mind during the course of reading this paper. Furthermore, the overwhelming, vast majority of Bibles translate Jeremiah 29:10 "for Babylon," not "at Babylon," including, but not limited

to, the *NAB*, *NIV*, *NLT*, *ESV*, *NASB*, *ASV*, *BIBE*, *DBT*, *ERV*, *WEB* and *Green's Literal Translation*, not to mention recently updated versions of the Jehovah's Witnesses' *New World Translation* published in Swedish and Danish. As Carl Olof Jonsson illustrates in his recent critique of the WBTS' defense of 607 B.C.E. in *When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed* (2011), world-leading experts on the subject are in accord. Pursuant to Professor Ernst Jenni, the most respected authority on Hebrew prepositions, Jeremiah 29:10 must read "for Babylon," providing, "The rendering in all modern commentaries and translations is 'for Babel' (Babel as world power, not city or land); this is clear from the language as well as also from the context" (*GTR4*, pages 212, 213, 379).

Likewise, Dr. Seth Erlandsson writes, "The spatial sense [at Babylon] is impossible at Jer. 29:10" (parenthetical added). Professor Norman Gottwald emphasizes: "Certainly it must be stressed that the seventy years refer primarily to the time of Babylonian world dominion and not to the time of the exile, as is often carelessly supposed." (N. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth*, New York, Evanston, London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964, pp. 265, 266). The author of the classic *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Professor Jack Finegan, wrote in 1998 on page 255 of the second edition, that "The 'seventy years ... for Babylon,' of which Jeremiah speaks are therefore seventy years of Babylonian rule, and the return of Judah from exile is contingent upon the end of that period. Since the final fall of the Assyrian empire was in 609 B.C. (§ 430), and the New Babylonian empire endured from then until Cyrus the Persian took Babylon in 539, the period of Babylonian domination was in fact seventy years (609 – 539 = 70)."

Mr. Jonsson, whose treatise can be found online at <http://kristenfrihet.se/vtsvar/vtsvar1.pdf>, also writes of the expertise of "Dr. Jack Lundbom, an internationally respected authority on the book of Jeremiah. His three-volume commentary on Jeremiah in the Anchor Bible series is the most extensive and detailed modern commentary on the book, covering 2262 pages in all (Vol. I, 1999, XXV+934 pages; Vol. II, 2004, XVI+649 pages; and Vol. III, 2004, XIV+638 pages). In his discussion of the 70 years in Jeremiah 25:10-12 and 29:10 Dr. Lundbom concludes that this period refers 'not to the length of Judah's exile or to Jerusalem's desolations, but to Babylon's tenure as a world power (Duhm).

He (Lundbom) further observes: Classical Historians – How Accurate? – The Canon of Ptolemy: "From the fall of Nineveh (612 B.C.) to Babylon's capture by Cyrus (539 B.C.) was 73 years; from the Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.– Nebuchadrezzar's first year; cf. 25:1) to Babylon's capture by Cyrus (539 B.C.) was 66 years; and from the actual end of the Assyrian Empire (609/8 B.C.) to Babylon's capture by Cyrus and the return of the exiles (539 B.C.) was almost precisely 70 years.' (Vol. II, Doubleday, 2004, pp. 249, 250)."

One should therefore make no mistake about this crucial fact. Jeremiah 29:10 refers to the domination of all the nations by the Babylonian Empire for 70 years. It does not mean that Jerusalem's exiles would serve the Babylonian Empire, "at Babylon" for 70 years.

G. The nations' seventy years of servitude ended in 539 B.C.E. when Babylon fell to the Persians and Medes while the exiles were still in Babylon, thus bringing to a conclusion the servitude prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11, before the Jews returned home.

So, in light of Jeremiah's detailed explanation in chapter 25 and elsewhere that the seventy years of servitude applied to the nations of the earth that came under the domination of Babylon, the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory, what did he intend to convey in his letter to the exiles at Jeremiah 29:10? Did he mean that after the nations collectively finished serving Babylon seventy years when the empire fell he would turn his attention to the exiles and return them home? Or did he mean, as the Jehovah's Witnesses argue, that after the exiles returned home to Judah after having served at Babylon seventy years, beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem, he would turn his attention to them and bring them home from Babylon? That doesn't make sense, but that is precisely what they are arguing, even though on its face it is obviously illogical. None-the-less, even assuming that their interpretation is correct it fails repeatedly under a simple test.

Under the test, if the seventy-year period ended in 539 B.C.E. when Babylon fell and the Persians and Medes began to reign while the exiles were still in Babylon, the Jehovah's Witnesses' Return theory fails in three significant ways: **a)** the seventy years obviously did not end upon their return in 537 B.C.E., **b)** their seventy-year period amounts to only 68 years from 607 B.C.E. to 539 B.C.E., and **c)** from the fall of Babylon in October 539 B.C.E. to the exiles' return to Judah in 537 B.C.E. there was no king of Babylon to serve. So when exactly did the prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 end, whereby "these nations" would stop serving the king of Babylon seventy years? It ended in October, 539 B.C.E., not upon their return in 537 B.C.E.

First, nowhere in the Bible does it state that the return of the Jews marked the end of the seventy years. Second, Leviticus 26:32-35 whereby Moses prophesied the pending curse and punishment that befell the Jews states that Jehovah would scatter them among the nations and that the land would become a desolation, and Judah would pay off its Sabbaths all the days of its lying desolate **while the exiles were in the land of their enemies, Babylon, and not after they returned.**

32 And I, for my part, will lay the land desolate, and YOUR enemies who are dwelling in it will simply stare in amazement over it. 33 And YOU I shall scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe a sword after YOU; and YOUR land must become a desolation, and YOUR cities will become a desolate ruin.

34 **“At that time the land will pay off its sabbaths all the days of its lying desolated, while YOU are in the land of YOUR enemies.** At that time the land will keep sabbath, as it must repay its sabbaths. 35 All the days of its lying desolated it will keep sabbath, for the reason that it did not keep sabbath during YOUR sabbaths when YOU were dwelling upon it.

So even though the exiles had not reoccupied the desolated lands and were still in Babylon, the seventy-year prophetic curse ended.

Third, Jeremiah 25:12 states that only after the seventy years had ended, or been fulfilled, Jehovah would call to account against the king of Babylon, which he did beginning with its fall to Cyrus in October 539 B.C.E., one date the Jehovah's Witnesses and everyone else seem to agree on. The seventy years ended when Babylon fell, not two years later when the exiles stepped foot back on the soil of Judah.

12 “‘And it must occur that **when seventy years have been fulfilled** I shall call to account against the king of Babylon and against that nation,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘their error, even against the land of the Chal-de’ans, and I will make it desolate wastes to time indefinite. 13 And I will bring in upon that land all my words that I have spoken against it, even all that is written in this book that Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations. 14 For even they themselves, many nations and great kings, have exploited them as servants; and I will repay them according to their activity and according to the work of their hands.’”

Fourth, Jeremiah 29:10 likewise concludes the end of the seventy-year period of servitude while the Jews were in Babylon, not after they returned.

10 “For this is what Jehovah has said, ‘In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at Babylon I shall turn my attention to YOU people, and I will establish toward YOU my good word in bringing YOU back to this place.’

11 “‘For I myself well know the thoughts that I am thinking toward YOU,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘thoughts of peace, and not of calamity, to give YOU a future and a hope. 12 And YOU will certainly call me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to YOU.’

13 “‘And YOU will actually seek me and find [me], for YOU will search for me with all YOUR heart. 14 And I will let myself be found by YOU,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘And I will gather YOUR body of captives and collect YOU together out of all the nations and out of all the places to which I have dispersed YOU,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘And I will bring YOU back to the place from which I caused YOU to go into exile.’

After the seventy years ended Jehovah would turn his attention to his people and bring them back. The seventy years had to end first in 539 B.C.E., in Babylon, and only then would his people be gathered together and brought back.

Fifth, 2 Chronicles 36:20 states that the captives removed to Babylon would be servants to the king “until the royalty of Persia began to reign,” which began October 539 B.C.E. and not until the exiles physically returned to Judah two years later.

"Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and

they came to be servants to him and his sons **until the royalty of Persia began to reign;**
... "

Both sides agree that Babylon fell to the Persians in October 539 B.C.E. That fall signaled the beginning of Persia's reign. The prophet Daniel foretold its sudden collapse when he interpreted the writing on the wall for Babylon's king Belshazzar, "This is the interpretation of the word: MENE, **God has numbered [the days of] your kingdom and finished it.**" And he did in 539 B.C.E.

Sixth, the Jehovah's Witnesses at page 24 contradict themselves because they also claim that Ezra wrote that the seventy years ran until the first year of Cyrus which they submit was his first regnal year, which would actually be his second year of having power.

... the inspired Bible writer Ezra reported that the 70 years ran until "the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia," who issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. (Ezra 1:1-4; 2 Chronicles 36:21-23)

At Ezra 1:1, reference is made to "the first year of Cyrus," not "the year Cyrus became king" (or accession year), so he was speaking of the first regnal year of Cyrus, which cuneiform documentation places in 538/537 B.C.E. Jewish historian Josephus corroborates by referring to "the first year of the reign of Cyrus."—*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, Chapter I.

This statement is false. The inspired Bible writer Ezra never said that, and furthermore, their position contradicts the Jehovah's Witnesses' own claim under its Return theory that the seventy years ran until the exiles returned to Judah in the fall of 537 B.C.E., long after the decree setting them free was issued, and after Cyrus began to reign. Not only is it a contradiction, but it is not correct. In the first place it contravenes 2 Chronicles 36:22 just quoted which pegs the end of the 70 years at the inception of the reign of Persian royalty, which began immediately when Babylon fell in 539 B.C.E., not one year later beginning with the second, or 'regnal' year of Cyrus' rule. Again, common sense is in order. *Setting the Record Straight* at 24 claims "the first year of Cyrus" was his first regnal year which would be his second actual year of ruling Babylon. However that would create a one-year gap between Babylon's fall and the Persians' reign, and surely no one could suggest that when Cyrus made his triumphant entry 16 days after Babylon's fall in October 539 B.C.E. to his army that the reign of Persia had not yet begun or that the Babylonian Empire was still ruling and in control. Daniel said that the Babylonian kingdom was finished.

Read Ezra 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:21-23 carefully. Ezra did not state that the seventy years ran until the first regnal (or second actual) year of Cyrus the Persian's reign. Ezra did not say that in order for the seventy years to come to an end Cyrus had to issue his decree setting them free which was long after Persia began to rule. One of their contradictions ends in Babylon, the other in Judah, and it is strategically and scripturally not feasible to occur at the exact same time or in the same year.

So what basis do the Jehovah's Witnesses claim supports their belief that the seventy-year prophecy ended upon the exiles' return to Judah in 537 B.C.E. and not earlier when Babylon fell to Persia in 539 B.C.E.? Nothing, as it turns out, although they allude to their reasoning in *Setting the Record Straight* at p. 25, 26:

“And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, that Jehovah’s word from the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Jehovah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia so that he caused a cry to pass through all his realm.”—Ezra 1:1 (see also 2 Chronicles 36:22).

The highlighted portion of the above-quoted verse serves as unimpeachable evidence that “Jehovah’s word from the mouth of Jeremiah” had not yet been accomplished, even by the “first year of Cyrus,” proving conclusively that the conquest of Babylon by Persia was not the determining factor in fulfilling Jeremiah’s prophecy.

All that this vague and convoluted assertion attempts to state is that the seventy-year period allegedly ended when the Jews returned in 537 B.C.E. and not when Babylon fell in 539 B.C.E.; that the Jews’ return had not happened by the time Babylon fell. Well, of course it hadn’t, but more importantly, it wasn’t a requirement because the seventy years ended in 539 B.C.E., not on their return. Because their return happened two years after Persia conquered Babylon, the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory fails, they claim, because Babylon was conquered two years before their return.

This false and distorted piece of logic begs the essential question: “When did the seventy years end?” Had they been forthcoming and actually quoted Jehovah’s word from the mouth of Jeremiah rather than force the reader to hunt for its meaning it would have been self-evident, but more importantly, it would have proven them wrong which is perhaps why they did not wish to bring it to the readers’ attention in the first place.

We can determine what Jehovah’s word was by reference to Ezra 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:22 which they quote in support of their position. And even though neither one of these verses specify what the word of Jehovah was either, the context and subject matter of these Scriptures indicates that it refers to Jehovah’s promise to return the Jews and Cyrus’ decree setting them free.

1 And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, that **Jehovah’s word from the mouth of Jeremiah** might be accomplished, Jehovah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia so that he caused a cry to pass through all his realm, and also in writing, saying:

2 “This is what Cyrus the king of Persia has said, ‘All the kingdoms of the earth Jehovah the God of the heavens has given me, and he himself has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Whoever there is among YOU of all his people, may his God prove to be with him. So let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of Jehovah the God of Israel—he is the [true] God—which was in Jerusalem. 4 As for anyone that is left from all the places where he is residing as an alien, let the men of his place assist him with silver and with gold and with goods and with domestic animals along with the voluntary offering for the house of the [true] God, which was in Jerusalem.’”(Ezra 1:1-4 see also 2 Chronicles 36:22,23).

Jehovah’s word related to the return of the Jews and is found at Jeremiah 29:10. But only **after** the seventy years had ended would he turn his attention to returning the Jews.

10 “For this is what Jehovah has said, ‘In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at

Babylon I shall turn my attention to YOU people, and I will establish toward YOU my good word in bringing YOU back to this place.’

This, in actuality, is unimpeachable evidence that the seventy years of servitude came to an end first in 539 B.C.E. and only later, in 537 B.C.E. would the Jews return. Accordingly, it is not necessary or even possible that the ‘return’ occur before Babylon fell and the seventy years ended. Even with their improper rendering that the seventy years would be accomplished at Babylon, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Return theory lacks merit. Jeremiah 29:10 supports the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory and disproves the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Return theory.

H. The seventy years could not have ended when the exiles returned to Judah in 537 B.C.E. because there existed no king of Babylon to serve for two years between 537 B.C.E. and 539 B.C.E., after Persia began its reign in 539 B.C.E.

If there was no longer a king of Babylon once the reign of Persia began, how could the exiles serve him for two more years until they returned to their homeland? It would not be possible. The Jehovah’s Witnesses counter that Cyrus the king of Persia was the king of Babylon during those last two years between 539 B.C.E. and 537 B.C.E. so they were still captives serving a king of Babylon, Cyrus. They also claim that at first Cyrus did not alter the policy of the Babylonian Dynasty and therefore the nations continued to serve ‘the king of Babylon’ (thus dipping into the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory for convenience’ sake), and that a contemporary clay inscription quotes Cyrus as referring to himself as king of Babylon. Their argument is reproduced here:

Until their release in 537 B.C.E, **for the entire duration that the Jewish exiles were held captive in Babylon, it could rightly be said that they were serving the king of Babylon.** This is expanded upon in paragraph 10 of an article entitled “The ‘Cup’ That All Nations Must Drink at God’s Hand” that appeared in the September 15, 1979 issue of The Watchtower, p. 24:“ It is true that he [Cyrus] conquered Gentile Babylon in 539 B.C.E., **or about two years before the“ seventy years” of desolation of the land of Judah ran out. He proclaimed himself “king of Babylon” and at first did not alter the policy of the Babylonian dynasty of King Nebuchadnezzar. Thus the nations subjugated by Nebuchadnezzar continued to serve “the king of Babylon” 70 years.”**

Are Jehovah’s Witnesses justified in making this claim? Yes, for the Bible tells us that after Cyrus II conquered Babylon, Darius the Mede became “king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans,” (Daniel 5:31, 9:1) and shortly thereafter, Cyrus established his kingship over all of Babylon, even being referred to as “Cyrus the king of Babylon” at Ezra 5:13. **A contemporary inscription on a clay barrel confirms the accuracy of the Biblical account:** “ All the

inhabitants of Babylon as well as the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors (included), bowed to him (Cyrus) and kissed his feet, jubilant that he (had received) the kingship . . . I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad.”—Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, James B. Pritchard, p.316.

Four questions present themselves: **a)** what year was Cyrus crowned king of Babylon, **b)** if he was crowned king of Babylon before the Jews returned to Judah why was he referred to as king of Persia during this time, and afterward, **c)** if he was not crowned king of Babylon immediately in 539 B.C.E. when Babylon fell but at a later date, allowing for a gap in time, could the exiles legitimately be said to have served him during that gap which would shorten the seventy year time span, and **d)** even if Cyrus was crowned king of Babylon before the Jews returned, did he change the empire's policy and free the Jews so that they were not serving as captive slaves to Cyrus even before they began the long journey home?

First, while it is true that at Ezra 5:13 Cyrus was referred to as king of Babylon, it should be noted that it was not the Jews who referred to Cyrus as the king of Babylon, but the Jews' enemies who were attempting to thwart the rebuilding effort who paraphrased the Jewish response. Their enemies claimed the Jews referred to Cyrus as king of Babylon, which is hearsay. The Jewish defense was restated in a letter from the Jews' enemies Tattenai, the governor beyond the river, to King Darius years after their return. The letter was written long after the exiles returned while the task of re-building was underway. It does not provide any evidence that Cyrus was king of Babylon from October 539 B.C.E. to 537 B.C.E. See generally chapter 5 of the book of Ezra.

Secondly, as a matter of fact Cyrus is referred to as king of Persia six times in verses preceding Ezra 5:13; four instances covering the time period before the exiles departed Babylon (Ezra 1:1, 2, 8), and twice in connection with the Jews' attempts at rebuilding the temple at Ezra 4:3,5. Before the Jews returned, and even after they returned, they considered Cyrus king of Persia.

Third, the Jehovah's Witnesses find support for their theory that the Jews served Cyrus the king of Babylon from 539 B.C.E. to 537 B.C.E. by reference to the above highlighted undated 'contemporary' cuneiform inscription on a clay barrel. As it turns out, this clay barrel is no ordinary clay barrel. It is considered to be the first charter of human rights and a very important historical artifact. In addition, it is the document, or charter, by which captives of the Babylonian Empire were freed, including the Jews. And that date, was the first day of spring 538 B.C.E., a mere 6 months or less after Babylon fell:

"The charter of Cyrus the Great, a baked-clay Aryan language (Old Persian) cuneiform cylinder, was discovered in 1878 in excavation of the site of Babylon. In it, Cyrus the Great described his human treatment of the inhabitants of Babylonia after its conquest by the Iranians.

The document has been hailed as the first charter of human rights, and in 1971 the United Nations was published translation of it in all the official U.N. languages. "May Ahura Mazda protect this land, this nation, from rancor, from foes, from falsehood, and from drought". Selected from the book "The Eternal Land".

This is a confirmation that the **Charter of freedom of Humankind issued by Cyrus the Great on his coronation day** in Babylon could be considered superior to the Human Rights Manifesto issued by the French revolutionaries in their first national assembly. The Human Rights Manifesto looks very interesting in its kind regarding the expressions and composition, but the Charter of Freedom issued twenty three centuries before that by the Iranian monarch sounds more spiritual.

Comparing the Human Rights Manifesto of the French National Assembly and the Charter approved by the United Nations with the Charter of Freedom of Cyrus, the latter appears more valuable considering its age, explicitness, and rejection of the superstitions of the ancient world.

Cyrus the Great entered the city of Babylon in 539 BCE, and after the winter, on the first day of spring, he was officially crowned: My numerous troops moved about undisturbed in the midst of Babylon. I did not allow anyone to terrorize the land of Sumer and Akkad. I kept in view the needs of Babylon and all its sanctuaries to promote their well being. The citizens of Babylon **I lifted their unbecoming yoke.** Their dilapidated dwellings I restored. I put an end to their misfortunes.

The description of the coronation of Cyrus is the most elaborate one in the world written by the Greek philosopher, politician, and historian Xenophon (Cyropaedia of Xenophon, The Life of Cyrus The Great).

On the day of coronation, Cyrus read the Charter of Freedom out after he put on the crown with his hand in Marduk Temple.

Uncertain and the full text of the Charter was unavailable until an inscription was found during the excavation works in the old city of Ur in Mesopotamia. After the translation of the words, it was found out that the document was the same Charter. It is now kept in the British Museum and it is no exaggeration to say that **it is one of the most precious historical records of the world.**

In the Charter, after introducing himself and mentioning the names of his father, first, second, and third ancestors, Cyrus says that he is the monarch of Iran, Babylon, and the four continents:

I am Kourosh (Cyrus), King of the world, great king, mighty king, **king of Babylon**, king of the land of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters, son of Camboujyah (Cambyases), great king, king of Anshân, grandson of Kourosh (Cyrus), great king, king of Anshân, descendant of Chaish-Pesh (Teispes), great king, king of Anshân, progeny of an unending royal line, whose rule Bel and Nabu cherish, whose kingship they desire for their hearts, pleasure. When I well-disposed, entered Babylon, I set up a seat of domination in the royal palace amidst jubilation and rejoicing. Marduk the great god, caused the big-hearted

inhabitations of Babylon to me, I sought daily to worship him.

He continues:

At my deeds Marduk, the great lord, rejoiced and to me, Kourosh (Cyrus), the king who worshipped him, and to Camboujyah (Cambyases), my son, the offspring of (my) loins, and to all my troops he graciously gave his blessing, and in good sprit before him we glorified exceedingly his high divinity. All the kings who sat in throne rooms, throughout the four quarters, from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who dwelt in, all the kings of the West Country, who dwelt in tents, brought me their heavy tribute and kissed my feet in Babylon. From ... to the cities of Ashur, Susa, Agade and Eshnuna, the cities of Zamban, Meurnu, Der as far as the region of the land of Gutium, **the holy cities beyond the Tigris whose sanctuaries had been in ruins over a long period, the gods whose abode is in the midst of them, I returned to their places and housed them in lasting abodes.**

I gathered together all their inhabitations and restored (to them) their dwellings. The gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabounids had, to the anger of the lord of the gods, brought into Babylon. I, at the bidding of Marduk, the great lord, made to dwell in peace in their habitations, delightful abodes.

May all the gods whom I have placed within their sanctuaries address a daily prayer in my favour before Bel and Nabu, that my days may be long, and may they say to Marduk my lord, "May Kourosh (Cyrus) the King, who reveres thee, and Camboujyah (Cambyases) his son ..."

And:

Now that I put the crown of kingdom of Iran, Babylon, and the nations of the four directions on the head with the help of (Ahura) Mazda, I announce that **I will respect the traditions, customs and religions of the nations of my empire and never let any of my governors and subordinates look down on or insult them until I am alive.** From now on, till (Ahura) Mazda grants me the kingdom favor, **I will impose my monarchy on no nation. Each is free to accept it , and if any one of them rejects it , I never resolve on war to reign.** Until I am the king of Iran, Babylon, and the nations of the four directions, I never let anyone oppress any others, and if it occurs , I will take his or her right back and penalize the oppressor.

And until I am the monarch, I will never let anyone take possession of movable and landed properties of the others by force or without compensation. Until I am alive, I prevent unpaid, forced labor. To day, I announce that everyone is free to choose a religion. People are free to live in all regions and take up a job provided that they never violate other's rights.

No one could be penalized for his or her relatives' faults. **I prevent slavery** and my governors and subordinates are obliged to prohibit exchanging men and women as slaves within their own ruling domains. Such a traditions should be exterminated the world over.

I implore to (Ahura) Mazda to make me succeed in fulfilling my obligations to the nations of Iran (Persia), Babylon, and the ones of the four directions."
(www.IranChamber.com).

So, even though the "contemporary" barrel may have been undated, within it one finds key dates and policy changes which completely undermine the the Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding. The most glaring oversight by Jehovah's Witnesses is the date Cyrus was crowned king of Babylon, the first day of spring 538 B.C.E., roughly six months or less after Babylon fell to the Persians. So, for those six months there was no "king of Babylon" for the Jews to serve and their servitude amounts to around 69 1/2 years, not seventy. And if he was crowned a year later, in the spring of 537 B.C.E., as the Jehovah's Witnesses imply, that amounts to a year and a half gap of the Jews not serving any king of Babylon.

Yet, even if Cyrus was crowned king of Babylon, from the first day of spring 538 B.C.E. he set the Jews and all the other Babylonian captives free. He imposed his monarchy (kingship) on no people unless they wished it, which the Jews did not. He outlawed unpaid forced labor (slavery), people were free to live in all regions, and displaced inhabitants were restored to their dwellings. The Jehovah's Witnesses' lack of basic understanding of this is incredulous. A little common sense, coupled with this "clay barrel" go a long way. Were the Jews still captive slaves after Cyrus set them free? No. Were they still captive slaves until they actually picked up their things and started walking home? Of course not. The Jews were not captive servants to any king of Babylon once Persia ruled. Again, the Jehovah's Witnesses come up short of seventy years.

Fourth, the Jehovah's Witnesses further argue, as stated above, that Cyrus proclaimed himself king of Babylon and at first did not alter the policy of the Babylonian dynasty or Nebuchadnezzar and therefore the Jews continued to serve the king of Babylon seventy years. The problem of course is that the authors of the Watchtower magazine failed to cite any authority for their self-serving statement that "at first [Cyrus] did not alter the policy" That statement is false, they offer no proof, and as just shown, Cyrus' Charter of Freedom above disproves any such notion. Cyrus did, in fact, alter the policy and set the Jews free early in his reign, within six months of his numerous years of ruling Babylon. There could not be a more profound policy change affecting the captive Jews, and other captives, than this.

Fifth, citing no verifiable authority they attempt to avoid this dilemma by asserting that the official decree freeing the exiled captives occurred in late 538 B.C.E. or early 537 B.C.E. in a last-ditch effort to push the date of captivity as close to 537 B.C.E. as possible. However, as shown above, it has been solidly established by archeologists and historians the world over that Cyrus' decree was issued in 538 B.C.E.

Sixth, even assuming for the sake of argument that the roughly 50,000 exiles set free by Cyrus were not technically free until they began walking home after lengthy preparations, the Jehovah's Witnesses' Return theory still falls four months short of seventy years because that is how long it took them to complete the journey according to *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1952, pp. 271-2:

In either case this would have given sufficient time for the large party of 49,897 Jews to organize their expedition and to make their long **four-month journey from Babylon to Jerusalem** to get there by September 29-30, 537 B.C., the first of the seventh Jewish month, to build their altar to Jehovah as recorded at Ezra 3:1-3. Inasmuch as September 29-30, 537 B.C., officially ends the seventy years of desolation as recorded at 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21, so the beginning of the desolation of the land must have officially begun to be counted after September 21-22, 607 B.C., the first of the seventh Jewish month in 607 B.C., which is the beginning point for the counting of the 2,520 years.

Setting the Record Straight at pp. 4-5 is in accord with this position and clarifies that the seventy years was exactly seventy years to the month.

At 2 Kings 25:25, 26, the Bible reports that by the seventh month even those left behind, “all the people, from small to great,” fled to Egypt, leaving the land completely desolate, “without an inhabitant.” As this factor was necessary for fulfillment (Isaiah 6:11, 12; Jeremiah 4:23, 25; 4:27, 29; 6:7, 8; 9:11; 24:8, 10), Jehovah’s Witnesses recognize that the seventy years of desolation could not officially begin to be counted until after the first of the seventh Jewish month. Ezra 1:1 shows that it was “in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia,” or 538/7 B.C.E., that Cyrus issued the decree releasing the Jews from captivity.

The Bible notes that the Jews arrived back in their homeland by the seventh month, Tishri, which would be September 29-30, 537 B.C.E. (Ezra 3:1-3). **From this date, Jehovah’s Witnesses count back seventy years to 607 B.C.E. as the year for Jerusalem’s destruction. Thus, the “devastations of Jerusalem, [namely], seventy years,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, were exactly seventy years in duration, running from the seventh month of 607 B.C.E. to the seventh month of 537 B.C.E.**

Accordingly, if the Jews' seventy-year period of captivity ran exactly seventy years from the seventh month of 607 B.C.E. to the seventh month of 537 B.C.E., but they were set free and were not captive during the four months it took them to travel home, their seventy-year Return theory fails because they were captive for only sixty-nine years and eight months. They could not have ‘served’ the king of Babylon, even if it was Cyrus, for the full seventy years.

Seventh, the entire argument that Cyrus the Persian, the anointed of Jehovah, who rescued the Jews and freed them was on equal footing with the previous Babylonian kings who slaughtered, captured and enslaved the Jews in the first place contradicts a literal reading of Jehovah’s prophecy to all the nations which was very sweeping in scope. Which of these nations of Jeremiah 25:11 were to serve the king of Babylon seventy years? According to Jeremiah 25:26 they included “... all the kings of the Medes ... all

the kings of the north who are near and far away, one after the other, and all the [other] kingdoms of the earth that are on the surface of the ground;” This includes Persia and the Medes who conquered Babylon. As such the Jehovah's Witnesses' theory would result in an incompatible irony - during the last two years of the Jews' seventy-year Return theory the kings of Persia and the Medes would have had to serve itself.

Ultimately, the Jehovah's Witnesses' arguments supporting their Return theory - that the seventy years ended when the exiles returned to their homeland - are moot and irrelevant because as established above and in accordance with clear, unambiguous Scripture, the seventy years of servitude applied to all nations dominated by the Babylonian Empire, and that dominance, and the nations' corresponding servitude to the kings(s) of Babylon ended in October 539 B.C.E. when Babylon fell.

The seventy-year prophecy ended while the Jews were in Babylon and only later did they return home. There is no viable Return theory. And because there is no Return theory, because it is an unscriptural and impossible concept to implement due to its many failures and inconsistencies the Jehovah's Witnesses incorrectly render Jeremiah 29:10 ‘at Babylon,’ rather than ‘for Babylon’. But the latter is what Jehovah through the mouth of Jeremiah intended.

10 “For this is what Jehovah has said, ‘In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years **for Babylon** I shall turn my attention to YOU people, and I will establish toward YOU my good word in bringing YOU back to this place.”

I. The phrase "and all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment" at Jeremiah 25:11 does not mean a) the land Judah, and Jerusalem, would exist without a single inhabitant, b) for a period of exactly 70 years, c) beginning with Jerusalem's destruction.

Jeremiah 25:11 in its entirety in the Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation Bible reads “And all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment, and these nations will have to serve the king of Babylon seventy years.” You can stare at that sentence all day long and it still will not say that Judah and Jerusalem would exist in that state without a single inhabitant or that its devastated condition would last exactly seventy years beginning with Jerusalem's destruction and not before. It just doesn't say that, yet the Jehovah's Witnesses have grafted these embellishments onto its meaning.

The two parts of Jeremiah 25:11, devastation and servitude, are distinct concepts even though they share common origins; both stem from Jehovah's punishment of Judah and all the nations by the hand, or sword, of Babylon. The devastation deals with the physical state or condition of a geographic region, one nation, Judah and its cities. Servitude, on the other hand, relates to the human condition of people of many nations, including Judah, and their subservient relationship to political authority, Babylon.

Through a process of arbitrarily mixing and matching verses, the Jehovah's Witnesses have attempted to change the "devastation" aspect of the prophecy to mean that beginning at the destruction of Jerusalem, and not before, Judah and its cities would become a) a devastated place, b) without a single inhabitant, c) for exactly seventy years. Scripture proves otherwise.

J. The devastated condition of Judah does not mean it existed in that state without a single inhabitant.

The Hebrew word for 'devastated' or 'devastations' is *chorbah*. The Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament by Dr. James Strong (1890) defines '*chorbah*' as: "a place laid waste, ruin, wasted, desolation." And while it is agreed that the degree of devastation, or *chorbah*, was severe, the Jehovah's Witnesses, according to *Setting the Record Straight* at p. 15, contend that Judah, and by extension Jerusalem, "would be devastated so as to be without an inhabitant," and that the concept of Judah's devastation, or *chorbah*, of Jeremiah 25:11 did not apply to its condition at any time before its destruction.

In support they quote Jeremiah 6:7-8, 9:11, 4:23, 25, 4:27, 29b, 24:8, 10, Isaiah 6:11, 12 and Jeremiah 44:2,6., all of which correctly state that Jerusalem and/or Judah would exist without an inhabitant, or something similar. But nowhere in those verses does it say the uninhabited state would last seventy years. More importantly, they omit key verses which prove that Judah and Jerusalem were in fact inhabited during that time, and that *chorbah* does not by definition mean a devastated place that cannot be inhabited, or that the era preceding Jerusalem's destruction was not in a devastated condition.

First, in quoting the original prophecy handed down by Moses the Watchtower Society omitted Leviticus 26:32 which refutes their argument.

After describing the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21 states: "Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be servants to him and his sons until the royalty of Persia began to reign; to fulfill Jehovah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had paid off its sabbaths. All the days of lying desolated it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."—Insight on the Scriptures, Volume 1, p. 463.

The reference to the land paying off its sabbaths is a direct reference to Leviticus 26:32-35 which also should have been brought to the readers' attention.

32 And I, for my part, will lay the land desolate, **and YOUR enemies who are dwelling in it** will simply stare in amazement over it. 33 And YOU I shall scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe a sword after YOU; and YOUR land must become a desolation, and YOUR cities will become a desolate ruin.

34 "At that time the land will pay off its sabbaths all the days of its

lying desolated, while YOU are in the land of YOUR enemies. At that time the land will keep sabbath, as it must repay its sabbaths. 35 All the days of its lying desolated it will keep sabbath, for the reason that it did not keep sabbath during YOUR sabbaths when YOU were dwelling upon it.

Verse 32 teaches us that people, in this case Judah's enemies, would dwell in the land during its devastated condition. In biblical times this often occurred as a natural consequence. Devastated places (*chorbah*) can be inhabited, and were.

Secondly, Daniel himself considered Jerusalem to be inhabited even though it was in a devastated state, or *chorbah*. In the first year of Darius, right after Babylon fell to the Persians and Medes, Daniel understood the meaning of Jeremiah's original prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11 to mean that the Jewish nightmare had come to an end with Babylon's fall after seventy years of world domination. In accord with Jeremiah 29:12, he then engaged in prayer to Jehovah (while in Babylon and before the exiles returned to Judah) and it is in this prayer that Daniel refers to devastated Jerusalem as being inhabited.

7 To you, O Jehovah, there belongs the righteousness, but to us the shame of face as at this day, **to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem** and to all those of Israel, those nearby and those far away in all the lands to which you dispersed them because of their unfaithfulness with which they acted against you.

Third, in the book of the exiled prophet Ezekiel he reiterated Jehovah's word which stated that the devastated places were inhabited.

23 And the word of Jehovah began to occur to me, saying: 24 "Son of man, **the inhabitants of these devastated places** are saying even concerning the soil of Israel, 'Abraham happened to be just one and yet he took possession of the land. And we are many; to us the land has been given as something to possess.'

Even if, as the Jehovah's Witnesses argue, these devastated areas did not become completely uninhabited until the remaining remnant of Judah fled to Egypt a while after Jerusalem's destruction, that's not the point. The point is, Jehovah himself referred to devastated Judah as being inhabited at that time.

Fourth, in his twenty-third year Nebuchadnezzar took 745 Jews into exile - that is, five years after Jerusalem's destruction. The Jehovah's Witnesses argue they may have come from one of the surrounding nations and could not have come from Judah, as it was uninhabited. However, it is more reasonable to conclude they came from Judah and very likely were of those Jews who fled to Egypt after Jerusalem was destroyed, and then fled back to Judah after Nebuchadnezzar razed Egypt and devoted most of the original contingent of Jews to the sword, pestilence and famine.

Briefly, after Jerusalem and Judah were destroyed, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor over the remaining inhabitants of the land who were warned by Jehovah not to flee to Egypt but remain in Judah. (Thus, Judah was inhabited after its destruction.) In time Ishmael killed Gedaliah and took

Jewish captives from Mizpah to the sons of Ammon. They were subsequently rescued, returned to Judah, and despite warnings of dire consequences if they did, fled to Egypt under the mistaken belief that they would be safe from the Babylonian army (see Jeremiah chapters 40-44). Included in the fleeing remnant were other dispersed Jews who had returned to Judah, picked summer fruit, and then ran off to Egypt as well.

And there will come to be no escapee or survivor for the remnant of Judah who are entering in to reside there as aliens, in the land of Egypt, even to return to the land of Judah to which they are lifting up their soul[ful desire] to return in order to dwell; **for they will not return except some escaped ones.** (Jeremiah 44:14)

"And as for the ones escaping from the sword, **they will return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah few in number**" (Jeremiah 44:28)

Since these escaped ones were being hunted down and chased by the sword it is highly unlikely they waited to return seventy years later at the advanced age of 80 or 90 after Cyrus issued his famous decree allowing the Jews to return home. So, even though devastated, a ruin, a waste etc., Judah was inhabited after its destruction. There is no sound scriptural reason for implying that the devastated place of Jeremiah 25:11 was without inhabitant.

Sixth, given the foregoing scriptural certainty, the phrase "a desolate waste, without inhabitant" or similar variant, was never meant to be taken literally. Yet even if it were meant to be taken literally the uninhabited condition could only have been for an initial period of time because Judah was re-inhabited after all. This phrase is therefore hyperbole, an intended exaggeration in order to make a point, such as "I waited for you an eternity." The Bible is filled with Jehovah's exaggerated statements in order to make a point of emphasis which is what "without inhabitant" is.

This hyperbolic statement does not mean, however, that it did not refer to Judah's condition after Jerusalem's destruction. It did. Stated another way, the phrase or notion that Judah would become a "devastated place, without inhabitant" or similar variant most surely in most instances refers to Judah after Jerusalem's total annihilation. But that's not the issue. The issue is whether the Jehovah's Witnesses have a legitimate basis for inserting "without inhabitant" for "seventy years" into the "devastation" part or aspect of Jeremiah 25:11. They must do so in order to stretch Jerusalem's destruction back to 607 B.C.E., and discount any countervailing argument that the devastation began before Jerusalem's final destruction. If Jerusalem was in a devastated condition years before its ultimate demise, the Jehovah's Witnesses' theory fails.

Accordingly, in order to prevail, the Jehovah's Witnesses must a) legitimately inject "without an inhabitant" into the phrase "and all this land must become a devastated place, an object of astonishment" at Jeremiah 25:11, and b) they must establish that the devastated uninhabited condition lasted seventy years exactly, beginning with Jerusalem's destruction, and not before. Neither task is scripturally feasible. To reiterate the question, was the foretold devastation of Jeremiah 25:11 limited to the most extreme condition that ensued following Jerusalem's destruction or did it include the less extreme but significant devastation that Nebuchadnezzar wreaked on Judah during the preceding years he razed the country?

K. The devastation of Judah and Jerusalem at Jeremiah 25:11 referred to its devastated condition after Jerusalem's destruction and during the many years before that city fell.

The answer to the preceding question is found at Daniel 9:2, 7:

1 In the first year of Da-ri'us the son of A·has·u-e'rus of the seed of the Medes, who had been made king over the kingdom of the Chal-de'ans; 2 in the first year of his reigning **I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, for fulfilling the devastations of Jerusalem, [namely,] seventy years.** 3 And I proceeded to set my face to Jehovah the [true] God, in order **to seek [him] with prayer and with entreaties, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.** 4 And I began to pray to Jehovah my God and to make confession and to say:

“Ah Jehovah the [true] God, the great One and the fear-inspiring One, keeping the covenant and the loving-kindness to those loving him and to those keeping his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled; and there has been a turning aside from your commandments and from your judicial decisions. 6 And we have not listened to your servants the prophets, who have spoken in your name to our kings, our princes and our forefathers and to all the people of the land. 7 To you, O Jehovah, there belongs the righteousness, but to us the shame of face as at this day, **to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem** and to all those of Israel, those nearby and those far away in all the lands to which you dispersed them because of their unfaithfulness with which they acted against you.

The Jehovah's Witnesses rely heavily on verse 2 but verse 7 demonstrates their reliance on verse 2 is misplaced. As mentioned previously, shortly after Babylon fell to the Persians and Medes, in Darius' first year, before the exiles returned home to end the alleged seventy-years Return theory and reinhabited Judah, Daniel came to understand the meaning and extent of Jeremiah's original prophecy at Jeremiah 25:11. Daniel discerned that the fulfillment, or end, of the seventy years of Babylonian world domination was over which marked the end of their nightmare and the beginning of the process of returning home.

With respect to 'devastated' places, the devastations (*chorbah*) of Jerusalem at Daniel 9:2 is a direct reference to the 'devastated places' of the land of Judah in Jeremiah 25:11 of which Jerusalem was the principal city. The end of the devastation by the fall of Babylon was the object of Daniel's discernment.

Therefore, in accord with Daniel 29:12, 13, when Daniel in prayer referred to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it was the same Jerusalem which had suffered devastation in verse 2, which in turn was the same Jerusalem which was one of the cities of Judah in Jeremiah 25:11 which had become a devastated place, an object of astonishment. And if Jerusalem was inhabited, Judah was inhabited.

Daniel understood that the devastated condition of the land of Jeremiah 25:11 reached from long before Jerusalem's destruction until afterward. True, it included that later period when Judah existed "without inhabitant," but it also included the time before Jerusalem's destruction when Judah's populace suffered under the might of Nebuchadnezzar. The exact date of the beginning of the devastation is not important or necessary to prove the Jehovah's Witnesses wrong. It is sufficient to show that it began at some time before Jerusalem's destruction. The Jehovah's Witnesses have improperly attempted to add to Jehovah's word at Jeremiah 25:11 by injecting the term "without inhabitant." They believe it is essential because they need seventy years to reach from 587 B.C.E. to 607 B.C.E. A strict literal rendering of "Judah without an inhabitant" when coupled (wrongly) with the seventy years mentioned in Jeremiah 25:11 and Daniel 9:2 is necessary for them to stretch the utter and complete devastation of Jerusalem back to 607 B.C.E. But since the Judah of Jeremiah 25:11 was inhabited, their theory has no scriptural support, and the period of devastation greatly exceeds their seventy-year time frame.

L. The Bible shows that Judah was "a devastated place, an object of astonishment" during the years leading up to Jerusalem's destruction.

Judah suffered the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar beginning in the early years of his reign. When Judah's king Jehoiakim rebelled from being a vassal Jehovah sent against Judah marauder bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and the sons of Ammon in order to "destroy it" (2 Kings 24:2). Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah's king Jehoiakim, laid siege to Jerusalem, and "bound him in bronze fetters to take him away to Babylon (according to the literal Interlinear Bible, 2 Chronicles 36:36). Also taken to Babylon were exiles which included the prophet Daniel and some of the utensils of the house of Jehovah - highly valued religious artifacts (Daniel 1:1). Even the Watchtower Society's founder Russell believed exiles were taken captive in Nebuchadnezzar's first year. Charles Taze Russell, in *The Time Is At Hand* (Studies in the Scriptures, Series 2, 1912 edition), p. 52 wrote:

Usher dates the seventy years desolation **eighteen years earlier than shown above**—i.e., before the dethronement of Zedekiah, Judah's last king — **because the king of Babylon took many of the people captive at that time** (2 Chron. 36:9, 10, 17, 21; 2 Kings 24:8-16.)

The degree of devastation only intensified under Jehoiachin. Under his reign "all of Jerusalem was taken into exile to Babylon." This included all of the princes, the king's mother, his wives and court officials, and all the valiant mighty men - ten thousand people - and every craftsman and builder of bulwarks. No one was left behind except the lowly class of the people of the land (2 Kings 24:12-15). Nebuchadnezzar also removed all of the treasures of the house of Jehovah and the treasures of the king's house and cut to pieces all of the gold utensils that Solomon had made in the temple of Jehovah (2 Kings 24:12-15).

It even got worse before Jerusalem fell. Before Jerusalem was destroyed Nebuchadnezzar's army conquered all of Judah's many cities except two:

And Jeremiah the prophet proceeded to speak to Zedekiah the king of Judah all these words in Jerusalem, when the military forces of the king of Babylon were fighting against Jerusalem and **against all the cities of Judah that were left remaining, against Lachish and against Azekah; for they, the fortified cities, were the ones that remained over among the cities of Judah.**" (Jeremiah 34:6, 7).

An objective reading of the Jewish condition should hopefully lead one to conclude that the land of Judah, and its principal city Jerusalem, had become "a devastated place, an object of astonishment" even before the final and complete destruction of Jerusalem, and even though it was inhabited. Jehovah's destruction obviously could not have started with Jerusalem.

M. The fulfillment of the "devastations of Jerusalem [namely,] seventy years" at Daniel 9:2 refers to the end of Babylon's seventy years of world domination and the technical end of Jerusalem's devastated condition. It does not mean that Jerusalem - and by extension Judah - was devastated (without inhabitant) exactly seventy years.

First, one of the Jehovah's Witnesses' critical errors is their failure to interpret Daniel 9:2 in light of the original prophecy of Jeremiah 25:11 and other verses which explain in detail that the seventy years of servitude referred to many nations falling under the domination of the Babylonian Empire. The key date, and the focus of Daniel's discernment, was the completion, or end, of that domination which marked the beginning of the process by which the exiles would return to their homeland.

As explained at the beginning of this paper, part of the problem is that the Jehovah's Witnesses interpret the word "fulfill" to somehow mean "equal" in order to equate Jerusalem's devastation with seventy years. To fulfill seventy years of devastation means, to them, that the devastation lasted seventy years, but that is incorrect. "Fulfill" when referring to prophetic years means the end of those years, the accomplishment of a prophecy. Daniel discerned that the end of Jewish servitude (and that of the nations) had begun.

With this in mind it would be helpful to revisit Daniel 9:2.

... 2 in the first year of his reigning I myself, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of the years concerning which the word of Jehovah had occurred to Jeremiah the prophet, ...

The word of Jehovah that occurred to Jeremiah is a direct reference to Jeremiah 25:11 and

accompanying verses, which detail seventy years of many nations' servitude to Babylon. Jehovah's word with respect to the seventy years and the context within which it was presented: **a)** directed the prophecy to all nations, not only Judah, **b)** reflected Jehovah's sweeping grant of authority to the king of Babylon, that all the nations and beasts would serve him, **c)** listed all the nations that would come to serve the king of Babylon one way or the other, **d)** stated that "these nations" would serve the king of Babylon seventy years, **e)** the seventy years would end with Babylon's fall and the beginning of Persia's reign, and **f)** Jehovah would **then** turn his attention to his exiled people and return them home.

Continuing with Daniel 9:2:

... for fulfilling (**ending**) the devastations of Jerusalem, [namely'] seventy years. (emphasis added)

Jeremiah understood, or discerned, that the seventy years of Jeremiah 25:11 marked the end, accomplishment or fulfillment of that seventy-year period of servitude. But he could not have believed Jerusalem was uninhabited seventy years because according to Jehovah's Witnesses, the end of seventy years was still in the future when they returned home. Daniel was fully aware of Scripture which marked the end of the seventy years while the exiles were still in Babylon, when the empire fell and the Persians began to reign.

In light of all that we have learned so far, and in light of the original prophecy, it is simply not credible or possible that Daniel meant that Jerusalem lay devastated without an inhabitant for seventy years following Jerusalem's destruction. It could not have.

Secondly, there is a contradiction in the Jehovah's Witnesses' seventy-year uninhabited devastation theory. On the one hand they claim that the seventy years of devastation began with Jerusalem's destruction: "We believe that the most direct reading of Jeremiah 25:11 and other texts is that the 70 years would date from when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and left the land of Judah desolate. Jeremiah 52:12-15, 24-27; 36:28-31." Kingdom Come at p.10.

On the other hand, the Jehovah's Witnesses in *Setting the Record Straight* at pp. 4-5 claim that the seventy years began later, exactly in the 7th month of 607 B.C.E. when the last of the remnant fled to Egypt. As outlined above, much transpired between Jerusalem's fall including the official appointment of Gedaliah as governor, his assassination, the capture and removal of Jews by Ishmael to the sons of Ammon, their rescue and return to Judah, and along with other dispersed Jews who returned to Judah and picked summer fruit, their eventual flight to Egypt.

Third, Daniel could not have understood the seventy years to be years of devastation of Judah without inhabitant if it began upon the destruction of Jerusalem because Judah was still inhabited by those remaining over whom Gedaliah was appointed governor. And, counting forward exactly seventy years to the month, the exiles would not have yet returned to Judah to re-inhabit it thereby falling short again of seventy years.

Fourth, neither could Daniel have understood the seventy years to be years of devastation without inhabitant if it began when the last of the Jewish remnant fled to Egypt because counting forward exactly seventy years from the month puts the end of the alleged captivity and servitude upon the Jews' return, and as it hopefully should be very clear by now, the seventy years ended while the Jews were in

Babylon when Persia began its reign which amounts to 68 - 69 years, not seventy.

Fifth, Daniel was fully aware of Leviticus 26:32 - 35 which Ezra quoted in part at 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21 where Moses wrote that the desolation would end while the exiles were still in Babylon, in the land of their enemies, not when they returned. He would not have understood the seventy years to have ended two years in the future when they returned. Once again, the time frame falls short of seventy years.

Sixth, in addition to the same reasons stated above, Ezra, the author of 2 Chronicles 36 could not have meant that "All the days of laying desolated it kept the Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years" referred to seventy uninhabited years of devastation beginning with Jerusalem's destruction. Nowhere does Ezra claim that the land would be, or was, uninhabited. Desolated, yes, but not uninhabited. The reference to keeping the land Sabbath is metaphor - the land was unproductive and rested, not uninhabited. In fact, "Sabbath" connotes a human condition or presence, defined as "the day of rest and religious observance of the Jews...." Paying off its sabbaths is akin to paying off a loan, which was fulfilled or accomplished or ended or finished while the exiles were still in the land of their enemies, Babylon. The fulfillment of seventy years at 2 Chronicles 26 referred to the conclusion of the desolation and sabbatical-like condition which began with Babylon's fall and Persia's rise to power. Ezra was not saying the land was desolated without inhabitant for seventy years ending in 537 B.C.E.

One might then ask how the Jews could re-inhabit Judah while still physically in Babylon? The answer is that **a)** Daniel stated that Jerusalem was already inhabited, and therefore Judah was inhabited, when the seventy year prophecy ended after Babylon's fall, and **b)** the prophecy did not require a physical return. An apt parallel can be drawn with Cyrus' decree setting the Jews free; they were declared free and were therefore free even before they left on their journey home. Similarly, the land was no longer paying off its sabbaths even though the Jews had not returned to their soil. The debt, or condition, was paid off while they were in Babylon; **c)** physical occupation by the returnees would not end the devastated condition. The land was as devastated the day after their return as it was the day before their return.

It bears repeating, because the "sabbaths" were paid off **while the exiles were still in Babylon** Ezra could not have meant that the reference to seventy years meant that Judah lie desolate without inhabitant exactly seventy years ending upon the exiles' physical return in 537 B.C.E. It's impossible. Remember, Ezra also had access to Jeremiah's prophecy. He knew the fulfillment and timing of seventy years was tied directly to the fall of the Babylonian Empire and the rise of Persian royalty.

Lastly, lest one forget, there is a mountain of archeological and historical evidence that proves that Jerusalem was not destroyed in 607 B.C.E. but that it was destroyed in 587/6 B.C.E., and that it remained in that severely devastated condition 48-50 years, not seventy years. And, that the exiles removed at Jerusalem's destruction were not in Babylon seventy years, but 48-50 years. Of course, one is free to ignore such evidence and pretend it does not exist, but it is preferable to harmonize one's interpretation of the Bible with archeology and history which is possible if Jerusalem was destroyed in 587/6 B.C.E., but not if it was destroyed in 607 B.C.E.

Even though the Jehovah's Witnesses have attempted to merge the two parts of Jeremiah 25:11, to borrow the seventy years of servitude to improperly extend the length of devastation, in the final analysis all of this talk about seventy years of an uninhabited devastated place is moot; it is a non-

existent element of Jeremiah's prophecy. The concept of seventy years of an utterly uninhabited devastated place, an object of astonishment, is a false doctrine used to gain twenty years in order to reach 607 B.C.E. It is an illogical, unscriptural and gross misinterpretation because the seventy years pertained to the nations' servitude to the king(s) of Babylon, not Judah's devastation. And that is precisely what Jehovah's prophets understood.

The Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding that Jeremiah 25:11 is a composite of "devastation" and "servitude" - that it is actually one prophecy, one indivisible unit - is flawed in yet another way because if it really is a composite it cuts both ways. This would mean that all of "these nations" which served the Babylonian Empire were also "uninhabited" places and objects of astonishment for seventy years, which contravenes history, Scripture and is patently false. The fact that the word "and" separates these two concepts does not equate them or join them together. The phrase "Frank **and** Henry" does not mean that "Frank **is** Henry."

539 B.C.E. marked the end of the seventy-year servitude prophecy with the finishing off of Babylon and the rise of Persia and the Medes. Counting back seventy years takes one to 609 B.C.E. and the last Assyrian battle at Haran that saw the demise of Assyria at the hands of the then king of Babylon. This is the only correct and workable chronological slot or window the seventy years of Jeremiah 25:11 fits into.

The Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding with respect to the destruction of Jerusalem, though well-intentioned at its inception, is flawed in the extreme, and no amount of convoluted double-talk and intellectual acrobatics will change that. Jerusalem was not destroyed in 607 B.C.E. That is false. It is not truth.

" Make sure of all things;" 1 Thessolonians 5:21.

N. Further Reading and Acknowledgments

I have known some wonderful Jehovah's Witnesses in my time. They are without a doubt some of the kindest, nicest, decent and morally upstanding citizens you will ever find. But that is not what this paper is about. Good intentions, when one should know better, when other people's lives and well-being are at stake, are not enough. We'll just leave it at that.

Setting the Record Straight is by far the Jehovah's Witnesses' strongest argument in support of their 607 theories. Much time and effort has been devoted to its writing by some very motivated and highly educated individuals. It is unclear what connection those authors have with the Watchtower Society, but it would not be surprising if there is a connection. They have covered most of the bases in detail. There is very little else anyone can offer in their defense. It would not be surprising, in light of the above, if the Society should now distance itself from *Setting the Record Straight*, but if they do, and since they reject all archeological and historical evidence proving their 607 theories wrong, it is difficult to imagine where else they would turn to defend their theories. Blind faith is not enough. By all means, read *Setting the Record Straight*. Read everything. Please, get an accurate translation of the Bible, and compare it to their New World Translation - you will be amazed at the liberties they have taken. Don't be afraid of them. Fear the Almighty, instead. If I'm wrong, my viewpoints hopefully will in time drift

away in the wind and truth will rise. But if I'm right

Just remember that YHWH wants you to be sure of all things, test all things, be like Paul and use your intellectual capacities - your brain - and logic. Beware of, and look out for, false prophets. And always pray for understanding. The article *Setting the Record Straight* can be found here:

<http://onlytruegod.org/jwstrs/intro.htm>

We could never have done this without the very able research and writing of Shaun, last name unknown. Although I don't agree with all of his conclusions, he did a great job. Thank you, Shaun. Well done. I highly recommend his web site where he, among other things, offers a great overview of the archeological and historical (secular) evidence which proves that Jerusalem was not destroyed in 607 B.C.E. He also is an advocate of the Dominant Babylonian Empire theory. It's a real eye-opener, shocking, actually. His research can be found on the web here:

http://www.jwfiles.com/607v587/1st_letter_to_governing_body.htm