

Truth in Grace

Truth in Grace Ministries

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Winter 2000, Issue 5

GOD'S CALENDAR



Dan's Desk

The year 2000 is certainly a milestone for humanity, but it probably means very little in the annals of time. Apart from the computer glitch concern, all of the hype over this millennial change has a curious aspect to it. Not everyone agrees that it is really the year 2000.

Year 1 in the Moslem calendar was in 622 A.D., the year Mohammed founded the first mosque in Medina. So for the Moslems it is simply the year 1379. The Jews date their calendar from the supposed day of creation, 3761 B.C., and they are therefore, currently in the year 5760 A.M. (anno mundi — the year of creation). Furthermore, Jewish New Year (“Rosh Hashanna”) is in the fall of the year, not on January 1. Thus, the year 5760 A.M. began four months ago at sundown on September 11. Coptic Christians in Egypt still date their calendars according to an older Roman tradition that started the year 1 at the time the Emperor Diocletian ascended the throne in 284 A.D. For them therefore, it is the year 1716 A.D. (anno Diocletiani — the year of Diocletian). The Buddhists see it as the year 2544.

So what year is it, really? Well, it depends on who you're talking to. It is indeed the year 2,000, according to the Julian-Gregorian calendar. But then, who is Julius and who is Gregory?

The Julian Calendar

Julius Ceasar is the famed Julius of the Julian Calendar. A man of great military ability, he also had an inquisitive mind with regard to science and literature. In fact, his passion for calendar studies was overshadowed only by his passion for Cleopatra, who acquainted him with the Egyptian concept of calibrating time by the sun, rather than by the moon, and who introduced him to the masterful Egyptian astronomer, Sosigenes.

Every culture has struggled with the awkward task of calculating time because of the unsynchronized patterns of the moon and the sun. The cycles of the moon's phases and the revolution of the earth as it follows its path around the sun do not coincide. The full cycle of the moon (the Synodic Month) is 29.53059 days. The orbit cycle of the earth with regard to the sun (the Tropical Year — the interval between successive passages of the sun though the vernal equinox) is 365.242199 days. Therefore,

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The accuracy of any date is directly dependent upon the starting point.

twelve lunations (moon cycles) are 11 days short of a Tropical Year. Yet most ancient cultures used the moon to calibrate time, and consequently they were always off balance in trying to harmonize their calendars with the seasonal changes of the

year. Actually, the recording of time is even more complicated than that, but simplistically speaking, that was Julius' problem.

By the time of Julius Caesar, the Roman Calendar was so askew that he engaged the Egyptian Sosigenes to make the necessary reforms and to set it right. So in 46 B.C., extreme measures were taken. 13 days were added to the month of February, and 2 additional months (one of 33 days and one of 34 days) were inserted between the months of November and December. 46 B.C. became known as "the year of confusion" in that it was 445 days long (80 days longer than a normal year). The system of twelve irregular length months and an occasional leap year was instituted at that time to bring the Roman calendar into harmony with the sun's pattern of 365 days. This became known as the Julian Calendar, which continues to be the basis for our western world calendar. The Calendar problems, however, were not over.

The Gregorian Calendar

In 1267 AD an English friar named Roger Bacon made an official appeal to Pope Clement IV concerning problems with the Julian Calendar. Friar Bacon had noticed that the calendar year was actually 11 minutes longer than a Solar Year, which translated to an error of an entire day every 125 years. By Bacon's time, that had accumulated to an error of 9 full days. His point to Pope Clement was that if this was left unchecked, the drift would shift March to the dead of winter and August to the Spring. His words to the Pope were strong:

The calendar is intolerable to all wisdom, the horror of all astronomy, and a laughing-stock from a mathematician's point of view.

Calendar, by David Ewing Duncan, p. 1

But on November 29, 1268, Pope Clement IV suddenly died and Roger Bacon fell on hard times, being branded as a rebel and a heretic within the church. It would be another three centuries before Roger Bacon's appeal for calendar reform would be heeded by Pope Gregory XIII, who finally fixed the problem in 1582. By then, however, there were two and a half additional lost days reflected in the Julian Calendar as measured against the true Solar Year. David Ewing Duncan describes the Gregorian change by saying,

When bells chimed across Europe in the waning moments of October 4, 1582, the calendar did

something it had not done since Julius Caesar's time: it jumped 10 days, at least in those countries that obeyed the Pope's bull. Anyone alive on what would have been October 5 instantly lost ten days in his or her life, according to Rome's new calendar. This genuinely upset people who felt the days had somehow been stolen from them.

Calendar, by David Ewing Duncan, p. 261.

That's the good news. The bad news, however, is that the Gregorian calendar isn't perfect either. Duncan says that it is not "even close to perfect" (p. 295) and mentions that there are contemporary calendarians who are hopeful of introducing even further change. Oh well, maybe someone will steal some of our days, too. The Bible tells us that the Antichrist will seek, to "make alterations in times and in laws" [NAS] (Dan. 7:25). Interestingly enough, there is a popular proposal for calendar reform that is being called "The World Calendar". Quoting again from Duncan, he says,

The World Calendar would start each year and each quarter on a Sunday. And each month would always start on the same day. Leap days would simply be an extra day, not attached to a month. One plan was to declare this special day "World's Day."

Calendar, by David Ewing Duncan, p. 297.

It seems that at some point, perhaps in the near future, the world will experience another changing of the times.

The Great Transition

There is another calendar phenomenon that directly affects our celebration of the year 2000. The accuracy of any date in the progress of time is directly dependent upon the starting point — and the A.D. system, in that respect, appears to be wrong.

Summarizing the story, as told by David Duncan, the A.D. system was devised by an abbot named Dionysius Exiguus in the 6th Century A.D. The starting point for the Roman Calendar in his day was 284 A.D., the year Emperor Diocletian ascended the throne. So in 531 A.D. (the year the system was changed), it was really 247 anno Diocletiani, "The year of Diocletian". But since Diocletian was a notorious persecutor of Christians, Dionysius suggested that the Roman Church would do better to date their calendar from the Incarnation of Christ. He calculated that Christ had been born 531 years earlier (no one knows how he came up with that date) which became the base year A.D. 1 (Dionysius did not designate a base year of 0 because the concept of 0 had not been invented yet).

The problem was that Dionysius got his starting date wrong, historically. Matthew tells us in his Gospel that Christ was born in the time of Herod the Great (who died in 4 B.C.). Therefore, taking into account the calculation of Christ's birth by Herod himself as a little less than two years earlier at the

time when he killed the male children in Bethlehem (Matthew 2), Christ could not have been born after 5 or 6 B.C. That, of course, would put our calendar off by 6 or 7 years (considering also the lack of a base 0 year). Understanding this, we are certainly off in our celebration of the year 2000, which already occurred sometime between 1993 and 1996, depending on where you put the date of Christ's birth. To paraphrase a very famous rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, "We're late! We're late, for a very important date."

Furthermore, David Duncan reminds us that there is another miscalculation with regard to our euphoric celebration of Y2K.

The "era" we use to number our years — initially called the "Christian Era" and now the "Common Era" — remains confusing because there is no year zero. This means that technically century-years come in the -01 slot, not -00, and millennium years happen in -001, not -000. But people prefer to celebrate the beginning of, say, the twentieth century as 1900, and the coming millennium in the year 2000, not 2001.

Calendar, by David Ewing Duncan, p. 296

Time really does seem to be a conundrum. So much emphasis has been given to the year 2000, but our excitement appears to have more to do with our desire to be excited than it does with anything of actual significance.

The Divine Perspective

So, who knows what year it is? As you are reading this article you're probably saying, "and who cares?" Well, the answer of course is that God cares. It's not so much that He cares about what year it is, but that He is interested to observe how we respond to Him within our span of time. You see, time with God is not simply a matter of sequence (decades, centuries, and millenniums). The more crucial element with Him is purpose.

What difference does it make, for instance, how long a man lives if there is no fulfillment of purpose? Years alone do not make a life. Fullness of purpose is the significant thing. And yet, time does play an important role by setting the limits of opportunity to find and fulfill that element of purpose.

The original purpose for time can be seen in the emphasis God gave to the weekly cycle. God, of course, is the author of time and He obviously included the idea of "seasons" as well as "days and years" (Gen. 1:14). But the whole creative act centers around 7 days as a unit cycle, with the seventh day as a

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day of rest. The emphasis in Genesis is clearly on that weekly pattern.

Now God did not need 7 days to do His work, nor did He need to rest when He was done. He is omnipotent, which means that He is infinite in power. One word and it's done. That's infinity as it relates to the use of divine power. So the weekly cycle was not something God needed. It was a pattern for man, to govern his life of work, rest, and worship. The rehearsal of the weekly cycle of creation in the giving of the fourth commandment to worship God on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8-11) makes this abundantly clear.

The thing to notice here is that the morning and evening pattern of days and the 7 day weekly cycle were conventions of time to regulate the activity of people. Time, therefore, was merely a means to an end, not an end in itself. God was using the dimension of time to structure man's life in a meaningful repetitious pattern. And as weeks would cycle repetitiously, so the seasons would also repeat on an annual cycle. Everything was moving in cycles — the rotation of the earth on its axis, the movement of the earth around the sun and the phases of the moon as it circled around the earth. Around and around we go. Nothing is in a straight line. Therefore, from the divine perspective, time is not so much linear (the counting of years, decades, centuries, and millenniums) as it is cyclical (the repetitious patterns that continually remind humanity of its accountability to God).

Furthermore, there is a cyclical pattern to lifetimes (gen-

erations come and go) and a cyclical pattern to cultures (nations and kingdoms come and go). In all of this, it seems that God is reminding us that time merely puts limits on our existence and causes us to reflect on the matter of ultimate purpose.

According to the Decalogue, the 7-day cycle was designed for the purpose of incorporating the worship of God into the pattern of human activity. Every seventh day man was to cease all that he was doing and refocus on the imperative of acknowledging God as the giver and sustainer of life. Even the day-night cycle seems to have encouraged that same response. As the sun went down in the evening, all was lost unless God brought it back again the next day.

In like fashion, the seasons were a macrocycle of the same idea. Harvest season was great. But as the sun crossed the fall equinox and the earth went dormant for the winter, there was another reminder that without the intervention of God in the yearly cycle to bring the sun back in the spring, there would be no production of food for the year to come. The cycles of days, weeks, months and years (however they were recorded by any given culture) were a continual reminder to humanity of its dependence upon God.

There is, of course, a linear dimension to time, but again that appears to be related to the divine purpose. Time may revolve in cycles, but it is like the cycles of a screw — all moving toward a point. God speaks of "the fullness of the time" (Gr. "chronos" — i.e., *chronology* as a linear dimension of time)

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where time finds its fullness when “*God sent forth His Son, born of a woman... in order that He might redeem those who were under the law*” [NAS] (Gal. 4:4-5). Chronological time is said to be related to God’s redemptive purpose of bringing salvation to mankind.

If the “*fullness*” of time is the first advent of Christ, then the completion of time would be heralded by the second advent of Christ. The disciples said to Jesus, just prior to His ascension into heaven, “*Lord, is it at this time (chronos) you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?*” He answered by saying, “*It is not for you to know the times (chronos) or epochs which the Father has fixed by his own authority*” [NAS] (Acts 1:6-7). The kingdom of Christ appears to be the culmination of linear time. Perhaps this is what is being indicated by the angel, who said, just prior to the seventh trumpet judgment ushering in the Kingdom Age “*that there should be time (chronos) no longer*” [KJV] (Rev. 10:6). The point is that though the Kingdom will last 1,000 years (Rev. 20), that will be the *end* of time.

In all of this, though God is accomplishing His purpose in

the cycles of time and in the linear fulfillment of time, the emphasis of God for each person is upon personal response to His offer of salvation in the present tense of time — “*today*” (Heb. 3:7, 13, 15; 4:7). God is the consummate existentialist. After all, His name is “*I AM*” (Ex. 3:14). It doesn’t matter what year it is in the sequence of time. What matters is, have you responded to God with repentance and faith “*today*”?

So, don’t just get caught up in the euphoria of a Y2K millennial change. Be sure to focus your attention on *the* millennial change two thousand years ago, the focal point of all time, and grasp the true significance of the birth of Christ. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son to be your Savior. That’s the true significance of Y2K. It is simply 2,000 years after *the* crucial event of all time. It is 2,000 *A.D.* Acknowledging Jesus Christ as Savior is, therefore, the all-encompassing significance of time, and you need to respond to that “*today*”. 

(Information on the story of “time” is taken from David Ewing Duncan’s excellent book, *CALENDAR*, Avon Books, Inc.; 1998)

A Word from the Word

Eph 5:16

THINK OPPORTUNITY

Kairos

A man was talking with his friend. “Well, I’m turning 50 this year,” he said, “time certainly has a way of catching up with you.”

A mother had an issue to settle with her daughter. “Have you talked with her yet?” asked the father. “No,” the mother replied. “I’m waiting for the appropriate time”.

Both of these discussions are about time. Yet there are two different concepts of time being expressed in the alternate dialogues. In the first case, the man is talking about sequence of time. The years roll on (a linear concept) and before you know it, you’re 50. The mother, however, is referring to appropriateness of time. There was a right time and a wrong time to talk with her daughter.

The Greeks saw a need to distinguish between these two concepts of time. So they had two words. And when the New Testament writers used the Greek language to articulate the Word of God, they used these two words to distinguish between the two ways we should think about time from the perspective of God.

The Greek word used to express the idea of linear time is **chronos**. We get the word chronology or chronological from this Greek word. It expresses the thought of sequence and continuum as it relates to time. Days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, and millenniums are all concepts related to **chronos**. The dating of events, as well as the minutes ticking on our watches, reflect the idea of chronology. It was in this regard that Paul wrote, “*But when the fullness of the time [chronos] came, God sent forth His Son...*” (Gal. 4:4). In the sequence of time, the time for the Incarnation had come.

God is speaking about something quite different, however, when He tells us to “*make the most of your time*” (Eph. 5:16). This is the other word for time — **kairos**. Here the idea has more to do with “timing”, as when a comedian says that, in telling a joke, timing is everything. **Kairos** is used to refer to the right time, the proper time, favorable time, or an opportune time. In fact, the exact same phrase used in Ephesians 5:16 is also found in Colossians 4:5 and is translated, “*making the most of the opportunity (kairos)*” by the New American Standard translators.

So, here is the point. We can get caught up in all of the excitement of a new millennium by merely emphasizing the chronological dimension of time — **chronos**. Y2K, however, is simply another blip in the sequential passing of time. Or, we can see that God is still giving us an opportunity (**kairos**) to refocus our priorities in the light of the passing of time. That is the emphasis of Paul in Ephesians 5. Here is what he says in the context,

“Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your *time (kairos)*, because the days are evil. So then, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” (emphasis mine). [NAS] Eph. 5:15-17

There is no question about it — the days we live in are evil. Therefore, the wise person thinks about opportunity — opportunity to walk with God and opportunity to share the Gospel of Christ with those who need to be saved from their sins. **Kairos** is the important thing, not **chronos**.

Truth in Grace

Bits & Pieces

...Truth in Grace is an outreach ministry of Grace Church of West Ottawa in western Michigan where Dan Hayden is the Pastor/Teacher. All of the tape series described in this periodical are messages preached by Dan at Grace Church.

...Grace Church is on the web at www.gcwo.org. Recently we have been working at getting Truth in Grace's website up and running as well (www.truthingrace.org). We are in the first stage of development and appreciate your patience as the site is put together. Check us out!

...This past October, God took our dear friend and colleague in ministry, Bob Van Kampen, home to heaven. Bob was instrumental in initiating Truth in Grace and served as one of our vice-presidents. We are truly thankful to God for his vision and encouragement to this ministry over the past several years. He is greatly missed.

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