

When Did Jerusalem Fall?

INTRODUCTION

Pinpointing this time period is extremely important to us as Christian Witnesses of Jehovah. I'm sure you will agree with that. The entire chronology we have been taught hangs upon the date of 607 B.C.E. By starting with this date, we calculate that the 2,520 years of the gentile times brings us to the year 1914 C.E. This then leads us to when Christ appointed a faithful slave over all his belongs in the year 1919. So without knowing when Jerusalem fell back in the pre-Christian era, none of these other dates could be calculated. What follows is research on this subject in the following ways:

1. What archaeology says
2. What the Bible says
3. What the WT CD-ROM says
4. What others Witnesses and Christian Commentators have said

The first point, archaeology, is secondary to what the Bible says, but must be considered because the Scriptures do not give us any hard dates in our format of measuring modern dates, so a "pivotal date" has to be found somewhere in history, and the Watchtower has said as much and I agree articles regarding that. 539 BCE, when Babylon fell, is one such absolute date that is accepted by the WTS, historians, etc.

The second point, what the Bible itself says, is the strongest proof of all as to when it fell. Reasoning on a couple of scriptures in Haggai establishes a powerful point specifically with regard to the possibility of Jerusalem falling in 607 BCE, which I will get to in a little bit.

Thirdly, the WT CD-ROM has a wealth of information on the topic, the vast majority of which I agree with and I assume you will/do to.

And finally, though not as important as points #1 and especially #2, point four is relevant because many scholars and several brothers (that I know of) have spent thousands of hours studying it, some even traveling all over the world to see historical artifacts and speak with archaeologists about the matter.

SUCCESSION OF BABYLONIAN KINGS DOWN TO 539 B.C.E. USING THE WT LIBRARY

Figuring out where in the stream of time to start allows us to count backwards to the fall of Jerusalem. The W55 2/1 p. 95 'Questions From Readers' says this:

It is well to understand that all Bible chronology dates for events prior to 539 B.C. must be figured backward from the Absolute date of 539 B.C.

This makes sense, since history verifies that Babylon fell in 539 BCE and Daniel 5 tells us Belshazzar blasphemed Jehovah and died at the hands of Cyrus the Persian. (See IT book vol 1, page 284) So we can begin by tallying up the amount of time leading towards Jerusalem's fall, starting from 539 BCE, working backwards. Regarding the first king moving from this date, Insight vol 2 says this:

*** it-2 p. 457-458 Nabonidus ***

Last supreme monarch of the Babylonian Empire; father of Belshazzar. On the basis of cuneiform texts he is believed to have ruled some 17 years (556-539 B.C.E.).... Nabonidus' ascension to the throne followed the assassination of Labashi-Marduk.

So Nabonidus ruled from 556-539 BCE and his rule followed Labashi-Marduk's assassination. How long was his reign? The 1965 WT answers that:

*** w65 1/1 p. 29 The Rejoicing of the Wicked Is Short-lived ***

Neriglissar, who reigned for four years, which time he spent mainly in building operations. His underage son Labashi-Marduk, a vicious boy, succeeded him, and was assassinated within nine months.

What we know so far then is:

Nabonidus	556 BCE - 539 BCE	-last monarch of Babylonian Empire
Labashi-Marduk	556 BCE	-for 9 months, succeeded Neriglissar

Next we need to find out how long Neriglissar's reign was. The WT tells us:

*** w65 1/1 p. 29 *The Rejoicing of the Wicked Is Short-lived* ***

Evil-merodach reigned two years and was murdered by his brother-in-law Neriglissar, who reigned for four years, which time he spent mainly in building operations. His underage son Labashi-Marduk, a vicious boy, succeeded him, and was assassinated within nine months.

An update shows this:

Nabonidus	556 BCE - 539 BCE	-last monarch of Babylonian Empire
Labashi-Marduk	556 BCE	-for 9 months, succeeded Neriglissar
Neriglissar	560- 556 BCE	-reigned 4 years, murdered Evil-Merodach

So how long did Evil-Merodach reign? The previous quote said two years. The only reason this is notable is that Insight book page 773 says:

"(E'vil-mer'o-dach) [from Babylonian, meaning "Worshiper of Marduk"]. The Babylonian king who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar to the throne"

So that tells us who was next in the line of kings.

Now we update our time chart again:

Nabonidus	556 BCE - 539 BCE	-last monarch of Babylonian Empire
Labashi-Marduk	556 BCE	-for 9 months, succeeded Neriglissar)
Neriglissar	560 - 556 BCE	-reigned 4 years, murdered Evil-Merodach
Evil-merodach	562 - 560	-reigned 2 years, succeeded Nebuchadnezzar

Next we need to know how long Nebuchadnezzar reigned, because he is next in the line. The Daniel's Prophecy book tells us:

**** dp chap. 4 p. 50 par. 9 The Rise and Fall of an Immense Image *** Nebuchadnezzar, who reigned for 43 years, headed a dynasty that ruled over the Babylonian Empire.*

Our time chart now looks like this:

Nabonidus	556 BCE - 539 BCE	-last monarch of Babylonian Empire
Labashi-Marduk	556 BCE	-for 9 months, succeeded Neriglissar)
Neriglissar	560 - 556 BCE	-reigned 4 years, murdered Evil-Merodach
Evil-merodach	562 - 560	-reigned 2 years, succeeded Nebuchadnezzar
Nebuchadnezzar	605-562	-reigned 43 years

So when was Jerusalem destroyed? Insight volume 2 page 481 says when it was destroyed, relative to Nebuchadnezzar's rule:

**** it-2 p. 481 Nebuchadnezzar *** In the 11th year of Zedekiah's reign (Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year if counting from his accession year or his 18th regnal year), a breach was made in Jerusalem's wall.*

Now we want to double-check that we didn't miss any rulers in this succession. The book *Your Will Be Done* page 365, lists them in a chart labeled "BABYLONIAN EMPIRE (607-539 B.C.)":

- *Nebuchadnezzar*
- *Evil-merodach*
- *Neriglissar*
- *Labashi-Marduk*
- *Nabonidus*
- *Belshazzar, died 539 BCE*

So all rulers in this time span are accounted for. The only thing left is one piece of subtraction to complete our calculation. This will tell us when Jerusalem fell. The year Nebuchadnezzar started reigning was 605 BCE. (See W00 5/15 p. 12 par. 17) During the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign as world ruler of Bible prophecy (606/605 B.C.E.), God sent him a terrifying dream and the wall was breached in his 18th year of ruling (as mentioned above in the IT book volume 2 p. 481) so that gives us:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 605 \\
 - 18 \\
 \hline
 = 587 \text{ BCE}
 \end{array}$$

Adding up the length of each King's reign, from the fall of Jerusalem down to the fall of Babylon covers a span from 587 BCE – 539 BCE, and this is confirmed by using historical references from nothing but WT publications.

MAIN POINT – ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

After reading information from museums, archaeologists, scholars of Jerusalem history, etc. I couldn't find a single one that subscribed to a 607 date. I read some articles and books excerpts in PDF as well. They all say that it fell in 586/587 BCE. The Jewish/Israeli folks also state that this happened in 587. I also studied several websites that are "PRO 607 BCE" written by brothers that feel sincerely that they need to defend the date.

One website, www.607v587.com is written by a baptized brother that was challenged by his fleshly brother to prove the 607 date and he set out to substantiate it. He ended up traveling to the British Museum, speaking to a Mr. Walker, the Assistant Curator of Babylonian Antiquities. The more time he spent trying to establish 607, the more was forced to concede that Jerusalem had to have fallen in 587. This brother's experience is by no means unique. It turns out there have been many friends that have come to the same conclusion through much time and struggling to figure out this complicated chronology.

If you turn to any encyclopedia or archaeological text on the subject you will find that they say Jerusalem fell between 586 and 587. The Watchtower uses 607 by claiming all historical evidence we have on the subject is wrong. Yet to make such a claim opens a paradox - if archaeology is unreliable for 587, and this same information is being used to determine 607, then 607, 539, etc. must be equally unreliable.

There are numerous ways used to determine when Jerusalem fell. This includes Ptolemy's Canon, the Nabonidus Chronicle, Harran, Hillah stele and synchronization with Egyptian chronology. The Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology, page 274 states "Archaeological evidence for the destruction of the kingdom in 586 B.C. comes from Jerusalem, Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim, and other sites." Tens of thousands of detailed Economic-administrative and legal documents have been unearthed outlining daily, monthly and yearly occurrences during the reign of the Babylonian kings.

Prosopography – the study of careers - supports 587 through comparison of business people such as the Egibi business house. The Society's addition of twenty years to Babylonian history during this period results in having to extend by 20 years the life span of members of the Egibi family. Watchtower chronology would require people mentioned in these records to have been working to over the age of 100. Likewise, when compared with the Adad-guppi' stele, for Jerusalem to have fallen in 607 would require the mother of Nabonidus to have lived until the age of 121. But we know that by about the time of Moses people lived 70-80 years unless Jehovah specifically gave them holy spirit to preserve them past the average life span. (Psalm 90:10)

Josephus, quoted extensively in Watchtower articles as a reliable historian, is in agreement with archaeological sources. He states that Jerusalem was desolate for 50 years, not 70 years, in *Against Apion* Book I, Chapter 21, which is quoted here:

*"Nebuchadnezzar, in the eighteenth year of his reign, laid our temple desolate, and so **it lay in that state of obscurity for fifty years**; but that in the second year of the reign of Cyrus its foundations were laid, and it was finished again in the second year of Darius,"*

We studied earlier that the second year of Darius' reign was 605, and subtracting 18 years brings us down to 587. So the historical accounting of Josephus would again put the date of Jerusalem's fall at 587, not 607.

MAIN POINT – REASONING ON HAGGAI 2:3,4

Here's an example where the Bible speaks for itself on the subject, apart from any historian or archaeologist. First we establish that Haggai was written in 520 BCE:

*** it-1 p. 1019 Haggai, Book of *** The four messages recorded by Haggai were delivered at Jerusalem within about a four-month period in the second year of Persian King Darius Hystaspis (520 B.C.E.), the book apparently being completed in 520 B.C.E. (Hag 1:1; 2:1, 10, 20)

Now we consider what he said. Haggai 2:3-4 reads:

'Who is there among YOU that is remaining over who saw this house in its former glory? And how are YOU people seeing it now? Is it not, in comparison with that, as nothing in YOUR eyes?' 4 "But now be strong, O Ze-rub'ba-bel,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'and be strong, O Joshua the son of Je-hoz'a-dak the high priest.' "And be strong, all YOU people of the land,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'and work.' "For I am with YOU people,' is the utterance of Jehovah of armies.

Haggai is directing his questions to Zerubbabel, High Priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak, (IT v2 p115) and all the others then present. His statement called attention to the deep disappointment shared by those who had seen the beauty of the temple that the Babylonians had destroyed. For the older ones in their midst to be able to draw a comparison with the former temple and what their eyes had previously beheld, they must have been of advanced years. No infant, toddler, or very young child at the time of the temple's destruction would have had a valid reference point. Moreover, already ten years before the Babylonians destroyed it, the temple had lost a measure of its glory, a magnificence it had after King Josiah had the needed temple repairs completed. (2 Chronicles 34:8-12) In 2 Kings

24:13 the account reports about what the king of Babylon did ten years before the destruction of the temple.

“Then he brought out from there all the treasures of the house of Jehovah and the treasures of the king’s house, and went on to cut to pieces all the gold utensils that Sol’o-mon the king of Israel had made in the temple of Jehovah, just as Jehovah had spoken.”

So if the former glory relates to the temple’s appearance prior to this event, those whom Haggai addressed would have been very old. Haggai 2:3,4 doesn’t say how old these individuals would have been for them to have seen the former glory and to make a comparison, but enough information is provided in the material to make a calculation. The second year of Darius is known to be 520 BCE. So, if someone believed the date of the destruction for Jerusalem to be 607 BCE, one who was a toddler would have been around 90 at the time Jerusalem was destroyed. And if the former glory referred to the situation 10 years earlier, they would have been over 100 years of age as a toddler. Now Haggai addressed a group of people, a subset of which had seen the former glory of the temple. Thus, for there to have been a significant enough number for Haggai to call attention to those who had seen the former glory, they simply could not have been persons who were over 90 years of age and certainly not over 100 years of age. So the 607 BCE date simply does not fit the Biblical narrative here. If Jerusalem fell in 587 BCE, there would have been a number of Israelites in their 70s and 80s listening that would have nodded their heads, and even given testimony to what Haggai was referring to. The others would give them respect and acknowledge their life experience and wisdom, motivating the people to act for pure worship. Haggai spoke to “the old timers” in these verses because he knew they would back up his reference.

CONCLUSION

To me the biggest proof against the 607 BCE date is the Bible itself, as I explained in this last part. Haggai 2:3, 4 clearly shows that it couldn't have been so long ago. Further, all historical evidence points to the date 587 BCE date. Josephus, in his book Against Apion, clearly does not take the 70 years to mean from the time of the destruction of the temple. The chronology that he accepted confirms a date that was some twenty years later.

My goal is not to tear down our beliefs and abandon our service to Jehovah God and Jesus Christ. Rather it is to worship him with "spirit and truth" (John 4:24) as accurately as I possibly can. This has been a complicated consideration, and I appreciate your patience and diligent attention in going through this information with me. Please double-check my findings- look up the quotes to confirm their accuracy. I have not taken anything out of context (that I know of) or tried to distort the truth. Finally, a scripture that I will leave you to think and to pray on is this one in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15:

*...But a physical man does not receive the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot get to know [them], because they are examined spiritually. 15 However, **the spiritual man examines indeed all things**, but he himself is not examined by any man.*