

Why *Adult Bible Study* Sometimes Uses BCE and CE

Adult Bible Study occasionally receives inquiries about the use of BCE and CE in place of the familiar BC and AD designations of years on either side of Christ's birth. Gail Shetler, one of our writers, explained:

CE is known as either the Christian Era or the Common Era; BCE stand for Before the Christian Era. Actually, this designation is quite old, dating back to at least the 17th century in Christian Europe. Already scholars were concerned that the dating of Christ's birth may have been off by a few years either side of AD 1 (*anno Domini*—Latin for “in the year of the Lord”). Renumbering the years would have been a daunting task, so instead the designation of the years was changed to reflect the fact that scholars do not know the exact year of Christ's birth.

I do not believe this is an anti-Christian designation but one that is truly concerned with (1) the fact that Jesus Christ is a real historical figure, (2) that Jesus Christ actually lived here on earth in a real historical setting, and therefore, (3) trying to be as accurate as possible as to when that occurred. God is the God of history. Trying to be accurate in historical documentation, I believe, gives God honor and glory for being the God who works in the midst of human history.

Adult Bible Study uses both sets of designation, especially when quoting commentaries and other Bible study resources. When the dating discrepancy has been accurately accounted for, BCE and CE are used.