

Are We Living in the Year 5770? Persian Chronology in the *Seder Olam*

We now turn to the matter of Jewish chronology to establish that there is in fact a 160-year difference between the commonly accepted chronology and Jewish tradition for the period encompassed by Persian world rule. The question of how and why this 160-year difference came about is most relevant to the theme of this chapter. If this 160-year discrepancy can be shown to be a deliberate misconstruction on the part of second century rabbinic authorities, not only would it have pointed to Simon bar Kokhba, the false messiah of the Second Jewish Revolt of 132 AD, but it would have concomitantly pointed away from the actual fulfillment of Daniel 9:25 during the lifetime of Yahshua the Messiah. I am indebted to Dr. Jack Moorman and Floyd Nolen Jones for bringing this information to the fore.^[1]

The Jews reckon 2010 to be 5770 years from Creation in Genesis 1. This Jewish reckoning of years goes back to R. Yose Ben Halafta, one of the main disciples of R. Akiva, “the father of the Mishnah.” Yose was responsible for codifying Jewish chronology in the *Seder Olam* around 140 AD. The words *Seder Olam Rabbah* mean ‘Book of the Order of the World.’ Although the *Seder Olam* is not a formal part of the Mishnah or Talmud, it is a work of Talmudic authority which no orthodox Jew would think of openly contradicting.^[2] It forms the basis for traditional Jewish historical dating even today, despite their realization that it is missing around 240 years.

At the time the *Seder Olam* was compiled, the Jews dated their years from 312 BC, the beginning of the Seleucid era. According to the Encyclopedia Judaica, “only when the center of Jewish life moved from Babylonia to Europe and the calculation according to the Seleucid era became meaningless was it replaced by that of the *anno mundi* era of the *Seder Olam*.”^[3] From the 11th Century onward *anno mundi* reckoning became dominant throughout most of the world’s Jewish communities.

As with Archbishop James Ussher’s chronology of the 17th Century, the Hebrew Scriptures are the basis for *Seder Olam* dating. Ussher’s chronology fixes 4004 BC for the creation of Adam and Eve, while the *Seder Olam* comes up with 3761 BC. Why the 243-year shortfall in Jewish chronology?

In the *Seder Olam*, there is a sixty year shortfall between creation and the birth of Abraham. There is a mere seventeen year shortfall from Solomon down to the consecration of the Second Temple in 516 BC. However, from dedication of the Second Temple to 70 AD there is a whopping 164 year discrepancy between the two chronologies!

The *Seder Olam* records only five Persian monarchs. The following are the particulars of the highly truncated period of Medo-Persian rule:

- Darius the Mede’s reign is reduced to one year, 374-373 BC. His actual regnal length was anywhere from 25-35 years, depending on whether one counts from his assumption of the throne of Media when his father died, or from 575 when he acceded to the throne of Babylon at the murder of Belshazzar. His kingdom was subsumed by Cyrus the Great in 551 BC.
- Cyrus the Great’s reign is reduced to three years, 373-371 BC. His actual reign is either 22 years (551-529 BC, from his defeat of Darius the Mede), or 10 years, from the time he conquered Babylon in 538 down to 529 when Cambyses ascended his throne.
- Cambyses (whom *Seder Olam* calls Artaxerxes) was allotted a mere half year (should be seven years ending in 522 BC).

- A fictional ‘Ahasuerus’ reigns 14 years, 370-356 BC, and weds Esther, who bears Darius the Persian. **There is no room in Persian inscriptions, Herodotus or any ancient historian for any monarch between Cambyses and Darius the Great**, except Pseudo-Smerdis, who claimed to be Cambyses’ brother, and was deposed within seven months in 522.
- Darius the Great, the Persian (Hystapes), is assigned a reign of 35 years (356-321 BC) in the *Seder Olam*. This is the only monarch allotted the correct regnal length, 35 years. *Seder Olam* has Second Temple dedicated in 355, the next year after Darius’ accession, whereas the book of Ezra indicates very late in the sixth year of his reign! The chronology at this point is 160 years too late, as the Temple was dedicated in 515 BC! The *Seder Olam*, incredibly, has the Darius who provided the umbrella of protection for Joshua and Zerubabel to complete the Temple as *the same Darius defeated by Alexander the Great* in 321 BC!^[4] Notable Christian chronologer of the 19th Century, Humphrey Prideaux, provides this insightful summary of this untenable Jewish position:

In the last year of Darius Hystapes, the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi died, that thereon the spirit of prophecy ceased from among the children of Israel. The [Jewish] tradition tells us that the kingdom of the Persians ceased also the same year, for they will have it that this was the Darius whom Alexander the Great conquered, and that the whole continuance was only 52 years.^[5]

The Encyclopedia Judaica has this to say about R. Yose’s “compression of the Persian period” [Emphasis mine]:

The most significant confusion in R. Yose’s calculation is the *compression* of the Persian period, from the rebuilding of the Temple by Zerubabel in 516 BC, to the conquest of Persia by Alexander, *to no more than 34 years*.^[6]

Other Jewish scholars are aware of this problem. The more religious among them, such as R. Simon Schwab, have tried to justify this chronological sleight of hand with the following amazing words (emphasis Schwab’s):^[7]

The gravity of this intellectual dilemma posed by such enormous discrepancies must not be underestimated...How could it be 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 13th and 14th centuries...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...saintly ‘men of truth’ to leave out completely from our annals a period of 165 years and to correct all

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.

Really, a Divine command to cover up and deceive the Jewish people about the chronology of their nation and the world? Perhaps this is why the prophet Amos makes the blanket indictment of Judah: “Their lies have also led them astray, those after which their fathers walked.” (Amos 2:4) A number of Jewish scholars, including Schwab, have suggested that the reason God directed the sages of the second century to falsify the data was to confuse anyone trying to use the prophecies of Daniel to predict the time of the Messiah’s coming. By removing 165 years from Persian chronology, R. Akiva and Yose ben Halafta apparently hoped to steal the thunder of a thriving movement in Judaism’s midst which had successfully argued since 31 AD that the 483 years of Daniel 9 had been fulfilled by Yahshua of Nazareth. Indeed, it is not hard to conjecture that the motivation to fiddle with chronology was strong between the time of Josephus’ *Antiquities* (94 AD)^[8] and the heyday of R. Akiva, whose imprimatur on Bar Kokhba led to the unified revolt of 132-135.

If one ever needed evidence that the Jews of the first and second centuries were well aware of the relevance of Daniel 9’s 69 weeks,^[9] he need look no further than the *Seder Olam*. Its abbreviated Persian chronology not only deflected attention away from Yahshua of Nazareth’s fulfillment of Daniel 9, but facilitated Akiva’s effort to authenticate Bar Kokhba as the fulfillment of the 483 years. Indeed, there are 483 years between the *Seder Olam*’s date for the dedication of the Second Temple (355) and 129 AD ($483 - 355 + 1$ (no year zero) = 129 AD), when Jewish deliberations over Emperor Hadrian were deadly serious. Hence, we deduce that the falsification of Jewish chronology by Akiva and R. Jose Ben Halafta was deliberate, just the kind of “thinking to change times” that Daniel 7:25 anticipated. The fact that the paramount prophecy of the Old Testament, a foundation block of chronology, was dislodged by this unhistorical subterfuge meant little to those seeking to extricate themselves from Hadrian’s abuses. This misidentification of messiahs led to all Judea being laid waste. Jews were no longer allowed to live within ten miles of Jerusalem. Jews throughout the Empire, including women and toddlers, were required to pay a head tax to support the new temple of Jupiter in Jerusalem. What we find astonishing is the respect for Bar Kokhba among Jews to this day, despite the results of the Second Revolt: As Encyclopedia Judaica states, “Even in later generations, despite the disappointment engendered by his defeat, his image persisted as the embodiment of messianic hopes.”^[10] The consistent verdict of Jewish historians is: “The most important historical messianic figure was surely Bar Kokhba.”

Why Were Cuts Made in Persian Chronology and Not Seleucid Chronology?

R. Yose ben Halafta could not make cuts from the Greek Seleucid era, because the chronology of that period was still in use, was firmly fixed among the Jews, and was well understood. No years could be pared from the history after 312 BC, the beginning of the Seleucid era. Since the prophecy of Dan. 9: 24-27 dealt with a decree that was issued by a Persian monarch, the empire which preceded the Greeks, this left only the Persian period of history for them to exploit.

How Many Years Were Cut From Persian Chronology By *Seder Olam*?

In establishing the deliberate nature of this historical hoax it is important that we remind ourselves that Josephus, writing *Antiquities* one short generation prior to R. Akiva and R. Jose, knew exactly how many years there were in Persian history. He states there were 408 years from the time Daniel gave the prophecy about Antiochus Epiphanes in the third year of Belshazzar, until Antiochus's desecration of the Temple in 167 BC.^[11] This 408-year span yields the eminently plausible date of 575 BC for the third year of Belshazzar (Dan. 8:1), which doubles as the very year when Darius the Mede received the throne of Babylon (Dan. 5:31). Therefore, the arguments of those who say this shortened chronology among the Jews precedes Josephus ring hollow.

We are now prepared to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this Addendum: How much was deleted from Persian chronology, and why that amount? These answers have significant implications. If the approximate amount of the rabbinic alteration to Persian chronology can be determined, then we can speculate about how they understood the original *terminus ad quem* for Daniel 9:25.

There are two ways of calculating how many years were deleted from Persian chronology. First we compare the span of years between the dedication of the Temple and Alexander's conquest of Persia. R. Jose said "The Persian Empire existed during the time of the Temple for 24 years."^[12] This tells us he understood 331 as the year when Alexander defeated Persia, for he gives 355 as the year of the Temple's dedication.^[13] But the real date for the dedication of the Temple is Feb. 10, **515**, accepted by Fotheringham, Parker & Dubberstein, and most historians (some might put it in 516, but this year causes inappropriate activity to fall on the Sabbath for events dated in Ezra 6-7-8). The unequivocal date for Alexander's defeat of the Persians is **331 BC**, making a **span of 184 years** (515-331= 184). This indicates a deletion of **160 years** from the Persian period.

The other method of calculating the difference between the *Seder Olam* and the standard Ptolemaic system of chronology is to compare the number of years spanning the period from Cyrus the Great down to the destruction of the Second Temple. The *Seder Olam* gives 373 BC as the date of the Jews return in the first year of Cyrus. The *Seder Olam* date for the destruction of the Temple is 103 years after 34 BC, or 68 AD. This is a span of 440 years. The actual span is 607 years (538 BC to 70 AD), making a difference of **167 years**.

We see then that the compiler of the *Seder Olam* c. 140 AD deprived Persian history of 160-167 years in order to propel the 69 weeks of Daniel 9 into the second century and help unify the Second Jewish Revolt. Each Medo-Persian king, except one, is given a ridiculously truncated regnal length: Darius the Mede of Daniel = one year, Cyrus the Great = two years, Cambyses = 6 mos. Their last Persian king is Darius I, who is defeated by Alexander of Macedon in 331, a mere 24 years after the completion of the second temple. Thus the *Seder Olam* knows nothing of a Xerxes (21 years), a Artaxerxes Longimanus (40 years), Darius II Nothis (20 years), Artaxerxes II, or Darius III, etc.

Of the five Persian kings, Darius I alone is given the correct regnal length of 35 years. It is worth speculating why Darius the Great is singled out for his actual allotment of years. Obviously, second century Jewish historical acumen for Ezra-Nehemiah and the inception of the second Temple was far less confused than it has been among Christian scholars. This higher level of awareness prevented R. Jose from tampering with Darius' kingship, the king whose name was inextricably tied to the completion of the Second Temple. This situation lends significance to the fact that the *Seder Olam* assigns Nehemiah's work to the reign of Darius Hystapes (Neh. 5:14, 13:6), the same king R. Jose has Ezra dealing with.

Despite its chronological shortcomings, the *Seder Olam* has given us, even if indirectly, valuable insight into the original endpoint of Daniel's 483 years, as seen through early second century Jewish eyes. An undoctored time line of Persian history before Simon bar Kokhba would have placed Daniel 9:25's beginning point in the reign of Darius I, many years before the time of Artaxerxes I. R. Akiva and R. Jose ben Halafta changed the time line, but because of general awareness that the fourth decree of Daniel 9:25 was during Darius I's reign, they had to retain him as the king who issued this decree 483 years before Bar Kokhba, as well as his correct regnal length, in order not to provoke too many questions among their students.

The *Seder Olam* is also very helpful in determining the new year for the priestly courses at the Temple when it tells us Jehoiarib was serving on the 9th of Ab in 70 AD. Without knowledge of the priestly new year, one could not be certain of the birthdate of John the Baptist or Yahshua the Messiah. We have made good use of this information in our study dating the year of Christ's birth.

Matthew Henry had some poignant comments about Daniel 9:25 which we reproduce here:

[Daniel 9:25's 483-year prophecy] does serve still to refute and silence the expectations of unbelievers, who will not own that Jesus is he who *should come*, but still *look for another*. This prediction should silence them... for, reckon these seventy weeks from which of the command-ments to build Jerusalem we please, it is certain that they have expired above 1500 years ago; so that the Jews are for ever *without excuse*, who will not own that the Messiah has come when they have gone so far beyond their utmost reckoning for his coming. But by this we are confirmed in our belief of the Messiah's being come, and that our Jesus is he, that he came just at the time prefixed, a time worthy to be had in everlasting remembrance.

One further thing is now evident. It is possible to deduce that Akiva and/or his contemporary rabbinic authorities must have changed the status of the book of Daniel. As of the 90's AD, Josephus placed only four books in the third section of Hebrew Canon, the Writings. Daniel was definitely not one of the four; therefore he must have been included with the prophets. At the end of the second century, the Jewish Canon had Daniel in the second section of Scripture, the Prophets. The disillusionment over Bar Kokhba, and the refusal to accept the genuine article in Yahshua of Nazareth, led to the disbarment of Daniel from the Prophetic section of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Nevertheless, Daniel's greatness can be known in the fact that his contemporary, Ezekiel, himself a great prophet, singles out Daniel as one of the three most righteous men of human history up to his day, in league with Noah and Job (Ezek 14:15-20). He also enjoyed a tremendous reputation for wisdom, as Ezek. 28:3 would indicate. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom. Had the ignoble rabbis of the second century feared Adonai, they would have trembled at His Word and kept back their foot from trampling all over divine history and presumptuously demoting the book of Daniel. Something to think about next time you see a Messianic publication, website, or "rabbi" touting the *anno mundi* year 5769, 5770, etc.

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- ^[1] Moorman, *op cit.*, p. 10-13. Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D., , *The Chronology of the OT*, (Master Books, 2005), App. L, 295-99.
- ^[2] Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D., App. G, *The Annals of the World* (Master Books, 2005), 934.
- ^[3] Article "Seder Olam", *Enc. Judaica*, Vol. 14, p. 1092.
- ^[4] Martin Anstey, *The Romance of Biblical Chronology*, (London: Marshall Bros., 1913), 23-24.
- ^[5] H. Prideaux, *The OT & NT Connected to the History of the Jews* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1851), 223.
- ^[6] Article "Seder Olam" in *Enc. Judaica*.
- ^[7] Simon Schwab, *Dr. Joseph Breuer Jubilee Volume*, "Comparative Jewish Chronology" (NY, NY: R. Samson Raphael Hirsch Publications Society, Philip Felheim Inc., 1962), 182, 188.
- ^[8] Josephus' *Antiquities* is notoriously bad on Persian history. He has Cyrus being next after Xerxes. He has Ezra waiting until seven years after the death of Darius I (486) before obeying his order to deliver the precious vessels of the Temple, a delay of 37 years from its completion.
- ^[9] It is very evident now why there were so many Messianic movements extant in Judaism during the first century: Herodians, Zealots, Sacarii, Judas of Galilee, etc. Many were quite aware that Daniel 9:25 had run its course. The only one which fulfilled the plethora of prophecies of was Yahshua of Nazareth.
- ^[10] *Enc. Judaica*, Vol. 4, Article "Bar Kokhba."
- ^[11] Josephus, *AJ* X.xi.4.
- ^[12] *Seder Olam, Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (transl. Heinrich Guggenheimer (Jason Aaronson, Northvale, NJ, 1998), 260.
- ^[13] Jones, *op cit.*, p. 296.