

Introduction

The following four pages were extracted and transcribed from a much longer typed manuscript by George Herbert Fisher in about 1920-1923. The proposed article for the Watch Tower was never used or published. While the reasons for being unpublished are not stated, the article supports the chronology published by C. T. Russell in *The Studies in the Scriptures*. In these early years after his death in 1916, there were notable proposed revisions of the chronology and ongoing revisions in the mission and message from the WTB&T Society. Change was in the air, and it wouldn't do to have too much support for the old theology.

These portions of the article address subjects of the 50 year Jubilee cycles, Nebuchadnezzar the "head of gold", Jehoiakim or Zedekiah, Jerusalem "desolation" for 51 or 70 years and other dating matters. Fisher expands on confirming evidence for the accepted chronology. Furthermore, he details the consequences for changes in the time line.

It will be noted that the trend to revise the chronology of 6,000 years with new proposals and claims have continued. Little attention is given for the basis of prior fundamentals. With this in mind we find this early defense to be courageous and substantial. Before changing course, we should always recall why we walked in earlier paths and what we are leaving behind.

By 1925 Fisher was already distancing himself from the Society and its march toward changes and revisions. He died in New York on July 30, 1926.

WATCH TOWER article on Chronology.— Unpublished
NO CHANGE IN CHRONOLOGY [From George H. Fisher, a typed manuscript]

Readers of the WATCH TOWER know that its well established policy is that expressed by the Apostle, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to discuss his doubts.” We are so busy with what we apprehend to be the Lord’s work that we have no time and perhaps scant ability to discuss at length the difficulties of those who differ with us, and yet, when we find brethren who are wandering from the clear-cut and proven chronology of Pastor Russell to adopt items which he examined and rejected, we feel that some discussion of the points on which they are in difficulty may not be amiss, and that a restatement of our own strongly fortified position may be helpful to some.

We do not accept the propositions brought forward in the writings of a Mr. Guinness that the jubilee years were merely markers, beginning in the middle of the forty-ninth year and ending in the middle of the first year of another forty-nine year series. Such years would be but bogus years, as far as their value in chronology is concerned, serving only to tangle matters. But we quote Mr. Guinness:

“Now as the Jubilee was regulated by years, for it recurred every forty-ninth year at the time of the autumnal harvest, and was also regulated by months, for it was reckoned from the tenth day of the first month when Israel crossed Jordan, and the Jubilee day was the tenth day of the seventh month (that of atonement); it was most important that the year and months should closely agree. The Jubilee year, which is called the fiftieth, extended from the day of atonement in the forty-ninth year to the same date in the fiftieth year, and was thus an overlapping year, the course of Jubilees being 49,49,49, etc. The Jubilee year began in the seventh month of the forty-ninth year, and extended to the same date of the fiftieth, and thus overlapped and linked together the forty-nine year periods.”

We have no quarrel with Mr. Guinness, nor with any who choose to follow his teachings in preference to the teachings of Pastor Russell. Mr. Guinness was never a believer in the teachings of Pastor Russell. But we consider it well established that the Jubilees were periods of fifty years each, not forty-nine, and that the divinely authorized way of ascertaining the fiftieth year was to count the previous forty-nine years from the close of one harvest to the close of another. The difficulty here seems to rest in the fact that the jubilee system was to become operative when the Jews entered Canaan and that entry took place in the Spring, but it seems not to have occurred to Mr. Guinness and those who follow his writings that there was yet time in that first year for a series of crops, so that the proper place to reckon the beginning of the first fifty year cycle is from the end of the last previous harvest, or about October 1st, 1576, B.C. Our position on this point, as to whether there were fifty complete, good, honest, faithful and true years in each Jubilee cycle, following one another in the same way that the days of a calendar follow each other, or whether there were but forty-nine actual years and a fiftieth year which was a bogus or fraudulent year made up of two halves of forty-nine year periods is well set forth in the following article from Smith’s Bible Dictionary, under the caption, The Year of Jubilee:

“If the plain words of Lev. 25:10 are to be followed, this question need not be asked. The statement that the Jubilee was the 50th year, after the succession of seven weeks of years, and that it was distinguished from, not identical with, the seventh sabbatical year, is as evident as language can make it. The simplest view, and the only one which accords with the sacred text, is, that the year which followed the seventh sabbatical year was the Jubilee, which was intercalated between the two series of sabbatical

years, so that the next was the first of a new half century, and the seventh year after that was the first sabbatical year of the other series. Thus the Jubilee was strictly a Pentecost year, holding the same relation to the preceding seven sabbatical years, as the day of Pentecost did to the seven Sabbath days. The language of Josephus and Philo, and of every eminent Jewish and Christian writer, except those that have been mentioned (Jehuda, Scaliger, Petavius, Ussher, Cunaeus and Schroeder), are in favor of the fiftieth year.”

But take our position, and what do we find? First, we have the interesting fact that if the Jews had observed the first nineteen Jubilees (as they had opportunity to do) and if those Jubilee periods be counted as fifty years each, there would remain 2499 years more to bring us down to the date which, by other calculations, we have found to indicate the time of our Lord’s Second Advent, namely, October 1, 1874, A.D. And those 2499 years would, of themselves, just make up 51 periods of 49 years each, periods in which no jubilees were or could be attempted; seventy in all, as decreed.

But, as has been stated, the law provided that there should be fifty years in each Jubilee period, and that there should be seventy of them. See Scripture Studies, Volume II, Chapter VI. The point where the first one began to count, (reckonedly from about April 1st, 1575, B.C., but properly, we think,) from about October 1st, 1576 B.C., is 1575½ years back from the beginning of the A.D. era.

THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

Those now tampering with the chronology are forced to confess by the logic of events that the Times of the Gentiles ended “legally” in the Fall of 1914, but they seem to think that there are substantially two such periods, one beginning nineteen years subsequent to the other, and that the latter period, the real one, will end about 1933. We have only to say that if the Bible Students do not now see that the downfall of the Russian, German, Austrian, Hungarian and Turkish monarchies dates from that time, and that that fall is not yet complete, but will surely involve all other governments sooner or later (and sooner rather than later, according to the present outlook) then they are about the only intelligent people that do not see it.

What about this nineteen years which it is proposed to add to the Times of the Gentiles? Where does it come from? It is merely the restatement of an old delusion, referred to by Pastor Russell in Scripture Studies, Volume II, top of page 52, and held to tenaciously by Adventists that instead of “seventy years of desolation” beginning at the beginning of the Hebrew year 606 B.C. and ending seventy years later, with the first year of the reign of King Cyrus, there were but fifty-one years from the overthrow of Zedekiah to Cyrus, although the following Scriptures show that there were seventy years interim. Lev. 26:33-35; Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10; Daniel 9:2; 2 Chronicles 36:19,20.

Toward the end of the 11th year of Zedekiah the land of Judea was desolate (Jer. 44:2,6,7,22; II Kings 25:27,26). The abject fear of the remnant that was left in the land after Gedaliah’s death was foretold by Moses, who said that they would flee out of the land and perish among their enemies (Lev. 26:36-39), and that then the land would enjoy her sabbaths while she lay desolate without them (Lev. 26:33,34,43), to fulfill, or accomplish, 70 years.

In discussion of this subject, Morton Edgar, makes the following statement, in Pyramid Passages, Volume II, pages 30 and 31 [The 1913 edition and also in the 1924 edition, page 27.]

Although the teaching of the Scriptures regarding this period of 70 years desolation is very clear, it has been strangely obscured by Ussher and other chronologers. They have imagined that the 70 years began in the 3rd or 4th year of the reign of Jehoiakim, 19 or 18 years before Zedekiah's dethronement. This, of course, would shorten the chronological chain previous to A.D. 1, and thus make the six millenniums from the creation of Adam end 19 or 18 years after 1872 A.D. They recognized that the land was not "desolate without an inhabitant" during the remaining 7 or 8 years of Jehoiakim and the 11 years of Zedekiah, and they therefore termed the 70 years as a period of captivity. But the Scriptures are emphatic that no captivity began in the 3rd or 4th year of Jehoiakim, nor, indeed, till after the death of that king.

Some who are now getting "mixed in their dates" have fallen into the old error of understanding Jeremiah 27:1 to refer to Jehoiakim, not having noticed that, in the 3rd and 12th verses of the same chapter, and especially in the first verse of the succeeding chapter, this error is corrected and Zedekiah is plainly the one meant. This error is corrected in the margin of the Revised Version, and the verse is omitted altogether from the Septuagint. The Syriac and Arabic Scriptures read Zedekiah.

They have also stumbled over the apparent disagreement between Daniel 1:16 and Daniel 2:1. In the first of these passages we have Daniel and his companions trained for three years so that they might be prepared to stand before the king, and in the second passage they appear before him in the second year of his reign. The reading of Daniel 2:1 in the Variorum Bible is twelfth, which is evidently correct, and the probable meaning of Daniel 1:1 is the third year of Jehoiakim's vassalage to Nebuchadnezzar. This was undoubtedly the way the matter appeared upon the Babylonian records.

Brother Edgar continues: [1913 edition, page 35. 1924 edition, pages 30, 31.]

The question arises: on what basis did Ussher claim that there was a captivity of Judah 18 years before the dethronement of Zedekiah? Not by following Josephus, but by endeavoring to harmonize the Scriptural records with the Astronomical Canon of Ptolemy, which seems to gain support by Dan. 1:1-4. But the Scriptures and the Canon cannot be harmonized at this period, nor even if it could be supposed that the desolation of 70 years began in the 3rd year of Jehoiakim, as has been assumed to be the meaning of Dan. 1:1-4.

All who will seek to satisfactorily harmonize the above chronological records of the Scriptures, with the Canon's date for the 1st year of Nebuchadnezzar, will soon prove to himself the impossibility of the task. The difficulties of the problem are manifest by the fact that, while Ussher gives the date 588 B.C. for the destruction of Jerusalem at the dethronement of Zedekiah, the equally celebrated chronologer, Hales, places this destruction in the year 586 B.C., or two years later than Ussher. Accepting the united testimony of the sacred writers that Jerusalem and the land lay desolate for 70 full years, the chronological data of the Scriptures are harmonious.

For a complete examination of this ancient controversy, the most complete and convincing to be found anywhere, because it examines all the arguments pro and con and disposes of them one by one, see Edgar's Pyramid passages, Volume II, pages 29-39. What we are more concerned with is to see what the adoption of this error by those who believe in

Pastor Russell's teachings does to the chronology which constitutes so large a portion of the Second and Third Volumes of Scripture Studies.

The brethren who are wandering seem to have the thought that Nebuchadnezzar was the "head of gold" from the first moment of his reign, regardless of when that was. In our judgment it would be most improper to consider Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold, representing the dominion of earth by the Gentiles, as long as "the throne of the Lord" remained at Jerusalem, and this would be our view even if, during a portion of that time, the kings of Judah did pay tribute to him, as they often, in other days, paid tribute to others.

An examination of the 24th and 25th chapters of II Kings shows that there were eight years in the last twenty-two years of the reigns of Israel's kings when they paid no tribute to Nebuchadnezzar, whose reign embraced, or is alleged to have embraced nineteen of those twenty-two years. As three of the years when Jehoiakim was independent of Babylon were in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's predecessor, it follows that there were at least five years in which Israel's king was wholly independent of Nebuchadnezzar himself, and that does not comport well with the thought that the Times of the Gentiles began with his reign.

The beginning of the Times of the Gentiles would seem to us to be such an important point that it would be marked by some event that would be so plain that there could be no mistaking it. Such an event we find in the removal of the crown from Zedekiah. The taking off of this diadem and the removing of this crown from Zedekiah meant the utter obliteration of any show of any of David's posterity reigning until the right one should come. Plainly the time of the destruction of the city and of the absolute removal of all possibility of sovereignty is the point which the Lord intended us to look to as beginning the Desolation of the Land and the Times of the Gentiles. See Ezekiel 21:25-27.

The seventy years of desolation were especially applied to Jerusalem. (Jeremiah 1:3; 32:1-5) Jeremiah 29:1-4 seems especially to show that the seventy years began to count when Nebuzaradan took the last remnant captive in the eleventh year of Zedekiah. Josephus plainly held this view, and there would have been no object on his part in making the desolation longer than it really was: for it was only that much more disgrace to his nationality. Josephus uses the expression "During the interval of 70 years" and "continued to be a desert for 70 years."

The Bible chronology shows that six thousand years of human history ended October 1st, 1872. Allowing for two years of innocence in the garden of Eden, this becomes a valuable auxiliary to the other evidence which establishes the date of our Lord's Second Advent as October 1st, 1874. Deduct 19 years from the B.C. period as these brethren have proposed and the six thousand years of permission of evil would have ended October 1st, 1893. And what happened then? Nothing at all. And one of the evidences of our Lord's presence is destroyed.

Such an arrangement would reduce the length of Israel's double to 1826 years, instead of 1845 years, and 1826 years from the date of the beginning of our Lord's ministry, in the Fall of 29 A.D. would bring us to October 1st, 1855, instead of October 1st, 1874, and another of the evidences of our Lord's second advent would disappear and without compensating advantages.

Leaving the chronology just as we have it, it presents another beautiful picture of locating the last typical jubilee that could have been observed by Israel just 2500 years after the end of Adam's one-thousand-year day and 2500 years before 1874 A.D., the beginning of Christ's one-thousand years of presence in the earth.