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THE HISTORY OF AN INTERPRETATION

ALL IDEAS have a beginning. People who believe in an idea, however, are often completely unaware of its background, origin and development. Ignorance of that history may strengthen the conviction that the idea is true, even when it is not. As happens in other cases, this ignorance may provide fertile soil for fanaticism.

True, knowledge of the historical development of an idea does not necessarily disprove it, but such knowledge does enable us to improve our judgment of its validity. A clear example of an idea—in this case, an interpretation—that is obscured by ignorance is a widely-held concept concerning the “Gentile times” referred to by Christ at Luke 21:24:

They will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of Gentiles are fulfilled.—*NRSV*.

Millions of persons internationally have come to accept the belief that this prophetic statement definitely points to and is linked with a specific date in the twentieth century and they even build their present plans and future hopes on that belief. What is its history?

The “year-day principle”

The length of the period called the “Gentile times” (translated “the appointed times of the nations” in the Watch Tower Society’s *New World Translation*) has been calculated by some expositors, including the Watch Tower Society, to be 2,520 years. This calculation is founded upon the so-called “year-day principle.” According to this principle, in biblical time-related prophecies *a day always stands for a year*,



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The calculation of the "times of the Gentiles" as a period of 2,520 years, beginning in 607 B.C.E. and ending in 1914 C.E., is the chronological basis of the apocalyptic message preached worldwide by the Watch Tower Society.

"just as on a map one inch may stand for one hundred miles."¹ In the Bible there are two passages where prophetic periods are explicitly counted that way: Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.

In the first text, as punishment for their errors, the Israelites were to wander in the desert for forty years, measured out by the number of days the spies had spied out the land, forty days, "a day for a year."

In the second text Ezekiel was told to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days, prophetically carrying the errors of Israel and Judah committed during just as many years, "a day for a year."

It should be noted, however, that these specific interpretations are given to us by the Bible itself. "A day for a year" is *nowhere stated to be a general principle of interpretation* that applies also to other prophetic periods.

The development of the concept that the year-day principle can indeed apply to *any* time-related biblical prophecy has a long history. The shifting nature of its application during that history surely reveals something as to its reliability.

1 LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), Vol. II, p. 124.

Its use by Jewish scholars

Jewish rabbis were the first to begin applying this way of counting prophetic time beyond the two references cited, and they did this with the “seventy weeks” of Daniel 9:24-27, the first verse of which states: “Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”²

Despite this, the fact is that the “year-day” application was not stated as a general *principle* until the first century C.E., by the famous rabbi, *Akibah ben Joseph* (c. 50-132 C.E.).³

Hundreds of years passed and it was only at the beginning of the *ninth century* that a number of Jewish rabbis began to extend the year-day principle to other time periods in the book of Daniel. These included the 2,300 “evenings and mornings” of Daniel 8:14, and the 1,290 days and 1,335 days of Daniel 12:11, 12, all of which were viewed as having Messianic implication.

The first of these rabbis, *Nahawendi*, considered the 2,300 “evenings and mornings” of Daniel 8:14 as years, counting them from the destruction of Shiloh (which he dated to 942 B.C.E.) to the year 1358 C.E. In that year he expected the Messiah would come.⁴

Nahawendi was soon followed by others, such as *Saadiah ben Joseph* from the same century and *Solomon ben Jeroham* from the tenth century. The latter applied the year-day principle to the 1,335 days of Daniel 12:12. Counting them from the time of Alexander the Great, he arrived at the year 968 C.E. as the date for the redemption of Israel.

2 While this prophecy speaks of *weeks*, this of itself does not mean that it lends itself to an application of the “year-day principle.” To a Jew the Hebrew word for “week,” *shabû’a*, did not always signify a period of *seven days* as in English. *Shabû’a* literally means a “(period of) seven,” or a “heptad.” The Jews also had a “seven” (*shabû’a*) of *years*. (Leviticus 25:3, 4, 8, 9) True, when “weeks of *years*” were meant, the word for “years” was usually added. But in the later Hebrew this word was often left to be understood as implied. When “weeks of *days*” were meant, the word for “days” could sometimes be appended, as in the other passage in Daniel where *shabû’a* is found. (10:2, 3) Daniel 9:24, therefore, simply asserts that “seventy *sevens* are determined,” and from the context (the allusion to the “seventy years” in verse 2) it may be concluded that “seventy *sevens of years*” are intended. It is because of this apparent textual connection—and not because of any “year-day principle”—that some translations (*Moffatt, Goodspeed, AT, RS*) read “seventy weeks of years” in Daniel 9:24.

3 Froom, Vol. II, pp. 195, 196.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 196. Nahawendi also counted the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11 as a period of years, beginning with the destruction of the second temple [70 C.E.] and thereby arriving at the same date, 1358 C.E.

The famous rabbi, *Rashi* (1040-1105), ended the 2,300 year-days in 1352 C.E., when he thought the Messiah would come.

Abraham bar Hiyya Hanasi (c. 1065-1136) speculated that the 2,300-, the 1,290- and the 1,335-year periods would terminate on different dates in the fifteenth century. The end of the 2,300 year-days, for instance, was set at 1468 C.E.⁵

Even up into the nineteenth century, many other Jewish scholars were continuing to use the year-day principle to fix dates for the coming of the Messiah.

The methods the rabbinical scholars used in applying the year-day principle during those ten centuries were varied and the dates they arrived at differed. Whatever method employed, however, one thing was true: all the end-dates eventually proved empty of fulfillment.

Since the use of the year-day principle was relatively common among Jewish sources from early centuries, was this also the case among Christian Bible expositors?

Of greater interest, does the history of its use within the Christian community—and the *results* obtained—demonstrate a *contrast*, or does it follow a *similar pattern*? What has been its fruitage?

The “year-day principle” among Christian expositors

As we have seen, rabbi Akibah ben Joseph had presented the year-day method as a principle back in the first century C.E. We find no application of it—in that way, as a *principle*—among Christian scholars, however, for the following one thousand years.

True, several expositors from the fourth century onward suggested a *mystical* or *symbolic* meaning for the 1,260 days of Revelation, yet before the twelfth century they *never* applied the year-day rule to those days, nor to any other time period, with the sole exception of the 3½ days of Revelation 11:9. That period was interpreted to be 3½ *years* by a number of expositors, the first of whom was *Victorinus* in the fourth century.⁶ This, of course, was far from holding to a year-day rule or principle.

Joachim of Floris (c. 1130-1202), abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Corace, Italy, was most probably the first *Christian* expositor to apply the year-day principle to the different time periods of Daniel and Revelation. This was pointed out during the 19th century by *Charles Maitland*, a leading opponent of the idea, in a number of works and articles. For example, in refuting those holding that the

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 210, 211.

6 E. B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 3rd ed. (London, 1847), Vol. III, pp. 233-240.

1,260 days of Revelation 11:3 were 1,260 *years*, Maitland concluded, after a thorough investigation, that the system of the 1260 years “was never heard of till dreamed into the world by a wild Abbot in 1190.”⁷

Though many nineteenth-century adherents of the year-day principle tried to refute Maitland’s statement concerning the novelty of the principle, all their attempts proved unsuccessful. After a very thorough examination of all available sources, even the most learned of his opponents, the Reverend *E. B. Elliott*, had to admit that “for the *first four centuries*, the days mentioned in Daniel’s and the Apocalyptic prophecies respecting Antichrist were interpreted literally as *days*, not as *years*, by the Fathers of the Christian Church.”⁸ He thus had to agree with Maitland that Joachim of Floris was the first Christian writer to apply the year-day principle to the 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3, stating:

At the close of the 12th century Joachim Abbas, as we have just seen, made a first and rude attempt at it: and in the 14th, the Wyclifite *Walter Brute* followed.⁹

Joachim, who was probably influenced by Jewish rabbis, counted the 1,260 “year-days” from the time of Christ and believed that they would soon end in an “age of the Spirit.” Although he did not fix a specific date for this, it seems that he looked forward to the year 1260 C.E. After his death, that year came “to be considered by Joachim’s followers as the fatal date that would begin the new age, so much so that when it passed without any notable event some ceased to believe any of his teachings.”¹⁰

Joachim’s works initiated a new tradition of interpretation, a tradition in which the “year-day principle” was the very basis of prophetic

7 Charles Maitland, *The Apostles’ School of Prophetic Interpretation* (London, 1849), pp. 37, 38.

8 E. B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticae*, 3rd ed. (London, 1847), Vol. III, p. 233.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 240. The late Dr. LeRoy Edwin Froom, who was a modern defender of the year-day theory, arrived at a similar conclusion in his massive four-volume work, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. In Volume I (1950) on page 700, he states: “Heretofore, for thirteen centuries the seventy weeks had been recognized generally as weeks of years. But the first thousand years of the Christian Era did not produce any further applications of the principle, among Christian writers, save one or two glimpses of the ‘ten days’ of Revelation 2:10 as ten years of persecution, and the three and a half days of Revelation 11 as three and a half years. But now Joachim for the first time applied the year-day principle to the 1260-day prophecy.”

10 Froom, Vol. I, p. 716.

interpretations. During the following centuries innumerable dates were fixed for Christ's second advent, most of them built upon the year-day principle. At the time of the Reformation (in the sixteenth century), Martin Luther and most of the other reformers believed in that principle, and it was largely accepted among Protestant scholars far into the nineteenth century.

The principle applied to the Gentile times

As we have seen, Joachim of Floris applied the year-day principle to the 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3. The preceding verse converts this period into months, stating that "the nations . . . will trample the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." (Revelation 11:2, *NW*) Since this prediction about the "holy city" closely parallels Jesus' words at Luke 21:24 that "Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (*NASB*), some of Joachim's followers soon began to associate the "times of the Gentiles" with this calculated period in which the 1,260 days became 1,260 years.

However, because they believed that Revelation 11:2, 3 and 12:6, 14 dealt with the Christian church, Jerusalem or the "holy city" usually was interpreted to mean the church of Rome.¹¹ The period of the "times of the Gentiles," therefore, was thought to be the period of the affliction of the church, the end of which affliction was originally expected in 1260 C.E.

Others, however, believed the "holy city" to be the literal city of Jerusalem. The well known scholastic physician, *Arnold of Villanova* (c. 1235-1313), identified the Gentile times with the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11, converting them from 1290 days to 1290 years. Counting these from the taking away of the Jewish sacrifices after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E., he expected the end of the Gentile times in the fourteenth century. The Crusades were still being waged in his day and Arnold linked them with the hoped-for expiration of the Gentile times in the near future, arguing that, unless the end of the times of the Gentiles was near, how could the "faithful people" regain the Holy Land from the unbelievers?¹²

At the end of the fourteenth century, *Walter Brute*, one of John Wycliffe's followers in England offered yet another interpretation.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 717, 723, 726, 727. The information here is based on the work *De Seminibus Scripturarum*, fol. 13v, col. 2 (as discussed in Froom), which was written in 1205 A.D. The manuscript is known as Vat. Latin 3813.

According to him, the “times of the Gentiles” were the period when the Christian church was dominated by heathen rites and customs. This apostasy, he held, started after the death of the last apostle in about 100 C.E. and would continue for 1,260 years. This period, and also the 1,290 “year-days,” which he reckoned from the destruction of Jerusalem 30 years earlier (in 70 C.E.), had already expired in his days. He wrote:

Now if any man will behold the *Chronicles*, he shall find, that after the destruction of *Jerusalem* was accomplished, and after the strong hand of the holy people was fully dispersed, and after the placing of the abomination; that is to say, the Idol of Desolation of *Jerusalem*, within the Holy place, where the Temple of God was before, there had passed 1290 days, taking a day for a year, as commonly it is taken in the Prophets. And the times of the Heathen people are fulfilled, after whose Rites and Customs God suffered the holy City to be trampled under foot for forty and two months.¹³

Since the times of the Gentiles already had expired according to his calculations, Brute thought that the second coming of Christ must be *right at hand*.

Constantly changing dates

Time passed and left the many apocalyptic fixed dates behind, the predictions tied to them remaining unfulfilled. By now, counting the 1,260 or 1,290 years from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., or from the death of the apostles could no longer produce meaningful results. So, the *starting-point* had to be moved forward to a later date.

Groups persecuted and branded as heretics by the Roman church soon began to identify the ‘trampling Gentiles’ with the *papacy of Rome*. These persecuted groups commonly viewed themselves as “the true church”—pictured in Revelation 12 as a woman who had to flee into “the wilderness” for “a thousand two hundred and sixty days,” the period of trampling spiritual Jerusalem. (Revelation 12:6,

12 Arnold of Villanova, *Tractatus de Tempore Adventus Antichristi* (“Treatise on the Time of the Coming of Antichrist”), part 2 (1300); reprinted in Heinrich Finke, *Aus den Tagen Bonifaz VIII* (Münster in W., 1902), pp. CXLVIII-CLI, CXLVII. (See also Froom, Vol. I, pp. 753-756.)

13 From *Registrum Johannis Trefnant, Episcopi Herefordensis* (containing the proceedings of the trial of Walter Brute for heresy), as translated in John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 9th ed. (London, 1684), Vol. I, p. 547. (See also Froom, Vol. II, p. 80.)

14) This view now allowed them to advance the *starting-point* from the first century to a time somewhere in the *fourth century*, with its growth of authority on the part of the Roman church.

This “adjusted” view was very common among the Reformers. *John Napier* (1550-1617), the distinguished Scottish mathematician and student of prophecy, began the period about 300 or 316 C.E., and came up with the end of the Gentile times in the latter half of the sixteenth century.¹⁴

More time passed and the starting-point was once again moved forward, this time into the *sixth* or *seventh* centuries, the period when the popes had reached a real position of power. *George Bell*, for example, writing in the London *Evangelical Magazine* of 1796, counted the 1,260 years from either 537 or 553 C.E., and predicted the fall of Antichrist (the Pope) in “1797, or 1813.”¹⁵ Of the 1,260 years Bell says:

The holy city is to be trodden under foot by the Gentiles, or Papists, who, though they are Christians in name, are Gentiles in worship and practice; worshipping angels, saints, and images, and persecuting the followers of Christ. These Gentiles take away the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination that maketh the visible church of Christ desolate for the space of 1260 years.¹⁶

This was written in 1795 in the midst of the French Revolution. Shortly afterward the Pope was taken captive by French troops and forced into exile (in February, 1798). Very interestingly, these startling events in France and Italy had to some extent been “predicted” nearly a century in advance by several expositors, the best known of whom was the Scottish pastor, *Robert Fleming, Jr.* (c. 1660-1716).¹⁷ Surely, many felt, these major historical events had confirmed the rightness of their predictions! Because of this, the year 1798 was very soon quite commonly held among biblical commentators to be the terminal date for the 1,260 years.

This view—with some minor differences—was also adopted by Charles Taze Russell and his followers. And it is still prevalent among the Seventh-Day Adventists.

14 John Napier, *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of Saint John* (Edinburgh, 1593), pp. 64, 65. (See Froom, Vol. II, p. 458.)

15 G. Bell, “Downfall of Antichrist,” *Evangelical Magazine* (London), 1796, Vol. 4, p. 54. (See Froom, Vol. 2, p. 742.) Although published in 1796, the article was written July 24, 1795.

16 G. Bell, *ibid.*, p. 57. (See Froom, Vol. II, p. 742.)

17 Robert Fleming, Jr., *The Rise and Fall of Papacy* (London, 1701), p. 68. (For additional notes on this prediction, see Chapter 6, section D: “1914 in perspective.”)

Political and social upheaval fuels prophetic speculations

The French Revolution of 1789-1799 had extraordinary impact extending far beyond French borders. Following the violent removal of the French monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic in 1792, new extremist leaders not only brought about a period of terror and chaos in France itself, but they inaugurated an almost unbroken period of wars of conquest, which lasted until 1815, when Emperor Napoleon I was defeated at Waterloo. The Revolution's chaotic aftermath in Europe and other parts of the world excited intensified interest in prophetic study, especially as some of these upheavals had been partially predicted by expositors of the prophecies.

Historians recognize the French Revolution as marking a major turning-point in world history. It brought to an end a long era of relative stability in Europe, uprooting the established order and deeply changing political and religious thought.

Comparing the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte with the earlier Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) and the later World War I (1914-1918), historian Robert Gilpin says of these three wars that "*each was a world war involving almost all the states in the [international] system and, at least in retrospect, can be considered as having constituted a major turning point in human history.*"¹⁸

Another well-known historian, R. R. Palmer, in discussing the momentous role of the French Revolution in modern history, says:

Even today in the middle of the twentieth century, despite all that has happened in the lifetime of men not yet old, and even . . . in America or in any other part of a world in which the countries of Europe no longer enjoy their former commanding position, it is still possible to say that *the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century was the turning point of modern civilization.*¹⁹

The resultant uprooting of long-standing European political and social institutions caused many to believe that they were indeed living in *the last days*. Men of many backgrounds—ministers, politicians, lawyers, and laymen—became involved in prophetic study. A voluminous body of literature on the prophecies was produced, numerous

18 Professor Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (published in Cambridge, MA, and London, England), Vol. 18:4, Spring 1988, p. 606. (Emphasis added.)

19 R. R. Palmer in his foreword to Georges Lefebvre's *The Coming of the French Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1947), p. v.

prophetic periodicals were started, and prophetic conferences were held on both sides of the Atlantic.

The apocalyptic revival commenced in England, but soon spread to the European Continent and the United States of America where, in the latter case, it culminated in the well-known Millerite movement. Based on interpretations of Daniel 8:14, the predictions now developed generally pointed to 1843, 1844, or 1847 as the time for Christ's second advent.

It was in this feverish atmosphere that a new interpretation of the Gentile times was born, in which, for the first time, *the oft-used figure of 1,260 years was doubled to 2,520 years.*

The chart presented on the facing page shows the results that the "year-day" method of counting prophetic time-periods produced over a period of seven centuries. Though almost all of the thirty-six scholars and prophetic expositors listed were working from the same basic Scriptural text referring to 1,260 days, very rarely did they agree on the same starting and ending points for the period's fulfillment. The *ending* dates for the Gentile times set by them or their followers ran all the way from 1260 C.E. to 2016 C.E. Yet all of them advanced what to them were cogent reasons for arriving at their dates. What results now came from the doubling of this figure in connection with Jesus' statement about the "Gentile times"?

John Aquila Brown

In the long history of prophetic speculation, *John Aquila Brown* in England plays a notable role. Although no biographical data on Brown has been found so far, he strongly influenced the apocalyptic thinking of his time. He was the first expositor who applied the supposed 2,300 year-days of Daniel 8:14 so that they ended in 1843 (later 1844).²⁰ This became a key date of the Second Advent movement.²¹ He was also the first who arrived at a prophetic time period of 2,520 years.

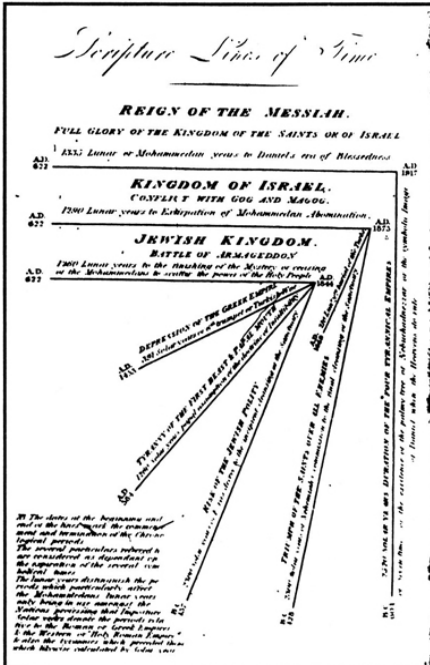
Brown's calculation of 2,520 years was based on his exposition of the "seven times" contained in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the

20 Brown first published his chronology in an article in the London monthly *The Christian Observer* of November 1810. According to his understanding of the Gentile times, the "trampling Gentiles" were the Mohammedans (or Muslims), and he therefore regarded the 1,260 years so widely commented on as Mohammedan *lunar* years, corresponding to 1,222 *solar* years. He reckoned this period from 622 C.E. (the first year of the Mohammedan *Hegira* era) to 1844, when he expected the coming of Christ and the restoration of the Jewish nation in Palestine.—J. A. Brown, *The Even-Tide*, Vol. 1 (1823), pp. vii, xi, 1-60.

TABLE 1: THE MULTIPLE, SHIFTING APPLICATIONS OF THE 1,260 YEARS

Expositor	Publication date	Application (all dates C.E.)	Remarks
Joachim of Floris	1195	1-1260	
Arnold of Villanova	1300	c. 74-1364	Gentile Times=1290 years
Walter Brute	1393	134-1394	
Martin Luther	1530	38-1328	Gentile times =1290 years
A. Osiander	1545	412-1672	
J. Funck	1558	261-1521	
G. Nigrinus	1570	441-1701	
Aretius	1573	312-1572	
John Napier	1593	316-1576	
D. Pareus	1618	606-1866	
J. Tillinghast	1655	396-1656	
J. Artopaeus	1665	260-1520	
Cocceius	1669	292-1552	
T. Beverley	1684	437-1697	
P. Jurieu	1687	454-1714	
R. Fleming, Jr.	1701	552-1794	1260 years of 360 days
" "	1701	606-1848	= 1242 Julian years
William Whiston	1706	606-1866	
Daubuz	1720	476-1736	
J. Ph. Petri	1768	587-1847	
Lowman	1770	756-2016	
John Gill	1776	606-1866	
Hans Wood	1787	620-1880	
J. Bicheno	1793	529-1789	
A. Fraser	1795	756-1998	1242 Julian years
George Bell	1796	537-1797	
" "	1796	553-1813	
Edward King	1798	538-1798	
Galloway	1802	606-1849	1242 Julian years
W. Hales	1803	620-1880	
G. S. Faber	1806	606-1866	
W. Cuninghame	1813	533-1792	
J. H. Frere	1815	533-1792	
Lewis Way	1818	531-1791	
W. C. Davis	1818	588-1848	
J. Bayford	1820	529-1789	
John Fry	1822	537-1797	
John Aquila Brown	1823	622-1844	1260 lunar years

The table shows a sample of the many different applications of the 1,260 and 1,290 “year-days” from Joachim of Floris in 1195 to John Aquila Brown in 1823. It would have been easy to extend the table to include expositors after Brown. However, the table ends with him because at this time another interpretation of the Gentile times began to surface, in which the 1,260 years were doubled to 2,520 years.



THE
EVEN-TIDE;
OR,
Last Triumph
OF THE
BLESSED AND ONLY POTENTATE,
THE KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS;
BEING A DEVELOPMENT OF THE
MYSTERIES OF DANIEL AND ST. JOHN,
AND OF
THE PROPHECIES
RESPECTING THE
RENOVATED KINGDOM OF ISRAEL;
In which the Scripture Lines of Time of the B.C. 501, 1900, 1950, 1970, 1985, 2000, and 2520 Years are traced and found to terminate.

A.D. 1844—IN THE RISE OF THE JEWISH KINGDOM, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PAPAL POWER.
A.D. 1873—IN THE EMPIRE OF ISRAEL, AND THE EXTIRPATION OF MOHAMMEDISM.
A.D. 1917—IN THE TRANSCENDENT "GLOBE OF ISRAEL," AND THE CLOSE OF THE LAST JUDGMENT.

By **J. A. BROWN.**

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

—AT EVENING TIME IT SHALL BE LIGHT—EZEKIAH

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1823.

180 Two Thousand Five Hundred and Twenty Year,

TWO THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS, OR DURATION OF THE FOUR TYRANNICAL EMPIRES.

B.C. 604—1917, A.D.

ALTHOUGH many large and learned volumes have been written on prophetic subjects during a succession of ages; yet, having never seen the subject, on which I am about to offer some remarks, touched upon by any author, I commend it to the attention of the reader, not doubting, indeed, but with strong confidence that it will be found still further to corroborate the scale of the prophetic periods, assumed as the basis of the fulfilment of prophecy.

The time of the last judgment, when the reign of blessedness commences, and when all the wicked will be judged and consigned to their eternal abode, as the just consequence of their transgression, I assume to be the forty-five years, or elongated period, beyond the thirty years of Daniel, when the "abomination which maketh desolate" shall be taken away; which thirty years succeed the mystic "time, times, and a half." "Blessed," says the angel, "is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days," xii. 12. A period, therefore, of *forty-five years* remains to be accounted for; of which nothing is mentioned by Daniel to take place within or under that period, unless it be the judgment of the other beasts, whose "lives were spared for a season and a time." The judgment of Daniel's Roman beast is evidently a judgment of some duration, implied by the term "consuming," which is also stated to continue "to the end," or prophetic years of the end. It has

or Duration of the Four Tyrannical Empires. 131

been seen, also, on a consideration of the burial of Gog and Magog, that it was to be a gradual decay, or consumption of dominion. Such, also, seems to be, though more rapid in execution, and marked by decisive manifestations of Divine interposition, the *time of judgment* now in question. That it is an eventful time, and attended by some distinguishing process, will, I doubt not, be made manifest.

The duration of that period, I conceive, takes in the time of searching the land for the remains of Gog and Magog; and the sitting in judgment on the adherents of Daniel's other beasts, that judgment closing finally with the casting of the Papal Beast, and the Mohammedan *Hell*, into the lake of fire; into which, also, every one brought into judgment, that cannot stand the fiery trial, shall be likewise cast. That the second event of Daniel's prophecy coincides with the second judgment of St. John, if it may not be considered as already proved, will, I think, be undoubtedly established, by points which yet remain to be considered.

The period of blessedness is marked, if I mistake not, by a still broader and longer line of Scripture time than any previously mentioned, commencing from the very first mooring of the tyrannical empire; is more comprehensive in its arrangements, and is distinguished by the exit of the grand week of prophetic years, or chronological period of the lives of the four great and unequal tyrannies. Thirteen hundred and thirty-five years of the Mohammedan Hegeira, from its first rise, close with the commencement of the reign of blessedness, in 1917. The grand week of years, commencing with the first year of the Babylonian tyranny, and ending with the last year of the time of the beasts, or of the forty-five years *time* of the judgment of the Mohammedan imposture, terminates in the very same year, 1917; calculating upon the same principle of solar years, when the tyrannical empires are concerned, and at a time when lunar years were scarcely known; reserving these for the adherents of the Mohammedan imposture, who, during their tyranny, only enjoyed them.

John Aquila Brown's book *The Even-Tide* (London, 1823), in which the "seven times" of Daniel 4 for the first time were explained to mean 2,520 years.

chopped-down tree in Daniel, chapter 4. It was first published in 1823 in his two-volume work *The Even-Tide; or, Last Triumph of the Blessed and Only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*.²² He specifically states that he was the first to write on the subject:

Although many large and learned volumes have been written on prophetic subjects during a succession of ages; yet, *having never seen the subject*, on which I am about to offer some remarks, *touched upon by any author*, I commend it to the attention of the reader, not doubtingly, indeed, but with strong confidence that it will be found still further to corroborate the scale of the prophetic periods, assumed as the basis of the fulfillment of prophecy.²³

In his interpretation, Brown differed from other later expositors in that he nowhere connects the “seven times” of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream with the “seven times” of prophetic punishment directed against Israel at Leviticus 26:12-28. “Nebuchadnezzar was a type,” Brown wrote, “of the three successive kingdoms which were to arise.” Of the “seven times,” or years, of Nebuchadnezzar’s affliction, he said:

- 21 The second advent was expected to occur during the year 1843/44, counted from Spring to Spring as was done in the Jewish calendar. It has been maintained that expositors in the United States arrived at the 1843 date as the end of the 2,300 years independently of Brown. Although that *may* be true, it cannot be proved, and interestingly, the London, England, *Christian Observer*, a periodical founded in 1802 which frequently dealt with prophecy, also had an American edition published at Boston which ran article for article with the British edition. So Brown’s article on the 2,300 years could have been read by many in the United States as early as 1810. Soon afterwards, the 1843 date began to appear in American prophetic expositions.
- 22 Published in London; the pertinent material is found in Vol. II, pp. 130-152.
- 23 Perhaps some may be inclined to object to this statement on account of the table on pages 404 and 405 of Froom’s *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Volume IV. It is true that this table *seems* to show *James Hatley Frere* as the first to write on the 2,520 years in 1813. But the part of the table farthest to the right on page 405 entitled, “Dating of other time periods,” does not have any close connection with the “Publication date” column on page 404. It simply states the author’s general position on other time periods. Besides, Frere never held the times of the Gentiles (or the “seven times”) to be a period of 2,520 years. In his first book on prophecy, *A Combined View of the Prophecies of Daniel, Esdras, and St. John* (London, 1815), he does not comment on Daniel 4 or Luke 21:24. The “holy city” of Revelation 11:2 he explains to be “the visible church of Christ” and “during the period of 1260 years, the whole of this city is trodden under foot of the Gentiles, excepting the interior courts of its temple.” (Page 87) Many years later Frere calculated the Gentile times to be a period of 2,450 years from 603 B.C.E. to 1847 C.E. See, for example, his book, *The Great Continental Revolution, Marking the Expiration of the Times of the Gentiles A.D. 1847-8* (London, 1848). Note especially pages 66-78. John A. Brown, of course, was well acquainted with the many contemporary writings on prophecy, and Frere was one of the best known expositors in England. So there seems to be no reason to doubt Brown’s own statement of priority with respect to the 2,520 years.

[These] would, therefore, be considered as a grand week of years, forming a period of two thousand five hundred and twenty years, and embracing the duration of the four tyrannical monarchies; at the close of which they are to learn, like Nebuchadnezzar, by the “season and time” of the two judgements, that “*the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*”

Brown calculated the 2,520 years as running from the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, 604 B.C.E., to the year 1917, when “the full glory of the kingdom of Israel shall be perfected.”²⁴

Brown did not himself associate this period with the Gentile times of Luke 21:24. Nonetheless his calculation for the 2,520 years, and his having based these on Daniel chapter 4, have since played a key role in certain modern interpretations of those Gentile times.

The 2,520 years linked with the Gentile times

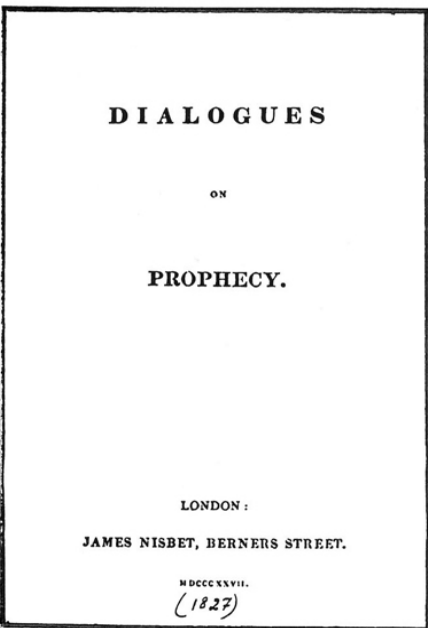
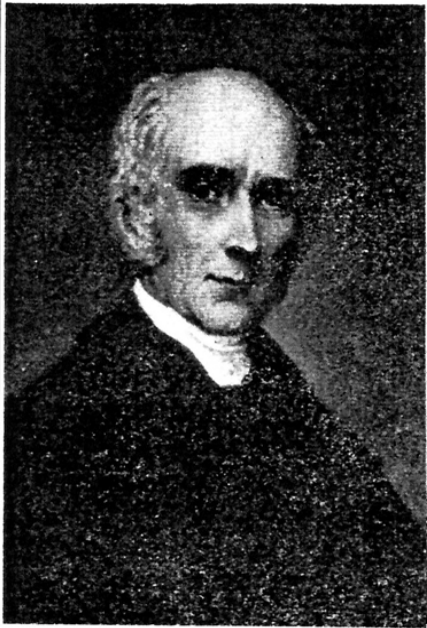
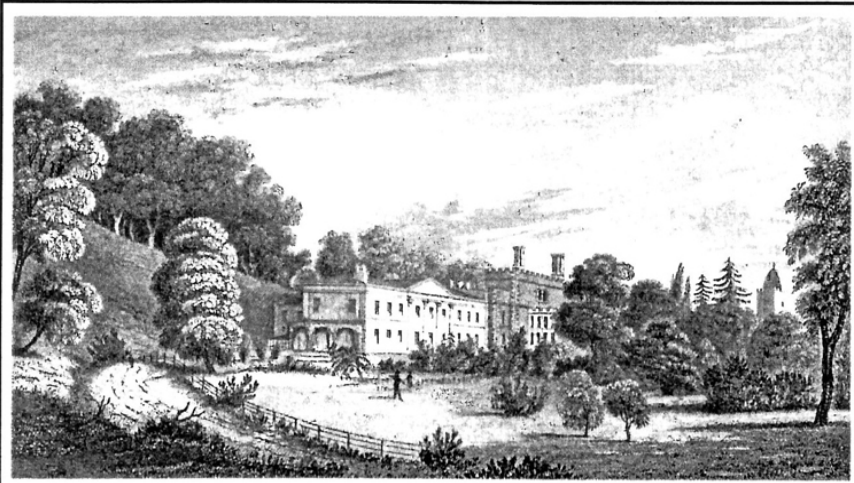
It was not long before other expositors began identifying the new calculation of 2,520 years with the “Gentile times” of Luke 21:24. But, even as with the 1,260 days, they came up with differing results.

At the *Albury Park Prophetic Conferences* (held annually at Albury near Guildford, south of London, England from 1826 to 1830), the “times of the Gentiles” was one of the topics considered. Right from the first discussions in 1826 they were connected with the 2,520 year period by *William Cuninghame*. He chose as his starting point the year when the ten tribes were carried into captivity by Shalmaneser (which he dated to 728 B.C.E.), thus arriving at 1792 C.E. as their last or termination date, a date that by then was already in the past.²⁵

Many biblical commentators counted the “seven times of the Gentiles” from the captivity of Manasseh, which they dated to 677 B.C.E. This was obviously done so that the Gentile times would end at the same time already being assigned to the 2,300 day-years, that

24 *The Even-Tide*, Vol. II, pp. 134, 135; Vol. I, pp. XLIII, XLIV.

25 Henry Drummond, *Dialogues on Prophecy* (London, 1827), Vol. I, pp. 33, 34. In this report from the discussions at Albury, the participants are given fictitious names. Cuninghame (“Sophron”) arrives at the 2,520 years by doubling the 1,260 years, not by referring to the “seven times” of Daniel 4 or Leviticus 26. In support of this he refers to the authority of *Joseph Mede*, an expositor living in the seventeenth century. Although Mede had suggested that the times of the Gentiles might refer to the four kingdoms beginning with Babylon, he never stated the period to be 2,520 years. (Mede, *The Works*, London, 1664, Book 4, pp. 908-910, 920.) In a later conversation “Anastasius” (Henry Drummond) connects the 2,520 years with the “seven times” of Leviticus 26 and, “correcting” the starting-point of Cuninghame from 728 to 722 B.C., he arrives at 1798 C.E. as the terminal date. (*Dialogues*, Vol. I, pp. 324, 325)



Above: The Albury Park residence, near Guildford, south of London, the place of the *Albury Park Prophetic Conferences*, 1826-1830. At these conferences certain ideas were developed that 50 years later were to become central parts of the message of the Watch Tower Society, viz., *the Gentile times as a period of 2,520 years, and the idea of Christ's second coming as an invisible presence.*

Below: Henry Drummond, owner of Albury Park and host of the conferences, who also published annual reports on the discussions (*Dialogues on Prophecy*).

is, in 1843 or 1844.²⁶ In 1835, *William W. Pym* published his work, *A Word of Warning in the Last Days*, in which he ended the “seven times” in 1847. Interestingly, he builds his calculation of the 2,520 years of Gentile times on the “seven times” mentioned in Leviticus 26 as well as the “seven times” of Daniel 4:

In other words, the judgements threatened by Moses, which should last during the seven times, or 2520 years; and the judgements revealed to Daniel, which should come to an end by the cleansing of the sanctuary after a portion of the greater number 2520.²⁷

Others, however, were looking forward to the year 1836 C.E., a year fixed on entirely different grounds by the German theologian *J. A. Bengel* (1687-1752), and they tried to end the “seven times” in that same year.²⁸

Illustrating the state of flux existing, *Edward Bickersteth* (1786-1850), evangelical rector of Watton, Hartfordshire, tried different starting-points for the “seven times of the Gentiles,” coming up with three different ending dates:

If we reckon the captivity of Israel as commencing in 727 before Christ, Israel’s first captivity under Salmanezar, it would terminate in 1793, when the French revolution broke out: and if 677 before Christ, their captivity under Esarhaddon (the same period when Manasseh, king of Judah, was carried into captivity,) (2 Kings xvii. 23, 24. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11.) it would terminate in 1843: or, if reckoned from 602 before Christ, which was the final dethronement of Jehoiakim by Nebuchadnezzar, it would terminate in 1918. All these periods may have a reference to corresponding events at their termination, and are worthy of serious attention.²⁹

One of the best known and most learned millenarians of the 19th century was *Edward Bishop Elliott* (1793-1875), incumbent of St. Mark’s Church in Brighton, England. With him, the date of 1914 first receives mention. In his monumental treatise *Horæ Apocalypticæ* (“Hours with the Apocalypse”) he first reckoned the 2,520 years from 727 B.C.E. to 1793 C.E., but added:

26 *John Fry* (1775-1849) was among those doing this, in his *Unfulfilled Prophecies of Scripture*, published in 1835.

27 Found on page 48 of his work. Quoted in *Froom*, Vol. III, p. 576.

28 So did *W. A. Holmes*, chancellor of Cashel, in his book *The Time of the End* which was published in 1833. He dated the captivity of Manasseh under Esarhaddon to 685 B.C.E., and counting the 2,520 years from that year, he ended the “seven times” in 1835-1836.

29 *Edward Bickersteth, A Scripture Help*, first edited in 1815. After 1832 Bickersteth began to preach on the prophecies, which also influenced later editions of *A Scripture Help*. The quotation is taken from the 20th edition (London, 1850), p. 235.

Of course if calculated from Nebuchadnezzar's own accession and invasion of Judah, B.C. 606, the end is much later, being A.D. 1914; just one half century, or jubilean period, from our probable date of the opening of the Millennium [which he had fixed to "about A.D. 1862"].³⁰

One factor that should be noted here is that in Elliott's chronology 606 B.C.E. was the *accession-year* of Nebuchadnezzar, while in the later chronology of Nelson H. Barbour and Charles T. Russell 606 B.C.E. was the date assigned for Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in his *18th year*.

The Millerite movement

The leading British works on prophecy were extensively reprinted in the United States and strongly influenced many American writers on the subject. These included the well-known Baptist preacher *William Miller* and his associates, who pointed forward to 1843 as the date of Christ's second coming. It is estimated that at least 50,000, and perhaps as many as 200,000 people eventually embraced Miller's views.³¹

Virtually every position they held on the different prophecies had been taught by other past or contemporary expositors. Miller was simply following others in ending the "Gentile times" in 1843. At the First General Conference held in Boston, Massachusetts, on October 14 and 15, 1840, one of Miller's addresses dealt with Biblical chronology. He placed the "seven times," or 2,520 years, as extending from 677 B.C.E. to 1843 C.E.³² The second coming of Christ was expected no later than 1844.

The date predicted for so long and by so many, with claimed Biblical backing, came and went, with nothing to fulfill the expectations based on it.

After the "Great Disappointment" of 1844, some, and among them Miller himself, openly confessed that the time was a mistake.³³

30 E. B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 1st ed. (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844), Vol. III, pp. 1429-1431. Elliott's work ran through five editions (1844, 1846, 1847, 1851, and 1862). In the last two he did not directly mention the 1914 date, although he still suggested that the 2,520 years might be reckoned from the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

31 David Tallmadge Arthur, "*Come out of Babylon*": A Study of Millerite Separatism and Denominationalism, 1840-1865 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1970), pp. 86-88.

32 William Miller, "A Dissertation on Prophetic Chronology" in *The First Report of the General Conference of Christians Expecting the Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Boston, 1842), p. 5. Other Millerites who stressed the 2,520 years included Richard Hutchinson (editor of *The Voice of Elijah*) in an 1843 pamphlet, *The Throne of Judah Perpetuated in Christ*, and Philemon R. Russell (editor of the *Christian Herald and Journal*) in the March 19, 1840 issue of that periodical. The 2,520 years also appear on charts used by Millerite evangelists. (See Fromm, Vol. IV, pp. 699-701, 726-737.)

<p style="text-align: center;">HORÆ APOCALYPTICÆ,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A COMMENTARY ON THE APOCALYPSE,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">INCLUDING ALSO AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHIEF PROPHECIES OF IT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ILLUSTRATED BY AN APOCALYPTIC CHAIN ENGRAVINGS FROM MEDALS AND OTHER MONUMENTS OF ANTIQUITY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BY THE REV. E. B. ELLIOTT LATE VICAR OF TOTTENHAM, AND FELLOW OF TRINITY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">VOL. III.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words, These things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;">REFLEW, BURNSIDE, AND SONS FLEET STREET, LONDON MDCCCLXIV. 1844</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">CHAP. IV.] CONCLUSION. 1429</p> <p>the end of the 6000 years of the world, and opening of the seventh Millennium, <i>by approximation</i> about A. D. 1862:—the same year, very nearly, that we before fixed on as the epoch of the consummation, on quite different data.</p> <p>I must add yet a word besides on two or three other more dubious, yet very interesting and important prophetic periods. Antl, 1st, on the <i>seven times of Nebuchadnezzar's insanity and bestialism</i>.¹ These calculated after the year-day system,² on the hypothesis of the Babylonish king's insanity figuring that of the great empires, which he then headed, in their state of heathen aberration from God, (a point on the propriety of which I can myself feel scarce a doubt,) terminate,—if dated from the time, B. C. 727, when the Assyrians under Shalmanezar³ first acted the wild beast's part against Israel, about the year 1793; that is, at the epoch of the French Revolution, and the coincident going forth of the Gospel message to evangelize the heathen:—doubtless a very remarkable synchronism: especially considering that the bisecting point of these <i>seven times</i> is then A. D. 533; the very commencing epoch, with Justinian's Decree, of the <i>three and a half times</i> of the Papal Antichrist. <u>Of course if calculated from Nebuchadnezzar's own accession and invasion of Judah, B. C. 606, the end is much later, being A. D. 1914; just one half century, or jubilean period, from our probable date of the opening of the</u></p> <p>Jewish Rabbies make the interval between the first destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and second by the Romans, just 490 (or, to use the prophet Daniel's language, <i>seventy weeks of</i>) years.—Thus there is nothing in the Jewish mundane chronology to affect the accuracy of Mr. C's.</p> <p>I have in the above notice had before me Mr. Lindo's Jewish Calendar; a late publication, elaborate with Jewish learning, and sanctioned by the then chief Rabbi in London, Solomon Hirschell.</p> <p>¹ Dan. iv. The figure is somewhat otherwise applied by Cowper to the wretchedness and ruined hopes of a prisoner:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—Like the visionary emblem seen By him of Babylon, life stands a stump, And filleted about with hoops of brass Still lives, though all his plesant boughs are gone.</p> <p>² See p. 957 on the year-day principle.</p> <p>³ Jer. 1. 17; "Israel is a scattered sheep: the lions have driven him away: first the King of Assyria hath devoured him; last this Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, hath broken his bones."</p>
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E. B. Elliott's *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, Vol. III (1844)

E. B. Elliott was most probably the first expositor to reckon the "times of the Gentiles" from 606 B.C.E. to 1914 C.E. It should be noted, however, that in his chronology the starting-point, 606 B.C.E., was the *accession-year* of Nebuchadnezzar, while in the chronology of Barbour and Russell this was Nebuchadnezzar's *eighteenth year*. Their chronologies, therefore, were conflicting, although the dates accidentally happened to be the same.

Others, however, insisted that the time itself was right, but the event anticipated was wrong. Expressing what has become a familiar justification, they had expected “the wrong thing at the right time.”

This position was taken by a group which later came to be known as the Seventh-Day Adventists. They declared that Jesus, instead of descending to earth in 1844, entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary as mankind’s great high priest to introduce the antitypical atonement day.³⁴ This group, which separated from the rest of the “Second Adventists” in the end of the 1840’s, caused the first major division within the original movement.

Some leading Millerites who also held to the 1844 date—among them *Apollos Hale*, *Joseph Turner*, *Samuel Snow*, and *Barnett Matthias*—claimed that *Jesus had indeed come* as the Bridegroom in 1844, although spiritually and invisibly, “not in personally descending from heaven, but *taking the throne spiritually*.” In 1844, they declared, the “kingdom of this world” had been given to Christ.³⁵

Offshoots of the Millerite movement

Thus, following 1844, the Millerite “Second Advent” movement gradually broke into several Adventist groups.³⁶ A proliferation of new dates began to appear: 1845, 1846, 1847, 1850, 1851, 1852, 1853, 1854, 1866, 1867, 1868, 1870, 1873, 1875, and so on, and these dates, each having their promoters and adherents, contributed to even greater fragmentation. A leading Second Adventist, *Jonathan Cummings*, declared in 1852 that he had received a “new light” on the

33 “That I have been mistaken in the time, I freely confess; and I have no desire to defend my course any further than I have been actuated by pure motives, and it has resulted in God’s glory. My mistakes and errors God, I trust, will forgive . . .” (*Wm. Miller’s Apology and Defence*, Boston, 1845, pp. 33, 34.) *George Storrs*, who had been one of the leaders in the last stage of the Millerite movement, the so-called “seventh month movement,” in which the advent had been finally fixed to October 22, 1844, was even more outspoken. Not only did he openly and repeatedly confess and regret his error, but he also declared that God had not been in the “definite time” movement, that they had been “mesmerized” by mere human influence, and that “the Bible did not teach definite time at all.” (See D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92.)

34 For a clarifying discussion of the development of this doctrine, see Dr. Ingemar Lindén, *The Last Trump. A historico-genetical study of some important chapters in the making and development of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1978), pp. 129-133. Years later the doctrine was changed to mean that the so-called “investigative judgment” of the believers—dead and living—began on October 22, 1844.

35 From, Vol. IV, p. 888. A detailed discussion of these views is given by Dr. D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-115.

36 In 1855 a prominent Second Adventist, J. P. Cowles, estimated that there existed “some twenty-five divisions of what was once the one Advent body.” (See D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 319.)

chronology, and that the second advent was to be expected in 1854. Many Millerites joined Cummings, and in January, 1854, they started a new periodical, the *World's Crisis*, in advocacy of the new date.³⁷

Other factors besides dates began to play a role in the composition of the Second Advent movement. Right up to the present time they appear as distinctive features among a number of movements that developed from Second Adventism, including the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and certain Church of God denominations. These factors included the doctrine of conditional—not inherent—immortality of the soul, with its corollary tenet that the ultimate destiny of those who are rejected by God is destruction or annihilation, not conscious torment. The trinitarian belief also became an issue among some sectors of the Second Adventists. (For further details on these developments and their effect in contributing to division among the offshoots of the Millerite movements, see the Appendix for Chapter One.)

Most of these developments had already taken place by the time that Charles Taze Russell, still in his teenage years, began the formation of a Bible study group in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. From the end of the 1860's onward, Russell increasingly got into touch with some of the Second Adventist groups which developed. He established close connections with certain of their ministers and read some of their papers, including George Storrs' *Bible Examiner*. Gradually, he and his associates took over many of their central teachings, including their conditionalist and anti-trinitarian positions and most of their "age to come" views. Finally, in 1876, Russell also adopted a revised version of their chronological system, which implied that the 2,520 years of Gentile times would expire in 1914. In all essential respects, therefore, Russell's Bible Student movement may be described as yet another offshoot of the Millerite movement.

What, then, was the most *direct* source of the chronological system that Russell, the founder of the Watch Tower movement, adopted, including not only the 2,520 year-period for the Gentile times, its ending in 1914, but also the year 1874 for the start of an invisible presence by Christ? That source was a man named Nelson H. Barbour.

37 Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message* (Yarmouth, Maine, Boston, New York, London, 1874), pp. 594-597.

Nelson H. Barbour

Nelson H. Barbour was born near Auburn, New York, in 1824. He joined the Millerite movement in 1843, at the age of 19. He “lost his religion” completely after the “Great Disappointment” in 1844 and went to Australia where he became a miner during the gold rush there.³⁸ Then, in 1859 he returned to America by way of London, England. In a retrospect Barbour tells how his interest in the prophetic time periods was again aroused during this voyage:

The vessel left Australia with an advent brother [Barbour himself] on board, who had lost his religion, and been for many years in total darkness. To wile away the monotony of a long sea voyage, [an] English chaplain proposed a systematic reading of the prophecies; to which the brother readily assented; for having been a Millerite in former years, he knew right well there were arguments it would puzzle the chaplain to *answer*, even though the time had passed.³⁹

During this reading Barbour thought he discovered the crucial error in Miller’s reckoning. Why did Miller begin the 1,260 “year-days” of Revelation 11 in 538 C.E. and start the 1,290 and 1,335 year-days of Daniel 12 *thirty years earlier* in 508 C.E.? Should not all three periods start at the same date? Then the 1,290 years would end in 1828 and the 1,335 years in—not 1843 but—1873. “On arriving in London [in 1860], he went to the library of the British Museum, and among many other extensive works on the prophecies found Elliott’s *Horæ Apocalyptica*” in which Elliott reproduced a table, “The Scripture Chronology of the World,” prepared by his friend, Reverend *Christopher Bowen*. The table showed that 5,979 years since man’s creation ended in 1851.⁴⁰ Adding 21 years to the 5,979 years, Barbour discovered that *6,000 years* would end in 1873. This he saw as a remarkable and stirring confirmation of his own calculation of the 1,335-year period.

On returning to the United States, Barbour tried to interest other Second Adventists in his new date for the coming of the Lord. From 1868 onward he began to preach and publish his findings. A number of his articles on chronology were published in the *World’s Crisis*

38 Nelson H. Barbour, *Evidences for the Coming of the Lord in 1873; or the Midnight Cry*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, N. Y., 1871), p. 32.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 33; E. B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalyptica*, 4th ed. (London: Seeleys, 1851), Vol. IV; fly-leaf appended at p. 236. Elliott’s work at that time, 1860, was a standard work advocating 1866 as the time of the coming of the Lord.

and the *Advent Christian Times*, the two leading papers of the Advent Christian Association. In 1870 he also published the 100-page pamphlet *Evidences for the Coming of the Lord in 1873; or the Midnight Cry*, the second edition of which has been quoted above.⁴¹ In 1873 he started a monthly of his own called *The Midnight Cry, and Herald of the Morning*, the circulation of which within three months ran up to 15,000 copies.⁴² When the target year of 1873 had nearly passed, Barbour advanced the time of the second advent to the autumn of 1874.⁴³ But when that year, too, came and went, Barbour and his followers experienced great concern:

When 1874 came and there was no outward sign of Jesus in the literal clouds and in a fleshly form, there was a general re-examination of all the arguments upon which the ‘Midnight Cry’ was made. And when no fault or flaw could be found, it led to the critical examination of the Scriptures which seem to bear on the manner of Christ’s coming, and it was soon discovered that the expectation of Jesus in the flesh at the second coming was the mistake⁴⁴

An “invisible presence”

One of the readers of the *Midnight Cry*, B. W. Keith (later one of the contributors to *Zion’s Watch Tower*),

41 Nelson H. Barbour (ed.), *Herald of the Morning* (Rochester, N.Y.), September 1879, p. 36. Actually, Barbour’s new date for the second advent was adopted by an increasing number of Second Adventists, especially within the Advent Christian Church, with which Barbour evidently associated for a number of years. One reason for this readiness to accept the 1873 date was that it was not new to them. As Barbour points out in his *Evidences* . . . (pp. 33, 34), Miller himself had mentioned 1873 after the 1843 failure. Prior to 1843, several expositors in England had ended the 1,335 years in 1873, for instance John Fry in 1835 and George Duffield in 1842. (Froom, Vol. III, pp. 496, 497; Vol. IV, p. 337) As early as 1853 the “age to come” Adventist Joseph Marsh in Rochester, N.Y., concluded, like other expositors before him, that the “time of the end” was a period of 75 years that began in 1798 and would expire in 1873. (D. T. Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 360) In 1870 the well-known Advent Christian preacher Jonas Wendell included Barbour’s chronology in his pamphlet *The Present Truth; or, Meat in Due Season* (Edenboro, PA, 1870). The increasing interest in the date caused the Advent Christian Church to arrange a special conference, February 6 to 11, 1872, in Worcester, Mass., for the examination of the time of the Lord’s return and especially the 1873 date. Many preachers, including Barbour, participated in the discussions. As reported in the *Advent Christian Times* of March 12, 1872, “The point on which there seemed to be any general unanimity was the ending of the thirteen hundred and thirty-five years in 1873.” (p. 263)

42 Nelson H. Barbour (ed.), *The Midnight Cry, and Herald of the Morning* (Boston, Mass.) Vol. I:4, March, 1874, p. 50.

43 N. H. Barbour, “The 1873 Time,” *The Advent Christian Times*, Nov. 11, 1873, p. 106.

44 *Zion’s Watch Tower*, October and November 1881, p. 3 (= *Reprints*, p. 289).

... had been reading carefully Matt. xxiv chapter, using the ‘Emphatic Diaglott’, a new and very exact word for word translation of the New Testament [translated and published by Benjamin Wilson in 1864]; when he came to the 37th and 39th verses he was much surprised to find that it read as follows, viz.: ‘For as the days of Noah thus will be the *presence* of the son of man’.⁴⁶

Keith thus found the Greek word *parousia*, usually translated “coming,” here translated as “presence.” A widely held idea among expositors at this time was that Christ’s second coming would take place in *two stages*, the first of which would be invisible.⁴⁵ Could it be that Jesus *had* come in the fall of 1874, though *invisible*, and been *invisibly present* since then?

To Barbour this explanation not only seemed attractive, but as he and his associates could find no faults with their calculations, they saw in it the solution to their problem. The date was right, although their expectations had been wrong.

Once again, it was seen as a case of having expected “the wrong thing at the right time”:

It was evident, then, that though the *manner* in which they had expected Jesus was in error, yet the time, as indicated by the ‘Midnight Cry,’ was correct, and that the Bridegroom *came* in the Autumn of 1874⁴⁶

Most readers of the *Midnight Cry*, and *Herald of the Morning* magazine, however, could not accept this explanation, and the 15,000 readers rapidly “dwindled to about 200.” Barbour himself was convinced that the Millennial morning had already begun to dawn, and therefore he thought that the *Midnight Cry* no longer was a suitable name for his paper. He remarked: “Will some one inform me how a

45 This idea of Christ’s return was originally presented in about 1828 by a banker and expositor of the prophecies in London, *Henry Drummond*. It soon became very popular among the expositors of the prophecies during the rest of the century, especially among the Darbyists, who did much to popularize the idea. It was much discussed in the leading millenarian periodicals, in England in the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* (1849-1873) and *The Rainbow* (1864-1887), and in the United States in the *Prophetic Times* (1863-1881). The chief editor of the last mentioned paper (which was widely read also in Adventist circles, including that of C. T. Russell and his associates) was the well-known Lutheran minister Joseph A. Seiss. — An examination of the origin and dispersion of the “invisible presence” idea is found in *The Christian Quest* magazine (Christian Renewal Ministries, San Jose, CA), Vol. 1:2, 1988, pp. 37-59, and Vol. 2:1, 1989, pp. 47-58.

46 *Zion’s Watch Tower*, February 1881, p. 3, and October-November 1881, p. 3 (= *Reprints*, pp. 188 and 289).

‘Midnight Cry’ can be made in the *morning*?’⁴⁷ The paper, which had ceased publication in October 1874, was therefore restarted in June 1875 as the *Herald of the Morning*, thereby dispensing with the first part of the earlier title.

In one of the very first issues (September, 1875), Barbour published his calculation of the Gentile times, making them terminate in 1914 C.E.⁴⁸ (See following page.)

Charles Taze Russell

In 1870, as an 18-year-old businessman in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, *Charles Taze Russell*, together with his father Joseph and some friends formed a class for Bible study.⁴⁹ The group was formed as an outgrowth of Russell’s contacts with some of the former Millerites mentioned above, especially Jonas Wendell, George Storrs and George Stetson.

Wendell, a preacher from the Advent Christian Church in Edenboro, Pennsylvania, had visited Allegheny in 1869, and by chance Russell went to one of his meetings and was strongly impressed by Wendell’s criticism of the hellfire doctrine. Russell had been brought up a Calvinist, but had recently broken with this religious background

47 *Ibid.*, April 1880, p. 7 (= *Reprints*, p. 88).

48 Actually, Barbour hinted at the calculation already in the June, 1875 issue of *Herald of the Morning*, by stating that the Gentile times began with the end of reign of Zedekiah in 606 B.C., although he did not directly mention the terminal date (p. 15). In the July issue, he stated that the Gentile times would “continue yet *forty years*.” Although this seems to point to 1915, it is clear from the subsequent issues that Barbour had the year 1914 in mind. The August issue contains an article on “Chronology” (pp. 38-42), but the Gentile times are not discussed. The 1914 date is directly mentioned for the first time in the September, 1875 issue, where the following statement is found on page 52: “I believe that though the gospel dispensation will end in 1878, the Jews will not be restored to Palestine, until 1881; and that the ‘times of the Gentiles,’ viz. their seven prophetic times, of 2520, or twice 1260 years, which began where God gave all, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, 606 B.C.; do not end until A.D. 1914; or 40 years from this.” A lengthy discussion of the calculation was then published in the issue of October 1875, pp. 74-76.

49 Charles’ parents, Joseph L. and Ann Eliza (Birney) Russell, were both of Scottish-Irish descent. They had left Ireland during the great Irish famine of 1845-1849, when one and a half million people starved to death and another million emigrated abroad. Joseph and Eliza settled in Allegheny in 1846, where Charles was born in 1852 as number two of three children. As Eliza died in about 1860, Joseph had to take care of the upbringing of the children. As a youngster, Charles spent most of his leisure time in his father’s clothing store, and at an early age he became Joseph’s business partner. Their successful company, “J. L. Russell & Son, Gents’ Furnishing Goods,” finally developed into a chain of five stores in Allegheny and Pittsburgh.—For additional biographical notes on Russell, see M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed. The Story of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1985, 1997), pp. 13-15.

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HERALD OF THE MORNING.

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Come thou and all thy
Now the Lord had said to
thy country: into a land that
these shall all families of
And ye shall be unto Me

"Take off the diadem.
I will overturn, overturn
it shall be no
He come whose
and I will give

D. BOGGSWELL,
Dunsmuir, N. Y.,
Corresponding

bruise the serpent's head.
house, into the ark.
Abram, get thee out of
I will shew thee; and in
the earth be blessed.
a kingdom of priests.

remove the crown:
overturn it, and
more until
right it is
it Han"

J. H. PATON
Almont, Mich.
Editors.

N. H. BARBOUR, Editor, ROCHESTER N. Y.

One Copy, per annum, 60 Cents; Four Copies, to one address, \$2.00

I believe that though the gospel dispensation will end in 1878, the Jews will not be restored to Palestine, until 1881; and that the "times of the Gentiles," viz. their seven prophetic times, of 2520, or twice 1260 years, which began where God gave all, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, 606 B. C. ; do not end until A. D. 1914; or 40 years from this.

Herald of the Morning of September, 1875
in which N. H. Barbour first published the year 1914 as the end of the 2,520 years

because of his doubts in the predestination and hellfire doctrines. He was in a serious religious crisis at this time and even questioned if the Bible really was the word of God. His meeting with Wendell and his subsequent reading of Storrs' magazine, the *Bible Examiner*, restored his faith in the Bible. Articles published in this magazine seem to have been regularly discussed in Russell's study group.

Although Russell knew that some Adventists, including Jonas Wendell, expected Christ in 1873, he himself rejected the whole concept of time settings and fixing of dates. Then, in 1876, he began to alter his position:

It was about January, 1876, that my attention was specially drawn to the subject of prophetic time, as it relates to these doctrines and hopes. It came about in this way: I received a paper called *The Herald of the Morning*, sent by its editor, Mr. N. H. Barbour.⁵⁰

Russell states he was surprised to find that Barbour's group had come to the same conclusion as his own group about the *manner* of Christ's return—that it would be “thieflike, and not in flesh, but as a spirit-being, invisible to men.”

Russell at once wrote to Barbour about the chronology, and later in 1876 he arranged to meet him in Philadelphia where Russell had business engagements that summer. Russell wanted Barbour to show him, “if he could, that the prophecies indicated 1874 as the date at which the Lord's presence and ‘the harvest’ began.” “He came,” says Russell, “and the evidence satisfied me.”⁵¹

It is apparent that during these meetings Russell accepted not only the 1874 date but *all* of Barbour's time calculations, including his calculation of the Gentile times.⁵² While still in Philadelphia, Russell wrote an article entitled “Gentile Times: When do They End?” which was published in George Storrs' periodical the *Bible Examiner* in the October 1876 issue. Referring to the “seven times” of Leviticus 26:28, 33 and Daniel 4 on page 27 of the *Examiner*, he determines the length of the Gentile times to be 2,520 years which began in 606 B.C.E.

50 *Zion's Watch Tower*, July 15, 1906, pp. 230, 231 (= *Reprints*, p. 3822).

51 *Ibid.* In a two-page “Supplement to *Zion's Watch Tower*,” sent out “To the readers of ‘Herald of the Morning’” with the first issue of *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* of July 1, 1879, Russell gives an account of his meeting with Barbour and his associate John Paton in 1876 and their subsequent collaboration for the following three years in spreading the “Harvest message,” and explains why he had to break with Barbour in 1879 and start his own paper.

52 This is also indicated by Russell himself who states: “. . . when we first met, he had much to learn from me on the fulness of *restitution* based upon the sufficiency of the ransom given for all, as I had much to learn from him concerning *time*.”—*Zion's Watch Tower*, July 15, 1906, p. 231 (= *Reprints*, p. 3822).

and would end in 1914 C.E.—precisely the same dates Barbour had arrived at and had begun publishing a year earlier, in 1875.

Looking forward to 1914

What, exactly, would the end of the “Gentile times” mean for mankind? Although monumental events relating to Christ’s return were proclaimed to have taken place in 1874, these were all said to be invisible, occurring in the spirit realm unseen by human eyes. Would 1914 and the termination of the Gentile times be the same, or would it bring visible, tangible change for the earth and for human society on it?

In the book *The Time is at Hand*, published in 1889 (later referred to as Volume II of *Studies in the Scriptures*), Russell stated that there was “Bible evidence proving” that the 1914 date “will be the farthest limit of the rule of imperfect men.” What would be the consequences of this? Russell enumerated his expectations for 1914 in seven points:

Firstly, That at that date the Kingdom of God ... will have obtained full, universal control, and that it will then be ‘set up,’ or firmly established, in the earth.

Secondly, It will prove that he whose right it is thus to take dominion will then be present as earth’s new ruler ...

Thirdly, It will prove that some time before the end of A. D. 1914 the last member of the divinely recognized Church of Christ, the ‘royal priesthood,’ ‘the body of Christ,’ will be glorified with the Head ...

Fourthly, It will prove that from that time forward Jerusalem shall no longer be trodden down of the Gentiles, but shall arise from the dust of divine disfavor, to honor; because the ‘Times of the Gentiles’ will be fulfilled or completed.

Fifthly, It will prove that by that date, or sooner, Israel’s blindness will begin to be turned away; because their ‘blindness in part’ was to continue only ‘until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in’ (Rom. 11:25) ...

Sixthly, It will prove that the great ‘time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation,’ will reach its culmination in a worldwide reign of anarchy ... and the ‘new heavens and new earth’ with their peaceful blessings will begin to be recognized by trouble-tossed humanity.

Seventhly, It will prove that *before that date* God’s Kingdom, organized in power, will be in the earth and then smite and crush the Gentile image (Dan. 2:34)—and fully consume the power of

these kings.⁵³

These were indeed very daring predictions. Did Russell really believe that all these remarkable things would come true within the next twenty five years? Yes, he did; in fact, he believed his chronology to be *God's* chronology, not just his own. In 1894 he wrote of the 1914 date:

We see no reason for changing the figures — nor could we change them if we would. *They are, we believe, God's dates, not ours.* But bear in mind that the end of 1914 is not the date for the *beginning*, but for the *end* of the time of trouble.⁵⁴

Thus it was thought that the “time of trouble” was to commence some years *before* 1914, “not later than 1910,” reaching its climax in 1914.⁵⁵

In 1904, however, just ten years before 1914, Russell altered his view on this matter. In an article in the July 1, 1904 issue of *Zion's Watch Tower*, entitled “Universal anarchy — just before or after October, 1914 A.D.,” he argued that the time of trouble, with its worldwide anarchy, would begin *after* October, 1914:

We now expect that the anarchistic culmination of the great time of trouble which will precede the Millennial blessings will be after October, 1914 A.D.—very speedily thereafter, in our opinion—‘in an hour,’ ‘suddenly,’ because ‘our forty years’ harvest, ending October, 1914 A.D., should not be expected to include the awful period of anarchy which the Scriptures point out to be the fate of Christendom.⁵⁶

This change caused some readers to think that there might be other errors in the chronological system, too—one reader even suggesting that Bishop Ussher's chronology might be more correct when it dated the destruction of Jerusalem as having happened in 587 B.C.E. rather than in 606 B.C.E. This would end the 2,520 years in about 1934 instead of 1914. But Russell strongly reaffirmed his belief in the 1914 date, referring to other claimed “time parallels” pointing to it:

53 C. T. Russell, *The Time is at Hand* (= Vol. II of the *Millennial Dawn* series; later called *Studies in the Scriptures*), Pittsburgh: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1889, pp. 77, 78. Some of the predictions were slightly changed in later editions.

54 *Zion's Watch Tower*, July 15, 1894 (= *Reprints*, p. 1677).

55 *Ibid.*, September 15, 1901 (= *Reprints*, p. 2876).

56 *Ibid.*, July 1, 1904, pp. 197, 198 (= *Reprints*, p. 3389).

We know of no reason for changing a figure: to do so would spoil the harmonies and parallels so conspicuous between the Jewish and Gospel ages.⁵⁷

Answering another reader, he said:

The harmony of the prophetic periods is one of the strongest proofs of the correctness of our Bible chronology. They fit together like the cog-wheels of a perfect machine. *To change the chronology even one year would destroy all this harmony*,—so accurately are the various proofs drawn together in the *parallels* between the Jewish and Gospel ages.⁵⁸

These arguments were further backed up by articles written by the Edgar brothers of Scotland.⁵⁹

Growing doubts

So in 1904 Russell was still as convinced of his dates as he was in 1889, when he wrote that the understanding of these time features was the “*sealing of the foreheads*” mentioned at Revelation 7:3.⁶⁰

As the 1914 date drew nearer, however, Russell became more and more cautious in his statements. Answering an inquiring Bible student in 1907, he said that “we have never claimed our calculations to be infallibly correct; we have never claimed that they were *knowledge*, nor based upon indisputable evidence, facts, knowledge; our claim has always been that they are based on *faith*.”⁶¹

The dates no longer seemed to qualify as “God’s dates,” as he had stated thirteen years earlier; now they might be fallible. Russell even considered the possibility that 1914 (and 1915) could pass by with *none* of the expected events having occurred:

But let us suppose a case far from our expectations: suppose that A.D. 1915 should pass with the world’s affairs all serene and with evidence that the ‘very elect’ had not all been ‘changed’ and without the restoration of natural Israel to favor under the New Covenant. (Rom. 11:12, 15) What then? Would not that prove our chronology wrong? Yes, surely! And would not that prove a keen disappointment? Indeed it would! . . . What a blow that would be! One of the strings

57 *Ibid.*, October 1, 1904, pp. 296, 297 (= *Reprints*, pp. 3436, 3437).

58 *Ibid.*, August 15, 1904, pp. 250, 251 (= *Reprints*, p. 3415). Emphasis added.

59 *Ibid.*, November 15, 1904, pp. 342-344; June 15, 1905, pp. 179-186 (= *Reprints*, pp. 3459, 3460, 3574-3579).

60 C. T. Russell, *The Time is at Hand*, p. 169.

61 *Zion’s Watch Tower*, October 1, 1907, pp. 294, 295 (= *Reprints*, p. 4067).

of our ‘harp’ would be quite broken! However, dear friends, our harp would still have all the other strings in tune and that is what no other aggregation of God’s people on earth could boast.⁶²

Another point of uncertainty was whether a year 0 (between 1 B.C.E. and 1 C.E.) was to be included in the calculation or not. This matter had been brought up by Russell as early as 1904, but gained in importance as the year 1914 approached.

The 1914 date had been arrived at simply by subtracting 606 from 2,520, but gradually it was realized that no year 0 is allowed for in our present calendar of era reckoning. Consequently, from October 1, 606 B.C.E. to the beginning of January, 1 C.E. was only 605 years and 3 months, and from the beginning of January, 1 C.E. to October 1914 was only 1913 years and 9 months, making a total of 2,519 years, not 2,520. This would mean that the 2,520 years would end in October 1915, rather than October 1914.⁶³ But when the war broke out in Europe in August 1914, it apparently seemed ill-timed to correct this error. It was allowed to stand.

By 1913, with 1914 on the doorstep, the cautiousness regarding that year had increased. In the article “Let Your Moderation Be Known,” which appeared in the June 1, 1913 issue of *The Watch Tower*, Russell warned his readers against spending “valuable time and energy in guessing what will take place this year, next year, etc.” His confidence in his earlier published scheme of events was no longer evident: “This is the good tidings of God’s grace in Christ—whether the completion of the church shall be accomplished before 1914 or not.”⁶⁴ He expressed himself still more vaguely in the October 15 issue of the same year:

We are waiting for the time to come when the government of the world will be turned over to Messiah. We cannot say that it may not be either October 1914, or October 1915. It is possible that *we might be out of the correct reckoning on the subject a number of years.* We

62 *Ibid.*

63 *The Watch Tower*, December 1, 1912 (= *Reprints*, pp. 5141, 5142). As the First World War broke out in 1914 and that year was retained as *the end* of the Gentile times, the starting point of those times needed to be moved back one year from 606 to 607 B.C.E. in order to preserve a total of 2,520 years. Although some of the Society’s adherents had pointed this fact out very early (see, for example, the footnote on page 32 of John and Morton Edgar’s *Great Pyramid Passages*, 2nd ed., 1924) this necessary adjustment was not made by the Watch Tower Society until 1943, when it was presented in the book, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, on page 239. See also the book, *The Kingdom is at Hand*, 1944, p. 184. For additional details, see next chapter, page 79.

cannot say with certainty. We do not know. It is a matter of faith, and not of knowledge.⁶⁵

Earlier, 1914 had been one of “God’s dates,” and “to change the chronology even one year would destroy all this harmony.” But now they “might be out of the correct reckoning on the subject a number of years,” and nothing on the matter could be said “with certainty.” This was truly a *volte-face*! If it was indeed “a matter of faith,” one can only wonder in *what* or in *whom* that faith was to be based.

Russell’s own tottering faith in his chronology was further brought to light in *The Watch Tower* of January 1, 1914, in which he stated: “As already pointed out, we are by no means confident that this year, 1914, will witness as radical and swift changes of dispensation as we have expected.”⁶⁶ The article “The Days Are At Hand” in the same issue is especially revealing:

If later it should be demonstrated that the church is not glorified by October, 1914, we shall try to feel content with whatever the Lord’s will may be. . . . If 1915 should go by without the passage of the church, without the time of trouble, etc., it would seem to some to be a great calamity. It would not be so with ourselves. . . . If in the Lord’s providence *the time should come twenty-five years later*, then that would be our will. . . . If October, 1915, should pass, and we should find ourselves still here and matters going on very much as they are at present, and the world apparently making progress in the way of settling disputes, and there were no time of trouble in sight, and the nominal church were not yet federated, etc., we would say that evidently we have been out somewhere in our reckoning. In that event we would look over the prophecies further, to see if we could find an error. And then we would think, *Have we been expecting the wrong thing in the right time?* The Lord’s will might permit this.⁶⁷

Again, in the May 1, 1914 issue—forgetting his earlier statements about “*God’s dates*” and of “Bible evidence *proving*” that the predicted developments would occur in 1914—Russell told his readers that “in these columns and in the six volumes of *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES* we have set forth everything appertaining to the times and seasons *in a tentative form*; that is to say, not with positiveness, not with the claim that we knew, but merely with the suggestion that ‘thus and so’ seems to be the teaching of the Bible.”⁶⁸

64 *The Watch Tower*, June 1, 1913, pp. 166, 167 (= *Reprints*, p. 5249).

65 *Ibid.*, October 15, 1913, p. 307 (= *Reprints*, p. 5328). Emphasis added.

66 *Ibid.*, January 1, 1914, pp. 3, 4 (= *Reprints*, p. 5373).

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5 (= *Reprints*, p. 5374). Emphasis added.

68 *Ibid.*, May 1, 1914, pp. 134, 135 (= *Reprints*, p. 5450). Emphasis added.

Two months later Russell seemed to be on the point of rejecting his chronology altogether. Answering a colporteur, who wanted to know if the *Studies in the Scriptures* were to be circulated after October, 1914, “since you [Russell] have some doubts respecting the full accomplishment of all expected by or before October, 1914,” Russell replied:

It is our thought that these books will be on sale and read for years in the future, provided the Gospel age and its work continue. . . . We have not attempted to say that these views are infallible, but have stated the processes of reasoning and figuring, leaving to each reader the duty and privilege of reading, thinking and figuring for himself. *That will be an interesting matter a hundred years from now*; and if he can figure and reason better, he will still be interested in what we have presented.⁶⁹

Thus, by July 1914, Russell now seemed ready to accept the thought that the 1914 date probably was a failure, and that his writings on the matter were going to be merely of historical interest to Bible students a hundred years later!

Reactions to the outbreak of the war

With the outbreak of the war in Europe in August 1914, Russell’s wavering confidence in the chronology began to recover. Although the war itself did not exactly fit into the predicted pattern of events — that the “time of trouble” would be a class struggle between capital and labor, leading up to a period of worldwide anarchy — he saw in the war the prelude to that situation:

Socialism is, we believe, the main factor in the war now raging and which will be earth’s greatest and most terrible war — and probably the last.⁷⁰

Later in 1914, he wrote:

We think that the present distress amongst the nations is merely the beginning of this time of trouble. . . . The anarchy that will follow this war will be the real time of trouble. Our thought is that the war will so weaken the nations that following it there will be an attempt to bring in Socialistic ideas, and that this will be met by the governments — [etc., leading up to worldwide class struggle and

69 *Ibid.*, July 1, 1914, pp. 206, 207 (= *Reprints*, p. 5496). Emphasis added.

70 *Ibid.*, August 15, 1914, pp. 243, 244 (= *Reprints*, p. 5516).

anarchy].⁷¹

Like other millenarian authors, Russell believed that the expiration of the Gentile times would mean a restoration of the Jewish nation in Palestine. Toward the end of 1914, however, Palestine and Jerusalem were still occupied by Gentiles. It seemed obvious that the restoration would not begin to occur in 1914 as had been predicted. In the November 1 issue of *The Watch Tower*, therefore, Russell tried to reinterpret the end of the Gentile times to mean the end of the *persecution* of the Jews:

The treading down of the Jews has stopped. All over the world the Jews are now free—even in Russia. On September 5, the Czar of Russia issued a proclamation to all the Jews of the Russian Empire; and this was before the times of the Gentiles had expired. It stated that the Jews might have access to the highest rank in the Russian army, and that the Jewish religion was to have the same freedom as any other religion in Russia. Where are the Jews being trodden down now? Where are they being subjected to scorn? At present they are receiving no persecution whatever. We believe that the treading down of Jerusalem has ceased, because the time for the Gentiles to tread down Israel has ended.⁷²

However, the relief for the Jews in Russia and elsewhere referred to by Russell turned out to be only temporary. He could not, of course, foresee the coming fierce persecutions of the Jews in Germany, Poland, and other countries during the Second World War.

From the outbreak of the First World War and up to his death on October, 1916, Russell's restored confidence in his chronology remained unshaken, as demonstrated by the following extracts from various issues of *The Watch Tower* during the period:

January 1, 1915: “. . . the war is the one predicted in the Scriptures as associated with the great day of Almighty God—‘the day of vengeance of our God.’”⁷³

September 15, 1915: “Tracing the Scriptural chronology down to our day, we find that we are now living in the very dawn of the great seventh day of man's great week. This is abundantly corroborated by the events now taking place about us on every hand.”⁷⁴

71 *Ibid.*, November 1, 1914, pp. 327, 328 (= *Reprints*, p. 5567).

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 329, 330 (= *Reprints*, p. 5568).

73 *Ibid.*, January 1, 1915, pp. 3, 4 (= *Reprints*, p. 5601).

74 *Ibid.*, September 15, 1915, pp. 281, 282 (= *Reprints*, p. 5769).

February 15, 1916: “In STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, Vol. IV, we have clearly pointed out the things now transpiring, and the worse conditions yet to come.”⁷⁵

April 15, 1916: “We believe that the dates have proven to be quite right. We believe that Gentile Times have ended, and that God is now allowing the Gentile Governments to destroy themselves, in order to prepare the way for Messiah’s kingdom.”⁷⁶

September 1, 1916: “It still seems clear to us that the prophetic period known to us as the Times of the Gentiles ended chronologically in October, 1914. The fact that the great day of wrath upon the nation began there marks a good fulfilment of our expectations.”⁷⁷

In November 1918, however, the First World War suddenly ended—without being followed by a worldwide Socialist revolution and anarchy, as had been predicted. The last member of the “divinely recognized Church of Christ” had not been glorified, the city of Jerusalem was still being controlled by the Gentiles, the kingdom of God had not crushed “the Gentile image,” and the “new heavens and the new earth” could not be seen anywhere by trouble-tossed humanity. Not a single one of the seven predictions enumerated in the book *The Time is at Hand* had come true.⁷⁸ Pastor Russell’s “Bible Students” were confused, to say the least.

Yet—though not among the predictions—something *had* happened: The World War. Could it be that the time was right, after all, even though the predictions had failed? The explanation resorted to by the Adventists after 1844 and by Barbour and his associates after 1874—that they had expected “the wrong thing at the right time”—now seemed even more appropriate.⁷⁹ But how could the time be right, when all predictions based on it had failed? For years many of Russell’s followers experienced deep perplexity because of the non-arrival of the predicted events. After the lapse of some years, *J. F. Rutherford*, Russell’s successor as president of the Watch Tower Society, began to explain, step by step, what “really” had been fulfilled from 1914 onward.

75 *Ibid.*, February 15, 1916, pp. 51, 52 (= *Reprints*, p. 5852).

76 *Ibid.*, April 15, 1916 (= *Reprints*, p. 5888).

77 *Ibid.*, September 1, 1916, pp. 263, 264 (= *Reprints*, p. 5950).

78 See above, pages 50, 51. For a long time after 1914 it was held that the “time of trouble” (Matt. 24:21, 22) really began in that year, but this view was finally abandoned by the Watch Tower Society in 1969. (See *The Watchtower*, January 15, 1970, pp. 49-56.)

79 A. H. Macmillan, *Faith on the March* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 48.

In the address “The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand” at the September 5-13, 1922, Cedar Point Convention, Rutherford told his audience that the Kingdom of God *really had been established in 1914*, not on earth but *in the invisible heavens!*⁸⁰ And three years later, in 1925, he applied Revelation 12 to this event, stating that God’s Kingdom was *born in heaven in 1914* according to this prophecy.⁸¹

Previously the *Watch Tower’s* predictions had all been of an obvious, clearly visible, takeover of earth’s rulership by Christ. Now this was presented as something invisible, evident only to a select group.

Also at the Cedar Point Convention in 1922, Rutherford for the first time presented the view that “in 1918, or thereabouts, the Lord came to his (spiritual) temple.”⁸² Earlier, Russell and his associates had held the view that the heavenly resurrection took place in 1878. But in 1927 Rutherford transferred that event to 1918.⁸³ Likewise in the early 1930’s, Rutherford changed the date for the beginning of *Christ’s invisible presence* from 1874 to 1914.⁸⁴

Thus Rutherford gradually replaced the unfulfilled predictions with *a series of invisible and spiritual events* associated with the years 1914 and 1918. Ninety years after 1914 Rutherford’s “explanations” are still held by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

80 *New Heavens and a New Earth* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1953), p. 225. Until 1922, that is, for over forty years, the Bible Students had believed and taught that the kingdom of God had begun to be established in heaven in 1878. This event was now transferred to 1914. — See *The Time is at Hand* (= Vol. II of *Millennial Dawn*), 1889, p. 101.

81 See the article “Birth of a Nation” in *The Watch Tower* of March 1, 1925.

82 *The Watch Tower*, October 1, 1922, p. 298; November 1, 1922, p. 334.

83 *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1958), p. 192.

84 As of 1929 the Watch Tower Society still taught that “the second presence of the Lord Jesus Christ began in 1874 A.D.” (*Prophecy*, Brooklyn, N.Y.: International Bible Students Association, 1929, p. 65.) The exact date for the transference of the second coming from 1874 to 1914 is difficult to pinpoint. For some time confusing statements may be found in the publications. Perhaps the first indication of a change is the statement in *The Golden Age* of April 30, 1930, page 503, that “Jesus has been present *since the year 1914*.” However, *The Watch Tower* of October 15, 1930, somewhat vaguely states on page 308 that “the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ dates *from about 1875*.” Then, in 1931, the booklet, *The Kingdom, the Hope of the World*, again indicates that the second coming occurred in 1914. And in 1932 the booklet *What is Truth* clearly states on page 48: “The prophecy of the Bible, fully supported by the physical facts in fulfillment thereof, shows that *the second coming of Christ dates from the fall of the year 1914*.”

Summary

The interpretation of the “Gentile times” as having been of 2,520 years, beginning in 607 B.C.E. (earlier, 606 B.C.E.) and ending in 1914 C.E., was not some divine revelation made to Pastor Charles Taze Russell in the autumn of 1876. On the contrary, this idea has a long history of development, with its roots far back in the past.

It had its origin in the “year-day principle,” first posited by Rabbi Akibah ben Joseph in the first century C.E. From the ninth century onward this principle was applied to the time periods of Daniel by several Jewish rabbis.

Among Christians, Joachim of Floris in the twelfth century probably was the first to pick up the idea, applying it to the 1,260 days of Revelation and the three and one-half times of Daniel. After Joachim’s death, his followers soon identified the 1,260 year period with the Gentile times of Luke 21:24, and this interpretation was then common among groups, including the Reformers, branded as heretics by the church of Rome during the following centuries.

As time passed, and expectations failed when earlier explanations proved to be wrong, the starting-point of the 1,260 (or, 1290) years was progressively moved forward, in order to make them end in a then near future.

The first to arrive at a period of 2,520 years was apparently John Aquila Brown in 1823. Although his calculation was founded upon the “seven times” of Daniel 4, he did not equate those periods with the “Gentile times” of Luke 21:24. But this was very soon done by other expositors. Fixing the starting-point at 604 B.C.E., Brown reached the year 1917 as the seven times’ termination date. By using different starting-points, other biblical commentators in the following decades arrived at a number of different terminal dates. Some writers, who experimented with biblical “Jubilee cycles,” arrived at a period of 2,450 (or, 2,452) years ($49 \times 49 + 49$), which they held to be the period of the Gentile times.

The accompanying table presents a *selection* of applications of the 2,520 (and 2,450) years made by different authors during the last century. The calculations were in fact so numerous, that it would probably be difficult to find a single year between the 1830’s and 1930’s that does not figure in some calculation as the terminal date of the Gentile times! That a number of expositors pointed to 1914 or other years near to that date, such as 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1922 and 1923, is, therefore, not a cause for astonishment. The 1914

TABLE 2: APPLICATIONS OF THE 2,520 (OR 2,450) YEARS

Expositor	Date	Publication	Application BCE-CE	Comments
John Aquila Brown	1823	The Even-Tide . . .	604-1917	= "Seven times" of Daniel 4
William Cuninghame	1827	Dialogues on Prophecy, Vol. 1	728-1792	Report of the prophetic conferences at Albury Park
Henry Drummond	1827	" "	722-1798	
G. S. Faber	1828	The Sacred Calendar of Prophecy	657-1864	
Alfred Addis	1829	Heaven Opened	680-1840	
William Digby	1831	A Treatise on the 1260 Days	723-1793	
W. A. Holmes	1833	The Time of the End	685-1835	
Matthew Habershon	1834	A Dissertation . . .	677-1843	
John Fry	1835	Unfulfilled Prophecies . . .	677-1843	
William W. Pym	1835	A Word of Warning . . .	673-1847	
William Miller	1842	The First Report . . .	677-1843	
Th. R. Birks	1843	First Elements of Sacred Prophecy	606-1843	Gentile times = 2,450 years
Edward B. Elliott	1844	Horæ Apocalyptiæ, Vol. III	727-1793	
" "	1844	" "	606-1914	A second alternative
Matthew Habershon	1844	An Historical Exposition	676-1844	
" "	1844	" "	601-1919	A second alternative
William Cuninghame	1847	The Fulfilling . . .	606-1847	Gentile times = 2,452 years
James Hatley Frere	1848	The Great Continental Revolution	603-1847	Gentile times = 2,450 years
Robert Seeley	1849	An Atlas of Prophecy	606-1914	Counted from "606 or 607"
" "	1849	" "	570-1950	A second alternative
" "	1849	" "	728-1792	A third alternative
Edward Bickersteth	1850	A Scripture Help	727-1793	Another of his calculations was 677-1843
" "	1850	" "	602-1918	

Anonymous	1856	The Watch Tower	727-1793	A pamphlet
Richard C. Shimeall	1859	Our Bible Chronology	652-1868	A London periodical edited by William Leask
J. S. Phillips	1865	The Rainbow, March 1,	652-1867	
"J. M. N."	1865	" " April 1,	658/47-1862/73	
Frederick W. Farrar	1865	" " November 1,	654-1866	
Anonymous	1870	The Prophetic Times, December,	715-1805	A periodical edited by Joseph A. Seiss <i>et al.</i> These are some examples; the writer gives twelve different alternatives!
" "	1870	" " "	698-1822	
" "	1870	" " "	643-1877	
" "	1870	" " "	606-1914	
" "	1870	" " "	598-1922	
Joseph Baylee	1871	The Times of the Gentiles	623-1896	
"P. H. G."	1871	The Quarterly Journal of Prophecy, April,	652/49-1868/71	A London periodical edited by Horatius Bonar
" "	1871	Our Hope, June,	626-1894	
Edward White	1874	Herald of the Morning, Sept & Oct.,	606-1914	A London periodical edited by Wm. Maude
N. H. Barbour	1875	The Bible Examiner, October,	606-1914	Periodical published by Nelson H. Barbour Edited by George Storrs
C. T. Russell	1876	The Rainbow, August,	651/50-1869/70	
E. H. Tuckett	1877	Forty Coming Wonders, 5th ed.	695-1825	
M. P. Baxter	1880	" " "	620-1900	A second alternative
" "	1880	Light for the Last Days	606-1915	These are only some of his many, diverse analyses
H. Grattan Guinness	1886	" " "	598-1923	
" "	1886	" " "	587-1934	
" "	1886	" " "	606-1915	
W. E. Blackstone	1916	The Weekly Evangel, May 13	606-1915	This article sums up his viewpoints as published many years earlier
" "	1916	" " "	595-1926	
" "	1916	" " "	587-1934	

date would most probably have drowned in the sea of other failed dates and been forgotten by now had it not happened to be the year of the outbreak of the First World War.

When, back in 1844, E. B. Elliott suggested 1914 as a possible terminal date for the Gentile times, he reckoned the 2,520 years from Nebuchadnezzar's *accession-year*, which he dated to 606 B.C.E. N. H. Barbour, however, reckoned the 2,520 years from the desolation of Jerusalem in Nebuchadnezzar's *18th* regnal year. But as he dated this event to 606 B.C.E., he, too, in 1875, arrived at 1914 as the terminal date. Since their chronologies not only conflicted with each other, but also conflicted with the historically established chronology for Nebuchadnezzar's reign, their arriving at the same terminal year was simply a coincidence, demonstrating how arbitrary and gratuitous their calculations really were.

Barbour's calculation was accepted by C. T. Russell at their meeting in 1876. Barbour was then fifty-two years old while Russell was twenty-four—still very young. Although their ways parted again in the spring of 1879, Russell stuck to Barbour's time calculations, and since that time the 1914 date has been the pivotal point in prophetic explanations among Russell's followers.

Supplement to the third and later editions, chapter 1:

The information presented in this chapter has been available to the Jehovah's Witnesses since 1983, when the first edition of this book was published. In addition, the same information was summarized by Raymond Franz in chapter 7 of his widely known work, *Crisis of Conscience*, published in the same year. Thus—after 10 years—in 1993 the Watch Tower Society finally felt compelled to admit that neither the 2,520-year calculation nor the 1914 date originated with Charles Taze Russell as it had held until then. Further, the Society now also admits that the predictions Russell and his associates attached to 1914 failed.

These admissions are found on pages 134–137 of *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, a book on the history of the movement published by the Watch Tower Society in 1993. Prior to 1993 the impression given had been that Russell was the first to publish the 2,520-year calculation pointing to 1914, doing this for the first time in the October, 1876 issue of George Storrs' magazine the *Bible Examiner*. Also, that decades in advance Russell and his followers foretold the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and other events associated with the war. Thus the earlier organiza-

tional history book *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* quoted some very general statements made in the book *The Plan of the Ages* (published in 1886) about the "time of trouble" (originally believed to extend from 1874 to 1914) and claimed:

Although this was still decades before the first world war, it is surprising *how accurately the events that finally took place were actually foreseen.* (Emphasis added.)⁸⁵

Similarly, *The Watchtower* of August 1, 1971, made the following pre-tentious statements on page 468:

From the Bible chronology, Jehovah's witnesses as far back as 1877 pointed to the year 1914 as one of great significance. . . .

The momentous year of 1914 came, and with it World War I, the most widespread upheaval in history up to that time. It brought unprecedented slaughter, famine, pestilence and overthrow of governments. *The world did not expect such horrible events as took place. But Jehovah's witnesses did expect such things, and others acknowledged that they did.* . . .

How could Jehovah's witnesses have known so far in advance what world leaders themselves did not know? Only by God's holy spirit making such prophetic truths known to them. True, some today claim that those events were not hard to predict, since mankind has long known various troubles. But if those events were not hard to predict, *then why were not all the politicians, religious leaders and economic experts doing so? Why were they telling the people the opposite?* (Emphasis added.)

Unfortunately for the Watch Tower Society, none of these claims are in accordance with the facts of history. Whether deliberate or the result of ignorance, each represents a serious distortion of reality.

Firstly, although there were a number of predictions in the Watch Tower publications as to what would take place in 1914, *none of them came close to a prediction of the outbreak of a world war in that year.*

Secondly, political and religious leaders, *contrary to the statements in The Watchtower* quoted above, *long before 1914* expected that a great war sooner or later *would* break out in Europe. As early as 1871 *Otto von Bismarck*, the first Lord High Chancellor of the German Empire, declared that the "Great War" would come one day. For decades before 1914, the daily papers and weeklies were constantly occupied with the theme. To cite just one example among many, the January 1892 issue of the highly respected English weekly *Black and White* explained in an editorial introduction to a fictional serial on the coming war:

85 *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1959), p. 31.

The air is full of rumours of War. The European nations stand fully armed and prepared for instant mobilization. *Authorities are agreed that a GREAT WAR must break out in the immediate future*, and that this War will be fought under novel and surprising conditions. All facts seem to indicate that the coming conflict will be the bloodiest in history, and must involve the momentous consequences to the whole world. At any time the incident may occur which will precipitate the disaster.⁸⁶

I. F. Clarke, in his book *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984*, explains to what an extent the First World War “was being prepared in fact and in fiction”:

From 1871 onwards the major European powers prepared for the great war that Bismarck had said would come one day. And for close on half a century, while the general staffs and the ministries argued about weapons, estimates, and tactics, the tale of the war-to-come was a dominant device in the field of purposive fiction. . . . The period from the eighteen-eighties to the long-expected outbreak of the next war in 1914 saw the emergence of the greatest number of these tales of coming conflicts ever to appear in European fiction.⁸⁷

The people of that time, therefore, could not avoid being confronted with the constant predictions of a coming great war in Europe. The question was not *if* but *when* the Great War would break out. Here there was room for speculations, and many of the imaginative tales and novels suggested different dates. Specific dates were sometimes even pointed out in the very titles of the books, for example, *Europa in Flammen. Der deutsche Zukunftskrieg 1909* (“Europe in Flames. The Coming German War of 1909”), by Michael Wagebald, published in 1908, and *The Invasion of 1910*, by W. LeQueux, published in 1906.

Politicians and statesmen, too, sometimes tried to pinpoint the specific year for the outbreak of the expected great war. One of the more lucky was *M. Francis Delaisi*, a member of the French Chamber of Deputies. In his article “*La Guerre qui Vient*” (“The Coming War”), published in the parish periodical *La Guerre Sociale* in 1911, he discusses at great length the diplomatic situation, concluding that “a terrible war between England and Germany is preparing.” As shown by the following extracts from his article, some of his political forecasts turned out to be remarkably accurate:

A conflict is preparing itself compared with which the horrible slaughter of the Russo-Japanese war [in 1904-05] will be child’s play.

In 1914 the [naval] forces of England and Germany will be almost equal.

A Prussian army corps will advance with forced marches to occupy Antwerp.

We, the French, will have to do the fighting on the Belgian plains.

86 Quoted by I. F. Clarke in *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 66, 67.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

All newspapers will print in headlines as large as your hand these prophetic words: THE BELGIUM NEUTRALITY HAS BEEN VIOLATED. THE PRUSSIAN ARMY IS MARCHING UPON LILLE.⁸⁸

In the religious area, it was especially the “millennarians” that were then presenting predictions of the approaching end of the world. This movement included millions of Christians from different quarters, Baptists, Pentecostals, and so on. Pastor Russell and his followers, the “Bible Students,” were just a small branch of this broad movement. Common to them all was their pessimistic view of the future. In his book *Armageddon Now!* Dwight Wilson describes their reaction to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914:

The war itself came as no shock to these opponents of postmillennial optimism; they had not only looked toward the culmination of the age in Armageddon, but anticipated ‘wars and rumors of wars’ as signs of the approaching end.⁸⁹

Wilson then goes on to quote one of them, R. A. Torrey, dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, who, in 1913, one year before the outbreak of the war, wrote in his book, *The Return of the Lord Jesus*: “We talk of disarmament, but we all know it is not coming. All our present peace plans will end in the most awful wars and conflicts this old world ever saw!”⁹⁰

As Theodore Graebner tells in his book *War in the Light of Prophecy*, the war of 1914 had scarcely begun before a great host of writers from different religious quarters arose, claiming that the war had been foretold:

Soon the announcement was made by several investigators: IT HAS BEEN FORETOLD. Immediately thousands of Bible Christians became interested. Immediately, too, others set to work on Gog and Magog, Armageddon, the Seventy Weeks, 666, 1,260, etc., and soon religious periodicals, in this country and abroad, contained the message, announced with greater or less assurance, IT HAS BEEN FORETOLD. Pamphlets and tracts appeared promulgating the same message, and soon a number of books were on the market, running to 350 pages each, which not only contained most circumstantial ‘proof’ for this assertion, but announced likewise the exact time when the war would come to a close, who would be the victor, and the significance of the war for the Christian Church, now (it was said) about to enter into her millennial period.⁹¹

Graebner, who felt incited to examine a great number of these contentions, after a very thorough investigation concludes that:

88 Quoted by Theodore Graebner in his book, *War in the Light of Prophecy*. “Was it Foretold?” *A Reply to Modern Chiliasm* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), pp. 14, 15.

89 Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 36, 37.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

. . . the entire mass of millennial literature that flourished during the First World War—and a tremendous mass it was—was proved definitely, completely, absolutely, false *by the events*. In not a single point did the First World War develop as was to be expected after reading the chiliastic [millennialist] interpreters. Not a single [one] of them predicted the outcome of the war. Not a single [one] of them foretold the entrance of the United States. Not a single [one] of them foretold World War II.⁹²

Pastor Russell's speculations about the coming great war in Europe did not differ appreciably from those of the contemporary novel-writers and millenarian expositors. In the *Zion's Watch Tower* of February, 1885, he wrote: "Storm clouds are gathering thick over the old world. It looks as though a great European war is one of the possibilities of the near future."⁹³

Commenting on the prevailing world situation two years later he concluded, in the issue of February, 1887: "This all looks as though next Summer [1888] would see a war on foot which might engage every nation of Europe."⁹⁴ In the issue of January 15, 1892, he had postponed the war to "about 1905," at the same time *stressing that this generally expected Great War had nothing to do with 1914 and the expectations attached to that date*. In 1914 he expected—not a general European war—but the climax of the "battle of Armageddon" (which he thought had begun in 1874), when all the nations on earth would be crushed and be replaced by the kingdom of God. He wrote:

The daily papers and the weeklies and the monthlies, religious and secular, are continually discussing the prospects of war in Europe. They note the grievances and ambitions of the various nations and predict that war is inevitable at no distant day, that it may begin at any moment between some of the great powers, and that the prospects are that it will eventually involve them all. . . .

But, notwithstanding these predictions and the good reasons which many see for making them, we do not share them. That is, we do not think that the prospects of a general European war are so marked as is commonly supposed. . . . Even should a war or revolution break out in Europe sooner than 1905, we do not consider it any portion of the severe trouble predicted. . . . [The] ever-darkening war cloud will burst in all its destructive fury. This culmination we do not expect, however, before about 1905, as the events predicted will require about that time, notwithstanding the rapid progress in these directions now possible.⁹⁵

91 Graebner, *op. cit.*, p. 8, 9.

92 *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10.

93 *Reprints*, p. 720.

94 *Reprints*, p. 899.

95 *Reprints*, pp. 1354-1356

The generally expected Great War finally came in 1914. But probably none, and in any case not Charles Taze Russell and his followers, had predicted that it would come that year. The very different events that he and his associated “Bible Students” had attached to that date did not occur. Like the predictions of the many other contemporary millennialist writers, their predictions, too, were proved “definitely, completely, absolutely, false by the events.”

To claim afterwards, as the Watch Tower Society repeatedly did up to 1993, that they and they alone “accurately,” “by God’s holy spirit,” had predicted the outbreak of the war in 1914 and other events, and that “all the politicians, religious leaders, and economic experts” had been “telling the people the opposite,” is demonstrably a gross distortion of the historical facts.

As explained earlier, some of those pretentious claims were finally, in 1993, withdrawn in the new book *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*. The book was introduced at the district assemblies of Jehovah’s Witnesses that year as a “candid look” at the history of the movement. The admissions, however, usually are contextually surrounded by a minimum of background information which, moreover, is so apologetically slanted and warped that it often conceals more than it reveals.

True, the Society finally admits that Russell took over his calculation of the Gentile times from Nelson H. Barbour, who had published it one year before Russell “in the August, September, and October 1875 issues of the *Herald of the Morning*.”⁹⁶ In the preceding paragraph the book even seeks to enlist the 19th-century expositors of the 2,520-year calculation as supporting the 1914 date. This impression is further enhanced by the bold-typed statement to the left of the paragraph: “**They could see that 1914 was clearly marked by Bible prophecy.**” The presentation of the history, however, is narrowly limited to a few carefully selected expositors, the calculations of whom are partially obscured, adjusted and arranged so as to create the impression that the 2,520-year calculation *uniquely pointed forward to 1914*. *None of the many other terminal dates arrived at by expositors before Russell are mentioned*. Thus, although John A. Brown is stated to have arrived at the 2,520 years “as early as 1823,” his particular application of the period is completely veiled and distorted in the subsequent sentences:

⁹⁶ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1993), p. 134.

subtitle "Herald of Christ's Presence," which appeared on the cover of *Zion's Watch Tower*.

Recognition of Christ's presence as being invisible became an important foundation on which an understanding of many Bible prophecies would be built. Those early Bible Students realized that the presence of the Lord should be of primary concern to all true Christians. (Mark 13:33-37) They were keenly interested in the Master's return and were alert to the fact that they had a responsibility to publicize it, but they did not yet clearly discern all the details. Yet, what God's spirit did enable them to understand at a very early time was truly remarkable. One of these truths involved a highly significant date marked by Bible prophecy.

End of the Gentile Times

The matter of Bible chronology had long been of great interest to Bible students. Commentators had set out a variety of views on Jesus' prophecy about "the times of the Gentiles" and the prophet Daniel's record of Nebuchadnezzar's dream regarding the tree stump that was banded for "seven times."—Luke 21:24, *KJ*; Dan. 4:10-17.

As early as 1823, John A. Brown, whose work was published in London, England, calculated the "seven times" of Daniel chapter 4 to be 2,520 years in length. But he did not clearly discern the date with which the prophetic time period began or when it would end. He did, however, connect these "seven times" with the Gentile Times of Luke 21:24. In 1844, E. B. Elliott, a British clergyman, drew attention to 1914 as a possible date for the end of the "seven times" of Daniel, but he also set out an alternate view that pointed to the time of the French Revolution. Robert Seeley, of London, in 1849, handled the matter in a similar manner. At least by 1870, a publication edited by Joseph Seiss and associates and printed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was setting out calculations that pointed to 1914 as a significant date, even though the reasoning it contained was based on chronology that C. T. Russell later rejected.

Then, in the August, September, and October 1875 issues of *Herald of the Morning*, N. H. Barbour helped to harmonize details that had been pointed out by others. Using chronology compiled by Christopher Bowen, a clergyman in England, and published by E. B. Elliott, Barbour identified the start of the Gentile Times with King Zedekiah's removal from kingship as foretold at Ezekiel 21:25, 26, and he pointed to 1914 as marking the end of the Gentile Times.

Early in 1876, C. T. Russell received a copy of *Herald of the Morning*. He promptly wrote to Barbour and then spent time with him in Philadelphia during the summer, discussing, among other things, prophetic time periods. Shortly thereafter, in an article entitled "Gentile Times: When Do

They could see that 1914 was clearly marked by Bible prophecy

But he did not clearly discern the date with which the prophetic time period began or when it would end. He did, however, *connect these 'seven times' with the Gentile Times of Luke 21:24.*⁹⁷

Quite to the contrary, as shown in the chapter above, Brown expressly stated as his *firm conviction* that the 2,520-year period began in 604 B.C.E. and would end in 1917. Further, despite the Society's italicized statement, Brown *did not* connect the 2,520 years with the Gentile times of Luke 21:24, because, as pointed out in the chapter above, he held the Gentile times referred to in this text to be 1,260 (lunar) years, not "seven times" of 2,520 years. (See footnote 20 above.) Both statements about Brown's calculation, then, are demonstrably false.

In addition to John A. Brown, the Society in the same paragraph refers to Edward B. Elliott and Robert Seeley, both of whom mentioned 1914 as one of the possible dates for the end of the "seven times." Both of them, however, actually *preferred* 1793 (later changed to 1791 by Elliott) as the terminal date.⁹⁸

Finally, an unnamed publication edited by Joseph Seiss and others is stated to have set out calculations that pointed to 1914 as a significant date, "even though the reasoning it contained was based on chronology that C. T. Russell later rejected."⁹⁹

The fact is, however, that this holds true of *all* four expositors mentioned by the Society. *All of them used a chronology that dated the desolation of Jerusalem to 588 or 587 B.C.E.* (not 606 B.C.E. as in Russell's writings). Brown arrived at 1917 as the terminal date only because he reckoned the 2,520 years from the *first year* of Nebuchadnezzar (604 B.C.E.) instead of his 18th year, as did Barbour and Russell. And the other three arrived at 1914 by counting from Nebuchadnezzar's *accession-year*, which they

97 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

98 The Watch Tower Society gives no specific references. E. B. Elliott first published his calculations in *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 1st ed. (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844), vol. III, pp. 1429-1431. Robert Seeley published his calculations in *An Atlas of Prophecy: Being the Prophecies of Daniel & St. John* (London: Seeley's, 1849), p. 9. See also footnote 30 of chapter I.

99 The unnamed publication is the *The Prophetic Times* magazine. The calculation was presented in the article "Prophetic Times. An Inquiry into the Dates and Periods of Sacred Prophecy," written by an anonymous contributor and published in the issue of December, 1870, pp. 177-184. The author, on pages 178 and 179, presents *12 different starting-points for the times of the Gentiles, extending from 728 to 598 B.C.E., thus arriving at 12 different terminal dates extending from 1792 to 1922 C.E.!* The year 1914 is the next to the last of these terminal dates. The calculation pointing to 1914 is counted from the *accession-year* of Nebuchadnezzar, which the author, like Elliott and Seeley, dates to 606 B.C.E. Thus he, too, followed a chronology that dates the destruction of Jerusalem to 588 or 587 B.C.E., not 606 B.C.E. as in Russell's writings or 607 B.C.E. as in later Watch Tower publications.

dated to 606 B.C.E. (instead of 605 B.C.E., the date established by modern historians).¹⁰⁰

Although all of them based their calculations on chronologies that were rejected by Russell and his followers, the Society claims that these expositors “could see that 1914 was clearly marked by Bible prophecy.” How they “could see” this “clearly” by using chronologies that the Society still holds to be false is certainly puzzling. Of course, for a reader to discover such inconsistent reasonings, he or she has to check the works of these expositors. The problem is that the Society’s authors commonly avoid giving specific references. This practice makes it virtually impossible for the great majority of readers to discover the subtle methods used to support indefensible interpretations and cover over embarrassing evidence.

As just mentioned, the Society, contrary to earlier claims, concedes in the new book that the predictions attached to 1914 failed. As was shown in the chapter above, the very specific and distinct predictions about 1914 were summarized in seven points on pages 76-78 of Vol. II of *Millennial Dawn*, originally published in 1889. These predictions were there put forward in no uncertain terms. The discussion is teeming with words and phrases such as “facts,” “proof,” “Bible evidence,” and “established truth.” That 1914 would see “the disintegration of the rule of imperfect men,” for instance, is stated to be “a fact firmly established by the Scriptures.”¹⁰¹

What does the Society’s new history book do with the pretentious claims and the very positive language that originally encapsulated these predictions? They are totally smoothed over or concealed. Referring to the above-mentioned discussion of the Gentile times in Vol. II of *Millennial Dawn*—but without quoting any of the *actual statements* made—the Society asks: “But what would the end of the Gentile Times mean?” The surprising answer given is that the Bible Students “were not completely sure what would happen”!

100 As shown in the chapter above, Barbour and Russell, too, started the Gentile times in 606 B.C.E., although this was held to be the date for the desolation of Jerusalem in the *eighteenth* year of Nebuchadnezzar. The 606 B.C.E. date is nowhere mentioned in the Society’s new book, probably because the Society today uses 607 B.C.E. as the starting-point. Reminding the readers of the earlier date, therefore, might only seem confusing, at least to those who have never heard of it. How the Society in 1944 (in the book *The Kingdom is at Hand*, p. 175) managed to change the starting-point from 606 to 607 B.C.E. and still retain 1914 as the terminal date has a strange history of its own, a history that has been recounted in the booklet *The Watchtower Society and Absolute Chronology* (Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, 1981), authored by “Karl Burganger” (a pen name I used at that time). See also next chapter, pp. 77-84.

101 *The Time is at Hand* (= Vol. II of *Millennial Dawn*, later called *Studies in the Scriptures*), Pittsburgh: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, 1889, pp. 76-102.

Although some of the predictions are briefly mentioned, the Society carefully avoids terming them “predictions” or “prophecies.” Russell and his associates never “predicted” or “foretold” anything, never claimed to present “proof” or “established truth.” They just “thought,” “suggested,” “expected,” and “earnestly hoped” that this or that “might” happen, but they “were not completely sure.”¹⁰² Thus the predictions are wrapped up in language that completely masks the true nature of the aggressive doomsday message proclaimed to the world by the International Bible Students for over a quarter of a century before 1914. Disguising the presumptuous predictions in such vague and unassuming words and phrases, of course, makes it easier to “humbly” concede that these failed.

102 *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (1993), page 135.