

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
Volume 19, Number 3, August 2008

Memorial Observances

"Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (Corinthians 5:7).

FOUR QUESTIONS

Considerations about the Memorial observance were treated in February 1996, when four questions were answered.¹

(1) Since Bible Students link the celebration of Memorial to the Passover observance and use the Jewish calendar to determine the date for the 14th of Nisan, why does our Memorial occur consistently two days before the Passover?

(2) Did our Lord's death on the cross occur at the full of the moon, and if so, what is the spiritual significance of this?

(3) Should not the occurrence of the full moon dictate the proper date for the celebration of the Memorial Supper, especially in view of the significance of Jesus' death occurring at that time?

(4) When our Lord died on the cross at full moon, was there also an eclipse of the moon? If so, what would this illustrate and does it help establish the date of the crucifixion?

Here we build upon that work by addressing four additional questions.

Question Five

How Do the Temple Festivals Relate to the Memorial?

The cycle of Temple festivals provided much of the joyful anticipation for the Lord's people under the Law Covenant that we enjoy today in our regular conventions. The Temple festivals appropriately open in the spring of the year with "the Passover" (*Pesach* in Hebrew) that links directly to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Another Temple Festival, the Feast of Booths, is a convenient antipode that consists of a week-long autumn harvest festival. The Feast of Tabernacles was the final and most important holiday of the year, described as "a lasting ordinance." The divine pronouncement "I am the Lord your

God" concludes this section on the holidays of the seventh month.

The Feast of Tabernacles begins five days after *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement on the fifteenth of Tishri (September or October). That feast is a drastic change from one of the most solemn holidays in the Jewish year to one of the most joyous. However, whereas Jesus did establish an antitype of the Passover and asked us to remember and observe his death, he said nothing respecting the Feast of Booths. This may suggest that its antitype points to the Kingdom (*Tabernacle Shadows*, page 93).

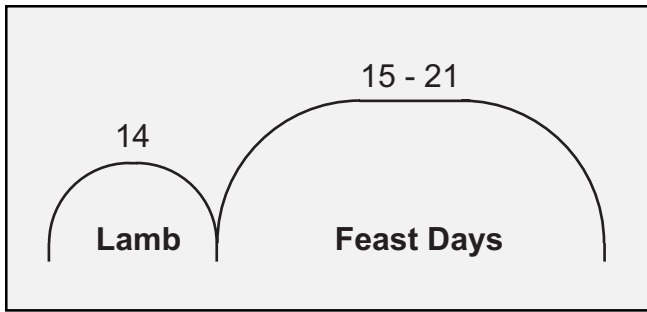
The Passover refers to the sacrifice of the lamb, not to the eating of the lamb, which was to be attended with unleavened bread. Thus keeping "Passover" was something on the 14th day, and eating the Passover was something on the 15th day, the first day of the "feast." Hence, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, properly speaking, is distinct,² as we can see from Leviticus 23:5,6, Numbers 28:16,17, 2 Chronicles 30:15,21, Ezra 6:19,22, Mark 14:1.

The "Passover" takes place on the 14th of Nisan. The "Feast of Unleavened Bread" commences on the 15th and lasts seven days to the 21st of the month (Exodus 12:15). But from their close connection they are generally treated as one, both in the Old and New Testament (Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:12, Luke 22:1). Josephus describes it as "a feast for eight days" of unleavened bread (*Antiquities* 2.15.1).

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Question Six

What were the most significant changes introduced after the Babylonian exile that were observed in our Lord's day?

Before our Lord's day, during the period of the Second Temple (built between 519 and 515 BC), and for three centuries after its destruction, a council of the Sanhedrin decreed when the new months began. The start of each month was established by observing the arrival of the new moon. The council would meet on the thirtieth day of the month to hear the testimony of "two trustworthy witnesses" as to whether they observed the new crescent moon on that day. If they had, that day was declared the first of the new month. If they did not, then the next day was declared the first of the new month.

Once the council made their declaration, the new month was announced by fire signals to inform the communities outside of Jerusalem. Distant villages which could not always receive prompt notice celebrated the new moon for two days to be sure they included the correct day. Some holidays were also celebrated for two days due to the uncertainty of the new moon.

The council compensated for solar and lunar differences by adding a "leap month" in the calendar every second or third year as the eleven-day difference between a solar year, and 12 new moon periods, accumulated. The Jewish reckoning allowed for some flexibility, considering astronomical facts as well as religious and agricultural requirements. They observed the state of the crops and the need to avoid muddy roads on the Passover journey, and inserted the leap month in an advantageous way.

During this period the customs of the festival were shifted to include much of what is still considered proper celebration, but these ceremonial refinements did not alter the main activities of the 14th and 15th day of Nisan. On this there is an almost "unanimous opinion of Jewish scholars."³

Most significant, the 14th day of the first month after the Babylonian exile was now designated as a "fast" day for all the male firstborn of Israel. The events are described by a Jewish website:⁴

"The Fast of the Firstborn. On the day before Pesach, the 14th Nisan, it is necessary for firstborn sons to fast. Called *Ta'anit Bechorim*, this fast commemorates the deliverance of the first born Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 12: 23, 24). It is usual for the firstborn to attend morning service and to participate in a *Siyum*, a religious celebration that

marks the completion of a volume of the Talmud or any rabbinic work. In Jewish teaching, study is an act of religious joy and the participant is thus absolved from this very minor fast and able to partake of refreshment.

"The Search for Chametz. On the eve of the 14th day, a search is made for leaven throughout the home. This is called *Bedikat Chametz*. After the search, the leaven is set aside to be burned on the following morning. It is customary to place a few pieces of bread in various parts of the house so that the search is not in vain. It is, however, not right to collect only these pieces without making a search throughout the home."

Hence, while the New Testament accounts are correct, there has been confusion among some Bible commentators who look at the instructions in Exodus without recognizing that there were differences between the observances of the Passover festival as directed in Exodus, and prevailing Jewish custom after the Babylonian exile as practiced for more than 500 years by our Lord's day. These issues were compounded by differences between the Roman and Jewish "day." Observant Jews reckoned the start of each day near sunset, and the prevailing Roman custom we have inherited began the day at midnight.

Earlier in this publication, the harmony of the Gospel accounts with the calendar date of Friday, April 3rd, 33 AD as the date of the Lord's crucifixion and burial has been discussed in the article "Dating the Crucifixion."⁵ The Last Supper in the upper room would be on the preceding Thursday night by our reckoning.

Customs of the Second Temple Era

- Two reliable witnesses to a new crescent established a new month
- Some distant communities celebrated two days, to be sure they included the correct day
- A leap month was added every two or three years to synchronize with the solar year
- The 14th of Nisan became a fast day for firstborn males
- A search for leaven was made on the eve of Nisan 14

Question Seven

What is the record of the primitive Church observance of the 14th of Nisan?

Any undertaking to change the date of the Memorial must be viewed with deepest concern in consideration of the special warning in Daniel 7:25. The scriptural record is clear that our Lord suffered and died on a Friday and that he rose again early in the morning on Sunday. Since the church came

to recognize that Sunday, rather than the Sabbath, as the appropriate day for worship, there was also a desire to see every Passover follow this same pattern. This would not be possible without changing the manner of manner of calculating the dates.

However, historical records show that our observance is in conformance with primitive church custom for calculating the Passover. Pastor Russell treats the changes coming into the primitive worship in *Studies in the Scriptures*, Volume Six, “Passover-Easter,” pages 481-484. See also the treatment in *Foregleams of the Messiah*.⁶

One of the curious footnotes in the history of the divergence of the English church from the Church of Rome may be found in the English church’s treasured history by the “venerable” Bede completed in 731 AD. His writings suggest that the English people kept a corporate historical memory that never quite forgot their setting aside custom received from Apostolic times so that they could be accepted into fellowship with the church of Rome, and that what he calls “Easter” was not always celebrated on a Sunday.

By way of background, during the political and economic collapse of the Western Roman Empire, Roman settlement in London was abandoned in 409 AD. After nearly two centuries of no contact, formal contact was reestablished by a formal visit in 603 AD from Bishop Augustine acting on behalf of the Roman Church.⁷ Up until the 600s, Britons celebrated our Lord’s death and resurrection following the same scriptural formula that we use. Bede writes as follows.⁸

“Now the Britons did not keep Easter at the correct time, but between the fourteenth and twentieth days of the moon—a calculation depending upon a cycle of eighty-four years.”

Bede notes further that when presented with the changes in custom then in force throughout the Roman Church, there were “Britons who stubbornly preferred their own customs to those in universal use among the Christian Church.”

Early on, custom emerged to convene a church convention during the eight days of Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. The church historian Eusebius, writing just after 325 AD, makes it clear that this custom was still in force less than one hundred years before his day in the church of Antioch. Antioch was one of the most ancient and important churches in the East, St. Paul’s home ecclesia, and where the brethren were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26).

Eusebius records an incident from the life of Caesar Philip (“The Arabian”) who wished to be counted as a Christian in 244 AD.⁹ The church of Antioch, like all the churches of this period, based their observance on the Jewish custom and observed this festival for its full period. Eusebius called this period the “Paschal vigil” (from the Hebrew *Pesach*).

Caesar Philip’s penance conformed with custom that favored baptism at the start of Passover. The newly baptized wore a white robe for the week, but at the end of this “Paschal vigil” they were laid aside and street clothes were resumed as everyone returned to the normal pursuits of life. Later, “Easter” (conforming to this pagan name seems ap-

propriate to the changed festival) was established to be always on a Sunday. The Sunday after Easter became known as *Dominica in Albis Depositis*, the “Sunday the White Garments are set down.” In English church tradition this is the origin of the term “Whitsunday” or “White Sunday.”

Though this movement began with the churches in the East, it took hundreds of years for the changed observance to become uniform. Dionysius Exiguus (ca. 470 to 544), a leading church scholar of Romanian origins, is best known as the inventor of the “Anno Domini” or, “AD” era. He introduced conformity in the calculation of Easter. In 525, Dionysius prepared a table of future dates for Easter and a set of “arguments” explaining their calculation. He did this on his own initiative, not at the request of Pope John.

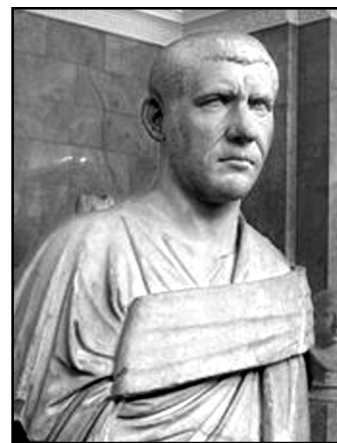
Although Dionysius stated that the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD sanctioned his method of dating Easter, the surviving documents are ambiguous. A canon of the council implied that the Roman and Alexandrian methods were the same even though they were not, whereas a delegate from Alexandria stated in a letter to his brethren that their method was supported by the council.

In either case, Dionysius’ method had actually been used by the Church of Alexandria (but not by the Church of Rome) at least as early as 311 AD and probably began during the first decade of the fourth century, its dates naturally being given in the Alexandrian calendar. Thus Dionysius did not develop a new method of dating Easter. At most, he may have converted its arguments from the Alexandrian calendar into the Julian calendar. The resulting Julian date for Easter was the Sunday following the first Luna XIV (the 14th day of the moon) that occurred on or after the XII Kalendas Aprilis (21 March), that is, 12 days before the first of April, inclusive. This formula is still in use today.

How do these systems compare? Using the Catholic Formulation of Dionysius Exiguus, in this year 2008 AD the spring equinox (March 21st) was a Friday, and the full moon came the next day. Hence, there was an unusually early Easter Sunday March 23rd with the start of spring as “Good” Friday, March 21st.

Using the Jewish reckoning, in this year 2008 AD Nisan began with the new moon approximately two weeks after the Spring Equinox. Hence the 14th of Nisan two weeks after that began at sunset on Friday, April 18th.

The unusual conjunction of the equinox and the full moon thus put the two observances out of phase by a full lunar month. It is not an accident that with the anti-Jewish senti-



Caesar Philip, first nominally “Christian” emperor

ments of the early church, the formula was deliberately chosen so that the two holiday observances would never coincide.

Question Eight

What is the current reckoning of the Memorial dates for the near future?

The Jewish Calendar that dates from the time of Hillel II (359 AD) is the official calendar of the State of Israel. It is used to determine the dates for Passover provided here. It is a lunisolar calendar based on computations rather than visual observations (visual observations of the young crescent moon were used in ancient times).

Passover begins on the same liturgical date, Nisan 15, each year. The dates for Passover for the years 2008-2029 using the civil calendar are based upon this method as calculated by the U.S. Naval Observatory which was employed because it is religiously neutral.¹⁰

Note that the Memorial in 2015 is unusual in that it will also coincide with the solar anniversary of our Lord's sufferings, the Memorial on a Thursday evening, April 2nd, his crucifixion on Friday April 3rd, and the celebration of his resurrection on the following Sunday April 5th. Bro. Redeker observes,

"It is interesting to note that when the dates are set up according to the 19-year cycle of the Jewish calendar, the day of the month for Nisan 13 (calendar date on which our Memorial falls) each year in the cycle is the same, or seldom varies by more than a day or two. Thus this year (2008) our Memorial occurred on April 18th. This was the 11th year in the current 19-year cycle, and the 304th cycle since the (supposed) beginning of the world. The 11th year in the previous cycle was in 1989, and it also fell on April 18th; the 11th year in the next cycle will be 2027, and that will fall on April 20th; etc. This is a recurring phenomenon throughout all the cycles."¹¹

The chart at the top of the next column lists dates for the Memorial observance for several years into the future.

— Richard Doctor

(1) "The Memorial Supper — Questions of Interest," *Beauties of the Truth* (7:1), February 1996.

(2) Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, reprinted by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI (1983) Chapter 11.

(3) Redeker, Charles F., personal correspondence (May 5, 2008); and Redeker, C.F., *Foregleams of the Messiah*, Zion's Tower of the Morning Tract Publications (www.zionstower.com, Box 3261, Southfield, MI 48075), originally published 1982, page 16, "The search for leaven." This valuable reference also includes many helpful diagrams. See also Redeker, C.F., *The Memorial Supper*, Zion's Tower of the Morning Tract Publications (2008).

(4) <http://www.jewishagency.org/>

(5) "Dating the Crucifixion," *Beauties of the Truth* (7:1), February 1996.

(6) Redeker, *Foregleams of Messiah*, *op. cit.*, pages 103-109.

(7) This Augustine is not the famed "Saint" Augustine, Bishop of Hippo and author of *City of God*.

Memorial Dates

Year	Nisan 14 as first stars appear, 7:30 PM*		
2008	18	April	Friday
2009	7	April	Tuesday
2010	28	March	Sunday
2011	17	April	Sunday
2012	5	April	Thursday
2013	24	March	Sunday
2014	13	April	Sunday
2015	2	April	Thursday
2016	21	April	Thursday
2017	9	April	Sunday
2018	29	March	Thursday
2019	18	April	Thursday
2020	7	April	Tuesday
2021	26	March	Friday
2022	14	April	Thursday
2023	4	April	Tuesday
2024	21	April	Sunday
2025	11	April	Friday
2026	31	March	Tuesday
2027	20	April	Tuesday
2028	9	April	Sunday
2029	29	March	Thursday

*Note, the claim by the Naval Observatory for "as soon as the first stars are seen" differs with some Jewish commentators who claim 6:00 PM.

(8) Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, Book 2, Chapter 2.

(9) Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 6, Chapter 34, "Philip Caesar." Philip considered himself a Christian, hence the first Caesar who was a "Christian," well before Constantine. But following his acquisition of supreme power through murder, he found that the church would not lightly dismiss such a sin. "Gordianus had been Roman emperor for six years when Philip, with his son Philip, succeeded him [244 AD]. It is reported that he, being a Christian, desired, on the last day of the paschal vigil, to share with the multitude in the prayers of the Church, but that he was not permitted to enter, by him who then presided, until he had made confession and had numbered himself among those who were reckoned as transgressors and who occupied the place of penance. For if he had not done this, he would never have been received by him, on account of the many crimes which he had committed. It is said that he obeyed readily, manifesting in his conduct a genuine and pious fear of God."

(10) <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/passover.php>. For further information see the *Explanatory Supplement to the Astronomical Almanac*, ed. Seidelmann, P.K. (1992), Chapter 12, "Calendars," by L. E. Doggett. Most books on calendars describe the details of the Jewish Calendar.

(11) Redeker, personal communication (May 5, 2008).

Carl Hagensick

Born September 17, 1934

Changed May 23, 2008

After dealing with a paralyzing stroke for some 19 years Bro. Carl Hagensick, a founding editor and frequent contributor to Beauties of the Truth, has finished his earthly pilgrimage. He leaves behind a legacy of devoted service to the brethren all over the world.

Bro. Carl was personally involved in many special projects that have blessed our fellowship immensely, such as the reprinting of the Watchtower Reprints, the compilation of the Expanded Biblical Comments, as well as the reprinting of many other writings of Pastor Russell. His extensive world travels helped create a special closeness amongst Bible Students. His desire of uniting brethren was partially realized with the creation of the first International Convention in 1988. His introduction of youth seminars has also been a great blessing to many of the young people.

The timing of his death was providential, coming just one day before the Chicago Memorial Day Convention. This provided the brethren an opportunity to share in a special Memorial Service after the convention proper. Some 350 brethren attended with an additional 300-400 viewing over the internet.

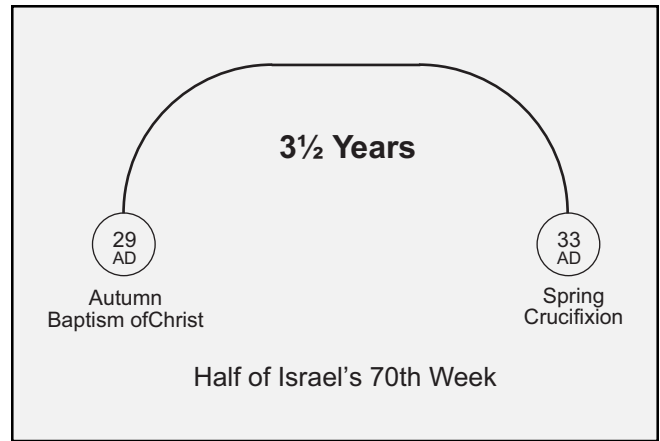
Bro. Carl will be dearly missed, but we are comforted in the hope that he was born in Zion. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Three and a Half Years

"In the midst of the week, he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease" (Daniel 9:27).

Thus are the 3½ years of our Master's earthly ministry defined — half of the last, or seventieth week, of the prophecy. Probably all would agree that these are the most important 3½ years for the human race. During this time the very son of God himself graced our planet with the sweet teachings of godliness, and shewed by his life, compassion, and devotion, a reflection of the character of God, and the example for all Christians to pattern their own lives and characters after, ever since.

These 3½ years of Christ's first advent are represented also in a parallel period commencing the work of Christ's second advent. The first advent began at Jordan, in the



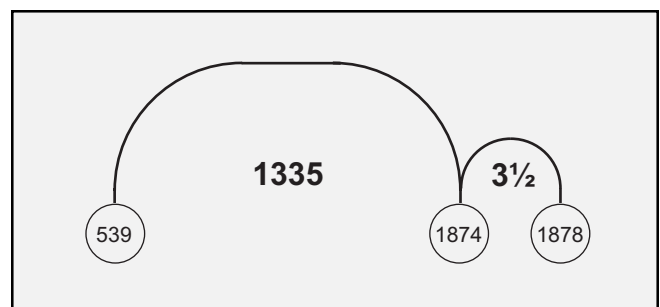
autumn of 29 AD. The second advent began when Michael, our Lord Jesus, "stood up" at the close of the 1335 days of Daniel 12:12 — namely, 1874. As Israel lost their national favor after their crucifixion of Christ, at the end of his 3½ year ministry, so Israel 3½ years into the second advent began to have their fortunes reversed. In the year 1878 the first Jewish colony of modern times, Petah Tikvah, was established. This was in consequence of the Berlin Congress of Nations adopting a treaty to close the Russo-Turkish War. This treaty stipulated that all people of Palestine would have equal rights under the Law. This meant that Jewish people could now purchase and settle land in their former state of Israel, and this they began to do.

THE 3½ YEAR APPENDAGE

This means that the 1335 days of Daniel, closing with 1874, are "extended" as it were, by another 3½ years, the same amount of years as the period of our Lord's ministry. But if this is the case with the 1335 years, it suggests the question whether its companion prophecies might have a similar extension.

The prophecy of 1335 years is found in the 12th chapter of Daniel. The two time prophecies in the same chapter which precede this are of 1260 years and 1290 years. Is there a similar 3½ year extension in these cases?

As to the 1260 years, yes. Such an appendage is directly referred to in the book of Revelation. Revelation 11:3 says of the 1260 years — "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth." This refers to the difficult days during the Gospel Age when the Old and



New Testaments were in “mourning” because of the oppression of the Papal “man of sin.” Now notice what follows.

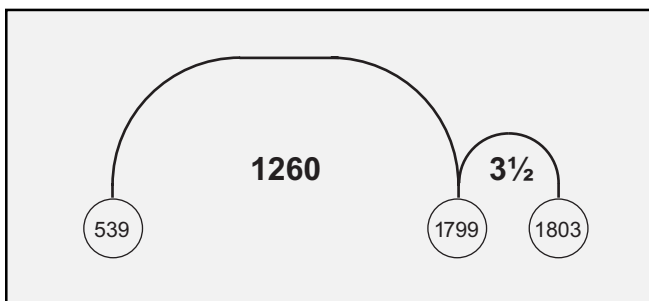
“And when they shall have finished their testimony” — that is, when the 1260 years of verse three have expired — “the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them” (Revelation 11:7). This beast is not the Papal Beast, but the peoples formerly ruled by Papacy who rose up briefly, during the French Revolution, revolting against Papacy and against the King of France in league with Papacy.

The French Revolution commenced in 1789, and the “reign of terror” was in the year 1793. It was late in that year that France took formal steps to abolish Christianity. Their anger was presumably chiefly against Papacy, but they did not distinguish the good from the bad. When Papacy was vanquished, “headless” by the death of the Pope in 1799, Napoleon refusing to allow the election of a successor, Christianity was in deepest remission, both false and true. So was its standard, the Bible, represented as the “two witnesses.” This would be just at the close of the 1260 years of the scriptures prophesying in sackcloth. So what would happen next?

We might suppose there would follow a triumph of scripture, but it was just the reverse. The two witnesses were killed, and “their dead bodies ... lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt ... three days and an half” (Revelation 11:8, 9).

Subsequently they would rise again and ascend to heaven. “And after three days and a half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet ... and they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them” (Revelation 11:11, 12).

Three and a half years from 1799 — a day for a year — takes us to 1803. That was the year of a concordat between Napoleon and Papacy, on behalf of Italy, which effected a restoration of “Christian” authority.



This was exhibited through an agreement with apostate Christianity, but the effect was toward bad and good alike, not distinguishing. Now it was time for the ascent of the scriptures into greater prominence, and this occurred through the Bible Societies which sprang up in this era of history. This renewed influence of the Scriptures is referred to also in Revelation 10:10, 11, where the “little book” represents the testimony of Scripture.

1290 YEARS

Noting that there is a marker 3½ years following the 1335 years, and following the 1260 years, the question is apparent — is there any such marker 3½ years after the 1290 year prophecy?

The 1290 years take us to 1829, and this is “about” the time of the Miller Movement. Yes, “about” — but not exactly. William Miller himself had studied deeply by this time, but he had neither published nor preached his views publicly. His first preaching would not be until 1831, and his first series of articles would be published in 1832.

Probably the 1829 date points more directly to the stirring of Adventist thought in England. This was the year a series of prophetic studies at Albury Park, England, came to a head. These were convened on the private estate of Henry Drummond, perhaps 50 thoughtful prophetic students contributing to the deliberations. It achieved the following points of consensus.

(1) Christianity will not gradually fade by a universal preaching of the gospel into the Thousand Year Kingdom, but will find her end by verdicts ... the visible church and state are destroyed, as once the Jewish state has been destroyed.

(2) At the time when these verdicts will come over Christianity the Jews will be restored in their country.

(3) These verdicts will probably ... come ... most heavily over that part of the church of God that has been blessed mostly, and therefore bears the greatest responsibility.

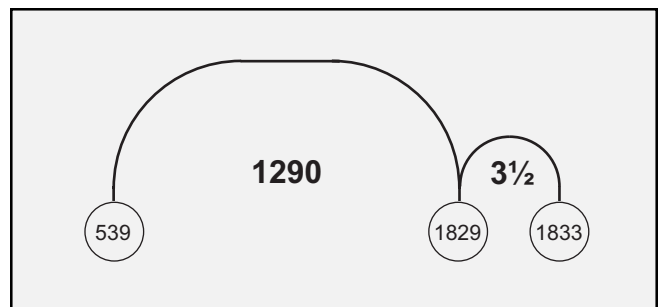
(4) After these verdicts the Thousand Year Kingdom commences for the entire human race, even for the unwitting creation.

(5) The Return of the Messiah takes place before the beginning of this Thousand Year Kingdom.

(6) Our blessed Lord will return soon.

These are remarkable conclusions, so much in keeping with the compendium of Present Truth which would emerge in the Harvest period a generation later.

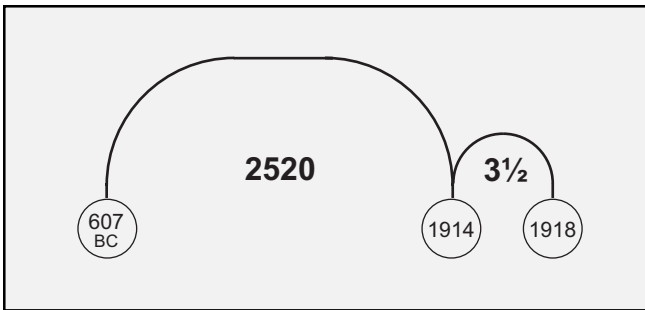
Meanwhile, in America, the activity in the Miller Movement took a step forward. To find a marker 3½ years following 1829, we would look at the year 1833. Was there anything significant about that year, respecting the Adventist movement? There was a marker. Bro. Miller’s early success in preaching about the coming of Christ induced some to formally recognize, and thus facilitate, his preaching. In



1833 he was licensed as a Baptist minister by a local congregation, the Low Hampton Baptist Church (Wikipedia, William Miller).

2520

The 2520 years of Israel’s national punishment point us to the date 1914, widely held among the brethren. But a date a few years later — in 1918 — was also noted. This appeared as a tentative suggestion in a late Watch Tower article in the year 1916. The article is a famous one, titled “The Harvest is Not Ended.” On Reprint page 5951, Bro. Russell made this observation. “Incidentally we remark that some historians put the end of the Jewish Time of Trouble as April 73 AD, which would correspond to April 1918.” On the page preceding that, his brief chart of years also gives the date 73 AD, corresponding to 1918.



That article was published in September, 1916, two years before the close of the Great War. Bro. Russell passed into glory at the close of the following month, October, 1916. Thus he did not live here to see that the date he saw some potential for, did in fact have some meaning. It did not mark the close of the High Calling, or the completion of the Church. But it did mark the close of the Great War, just as the fall of Masada in 73 AD marked the close of the Jewish revolt in the Jewish Age harvest.

Thus all of these prophecies appear to have had a noteworthy “extension” about 3½ years following the ending time of the prophecy itself. In passing, we notice that even the date Miller anticipated for the second advent of Christ — namely 1843 — was followed by a similar marker in 1847. For the latter date was the one anticipated by Joseph Wolf, whose preaching about the approaching second advent of Christ was well known in Asia, as the preaching of Miller was well known in America.

SUMMARY

In each of these cases, the closing date appears to have an “extension” as it were, something of note, related to the original date, which appeared 3½ years later. This period of years is significant because it is the same length of time as the ministry of our Lord Jesus. The period from 1874 to 1878 is a direct parallel to this span. This “extension” of the 1335 year prophecy seems to be matched also by similar periods at the close of the 1260, 1290, and 2520 years of prophecy.

This observation suggests something of order, plan, and precision. This in turn gives us greater confidence that the prophetic periods themselves have been properly applied.

— Bro. David Rice

John Huss, Martyr

John Huss was the bold reformer who took up the spirit of Wycliffe, who predeceased Huss by 31 years. Huss laid the groundwork for the Reformation of Martin Luther a century later. He was also a master at Charles University in Prague, and produced extensive writings.

Richard II, King of England, married Anne of Bohemia, and travelling back to Bohemia brought Wycliffe’s ideas with them. Adopting Wycliffe’s ideas, Huss proposed to reform the church in Bohemia as Wycliffe had in England. His followers were known as Hussites, and the more ardent as Taborites. The Roman Catholic Church deemed Huss a heretic. He was excommunicated in 1411, condemned by the Council of Constance, and burned at the stake July 6, 1415. In the Czech Republic he is considered a national hero today.

Following are excerpts from “The Trial and Burning of John Huss,” said to contain an eyewitness account by Fra Poggius, Member of the Council of Constance (taken from The Lives of the Principal Reformers 1360-1600, by Richard Rolt, 1759).

“When the news came to Constance: ‘Huss, the arch-heretic has arrived!’ there was a great tumult and no one’s heart could await the day when Huss would walk openly through the streets of Constance to the Council. This then happened for the first time on the 25th of November of this year [1414], when he was called for a short questioning before several cardinals. He could hardly squeeze his long body through the masses of the populace, so crowded stood the curious, while some of them, here and there, squeezed his hand in deep concern, others encouragingly ... these happenings already lined up his preliminary judges against him, because they did not want him to be known and heard among the people, out of their own weakness.

“ ‘We, the chief guardians of the holy Roman-Catholic Church, command you from now on, by the power of our regency, to quiet and silence and grant you only permission to answer modestly to our questions.’ Loudly and angrily yelled Cardinal Goolvi, so that I Poggius, standing in the ante-chamber, became suddenly frightened. But he [Huss] raised his voice without fear. ‘I am sorry for the zeal and rage of your Lordships ... but this you gentlemen might grant me, that I only talk, when my conscience urged me and that I always base my words upon the apostle Paul who forcefully says: one must obey God more than man! I was not called here to keep silent ... and I have not left my homeland to be insulted at Constance ... I lift my eyes manfully before your Lordships.’ ”



Jan Huss, reformer of Bohemia

Huss was detained for six weeks, to the anxiety of his friends. Two of his friends returned to Bohemia to inform King Wenceslaus. Huss was kept in small confines, dank and putrid, and “often dragged forth from his hole, to be questioned as to his convictions,” always undeterred.

Poggius appealed to “Dominico, the Cardinal Legate” who was unmoved, so “I left him and went to the Chief Marshal of the town of Constance to ask him ... to provide better quarters for the sick man ... After a short while Huss was led out of his dungeon into a decent chamber, but his feet almost refused to carry him ... listless and unused to the day was the light of his eyes, deathly pale his cheeks and loose what was left of his teeth, since eleven had fallen out due to the damp prison ... upon his skin was a crust of dirt, his shoes had rotted upon his feet and his shirt and loincloth had vanished. The rounded flesh which had covered his bones had shrunken and shrivelled and he had become a picture of woe without equal.”

When brought to the Council Huss was refused his request for the holy Scriptures from which to answer for his views. “What harm? I tell you, that, even if you would burn and exterminate the holy scriptures, I could replace them by heart, with the exception of the Chronicles.”

As he was brought to the Council, forty thousand filled the streets, the bells tolled thrice to announce the occasion, and work ceased everywhere. “The Cardinal Legate caused trumpets to be sounded from his abode and had the purpose of today’s synod of the fathers announced and that every Christian believer, upon bent knees, should piously beseech heaven to grant a triumph of the Church over the portals of hell.”

Before him gathered 56 clerics, two procurators, several scribes, and eleven witnesses. While their oaths were taken, “one of the witnesses relented, because his conscience tortured him. He declared publicly that he had permitted himself to be bribed to give false testimony ... quickly the

repentant witness was ordered away with the death sentence ... the unfortunate man was dragged upon the bridge and cast over the railing so that he drowned.”

“First, the persecuted priest wanted to make complaints against his enemies, who had incarcerated him for eight moons, in spite of an Imperial safe conduct ... but the fathers, as well as the Cardinal Legate, forbade him ... every complaint and demanded only an answer of yes or no to the questions which the council had found to be in order. Huss listened attentively to them, answered 29 in the negative and one he answered firmly and with well-worded oration in the positive.”

During the mockery of his “hearing” he boldly recited the offenses even of the Pope before the council, denouncing him as antichrist who formed unjust wars and “permits indulgences to be sold to murderers, thieves, perjurers and all those who help him with their possessions, blood, money or hired soldiers.”

His fate was apparent. An aged friend of twice his years arranged an escape for Huss during the night. Huss went out from the prison with his liberator, stopped and gazed at the sky for a time, and reflected on his duty to speak the witness God had for him before the Council. Whereupon he returned to his narrow prison.

On the seventh of June he would appear before Emperor Sigismund. Visitors from Spain, France, England, Holland, Denmark, Prussia, Poland, Saxony, Bohemia, Austria and Bavaria had arrived. Against him were read 47 charges, with emphasis upon six in particular — that Huss was against transubstantiation, against the worship of saints, disputed the power of absolution by a vicious priest, rejected absolute obedience to worldly superiors, rejected the prohibition of marriage for priests, and decried indulgences. To all of which Huss gave resounding defense in most noble, articulate, and reasoned speech.

But as Steven before him, the Council would gnash for his death. “The clerical Lords could not contain themselves any longer, they yelled in maniacal ire, distregarding the presence of the Emperor entirely, not hearing the voice of the chairman.”

Huss was condemned on July 5, 1415, and burned the following day. At the proceedings Emperor Sigismund was “paled, trembled and stuttered like a prisoner,” but signed the order for the death of Huss.

More than eighty would cast votes, another having died sat motionless in his chair. For heresy, 51 in the majority. Has the Council the right to punish? 51 in the majority. What punishment should be given? 30 for release, 11 for public excommunication, 45 for death if no recantation — which Huss with clear voice and reason refused to give.

He would suffer more hours of disgraceful indignities. At the stake, he said “Today you will roast a lean goose [Huss means goose], but a hundred years from now you will hear a swan sing, whom you will leave unroasted and no trap or net will catch him for you.” The family emblem of Martin Luther is said to have been a swan.