

Spiritual Blessings



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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3

The Book Of Acts (2)

By John Hutton, Newcastle, Australia.

Read Ex. 6:1-8

In the last study, I pointed out that in Scripture the title, ‘God’s people’, belongs exclusively to Israel and is based upon the covenant God made with Himself to Abraham in Gen. 15.

The people of Israel had gone into Egypt to escape a great famine in Canaan. They had a good beginning in Egypt because of the presence of Joseph and the position that he had in the Egyptian hierarchy. In the few hundred years between going to Egypt and the Exodus, Israel had grown in such numbers that the Egyptians feared they might rebel and take over Egypt, so they greatly oppressed the Israelites. Their life in Egypt had become one of bondage, and they cried out for relief. God heard their groaning and decided to get them out of Egypt. We know the story so well that we will not go into it in detail. In the reading above, however, the word ‘redeem’ occurs for the first time in Scripture. Ex.6:6, “... I am the Lord ... I will rescue you ... I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.”

Notice that God said that He would redeem them by bringing them out of the bondage of Egypt. Consider the following passages which continue the ‘Redemption’ theme.

Ex. 15:1–21, the ‘Song of Moses’. Note verse 13.

“Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them

in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.”

Deut. 7:7-8.

“The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: ⁸But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Deut. 21:8.

“Be merciful, O LORD, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel’s charge.”

The Book of Deuteronomy was written to the generation of Israel who were 20 years old or less when they came out of Egypt. God had sentenced all Israelites over 20 years of age to die in the wilderness because of their unbelief. The only exceptions to that were Joshua and Caleb. Deut. 24:18.

“But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there ...”

Isa. 43:1 & 2.

“But now thus saith the LORD, who created you, O Jacob ... Fear not, for I have redeemed you: I

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President's Word

As you are aware, David and Janelle Tavender both felt the need to retire from their positions on the committee, Janelle for health reasons and David because of time constraints that this has placed on him. Thankfully I am able to tell you that Janelle is responding well to the treatment, and your continued prayers and support for them are appreciated.

The new committee is listed on the last page of this issue of Spiritual Blessings. Please uphold us in prayer as we adjust to our new roles, especially as the annual conference draws near. As the incoming President, I say a hearty thanks to the committee for stepping into the new roles so seamlessly and willingly. Let's face it, none of us thought, a few months ago, that we would be holding the positions we do now. By the time you receive this issue, Karen Milford will have been voted onto the committee as secretary. She volunteered her services, and is excited to be a part of the fellowship in that capacity.

As mentioned, the annual conference is fast approaching. Those who attend on a regular basis know the rich time of teaching and fellowship that we all enjoy. At this time of year many of us try to think of ways we can encourage others to attend, because we are sure they will have as good a time as we do. And the question we have to ask ourselves is "What can we say that will convince people to attend?" In the end, all we can really do is to assure you that it will be well worth the effort if you can possibly do so. Please give it prayerful thought. We would love to see you there.

Speaking of which, a registration form has been inserted into this issue, please get this back to Sue as soon as possible if you know you are attending. And if you are still uncertain about attending, may we encourage you?... Enough said.

This year the conference will be held at the Bethshan Conference Centre in Wyee, on the beautiful NSW Central Coast. There is a link to Bethshan on the Spiritual Blessings website, go to the "Meetings" tab and press on "Annual Conference" and the link to "Bethshan Conference Centre" in the first paragraph.

While you are visiting the website you might as well take a look around, especially if you have not already done so. There is a wealth of information at your fingertips with many articles to read, books to download etc. I am sure you will be pleasantly surprised and delighted at the

range of information and material available. You could spend days in there without exhausting it. Let someone else know about the website too, maybe put a 'signature' on your emails referring people to the website, or maybe even a sign on the rear window of your car.

My apologies to the Brisbane folk who missed out on a Bible study weekend this year. Events out of our control made it all but an impossibility. Next year we will pull out all stops to make sure something is arranged for you. Do you want a Bible study day/weekend where you are? Getting a few people together and asking for a speaker is all that is needed, we will do our best to accommodate your request - within reason that is.

Finally, thank you again to all those who support the work of the BBFA in any capacity - by praying, donations, attendance at regular meetings or in any other way. Until next time,

Frank Haegler

Editorial

Since our last issue, changes have taken place in the BBFA Committee, but our commitment to serving our Lord remains the same. One way of doing this is to issue this little magazine at reasonably regular intervals, and we pray that the contents will, at the very least, send you to your Bible like the Bereans of old, to see if what we are saying squares with God's Word.

John Hutton continues his study of Acts, together with associated subjects, and I go off into some of the twists and turns of Bible Chronology.

Back in June, we had a great day of Bible study at Thornton, near Newcastle, NSW, and Clem Milgate has written a report of it.

I recently received a letter from a friend of mine, Philip Millner, asking a question about an article on Resurrection that was in the Sept/Oct. 2010 issue. Philip has graciously allowed his letter to be printed, and with it, you will find my reply. Please join the discussion if you wish to. The subject is certainly a vital one.

What has been your reaction to some of the almost unbelievable events taking place in various parts of the world, such as the massacres in Norway, the riots and looting in England, and the upheavals in the Middle East? There seems to be nothing but strife and upheaval all around. But I trust you know the peace of God that passes understanding, that is ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Athol Walter.

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have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you ...”

Isa. 44:21-22.

“... Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.”

Isa. 62:12.

“And they shall call them The Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord ...”

Hosea 7:13.

“For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants”.

Zech. 10:8

“I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them”.

What is Israel called in these verses? These are not a few isolated verses. Israel is said to be a redeemed people in other places in the OT, the last being Zechariah. That Israel are said to be a redeemed people in Isaiah is remarkable, isn't it? Why? Think about this:-

The Exodus took place about 1490BC. Isaiah was written about 600BC, approx. 900 years later. Yet every Israelite living at the time of Isaiah was counted as 'redeemed' by God because of an event which occurred 900 years earlier in the lives of their ancestors.

Don't you wish that the same thing happened for us today? If it did, we wouldn't have to worry about our children, would we!

All of the Bible is for us, but it is not all about us! When we learn that lesson we will be less prone to make errors in our understanding and application of it.

Who did the Lord come to in His earthly ministry?
His own People! God's redeemed nation! But they were not saved.

When you and I were saved, several things happened to us. We were born again, i.e. born of the Spirit, we were saved from paying the price of our sin, we were redeemed by the blood of Christ, we were justified by faith and we were sanctified. Can you think of anything else? All these things are different, but we received them at the same time. Israel were redeemed and sanctified. What does sanctify mean? To be set apart. Israel were not born again, they were not justified by faith, they were not saved from paying the price of sin.

Be careful what you do with what you read in the Old Testament. Doctrinal subjects, such as 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God', don't change, but other subjects that belong to particular dispensations, do change, and we must 'test the things that differ'. (Phil. 1:9, 10)

Is this 'discernment' necessary in the New Testament? I believe it is. If we recognise that some parts of the NT are not about us or to us, it will start to make more sense.

Now turn to Matthew 5. In chs. 5, 6 & 7 of Matthew, the Lord is teaching what is called 'the Sermon on the Mount'. Look at 5:1. Some teach that the Lord saw the crowds, left them, went up in to a mountain and when His disciples came to Him, He taught only the disciples. Look at verse 1 again. 'The Lord saw the multitudes'. If you are going to speak to a crowd, what is the best place to do it from? Somewhere higher than the crowd, from which you will be seen and heard. If the Lord went up to a higher place so that the crowd could see and hear Him, where do you think that His disciples would want to be? As close as they could get to Him, wouldn't they?

Look at 7:28. KJV & NKJV say 'the people'. The NIV and YLT say 'the multitudes'. The Greek word for 'multitude' is 'ochlos', which occurs in both 5:1 and 7:28. The crowd was there in the beginning and they were there at the end of the sermon. The Lord preached the 'Sermon on the Mount' to a big crowd.

You can learn a lot by noticing what is not said when trying to understand Scripture. There is a word that is missing altogether and one word that is only used once in the 'Sermon on the Mount', two words that we would use over and over again if we were preaching the Gospel today to unbelievers. Can you think what they are? The word 'believe' is not used at all in 'the Sermon on the Mount' and the word 'faith' only once.

Now go back and read Matt. 5:3-10. There is nothing in these verses about accepting who the Lord was or having sins forgiven. They were indeed sinners, but He was not addressing them as such. He was addressing them as the redeemed people of Israel. Look at v. 13:

“You are the salt of the earth ...”

If you were preaching to a crowd of unbelievers, would you tell them that they were the salt of the earth or would you tell them they needed to have their sins forgiven?

I repeat, the Lord was not addressing them as sinners, but as the redeemed people of Israel who were falling down on their job. What was Israel's job as far as the earth was concerned? See v. 14:

“Ye are the light of the world.”

We have the same thing here. He was addressing redeemed Israel and pointing out what their position was in the world as far as God was concerned, from the time of Abraham, at least up until the Sermon on the Mount.

Now to 6:25-32.

Do these verses apply to you? If so, why do you go to work? If you receive a pension, why? If you go to a clothes shop to buy clothes, why? No, it does not apply to believers in this Dispensation, but when the Kingdom comes God will take care of all of Israel's temporal needs.

In v. 32, the Lord makes a contrast between those listening to Him, and other people. Who were the people in this crowd who were listening to Him? Jews. And who were they said to be better than? Gentiles! If you were a Gentile in the crowd that day, you could be excused for thinking that the speaker was a bigot. You could be excused if you walked away thinking that the message was not for you. And you would have been right, for the Lord was addressing the redeemed people of Israel.

There are some interesting commands in Matt. 10:5-6.

“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles ... But go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.”

Please read Matt. 8:1-4. Here the Lord healed a Jew without any hesitation. But now read verses 5-10.

Here was a Gentile and the Lord healed him. No difference to the Jew healed in verses 1-4, was there – or was there?

Turn to Luke 7, where we read of the same incident. Compare the two passages. Can you see the additional information that Luke gives that Matthew left out?

“And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: ⁵For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. ⁶Then Jesus went with them’.

What they were saying was that the

centurion was worthy to have his servant healed. Why was he worthy to receive a miracle? The answer is in Gen.12:3.

“I will bless those who bless you ...”

What about a Gentile who had not blessed Israel in some way or other? We have an example in Matt. 15:22-28. Notice that, at first, the Syro-phenician woman used the same title that blind Bartimeus had used – ‘Son of David’.

Here was an ordinary Gentile woman with no elders of Israel to plead her cause. What was the Lord's initial reaction to her plea? He ignored her! What was the disciples reaction to her? “Send her away!”

Did you notice that this Gentile woman knew that Gentiles were looked on differently to Jews? In verse 24, the Lord tells her that He was not sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In verse 26, He tells her that it was not right to give Israel's bread to dogs, i.e. Gentiles. In verse 27, she said that she knew about Gentiles being unworthy or less worthy in God's sight when she said, ‘True Lord’. It was only when the woman acknowledged she had no right as a non-Jew, and addressed Jesus as ‘Lord’ instead of ‘Son of David’, that He granted her prayer. Then from v. 29 on, we are told of the Lord healing multitudes.

Let us summarise the Lord's healing ministry. The Lord heals a Jew without any reason at all other than he was Jew, and almost all of those healed in the Gospels were Jews. He heals a Gentile because he had blessed Israel and fulfilled God's promise in Gen. 12. He heals another Gentile but not without first putting her in her place. This brings us, finally, to the Book of Acts and the Acts period.

Please read Luke 24:44-45.

“... and He opened their (i.e. the disciples’) understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures.”

Then in Acts 1:3, we read that, during the forty days following His resurrection, the Lord taught the disciples about the Kingdom of God. When this teaching was concluded, the disciples had one question, which we find in v. 6.

“... Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

We will leave Pentecost and the story of Cornelius until a later study.

Turn now to Acts 11:1 & 2.

Who is present at this meeting? They had been with the Lord after His resurrection and had been taught by the Lord with the eyes of their understanding opened, hadn't they? Now v. 18.

“When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’”

What had not been included in those 40 days of teaching after the resurrection? Anything about Gentiles being saved!

The inclusion of Gentiles into the company of believers at that time caused conflict for many Jewish believers. The situation was resolved some time later by a decree from the Jerusalem church, stating that all that was required of Gentile converts was to abstain from food offered to idols, from eating blood, from things strangled and from fornication (See Acts 15).

Paul's Epistle to the Romans was the last book written by anyone in the Bible in the Acts period. So let's see what it has to say about the relative position of Jewish and Gentile believers. Turn to Romans 1:16

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

Feedback

Letter to the Editor from Philip Millner, Duns Creek, NSW.

Dear Athol,

I enjoyed reading your article 'Resurrection' in the Sept/Oct, 2010 issue. In the article, you ask the reader who he believes, Plato or Paul. You gave us lots of information on Paul's viewpoint, which I read with interest, but you tell us very little – indeed practically nothing – about Plato's views, which are extensively documented both in his Republic and in his Phaedo.

If I had to choose between one or the other, I could not commit myself unless I had just as much information on the views of the Greek philosophers on such matters as immortality and the belief in Heaven/Hell. I think that these concepts are basic to our understanding of some of the big questions.

I look forward to your response.

Yours etc, Philip Millner.

Did Paul act in accordance with his own words? Look at Acts 17:1 & 2.

“... they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.”

What was Paul's commission? To be the Apostle to the Gentiles, but he always went to the Jews first during his ministry in Acts. In Romans 3:1-2 and 9:1-5, Paul gives the reasons for Israel's primary position in the Acts period. And he is nothing if not consistent, for his first official act when he finally arrives at Rome is to arrange a meeting with the Jewish leaders there. Read about it in Acts 28:20–29

Let us finish this study by going to the first book written after the Acts period. Please read Eph. 2:11-13

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh ... Uncircumcision ... without Christ ... aliens ...having no hope and without God in the world. But now ...”

Two questions to be looked at in the next study:

1. Why was the Jew still so prominent in the Acts ?
2. Why were Gentiles let in at all?

The Editor's reply:

Dear Philip,

Thank you for your letter and your request. I'm not sure that I can give you all that you ask for, as to go through all that Plato had to say on life, death and immortality etc, would take more time than I can give..

I think, however, that one does not need a lot of information about Plato's views to make a judgment between his thoughts and what the Bible's teaching about death and resurrection. And I have no desire to denigrate Plato, who has wielded a tremendous influence on western ideas, particularly in the realm of philosophy. For the Bible believer, however, the Word of God is the final arbiter of thought and belief.

From the reading I have done, Plato appears to have believed in the immortality of the soul, that

Cont. on p. 7

Thornton Bible Study Day.

By Clem Milgate, with a little help from his wife, Julie.

It was good to see approx. 40 people attend the Study Day on Sat. June 11th. at Thornton Community Centre. It was great to see some new folk among them.

The day started at 10 am with a 'cuppa' and refreshments, catching up with old friends and also meeting new ones. Then Peter Ward led us all in some rousing hymn-singing and an opening prayer.

Athol Walter was the speaker for both the morning and afternoon studies. His subject was "Why I believe Acts 28 is the Dispensational Boundary". In the first study, Athol looked at the BBFA's fourth tenet, as this is the one that differentiates us from most other Christian groups. It states that we believe the Scriptures must be rightly divided. We are sometimes accused of 'cutting up Scripture', but all believers are dispensational, or in other words, divide the Scriptures in some way or other. For example, no one argues about the division between Old and New Testaments, and even those who observe Saturday as the Sabbath Day, put aside other parts of the Mosaic Law, such as the choosing and killing of an unblemished lamb at Passover time. But it is the claim of 'Ultra-Dispensationalists (as we are sometimes called), that the "Church", the Body of Christ, was not revealed until God, through Paul, set Israel aside at the end of the Book of Acts, that causes the strongest reaction.

Then Athol showed that in the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son, in Matt. 22:1-7, the Lord pictured the actual events that were unfolding for Israel during His ministry and in the years that followed. V. 3, in which the King sends his servants to those who were invited to the wedding, i. e. Israel, refers to the ministry of both John the Baptist and the Lord Himself. Their message was, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". But they would not come. V. 4 records the second call to those who had been invited, "... all things are now ready. Come to the feast". Everything was ready for the great feast – Christ, the Passover Lamb had been slain – but they refused the invitation the second time. This refers to the ministry of the Apostles and others during Acts, and even a casual reading of Acts shows that, indeed, the messengers were treated spitefully and even killed.

V. 7. records the reaction of the king when he heard that his invitation had been refused the second time. "The king ... was furious. He sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city."

Athol referred to Luke 23:32-34, where the Lord, as He was being placed on the Cross, prayed for Israel's forgiveness because they were acting in ignorance. He then concluded the first session, by reminding us that in the parable, the king had destroyed those who had refused his invitation, and burned up their city. This had actually happened in AD 70. We were then asked this question. If the destruction of Jerusalem was the punishment for Israel's rejection of their Messiah, and if, as is commonly taught, Israel was set aside by God at the Cross, why was the punishment not inflicted immediately following the Lord's Crucifixion, rather than being held back for forty years until after the end of the witness of the Apostles in Acts?

At that point, the 'Students at Thornton' needed to break for lunch. This was another great time for fellowship over bowls of soup and other goodies, thanks to Sue Hall and all the ladies who helped with the catering. Then, after much chatting and browsing through the bookstall (which included many 'freebies') it was time to settle down for the afternoon session, and find out what happened next.

Once again, Peter had us all on our feet again for another good singalong, although with full stomachs, it wasn't so easy! But it is always inspirational.

A short prayer, then Athol was back into Acts 28. He stressed that Acts 28:28 was the actual point where the change of Dispensation took place. He then spoke about the difference between basic doctrines, such as universal sin and death, salvation only through faith in Christ, and dispensational doctrines that change; for example, the various places of blessing for different sections of God's family, such as the promised land, the New Jerusalem and Heavenly Places at God's right hand.

To illustrate this point, Athol told of a time when he was visiting New Zealand, and barely avoided a serious car accident because he assumed that the road rules there were the same as in Australia. It was useless to say that he and the other driver were both

humans and had the same needs of eating, drinking and sleeping, therefore everything else should be the same. No. He had crossed the boundary and the Australian road rules did not apply in New Zealand, and he had to adopt those changes if he wished to stay out of trouble. In the same way, when we cross the boundary line between the dispensation when God is dealing primarily with Israel, and enter the 'new country' where the 'road rules' for Israel no longer apply, and different 'road rules' for members of the Body of Christ are given through Paul, the Steward of the Dispensation of the Mystery, we must observe the new rules in our lives, otherwise, we will not be walking worthy of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

One aspect that Athol then concentrated on was that of the signs and gifts. These abounded in the ministry of the Lord and of those whom He sent out during the Gospel period. He also told His disciples that in the future, they would perform greater miracles than He, and the Book of Acts is full of these 'signs and wonders'. Some expositors believe that the signs tapered off throughout Acts until they had ceased by the last chapter, but one only has to read the first half

of Acts 28 to see that Paul suffered no consequences when he was bitten by a deadly snake, and then went on to heal many sick folk on the island. But, in spite of the claims of some sections of Christendom today, these signs are now conspicuous by their absence. Even Paul tells us in several of his epistles written after Acts, that he was unable to heal some of his closest colleagues. This one great change alone is sufficient to prove that there was indeed a change of dispensation at Acts 28:28.

Athol rounded off the day with a short explanation of the Mystery that was revealed through Paul after the end of Acts. It is found with all its amazing blessings in his epistles such as Ephesians, Colossians, etc. These truths apply to all who are members of the Body of Christ, and we are so fortunate to be part of this Church.

The afternoon was nearly over, but there was just time for one more 'cuppa', to pack everything up, say our goodbyes and acknowledge that it was truly a day of blessing for all who attended.

Make sure you don't miss the next one!

Feedback, cont. from p. 5.

the soul is "reborn" many times, with philosophers being fast-tracked to the destination faster than others. After this the soul speeds away to heavenly bliss.

This process of 'rebirth' of the soul seems to be akin to the doctrine of re-incarnation held by some eastern religions, in which the soul is condemned to relive life in various forms until they can achieve the desired state of nirvana.

In contrast to this, the Bible teaches that, as a result of Adam's sin, Adam and all his descendants are subject to death and decay. One only has to look around to see how true this is.

God told Adam that if he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would die. Satan, in his temptation of Eve, said in total denial, "You will not die", and this has become a basic belief of most religions ever since. And it has been through the influence of Greek philosophers such as Plato, that the concept of the undying – the immortal – soul has become entrenched in much Christian teaching.

But Paul states that Jesus Christ is the only one who has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16), which must mean that we don't have it as yet. What the believer

has is the **promise** of eternal life through faith in Christ. (See 2 Tim. 1:1, 1 John 2:25, Titus 1:1, 2).

In contrast to Plato's many rebirths of the soul, the Bible states unequivocally that humans die, after which, in due course, they face the judgement of God (Heb. 9:27).

It is the clear and simple message of the Gospel that the **ONLY** way to escape that judgement and the punishment for rejecting God's offer of life in Christ Jesus, is indeed, to bow in penitence before God, recognising that when His Son died on the Cross, He was paying the penalty of death that is rightfully ours.

And that brings me back to the subject of my article, Philip. Resurrection is the key word for us. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 15, without the resurrection to life in and through Christ, which is the promise to the believer, we are lost in the fullest meaning of the word.

I apologise that I cannot give a comprehensive summary of Plato's teaching. If I could, would it have made any difference? I think not. The issue is still the same. Who do you believe, Plato or Paul?

Yours in the love of Christ,
Athol Walter.

How Are You With Biblical Chronology?

By Athol Walter

The Bible contains many chronological statements that are an integral part of the record, but these often receive little attention from many believers.

However, it is important that we get some understanding of biblical chronology, because it will help in our understanding of what God is doing in human affairs. But before we go any further, see how you go with these few chronological questions.

1. How old was Joseph when his brothers sold him as a slave?
2. How old was the Lord Jesus when He began His ministry?
3. In what year was the Lord born?
4. How old was Esau when Jacob was born?
5. How old was Jacob when he ran away from home and went to his Uncle Laban?

We'll get to the answers later.

For many people, whenever there is a conflict between a historical or chronological statement in Scripture and a reference in some secular writing, their immediate reaction is to assume that the Bible is wrong. But our approach is different. We believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word, so our attitude is that, if there is a conflict between the Bible and some other source or if we can't understand something, then the Bible is right and the other source or our understanding must be wrong. Then, by patient, prayerful searching, the answers will come. I hope that is your attitude, as it is mine.

One problem I have with chronology is that I have trouble with numbers. I don't mean that I distrust the Bible's numbers, but rather that maths is not my strong point. For instance, when I see calculations in dates that go back into the BC realm I get confused, because they go backwards. I have enough trouble adding up forwards, let alone trying to do it in reverse!

This raises an small but important point with the BC dating that we must know. BC, of course, means 'Before Christ' and AD is 'Anno Domine', meaning 'In the year of Our Lord'. Now follow me here. BC 4, BC 3, BC 2, BC 1, ...? What comes next? Not BC 0 and neither AD 0, but AD 1. There is no year zero, but I expect it, so I get thrown.

Now let's go back to the beginning. The first chronological statement in Scripture is in Gen. 5:3. "Adam lived 130 years and begot a son ... and named him Seth". Isn't it interesting that there are no ages given for the births of Cain and Abel. I'll tell you why I think this is so later.

Then we are told that Seth was 105 when his son Enosh was born; Enosh was 90 when Cainan was born; and so on to the last verse of ch. 5, where we read that Noah was 500 years old and begat Shem, Ham and Japheth. That verse presents something of a problem, but before we consider it, I want you to notice something else in Gen. 4:17 & 18:-

"Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch ... To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael: and Mehujael begot Methusael; and Methusael begot Lamech."

Have you spotted what's missing? There are no ages given in this line. Why not? Because this is not the line to the Messiah. This principle is true all the way through the Old Testament. Ages are given for the families in the line to the Messiah only. This, I think, is why there are no ages given when Cain and Abel were born – Cain, because he was not to be in the line, and Abel, because he died before producing any children.

Now go to Gen. 11:26: "Now Terah lived seventy years and begot Abram, Nahor and Haran." So, who was the firstborn? Look at 11:32: "So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran." So far so good. Now 12:4. "And Abraham was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran."

We have here a simple bit of arithmetic which even I can handle. Abram left Haran after his father died there. Terah was 205 when he died, and Abram was 75 when he left Haran. By subtracting 75 from 205 we find that Terah was 130 years old when Abram was born. This means that Abram was not the oldest of Terah's three sons, because Terah was 70 when he had his first child. Abram, probably, was the youngest.

There is an important point here. All the information we needed to find out how old Terah

was when Abram was born was there in the Scriptural narrative all the time. I believe this is true for most chronological matters in the Bible. The information you need is not always as close by as the information about Terah and Abram, but it is in the Bible somewhere. We just need to do some work to find it.

Let's come now to the last of the questions I asked earlier. How old was Jacob when he ran away from home and went to his Uncle Laban?

Gen 47:28.	Jacob died in Egypt at age	147
"	Subtract years Jacob was in Egypt	<u>-17</u>
47:9	Jacob came to Egypt when he was	130
45:6	which was after 2 yrs famine	<u>-2</u>
	at which time Jacob was	128
41:47	Take away preceding years of plenty	<u>-7</u>
	at the start of which Jacob was	121
41:46	Joseph was then	<u>-30</u>
	So Jacob at Joseph's birth was	91
29:20,27	Subtract years Jacob laboured	
	for Leah and Rachel	<u>-14</u>
	So when he went to Laban, Jacob was	77

The Life of the Lord

Now let's think about chronology connected with the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that the Lord was born in 4 BC, because He was born just a little before King Herod died, which was in 4 BC.

But why do we have 4 BC for the Lord's birth, if BC means before Christ? Answer: The length of the solar year is not exactly 365 days, so it has taken a long time to get a calendar that stays in step with the seasons. The Gregorian calendar we now use is almost exact, needing only the occasional adjustment of a leap year.

In AD 525, Pope John 1 asked a Roman abbot, Dionysius Exiguus, to prepare a standard calendar for the church, so all the feast days and saints' days could be observed properly. But somehow, Dionysius made a mistake of four years, and we have been stuck with that mistake ever since.

In Luke 3:1-3 we read it was in the 15th. year of Tiberias that John the Baptist started his public work. The 15th. year of Tiberias translates to AD 26. It would seem that the Lord came to John to be baptized in that same year, and after the wilderness temptation, began His public ministry. Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus was about 30 years of age at the time.

Now turn to Luke 4:16-19. Do those words make you think of anything in particular? One writer suggests that the Lord was proclaiming a year of

Jubilee! It is an interesting thought. The same writer also claims that the Lord's ministry lasted for exactly three and a half years. I can readily accept that, for 3½ years is quite a significant time in Israel's prophetic timetable.

But more to the point, by adding the 3½ years to AD 26 we arrive at AD 30 for the year of the Crucifixion at the Passover Feast. I am well aware that other dates – from AD 29 to 33 – are given for the Crucifixion, but I have a liking for 30. Why? Because the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, forty years later, and forty is a significant number connected with testing in the Bible.

Regarding the Temple destruction, here is something of interest. To the Jews, the 9th day of the month Ab is a very solemn day. 9th of Ab is about mid-July for us. But it was on that day in 586 BC that the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Another temple was built in Jerusalem by the returning exiles, and this temple was greatly enlarged and decorated by Herod the Great. It too was destroyed, this time by the Romans under Titus in AD 70. Have a guess as to the date. 9th Ab. But 9th Ab crops up once again in Jewish history, in the year AD 135 to be precise. That was the date when Simon Bar Kochba, who set himself up as the Messiah and led another revolt against Rome, was crushed by the Romans. It does seem that God might have a sense of timing.

One last point. It is quite possible to construct a continuous time line from Adam right through to the birth of the Lord Jesus using the chronological material given in the Bible, and more than one scholar has done so. Probably the most famous is Archbishop Ussher (1581-1656).

Now when all the figures are calculated, the births of John the Baptist and his cousin, Jesus the Christ, occurred in the year of humanity 4,000. If your reaction is 'So what?', think about this. There are reasons to believe that the purposes of God will be worked out on the platform of this planet of ours, over a period of seven days of one thousand years each. The Lord's first coming was at the end of the fourth day. His second coming will be at the end of the 6th day, which is not too far away. And His coming will usher in the seventh day, otherwise known as the Millennium.

New Testament Developments

When we compare the chronological statements in the New Testament with those in the Old, we find that they are, in the main, strangely absent. The birth of the Lord Jesus

is dated, and we are given the age of the Lord when He started His ministry. From then on, however, the passage of time is not specifically recorded.

One other time mark that should be noted, however, is the day on which the Lord presented Himself to Israel as their Messiah. He rode into Jerusalem on an ass, thus fulfilling prophecy, and I believe the day on which it took place, was the literal fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah. Biblical Chronologists differ in their calculations of the day, but all agree that day was THE day specified by Daniel. I will leave readers to do their own research on that one*.

While it may be difficult to assign actual dates in Acts and for Paul's epistles, we can get a clear picture of the way God's purposes unfolded, and I believe it is vital to have this development clearly in mind. I am also convinced that it is the lack of clarity in this area that leads to much misunderstanding of the position of believers in God's purposes today.

As we well know, the New Testament opens with the births of John and the Lord Jesus. This leads into their ministry, a call to Israel to repent for the Kingdom of Heaven (or God) is upon them. Now let's tabulate the main points.

Gospel period.

The Call to Israel, by both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus, to repent and accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Disciples sent out with same message, but only to Israel (Matt. 10:5). Miraculous signs and wonders prominent.

But Israel say NO, and crucify their Messiah. Gospels conclude with the Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord. The Lord, however, had prayed for Israel's forgiveness (Luke 23:34), which accounts for the second offer of Jesus as Israel's Messiah during the years of the Book of Acts.

ACTS

An important point to notice here is that Israel was not set aside by God just after the Cross. From Acts 1 right through to Acts 28:28, Israel is still the focus of God's purpose.

Acts 1–12. Witness in the Jewish homeland, Peter is a key figure. Again, Jewish leaders refuse the witness and murder Stephen. This leads to Saul's conversion, after which Peter is sent to Cornelius, the first Gentile to be converted. Note the controversy back in Jerusalem after Peter's visit to Cornelius. Peter now disappears from the account.

Acts 13–28. Saul, later called Paul, now becomes the focus, and as his ministry develops, he turns to Gentiles. In spite of this, he and his colleagues ALWAYS take the message to Jews first. Paul gives the reason for the inclusion of Gentiles at this time in Rom. 9–11.

Many churches were established by Paul and his helpers outside Israel, but by and large, Jews everywhere reject Jesus as Messiah.

Note the conference in ch. 15, which established a different set of rules for Gentle converts as opposed to Jewish converts, who still observed the Mosaic Law. See also Gal.2:1–10.

Paul is later arrested in Jerusalem, and after long delays, goes to Rome to be tried before Caesar. Note that in the first part of Acts 28, miraculous signs and wonders are still in operation.

Now note what Paul's first official action is in Rome. He does not call the believers in Rome to come and see him, but arranges a conference with Rome's Jewish leaders. At that day-long meeting, Paul preaches Jesus to them from the Law and the Prophets. But they did not agree among themselves and Paul finally dismisses them with the fateful words found in Acts 28:25–29.

Acts closes with a short statement that, from then on, Paul received all who came to him (no longer just Jews) preaching the Lord Jesus Christ (not Jesus now), no longer being hindered by Jewish opposition. When it is recognised that Israel is the focus of the Book of Acts, then it's rather abrupt ending becomes understandable. Peter was the spearhead of the renewed offer of repentance to the Jews in the homeland. They rejected, the climax of which was the martyrdom of Stephen. Paul was the spearhead of the witness to Jewry outside the homeland, and Jewish rejection of this witness came to its climax in that day-long conference at Rome. So Israel becomes, at that point, LO-AMMI. As there is no reason to proceed, the record stops. This time there was no place for any further opportunities.

After Acts 28:28. We can only put an approx. date on Paul's arrival in Rome, which is AD 62. After dismissing Israel, Paul writes a further series of seven epistles before his martyrdom at the hands of Nero. We will come to this subject shortly.

In those final years of his life, Paul apparently was able to visit some of the churches he had planted, and also established helpers such as Timothy and Titus in particular areas. It is a puzzle to me that neither Church nor secular history give

us any clues as to the fate of Timothy or Titus. What we do know, however, is that the Church at large turned away from Paul and his message. Not only do we have Paul's heart-rending statement in 2 Tim. 1:15, "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me ...", we also have the sad record of the early Church. The records that have survived after the apostolic period closes, show that the twin truths that are exclusively of Paul have been 'turned away from'. They are the truth of Justification by Faith and the truth concerning the Dispensation of the Mystery (or Secret).

Paul's Epistles. Why consider only the epistles of Paul? Because Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles. Peter, James, Jude and John were Apostles to the Circumcision, and have no messages for the times after Israel's setting aside.

Paul's epistles are in two sets. If Hebrews is included as Pauline, as I believe it is, then Paul wrote fourteen letters. Seven of them were written during Acts, while the remaining seven come after the revelation of the Secret, which Paul first writes about in Eph. 3. It is significant, I believe, that while many Bible expositors disagree with the dispensational interpretation of Scripture, not one of them disagrees with the division of Paul's epistles as stated above. And that, dear Reader, is the crucial point.

The first set of Paul's letters is: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Hebrews. The second set is: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Now here is something that you can, and should, check out for yourself, if you have any doubts about it.

Those first seven are full of Old Testament quotes, the focus is on Israel and her Messiah, miraculous signs and wonders abound, and Israel is warned against the folly of rejecting the witness the second time. Gentile believers are in a secondary position to Jewish believers. In fact, Paul claims that the Gentiles are only there at all in an effort by the Lord to provoke Israel to accept their Messiah, even through jealousy. The hope of the believers is the New Jerusalem, also known as the Bride of the Lamb.

But what a difference in the second set. Hardly any Old Testament quotes at all. It is worth considering the significance of this point. If, as Paul claims in Ephesians and Colossians, that the Dispensation of the Secret has been kept hidden by God in Himself since the foundation of the world,

until it was revealed to and through Paul after the Acts 28:28 dismissal of Israel, then it cannot be found in any Scriptures written up to the end of Acts.

Some readers may think of 1 Cor. 12 where Paul speaks about the assembly at Corinth as being the body of Christ. But v. 27 has been incorrectly translated. What Paul wrote was 'Now you are A body of Christ', not 'THE body of Christ'. In this chapter, Paul was simply using the diversity of the human body to illustrate the diversity of gifts and function in the assemblies of that period.

Other unique features of the later epistles are these: members of the Church which is His Body were chosen before the foundation of the world; they are seated, potentially, with Christ in the Heavens at the right hand of God; all distinctions between Jew and Gentile have now gone. In fact, not only have Gentiles lost their Gentile disadvantages. and the Jews their Jewish advantages, but humanity is now treated simply as sinning children of Adam. Also, this Company of Believers — this Church — has no connection whatsoever with any of the covenants made to Abraham or through Moses. As Paul says in Titus 1:2, our hope is eternal life promised by God before time began.

I hope that these thoughts will stimulate you to look into Biblical chronology a bit more than perhaps you have done before. It is an excellent exercise for the brain, even better than doing cryptic crossword puzzles!

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1. 17. 2. About 30. 3. 4 B. C. 4. Probably only a few minutes. They were twins. 5. 77.

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C. H. Welch. Alphabetical Analysis, Vol. 5, p. 285.

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