

Faithbuilders Fellowship

Proclaiming Christ's Parousia
and the coming Millennial Kingdom
May, June 2008

The Passover Lamb

"Behold, the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The passover sacrifice of ancient Israel began at the time of the Exodus. God told Moses that each household of the Israelites should select a lamb on the 10th day of the first month of their calendar, and slay it on the 14th day, for eating later that night.

Today that month is called Nisan, drawn from the Babylonian month Nisanu. But originally the month was named Abib, which means to be "tender, green" (Strong's Concordance), as fresh shoots of growth would be — an appropriate name for the month which opened the spring of the year. Israel continued to number their years from spring to spring for some time, certainly through the forty years of their wilderness wandering.¹

Some time later, after the Israelites settled the land of Canaan, their farming cycle which ran from autumn to autumn evidently induced them to number years from the autumn of the year — thus the regnal years of all the kings of Judah commenced with month seven of their calendar, which following the Babylonian captivity became known as the month Tishri, from the Babylonian name Tashritu.²

This may seem an odd arrangement — months counting from the spring, and years counting from the autumn — but the custom continues to this day. Thus Rosh Hashanah, the day of new year on the Jewish Calendar, is the first day of Tishri, even though the month always counted as "one" in the scriptures is the month Nisan, which begins in the spring.

"This month [Abib, Nisan] shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus 12:1). This was to commemorate the month of the Exodus, which was in a sense the beginning of Israel's national life.

Jesus the Passover Lamb

All Christians recognize that the passover lamb was a type, or symbol, or picture, of our Lord Jesus. Paul affirms this meaning in his letter to the Corinthians, "For

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even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast" (1 Corinthians 5:7, 8).

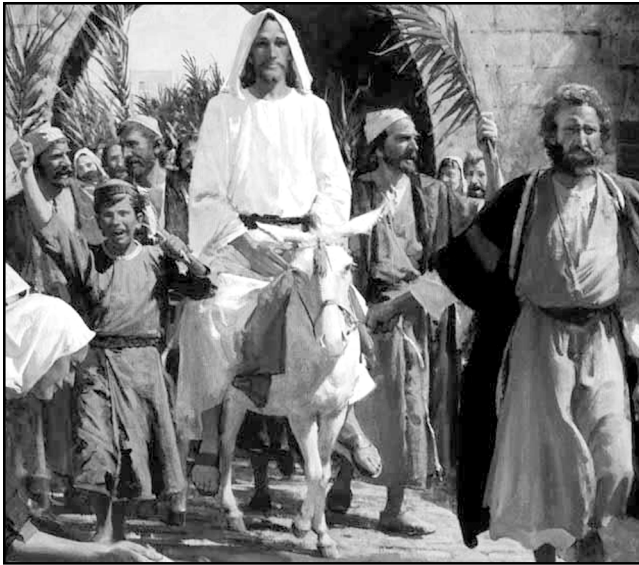
The selection of the Lamb on the 10th day of the month was fulfilled by Jesus when he rode into Jerusalem on Monday morning, Nisan 10, 33 AD. He was acclaimed by the crowds, "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John 12:13). It was a moment of triumph. One might suppose it would stir joyous emotions in the King of Kings as he rode in on a young colt, as kings of old time were accustomed to do.

But Jesus knew this presentation — this "selection" by the crowds — presaged his sacrifice. He thought of his death, and spoke of it. "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:23, 24).

Only a little later, in view of his coming ordeal, he said "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour ... and I, if I be lifted up from the earth [on the cross], will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die" (John 12:32, 33).

The Intervening Days

On this occasion Jesus received a commendation from God, audibly, from heaven. Some standing by thought it thundered, but the words are recorded for us by John. Jesus said "Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a



Triumphal Ride into Jerusalem

voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28). Jesus said that the voice came for the benefit of those around him. But it must also have been an assurance to Jesus that all would work well in the days ahead.

That day Jesus taught the people in the temple — but he also observed the practices. The rulers of the temple thrived on the temple trade, converting various currencies into a special temple currency, with which the people would purchase sacrifices. It was a lucrative trade for the money exchangers.

The next morning, Tuesday, Jesus came to a fig tree bare of fruit and cursed it, emblematic that Israel would not bear fruit during the coming age. As Jesus proceeded into the city, he was prepared to act. He made a scourge of small cords and applied it with vigor, purging the temple of the money changers, overthrowing their tables, and demanding that the animals for sale be removed.

The next morning, Wednesday, the disciples observed that the fig tree had withered from its roots and marvelled. As Jesus entered the city, he was accosted by the rulers of the temple, demanding to know by what authority he acted so forcibly the previous day. He responded in essence that it was the same authority that prompted John the Baptist, and his accusers fell silent before the crowds who esteemed John a prophet of God.

The Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians conspired to catch Jesus in his words, unsuccessful in each case. It was a day of confrontation, and solemn warning by Jesus against the leaders of Israel and about the coming judgment. "All these things shall come upon this generation ... your house is left unto you desolate ... There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 23:36, 38, 24:2). Passing out of the temple complex, eastward toward Bethany, he

paused at the Mount of Olives to give his disciples two chapters of prophecy and parables (Matthew chapters 24, 25).

Thursday Jesus spent with his disciples in Bethany, until at the close of the day he sent two disciples to prepare the coming passover. Later that evening he joined them for the Last Supper. Still later Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was taken to Annas, then to Caiaphas where he passed through the mockery of a trial before the council, and endured the torments of the soldiers until they tired of their sport. At daybreak his sentence was affirmed. He then appeared before Pilate, Herod, Pilate again, was scourged, presented to the crowds, appeared before Pilate a third time, before the crowds again, and was consigned to his death.

The Passover Sacrifice

"And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening" (Exodus 12:6).

In keeping with this type, Jesus died on the 14th of Nisan, the very day the lambs were to be sacrificed by the Israelites. The type specifies the time as "in the evening," but this expression in our common version hides the nature of the Hebrew, which is however revealed in the reading in the margin of many of our Bibles. The Hebrew expression is "between the two evenings." This expression has been often discussed, and its meaning disputed. However, the time of day intended can be determined by its other uses in the scriptures.

Numbers 28:4 uses the expression when speaking of the two lambs offered daily by the priests in the Old Testament — one in the morning, the other "between the

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two evenings.” The word “other” comes from the Hebrew word *sheniy*, Strongs Concordance word number 8145, “properly double, i.e. second.” In other words, the first lamb was in the morning and the second daily lamb was “between the two evenings.”

Notice the sequence — morning first, then “between the two evenings.” The apparently trivial observation that morning precedes evening, indicates that the “evening” offering was late in a given day. In fact evening, as it applied to a Jewish day, was always in the latter part of the day.³

The time intended by “between the two evenings” was mid-afternoon. The Jews counted two evenings in the day, the lesser commencing at noon with the decline of the sun, the greater closing at sunset, so that “between the two evenings” would be mid-afternoon.

This meaning is illustrated by a mention of the evening sacrifice in 1 Kings 18:29. The priests of Baal called upon their god “when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice” — and then Elijah went into action. As the context demonstrates, this was sometime about mid-afternoon, some hours before nightfall.

All of this is consistent with Matthew 27:46-50, which tells us Jesus died at the ninth hour (from daybreak) — about 3:00 in the afternoon. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that about this time of day, officials in the temple courts were slaying the passover lambs for the Israelites.⁴ Thus not only the very day, but even the time of day, of Jesus’ death, was overruled by the providence of God as testimony to his son.

As the Jews observed two lambs daily — one in the morning, the other in the evening — so Jesus was put on the cross in the morning, and expired “between the two evenings.” Jesus was put on the cross at the “third hour” — nine am by our reckoning (Mark 15:25) — and expired the “ninth hour” (Mark 15:34). Thus he endured his agony on the cross for six hours. Even here we have some meaning — the six hours of suffering in redemption, for 6000 years of sin and death, from the sin of Adam to the establishment of the Millennium.

Three Days

Jesus was buried the same day he died. Joseph of Arimathea secured his body, and Nicodemus secured a large quantity of myrrh and aloes, “about an hundred pound weight,” for use on the body, wrapped in linens. Thus was symbolized the suffering of Jesus (myrrh), and the healing which springs from the life he gave (aloes). The hundred pounds reminds us of the 100 silver sockets which served as a foundation for the tabernacle, collected from the “ransom” money paid by the Israelites for their redemption (Exodus 30:12, 38:26, 27).

Jesus was in the tomb for the remainder of that Friday, April 3, 33 AD (Julian date). About the time of sunset, as the moon rose, it was still partly in eclipse, tinged with



Jesus before Pilate

orange, a condition the ancients described as turning “the moon into blood” (Joel 2:31). It was a token of the judgment upon Israel, as their favor eclipsed. It was the time of full moon, representing the fullness of Israel’s favor with the presence of Messiah — but thereafter the moon would wane, and so would Israel’s blessings. Not long after, they would be scattered hither and yon in the Roman diaspora.

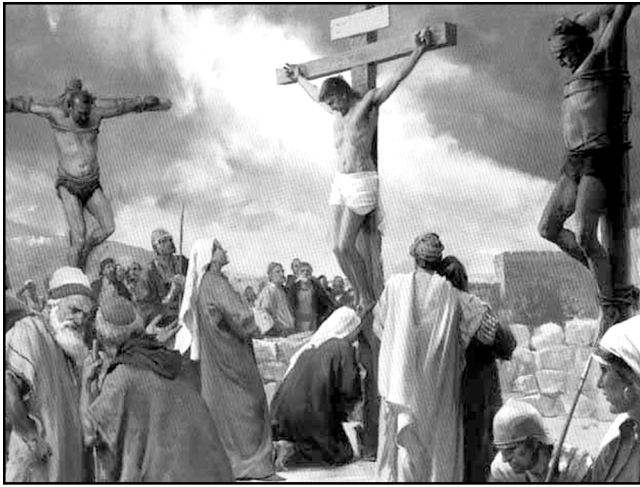
Now the suffering of Jesus was over. The next day was Saturday, Sabbath, a day of rest. Jesus rested in the sleep of death. Early Sunday morning an earthquake at the tomb signalled his resurrection from the dead, just as an earthquake had signalled his death at the cross (Matthew 27:51, 28:2).

His resurrection was in the morning of Nisan 16, the day specified in the Law of Moses for waving before Jehovah an offering of the firstfruits of the spring harvest (Leviticus 23:10, 11). Paul the apostle applies this to Jesus: “now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The Passover Lamb

Jesus said, “except you eat the flesh of the son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). He explained that his words were to be understood spiritually — “the words that I speak, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The flesh and blood of Jesus represent his perfect human life, given as our Ransom. Without this we have no standing — not one of us.

This life was shown long ago in the passover lamb, eaten by the Israelites, and the blood of that lamb sprinkled on the door posts and lintels of the house. The lamb was roast with fire, expressing the fiery trials our Lord passed through to become our redeemer. The bitter herbs represent our trials, and the unleavened bread, our desire to have leaven purged from us as disciples of



Jesus died "Between the Two Evenings" — 3:00 pm

Christ. The Israelites were to eat with shoes on their feet, ready for a journey — showing our status as vagabonds in this earth, seeking a heavenly Canaan. They were to have "staff in hand" — representing the promises of God by which we walk in faith.

The Memorial

At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted a memorial of his death for his disciples to keep. He represented his body by the bread they had at the meal, and his blood by the "fruit of the vine" they had as beverage at the meal. So when we take the sustaining bread, and nourishing cup, in fellowship together, we remember the life-giving ransom given by our Lord. Without that, we could have no hope of life beyond the fleeting years of the present.

The Firstborn

When the Israelites ate their lamb, that fateful night in Egypt so long ago, the firstborn were under jeopardy of judgment by the death angel which passed by. But those houses with the passover blood applied at the entrance were spared. We, who have come into Christ, are the "firstborn" class. We have great privileges, and great prospects, for life in the spirit realm with our Lord Jesus in the resurrection. But there is also some jeopardy, for we are under judgment in the present time. The judgment of the world will be during the Millennium — but the judgment of the saints is in the present.

But the passover lamb benefited more than just the firstborn. For in the morning, the entire host of Israel passed out of Pharaoh's domain, and subsequently through the Red Sea. So in the Millennial Morning the entire world will pass out of the bondage of Satan's world, into the freedom of God's Kingdom.

But Satan — represented by Pharaoh — will pursue them again. At the end of the Millennium Satan is allowed to work his wiles again, to find all those not in heart sympathy with God (Revelation 20:7-9). After a "Little Season" of testing, the ungodly will be removed,

together with Satan and all his hosts. This was represented by the doom of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea.

Thereafter the Israelites were free and rejoiced in God's deliverance. So will the world be free at last from every residue of Satan's influence, and the curse of sin and death he brought upon us. Jesus, the Passover Lamb, gives deliverance to us now, the "Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23). But in the Millennium, so near at hand, salvation will come to the entire world as well.

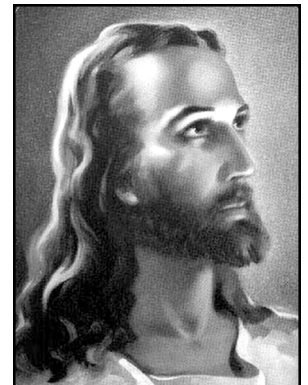
(1) This is apparent from Numbers 33:38, compared to Deuteronomy 1:3. The first text cites the passing of Aaron in the fifth month of year 40, and the second text, which was some months later, speaks of the eleventh month of year 40. Which means that the number of the year did not augment when they crossed over month seven, as for example it does today. The year numbers then turned in the spring of the year with the advent of Abib, month number one.

(2) The record of the reign of Josiah contains an example which shows that the year number during his reign did not change with the advent of Abib in the spring. In the 18th year of Josiah a work was begun to "repair the house of Jehovah" (2 Chronicles 34:8). In the process they recovered the book of the Law, and realized how many things they had failed to keep. This spurred a reformation, which included a passover observance when the month Abib arrived, "and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month" (2 Chronicles 35:1). Verse 19 expressly says "in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept." Which means that the number of the year did not change when they crossed into Abib, month number one. During the period of Kings, in the land of Judah, the year number changed in the autumn with the advent of month number seven.

In the 10 Tribe Kingdom of Israel in the north, it was different. Jeroboam, the first ruler of that kingdom, purposely instituted a system which differed from his rival Judah in the south — thus the regnal years of the northern kingdom incremented in the spring with the advent of Abib. This fact is one of the keys to integrating the scriptural records for the reigns of the kings of the two kingdoms.

(3) The term "evening" always refers to the close of a given day. Thus the Day of Atonement, which was the 10th day of the seventh month, was defined as running from "the ninth day of the month at even, from even [of day nine] unto even [of day ten]" (Leviticus 23:32). The simple word "even" or "evening" may apply, depending on context, at any time in the declining of the sun from its height — whether in the afternoon, or at sunset. But the expression "between the two evenings" defines a point about mid-afternoon, long before what we would term sunset.

(4) "These high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover ... slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour to the eleventh" (Wars of the Jews 6.9.3). Earlier Josephus said "they offered the sacrifice which was called the Passover, on the 14th day [of the month Nisan]" (Antiquities 11.4.8).



Prayer a Great Privilege

"When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Daniel 6:10).

Daniel made no show of prayer. His windows open toward Jerusalem, the sacred city of his youth, was a means of directing his thoughts more closely upon Jehovah, the God of Israel, whose temple of prayer had been at Jerusalem. But there is no evidence that Daniel was ostentatious about his prayers. He did not stand, leaning outside the window, and express himself for the public to hear. He humbly "kneeled upon his knees" presumably out of view of any random passers-by, and spoke to God.

But Daniel was regular in prayer, following a pattern of holy habit which evidently endeared him to God, as he is thrice termed a man "greatly beloved" (Daniel 9:23, 10:11, 10:19). On this occasion, his enemies were waiting, watching, specially to "catch" him in prayer, so as to effect the plan they laid for his demise.

King Darius — perhaps the Median designation for King Cyrus — had been fooled into a rash decree, and now regretted it. Possibly we might reason that a more secret, private, prayer in our minds in a closed room would be suitable in this situation. There is something to be said for this possibility. But Daniel perceived in this a test of his fidelity to Jehovah, and everything about the narrative indicates God was pleased with Daniel's decision which has endured through the ages as a testimony of righteous conscience even in the peril of death.

Prayer is a Privilege

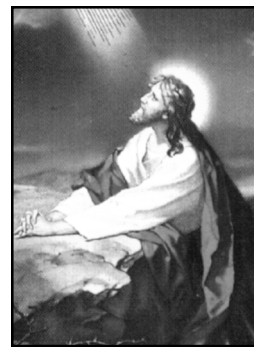
"Prayer is a privilege. Jesus did not command his disciples to pray, nor did he even give them a form of prayer until they requested it. 'Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.' The Lord's people must feel their need of divine grace and help in order to appreciate the privilege of approaching the throne of heavenly grace.

"The trials and difficulties, the sorrows and temptations of life, frequently impel God's children to prayer. It marks a better, a higher Christian development when they love to come to the throne of grace, not only in their sorrows, but also in their joys, to give thanks, to praise, to worship, to adore." (Charles Russell, Reprint page 5021).

The Lord's Prayer

When the disciples requested our Lord to assist them in prayer, he provided something brief, simple, direct, and orderly. We refer to it as the Lord's prayer, memorized to good effect by many Christians, recorded in Matthew 6:9-13.

First is an address of reverence. "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." Then we remember the divine authority which God designs for the blessing of all people, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." The will of the heavenly Father, who in love produced us all and in love plans the best for all of us, is the program for the maximum blessing of the world. We who have received Christ now in the present "Gospel Age" have a heavenly hope for the Resurrection — the remainder have a blessed earthly hope for the Resurrection during the coming Millennium. All have the opportunity for everlasting life.



"Give us this day, our daily bread." God cares for our necessities. He does not promise us riches, or dainties, or pleasantries. Even if we sometimes receive them as part of the bounty of life, we remember that the noblest of the disciples, as represented in the Apostles, were not men of wealth, and encouraged us to beware of riches. "The love of money is a root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (1 Timothy 6:10, 11). However, we are authorized to pray for the necessities of life — for God's blessing upon our labors to secure food, clothing, shelter, for ourselves and our dependents in a responsible way.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Do we wish mercy from our Heavenly Father? Then we should express this not only by our seeking it in prayer, but by our exhibiting mercy toward others. Using the mercy we show to others, little as it is compared to the mercy we received from God, is a very generous proposition. What would we say if a rich man told us, that by giving a few pennies away, he would provide many dollars in compensation?

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." There is a great adversary who wishes to turn us into sin and away from God, and away from life. He may bring enticing allurements to mind, but the end would be death — just as he deceived Eve, and brought her into death. Jesus experienced Satan's temptations during forty days in the wilderness, and refused them. Let us remember in prayer also, to be delivered from the evil one, and refuse the inducements he brings to bear. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

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The remainder of verse 12 is omitted in the earliest manuscripts — "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." It is helpful to observe this, lest the present Gospel Age be confused with the "kingdom, power, and glory" to follow in the next age.

Lessons on Self Control

“Keep the door of my lips” (Psalms 141:3).

Everyone of experience knows something of the need to watch the words we speak. There are various levels of concern. We would that our words would be peaceable, kindly, helpful, pleasant to all. We would that our words express wisdom and thought. And above all else, we would have our words always truthful. “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Psalms 34:13).

In Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians, he gives a variety of practical advice, including some about the tongue, and he repeats the advice of Psalms in different words. “Putting away falsehood, speak every man truth with his neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25). The apostle James gives similar advice. “Swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation” (James 5:12).

Our Lord himself advised us, “Let your speech be, yea, yea, nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matthew 5:37). In other words, our simple words should be trustworthy.

Pastoral Advice

Following are some comments on this subject from Pastor Charles Russell, whom we esteem the seventh messenger to the Church (Revelation 1:20). These are from an article titled, as above, “Lessons on Self Control” (Reprint page 3737).

“Others may feel it necessary to emphasize their statements by oaths or expletives, but the followers of Jesus are to so live, so act, so speak, that their words pass for par anywhere and with anybody. To this end they must be absolutely truthful, so that whoever may hear them may know that their yea is yea and their nay is nay.

“Oaths and solemn asseverations in the ordinary conversation of life imply that the truth of the speaker is questionable — that his yea is not always yea, and that his nay is not always nay. The tendency is to make him less careful in the ordinary statements of his conversation which are not thus solemnized; the effect is also to make him less reverent toward the Lord or the other holy things which he may call upon as witnesses, as evidences of his truthfulness. As the word of such people becomes common and liable to be broken, so their oaths would soon also become common and liable to be broken — such matters go on from bad to worse usually. On the contrary, where the word is held sacred the avenues of sin and error and falsehood are measurably stopped.

“Nothing in this injunction can properly be understood to apply to the taking of an oath in a court of law. Such oaths, commanded by the law of the State, are necessary, because all have not the high standard of truth

desired. But even in the courts of law in many states it is permitted that an affirmation may be made instead of an oath if any so prefer. To one of the Lord’s people an affirmation must mean exactly the same as an oath; he would not affirm what he would not be willing to swear to. He recognizes that, as a follower of the Lord and one of his representatives, his yea or his nay must be as truthfully kept as his oath would be.

“The Lord’s people find the tongue the most difficult member to bring into subjection, and therefore may well pray, ‘Keep thou the door of my lips.’ And if the prayer be sincere, from the heart, it will imply that the petitioner is doing all in his power in this direction himself, while seeking the divine aid.

“Divine aid ... assures us that the lips are not at fault, that it is the heart that needs a completion of the regenerative work of the holy Spirit, for “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” The lesson here is that whatever difficulty we have through our lips needs correction at the heart. We need to get our hearts more in accord with the heart of the Almighty — more in tune with the gracious elements of the divine character, represented not only in justice toward others, but additionally in mercy, love, kindness and benevolence towards all.”

Daniel 11:20

“Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes in the glory of the kingdom: but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle.”

Thus briefly, in but a single verse, is the reign of Seleucus Philopator referred to in prophecy. This is quite a contrast with his predecessor, his father Antiochus Magnus, whose 36 years of reign consume verses 10b through 19, the longest account to this point for a single ruler. However, this would be outdone by his son Antiochus Epiphanes, from verses 21 through 39 — not merely nine verses as for Magnus, but 19 verses.

There is a good reason for such detail in the case of Epiphanes. For not only was he the infamous persecutor of the Jewish people, whose atrocities sparked the Maccabean revolt, but the account of those atrocities in the prophecy also apply to Pagan Rome which would break Jerusalem, and also to Papal Rome, the great persecutor of the “saints of the most high” during the Gospel Age. This we will see in due course.

Two Pairs of Brothers

The last four rulers of the Seleucid Kingdom were two pairs of brothers. Seleucus Ceraunus and Antiochus Magnus were the first pair, sons of Seleucus Callinicus. These are the “sons” of verse 10 who assembled forces, but Ceraunus was killed after a brief reign leaving but “one,” Magnus, to pursue their plans.

Two Pairs of Brothers

Seleucus Ceraunus (3 years)

Antiochus Magnus (36 years)

Seleucus Philopator (11 years)

Antiochus Epiphanes (12 years)

The prophecy of Daniel takes us to the infamous persecutor of the Jewish People. The prophecies which describe him from verses 31 and forward also describe the breaker of the Jews — Pagan Rome — and the infamous persecutor of the “saints of the most high” — Papacy.

The second set of brothers were sons of Antiochus Magnus. In this case also, the first of these is given but a brief comment, namely verse 20, which applies to Seleucus Philopator, and a lengthy account follows for his brother Antiochus Epiphanes. Those are the last of the Seleucid rulers detailed in the prophecy, which applies also to Pagan Rome and Papal Rome, from verse 31.

Raiser of Taxes

But first verse 20, the single verse applying to **Seleucus Philopator**. It is remarkable how descriptive is this brief verse. First, it terms this ruler a “raiser of taxes.” Recall from the previous article in this series that after his father, Magnus, suffered defeat by the Roman general Scipio, Magnus was placed under heavy tribute to Rome, so onerous that he required to plunder regions of his own empire, and he died doing so.



The obligations continued in the reign of his son Philopator, and this is the cause of his pronounced need to raise taxes. But the prophecy notes more than a general taxation — it is specific to “the glory of the kingdom.” This refers in particular to the holy land of the Jews, the people of Daniel, the people of God (compare Isaiah 4:5).

There is a remarkable account of this taxation applied against Jerusalem, when Philopator sent his minister Heliodorus to plunder its riches. We partly summarize, and partly cite, the following from 2nd Maccabees chapter three (a non-canonical book which preserves the history of the times).

During the reign of Seleucus Philopator, righteous Onias was high priest in Jerusalem, and “the Holy City enjoyed unbroken peace and prosperity, and there was exemplary observance of the laws, because he [Onias] was pious and hated wickedness. The kings themselves held the sanctuary in honour and embellished the temple with the most magnificent gifts; King Seleucus [Philopator] of Asia [the Seleucid Empire] even met the whole cost of the sacrificial worship from his own revenues.” Onias was a descendant of Joshua, who was high priest three centuries earlier when Israel had returned from Babylon.

However, Onias had an enemy, Simon. He sent to the Seleucid governor of the area and “alleged that the treasury at Jerusalem was so packed with untold riches that the total of the accumulated balances was beyond all reckoning; it bore no relation to the account for the sacrifices, and he suggested that these balances might be brought under the control of the king ... whereupon the king chose Heliodorus, his chief minister, to be sent with orders to effect the removal of these treasures.”

When Heliodorus came to Jerusalem, he asked of the treasury and explained his purpose. Onias explained that the matter was misrepresented by Simon, that the total sum was 400 talents of silver and 200 of gold — a goodly sum, but not the extravagant riches claimed, most of it held in trust for widows and orphans. His protests notwithstanding the minister would claim them.

The day came, and “the people flocked from their houses and rushed to join in universal supplication because of the dishonour which threatened the holy place ... imploring the Lord Almighty to keep the deposits in tact and safe.” God heard them. “Just as [Heliodorus] was arriving with his escort at the treasury, the Ruler of spirits ... sent a mighty apparition, so that everyone who had dared to accompany Heliodorus collapsed in terror, stricken with panic before the might of God. There appeared to them a horse ... with rider ... clad all in golden armour; it rushed fiercely at Heliodorus and, rearing up, attacked him with its hooves.

There also appeared to Heliodorus two young men of surpassing strength ... they flogged him, raining on him blow after blow. ... Some of Heliodorus’ companions lost no time in begging Onias to pray to the Most High that the life of their master, now lying at his very last gasp, might be spared. ... As the expiation was being made, the same young men, dressed as before, again appeared to Heliodorus, and standing over him, said: ‘You should be very grateful to Onias the high priest; it is for his sake the Lord has spared your life.’ The minister was properly humbled, and reported to the King.

According to the prophecy, not long after this the King would be deposed. “Within few days he shall be destroyed.” As brief as this it, it specifies that this monarch would not die a natural death. He would be put to death — “destroyed” (quite unlike a much later famous taxer

of the Israelites, Augustus, who would die peacefully of old age). He would not die “in battle,” nor would it be a consequence of some feud, “neither in anger.” In spite of the brevity, this is very limiting. It was accurately fulfilled by a palace coup led by his minister, Heliodorus.

His Successor, Epiphanes

Heliodorus was successful in removing Philopator, but not in gaining the throne. Normally the throne would go to the son of Philopator, but instead it was received through intrigue by his brother **Antiochus Epiphanes**. “In his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries” (Daniel 11:21).



In other words the next ruler would not be the normally expected successor — and so it was. Epiphanes had been a hostage in Rome. He became a hostage as part of the “Treaty of Apamea” in 188 BC, between Magnus and Rome — the same treaty which had imposed a charge of 1000 talents a year for 12 years, causing Magnus and then Philopator such distress. Epiphanes was one of 20 hostages.

But he had recently been exchanged for Philopator’s son, and rightful heir, Seleucus IV. “Antiochus took advantage of this situation, and proclaimed himself co-regent with another of Seleucus’ sons, the infant Antiochus, whose murder he orchestrated a few years later” (Wikipedia).

Thus the prophecy was fulfilled — he took the kingdom not by armed revolt, but peaceably, subtly. We take up the activities of this inglorious ruler at verse 22, next issue.

Seventy Years

“For thus saith Jehovah, After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place” (Jeremiah 29:10, ASV).

In our series on Bible Chronology, we have traced the count of years from Adam forward, period by period, to the close of the kingdom of Israel in the days of Zedekiah of Judah and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. This suffices to resolve the date of Adam’s creation — namely 3958 BC. For the dates of Nebuchadnezzar are fixed by dozens of eclipses, as noted in the previous article in this series. By affixing absolute dates to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar by this means, his 18th year, when Zedekiah’s

kingdom fell and the Temple at Jerusalem was burned, is fixed to the year 587 BC.

This also is precisely in synch with the fixed dates of the history of Assyria. The history of Assyria, and the history of Babylon, overlap each other by more than a century, with various cross connections between them. Thus the history of each substantiates the other.

Counting from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, back through time, through the connected history of both nations, we arrive at the year 763 BC as the year of the Assyrian eponym Bur-Sagale. In the year 763 BC there was a striking total solar eclipse in the month of June — and in the Assyrian records for this year there is mention of an eclipse in the month Simanu, which matches this — June 15, 763 BC, Julian date.

By linking Assyrian history with the Hebrew record of the kings of Israel and Judah, we have a strong and multi-strand testimony which provides us the date for the foundation of Solomon’s Temple, in the spring of his fourth regnal year, as 966 BC. We have referred to this before in previous articles.

Thus the thread of Bible Chronology, from Adam forward, is securely tethered to specific dates without a need to work forward from Nebuchadnezzar, through the few rulers of that empire, to the time of King Cyrus, first ruler of the Persian Empire. Nevertheless, this period also has engaged many minds, and it is worth explaining the specifics.

Persian History

The years of the Persian empire also are well fixed, beginning with the first ruler of the empire. The armies of Cyrus the Great took Babylon on October 12, 539, Julian dating. This is a widely accepted date. Even within Bible Student circles there is no formal challenge to this date, and rightly so. It is predicated upon dependable records — not so complete and clear as those affixing the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, but reliable nonetheless.

The Babylonians, and the Persians who took Babylon, both reckoned their years from spring to spring, and they both reckoned the years of their monarchs using the accession-year method. This means that the year Cyrus came to power as the ruler of the empire was counted his accession year — so that his official “Year One” commenced the following spring, with the month Nisan, 538 BC. Thus the very many references today to the first year of Cyrus commencing in 538 BC. This is predicated upon his taking Babylon the previous autumn.

However, more than a century ago some Biblical reference works assigned the date 536 BC to the first year of Cyrus, rather than 538 BC. Why is this? It has to do with the mention in the Book of Daniel of one “Darius the Mede” who took the kingdom, and the supposition that he was some ruler, a superior of Cyrus, whose brief reign intervened before Cyrus personally ruled the Empire. A period of two years was sometimes used for this

period, but for no substantial reason. Using these assumptions, the first year of the reign of Cyrus would be deferred by two years, thus commencing in the spring of the year 536 BC.

Now We Know

None of those assumptions are embraced today. Indeed, Cyrus rode into Babylon in triumph only some days — a couple of weeks — following the taking of the city, and was acclaimed by the populace. “On the sixteenth day (of Tasritu), Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, and the army of Cyrus, entered Babylon without a battle. ... On the third day of the month Arahsamnu [October 29, 539 BC Julian date], Cyrus entered Babylon ... There was peace in the city when Cyrus spoke greetings to all of Babylon. He (Cyrus) appointed Gubaru governor of all the governors in Babylon” (Babylonian Chronicle, pages 224-225, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, Paul-Alain Beaulieu, 1989, Yale University Press).

A record of the event was made, and as customary in those times, it was buried as a foundation deposit, in this case at Esagla, the temple of the Babylonian god Marduk. It was discovered in the year 1879 by archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam and is retained today by the British Museum. It was written on a clay cylinder in cuneiform script, and is known as the Cyrus Cylinder. Here is a translation of a pertinent part. (The entire text can be found online at Wikipedia, under “Cyrus Cylinder,” our source for these comments.)

“I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four rims (of the earth), son of Cambyses, great king,



*"The **Cyrus Cylinder** artifact was inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform at Cyrus' command after his conquest of Babylon. The cylinder has been considered as the world's first known charter of human rights, as there are passages in the text which have been interpreted as expressing Cyrus' respect for humanity. It promotes a form of religious tolerance and freedom. He allowed his subjects to continue worshipping their gods, despite his own religious beliefs, and he even restored the temples of foreign gods. In 1971, the United Nations published a translation of the document in all the official U.N. languages. A replica of the Cyrus Cylinder has reportedly been on display at United Nations headquarters in New York City as a tribute to Cyrus' display of respect and tolerance." (Some scholars reject this view, arguing that the concept of human rights is alien to the historical context.) — Wikipedia*

king of Anshan, grand-son of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, great king, king of Anshan, of a family (which) always (exercised) kingship; whose rule Bel and Nebo love, whom they want as king to please their hearts ... I entered Babylon as a friend ... I established the seat of government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing.”

This testimony agrees with every other ancient testimony that Cyrus was the supreme ruler at the fall of Babylon — and this agrees with the testimony of Scripture as well. “Thus saith Jehovah, to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him ... I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.” Thus does the prophet Isaiah refer to the taking of Babylon by the forces of **Cyrus** (Isaiah 45:1, 2). That matter is settled.

Who, Then, Was Darius?

Some suppose Darius the Mede was a governor who served under Cyrus, and some suppose Darius the Mede was the same person as Cyrus the Persian — Cyrus was Median by his mother, and Persian by his father, and united both peoples into one empire. The latter is evidently the proper view. Daniel 6:28 should read “Darius, **even** ... Cyrus the Persian” — the same construct as 1 Chronicles 5:26, which all newer translations show equates Pul and Tilgathpilneser with the same word, **even**.

The clarity of the subject notwithstanding, still we hear now and then that some dear brethren are vague, apprehensive, resistant, albeit without any clear grasp of the nature of the issue or the explicit testimonies on the subject. This has nothing to do with the actual evidence at hand. It has to do with a lingering attraction to the date 536 BC, published so long ago. When it is pointed out that this date does not accord even with their own use of it in prophecy — still a lingering mist seems to cloud the mind on the subject.¹

The Desolation of the Land

This means that from the burning of the Temple at the close of the reign of Zedekiah, in 587 BC, until the return of the Israelites in the first year of Cyrus, in 538 BC, was a period of 49 years. This is a very appropriate period of time, for Leviticus 26:34 says during this time the land of Israel would observe sabbath, rest — and a cycle of years from one Jubilee to another was this same period, 49 years.

In other words, God determined that an appropriate rest period for the land, to atone for the many years of poorly kept sabbaths of the past, would be one full cycle of seven times seven years. What a reasonable, satisfying result. Whereas, were the period 47, 53, or some other random number of years, we may feel a sense of something amiss.

Seventy Years

This brings us to the matter of the Seventy Years. Our opening text defines these years as “for Babylon” — and to this history accords exactly. The Assyrian Empire had been the strongest power of the near east for centuries, but their capital of Nineveh was overrun in the year 612 BC, causing them to regroup at Harran. That would be their last stronghold. That city fell to the Babylonians in 610 BC, and this left Babylon as the chief power remaining. The “Seventy Years” allotted to Babylon had commenced. One by one other peoples would fall to them. But it was when Babylon superseded the previous empire, Assyria, that their power was established.

Seventy years later take us to the year 540 BC. That was the year Cyrus successfully took Lydia, in Turkey, and began marshalling his forces against Babylon, which fell the following year. Jeremiah 25:12 had predicted, “And it shall come to pass, when **seventy years are accomplished**, that I will punish the king of Babyon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their inquiry.”

The punishment of “that nation” — Babylon — began with the advance of Cyrus against them. According to Jeremiah, that means Babylon’s Seventy Years had expired. The Seventy Years *for Babylon* ran from **610 BC to 540 BC**. Subsequently they were marched against, engaged in battle, and retreated to Babylon — which was sieged and taken without a battle. Belshazzar, regent in Babylon for his father Nabonidus, was slain that night.

Desolation of the Land

What has confused the subject is a *misunderstanding* of the meaning of three passages — Jeremiah 25:10,11, 2 Chronicles 36:21, and Daniel 9:2. A casual reading of these texts can lead a person to suppose that the seventy years was a time of desolation of Judea. But the desolation of Judea commenced after Zedekiah lost his kingdom in the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar. This was in the year 587 BC, which was 23 years after the actual beginning of Babylon’s seventy years in 610 BC.

This has led some to suppose that the history of the times is untrustworthy, and no amount of reason or evidence seems sufficient to appease this concern. But the matter can be resolved by looking closely at the texts themselves — careful to note what they do say, and what they do **not** say. The fault lies not with the facts, records, scriptures, or prophecies. The fault lies in a misunderstanding of the texts.

We will examine each one.

Jeremiah 25:10, 11. “Moreover I will take from them [Judah] the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”

The text does speak of desolation. But it does not say the desolation would endure for seventy years. It says the nations would serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Even this does not mean each nation would serve the entire duration, for verse nineteen lists Egypt among the serving nations, and Ezekiel 29:17 and following shows that as of year 27 of Ezekiel’s captivity, 16 years after the loss of Zedekiah’s kingdom, the conquest of Egypt was still future.

Compare Jeremiah 7:34, where also the desolation of the land is predicted. There neither the servitude of other nations, nor the period for such servitude, is mentioned — so that text does not mention “seventy years.”

This emphasizes the point that the time period prescribed, seventy years, did not define the desolation. It defined the period during which power was given to Babylon to rule the nations. Various nations would serve for various lengths of time during that period.

2 Chronicles 36:21. “To fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath to fulfil threescore and ten years.”

By citing this verse by itself, we miss the predicate of the verse, which is in verse 20. “Them that has escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: [and now verse 21] to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah.”

What was it that Jeremiah predicted? He said the captivity of Israel would not abate until Babylon fell. Jeremiah said this in Jeremiah 29:10 — “after seventy years be accomplished *for Babylon*,² I will visit you ... causing you to return to this place.”

“Until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths.” This part is **not** from Jeremiah. In fact the entire book of Jeremiah says nothing about the land of Israel resting, or sabbaths of the land. The chronicler picked up this part from Leviticus 26:34, “Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths.” Indeed, the land kept sabbath as long as it was desolate. But neither Leviticus, nor Jeremiah, tells us how long the desolation and sabbath would endure.

“To fulfil threescore and ten years.” Here the chronicler cites Jeremiah again (for Leviticus does not specify any number of years). The word “fulfil” is the same Hebrew word as in Jeremiah 29:10,



Nebuchadnezzar who took Jerusalem

“accomplish,” or as the NASB renders it, “complete.” This blends the point of Jeremiah 29:10 with the warning of Leviticus 26:34, and tells us that the sabbath of the land would not abate until the close of the seventy years “for Babylon.”

Note, this text does not say the sabbath keeping would last 70 years. It merely affirms that it would not abate until the seventy years closed — until the seventy years “for Babylon” were “complete” (NASB). Some time after the 70 years closed, Israel would return and farm the land again.

Daniel 9:2. “In the first year of his reign 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 desolations of Jerusalem.” Here is the same word — accomplish, fulfil, complete — as before.

Daniel saw that Jeremiah predicted 70 years for Babylon. Clearly that time had passed, for Babylon had fallen to the Persians. Now, at last, it was possible for Israel to be released, return to their land, and bring the desolation of Judea to a close. So Daniel prayed to God for His blessings to return.

Daniel had been taken in the first wave of captivity, in the year 605 BC (Daniel 1:1). He was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, who during this campaign would receive news of the death of his father, Nabopolassar, back in Babylon. That would be the year of accession of Nebuchadnezzar to the throne of Babylon. Daniel was a young lad at the time — perhaps 15 or so — and now it was 67 years later. Daniel would be in his early 80s, and he had lived all during the period of captivity.

Some have been misled by the NIV paraphrase, which misses the meaning — “the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.” The NASB does better — “for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, seventy years.” In other words, the desolation of Judea would not remit until Babylon’s seventy years had run their course. Subsequently the Israelites would return and the desolation would end.

What Daniel Knew

Daniel knew the desolation of Judea would not last seventy years. Daniel was among the first captives taken to Babylon, in the third year of Jehoiakim (Daniel 1:1). Thousands more followed him into Babylon eight years later, when Jehoiachin was taken captive.

Four years later they would receive a letter from Jeremiah, telling them to plan for a long stay, for they would not be released until seventy years “for Babylon” had passed. Jeremiah 29:10 was part of that letter. The captives knew the seventy years had begun. That was the reason they were in Babylon. Yet the desolation of Judea was still seven years away.

The Intervening Years

The years of Nebuchadnezzar, and the years of Cyrus, can be dated independently. By this means we know the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar was in 587 BC, and the first year of Cyrus 538 BC. Thus the desolation of Judea between these dates lasted 49 years.

In addition, this span of time is attested to by a network of documents from antiquity, which specify all the kings of Babylon who ruled during this period, and the regnal years of each of them. A list of rulers, and the supporting documents from antiquity, follows.

Years of Babylonian Empire

- 21 Nabopolassar
- 43 Nebuchadnezzar
- 2 Amel Marduk
- 4 Neriglissar
- 0 Labashi Marduk (a few months)
- 17 Nabonidus

Thus from 18 Nebuchadnezzar, to the first year of Cyrus (who deposed Nabonidus, father of Belshazzar), are 49 years.

Attesting Documents from Antiquity

Uruk King List
Adda-Guppi Stele (mother of Nabonidus)
Hillah Stele
House of Egibi records
2000 Tablets, Yale University
4500 Tablets, British Museum

The last two items are several thousand original documents from this period — dated receipts of commercial transactions. They cover the entire span of time. For the period from 18 Nebuchadnezzar through Cyrus there are an average of more than 70 documents **per year**. The history of this time is fully resolved. (Documents discussed in Section Five, “Time and Prophecy”)

Summary

The seventy years “for Babylon” ran from the fall of Harran in 610 BC, to the advance of Cyrus against Babylon in 540 BC — **70 years** in duration.

The desolation of Judea commenced in 587 BC when the residents of Jerusalem left for Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them, and closed in the autumn of 538 BC with the return of 42,360 Babylonian exiles (Ezra 2:64) — **49 years** in duration.

Endnotes

(1) In particular, this has to do with the view published in Volume Two of *Studies in the Scriptures*. Written more than a century ago, it cites the date 536 BC for the first year of Cyrus, drawing naturally enough upon sources then current which misunderstood the subject. Using that date, and adding 70 years backward in time, produced the date 606 BC, autumn, for the supposed desolation of the land. Going forward 2520 years thereafter supposedly leads to the date 1914 AD as the close of Israel's Seven Times of punishment.

Because the date 1914 is so prominent in prophecy, there is a tendency to suppose that all the arguments used for it must be correct. This is a mistake. But the hold of this concern has so fixed itself upon some that they are impervious to facts and evidence on the issue. In some cases they simply refuse to discuss the subject.

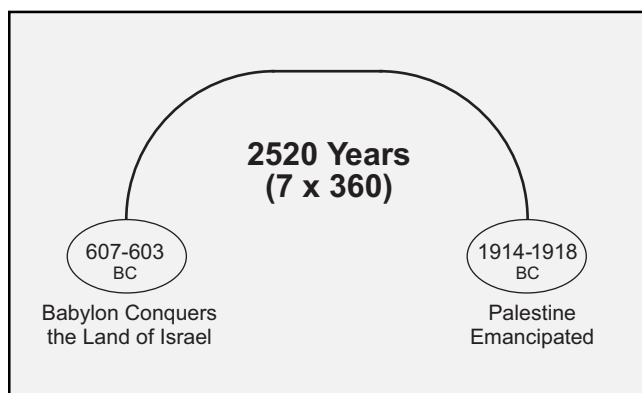
Long ago, the Jehovah's Witnesses — who secured their date 1914 from the same foundation as Bible Students, namely from Volume Two of *Studies in the Scriptures* just referred to — recognized a mistake. Today they frankly acknowledge that the dates 536 BC, and 606 BC, are the wrong dates. They modify the approach somewhat, as little as possible. They suppose the Israelites were not back in the land of Israel until the autumn of 537 BC. Adding 70 years back from this date they secure 607 BC for the beginning of the "Gentile Times" — 2520 years. Their arithmetic now does work, for 2520 years from 607 BC yields the correct date, 1914 AD. ($2520 - 607 = 1913$, plus one to adjust for crossing the BC / AD divide, yields 1914). However, they have merely worked the numbers without regard to the facts.

When one actually follows the recorded facts of history, the answer resolves much more satisfactorily. The year 607 BC was not the fall of Zedekiah or the end of the Kingdom of Judah. It was the year the Babylonian armies crossed the Euphrates River in the north, into Israel's "promised land."

Four years later, in 603 BC, the second year of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian records speak of Nebuchadnezzar receiving all the tribute of the kings of the Hatti-land, which includes the land of Israel. The prophet Daniel in that same year declared Nebuchadnezzar to be the "head of gold" of the image of Gentile power (Daniel 2:1, 38).

In other words, the four years from 607 BC to 603 BC saw the conquest of the land of promise, and the subjugation of Judah to the power of Babylon. Going forward 2520 years brings us to the four years from 1914 AD to 1918 AD, which were the four years of World War I. Britain took control of Israel from the Ottoman Empire and declared their intent to make the territory a national homeland for the Jewish people. The parallel is more fitting than formerly — and exactly conforms to the truth of history.

(2) Not "at" Babylon, which is a faulty translation.



Questions of Interest

Responses from Thoughtful Readers

"Thanks to God for these wonderful teaching materials. I have a diploma in Bible study but I have never met such blessed revelation revealed in your pamphlet which I got from a servant of God in Eldoret. The Faithbuilders Fellowship on the Abrahamic covenant blessed my Bible Study group of 25 committed students. Unfortunately, following post election violence, we lost contact with the pastor (who gave him the Faithbuilders journal). My study group is thirsty for more materials. Please, how do we get these wonderful teachings!? — [All readers: this Journal is available on request to any interested party.] — What is the meaning of Christ's Parousia and Millennial Kingdom?" — Kenya

Dear Brother — As to **parousia** — it is the Greek word which means "presence." It refers to the fact that Christ would be present after his return, during the "harvest" period of the age — which we are presently in. "The Harvest is the end of the age" (Matthew 13:39). Thus we announce the presence of Christ, who has returned for three purposes — (a) to gather his saints through the message of present truth, (b) to restore Israel to their land in preparation for the Kingdom, (c) to prepare the world for the kingdom, both with a time of trouble such as the world wars we have passed through, and an increase of technology so that the world can receive the blessings of the kingdom in due time.

The "Millennial Kingdom" refers to Revelation 20:2-6, which says Christ will rule the world for a thousand years (which is a Millennium). That time will be the Seventh Millennium of human history. From the testimony of Scripture we now know that nearly 6000 years from Adam have passed — we lack only 35 years more until the Seventh Millennium.

By then the heavenly call will have closed, but the call to the world to righteousness, and an earthly Kingdom, will then just be beginning. If we are consecrated to God in this life, and prove "faithful unto death" (Revelation 2:10), we will have the unspeakable honor of being with Christ in glory, in the spirit realm, supervising — ruling — with him during his thousand year Millennium. As kings and priests, we will be with him in rescuing the entire world from the thralldom of sin and death, back to life, perfection, and everlasting life. Every man, woman and child who has ever lived will be raised to life then, to share that opportunity.

We warmly encourage your participation with us in the service of the Truth. The world will come to see it soon, but we have the privilege of it now. It opens to us the privilege of walking in the "narrow way" as Christ's disciples — and the glory of the future in the heavenly resurrection.