

MISTAKES OF PTOLEMY, THE PAGAN HISTORIAN

[A 1922 private letter from Brother Morton Edgar addressed to a sister in Christ as follows:]

DEAR SISTER:

I am real glad that my notes which I sent you have proved helpful. I found the thoughts helpful myself, and so believed I should pass them on. Is it not strange: that the *Herald* brethren should now be throwing doubt upon the correctness of the “times and seasons”?

The *Herald* quotes Brother Russell as saying (at the beginning of 1914, or 7 months before the great war broke out) that if everything went on much as usual, and *no time of trouble* was in sight, that is, no trouble happened in 1914 at all, *then* we would require to look into the prophecies once more and see if we had made any error in our reckoning; for it might be that we had been looking for “the wrong thing at the *right time*”. Brother Russell never doubted the *time*. But these *Herald* brethren have proceeded to change the *time*, and not to change the *thing* which was expected to happen. They say that all our expectation regarding 1914 “utterly failed”. I wonder if the people in Russia, in Austria, in Germany, etc., etc., think that *nothing happened* in 1914.

The *Herald* brethren are anxious to throw doubt on the chronology for some reason, and they make some strange changes in the “times” to suit their views. For instance, they say that there were *no* Jubilee years at all; that each 49 years was immediately followed by another 49 years; and so on. This does away with the special 50th year of Jubilee, pronounced by Jehovah to be both “hallowed” and “holy”. Then they say that the land had its “sabbaths of rest” even when the people were in the land for about 16 or 17 years, from the first of Cyrus till the second of Darius. How could the land *rest* when the people tilled it during about 16 or 17 years?

Note how they misunderstood Brother Russell’s statement, that *if* nothing transpired by the end of 1914, *then* we might consider that we had been expecting “*the wrong thing at the right time*”. That is, *the time was right*, but the expected event might have proved wrong. Why, then, do they immediately proceed to change the *time*, seeing that the time is right? It seems strange. Of course, as everyone now knows, expected things *did* indeed happen in 1914 as predicted. The great time of trouble broke out and is still raging. The nations are endeavoring their utmost to regain their lost power, but have not succeeded. Too much of the poor old world lies prostrate to say truthfully that things continue much as they were before 1914. To say that gentile times ended in 1914 is also to say that the Lord himself is now reigning (according to the Scriptural declaration). Therefore, the Lord now reigns, the gentile times having ended, as foretold in 1914. It may be some years yet before the last member of the body is glorified; but the reign of Christ has now begun, and the members on this side of the veil are doing kingdom work with him. The feet members are in contact with the earth, while the Head and the body in general are now “in the air”. All are doing kingdom work together. The Lord be praised for this assurance! The *Herald* writers are quite wrong in very many of their interpretations. They are certainly not safe guides to the Lord’s people.

There is one strange point in connection with the “Astronomical Canon of Ptolemy”, which list of kings is much venerated by the *Herald*. According to this list, Nabokolassar, said to be Nebuchadnezzar, began to reign in 604 B.C. (some copies say 605 B.C.). But the name of the king who comes before this is spelled practically the same: “Nabopolassar”. There is only a difference of one letter between them, as you will see “Nabo-po-lassar” began to reign, according to Ptolemy’s list, in 625 B.C., or, more probably, as some have it, in 626 B.C. Therefore the 19th year after the beginning of Nabo-po-lassar’s reign is 606, or 607 B.C., the very date required for the beginning of the “great seven times of the gentiles”, ending in Autumn, 1914 A.D. It is quite possible, and may even be probable, that Ptolemy, or some of his interpreters, has mixed up these two names, names of two men who are said to be father and son. Nabo-po-lassar, the father, is very likely mixed up with Nabo-ko-lassar, the son.

It is just as likely as not that historians made a mistake here; and that *both* names are really the names of *one* king only, and not two. There is nothing improbable in this; for such mistakes are not by any means infrequent. For instance, it is through a mistake of this very kind that Ptolemy made another well-known mistake in his list of kings, namely, by mixing up the names of two kings called *Xerxes*, and *Artaxerxes*. Ptolemy’s canon makes a mistake of ten years in the reign of Xerxes, saying that he reigned for twenty-one years, whereas reliable history proves conclusively that Xerxes reigned for eleven years only. This is important to notice; for if Xerxes *did* reign twenty-one years, and not only eleven, then the twentieth year of his successor, that is, *Artaxerxes*, would then be ten years later than we understand it to be. And if Artaxerxes’ twentieth year is ten years later, then Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy

weeks, at the end of sixty-nine of which weeks Messiah was to come, *would not have been fulfilled!* But Ptolemy made a mistake here; and reliable history, quite apart from the Scriptural requirement, proves that Ptolemy was mistaken to the extent of ten years in the reign of Xerxes, and hence, also, of ten years in the reign of Artaxerxes.

This is really more than one, or even *two* mistakes of Ptolemy, for not only are his stated years for the reigns of two kings ten years wrong each, but the date for the death of the first, and the date for the accession of the second, are also, necessarily wrong. In other words, Ptolemy made a bad blunder in his history of this period.

If Ptolemy made a mistake of ten years during the fifth century B.C. (he himself lived during the second century A.D., or several hundred years later), is it *unreasonable* to say that he made a mistake of twenty-one years during his history of the seventh century B.C.? The *Herald* writers ask if it is *reasonable* to suppose that Ptolemy made such a mistake. Well, apparently it *is* reasonable to so suppose; for he is now abundantly proved to have made a blunder in his history of the fifth century, when one would have expected that he should have been more reliable, seeing it was about two hundred years nearer to the A.D. date.

But, as I say, it is not improbable that the *interpreters* of Ptolemy made this mistake, and not in this case Ptolemy himself. These later interpreters, as likely as not, have mixed up Nabo-*po*-lassar and Nabo-*ko*-lassar, just as many historians mixed up Xerxes and Artaxerxes. According to Ptolemy's astronomical list, or canon, of kings, Nabopolassar began his reign in 625, or 626, B.C.; and his nineteenth year of reign then lands in 606 or 607 B.C. "Seven times" or 2520 years from this ended in 1914 A.D., Autumn, which is correct. The Bible demands this, and the Bible will have *my* veneration and respect before any mere profane document, however supposedly accurate.

Then we have the explicit declaration of Daniel, the inspired prophet of the Lord, who says: "I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolation of Jerusalem". (Daniel 9: 2) The *Herald* brethren, like the higher critics, say that Daniel was all wrong! It was not, they say, seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem, but fifty-one years only! "Daniel in the critics' den" again! And Moses, the man of God, said: "And your *cities* [Jerusalem, *the city of the land*] shall lie waste, . . . then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, while ye be in your enemies' land"; etc. And Jeremiah says that when *Jerusalem* was destroyed at the dethronement of Zedekiah, Judah's last king, then the land (and Jerusalem, the great city) would lie desolate for seventy years to *fulfill her sabbaths of rest*. All these Scriptures are very plain, and all go to show that Brother Russell's interpretation of this feature of God's Plan of the Ages was correct, and that such writers as the writers of the *Herald* are quite misleading.

It was in 1904, or ten years before 1914, that similar views to those expressed by the *Herald* first came forth. So their views are by no means new, but have been seen, and refuted, long ago. And Brother Russell himself was one of those who pointedly refuted the wrong views now so boldly brought forward by the *Herald*, as if they were expressing something startling, and most unexpected new facts. There is nothing new about them; and they are certainly not *facts*.

Have you ever noticed that Nebuchadnezzar is sometimes also called Nebuchadrezzar? Just as Nabokolassar may also have been known as Nabopolassar. Note the spelling in, say, Ezekiel, and contrast it with that in Daniel. But Jeremiah spells this name both ways. Why this peculiar change of a letter? Needless to say, the testimony of the Great Pyramid, the Lord's "stone witness" in which Brother Russell still declared his implicit faith in his last notice of this monument, in his new preface to Volume III just about a month before his death—is quite against the new (?) chronological views of the *Herald*. But of course the *Herald* writers have no use for the Pyramid's testimony now. They have thrown that aside, just as Brother Hennings of Australia did before them, and under somewhat similar circumstances. The Great Pyramid substantiates the views held by Brother Russell beyond all doubt.

Why are the *Herald* writers so anxious to discountenance the chronology of Brother Russell, which is the true chronology of the Bible and the testimony, corroborative of the Pyramid? They desire to throw discredit on the "dispensational" work now carried on under the WATCH TOWER'S supervision. That is the reason. They say, bluntly: "There is no evidence of any new work being carried on". Well, there is at least no evidence that they are themselves engaged in this new work which, in spite of them, is being carried on! "Millions now living will never die!!" Hallelujah!

With love in Him as ever, MORTON EDGAR.