

MILLERITE COMPUTATION OF THE OCTOBER 22 DATE

The question has frequently been asked, What calendar did the Millerites use in computing the prophesied Day of Atonement in 1844? And the inquiry is continued in the challenge why September 23--the rabbinical Yom Kippur in that year--is not just as consistent as the October 22 date. What difference would twenty-nine days more or less make to the period about to be ushered in? Another question also presses itself home: How would Adventist scholarship of today have handled an ancient Jewish calendar argument one hundred years ago? It can be briefly stated that the September Yom Kippur in 1844 was based upon modern Jewish calculation, while the October 22 date was computed in ancient Jewish time, in harmony with the calendar of Moses. A review of the Millerite experience and the discussion of the questions in 1844 chronology should be full of encouragement and inspiration to those who are interested in the foundation principles of the Advent teaching of historical prophecy.

The year 1844 belonged to a period of serious investigation all over the world regarding the second advent of Christ. The movement was brought to its final conclusion in America, from whose shores second-advent influence went forth to countries east and west. Millerite leadership faced difficult alternatives in the study of Biblical chronology. The question was asked many times whether the crucifixion passover was in March or April, and just when a passover of the ancient type would occur in the year proposed to end the 2300-year prophecy of Daniel. The death date of Jesus was basic to the problem to be solved. Was the year 33 A.D., 31 A.D., or 30 A.D.? From the time of Roger Bacon (13th century), the year 33 A.D. had been the popular crucifixion date, and at first William Miller accepted this conclusion. He had no Spirit-of-prophecy literature to which he could turn for guidance. He writes that he "laid by all commentaries, former views and prepossessions" in the endeavor to understand the figures and metaphors of prophecy. Under the influence of his teaching and example, many people began to live in a very real

expectancy. Jesus might come any time. And when the day's work was over, one sought for assurance that his record was white and clean.

The Millerite Adventists met often in prayer together. Repeatedly they would spend the whole night in intensive study. These students of prophecy read and translated the Bible from its original texts. Some wrote in German, French, or Latin; others were astronomers and authoritative computers. They were called philomaths, and as recognized scholars they met other scholars in argument. They had at their disposal the best libraries in America, and they were fully acquainted with sanctioned writings at home and abroad on the subject of their investigation--the chronology of prophecy. Their documentary evidence is witness to their scholarship. But more than all else, they were of the number to whom it is said: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." Even a Voice from the golden altar in heaven spoke to the Millerite age. The message was understood and was given at the appointed time. The Millerite movement was the preface to the hour of judgment.

Such was the spiritual atmosphere in which were analyzed and deciphered the important chronological problems and historical dates upon which Adventism of our generation has founded its teachings. We owe to the Millerites the interpretation of difficult chapters in prophecy, whose main features of exposition the Spirit of prophecy has also confirmed. Through their faith in the prophetic Word, the 2300 years have been demonstrated as an historical period, and thereby the age of Ezra has been tied to the nineteenth century. The decipherment was based upon principles of computation that were not only Biblical, but they were also astronomical and inherently adapted to the American continent.

William Miller's Chronology

The chronological investigation of William Miller was along general lines

only. The Biblical periods of prophecy were his specialty, and he himself did not therefore point out specific dates or days of the month. One of his great contributions was the revival of the year-day principle by which every prophetic period is calculated if in harmony with the historical school of interpretation. This principle was definitely understood in the time of Christ, but was largely lost and forgotten in the early centuries of apostasy. It was not fully recognized by Bede, the scholarly English monk of the seventh century. But when the time came for prophecy and history to meet again, men arose who recognized the coincidence between time and prophecy. And thus the fulfillment of every prophetic period has had its witnesses, who each proclaimed the year-day principle of prophetic computation. And more than all else, William Miller discovered that the year-day principle not only gives Bible history a definite chronological outline, but that by this same principle, the Biblical outline is linked with modern time. Let us state the law in the exact words of Mr. Miller's coadjutor: Each day of the prophetic period represents a true solar year.¹

The Millerites were challenged as to the meaning of this principle. Inquirers wished to know how long the "true solar year" is. The answer was given that it is "365 days, 5 hours and a fraction" long. In William Miller's day, the exact length of the solar year had not been known for a century as yet. Another query was this: "But does not Mr. Miller reckon some years at 360 and some 365 days?" The answer was an emphatic "No."² It was carefully explained that a prophetic year is always the equivalent of 360 prophetic days, but that each one of these "days" equals a true solar year. The proof for this marvelous equation is found in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.

There was a keen sense of humor in every Millerite discussion, and it kept

¹ Signs of the Times [Boston, 1843], April 26, p. 61, col. 1.)

² Id., p. 60, col. 3.)

the participants in congenial temper. Throughout the year 1843, the important significance of the year-day method was continuously explained in the second-advent papers, and arguments on both sides of the question were published. But no one came forward with a consistent substitute, and the year-day principle was once more established as indisputable. Mr. Miller's calculations ultimately pointed to the spring of 1844 as the probable end of the 2300 days. But the vernal equinox passed, and Jesus did not come. A few students of prophecy had already figured out in 1843 that the 2300 years could not end in the subsequent March. Karaite literature pointed them to Leviticus as teaching that the ancient paschal season had to coincide with ripe barley, which, except in the valley of Jericho, occurs in April-May in Palestine--not in the March period. According to Dalman and others, Palestinian March is a winter month, and has a snowfall equal to that of January. Hence April is the barley-harvest month in Mediterranean countries, and therefore commonly the paschal month. Sometimes, however, the passover was as late as May. In the Near East, spring and winter stand in close connection, and the spring has strong meteorological contrasts, thus tending a delay in the harvest, and in the beginning of the Jewish year.³

Millerite Date for 1 Nisan in 1844

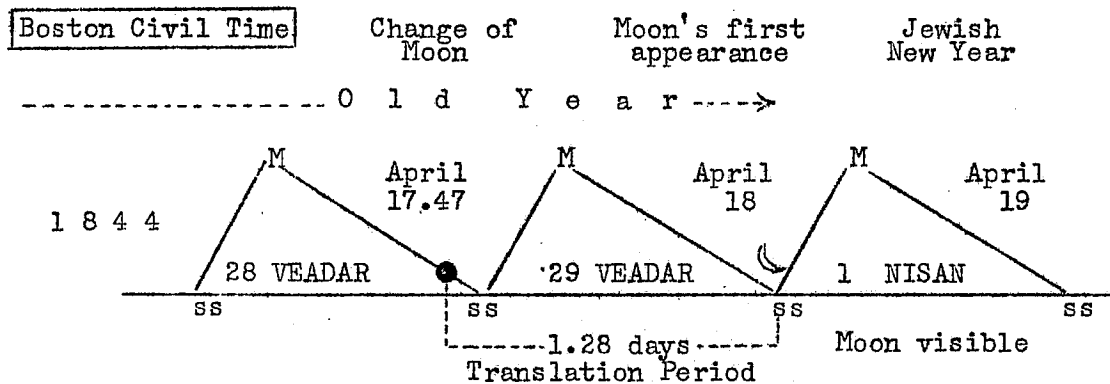
The Millerites rejected the rabbinical first day of Nisan on March 21 in 1844, and chose the April new moon for the beginning of the true type of the ancient first month. April 19 was the day.⁴ They argued that the modern Jewish calendar is based upon decisions that were unknown in the time of Christ. The modern lengths of the Jewish year--either the 385 days or the 353 days--were not in vogue in the first century. The so-called postponements, according to which the modern Jewish passover never occurs on Monday, Wednesday, or

³ Gustaf Dalman, Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina [Gütersloh, 1928], 3. Band, 1. Hälfte, pp. 305, 306.

⁴ Joseph Bates, Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps [New Bedford, 1847], p. 30.

Friday, are rules that were not adopted until the fourth century. For the crucifixion passover certainly occurred on Friday, and the passover in 28 A.D. was with equal certainty on Wednesday, April 28.⁵ The Millerites also discovered that the modern rabbinical calendar has an entirely different paschal season from that customary in the time of Christ.

The following diagram presents the astronomical proof for the April 19 date, which the Millerites have recorded as the first day of the Jewish month Nisan in 1844. Anciently, the new moon's first appearance marked the beginning of the new year.



April 1 (1843) to April 18 sunset (1844 = 384 days (length of Jewish year)

There are only three possible positions for the April new moon's first appearance after its change in 1844: (1) April 17 sunset. This date is excluded because the new moon cannot possibly be seen within five or six hours after the change; (2) April 19 sunset. This date is impracticable, for it would add an extra day to the previous Jewish year, causing it to be 385 days long, which is improbable for the ancient type of lunar year; (3) April 18 sunset was therefore the only possible point of time for the April crescent to be seen. The first day of Nisan therefore occurred from sunset to sunset on April 18/19, and this was the Jewish day which the Millerites record as the "first appearance" of the April new moon. In common parlance it was called

⁵ "Ancient Jewish Calendation," Journal of Biblical Literature [New Haven, 1942], December, p. 232.

April 19, while the moon appeared at sunset on April 18.

On April 18 the sun set at 6:37 p.m., and the new moon at 8:03 p.m., thus allowing the ample length of 1^h 26^m during which the new moon crescent could appear. Unlike the full moon, which has slowly filled its disk with light, the new moon appears suddenly in the dimness of the western horizon, and in the spring commonly needs quite an hour after sunset in order to appear. The new moon must be fairly high above the setting sun in order to be seen at all.

Jesus did not come on April 19, and the disappointment was great. Discouragement followed. Joseph Bates describes the experience as a "stupid, dark and still time."⁶ Then "angels were sent to arouse the discouraged saints"; and they watched "with deepest interest the result of the heavenly messages . . . for another light was yet to shine upon them."⁷ This additional light was based chiefly upon Daniel 9. Briefly stated, this is the Biblical argument that stirred the camp at Exeter, New Hampshire:

Since the crucifixion occurred "in the midst of the week" in the spring of the year, and hence in the middle of a literal Jewish year and also of a prophetic year, therefore the end of the prophetic year must come in the autumn. In other words, the prophetic years of Daniel end in the fall and not in the spring.⁸

This reasoning came as a startling truth to the Millerites, and an impelling cry went forth in August that Jesus would come within the next three months. Already, a single voice had anticipated this cry in July, on a Sunday in Boston, proclaiming October 22 as the tenth day of the seventh month. This date was computed by adding six lunar months or 177 days, to April 19, and thereby obtaining as the first day of the seventh month, October 13, from which nine days more extended to the tenth day on October 22. The Millerites have

⁶ Way Marks, p. 17.

⁷ Ellen G. White, Early Writings, pp. 235-238.

⁸ The Midnight Cry [Boston, 1844], August 22, p. 57, cols. 1-3.

left an official statement that they thus "reckoned" from the "appearance of the moon on the 18th of April" and thereby found that "the seventh Jewish month commenced with the appearance of the moon on the 13th of October, so that the tenth day of the seventh month synchronized with the 22d of that month."⁹

The "Midnight Cry" dates were the foundation impulse of the seventh month movement in the summer of 1844. The new moon crescent was seen at sunset of April 18, from which point of time the October dates were calculated in advance. It was the Biblical argument in Daniel 9 and Matthew 25 that gave impetus to the calendar facts, and a resulting momentum was felt throughout Advent communities. This reckoning was accomplished by means of the figures in a common almanac, which in early days was much more complete than a local almanac of the twentieth century.

There is no record that any actual observation of the October new moon was made by the Millerites, except the suggestion by Sylvester Bliss that the moon appeared on October 13. Indeed, this new moon could not be seen so far north as Boston at sunset of October 12, when there was only ten minutes between sunset and moonset. Obviously, because of this circumstance, the Adventist computers oriented their problem on the meridian of Jerusalem, and concluded that in that locality the October new moon would be seen at sunset of October 13, when the moon set a full hour after the sun.¹⁰ They figured that the Palestinian new moon at sunset on that date was "one day and 17 hours old," as against 22 hours and 46 minutes for the new moon on the Boston meridian at sunset of October 12. It is just as impossible for the new moon to be seen on the same evening all around the earth as it is for every locality to have simultaneously the same solar date. For as astronomers state, the new moon is

⁹ The Advent Shield [Boston, 1844-5], Vol. I, p. 278.

¹⁰ The Advent Herald [Boston, 1844], October 30, p. 93, col. 3.

frequently not seen in some place, while she is seen in another place not far to the west. But in some months, she may be seen in both places at once.

The Millerites ascertained this astronomical knowledge for themselves. They have left on record the deduction that in Judea the first day of the seventh Jewish month began at sunset of the second evening after the change, while in America it began at sunset of the first evening after the change. These two days in different parts of the world had seven hours in common, and this coincidence "strengthened" the Adventists that they had chosen the right moon. There were many in 1844 who made merry over a lunar reckoning that was not based upon the modern Jewish calendar. The answer was returned: "Every scholar knows that we are correct as to the Karaite seventh month." The Millerites were well aware of the rabbinical seventh month in September in 1844, and the circumstance was often mentioned in their papers. At the same time they were emphatic in their challenge that they dissented from the modern Jewish calendar because it did not agree with the laws of Moses.

The 1844 October 22 date on the American continent is historical. It was a specific example of the ancient season of the Jewish seventh month, and its computation illustrates the astronomical relation of the moon's change to the beginning of a new month. The Millerites necessarily had to calculate the October moon in advance, for its dates gave rise to the Midnight Cry and to the Second Angel's Message. Furthermore, there were astronomical reasons why this autumnal moon could not be seen in New England. On the contrary, the spring moon of April 18 was seen, and its "first appearance" acknowledged in the Advent Shield. In this Millerite record we have a key to the ancient form of the Jewish year, and we may therefore consistently conclude that the Jewish new year in the time of Christ was both computed and also confirmed by observation.

With reference to this historical date, October 22, Joseph Bates writes: "Many believed in that day. . . For myself I can truly say that it was the most triumphant and soul-inspiring point in all my Christian experience."¹¹

Grace Amadon

¹¹ Way Marks, p. 41.