

Introduction.

The countdown of a rocket launching is a very serious time. As the final hours and minutes approach, every functioning part must be checked out and approved.

The Army missile experts from Huntsville, Ala., and Cape ^{Kennedy} ~~Canaveral~~ ^{are} ~~were~~ highly pleased ^{when our} ~~that the~~ most recent space vehicles, ~~although it had not been tested before,~~ ^{are} ~~was~~ launched successfully after a perfect countdown.

(Our) merchants are careful to count daily the number of shopping days left before Christmas. Isn't it obvious that most people at this holy season are thinking more about exchanging gifts

(and ringing cash registers)

than they are about the blessed birth of our Savior?

How crassly commercial can we get?

There are advertising displays in abundance

about the latest gadgets & fashions,

but few are the indications of the religious and spiritual significance of the season.

Can you imagine how Christ felt when he saw the money changers & merchants capitalizing & commercializing the passover festival in Palestine?

Can you imagine how Jeremiah felt when his generation put their shackles of silver before humility of heart?

Can you imagine the soul-sickness of Isaiah when he saw pretended piety pulling the puppet strings of ungodly political alliances?

You perhaps remember the solemn countdown of irrevocable doom that Daniel pronounced to a blasphemous king, saying, "God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it."

Today, however, we want to ^(start) make a countdown to the original Christmas as it is given in God's Holy Word.

I. The Countdown Begins in the Garden of Eden,

4,000 years before the birth of Christ was to take place

A. The Purpose Prophesied. Gen. 3:15

1. The bruising of Satan's head

2. Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan

3. The cross sealed the doom of the Devil.

B. The Conflict Forecasted

1. Enmity between Satan & Eve
2. Conflict between Satan's followers and Eve's descendants.
3. Christ, the Seed of the woman, Gal. 3:16; supernatural element; not seed of the man, but of the woman.
4. *This was revealed to Adam.*

C. The Price to be Paid

1. The bruising of the heel of Christ
2. The wounds of Jesus
 - Zech. 12:10
 - Jn. 19:37
 - Zech. 13:6
 - Isa. 53:5

II, III, and IV see separate sheet of notes.

V. About 750 B.C. we come to another stage of this Christmas Countdown. *Revealed to Israel.*

A. Isa. 7:14 - the Parentage prophesied

1. The Sign of Jerusalem's deliverance from Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Samaria in time of "haz.
2. A young woman would soon give birth to a son who should be called Immanuel; before he would grow up very much, the kings of Syria & Samaria would be removed. (v.16)

B. The primary local reference, however,

does not adequately explain all there is in this very unusual prophecy.

It surely deserves to be referred in some way to the virgin birth of Jesus, although our basis of belief in the virgin birth of Xt rests not on this statement of Isaiah but on the manuscript evidence of Matt. & Luke.

C. There are many Scripture references which witness to the Davidic parentage of the Messiah.

and virgin birth
Our belief in the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Jesus is not founded on Isaiah 7:14 but on the testimonies of the gospel writers in the N.T.

II. About 2,000 B.C. it was revealed to Abraham that Israel would be the nation through which Christ would come. Genesis 12:3

"I will make of you, a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

It was Abraham's separation and faith that made him great. Separation is the way to spiritual power and service.

The church that is just like the world can do little for the world. The Christian who is no different from the man of the world exerts no influence for the Kingdom of God.

III. Two generations later God revealed to Jacob the secret that Messiah would come through the TRIBE OF JUDAH. (Genesis 49:10)

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come (or until he comes to whom it -- that is the scepter-- belongs).

This is the blessing that the aged Jacob pronounced on Judah. The reference to the scepter, the ruler's staff, or lawgiver, and the cryptic Shiloh -- all undoubtedly have a Messianic significance. The Jewish sect from Qumran by the Dead Sea interpreted this passage messianically. In a fragment which contains a commentary on Genesis 49:10, this phrase is interpreted to mean "Until the Messiah of Righteousness shall come."

IV. About 1,000 years B.C. God told DAVID that through his family the Savior would be born. (2nd Samuel 7:12-14) God said to David, "I will raise up your son after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom... I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever."

Yet David's royal line of reigning monarchs came to an end about 500 years later. How was this promise fulfilled?

In God's mind the prophecy reached forward to the time of Christ, and only in Christ was it fully verified. And David understood this. According to Acts 2:30, he knew that "God had sworn to him that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne."

This is a reference nearly 1,000 years before the birth of Christ, to the Messiah, of whom alone it could be said with truth that the kingdom was to last for ever.

We notice here, too, how God deals with his children's prayers.

David had asked of God to permit him to build a temple to the Lord.

God did not grant this request.

But in refusing it, he grants to him far above all he was able to ask or think.

He gave him something BETTER than what he had prayed for.

So God does for us today sometimes when we pray and don't get what we ask for.

a deliberate wordplay on "house"
v. 7 = "The Temple," v. 12 = "dynasty," v. 13

"...until the Messiah of righteousness shall come."

VI. About 700 years before the Birth of Christ we have the Place Prophesied.

A. Micah 5:2, Bethlehem named.

B. Little in geographical size, but big in spiritual significance.

C. His birth but not His beginning.

Jn. 17:5

Jn. 8:58

Jn. 1, 14.

VII. About 500 years before the Birth of Xt we have the time prophesied.

A. Daniel 9:24-27, "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build J'lem ^{sevens} unto the Messiah the Prince shall be 69 Weeks."

Each week equals 7 years. (one interpretation)

69 wks equal 483 years.

This was the approximate number of years from the time Artaxerxes gave permission for the rebuilding of J'lem to the time of Xt.

B. Many who call themselves liberal are not open minded enough to consider the possibility & place of predictive prophecy in God's Revealed Word.

C. Yet God does pledge His Word in advance, and He keeps His Word.

1. He is not only sovereign over but active in history.

2. And "when the fullness of time was come, he sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of Sons." Gal. 4:4

VIII. About 400 years before the Birth of Christ, the Forerunner, who should prepare the way, was prophesied. Mal. 3:1.

A. "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me;.. and the Lord shall suddenly come."

B. There is not sufficient understanding of the importance & place of the appearance & ministry of John the Baptist, the Forerunner of Xt.

C. John's emphasis in his preaching was on repentance from sin.

No one can be prepared to let the Lord have his way in his heart until he acknowledges guilt and changes his attitude.

IX. Fifteen months before the Birth of Jesus, the announcement was made to Zacharias the priest of the coming birth of John the forerunner who should "go before him in the spirit & power of Elias; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Lk. 1:17

A. This was an indication that the countdown was very nearly completed.

B. The climax of the centuries was imminent. Soon calendars would reckon the years not according to the reign of an Emperor in Rome but according to the Birth of a Baby in Bethlehem.

Roman highways would be the means of communication and transportation of His heralds of whom it would be sung, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace."

Roman concepts of Law and Justice would be elevated and impregnated with a higher spiritual content in the hands of the interpreters of this One who is "God with us."

The rich expressiveness of the common world language would be utilized to the limit in proclaiming the praises of this Prince of Peace.

Disillusioned devotees of meaningless mythology would find in the person of the Christ of Nazareth a satisfaction of their soul's deepest longings.

And an old priest burning incense in the temple of the Lord was the first one to know that the time was so very near!

X. Nine months Before the Birth of Jesus the countdown continued with announcements made to Joseph & Mary.

A. To Mary. Lk. 1:26-35

1. The unusual greeting, v. 28
2. The conception announced, v. 31
3. The son described, vs. 32-33
4. The puzzling question explained, v. 35
5. Faith challenged & demonstrated, vs. 37-38.

B. to Joseph, Mt. 1:20-25

1. Explanation of the supernatural conception, v. 20
2. Annunciation of the Savior's name, v. 21.
3. Consumation of prophetic Scripture, vs. 22-23.

CONCLUSION:

Christmas loses its true significance unless we see ^{beyond} ~~all~~ (the ringing of cash registers,
the wrapping of pretty packages,
(the rustle of frantic shopping,
the shallow search for "the spirit of cheer",
and the busy activity that gets us nowhere
so fast we arrive out of breath.

We must understand that the true Christmas spirit is that which searches the heavens,
not for man-made satellites,
but for the Star of Hope & Peace, and *seeks everywhere on earth* for men of good will.

It is the spirit which is occupied not by the tinsel that decorates gift packages
but with a holy life that adorns the gospel of the Savior whose birthday we celebrate.

It is the spirit which struts not boisterously,
but kneels reverently before the manger of the Christ Child who had "no crib for His bed."

It is the spirit not of those who are drunk with wine or other alcoholic beverages
but who are filled in sheer intoxication with the Holy Spirit of God.

It is the spirit of repentance & faith & dedication
which counts down to the zero hour of full
commitment to Christ.

It is the spirit which says, "Lord,
the time of preparation, of hesitation,
of procrastination, is ended;

I now, by your help & grace,
launch out onto the great adventure of daring
to accept Christ as my Savior,
and to follow Him as my Lord wherever He leads
in this world and forever beyond.

Gateway Bap. Ch. St. Pete - Dec-7+14, 1980

WAC Chapel Ft. RSC-1-5 Dec 76

So. Vietnam - 17 Dec 67

Cent. Ch. Augsburg 2 + 9 Dec. 62

H.M.B.C. 12/14/58; 1st Int. Bde. Ft. Dec. 11 Dec. '60.