

SELECTED SPEECHES

A Collection of Addresses and Essays
on Hashkafah, Contemporary Issues
and Jewish History.

Including: "Comparative
Jewish Chronology"

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P·U·B·L·I·S·H·E·R·S

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21 ■ Comparative Jewish Chronology?

1) The Jewish system for counting the age of the world according to the era of creation (לבריאת עולם) is abbreviated by the letters AM for Aera Mundi (the era of the world). The civil date we are familiar with is based on a Christian legend, and is used world-wide even among those who adhere to other religions or believe in no religion at all. We might say the secular way of reckoning time has lost its religious connotation. We call this the Common Era (CE), and the years before the Common Era are indicated by the letters BCE.

The Jewish world era, according to which the present Jewish year 5751 corresponds to the secular year 1990-91 of

the Common Era, is based upon chronological data provided by the Tanach and by Rabbinic tradition. [The earliest mention of this era (בריאת עולם) is found in עבודה זרה 9b.]

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

Adam	130	years
Sheth	105	years
Enosh	90	years
Kenon	70	years
Mahalallel	65	years
Yered	162	years
Hench	65	years
Methuselah	187	years
Lemech	182	years
Noah	600	years
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	1656	years after creation

(The year 1656 is the year of the Flood)

Arpachshad born after the flood	2	years
Arpachshad lived	35	years
Shelach lived	30	years
Eber lived	34	years
Peleg lived	30	years
R'oo lived	32	years
S'rug lived	30	years
Nahor lived	29	years
Terah lived	70	years
Abraham lived	100	years
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	2048	years after creation

The year 2048 is the year of the birth of Yitzchak (392 years after the Flood).

According to the 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, *Arachin* 12b, *Avodah Zarah* 9b, *Jer. Megillah* I, based on *Seder Olam* XI; see also *Midrash Lev R.* 21:9 and *Tossef. Korbanoth* XIII) stipulates that the periods of the First and Second Temples lasted 410 and 420 years respectively, and were separated 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	years after Creation
First Temple destroyed	3338	years after Creation
Second Temple consecrated	3408	years after Creation
Second Temple destroyed	3828	years after Creation

3) The accepted traditional Jewish calendar which is 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 *Tishrei*, the second *Rosh Hashanah* (when Adam became one year old) opens the year 3.

The *Mabbul* (Flood) occurred 1655 years later; namely in year 1658.

Yitzchak was born 392 years after the Flood; i.e. in 2050.

Exodus from Egypt occurred 400 years later in**2450**.
 First Temple was begun 480 years after the Exodus in
**2930**.
 First Temple was destroyed 410 years later in**3340**.
 Second Temple dedicated 70 years after the destruction
 of First Temple in**3410**.
 Second Temple destroyed 420 years after its consecration
 in**3830**.

4) However, these dates are at variance with the method adopted by the author of the *Sefer Seder Olam*, which is followed by most authorities. *Seder Olam* does not assign any number to the first year of Creation including the first five days, and considers the second *Rosh Hashanah*, when Adam became one year old, the beginning of year One (שנה אחת לעידה). (We also speak of a one-year-old child after this child has lived 12 full months and has experienced his first birthday.) According to this system, all data given before have to be set back two years; i.e. Creation—Year 0; Adam 1 year old Year 1, and so on.

There is a discrepancy of two years which we have to bear in mind when we attempt to engage in comparative chronology. This may be the reason that we always add in our documents, after the words לבריאת העולם *minyan she'anu monim*—according to our way of counting.

5) Yet we follow the first method and assume that the widely accepted date for the destruction of בית שני was in the

¹ The 420 years of the Second Temple are calculated by our sages in *Avodah Zarah* 9a, 10b, based on *Seder Olam* as follows:

34 years for the remainder of the Persian Era which lasted all together only 52 years. 180 years for the Greek Era. 103 years for the Hasmonian Era. 103 years for the Herodian Era. For a total of 420.

secular year 70 CE and since according to our Talmudic tradition the Second Temple stood for only 420 years,¹ 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.

We may be able to equate the Jewish and non-Jewish data and arrive at the following conclusion:

	AM	BCE
Year of Creation	1	3760
Flood	1658	2103
Birth of Yitzchak	2050	1711
Exodus from Egypt	2450	1311
First Temple begun	2930	831
First Temple destroyed	3340	421
Second Temple consecrated	3410	351
Second Temple destroyed	3830	70 CE
Present Year	5751	1990-91 CE

6) The Torah-true historian is now confronted with a truly vexing problem. Ancient history of the Babylonian and Persian Empires presents us with completely different data. These figures are the result of painstaking research by hundreds of scholars and are borne out by profound erudition and by ever-increasing “authoritative” evidence. Here is a short list of commonly accepted chronological data:

	BCE
Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem and First Temple	587
Cyrus conquers Babylonia	538
Reign of Cyrus	539-530

Cambyses	530-523
Darius I	522-486
	BCE
Xerxes I	486-465
Artaxerxes I	465-425
Xerxes II	425
Darius II	424-404
Artaxerxes II	404-359
Artaxerxes III	358-338
Darius III	336-331
Alexander the Great conquers Persia	334
Alexander the Great dies	323

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) of 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 do not doubt the date given for the destruction of the Second Temple (on or about 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 when compared with our Jewish way of reckoning!

7) Furthermore, there are at least nine Persian kings beginning with Cyrus until the beginning of the Greek Era, during a period of well over 200 years. (Seven of these kings reigned after the consecration of the Temple). 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.

8) The gravity of the dilemma posed by such enormous discrepancies must not be underestimated. The unsuspecting students of history are faced with a puzzle that appears insoluble. How could it have been that our forebears had no knowledge of a historic period, otherwise widely known and amply documented, which lasted over a span of at least 165 years and which was less than 600 years before 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 taken possession of the collective memory of an entire people? This would be 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 to those who, unfortunately, do not possess the necessary *emunas Chachamim* to accept the word of our Sages?

9) This enormous discrepancy between sacred tradition and secular data would, at first glance, appear to frustrate all hope that it might be possible to compile a comparative chronology acceptable to Orthodox Jewry and secular historians alike. To us, who are 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: 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 scholar, 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 or more years which our Tradition has ignored are, in fact, non-existent, and have been conjectured by secular historians through errors in computation. According to this mode of reasoning, it would follow that all the historical events reported in connection with the timetable of ancient history referring to that period are not history but fiction, and are based on misinterpretation and misleading evidence of archaeological findings. Or,

Two: We might accept the opinions of secular historians as coming as close to the objective truth as is possible. However, we would then make an ingenious attempt to interpret the Biblical data and to treat the traditional Rabbinic chronology as mere figurative *Aggadic* homily, which may lend itself to a symbolic or allegorical evaluation, as do many other *אגדות*.

This dilemma is most unfortunate. For it would appear that the only course to take would be either to “correct” secular ancient history by some 165 years, making it apparently “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 Einayim* (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 *Tzemach David* [No. 3448] and R. Yaakov Emden to *Seder Olam* XXX).

10) Let us now review briefly some excerpts from the works of more recent Orthodox writers and find for ourselves

whether they have dealt satisfactorily with the aforementioned problems of Jewish chronology.

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

(b) Z. Javetz, in his *Toldos Yisrael*, conveniently omits discussion of the discrepancy. He skips over most of the Persian kings and considers Darius II Nothus (423-404 BCE) to be identical with "Daryavesh" of Media, who is mentioned in the *Sefer 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* has not been taken seriously by anyone.

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

" . . . 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 of the time of the Persian kings to only 34 years.

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

“These consequences were rejected by Rabbi Zerachia of Lunel as incompatible with the word of the Bible.”

To solve these difficulties, Biberfeld suggests (page 32) a new interpretation of a simple verse in *Tanach*. 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.

This interpretation disregards entirely the detailed figures given in *Seder Olam* in that it allows only 215 years for the period of the Elders and the Judges, and only 208 years, instead of 370, for the Tabernacle in Shiloh, etc.² This disregard for the traditional chronology of *Seder Olam* is attributed to Rabbi Zerachia of Lunel (the Baal Hamaor), 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 Sassanides 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*

² Compare this with *Gittin* 88a and *Sanhedrin* 38a: “G-d was gracious with Israel to decree the exile 2 years before **וְהַשְׁמִיטָה**” (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.

³ Italics mine.

*some of the Amoraim of the Talmud who had dealings with the Sassanide Royal Courts.*³

“One of the most renowned authorities of the Diaspora, soon after the *Geonic* era, Rabbi Zerachiah Halevi of Lunel, the Baal Hamaor, around 1100 CE, considers this assumption . . . the purely personal opinion of some scholars. He maintains that there were several kings named Artaxerxes, etc.”⁴

11) Before we go any further, let us state our opinion emphatically that the saintly Baal Hamaor neither could nor ever would have “rejected” any statement by a *Mishnaic* authority, and certainly not one by ר' יוסי בן חלפתא, who is the author of *Seder Olam* (cf. *Yeb.* 82b, *Niddah* 46b). A special significance was attached to the pronouncement of Rav Yosi: “טעמו ומוקדו עמו—The justness of his interpretation is self evident” (*Erub.* 51a, *Gittin* 67a, *Aboth de R. Nathan* 18).⁵

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

⁴ See also Barzilai II, p. 22; Ahron Marcus, “*Judische Chronologie*” Frankfurt, 1925, *Jahrbuch, Juedische Lit. Ges.* 1900, p. 13.

⁵ 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?”

possibly “reject” those chronological calculations which have been made the subject of many a Talmudic discussion.

13) What does the Baal Hamaor really say?

The Talmud (*Rosh 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.

The Baal Hamaor, in the beginning of his commentary on *Rosh Hashanah*, analyzes this Talmudic discussion and then continues: “זהו העולה בידינו לפי מדרש רבותינו ולפי דקדוקיהם אבל הפרוש הגבון לפי הפשט זה שכתוב: ומטעם כודש וגו' שלשה מלכים עי"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 Zerachiah did nothing else but qualify the Talmudic interpretation of one verse, in *Ezra* 6:4, as belonging to the category of *midrash* or *drash*, which should not, however, exclude the simple meaning, or *pshat*. Nothing more and nothing less is contained in 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 our people to continue the construction work; and finally to Artaxerxes, who may have sponsored the completion of the sacred edifice (כן הוא בביאור הג"א בסוד) (עלם, פרק ל' הגה"ה עי"ש).

The 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 *pshat* of this verse has been explained by our classic commentaries in many ways, and the Baal Hamaor's view 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. Saadiah Gaon	Rashi (quoting Joseph ben Gorion)	Abraham Ibn Ezra	R. Moshe Hasefardi	Baal Hamaor
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 *pshat*, which is the usual procedure for our **מפרשי התורה**.

14) Whenever *pshat* and *drash* 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 *pshat* in the light of the *Aggadic* or *Midrashic* pronouncement, because the latter seems to contain the real meaning, or

(b) They may accept the *pshat* as the proper explanation and interpret the *drash* homiletically by searching for an allegorical or “hidden” meaning, or

(c) They may eliminate the discrepancy by demonstrating that both *pshat* and *drash* are acceptable simultaneously and are not necessarily mutually exclusive.⁶

The Baal Hamaor merely notes that regarding the passage quoted, there exists a discrepancy between the *pshat* and *drash* 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 Sassanides.⁷

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

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

15) There seems to be left, as yet unexplored, only one avenue of approach to the vexing problem confronting us. It seems possible that our Sages, for some unknown reason, “covered up” a certain historic period and purposely elimi-

⁶ For methods of Aggadic explanations:

ע' הקדמה להדמב"ם סדר זרעים ד"ה ענין רביעי
ע' מאמר על האגדות לד' אברהם בן הדמב"ם
ע' מבוא התלמוד לד' שמואל הנגיד ד"ה והגדה
ע' קצוד כללי התלמוד
ע' של"ה חלק תורה שבע"פ כלל כ"ה
ע' מאמר על האגדות לד' משה חיים לוצאטו (מובא בשער הספר עין יעקב)
'ע' חזון איש קובץ איגרת ס' ר"ו שכתב באה"ד: שנת בית שני... מדברי חז"ל...
זה אינו ענין לדברי הגדה שעניקון סוד בחכמת האמת או לעוד
את הנפש וכו' עיי"ש .

nated 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 *Chazal*, those saintly “men of truth,” to leave out completely from our annals a period of at least 165 years and to correct all data and historic tables in such a fashion that the subsequent chronological gap could escape notice for countless generations, and remain known only to a few initiates who were duty-bound to keep the secret to themselves.

16) In the course of our inquiry, we do indeed find a Divine command conveyed by an angel to Daniel to “seal the word and close the book” at the end of a long prophecy which begins in Chapter 11:1 and ends at Chapter 12:4 in *Sefer Daniel*. This strange vision predicting historical events concludes with a stern warning: **וְאֵתָהּ דְּנִיָּאל סָתַם הַדְּבָרִים וְחָתַם הַסֵּפֶר עַד עַתָּה.** “In writing his Divinely inspired book, Daniel obeyed the heavenly command, which explains the dark and obscure language of *Sefer Daniel*. 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 obviously had a thorough knowledge of the entire history of the Second Commonwealth, correspondingly eliminated in all chronological lists and pertinent discussion the same period which Daniel had to “close and seal up.”

To prove our point we offer the following:

In *Pesachim* (62b) we learn of a Book of Genealogies (**סֵפֶר יְחֻזְקִין**), which, according to Rashi, was a *Mishnaic* commentary on the Book of Chronicles. This book must have contained an enormous wealth of chronological material up to the time of Ezra, who is the main author of **דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים** (B.B.

15a), as well as 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 שנעזר ספר יחזקיהו—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 years which had to be suppressed in deference to Daniel’s strict instruction? 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.

17) We are now faced with two questions:

(a) Suppose such a holy “conspiracy” had been Divinely commanded, 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 סתומים וחתומים עד עת קץ “closed and sealed until the time of the End.” (Surprisingly, many of our great commentators did make such fruitless attempts.) Had it not been for the fact that important parts of those prophecies had 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 through the hiding of certain data and chronological material. Although we do not presume that anyone living

today would be capable of calculating anything concerning **ביאת המשיח**—even after he had been furnished all the missing facts—we still could not have the audacity to unveil a mystery which was so carefully hidden by our forebears, unless the mystery had become unveiled all by itself. This has occurred not through our own doing, but through 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, and other discoveries pertaining to the Babylonian and the Persian era. This host of historic information has become common knowledge. There is nothing left for us to uncover. We might, however, attempt to investigate how to take advantage of the already available archaeological findings which could serve as a guide for the perplexed, in order to avoid an intellectual dilemma.

Therefore, the working thesis suggested here deserves to be presented to the scrutinizing evaluation of serious scholars, unless it were to become disqualified by the clear verdict of an authentic Torah authority. Its positive acceptance would mean that our present year 5751 is literally only **למנין שאנו מנינין**—our own way of counting,” but not the real date. We would be much closer to the end of the 6th millennium than we had surmised.

18) In the spirit of the aforesaid, a new light is shed on the strange fact that 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**. The term *minyān shtaros* means the “Era of

Contracts,” which is also called the Seleucid Era. This era began on *Rosh Hashanah* 312-311 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 term לבריאת העולם was re-introduced by the latter *Geonim*, such as Rav Sherira (cf. Rambam, H. *Gerushin* 1:27). We can very well understand the bewilderment of a צדוקי wondering why a non-Jewish date was admitted into religious documents (*Yaddaim* 4:8). For indeed מונן שטרות was not a Jewish accounting. It was employed by a majority of nations in the Near East and the Mediterranean area for countless generations and still is used by some Eastern groups.

There were several calendar systems based on the Seleucid era:

(a) The Syrians started counting 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.

The Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 10a) mentions the “pendantic scribes” who start 6 years earlier, meaning 317 BCE.

Why did *Chazal* adopt the 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”!

The reason given משום כבוד המלכות could not apply after the abolition of מלכות יון. But since a certain period of time had to be hidden, this was accomplished effectively indeed by a switch to the Greek date.

19) 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 (להבדיל) like Josephus

and the so-called Elephantine Papyrus provide a few meager clues.

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, making use of data deduced from secular historians.

20) In 3386 AM (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, by which the Jewish people came to know him, was "Daryavesh, son of Achashverosh, the Median" (*Daniel* 6). During his brief 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). Daniel received the heavenly message that the *galus* was far from over, because the "70 years" were not just ordinary years (Verse 24).

Though Cyrus did permit the building of the Temple, he revoked 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" (*Bereishis* 45:8).) Darius' friendship for the Jews was the direct result of the inspirational influence of Queen Esther, who survived Achashverosh-Cambyses, the adopted son of Cyrus and father of Darius I.

The Temple building was 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.

True, the Second Temple had been consecrated; yet it was only a sanctuary with limited dimensions which were not in accordance with the prescribed measurements (cf. *Ezra* 6:3: only 60 cubits, compared to the height of 100 cubits required by *halachah*). Also, the walls were inferior (cf. *Rosh Hashanah* 4a). Furthermore, permission had not been granted for additional immigration into Eretz Yisrael.

During the first period of his reign, Darius I built up his empire. Fighting against the Greek city-states, he was defeated at Marathon in 491 BCE. He died exactly 52 years after the beginning of the Persian domination, being the last of the four Biblical Medio-Persian rulers, and succumbing 34 years after the construction of the Second Temple had been resumed (*Avodah Zarah* 9a). In the eyes of *Chazal*, who follow the visionary guidance of Daniel, the **מלכות פרס** had come to an end.

Although Xerxes had become king of Persia in 487-86 BCE, he was utterly defeated in Europe by Greece in 479-78 BCE. This year happened to be exactly 1000 years after the Exodus from Egypt. Soon after Xerxes became king, the Greeks revolted and, following a decisive victory, finally managed to throw off the Persian yoke.

In the visionary language of the seer, the **מלכות יון** 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. (cf. *Daniel* 8: Daniel had learned that the “Prince of Yavan” had come to replace the “Prince of Persia.”)

Indeed, culturally, the world dominion of Greek civilization had started. In the world of science, art and literature, Greece had now entered its heroic age.

In *Avodah Zarah* (*ibid.*), we learn of 6 years when the Greeks ruled in Elam before it “ruled over the whole world.”

These 6 years of the Greek rule over Elam are identical with the first 6 years of Xerxes, during which the Greek revolt was brewing. Maybe the word “Elam,” which is the name of a geographical area, does assume, in the language of *Chazal*, an additional meaning. It derives from the word **עלום**, which means “to hide,” because one thousand years after the Exodus, the period of the “hidden years” had begun. The Greek domain was **נעלם** (hidden) on earth, until the advent of Alexander the Great, 168 years later, around which time the secular **ממנין שטרות** was instituted in all Jewish documents. Since the 168 years which had passed after the end of the first millennium after the Exodus had been “hidden,” i.e., they are treated as if they never existed, we may very well say that **מלכות יון** started 1000 years after **יציאת מצרים**.

If all the above is not merely a wishful dream, and there is a kernel of truth in our deliberations, the road has now become clear for the outline of a comparative chronological table, incorporating the sacred text of Tanach and the authoritative pronouncements of our Sages, while at the same time not contradicting the accepted dates of general history.

AM	BCE	
3304	626-25	Jubilee. Torah scroll found by Hilkiyah.
3318	612-11	Josiah killed by Pharaoh Necho. Yahoyachaz king for 3 months.
3319	611-10	Yehoyakim king
3322	608-07	The first year of the Babylonian Empire. After the Battle of Carcemish which finally liquidated the last remnant of “Ninveh.” <i>Elul</i> 1st Nebuchadnezzar becomes Emperor of Babylonia. (The Babylonians count this year as the “Accession Year” (“ <i>rishonith</i> ”) and the next year as Year One.) According to Jewish

- reckoning, this year is Year One of Nebuchadnezzar. Yehoyakim kills Uriah and threatens Yermiyahu's life.
- 3323 607-05 In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar he invades Judah. Yehoyakim becomes his vassal for 3 years.
- 3326 604-03 Yehoyakim rebels. First year of independence.
- 3328 602-01 In *Adar* (3rd year of independence) Nebuchadnezzar's troops capture Yehoyakim and other nobles. Daniel and his three friends are among the captives brought to Babylonia. Yehoyakim dies in his chains while dragged out of Jerusalem. No king in Judah for approximately 8 months.
- 3329 601-00 Yehoyachin (or Yechoniah) becomes king for 3 months and 10 days. Babylonian troops lay siege to Jerusalem to capture king. In *Adar*, Nebuchadnezzar arrives, Jerusalem capitulates, and Yechoniah goes into Exile together with almost all learned and wealthy citizens.
(Daryavesh, son of Achashverosh, also called Gubarru (or Gobrias) is born in Media.) Nebuchadnezzar appoints Zedekiah king, who swears allegiance to him.
- 3332 598-97 Zedekiah travels to Babylonia to pay homage to Nebuchadnezzar and returns.
- 3334 596-95 Zedekiah conspires with Egypt against Babylonia. Vision of Yechezkel (in the 30th year after the Jubilee).

- 3336 594-93 Pharaoh Hophra captures Gaza while returning from an attempt to help Judah against the Babylonian army on the march.
- 3339 591-90 Siege of Jerusalem (*Teves* 10th) for 1 year and 5 months. This is year 410 of First Temple.
- 3340 590-89 On *Tammuz* 9th, Jerusalem is captured. Zedekiah brought to Nebuchadnezzar in Kiblah and blinded.
Av 7th-10th, Temple is destroyed. This is Year 1 of "*Galus Bavel*." Gedaliah appointed governor.
- 3341 589-88 *Tishrei* 2nd, Gedaliah assassinated. Yirmiyahu goes to Egypt with refugees.
- 3343 587-86 Daniel interprets dreams of Nebuchadnezzar.
- 3345 585-84 Conquest of Tyre. Many Jewish refugees in surrounding countries. Astayages becomes king of Media.
- 3349 581-80 Nebuchadnezzar conquers Egypt. Yermiyahu is in Babylonia.
- 3366 564-63 Adar 25th, Nebuchadnezzar dies. Exiled king Yechoniah released from prison, also Zedekiah, who dies upon regaining his freedom and is buried with regal honors by Evil-Merodach.
- 3367 563-42 *Theera* of Evil-Merodach (Amil-Marduch) lasts 22 years. Jews are honored and favored. Evil-Merodach is succeeded by two rulers.
 a) Nirgal Sharezer (Neriglassar), son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar.
 b) Nabonid, another son-in-law (also calls

himself Nebuchadnezzar) who adopts Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Belshazzar and grants him royal honors. Nabonid kills king of Edom, captures Gaza and lives for some 7 years in Tema (Arabia) in seclusion. (The reign of both Nirgal Sharezer and Nabonid are included in the twenty-two-year era of Evil-Merodach.)

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|------|--------|---|
| 3389 | 541-40 | Period of Belshazzar lasts 3 years. Jews are humiliated and disgraced. |
| 3391 | 539-38 | Belshazzar killed; Nabonid captured. End Babylonian Empire. Cyrus appoints Gubarru (Daryavesh the Mede) to be acting king of Babylonia, and he rules for less than a year. Daniel in the lion's den. |
| 3392 | 538-37 | Cyrus from his capital in Achmata issues proclamation of return. Daniel-Sheshbazzar, Zerubabel, Mordechai-Bilshon and approximately fifty thousand people go to Jerusalem. |
| 3393 | 537-36 | Temple rebuilding begins. |
| 3394 | 536-35 | Samaritans and other "enemies of Judah" active. |
| 3395 | 535-34 | Cambyses-Achashverosh, who is adopted son of Cyrus, appoints himself co-regent. Temple building stopped. Cyrus (now called Artashashta or Emperor) revokes his proclamation. Mordechai comes from Jerusalem to be representative of Jewish people in Shushan. |
| 3401 | 529-28 | Cyrus dies. Cambyses-Achashverosh becomes Emperor. In 525, he conquers Egypt |

- and rules from India to Ethiopia. Esther becomes queen.
- 3406 524-23 Haman's fall.
- 3407 523-22 *Purim*.
- 3408 522-21 Cambyses-Achashverosh dies. Persian Empire revolts.
- 3409 521-20 Darius I (the Great) under influence of Queen Esther. Chaggai and Zechariah prophesy. Nachemia Hatirshata.
- 3410 520-19 Temple-building resumes. End of 70 years of *Galus Bavel*.
- 3414 516-15 Temple dedication.
- 3415 515-14 Ezra arrives. First (prophetic) period of *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* begins.
- 3443 487-86 Darius dies. End of Persian Era, 34 years after resumption of Second Temple-building.
- 3444 486-85 Persia loses control over Greek Isles. Greek rule in "Elam." Xerxes Emperor of Persia. He is the Arthachshasta of Ezra. Ezra travels to Babylonia to organize ingathering of Exiles. In his absence from Judah, mixed marriages and other evils occur.
- 3448 One thousand years after Exodus.
- 168 hidden years begin.**
- We stop counting לבריאת עולם.**
- 481-480 Xerxes appoints Ezra as Pasha or Governor of Judah, and encourages immigration of all Jews to Eretz Yisrael. Festive celebration of *Pesach* in Jerusalem in anticipation of final redemption (*Ezra* 6:19).
- 480-79 Second coming of Ezra with only about

- 1500 immigrants; refusal of majority to leave exile.
- 479-78 Mixed marriages dissolved. Malachi (Ezra) prophesies.
- 466-65 Xerxes dies. Artaxerxes I Longimanous (the Artachashta of Nechemiah). Due to change of government, Ezra loses his power and deterioration sets in. Persecution of Jews under new Governor. Emergence of Samballat in Samaria, Tobia the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab as main antagonists. Enemies burn walls of Jerusalem. Many Jews flee the country. Poverty and corruption reign.
- 446-45 Nechemiah arrives, is appointed Governor by Artaxerxes. Walls of Jerusalem are repaired.
- 445-44 Spiritual restoration of Jewish community. Festive celebration of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Sukkos*. "Covenant of the faith."
- 435-34 Nechemiah leaves for Shushan. Deterioration sets in again.
- 433-32 Nechemiah returns. Dedication of Jerusalem wall. Ezra dies. Nechemiah dies. Biblical Canon closes. End of prophecy. Second period of *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* (*Soferim*) begins.
- 410 Jeb Temple in Egypt destroyed.
- 406 Bagoas Governor of Judea. Yochanan high priest. Deliah, son of Samballat, in Samaria.
- 405-04 Ataxerxes II Mnemnon.

- 360-59 Artaxerxes III Ochus.
 351-50 Final Temple restoration completed by Shimon Hatzaddik. Temple stands for 420 years.
 339-38 Darius III Codemanus.
 334-33 Alexander—Battle of Issus.
 332-31 Alexander welcomed in Jerusalem by Shimon Hatzaddik.
 334-23 Alexander dies.
 320-19 Ptolemy (king of the south) conquers Jerusalem.
 318-17 Beginning of Greek Era for 180 years.
 316-15 Antigonus (king of the north) conquers Jerusalem.
 313-312 Jerusalem reconquered by Ptolemy.
- End of hidden years; resume counting AM.**
- 3449 312-11 Battle of Gaza. Conquest of Eretz Yisrael by Selocus Nikator.
 The Seleucid Era begins, also called *Minyan Shtaros*. (If we disregard the hidden years, the Seleucid Era begins in the first year after the one thousand after the Exodus.)
- 3594 168-67 Miracle of *Chanukah*.
 3624 138-37 Commencement of Hasmonean Era (103 years).
 3727 35-34 Commencement of Herodian Era (103 years).
 3830 70 CE Destruction of Second Temple.
 5751 1990-91 Present year.

Epilogue

- 1) All the foregoing is based on an essay which was

printed about thirty years ago in **עטודת צבי** (Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Jubilee Volume, New York: Feldheim, 1962) and which was revised a few times. The purpose of this attempt was to assist the bewildered Torah-true students of Jewish history sitting on the horns of a dilemma, and to strengthen their *emunah*. Time and again, I was urged to publish this revised edition in order to serve a larger readership. But in the meantime many great doubts have bothered my mind and have made it mandatory for me to share my pangs of conscience with my readers.

a) "History" is either true or false. There is no middle ground. The events described in a history book have either happened or they haven't. The most ingenious theories which may have their place in philosophy or as a working thesis in the exact sciences have no meaning in the pursuit of historical evidence, which is a search for facts and which accepts no conjectures. A chronological time table is the backbone of any book on history which expects to be accepted by intellectually honest students.

b) If our forefathers wanted to hide a certain period in our history, because of a Divine mandate, who has the right to uncover the carefully concealed secret? Even with our best intentions to strengthen the faith of those who doubt the accuracy of our traditional method of counting the years **לבריאת העולם**, we still were not given the right to remove the veil for any reason. Therefore, I feel like the legendary king of the Khazars who was told a few times in a dream, **"כנתק רצויד, אבל מעשיך אינם רצויים"** —Your intentions are acceptable, but your deeds are not."

c) The "hidden years theory" necessitates the assumption that the construction of the Second Temple lasted for a century and a half which, by the way, would explain the discrepancy between the measurements of the **בית שני** in *Ezra*

6:13 and those of **מסכת מדות**. It would also explain why the **אנשי כנסת הגדולה** speak in the *Mishnah* (i.e. *Zevachim, perek 5:1*) of **למנים מן הקלעים** instead of using the word **עודה** as in all other places. There were no **קלעים** (hanging curtains) except in the **משכן** which was built in the desert. But there may have been **קלעים** during the very long construction period of the Second Temple, which was not completed and upgraded to its proper size until the time of Shimon Hatzaddik, exactly 420 years before its destruction by the Romans. True, there's a reference to this in the book *Ben Sira*, but no clear evidence. Therefore, the assumption of such a minor **בית שני**, for 186 years, is totally unproven.

d) Josephus, who was not a faithful Torah Jew, and who lived only about 400 years after Alexander the Great, makes no mention of a large interval between Ezra and the Greek period. He would not have kept quiet had he known about that from the gentiles.

e) One letter-writer suggested to me that most ancient documents are so unclear, confusing and self-contradicting that we do not have to take the conclusion of modern historians seriously. In this, case no real conflict exists.

Another correspondent called my attention to the writings of Rav Saadiah Gaon in **אמונתו ודעתו**, Chapter 9, where he states that a certain "nation" has inserted over one hundred years and 17 additional kings in their history books, in order to place the founder of Christianity into a fitting historical context.

f) A very knowledgeable friend has called my attention to the **חשבון המולדות**, the exact reckoning of the new moon, which we follow today, which could not be reconciled with the addition of 168 "missing" years. The computer shows that the **מולד** would be off by 1 1/2 days, by which time the moon is already visible.

The מאמרי חז"ל which deal with the *molad* at the time of creation, the so-called מולד תהו, would not tally if an additional 168 years are added. (Concerning the various methods of calculating the *molad*, see Rambam, *Kiddush Hachodesh* 6:8 and commentaries; *ibid*; *Torah Sheleimah* Vol. 11, chap.8, par. 110, also פתחי תשובה, אה"ז קכ"ז ס"ק' מה שמביא בשם ספר גט פשוט).

The counter-argument is that our system of figuring out the *molad* dates back only to the time after Daniel, and our Sages went to great lengths to hide the true חשבון by constructing a method which we follow today. Subsequently, the מולד תהו is figured out retroactively.

g) We are now counting the year 5751, and if we add 168 years, the real date for this year would be 5919, which leaves only 81 years till the end of the 6th millennium. This is most frightening, especially for all those born not so long ago, or those to be born in the near future, who would become the living witnesses of the "end of days." They will see with their own eyes whether the statement (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a, *Avodah Zarah* 9a, *Sanhedrin* 97) that "the world will exist only for six thousand years and then be destroyed" is meant to be taken literally, or has a different interpretation, as do many *Aggadic* pronouncements.

I am writing all this with awe and trepidation. On the other hand, if the "hidden years" never were, then mankind still has 250 years before the coming of the "end."

h) It is because of all these gnawing doubts that I have decided to put a big question mark after the words "Jewish Chronology." Let somebody with greater knowledge come and pick up the threads where I left off. Our traditional, universally accepted Jewish way of counting the years לבריאת העולם is sacred territory which only fools do not fear to tread upon.

This may be a disappointment to some, but on the other hand I must muster the courage to belong to those who rather wish

to be honest to themselves than to be “right.” I would rather leave a good question open than risk giving a wrong answer. And I follow the teachings of Rav Shimon (*Pesachim* 52b) who said, “כשם שקבלתי שכר על הדישה כן אקבל שכר על הפרישה”—Just as I was awarded for the research, so shall I be awarded for the retraction.”

The historic material which I have assembled may still be somehow useful, even for those who will doubt whether there can ever be a Jewish chronology which would satisfy the non-believer in the wisdom of our Sages. So I fall back into the ranks of all *שלומי אמותי ישראל*. And to me “*לבריאת העולם*” means what it meant to our fathers. It is as simple as that. And while we may keep on searching for the answers, we pray that Hashem may enlighten our eyes ,

וְהוּא יֵאֵד עֵינֵי כָל הַמַּחְכִּים לְאִלּוּהַ קְרוּבָה בְּמַחְדָּה בִּימֵינוּ אִמּוֹן.