Testing and Sifting From Within

Acts 13:19, 20 in the King James Version,* along with certain other factors, had thrown off the chronology by over a century.* This later led to the idea—sometimes stated as a possibility, sometimes more firmly—that since the seventh millennium of human history would begin in 1975, events associated with the beginning of Christ’s Millennial Reign might start to take place then.

Did the beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses on these matters prove to be correct? They certainly did not err in believing that God would without fail do what he had promised. But some of their time calculations and the expectations that they associated with these gave rise to serious disappointments.

Following 1925, meeting attendance dropped dramatically in some congregations in France and Switzerland. Again, in 1975, there was disappointment when expectations regarding the start of the Millennium failed to materialize. As a result, some withdrew from the organization. Others, because they sought to subvert the faith of associates, were disfellowshipped. No doubt, disappointment over the date was a factor, but in some instances the roots went deeper. Some individuals also argued against the need to participate in the house-to-house ministry. Certain ones did not simply choose to go their own way; they became aggressive in opposing the organization with which they had been associated, and they made use of the public press and television to air their views. Nevertheless, the number who defected was relatively small.

Although these tests resulted in a sifting and some blew away like chaff when winnowed, others remained firm. Why? Regarding his own experience and that of others in 1925, Jules Feller explained: “Those who had set their confidence in Jehovah remained steadfast and continued their preaching activity.” They recognized that a mistake had been made but that in no respect had God’s Word failed, and therefore there was no reason either to let their own hope grow dim or to slow down in the work of pointing people to God’s Kingdom as mankind’s only hope.

Some expectations had not been fulfilled, but that did not mean that Bible chronology was of no value. The prophecy recorded by Daniel regarding the appearance of the Messiah 69 weeks of years after “the going forth of...

*Compare the rendering in The Emphasized Bible, translated by J. B. Rotherham; see also the footnote on Acts 13:20 in the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References.

†See “The Truth Shall Make You Free,” chapter XI, “The Kingdom Is at Hand,” pages 171-5; also The Golden Age, March 27, 1935, pages 391, 412. In the light of these corrected tables of Bible chronology, it could be seen that previous use of the dates 1873 and 1878, as well as related dates derived from these on the basis of parallels with first-century events, were based on misunderstandings.

Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom, 1993