

1996 and Date Setting

by Thomas Ice

1996 marks the 6000th year since creation, according to the calculations of British Bishop James Ussher (1581-1656). In 1701, Ussher's chronology was taken into the margin of the King James Version of the Bible and is still included in many editions today. It has been noted that Ussher was motivated to study past chronology because of his interest in dating the future second coming of Christ.

Even though Ussher's approach to biblical chronology is usually disdained in our day, I believe that he is basically correct in his approach and conclusions. I think a few calendar adjustments should be made that would begin creation at 4000 B.C. instead of Ussher's 4004 B.C. Thus, A.D. 2000 is more likely the 6000th year since creation. If I believed that it were possible to date the second coming of Christ, it is not possible, then the theory teaching that man has 6000 years before the second coming of Christ would make the most sense.

The 7000 Year Theory

One of the most widely held beliefs of the first 400 years of the early church was that Christ would return after 6,000 years of history and that He would reign on earth for an additional 1,000 years. This view was based upon the six days of creation with the seventh day of rest (Gen. 2:2), and the belief (developed from Ps. 90:4 & 2 Pet. 3:8) that each day was to be reckoned as representative of a thousand years. Thus, just as man's work week (Ex. 20:8-11) is six days followed by the Sabbath rest, so the scope of history follows the pattern of six thousand years for man's history followed by the seventh thousand years of millennial rest (Heb. 4:9). This whole scheme is referred to as the sex- or septa-millenary theory.

Early church proponents believed that the end of the world would come around A.D. 500, because they followed the inflated chronology of the Septuagint. Ussher and later proponents of the septa-millenary tradition followed the more accurate numbers of the Hebrew Masoretic Text which produced Ussher's 4004 B.C. date for creation with the 6000 years of man's week ending in A.D. 1996. Others see a 4000 B.C. creation date with a focus on A.D. 2000.

Some have noted the panic and great concern throughout Christendom that surrounded events leading up to A.D. 500 and speculated that we may expect similar behavior as the year A.D. 2000 approaches. This is highly unlikely, because of the secular dominance of modern culture. Occasionally, some may be curious about a biblically related viewpoint, but never is society as a whole fearful of anything relating to the God of the Bible. But does the Bible support or allow for date-setting?

What About Date-Setting?

At least six passages (eight if parallel passages are included) specifically warn believers against date-setting. It is enough for something to be stated only once in the Bible for it to be true, but when God says something many times the emphasis should make such assertions even clearer. I am listing the specific passages below so that we can readily see these important biblical admonitions:

- **Matthew 24:36** *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. Mark 13:32 is an exact parallel.*
- **Matthew 24:42** *"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.*
- **Matthew 24:44** *"For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.*
- **Matthew 25:13** *"Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. Mark 13:33-37 is a parallel passage.*
- **Acts 1:7** *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;*
- **1 Thessalonians 5:1-2** *Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.*

These passages are absolute prohibitions against date-setting. They do not teach that it was impossible to know the date in the early church, but in the last days some would come to know it. They do not say that no one knows the day or the hour, except those who are able to figure it out through some scheme. No! The date of Christ's coming is a matter of God's revelation and He has chosen not to reveal it even to Christ in His humanity during His first advent (Mt. 24:36).

As 1996 progresses toward the year 2000 Christians may come under increasing pressure to speculate about the return of Christ, especially since God appears to be setting the stage for end-time events. However, such a temptation must be resisted. The Bible is clear that date-setting is wrong and the further implication of an any-moment rapture makes it doubly wrong. Our hope is that Christ could come at any moment. "And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).