

IS OUR BIBLE CHRONOLOGY CREDIBLE?

Opening Hymn: #7

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. In studying the history of man upon the earth, we discover an amazing thing: Apart from the Bible, there are simply no reliable records from which a **complete** chronology of man could be constructed.
1. Through man=s carelessness, the ravages of time, and the rise and fall of civilizations, most records of man=s existence have been destroyed.
 2. The earliest records of man go back only 4,000 years or so and most of these are only fragmentary in nature.
 3. Such finds consist mainly of tablets or inscriptions uncovered from archeological digs.
 - a. But unfortunately, the ancients marked time by counting from **local** events or by the reign of their **own** kings; they seldom showed-an-y appreciation for a **universal** conception of time that spanned more than just their local area.
 - b. Thus, even those records that **are** trustworthy often cannot be pieced together satisfactorily to form the basis for a reliable chronology of man, covering more than just one civilization.
- B. We are convinced, therefore, that it is as an expression of the love of our Creator that the Bible was preserved for man as an accurate source of his past. It provides a fairly complete account of his history upon the earth in a connected narrative that we call the chronology of man.
1. The unique role of the Bible in this regard has been described as follows:
 - a. AThe Bible ... the only work in the world which B beginning with Adam, the first man mentioned in history, monument, or inscription, whose name, the time of his creation and death are recorded, and from whom his descendants can be traced by name and age in successive links for nearly four thousand years B furnishes us a clear and connected history down to a period where secular history is well authenticated...
 - b. ATaken together, the history and prophecy of the Bible afford a panoramic view of the whole course of events from the creation and fall of man to his reconciliation and restitution. The Bible, therefore, is the chart of all history. Without it, as has been truly said, history would be >like rivers flowing from unknown sources to unknown seas=; but under its guidance we may trace these rivers to their springs, yes, and see their glorious ending in the ocean of eternity.@
 2. Who wrote these poetic words? None other than our beloved Pastor Russell. (See Vol. 2, pp.37,38.)
 3. And to those who have come to trust the Bible as God=s revelation, there has come a special blessing in terms of its chronological lessons.
 - a. Other ancient records, such as the early Sumerian King list, speak of many hundreds of thousands of years of man=s existence.
 - b. Men of science who think in terms of evolution have also proposed hundreds of thousands of years (or more) for man=s history on earth.
 - c. Yet the Bible makes it clear that man has only been here for about 6,000 years. And this truth has given more wisdom to the simple believer than the most advanced of the worldly wise today.
- C. Purpose of talk.
1. But in today=s study, our focus in considering the question, **AI s Our Bible Chronology**

Credible,@ will be along a different line.

2. Most of us here are fully in harmony with the Bible=s overall presentation -- that about 6,000 years have elapsed since Adam=s creation; also, that we have entered the end times of Bible prophecy.
3. Nevertheless, the suggestion is being made, even by some of our brethren, that our chronology is in need of some **adjustments** -- sow fine tuning, as it were.
 - a. Why are these changes being proposed at this particular time?
 - b. It is to bring our chronology more in line with archeological dating of recent years and the perceived improvement this offers to our understanding.
4. Therefore, we want to take a look at some of these suggested changes and note what bearing they have on our prophetic and chronological beliefs.
 - a. In so doing, we will be discerning what meaning the chronology holds for us today, living at the close of the 20th century.
 - b. And here we will introduce our theme texts, in Ps. 30:5 and Isa. 21 :11,12.

AWeeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.@ (Ps. 30:5)

AWatchman! How far gone is the night? Watchman! How far gone is the night? Said the watchman, The morning has come, but still it is night.@ (Isa. 21:11,12 -- Rotherham & Rev. Swedish Bible)

- c. Very appropriately we might ask:
 - (1) How far gone **is** the night of weeping?
 - (2) How close **are** we to the morning of joy?

II. OUTLINE OF THE 6,000 YEAR CHRONOLOGY.

A. Introduction.

1. Let=s take a look now at the **overall** chronology of the Bible, from Creation to the present. There will not be time for all the details, but at least we can sketch the broad outlines. (Refer to handout sheet, **BIBLE CHRONOLOGY**.)
2. There is a clear and connected chain of Biblical and secular history that traces the first 6,000 years of man=s existence to the year 1872. This true chronology is pointed out to us in the 2nd Volume of **Studies in the Scriptures**.
3. Actually, Pastor Russell is not the originator of this chronology. He gives the credit to Christopher Bowen, rector of a church in England, who worked it out around 1830. (See Reprints- pg. 289.) But it was Bro. Russell who became the instrument that God used to widely promulgate what we believe is the true chronology of the Bible.
 - a. More than any other man, he was the one who drew attention to the times and seasons in the Plan of God and to our place on the stream of time.
 - b. From this standpoint, we can appreciate the Pastor=s role as that of the watchman, using the true chronology to answer the age-old question of our theme text, AWatchman! How far gone is the night? (the long night time of man=s experience with sin and death) Said the watchman, the morning has come, but still it is night
 - c. With the chronology as our guide, we have not been left in the dark, so to speak, as to where we are on the stream of time. Let=s see how this works.

B. Outline of the chronology.

1. The main components of the chronology are tabulated in seven distinct periods: (See Vol. 2, p.42 and handout sheet.)

Creation to flood	1,656 years
to Abrahamic covenant	427

to Exodus	430
to division of Canaan	46
Period of Judges	450
Period of Kings	513
Desolation of land	<u>70</u>
	3,592 years (to the restoration)

2. Thus, from the Creation of Adam to the Restoration of the Jews to their land after the Babylonian captivity was a period of 3,592 years. The details of how the lengths of the individual periods are arrived at are clearly explained in Vol. 2, and would be too involved for us here. Anyway, there it is -- the Bible itself furnishes us with the length of time from Adam to the Restoration -- 3,592 years.
3. As interesting as this information is, it would be of little practical value to us today unless we had some way of tying it in to our modern era.
 - a. Unless we can connect **our** time to the past, we would have no idea of where **we** are on the stream of time.
 - b. Happily, the Bible provides us with a connecting link to secular history when it mentions that the Jews were restored to their land in the 1st year of Cyrus, the King of Persia (Ezra 1:1-3). The 1st year of Cyrus, according to reasonably reliable evidence from history, is the year 538-537 B.C.
4. Because of these known facts, we can now relate our day (and the year in which we live) to the chronology furnished by the Bible.
 - a. If the Restoration took place in 537 B.C., we can use the seven periods of Bible chronology (3,592 years) to compute back to Adam's creation (4129 B.C.) and forward to the ending of the 6,000 years (1872 A.D.).
 - b. Since we are living in the year 1995, this means that we are already more than 120 years beyond the ending of the first 6,000 years of man's history upon the earth. Hence the Bible is the only book in the world which accurately locates us on the stream of time!

III. SUGGESTED CHANGES TO OUR CHRONOLOGY.

A. Background.

1. Through the years, this chronology has come under attack from many quarters; both from within and without the Bible Student movement.
2. Some critics are quite flagrant in their approach and would over-throw just about everything connected with time prophecy or chronology.
3. Others, including some of our own brethren, are more selective. They would suggest certain limited changes in specific areas, to bring the chronology more in line with what they consider more accurate recent findings.
4. Let's take a look at each of these approaches in turn.

B. First, the extremist View.

1. Among the extremist group of critics is Carl Olof Jonsson, a former Jehovah's Witness and contemporary author.
2. These deny that Bible chronology points us to the present as the end of the age. In fact, they deny that **any** prophecies of the Bible were intended to identify **end-time events** -- even those of Mat. 24. These are taken merely as a series of repetitious events occurring throughout the Gospel Age.
3. They also flatly deny the legitimacy of the **year-for-a-day principle** of prophetic interpretations adopted not only by Bro. Russell, but by expositors down through the centuries.
4. No wonder they have no regard for **the Atimes of the Gentiles@ prophecy** mentioned by

Jesus, or for the **ADays of Daniel**,@ such as the 1,260, 1,290, and 1,335 days.

5. But these are really extremist views which we should recognize as such. Let us just not have anything to do with this kind of unreasonable thinking!

C. A Modified View.

1. In contrast to this, some of our own brethren are suggesting a more restricted modification to our chronology that=s rather unique.
 - a. It=s based on the belief that the Bible Student chronology and approach to time prophecy has been basically sound, but is in need of some adjustments.
 - b. It finds a need for correction in several of the Old Testament links of the chronology including: 21 years in the **Desolation Period**, 49-1/2 years in the **Period of the Kings**, and 101 years in the **Period of the Judges**, about, 171 years in all.
2. But at the same time it recognizes the close tie-in of the ending of the 6,000 years to the **PAROUSIA of our Lord** and the **return of the Jews** to their land.
 - a. Thus, it doesn=t merely criticize the supposed errors, but suggests an **internal correction** to maintain the ending of the 6,000 years at about the same point, near 1872.
 - b. How is this done? By suggesting that the differences and supposed errors in the three periods mentioned can be counterbalanced by making a correction in yet another Old Testament period.
3. Of course, the big problem is to determine just exactly **where** such a correction can be made.
 - a. The most likely place mentioned for this is in the **430-year period** from the Abrahamic Covenant to the giving of the Law.
 - b. And in the meantime, until such a determination can be precisely pinpointed, this view holds that we do not have an accurate Bible chronology, and that we do not know for sure how we arrived at our present point in time.
4. Our reaction to all of this is that we see this effort as being sincere and well-intended, though we believe it is misguided and dangerous.
 - a. It is **sincere**, in that it seeks to find a way to correlate the biblical data with the latest findings of the scholars which seemingly conflict with Scripture. But unhappily, it is based on the assumption that Bro. Russell (and most expositors before him, as well as most of our brethren after him) have been wrong in their beliefs and largely by coincidence did their calculation of the 6,000 years ending in 1872 prove correct.
 - b. We believe this effort is **misguided** because it relies too heavily on the opinions of worldly scholars, and closely follows the outline of a chief critic of the Bible Students, one Carl Olof Jonsson, whom we have already mentioned.
 - c. And we say **dangerous** because it ignores the basic principles inherent in establishing a valid Bible chronology, as enumerated by Bro. Russell, and which we will elaborate on shortly.
5. All of this is of sufficient importance for us to take a closer look at the overall consequences of these suggested changes.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGE.

A. Negative impact on end-time fulfillments.

1. The internal correction that some of our own well-intentioned brethren are offering may be sincere and sound innocent enough, but consider its consequences: it would require a major restructuring of many of our Bible Student prophetic/chronological beliefs.
 - a. First is the effect on the **ATimes of the Gentiles**@ prophecy of Luke 21:24. By using 587 B.C. as the date for Jerusalem=s fall (instead of 606-607 B.C.), there is no way that the 2,520 year period can be made to end in 1914. Hence, one of the most prominent of the

end-time dates -- 1914, and all that it entails as a turning point in our modern era -- would be lost.

- b. Second, it completely demolishes the Jubilee calculations leading to 1874 and confirming our Lord=s PAROUSIA. Hence, another verification of a significant date -- 1874 -- would slip away.
2. Another important point to bear in mind here is that only by applying a very large correction factor of 170+ years is it possible to hold on to the Jewish Double prophecy ending in 1878 and to have the 6,000 years come out at the right ending point in 1872.
 - a. But the very use of such a correction is highly subjective, arbitrary and questionable.
 - b. Such a correction is based neither on solid scriptural reasoning nor upon the best civil historical dates that are available to us for the period in which the correction is applied (the Abrahamic Covenant to the Exodus).
3. But this is still not all! Let us consider what else is amiss in these proposed revisions to the chronology.

B. Violation of Scriptural principles.

1. In suggesting these changes, as has already been mentioned, no less than four separate links in the chain of Bible chronology are seriously affected.
 - a. There are 21 years in the Period of Desolation, 49-1/2 years in the Period of the Kings, and 101 years in the Period of the Judges, for a total of about 171 years.
 - b. To make up for these years it is thought that a counterbalancing correction can be made in yet a fourth period, from the Covenant with Abraham to the giving of the Law. Thus, this period would have to be increased from the 430 years shown in Vol. 2 to 600 years.
 - c. By making these changes, it is thought that the Bible chronology can be brought more in line with the dates proposed by the secular scholars.
 - d. However, we believe that in so proposing, there are **serious violations** of Scriptural principles that occur. Note these points:
2. In the Period of Desolation.
 - a. There=s an interesting fact that shows the importance Bro. Russell gave to believing that this period was a full 70 years in length instead of just 49. The very reason he adopted Bowen=s chronology in the first place was that it was the **only** one which **followed the Scriptures** in specifying a full 70 years between the fall of Jerusalem and the decree of Cyrus.
 - b. Most of the prominent brethren in our movement who displayed interest in the chronology have followed Bro. Russell=s lead here in accepting the 70 years. These include the Edgar brothers of Scot-land,- authors of the classic work, **Great Pyramid Passages**, Bro. P.S.L. Johnson, Bro. John Meggison, and Bro. Julian Gray, most of whom have written extensively on this subject. All believed the Bible teaching on this was abundantly clear.
 - c. You know, there are at least 5 books of the Old Testament that concern themselves with the 70-year period associated with the captivity-and desolation of Judah. Together they form a tightly knit, interwoven band of teaching that is clear and harmonious. They unmistakably apply the 70 years both to the major captivity and to the utter desolation of the land after Jerusalem was destroyed. This is the teaching of Jeremiah and Daniel it was foreseen by Moses, confirmed in the Chronicles, and is consistent with Zacharia=s testimony.
 - d. But today=s scholars can no longer accept this and think the Scriptures can be interpreted in such a way as to accommodate the new view. Some of our brethren are being strongly influenced along these lines. Yet this is what Bro. Russell said about this: Athe uncertain dates of secular history [**should be made to**] **conform to the positive statements of the**

Bible,@ and **not** the other way around.

3. In the Period of the Kings.
 - a. In reckoning the length of this period, one would think that at least here we shouldn't have much difficulty. Both the books of the Kings and of the Chronicles set forth the reigns of the kings of Judah in a straightforward manner: by adding up the lengths of the individual reigns, there is good agreement that the total is 513 years.
 - b. But there is a highly controversial method for computing this period, which follows what is known as the **synchronisms** found in the Book of Kings. This relates the reigns of the Kings of Judah with those of Israel and seeks to strike harmony between them.
 - c. Bro. Russell as well as Bro. Edgar and others **warned us against using this method**, because of the confusing and contradictory results it supplies. I personally have not known any brethren or run across any writers who have used this method and whose results were in agreement with each other.
 - d. Yet our well-meaning brethren approve of this method and closely follow the findings of Prof. Edwin Thiele, who gives 464 years as the length of this period of the Kings of Judah.
 - e. So now it is no longer just 21 years we are talking about -- for here we have an additional 49 (or 50) years of difference, due to the use of synchronisms. But this shows the heavy influence of just one outside scholar, who readily admits his conclusions are based upon a large number of unprovable assumptions. This certainly seems like a **very shaky** basis for an additional correction to our chronology.
4. In the Period of the Judges.
 - a. This is the third link in the chain of chronology which is affected by the proposed modification.
 - b. Of this period, Bro. Russell writes that the data is so **Adisconnected, broken, lapped and tangled@ that it is not possible to arrive at any definite conclusion concerning it**. Again, it has been our experience that almost everyone who has studied the matter and attempted to add up the rules of the various Judges has come up with a different total.
 - c. This is where Bro. Russell advises us to accept the testimony of the Apostle Paul: Paul stated that after the division of the land, God **Agave them Judges about [during] the space of 450 years, until Samuel the Prophet.@** (Acts 13:19-21)
 - d. Though it says **Aabout@** 450 years, there are other texts where the same Greek word HOS seems to be describing a very specific number, such as Acts 13:18, the 40 years in the wilderness. This period was not approximately 40 years, but **exactly** 40 years, almost to the day, as we know from many Scriptures (see Deut. 1:3; 8:2; Josh. 4:19; 5:6-12; Heb. 3:8,9; etc.).
 - e. Here then is an example of where the New Testament makes up for a deficiency in the Old Testament chronological chain, by the providences of God (This occurs in only one other instance: in Gal. 3:17, which we will examine shortly.)
 - f. Thus, we believe it is a serious mistake to ignore the Apostle Paul's clear contribution and accept instead 349 years as the length of the Period of the Judges.
5. Now we come to the supposed counterbalancing correction, applied to the period from **the Covenant with Abraham to the giving of the Law**. Here, too, we see a clear violation of principle in working out the Bible chronology.
 - a. Of this period, Bro. Russell states that there is a **Abreak in the Old Testament chronology@** and that it needs to be bridged by Apostle Paul's clear statement in Gal.

3:17 that it was 430 years in length. This actually agrees with Moses= reference in Exod. 12: 40,41 about the length of time that the children of Israel had sojourned -- the same 430 years -- but its beginning point is not clearly defined there.

- b. One can actually trace out the individual time spans that make up this period from the Abrahamic Covenant onward: to the birth of Isaac, to the birth of Jacob, and to other significant events in the land of Egypt.
 - c. There is only one span that is missing and not directly stated in Scripture -- the short period from the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses. This can be deduced by subtracting the sum of all the known component spans from the total supplied by Paul. Thus, 430 less 366 equals 64 years for this period.
 - d. **But all of this is rejected by the latest revision**, which ignores the Apostle Paul >s contribution that effectively bridges the 430 year period in question. Instead of accepting Paul=s clear application, it expands this to 600 years, and again dramatically shows why this approach is seriously flawed and must not be accepted.
6. Summary: In summing up this new view of the chronology, this is what we find:
- a. The 6,000 year span from creation is given the same starting and ending points, but various corrections are offered=in some of the Old Testament links. These are merely shifted internally by 171 yrs. or so to harmonize better with the findings of scholars for these periods.
 - b. But in the process of so doing, various Scriptural principles of interpretation have been violated, as we have tried to point out.

C. Final evaluation.

1. Besides all the adverse consequences of these changes already mentioned, consider some final thoughts.
2. Bro. Russell said if the chronology were changed by as much as one year, it would Athrow the beautiful parallels out of accord.@ How true indeed that is!
 - a. The Edgar brothers of Scotland brought out some of these beautiful harmonies of various aspects of God=s plan of the ages in their charts drawn more than 80 years ago.
 - b. More recently, Bro. Paul Mezera, an elder in Wisconsin, has used the computer to further enhance these harmonies, and to show the overall balance and symmetry of the ages, based upon the true Bible chronology.
 - c. We submit that all of these beautiful harmonies would be eliminated by the adoption of the suggested changes.
3. Beyond all of this, though, we should also do some basic reasoning on this matter.
 - a. First, if our chronology is not correct, it would man that **Bro. Russell and all of our brethren through over a hundred years of the Harvest period have been misled.**
 - (1) But such a view does not seem reasonable because it was the chronology which inspired and encouraged the Pastor to begin his momentous ministry.
 - (2) It was the chronology which alerted the brethren to the end times and the blessings due at the close of the 1,335 days.
 - (3) And it was the chronology which pointed to the selection of that wise and faithful servant by-our returned Lord, all at the proper time .
 - b. Second, if our chronology is not valid, it would mean that **all through history and up until now, the correct Bible chronology had not been found.**
 - (1) Is-it possible that the Truth.Movement, which was permitted to recapture so many precious truths of doctrine, was actually based upon a series of erroneous concepts as

far as chronology was concerned?

(2) And is it reasonable to suppose that Bro. Russell was not given the correct insights in this area and that only now, so far along in the Harvest, is this truth due to emerge? And that the correct data would be supplied from sources **not even connected with the Truth Movement** and in some cases staunchly opposed to it?

(3) No, dear friends, these are all propositions that make little sense to us.

4. And finally, let us consider the appropriate illustration of the ocean mariner.
 - a. Here we have a picture of the navigator of a large vessel who has successfully worked his way across the ocean, amidst storms and gales and shifting currents.
 - b. After many days, his home harbor has come into view and he knows that very quickly he will be in port.
 - c. After such a voyage and coming precisely to his targeted point, is there any need for the navigator to recheck his maps or question the accuracy of his instruments?
 - d. Dear friends, that's about where we stand today with the Bible chronology. It has brought us a **long way**, through ages and dispensations, and tied us into end-time prophetic events. The landmarks of 1878 and 1914 have been passed, the Kingdom port is almost in view. **Let us not lose confidence now; we have almost made it home!**

V. CONCLUSIONS.

A. Review.

1. And so, dear friends, in this study for today we have been reminded of the times and seasons in the Plan of God. Yes, God is an accurate timekeeper. His purposes will be accomplished exactly on time. And to help us in understanding His purposes, He has given us the chronology.
2. We believe that the chronology was intended to be a blessing and an encouragement for the Lord's people. Especially is this true for us, as the Scripture says, **Aupon whom the ends of the ages are come.**@
3. Is it not a token of God's special love for us, that He has given us the chronology to enable us to accurately span the period from Adam's creation to our own day? Yes, God has blessed us with this knowledge, and it is, something which even the wisest among this world are unable to grasp.
4. Chronology and time prophecy, together with the evidences of the **Asigns of the times,**@ enable us to take our bearing on the stream of time. They make us realize that we stand indeed on the threshold of the Kingdom, and that we are in the morning of the new day.

B. Is this chronology credible? Let us return to our theme text: **AThe morning has come, and also the night.**@

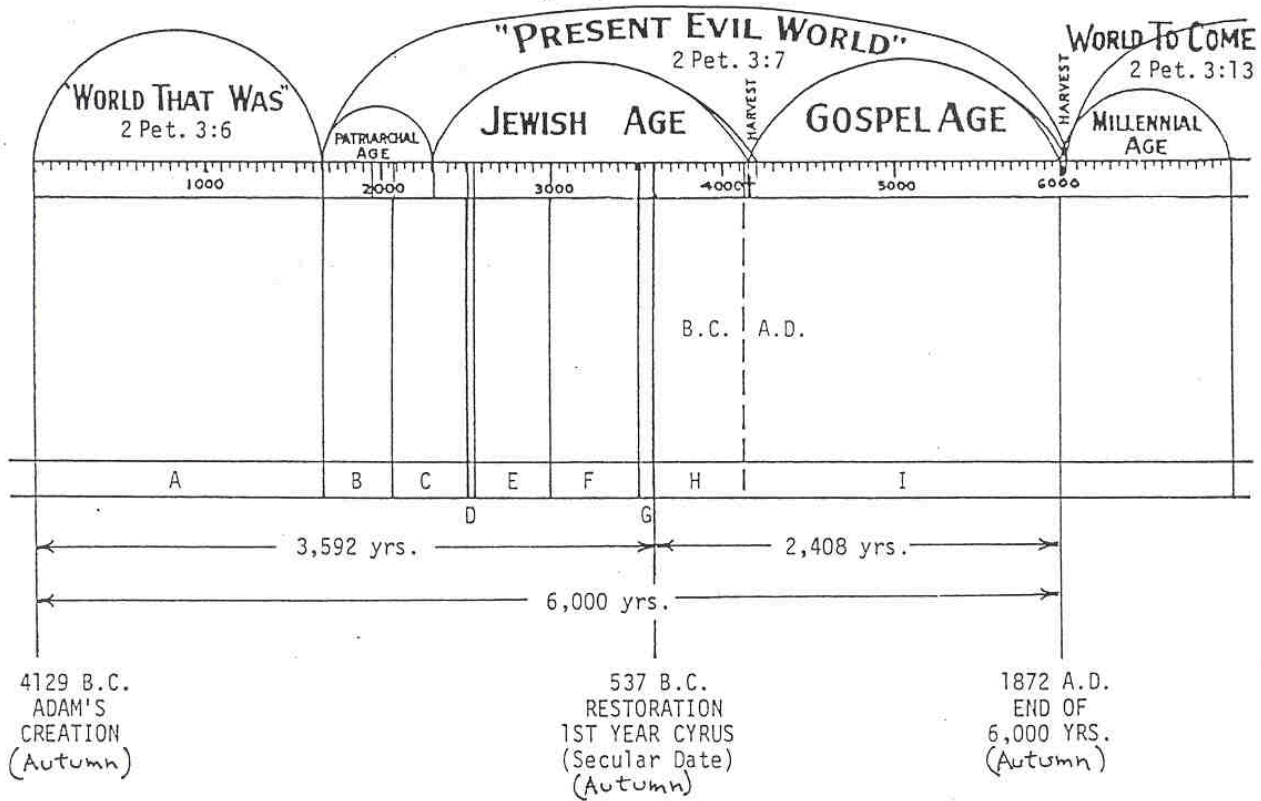
1. The chronology has brought us unerringly into the morning of the new day, and what a morning it has been!
 - a. With the return of our Lord has come a restoration of man's dominion over the earth, and the flood of inventions and discoveries of our time.
 - b. This dramatic increase of knowledge and running to and fro in the earth are but the foregleams of greater blessings to follow.
2. But in the meantime, as our text suggests, not only has the morning arrived, but **Astill it is night.**@
 - a. Is the world rejoicing and appreciative of the new day? No; just the reverse, it would seem.
 - b. In proportion as blessings have come, discontent has skyrocketed, and troubles have mounted.

- c. The dark night time continues and storm clouds of trouble persist. But it is all consistent with our text, and does not meditate against our chronology, but in fact, confirms it.
 3. These troubles must continue to increase until all the evil systems of this world are swept away; until only **Those things that cannot be shaken may remain.**@ (Heb. 12:27)
- C. Closing.
1. Well, no matter how we look at it, and what prophecies remain yet to be fulfilled, **the time, dear friends, is short.**
 - a. Perhaps you=ve heard the little verse which reads, **Only one life, T=will soon be past; Only what=s done for Christ, Will last.**@
 - b. Let us also join with the Psalmist in his earnest plea: **So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.**@ (Ps. 90:12)
 2. Let us not lose confidence in the Bible chronology. Let us not be discouraged by the dark clouds which but for a moment obscure the first warm rays of the morning sun. These are but the signs of trouble that were predicted to precede the **spectacular blessings** of this day:
When these things begin to come to pass, unbend and lift up your heads, because your redemption (deliverance) is drawing near.@ (Luke 21 :28, Rotherham)

Closing Hymn: #317

BIBLE CHRONOLOGY

(BOWEN/RUSSELL)



SEVEN OLD TESTAMENT PERIODS:		
A	1,656 yrs.	Creation to Flood
B	427 "	To Abrahamic Covenant
C	430 "	To Exodus
D	46 "	To Division of Land
E	450 "	Period of Judges
F	513 "	Period of Kings
G	70 "	Desolation of Land
} 3,592 yrs. to restoration of land		
<u>THENCE TO A.D. 1:</u>		
H	536 yrs. (536 1/4)	
<u>THENCE TO END OF 6,000 YRS.:</u>		
I	1,872 yrs. (1871 3/4)	
} 2,408 yrs. to end of 6,000 yrs.		
6,000 yrs.		

Note: There is no zero year between the B.C./A.D. dividing point.