WATCHTOWER
BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

CABLE WATCHTOWER

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EJ = C. Chain, Writ. Dept.

Carl Olof Jonsson

Sweden

Dear Brother Jonsson:

We are sorry for the long delay in sending a further reply to you with regard to the material you submitted to the Society in 1977 on the subject of ancient chronology. For some years before receiving the information that you provided and even during the years since receiving it the Society has continued to gather materials on the subject of Biblical and secular chronology. We appreciate what you have submitted and have read it and thought about it. In no way has it been forgotten or merely shoved aside as if of no importance. We are also in possession of your material entitled "The Gentile Times Reconsidered." This too has been read and will be subject to further consideration in the future.

We recognize that the research represented by the material that you have given us has required considerable time. Also we recognize that much time and effort went into writing up the information in the form in which you submitted it to us. Since you are quite evidently interested in promoting a better understanding of the inspired Word of God and have put forth so much effort to make a contribution to that end, we feel that it is only fair to make some comments about your material. We would like, though, to mention two problems that present themselves: (1) We do not feel that it would be proper for us to enter into point-for-point debate over every detail where we disagree or remain unconvinced about conclusions to which you have come. This would be out of harmony with the spirit of what is said about "questionings" and "debates" at 1 Timothy 6:3-5; (2) the material that you sent us with regard to chronology in itself covers scores of typewritten pages, and the information entitled "The Gentile Times Reconsidered" runs to 107 typewritten pages. Since those who handle correspondence for the Society have a considerable load of work to process each day, it is neither possible nor would it be fair to others for us to enter into lengthy correspondence with you. We do not mean that any answer you choose to give to this letter would be ignored. Whatever you say will be read and carefully considered. But the Society cannot enter into lengthy and repeated correspondence on these matters. As in the case of any subject, all we can do is endeavor to gather the best and most reliable materials and to draw conclusions from them that harmonize wholly with the inspired Word of God.

We will, however, make an effort to offer a few comments with regard to some points made in the materials that you sent to us. First of all, as to the Canon of Ptolemy, the Society cannot accept Ptolemy's figures for Babylonian kings as an unerring guide for the chronology of that period. The Canon of Ptolemy is composed basically of two things—history and astronomical information. Ptolemy had at his disposal some historical documents that gave the lengths of reign for Babylonian kings and he also had at his disposal astronomical information. When he gives information about eclipses, that information

is correct. But when he synchronizes that information with years of certain kings, that is another matter. There is no evidence that Ptolemy had at his disposal documents contemporary with the Neo-Babylonian period. Possibly he had access to certain "astronomical diaries" that give the name and year of a certain king along with observations of planetary positions during the year. However, all of such astronomical diaries that have been preserved down to our day date from the Seleucid Era. They are copies from earlier documents. The earlier documents themselves may have been copies from originals written during the Neo-Babylonian period. Ptolemy's figures for Babylonian kings agree with other figures available from such copies of astronomical diaries written during the Seleucid Era.

An example is the tablet known as VAT 4956. It appears from the information that you sent us that you are in possession of the article about (and translation into German of) this tablet provided by Paul Neugebauer and Ernst Weidner in 1915. You will note that on page 38 of the German text (as we translate into English) the following: "Our copy of this observation text was not made in the year -567/66 itself. It is rather a copy of a much later time." The authors also point out: "Additionally attention is called to the signature . . . which leads to the first line of the following tablet dealing with Nebuchadnezzar's 38th year. Our tablet therefore belongs to a collection of astronomical observation texts which probably covered a long period of time and were designed to serve as a basis for theoretical astronomical work." It is true that on page 39 the same authors state: "As far as contents are concerned, of course, our copy is a true picture of the original." While this opinion may be correct for the astronomical information on the tablet, it does not necessarily hold true regarding its historical details. While the astronomical information on this tablet points to the year -567/66 (568-567 B.C.E.), attributing the tablet to the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar may be simply the opinion of a scribe assembling and dating "a collection of astronomical observation texts," working at a "much later" period, who came to accept historical data that corresponds with that later presented by Ptolemy.

We do not mean by this, Brother Jonsson, that the Society views all of Ptolemy's figures as incorrect. For example, Ptolemy allows 43 years for Nebucahdnezzar; and this is confirmed by the Bible itself.

As for chronicle texts that have survived down to our time from ancient Babylon, these cover only relatively small parts of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. For example, we have information from chronicle texts for the first eleven years of Nebuchadnezzar and for his 37th year, for the third year of Neriglissar, but nothing from Amel Marduk and Labashi Marduk. Only part of the reign of Nabonidus is covered. While the years of Babylonian kings named in these chronicle texts do not contradict the Canon of Ptolemy, in themselves they are not sufficient to constitute full and absolute verification of all of Ptolemy's figures.

What, then, about the Nabonidus Harran Stele designated NABON H 1, B. It appears from your correspondence that you have a copy of the article about this document published in Anatolian Studies, Vol. 8, 1958. We note that Ptolemy's Canon allows for the period between Assyrian King Esarhaddon and Nabopolassar of Babylon a period of 42 years. The Nabonidus Harran stele gives 42 years

for Assurbanipal, who succeeded Esarhaddon. But before Nabopolassar this inscription presents a 3-year reign for a certain king Assur-etillu-ili. And there is a contract tablet dated to the fourth year of Assur-etillu-ili. C. J. Gadd, translator into English of NABON H 1, B, points out a further problem: "This difficulty is much increased when the reign of Sin-sar-iskun is also taken into consideration, for there has appeared to be sufficient indication that he too was king of Assyria before the accession of Nabopolassar . . . Nothing is known about the relations of Assur-etillu-ili and Sin-sar-iskun, both of whom were successors of Assurbanipal, one, probably both, being his son. The former is shown by contracts to have ruled for at least four, the latter for at least seven, years."

The same author also states: "In the present state of our knowledge it is hardly worthwhile elaborating conjectures to account for these seeming discrepancies: (a) that the Harran inscription appears to require about two years more between the death of Assurbanipal and the accession of Nabopolassar than our evidence, including the Ptolemaic Canon, puts at our disposal; (b) that the reign of Sin-sar-iskun, which otherwise should have begun before that of Nabopolassar, is now seemingly excluded from the brief interval then occurring." These chronological difficulties presented by contemporary cuneiform texts as well as the Canon of Ptolemy have engaged the attention of scholars. In view of the facts, we feel neither compelled nor inclined to view the figures in the Canon of Ptolemy as an infallible guide in matters of chronology.

With regard to business documents such as are presented by the Egibi House tablets, we know that there are tablets for all years of Neo-Babylonian kings represented in the Canon of Ptolemy. But can we say without doubt that the tablets from Egibi House represent every year of every king of that period? Can we say with certainty that none of those kings ruled during years not represented by tablets from the Egibi House? Surely we cannot. For example, during the reign of Darius I there are no records from Egibi House for years 7, 32, 33, 34 and 36. But we would not be warranted in saying that this king did not rule during those years simply on the basis of there being no tablets. We cannot say with certainty that Neo-Babylonian kings ruled only during years represented by such tablets.

As to the synchronism of Egyptian chronology with Babylonian kings and also rulers of Judah, the lengths of reign that can be verified by stelae do not extend beyond the time of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. We see no reason to disagree with the figures that synchronize with kings in Babylon and Judah before the time of Nebuchadnezzar. However, for the reigns after that time, for instance, for the reigns of Amasis and Psammetichus III there is some disagreement in historical sources. With regard to Amasis, according to one source, Manetho attributes to him 44 years. However, Syncellus quotes Manetho as giving him only 42 years. The highest date for Amasis known on monuments is year 44. Interestingly, though, Diodorus of Sicily (I, 68) attributes to this king 55 years. With regard to Psammetichus III, Manetho attributes to him a rulership of six months. However, the highest date available from monuments for this king is year 2; and a document mentioned in the publication Notice des papyrus démotiques archaïques (by Revillout) gives four years of rule to a King Psammetichus that the author claims is Psammetichus III. Hence, some historical sources for the kings Amasis and Psammetichus III give more years

than the lengths of reign commonly accepted. As to the years when Psammetichus reigned, some scholars (Unger, Wiedemann, Petrie) state that this king reigned in 526 and 525 B.C.E., whereas other scholars (Krall and Spiegelberg) prefer the years 528 and 527 B.C.E. In view of this, we can say with certainty that the chronology for the 26th dynasty of Egypt absolutely confirms the figures in the Canon of Ptolemy for the Neo-Babylonian period? Surely we cannot make such a claim.

We note that in the material about "The Gentile Times Reconsidered," beginning on page 51, you advance the opinion that the Babylonian captivity began inthe accession year of Nebuchadnezzar. As one line of evidence for this you cite the Babylonian chronicle as published by Wiseman, which includes this statement: "At that time Nebuchadrezzar conquered the whole area of the Hatti-country." However, the translation that appears in Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles, by A. K. Grayson does not have "Hatti-country" in this place, but rather "Ha[ma]th." In a note Grayson says: "Kur Ha-[ma-a]-tu: a restoration Ha-[at]-tu is to be rejected on the grounds that otherwise it appears Hat-tu in this chronicle."

According to Josephus, as acknowledged in your material, at Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar "occupied all Syria, with the exception of Judah." With this the Scriptures agree. Jeremiah states that Nebuchadnezzar took Jews into captivity "in the seventh year," "in the eighteenth year" and in "the twenty-third year" of his reign. (Jer. 52:28-30) The fact that Nebuchadnezzar took "heavy tribute" from Hatti-land does not have to mean that the seventy years of captivity to Babylon had begun. Gentile kings previous to Nebuchadnezzar had also taken tribute from Judah.

Once again, Brother Jonsson, we express appreciation for the hard work that you have done on the material that you have sent to us. There are many valuable observations in it, both from the Scriptures and from secular sources and we will keep it on file for reference. However, at present the Society has no plans for publishing anything additional or different from what already has been published on this subject.

Nevertheless, as information continues to flow in, it may be that something of this type can be done in the future. Once again, thank you for the considerable time and effort that you have put forth in order to promote a clearer understanding of a most difficult subject. We send our love and greetings.

Your brothers,

Watchtower B. & T. Society
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