



## •TIMELINE OF TOPICS•

### Quote

- Completely anonymous; no idea of author or time period

### Early Church

- Why do many people say that Jesus was born in 4 BC (or a little earlier)?

### American Church History

(1700s/1800s)

- Two people tried to date the return of Jesus. They both failed, but one spawned a new movement

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## Why do some people say that Jesus was born in 4 BC?

The Bible does not contain any year designations, like the year AD 2023. Why? Because the system of counting years used today did not develop until the 500s, and then it didn't catch on until hundred years after that. The guy who developed the AD system was Dionysius Exiguus (470-544), but more about him and why he felt it necessary to create the AD system later.

While the Bible does not have a system for counting years, it does use an old way of keeping track of years. This method is known as the "regnal system" and is based on indicating an event within the reign of a ruler. For instance, "such-and-such occurred in the fifth year of King whoever." A great example of this is in Luke 3:1-2. In those passages, Luke attempts to tell when "the word of God came to John [the Baptist] son of Zechariah in the desert." Luke describes this event within the rule of many people: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracoonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert."

Luke is very specific because he dates the call of John within the reigns of seven different people. This system worked well as long as people knew when the rulers ruled, but as time passed and people began to forget those rulers, they also forgot the dates when they ruled.

Now to Dionysius. Dionysius was a monk who help track the day when Easter was celebrated. (Which was difficult when you don't have a regular calendar.) In all of his calculations, he decided to change from the regnal system to a system of counting years based on the birth of Jesus. Thus Dionysius began his calendar with Anno Domini ("In the year of the Lord") 1. He first started using this system in the year AD 525. (That means you will never find any dates using the AD system before the year 525. In other words, the people living in the year 524 didn't realize they lived in that year.)

Dionysius' system was mainly theoretical at that time and did not have a broad appeal. But in the early 700s, a man named Venerable Bede wrote a history book that used Dionysius' system, and, soon afterward, this dating system was widely accepted.

Now about Jesus: Dionysius decided to start the calendar by calling the birth of Jesus "year 1." But as archaeology developed in the 1800s and 1900s, scholars began to be able to date people and events in the distant past with more accuracy. And they concluded that King Herod the Great died in the year 4 BC. Therefore, since Herod was alive when Jesus was born, this pushed the date of Jesus' birth back to at least 4 BC (or maybe even a couple of years earlier). So scholars say that Jesus was born in the year 4 BC (and some say 5, 6, or even 7 BC) because Dionysius got it wrong by at least four years. That isn't too bad, considering he devised the system in the Dark Ages.

Read on to learn more about the leap year (you only think you know the rule). Therefore, the way to keep track of years was established, but some tweaking with the length of the year became necessary. The calendar used by Dionysius is known as the Julian calendar and has three years of 365 days, then one year of 366 days, which we know as the leap year. Problem: the Julian calendar assumes that each year is 365.25 days long, but it is 365.2425 days long, just a bit shorter. So if you add a day every four years, you will not add enough.

By the 1500s, it was apparent that too many days had been added over time. Therefore, Pope Gregory XIII decided that the day after October 4, 1582 would be October 15, 1582. To make sure this mistake didn't happen again, they adjusted the leap year rule. No longer would an extra day automatically be added to every fourth year. From then on, an extra day would be added to every fourth year unless the year ended in "00", then an extra day would not be added unless the year could be evenly divided by 400, when an extra day would be added. So, 1900 was not a leap year but 2000 was.

A Christian will advance in spiritual maturity in relation to how much the Christian releases his or her own desires and replaces them with God's, no more or no less.

Unknown

### William Miller: Jesus to return in 1843

The idea of dating the return of Jesus is not new. Yet few people have been more specific than William Miller (1782-1849). Miller was a Baptist preacher (although not ordained as far as I could tell). He spent most of his life as a farmer, with part of the time serving as sheriff and justice of the peace.

In 1816 Miller left his previous belief in Deism (God created the world and then left it to run on its own) and became a Christian. Having come from skeptical Deism, which challenged many Christian beliefs, Miller set out to defend his new-found faith. He searched the Bible for passages which clearly defined Christianity. What he ended up with was a prediction of the return of Jesus.

In the midst of his studying, he turned to the book of Daniel. He focused on Daniel 8:14: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." He interpreted the "days" as "years," meaning that after 2300 years "the sanctuary [will] be cleansed." He interpreted the cleansing of the sanctuary to be the return of Jesus. But 2300 years after what? He believed this pivotal event to be the decree of the Greek king Artaxerxes in 457 BC to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem [which had been destroyed in 586 BC].

Doing the math: 2300 - 457 = 1843. So, Miller became convinced that Jesus would return around 1843. He began preaching his views in 1831 and attracted a large number of followers (estimates range from 30,000 to 100,000). Yet his followers wanted a more specific date than "about 1843." Miller studied Jewish calendars and celebrations and announced that Jesus would return between March 21, 1843 to March 21, 1844.

When March 22, 1844 arrived with no Jesus, Miller lost some followers. Yet other followers believed the true date to be October 22, 1844, which was the Jewish Day of Atonement. At first Miller did not accept this, but he changed his mind on October 6. With great anticipation, Miller and his followers prepared for October 6. October 7 arrived and no Jesus, yet Miller did not lose hope. He wrote on December 5, 1844: "Although I have been twice disappointed, I am not yet cast down or discouraged." He still believed that Jesus' return was imminent when he died five years later, having lost most of his followers.

Some of his followers later formed into the Seventh-day Adventists. They believed that his method was correct but that Jesus planned to return then, but changed his mind because Christians were all doing something wrong. After pondering on what this sin was, Miller's later followers decided that it was because all Christians were worshipping on the wrong day, Sunday. They switched the worship day to Saturday, since it was the day appointed in the Old Testament (the Sabbath), changed their name to Seventh-day Adventists ("Adventist" is someone who looks forward to the return of Jesus), and began encouraging all other Christians to worship on Saturday.

I once saw a sign in front of a Seventh-day Adventist church that stated, "Worship on Sunday is from Satan."

### Charles Wesley: Jesus to return in 1793

Many have undertaken the task of predicting the year of Jesus' return. Programs on television are dedicated to aligning biblical verses with current events in order to show that Jesus will come back in this generation of Christians. But here's the thing, and there is really no getting around it: many Christians from the past also thought that Jesus would return soon. One of these was Charles Wesley (1707-1788), brother of John Wesley. If you haven't heard of John Wesley, you may have heard of the denominations which claim him as inspiration: Methodists, Wesleysans, AME (African Methodist Episcopal), and AME Zion.

On April 25, 1754, Charles wrote a letter in which he explains his belief that Jesus will come back in 1793. The rest of this article consists of portions of that letter. (I will leave his spelling intact.)

"The answer of many prayers is at hand; I mean the kingdom of our Lord in its fullness upon earth. . . . The fullness of that blessed kingdom, and the day of its great things, is yet to come, and is now at such a small distance of time that you yourself may, by the course of nature, live to see it. . . . God has been pleased to lead me this winter, as it were by the hand, thro the labyrinth of the scripture Prophecies relative to the latter times. The scriptures say expressly that a great part of the contents of these Prophecies, and more especially what relates to their accomplishment, was to be shut up and sealed unto the time of the end; that is, until the very beginning of those days when they are to be fulfilled. And now these days are begun. He who hath the key of David, who shuts so as no man can open, and opens so as no man can shut, hath taken off the seals, and opened to unworthy me in a very great, tho' not yet in a full, measure, not only the nature of these awful and glorious events which the scriptures say are to be brought to pass in the latter times, but also the very times which the scriptures point out for their accomplishment. . . . It will appear a Paradox to affirm that all these events will be accomplished in FORTY years time counted from this present year 1754. . . . But on the 21 of March last, after I had by an accurate examination of in the scripture prophecies, both of the Old and New Testament, been enable to penetrate into the nature of the great and awful events that are to be brought about in the latter days, was enable also to penetrate into the passages of scripture, which determine the time of their fulfillment. I can only now just give you a glimpse of the first step of the calculation without giving you the proofs. The first step then toward the finding out the time fixed by scripture for the accomplishment of all these things is the observing that the number 666, assigned Revelation 13.18 for determining the time of the final destruction of the Beast, hath a relative to the time, times and half time, assigned in Dan. 12 for the bringing all the events spoken of in that and the preceding chapters, to an accomplishment, and particularly, for the bringing the end of Antichrist spoken of in the end of the last verse of the 11 chapter; and the final deliverance of the Jews spoken of the 1 and 7 verse of chapter 12. And so the said period of time and times and half a time is made up of 666-666-666-333 amounting an all to 2331 years, concerning which 2331 years I am able to show that the scriptures do express point out the first year thereof to have been the year 538 before the first of the Christian Aera [Era] [538 BC plus 2331 years equals AD 1793], being the first year of Darius the Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans."

Questions or comments contact Mark  
at [marknickens@gmail.com](mailto:marknickens@gmail.com)