

3.

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

Chronology is: "the science of ascertaining the fixed periods when past events took place and of arranging them in the order of occurrence." (Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979]). Biblical chronology then is the science of putting together the events and dates which are found in the Bible. This chapter is a simple examination of God's timetable for His work on this earth and approximately where we are on it.

In the Bible we read: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day" (Ex 20:11). God's work of creation and restoration on this present earth consisted of six days with a seventh day of rest. God did not choose to take weeks, months, or billions of years to accomplish this work. (The fact that geology and other sciences seem to indicate an older earth will be dealt with in chapter five.) Our God is capable of doing anything. He could have created the universe in six minutes if He so desired. We should realize that even time is the invention of God which He is using to accomplish His own purposes. Just because we are confined to it does not mean that He is. He exists eternally and is Almighty; there are no limitations on Him whatsoever.

However, our real purpose here is to examine the reason that God had for making the heavens and the earth in six days and resting on the seventh. Why did He do things this way? Why not eight days or five or even 50? Since there is nothing recorded in the Bible which is accidental

or does not have some meaning for us, perhaps there is something about God and His creation which we can understand from it. So, the remainder of this chapter will be an investigation of God's seven days.

There is another very significant verse of scripture which also speaks about "days." Peter, in his second epistle, addresses the question of the end of the age and the second coming of the Lord. In this context he says: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet 3:8). In this verse is the key to understanding the six days of creation. It contains a fact that the writer considered very important and about which he was concerned that believers would not be ignorant. Here we find a simple equation. One day equals one thousand years and one thousand years equals one day. To take this one step further we could say that one day of creation represents one thousand years of time which God has allotted man upon this earth and one thousand years corresponds to one day of creation. Lest some of you think that I am taking this too far, let us investigate some Biblical chronology.

Although many people do not realize it, through the years some very scholarly men of God have studied Biblical chronology. Among them are: Theophilus of Antioch (3rd century A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (3rd century A.D.), Eusebius (265-340 A.D.), Wm. Hales (fl. 1809), J. N. Darby, and Martin Anstey, to name just a few. One publication which may be of interest to the readers is: *Chronology of the Old Testament* by Martin Anstey, published by Kregel Publications in Grand Rapids, MI.

These men and others have traced the often slender thread of dates through the scriptures to arrive at a very good idea of how many years it has been since the creation of Adam and Eve as well as the timing of important events, such as God's covenant with Abraham and the advent of Christ. Although no two of these men agree completely on every date, the interesting thing is that almost without exception they are very close to one another. Within a reasonable amount of "scientific error" and

considering the great age of the documents and dates with which they must work, they essentially agree. Most of them come within one hundred to two hundred years of each other.

Now for a simple person like myself, such in-depth study of ancient history is a bit beyond my scope. But since these scholars agree with one another to a reasonable extent, I am inclined to accept their learned opinion. Peter the fisherman's brief chronology is more in my league. The surprising thing is however that Peter and the scholars agree! Their study and his revelation do not contradict one another. As one would suspect, honest intellectual investigation only serves to further support the Word of God.

Did you realize that according to the Bible the present earth has been in existence for almost six thousand years? Since the six days of creation until now about six thousand years have elapsed. Another interesting observation is that from the beginning of this world until Abraham was about two thousand years; from Abraham until Christ, about two thousand years; and from the birth of Jesus Christ until today, two thousand years. This is no coincidence. God's plan and His way of carrying out His plan since the creation are very orderly. There is nothing haphazard or disjointed about it. Things are going just the way He intended them to, and as time goes by His masterful plan unfolds.

Let us assume here that when Peter wrote about one day being equal to one thousand years he meant something specific by it and was not simply being poetic. Imagine for a moment that when God spoke these words through Peter, He was revealing something to us which could be of use in comprehending His timetable and that He was speaking to us about the end of the age. To go further, let us believe just what the Bible says and take heed to it. God chose to make the earth, the heaven, the sea and all that is in them in six days because He had already decided that man's time upon the earth would be six thousand years (of course let us not forget the seventh thousand). Since the "I Am" of creation knows both the beginning and the end, He planned to do things in this way.

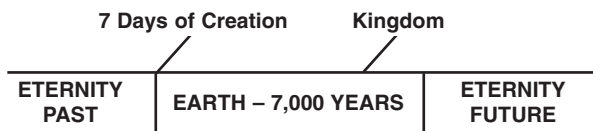
Much later He revealed this to Peter the apostle for our edification and benefit.

These observations all point to one thing. We are rapidly approaching the end of this age. We are on the very verge of its completion! We stand upon the threshold of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His Millennial (one thousand year) Kingdom upon this earth. And all this corresponds exactly to the six days of creation and the seventh day of sabbath rest. The simple chronology of Peter the fisherman is correct and is attested to by all the other scriptures. The prophetic utterances in the Bible, including the words of Jesus concerning the restoration of Jerusalem to the Jews (Lk 21:24) and the signs of His second coming, point to this fact – we are rapidly approaching the end of the six days, the completion of the age.

We have said all this to build up to one conclusion and that is that there is a seventh day coming, a one thousand year period of time, which is the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ. God is not through with the earth yet. If Jesus returned today, there would still be at least one thousand years of time on this earth remaining. The next stop for God's people is not heaven. Those who are already with the Lord will come back with Him and assist Him in setting up His heavenly Kingdom on the earth (Jude 14). God still has some work to do here in this world. And His people have the privilege of helping Him do it. Jesus is in the business of subduing the whole earth unto Himself. All the nations, the people in them, even the animals and the environment will be put in subjection to Him. This is the Kingdom of Heaven come down to the earth. This is the Father's answer to the first part of the "Lord's prayer" – "Thy kingdom come...on earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10 NASB).

Let us now take time for a brief summary. God has always existed and will exist eternally. So before the earth was created He was there, without time, in what can be called "eternity past." At some point He created the earth and later decided after a conference with Himself to make man and place him on it (Gen 1:26). In the process He also

created what we call "time" and confined man to it. The creating process took six days plus one day of rest, which corresponds to the time which God has allotted to man to dwell on the earth and accomplish His purpose. These seven days are a foreshadowing of the seven thousand years during which man will have inhabited this present earth. Then after the last one thousand years, which is the Kingdom reign of Christ, God will dissolve both the old heavens and the old earth and create new ones. There will be new heavens and a new earth. This is what most people call "eternity." For our purposes we will refer to it as "eternity future." Man then has been allotted a seven thousand year period on earth in between two "eternities."



It is at the end of the last one thousand years that the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, is seen descending out of heaven from God (Rev 21:10). This holy city will then be located on the new earth which God will create. The New Jerusalem and the new earth are what most people are referring to when they talk about spending eternity in "heaven." Actually it is not heaven at all but a whole new creation. Of course it will be heavenly in nature. In fact it will be a whole lot better than the present heaven, since what exists today has been polluted by the sin of the fallen angels and will completely pass away (Mark 13:31). If heaven today were what God considered perfect, there would be no need for Him to destroy it (II Pet 3:10-13). No, what God has prepared for those who love Him is glorious indeed. It is an entirely new creation, the thought of which has not entered into the mind of man, but which God is revealing to His servants (I Cor 2:9,10).

Now for a word of caution. Although this little chronology of events is very simple, we cannot be too sure about their exact timing. We are told the order of the things to come, but we are not told exactly when they will occur. As

a matter of fact, the scripture plainly tells us that no one will know the exact day or the hour (Mt 24:36). Specifically, we do not know just when our Lord Jesus will return and usher in the Millennial Kingdom. God has given us the prophecies and the timetable of six thousand years, but no one knows perfectly when it will be.

It has already been mentioned that the Bible chronologers seem to agree within one hundred to two hundred years. Even they, scholarly though they might be, cannot be certain of the date. We do know that it will be about two thousand years from the first appearing of Christ. But where shall we begin counting? Shall we count from His death or from His birth? As you know our calendar begins roughly near the time of His birth (give or take three to five years). Just because secular history has chosen this date as its reference point does not mean that God has. A very powerful argument could be made that His death at Calvary is the real focal point of history and the turning point for mankind. What I am saying here is: even though the year 2,000 A.D. has come and gone and Jesus has not yet returned, don't give up your faith. God is not slack as men count slackness. He is just not willing that any should perish. If we were to calculate the two thousand years from His death and resurrection, we would not even expect Him until the year 2,030.

As a matter of fact, the verse in II Peter about which we have been talking was written to address this very problem. People who have been expecting the Lord and looking for His coming will become disappointed and disillusioned. Towards the end some will even begin scoffing and asking, "Where is the promise of His coming?" No doubt many will be questioning this very thing if He delays longer than we think He should. Some Bible teachers will begin to invent new doctrines to explain away the Millennium and/or the second coming. Many Christians may even turn away from following Jesus because their hopes were raised again and again by preachers predicting the advent of Christ and then dashed when it did not happen. In these days when wickedness is abounding there is a great temptation for our love for the Lord to grow cold.

While others are enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season, Jesus is asking us to deny ourselves and follow Him. If His coming does not coincide with our concepts, we may be tempted to disbelieve and fall away. I myself had expected the return of Jesus during the 20th century. But since He has not yet come, I by His mercy will not abandon my faith, and neither should you. Our faith should not be based upon a timetable but upon Him.

In reality the teaching of the scriptures is that we should live each moment as if He were coming today. Our lives and our hearts should be ready for Him. The attitude we need to cultivate is one of constantly watching and waiting. If we do this then we will be ready. Then He will find us doing His will. As we willingly subject ourselves to His Lordship and live in His Kingdom today, there will be no problem tomorrow. "Blessed is that servant, whom his master will find so doing when He comes" (Lk 12:43).

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF DARBY'S CHRONOLOGY

Years

From the creation to the flood, when Noah was 600 yrs. old (Gen. 5:3-29; 7:11) . . .	1656
From the flood to the birth of Terah (Gen 11:10-25)	222
When his father died at the age of 205 yrs., Abraham was 75	130
Which fixes his birth, from the creation at	2,008
His entrance into the land of Canaan took place 75 yrs. later (Gen 12:4)	75
Up to the exodus from Egypt (Gen 15:13,16; Ex 12:40)	430
Up to the building of the temple 480 yrs. later	480
Length of Solomon's reign, less three yrs. already past (I Kings 6:1)	37
Kings of Israel and Judah, up to the captivity in Babylon	370
Length of the captivity 70 yrs., and up to Nehemiah 80 yrs	150
Sixty-nine "weeks" less 33 yrs. (Dan 9:26)	450
From creation to the birth of the Messiah	4,000