

to be a mother. To her, motherhood is not a vocation through accident of birth or of choice—nay, it is a natural outgrowth of her entire view of the world and of life, with instinctive or intuitive certainty depending upon her potentialities. In this vocation, the Jewish woman becomes complete, and frees herself from the anxiety and limitations of the earthly sphere for the selfless devotion to and agreement with the eternal structure of the universe: the plan of God's sovereignty. And if she devotes herself to it with the entire strength and moral energy of her personality, in resignation and painful sacrifice of her own ego, then she, who today still experiences upon her own self the commandment "let there be life," handed down by the Creator, with the same directness as heaven and earth experienced it on the First Day of Creation, will derive, from the choir of spheres of the universe in which she finds her rightful place, freely and in self-determination as an individual, as a chord losing itself in the womb of the whole, that very harmony of personality which will ripen unto her as the most precious fruit of all her life.

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Comparative Jewish Chronology

A.

1. The Jewish world era (or *Aera Mundi*) according to which the present Jewish year 5722 corresponds to the secular year 1961-1962 of the Common Era (CE) is based upon chronological data provided by the *T'nach* and by Rabbinic tradition.

The Biblical data up to the birth of Isaac can be easily computed by anyone who can read the *Chumash*, by adding the years of all twenty generations from Adam to Abraham together (plus 100 years for Abraham):

Adam	130 years
Sheth	105 "
Enosh	90 "
Kenon	70 "
Mahalallel	65 "
Yered	162 "
Henoch	65 "
Methuselah	187 "
Lemech	182 "
Noah	600 "

1656 years

(The year 1656 is the year of the Flood)

Arpachshad born after the Flood	2	years
Arpachshad lived	35	"
Shelach lived	30	"
Eber lived	34	"
Peleg lived	30	"
R'oo lived	32	"
S'rug lived	30	"
Nahor lived	29	"
Terah lived	70	"
Abraham lived	100	"

**392 years after the Flood
i.e. 2048 years after Creation**

According to tradition (*Seder Olam R. III*), the Exodus from Egypt took place 400 years later; i.e. in the year 2448 after Creation.

According to *Kings I*, 6:1, the building of the First Temple was begun 480 years after the Exodus; i.e. 2928 years after Creation.

The Talmud (*Yoma* 9a, *Erachin* 12b, *Aboda Zara* 9b, *Jer. Megillah* I, based on *Seder Olam* XI; see also *Midrash Lev. R.* 21:9 and *Tossef. Korbanoth XIII*) stipulates the periods of the First and Second Temples to have lasted 410 and 420 years respectively, interrupted by 70 years of the Babylonian Exile.

All this leads up to the simple computation as follows:

Exodus	2448	years	after	Creation
First Temple begun	2928	"	"	"
First Temple destroyed	3338	"	"	"
Second Temple consecrated	3408	"	"	"
Second Temple destroyed	3828	"	"	"

2. These calculations, while basically correct, are at slight variance with our present-day Jewish calendar system. It would lead too far afield to discuss this intricate problem at length here, but attention is being called to the excellent book, "Talmudic and Rabbinical Chronology" by the late Edgar Frank (New York, 1956), which should become required reading for anyone evincing more than a casual interest in this subject.

Frank has clearly demonstrated that the persistent discrepancy of *two years* between our present-day Jewish calendar and most of

the Talmudic-Rabbinic sources is due to the fact that our calendar follows the method known as **יְמוּלַד בַּהֲרָר** while Seder Olam and Talmud follow a different calendrical method called **יְמוּלַד וִי"ד**. The final outcome of both methods is identical and allows for no further discrepancies.

Accordingly, the accepted traditional Jewish calendar, which is commonly used at the present time, is based on a method of reckoning as follows:

The first Five Days of Creation are called year	1
The Sixth Day of Creation (when Adam was created) initiates the year	2
The first day of Tishri, the Second Rosh Hashanah (when Adam became one year old) opens the year	3
The <i>Mabbul</i> (Flood) occurred 1655 years later; namely in 1658	
Yitzchak was born 392 years after the Flood; i.e. in 2050	
Exodus from Egypt occurred 400 years later	2450
First Temple was begun 480 years after Exodus	2930
First Temple destroyed 410 years later	3340
Second Temple dedicated 70 years after destruction of First Temple	3410
Second Temple destroyed 420 years after its consecration	3830

While this ingenious solution is quite acceptable, the fact remains that all our authors quote the years of the Jewish calendar according to the method וי"ד adopted by Seder Olam and Talmud which does not assign any number to the first year of creation—including the first five days—and consider the Second Rosh Hashanah, when Adam became one year old: the beginning of year One [שנה אחת ליצירה]. (We are also used to-day to speak of a *one year old* child after this child has lived 12 full months and has experienced its first birthday.) Accordingly all data given before have to be set back two years; i.e. Creation — year 0; Adam 1 year old — year 1.

Mabbulyear 1656
Yitzchak born " 2048
Exodus " 2448

¹ Concerning the various methods of calculating the so-called מולד חוה see Rabbam, Kid. Hachodesh VI:8; see commentary *ibid.*; Torah Shelema, Vol. XIII, Chap. 8, par. 110; also מה שמביא בשם ר' יצחק קב"ן אה"ע מחתי תשובה אה"ע קכ"ז ס"ק י' שם גט משוט.

First Temple begun	"	2928
First Temple destroyed	"	3338
Second Temple dedicated	"	3408

In the course of our further deliberations we should be able to follow this last method without encountering any difficulty.

3. There can be no doubt as to the objective historical truth of marking the secular year 70 CE as the year of the destruction of the Second Temple. The circumstances surrounding the *churban* are illuminated by the clear evidence of Roman history. No serious scholar will therefore doubt the correctness of the chronological equation whereby the Jewish year 3830 *Aera Mundi* (AM) corresponds to the year 70 CE and, consequently, our present Jewish year 5722 AM to the secular year 1962 CE.

Since, according to our Talmudic tradition, the Second Temple stood for only 420 years,² we must of necessity assume—reckoning backward in time—that the Second Temple was consecrated in the year 352-351 BCE and that the Babylonian Captivity began immediately after the destruction of the First Temple in 422-421 BCE.

In this manner we should now be able to equate the Jewish and non-Jewish data and arrive at the following conclusion (למולד בה"ד):

Year of Creation	1 AM	3760 BCE
Flood	1658 AM	2103 BCE
Birth of Isaac	2050 AM	1711 BCE
Exodus from Egypt	2450 AM	1311 BCE
First Temple begun	2930 AM	831 BCE
First Temple destroyed	3340 AM	421 BCE
Second Temple consecrated	3410 AM	351 BCE
Second Temple destroyed	3830 AM	70 CE
Present Year	5722 AM	1962 CE

4. The Torah-true historian is now confronted with a truly

² The 420 years of the Second Temple are calculated by our Sages in *Abodah Zarah*, 9a, 10b, based on *Seder Olam*, as follows:

34 years for the remainder of the Persian Era
180 years for the Greek Era
103 years for the Hasmonean Era
103 years for the Herodian Era

vexing problem. Ancient history of the Babylonian and Persian Empires presents us with completely different data. These figures can hardly be doubted for they appear to be the result of painstaking research by hundreds of scholars and are borne out by profound erudition and by ever-increasing authoritative evidence. Sometimes small discrepancies of a year or two at the most have yet to be accounted for, but complete agreement seems to be almost within reach at the present time. Here is a short list of universally accepted chronological data:

Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem

and First Temple	587	BCE
Cyrus conquers Babylonia	539	BCE
Reign of Cyrus	539-530	BCE
Cambyses	530-523	BCE
Darius I	522-486	BCE
Xerxes I	486-465	BCE
Artaxerxes I	465-425	BCE
Xerxes II	425	BCE
Darius II	424-404	BCE
Artaxerxes II	404-359	BCE
Artaxerxes III	358-338	BCE
Darius III	336-331	BCE
Alexander the Great conquers Persia	334	BCE
Alexander the Great dies	323	BCE

Since, according to *Ezra* 6:15, the Second Temple was completed in the sixth year of Darius I, the date, following the secular chronology, must have been 517 BCE; i.e. exactly 70 years after the date (again, established by secular historians) for the destruction of the First Temple (587 BCE). Consequently, the first year of the era of the Second Temple was 517 BCE and *not* 351 BCE. As long as we cannot doubt the date given for the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) we are compelled to admit that the *בית שני* must have existed for *no less than 586 years* instead of the 420 years given by tradition. This amounts to a *discrepancy of over 165 years* compared with our Jewish way of reckoning!

5. Furthermore, there are *at least nine* Persian kings beginning with Cyrus (seven of these reigned subsequent to the consecration of the Temple) until the beginning of the Greek Era, during a

period of well over 200 years. Compare with these figures the statements of Seder Olam and of Talmudic-Rabbinic literature (*Seder Olam* XXX, *Rosh Hashanah* 3b) which know of only *four* Median-Persian kings ruling over a period of not more than *52 years*, of which only *34 years* belong to the period *subsequent* to the building of the Second Temple.

6. The gravity of this intellectual dilemma posed by such enormous discrepancies must not be underestimated. The unsuspecting students—including the pupils of our Yeshivoth and Beth Jacob High Schools—are faced with a puzzle that appears insoluble. How could it have been that our forebears had no knowledge of a period in history, otherwise widely known and amply documented, which lasted over a span of 165 years and which was less than 600 years removed in time from the days of the Sages who recorded our traditional chronology in *Seder Olam*? Is it really possible to assume that some form of historical amnesia had been allowed to take possession of the collective memory of an entire people? This should be quite like assuming that some group of recognized historians of today would publish a textbook on medieval history, ignoring all the records of, say, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of the Common Era. Would this not seem inconceivable even for those who, unfortunately, do not possess the necessary *אמונת חכמים* to accept the word of our Sages?

7. This enormous discrepancy between sacred tradition and secular data would appear at first glance to frustrate any and all hope that it might be possible to compile a comparative chronology acceptable to Orthodox Jewry and secular historians alike. To faithful believers in the veracity of our most sacred literature, both Biblical and Rabbinic, there seems to be left only the following two alternatives between which to choose:

One: Faithfully to put our trust in the superior wisdom of our inspired teachers of Torah who have arrived at the absolute truth and, consequently, to reject categorically and absolutely the right of any secular scientist, even the most objective in his field, to contradict our convictions. In this case, it would mean that we would have to declare that those 165 years which our Tradition has ignored are, in fact, *non-existent, and have been conjectured by secular historians out of the clear blue sky*. According to this method

of reasoning, it would follow that all the historical developments reported in connection with the timetable of ancient history referring to that period are not history but fiction and based on misinterpretation and misleading evidence.

or Two: We might accept the unanimous opinion of secular historians as coming as close to the objective truth as that is possible, but, make an ingenious attempt to interpret the Biblical data and to treat the traditional Rabbinic chronology as mere Aggadic homily which may lend itself to symbolic or allegorical evaluation.

This dilemma is most unfortunate. For it would appear that the only course to take would be either to "correct" secular ancient history by 165 years which we would then have to call "fictitious," or else to declare that our traditional calendar is based not on historical calculations but on Aggadic pronouncements. Even centuries ago, in his "Me'or Eynayim" (XXXV), Azariah de Rossi, a controversial figure in the annals of our people, criticized the puzzling texts of *Seder Olam* and of the Talmud, much to the righteous indignation of contemporary and later Rabbinic scholars (Cf. R. David Gans in *Tsemach David* (No. 3448) and R. Jacob Emden to *Seder Olam* XXX).

8. Let us now review briefly some excerpts from the works of more recent orthodox writers and find out for ourselves whether they have dealt satisfactorily with the aforementioned problems of Jewish chronology.

(a) Many of the editions of *Seder Hadoroth* by R. Yehiel Halperin of Minsk have a list of fifteen Persian-Median kings who are identical with those known from non-Jewish sources. At the same time, the author follows *Seder Olam* and Talmud by registering 34 years only for the entire list of rulers. [Due to the fact that the *Seder Hadoroth* has been edited and re-edited numerous times by unknown revisors, we find ourselves compelled to eliminate *Seder Hadoroth* entirely from our present deliberations until such time as the original text of the work has been clarified.]

(b) W. Javetz, in his *Toledoth Israel*, conveniently omits the discussion of the discrepancy; he skips over most of the Persian kings and considers Darius II Nothus (423-404 BCE) to be identical with "Daryovesh" of Media who is mentioned in the *Book of Daniel*

before Cyrus. As a result, the author is forced to *invent* a second Daniel who, he alleges, lived more than one hundred years after the death of the first Daniel. Fortunately, this incredible *Geschichtsklitterung* by an orthodox writer has not been taken seriously by anyone.

(c) Rabbi Philip Biberfeld, in his *Universal Jewish History* (New York, 1948, p. 30), makes the following statement:

"... 480 years which, according to *I Kings* 6:1, elapsed between the Exodus and the beginning of the building of the First Temple in the fourth year of King Solomon. The traditional chronology of the Seder Olam follows the literal meaning of this statement. As a result, only 902 years remain for the entire time from the building of the Temple to its second destruction. After a further subtraction of 70 years for the Babylonian exile, only 832 years are left for the time of the First and Second Temples. According to Seder Olam, they are divided into 410 and 420 years, respectively. The very short time thus available for the period of the Second Temple led to the *reduction*³ of the time of the Persian kings to only 34 years.

"It was *assumed*³ that the kings Koresh, Daryavesh and Artachsaasta were identical and that Ezra had already come to Palestine one year after the building of the Second Temple.

"These consequences were *rejected*³ by R. Zerachia of Lunel as *incompatible*³ with the words of the Bible."

To solve these difficulties, Biberfeld suggests (page 32) a new interpretation of a simple verse in *T'nach*. What he says is that the period of 480 years mentioned in the *Book of Kings* as having passed from the time that 'the Children of Israel had gone forth from the land of Egypt' until the beginning of the construction of the First Temple, begins *not* with the *Exodus* but with the starting of the "Era" of Exodus; namely, with the death of Joseph! In other words, the "480 years" would refer to the time that had passed from the beginning of the "Era of the Exodus" (starting with *ספר שמות*, the Second Book of the Torah) to the building of the First Temple.

This interpretation disregards entirely the detailed figures given in Seder Olam in that it allows only 215 years for the period

³ Italics mine.

of the Elders and the Judges, and only 208 years instead of 370 for the Tabernacle in Shiloh, etc.⁴ This disregard for the traditional chronology of Seder Olam is attributed also to Rabbi Zerachia of Lunel who is said to have "rejected" a statement in Seder Olam as "incompatible" with the words of the Bible!

(d) An even more drastic opinion is expressed by Aaron Marcus (*Barzilai* I, Berlin 1905, Page CCCXVII):

"The Sassanians had forgotten . . . history, identifying in their own histories the kings Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes with one another, assuming those names to be diverse titles of one and the same person. *This assumption was accepted by some of the Amoraim of the Talmud who had dealings with the Sassanide Royal Courts.*⁵

"One of the most renowned authorities of the Diaspora, soon after the Geonic era, Rabbi Zerachia Halevi of Lunel, around 1100 CE, considers this assumption . . . as *Privatansicht* (the purely personal opinion) of some scholars. He maintains that there were several kings named Artaxerxes, etc."⁶

(e) Subsequently Edgar Frank, in his otherwise excellent book *Talmudic and Rabbinic Chronology* takes note of a "mistake" on the part of Seder Olam and Talmud since, evidently, the time of the reign of the Persians was much longer than 34 years.⁷

9. Before we go any further, let us state our opinion emphatically that the saintly בעל המאור *neither could nor ever would have "rejected" any statement by a Mishnaic authority and certainly not one by רבי יוסי בן הלפתא who is the author of Seder Olam* (cf. *Yeb.* 82b, *Niddah* 46b). A special significance was attached

⁴ Compare this with *Gittin* 88a and *Sanhedrin* 38a: "God was gracious with Israel to decree the exile 2 years before *ג'שנ"ב*" (which has a numerical value of 852), i.e. the destruction of the Temple happened 850 years after *Israel* had come into its own land.

⁵ Italics mine.

⁶ See also *Barzilai* II, p. 22; Ahron Marcus, "*Juedische Chronologie*," Frankfurt, 1925, *Jahrbuch, Juedische Lit. Ges.* 1900, p. 13.

⁷ See also A. Marcus, "*Jahrbuch der Juedisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft*," Frankfurt, 1906, p. 331; Dr. Bondi in the *Jahrbuch*, Vol. XVII, p. 325.

to the pronouncement of R. Josi: טעמו ונימוקו עמו (*Erub. 51a, Gittin 67a, Aboth de R. Nathan 18*).⁸

10. In our case there were also *Midrashic* authorities who disagreed with R. Josi. For instance, in *Pirkei de R. Eliezer* (49) we find a statement by R. Jonathan that Artaxerxes was the last of the Medio-Persian kings, a statement which in turn is disputed there by R. Tanchum who considers Ahasverosh to be the last of the list of kings.

However, our traditional chronology is based on *Seder Olam* because of the authority of its author. It is therefore quite inconceivable that any post-Talmudic teacher could possibly "reject" those chronological calculations which have been made the subject of many a Talmudic discussion.

11. What does *Baal Hamaor* really say?

The Talmud (*R. Hashanah 3a*) in a discussion on chronology based on Chapter 30 of *Seder Olam* interprets the words of *Ezra* (6:14) as referring to one and the same king who bore three names: namely, one who was known as Cyrus, Darius and/or Artachshashta.

Baal Hamaor, in the beginning of his commentary on *Rosh Hashanah*, analyzes this Talmudic discussion and then continues:

וזהו העולה בידינו לפי מדרש רבותינו ולפי דקדוקיהם. אבל הפירוש הנכון לפי הפשט זה שכתוב: ומטעם כורש וגו' שלושה מלכים היו... ע"ש.

"This is our understanding according to the *Midrash* of our Rabbis and their manner of interpretation. However, the proper explanation according to the *simple meaning* of the text is that these names belong to three different kings. . . ."

A sober reading of the text in *Baal Hamaor* makes it clear that Rabbi Zerachia did nothing else but *qualify* the Talmudic interpretation of one verse in *Ezra* 6:4, as belonging to the category of *Midrash* or *D'rash*, which should not, however, exclude the simple meaning or *P'shat*. Nothing more and nothing less is contained in

⁸ Cf. Jerus. Talmud, end of *Gittin* VI: "When one questioned a statement by R. Josi, Rabbi used to say, 'How can we humble disciples question the words of R. Josi since the difference between our generation and that of R. Josi is comparable to the difference between the most holy and the most profane. . . .'"

this remark. *Baal Hamaor* follows the accepted dictum אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו, that no verse of the Scriptures ever loses its simple literal meaning, quite independently of any additional *Midrashic* interpretation (cf. *Shabb. 63a et al.*).

There is no doubt that the *literal* meaning of the verse under discussion is that the erection of the Second Temple is credited to *Cyrus*, who gave permission to have it built, to *Darius*, who allowed the people to continue the construction work, and finally to *Artaxerxes*, who may have sponsored the completion of the sacred edifice (כן הוא בבאור הגר"א בסדר עולם פרק ל' הגה"ה ז' עיי"ש).

Baal Hamaor does indeed follow the broad stream of our Biblical commentators who have persistently striven not to neglect the plain literal meaning of a passage, while at the same time interpreting the *Midrashic* or *Aggadic* traditions.

The *P'shat* of this verse has been explained by our classic commentaries in many ways and *Baal Ha-Maor* is only *one* of them. The following table may give us some idea of the variety of opinions on the subject of the chronological order of the Persian Kings mentioned in Biblical literature:

R. Saadia Gaon	Rashi (quoting Joseph ben Gorion)	Abraham Ibn Ezra	R. Moshe Ha-Sefardi	Baal Ha-Maor
1. Cyrus	Cyrus	Cyrus	Cyrus	Cyrus
2. Ahashverosh	Cambyses	Ahashverosh called Artaxerxes	Ahashverosh	Ahashverosh
3. Artaxerxes	Ahashverosh		Artaxerxes	
4. Darius, called Cyrus the Great	Darius	Darius, called Artaxerxes	Darius	Darius
5.			Artaxerxes	Artaxerxes

None of these Commentaries "rejected" the Talmud. They all attempted to find the simple *P'shat*, which is the usual procedure for our מפרשי התורה.

12. Whenever *P'shat* and *D'rash* seem to disagree, one of the following three methods is employed by our classical writers to reconcile what appears to be in disagreement:

(a) They *re-interpret* the apparent *P'shat* in the light of the

Aggadic or Midrashic pronouncement because the latter seems to contain the real meaning, or

(b) They may accept the *P'shat* as the proper explanation and interpret the *D'rash* homiletically by searching for a symbolic or "hidden" meaning, or

(c) They may eliminate the discrepancy by demonstrating that both *P'shat* and *D'rash* are acceptable simultaneously and are not necessarily mutually exclusive.⁹

Baal Ha-Maor merely registers in the passage quoted that there exists a discrepancy between *P'shat* and *D'rash* of this verse. He does not suggest any solution. But he most certainly does not "reject" any of the data of Seder Olam as a "mistake" adopted from ignorant Sassanians.

It seems that our post-Talmudic calendar makers have considered this *D'rash* of the quoted passage as *authentic basis for our chronology* which does not allow for any homiletical treatment.¹⁰

This brings us back to the confusing problem which is the subject matter of this discussion.

B.

1. There seems to be left, as yet unexplored, only *one* avenue of approach to the vexing problem confronting us. It should have been possible that our Sages—for some unknown reason—had "covered up" a certain historic period and *purposely eliminated and suppressed all records and other material pertaining thereto*. If so, what might have been their compelling reason for so unusual a procedure? Nothing short of a *Divine command* could have prompted our חז"ל, those saintly "men of truth" to leave out completely from our annals a period of 165 years and to correct all

⁹ For methods of Aggadic explanation:

ע' הקדמה להרמב"ם סדר זרעים ד"ה ענין רביעי

ע' מאמר על האגדות לר' אברהם בן הרמב"ם

ע' מבוא התלמוד לר' שמואל הגיד ד"ה והגדה

ע' קצור כללי התלמוד

ע' של"ה חלק תורה שבע"פ כלל כ"ה

ע' מאמר על האגדות לר' משה חיים לוצאטו (מבוא בשער הספר עין יעקב)

¹⁰ ע' חזון איש קובץ איגרות סי' ר"ו שכתב באה"ד: שנות בית שני... מדברי חז"ל...

וזה אינו ענין לדברי הגדה שעיקרן סוד בחכמת האמת או לעורר את הנפש וכו' ע"ש.

data and historic tables in such a fashion that the subsequent chronological gap could escape being noticed by countless generations, known to a few initiates only who were duty-bound to keep the secret to themselves.

2. In the course of our inquiry, we do indeed find a *Divine command* conveyed by an angel to Daniel to "seal the words and close the book" at the end of a long prophesy which begins in Chapter 11:1 and ends at Chapter 12:4 in the *Book of Daniel*. This strange vision predicting historical events concludes with a stern warning: ואתה דניאל סתום הדברים וחתום הספר עד עת קץ וגו'. In writing his divinely inspired book Daniel obeyed the heavenly command which explains the dark and obscure language of ספר דניאל. It also gives us a perfect right to assume that certain historical events, revealed to Daniel were omitted by him on purpose in faithful obedience to the divine command. It is equally safe to assume that our Sages, who had obviously a thorough knowledge of the entire history of the Second Commonwealth, correspondingly eliminated in all chronological lists and pertinent discussions the same period which Daniel had to "close and seal up."

To prove our point we offer the following:

3. In Pesachim (62b) we hear of a *Book of Genealogies* (ספר היוחסין), which, according to Rashi, was a *Mishnaic* commentary on the *Book of Chronicles*. This book must have contained an enormous wealth of chronological and historical material up to the time of Ezra, who is the main author of דברי הימים (B.B. 15a), as well as some טעמי תורה, according to Rashi (*ibid.*). The Talmud informs us that this *important book was hidden!* No reasons are given. Rav is quoted to have observed that: מיום שנגנו ספר יוחסין "since the day the *Book of Genealogies* was hidden, 'the strength of the wise had been weakened and the light of their eyes dimmed.'"

Is it now too presumptuous to think that this secret book contained the records of all generations and incidents during the missing 165 years which had to be suppressed in deference to Daniel's strict instructions? It would then become quite obvious why the all-embracing knowledge and the broad vision of our Talmudic sages were somewhat restricted by such a prohibition which resulted in the lack of an important link in our chronological tradition.

3. We are now faced with two questions:

(a) Suppose such a holy conspiracy had existed all along, what would have been its reason? (b) Why should we today be allowed to rend apart the veil of obscurity which was drawn in ancient days, hiding the chronological truth from our people?

We propose the following explanation:

In *Sanhedrin* 97b we find a stern condemnation of all those who conjecture the messianic date from the last chapter of *Daniel*. These mysteries are to remain קץ עד סתומים וחתומים, i.e. "closed and sealed until the time of the End." [Surprisingly there were many of our great commentators who made such fruitless attempts.] Had it not been for the fact that important parts of those prophecies have been left out or were purposely obscured, the clues for the messianic date found in *Daniel* might have yielded the desired results. This was rendered impossible by hiding certain data and certain chronological material. Although we do not presume that anyone living today would be capable to caculate anything concerning המשיח—even after he had been furnished all the missing facts—we still would not assume the right to unveil a mystery which was so carefully hidden by our forbears, *unless the mystery had become unveiled all by itself*. Not by our doing, but by the archeological discoveries made during the last century and a half. The earth has indeed opened its mouth and yielded countless bits of material in the form of decoded and readable clay tablets, inscriptions on rocks and temple-ruins, etc., pertaining to the Persian era. This host of historic information has become common knowledge, unchallenged and universally accepted. There is nothing left for us to uncover מיה שכיסה עתיק ימין—which was hidden by the "Ancient of Days." We might, however, attempt to investigate how to take advantage of the already available archaeological evidence which could serve as a guide for the perplexed, in order to avoid an intellectual dilemma.

Whether we have found the key to unlock the mystery remains to be seen. In every case the working-thesis suggested here deserves to be presented to the scrutinizing evaluation of serious scholars, unless it became disqualified by the clear verdict of an authentic Torah authority. Its positive acceptance would mean that our present year 5722 is literally למנין שאנו מונים—our own way of

counting, but not the real date. The "real" date would be actually 5722 plus 165 years, that is 5887 after the Creation. We would be much closer to the end of the 6th Millennium than we had surmised.

4. In the spirit of the aforesaid, a new light is shed on the strange fact that—soon after Ezra and Nehemia—a *new method* of counting the years was introduced by our Sages, a method which was retained for well over 1200 years by our people. We are referring to the so called Greek Era. In *Seder Olam* 30 we are told that "in the exile" we are to write into our documents the date according to מנין שטרות אלפא. The term *Minyan Sh'taroth* means the "Era of Contracts" and refers to the so-called Seleucid era. This era, also sometimes called מנין יוונים, began on Rosh Hashanah 312-11 BCE after the battle of Gaza and the conquest of the Holy Land by Seleucus Nikator, one of the generals of Alexander the Great. The Seleucid era was in use until the Middle Ages when the familiar term לבריאת עולם was introduced, or re-introduced, by the latter Gaonim, such as R. Sh'rira (cf. *Rambam*, *H. Gerushin* 1:27). There are numerous *Gittin* still extant which carry the date according to מנין שטרות. We can very well understand the bewilderment of צדוקי wondering why a non-Jewish date was admitted into the sacred documents (*Yaddaim* 4:8). For indeed מנין שטרות was *not* a Jewish date. It was employed by a majority of nations in the Near East and of the Mediterranean area for countless generations and still is in use in some Eastern groups.

There were several calendar systems based on the Seleucid era:

- (a) The Syrians started in the autumn of 312 BCE
- (b) The Babylonians began in the spring of 311 BCE
- (c) The Persians began in the autumn of 311 BCE, etc. (see a.o. Frank, p. 30). The Talmud (*Abodah Zarah* 10a) mentions the "pedantic scribes" who start 6 years earlier, that means 317 BCE

The Jewish people adopted the first system. This is meant by the strange term אלפא. It just means α, or method I.

Why did חז"ל adopt the generally accepted non-Jewish calendar for all our documents instead of a Jewish system? There seems to be only one satisfactory answer: Because it was part of the scheme to "close up the words and seal the book!" A certain period

of time had to be hidden. This was accomplished effectively indeed by this switch to the Greek date.

5. What happened to the Jewish people during those hidden years? The *Books of Ezra* and *Nehemiah* fill in some of the missing parts. Secular sources (להודיל) like Josephus and the so-called Elephantine Papyrus provide a few meager clues. The rest is silence.

The main issue at this juncture is to clarify that once we have established that a historical gap does exist, the stumbling block is removed and a comparative chronology can be outlined.

6. In 3386 AM, this is 540-39 BCE, Cyrus conquered the former Babylonian Empire. He appointed the Governor of Guteum in Media, a certain Gobrias or Gubarru, to rule as acting King for less than one full year over the conquered realm of the Chaldeans. The Persian name of this acting King under which the Jewish people came to know him was "Daryovesh, son of Achashverosh, the Medean." During his brief period of reign, while Cyrus stormed on to conquer his ever-widening empire, Daniel inquired as to the exact meaning of the 70 years which had been predicted by Jeremiah for the Exile. Almost 49 years had passed since the destruction of the First Temple (*Daniel* 9:1). Daniel received the heavenly message that the Galuth is far from over. The "70 years" are not just ordinary years (Verse 24).

Though Cyrus does permit the building of the Temple he revokes his permission a year or two later. Eventually Darius the Great permitted the construction to be continued. [He is sometimes called Darius ben Esther by our people, most probably in the same sense that Joseph was called the "Father of Pharaoh" (*Bereshith* 45, 8). Darius' friendship for the Jews was the direct result of the inspirational influence of Queen Esther who survived Achashverosh=Cambyses, son of Cyrus.

The Temple building is completed in the 6th year of his reign—in 517 BCE which is exactly 70 years after the destruction of the First Temple which had taken place in 587 BCE.¹¹

¹¹ Albert T. Olmstead: *The Story of the Persian Empire* (University of Chicago Press, 1955): "By December 22, 522 Babylon was dating its tablets in the 'year of the beginning of the reign of Darius, King of Babylon, King of the lands'; i.e. in Nisan 521 began his second year and Nisan 517 marked his 6th year. Dedication of new Temple in Adar, 516.

But in the following year, in 516 BCE, the גלות had not ended. True, the Second Temple had been consecrated; yet, it was only a sanctuary with *limited dimensions* not in accordance with the prescribed measurements (cf. *Ezra* 6:3: only 60 cubics as against the Halacha which requires a height of 100 cubics). Also the walls were inferior (cf. *Rosh Hashono* 4a). Furthermore, there was no permission granted for an additional immigration into Eretz Israel. The year 515 BCE is the first of the "hidden years." During the first period Darius was building his empire. Fighting against the Greek city states he had become defeated at Marathon in 491 BCE. In 486 BCE Xerxes became king. He was utterly defeated by Greece at Salamis. Persia lost all control over Greece in Europe in 479-78 BCE. This year happened to be exactly the year 1000 after the Exodus from Egypt!

After Xerxes had become king the Greeks had organized and had gotten ready for war. They revolted and battled against the Persian supremacy and finally managed to throw off the Persian yoke by a decisive victory. In the visionary language of the seer, the מלכות יין had now begun. Not on earth, not until Alexander the Great would actually conquer Persia in 334 BCE, a century and a half later, but in heaven. Daniel had learned that the "Prince of Yavan" had come to replace the "Prince of Persia." Indeed, culturally, the world dominion of Greece had started.

In *Abodah Zarah* (*ibid.*) the six years of Greek war preparations against Persia, the years of revolt are called: "the six years when Greece ruled in *Elam* before it ruled over the whole world." This may well be explained like this:

In the mysterious world above, as revealed to Daniel (Chapter 8) the following had taken place: ". . . In my vision I was in Shushan, in the province of *Elam* . . . A young goat came from the West over the face of the earth, but it touched not the ground; the young goat had a conspicuous horn between its eyes . . . it bitterly attacked a ram and broke its two horns. The ram had no strength to stand before him, he threw him down to the ground and trampled upon him . . . and the young goat grew very big, when it had become strong then the big horn broke and instead of it there came up the appearance of four horns." This vision is explained in Verse 20:

"The ram . . . the Kings of Medea and Persia, the young goat the King of Greece. . . ."

In his vision Daniel is transported from Babel to *Elam*. He witnesses the bitter attacks of Greece against Persia. The young goat *does not touch the earth*. [On earth Persia is still in power although beaten and defeated by Greece.] Greece grows into a powerful nation. Eventually Alexander the Great establishes his World Empire upon the ruins of the crushed Persian World Empire. Soon Alexander dies and his power is inherited by his four generals who divide the enormous estate amongst themselves. Most probably with reference to this vision חז"ל speak of the "six years of Elam." In the language of Daniel: *the Prince of Javan had already arrived*. On earth nobody knew as yet that the dominion of the world had been given to Greece. Culturally, in the world of science and the arts, Greece had now entered its heroic age. It had begun its triumphal march across the intellectual highways of the ancient world.]

6. It is technically not possible here to sketch within the framework of this essay the studies made by this writer of the *Books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemia, Hagai* and *Zechariah*, to be published, please God, elsewhere.

However, in order to fill in as much of the gap as possible, only the following shall be briefly mentioned. According to *Baba Bathra* 13a, most of *Sefer Ezra* was really written by Nehemia. It may be safely assumed that Nehemia came *much earlier* than Ezra to Jerusalem. He arrived in 386-85 BCE in the 20th year of Artaxerxes II (404-359 BCE) who is called "*King of Babel*" in *Nehemia* 13-6. Nehemia who repaired the walls of Jerusalem stayed on for 12 years as the Pasha of the Jews. He is forced to return to the services of his royal master. After an absence of ca. 20 years, now serving under the new king Artaxerxes III, he is sent back to Jerusalem to assist Ezra whom he survives. His official title now is *Tirshata*, meaning: the Royal Representative. In the meantime the following had occurred: Artaxerxes III after ascending the throne of Persia in 358 BCE had given permission to enlarge and renovate the Temple. The renovation of the Second Temple lasted 6 years. On the festival of Pesach in the year 354 BCE in the sixth year of Artaxerxes III, who, for some reason, is called "*King of Ashur*" (*Ezra* 6:22), the completed restoration of the Temple was celebrated amidst great rejoicing. Permission was granted by the King for another Jewish immigration in the Holy Land (*Ezra* 6:9). One

year later (353 BCE) Ezra haSofer arrived, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes III (*Ezra* 7:1), and—together with Nehemia—in 351 BCE—consecrated the walls of the Holy City (*Nehemia* 12:27). Thus, *the reconstruction of the Beth Hamikdosh is finally fully accomplished*.

At this historic moment, the period of the Second Temple—lasting 420 years—does officially begin, and the *second Commonwealth has been formally ushered in*.

The counting לבריאת עולם which was suspended in 516 BCE can now be resumed in 351 BCE, 165 years later.

We shall now be able to sketch the outlines of a comparative chronological table, incorporating the sacred text of *T'nach*, the authoritative pronouncements of our Sages, at the same time not contradicting the accepted data of general history.

Year AM	Year BCE	
0	3927	Creation
1	3926-25	Adam—one year old
1656	2270-69	Mabbul
2448	1478-77	Exodus
2488	1438-37	Invasion of Canaan
2928	998-97	First Temple begun
3338	588-87	First Temple destroyed,
3339	587-86	First year of Babylonian Exile
3386	540-39	Cyrus conquers Persia; Daryavesh of Media acting King
3387	539-38	Proclamation of Cyrus; Return under Zerubabel, etc.
3389	537-36	Foundation of new Temple constructed
3390	536-35	Cyrus assumes title of Artachshashta=Emperor; his son Cambys (=Achashverosh) co=regent; Temple construction stopped
3391	535-34	Banquet in Shushan
3395	531-30	Cyrus dies; Cambys sole ruler; Esther queen
3400	526-25	Haman's fall
3401	525-24	Purim; Cambys conquers Egypt
3402	524-23	Cambys killed, revolts in Persia

3403	523-22	Darius I, the Great
3404	522-21	Haggai, Zecharia; Temple building resumed by Zerubabel, etc.
3408	518-17	70th year of Babylonian Exile
3409	517-16	Dedication of (small) Temple, 18 years after stoppage

The "hidden years"

488-87	Darius I dies ¹²
487-86	Xerxes King
484-83	Greek revolt; war preparations against Persia ¹³
481-80	Persian navy defeated at Salamis
480-79	Battle of Plataea, Persians expelled
479-78	End of Persian rule in Europe, one thousand years after Exodus; culturally the "Greek Era" begins
466-65	Artaxerxes I
425-24	Darius II
[408-07]	Elephantine Jews sent letters to Bagoas]
405-04	Artaxerxes II ("King of Babel")
384-83	Nehemia rebuilds walls of Jerusalem
373-72	Nehemia returns to Shushan
359-58	Artaxerxes III ("King of Ashur"), Restoration of Temple begun
355-54	Pesach celebration marks end of Restoration (Baruch, Ezra's teacher dies in Babel)
354-53	Ezra and second gathering of immigrants arrive
353-52	Nehemia returns, Santification of Eretz Israel, Counting of Sh'mitta begins

¹² He was the last of the four biblical Medio-Persian rulers. He died exactly 52 years after the beginning of the Persian dominion and 34 years after the construction of the Second Temple had been resumed (cf. *Abodah Zarah* 9a).

¹³ 34 years after (small) Temple was dedicated, the six years "in Elam" begin (*ibid.*).

3410	352-51	Consecration of Walls by Ezra and Nehemia
		Beginning of the Second Commonwealth
3425	337-36	Darius III in Persia; Alexander in Macedonia
3427	335-34	Alexander begins World conquest! [Darius III killed in 331]
3444	318-17	[Greek Era begins for "pedantic scribes"] ¹⁴
3450	312-11	Seleucid Era — Minyan Sh'taroth
3830	69-70 CE	Second Temple destroyed
5722	1961-62 CE	present year ¹⁵

¹⁴ This is again 34 years after beginning of Second Commonwealth. These 34 years still belong to the Persian Era and its aftermath.

¹⁵ A mnemotechnic allusion: "סוד דניאל" possesses the numerical value 165.