

The Truth about *GOD'S CALENDAR*

By Jamie McNab

Part One of Three Parts

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What is the truth about "God's Holy Day calendar"? It is very likely that many of you will have been challenged over the past few years about the Holy Day calendar -- and if you haven't been challenged so far, you probably soon will be!!

The story usually goes along the lines of, "The calendar that we have traditionally followed in the Church of God is a man-made calendar. God originally gave the calendar rules to Moses, but the Jews have long since perverted those rules. The Jewish calendar we use today is the result of many alterations, and is of purely human origin. If you keep the days shown in the "Jewish calendar", you will often be adrift of God's *real* Holy Days -- sometimes by a day or two, and sometimes by an entire month!" You will then usually be shown an *alternative* calendar which, you will be assured, is based entirely on the Bible, and gives the "proper" dates for God's Holy Days.

The major "splits" in the Church of God (such as the Philadelphia, United, Global, Living, International, etc.) continue to follow the Hebrew calendar. There are a number of smaller groups

(Church of God in Truth, Church of God the Very Elect, and so on) who adopt different calendars.

The calendar can become a very big subject, and a huge amount has been written about it. With references to molads, conjunctions, dark moons, equinoxes, postponement rules, and so on, it can all become very technical and difficult to follow.

In the space available in this Newsletter, it will not be possible to cover all aspects of the calendar debate. However, we will look in detail at a couple of specific points which are often brought up. As we look at these points, we will hopefully see why we have chosen to hold fast to the calendar traditionally observed by the Church of God, and sanctioned for us in this generation by Mr Herbert Armstrong.

The two points we will review in these notes are: when in God's calendar do the months start, and when does the year start?

The New Moon

One of the first objections to the traditional Hebrew calendar that you are likely to hear is that the months begin "at the wrong time".

In fact, quite a *selection* of possible times are "on offer" for the beginning of the months! Various calendar writers will propose, for example, the visible crescent (sometimes based on Jerusalem time, others insist on "local" time) -- or the astronomical conjunction -- or the dark moon. The Hebrew calendar uses the molad.

Let us look more closely at one of the more "popular" of these

ideas -- the visible crescent. Here we will be told that the months must always begin with the "new moon", and that the new moon is to be defined as the first faint *visible crescent* of the moon, as observed over Jerusalem. This, we will be assured, is demanded by the inspired Scriptures, and any other time of starting the month is not recognised by God and is not valid.

But what, in fact, does the Bible say?

Firstly, it can be shown quite easily that God did indeed give us the sun and moon for "signs, and for seasons, and for days and years", see Gen 1:14. In Psalm 104:19, we read of God that "He appointed the moon for seasons..."

The Hebrew word for "seasons" here is *moed*, which means *appointed time*, and is frequently used throughout the Old Testament to refer to the Feast Days.

Virtually all calendar writers acknowledge that the moon determines the beginning of the months -- usually referring to the relevant moon as the *new moon*.

What, then, is the *new moon*? Can those who want us to follow a different calendar prove from the Bible that the new moon is the first faint visible crescent?

One writer says that he cannot find any Scriptures supporting the method the Jews adopt, but "*I did find one (Scripture) demanding observation of the New Moon*" -- by which he means a visible "new moon".

Is there such a scripture?

This particular writer devotes a whole chapter of his article to

God's Sacred New Moon. The chapter is over 4 pages long. Extensive quotes are made from a number of *external sources* (historians etc) to support the point, but only one scripture is given to "prove" a "visible" moon -- Deut 16:1 which merely states, "Observe the month of Abib ...".

The terms "month" and "new moon" are used interchangeably in the Old Testament. The writer opts to use the meaning "new moon" in this verse, then continues, "*Notice the command to observe it! ... The new moon must be observed...*" We are told that the new moon must be "observed" with the eye -- seen visibly -- as in "observe the cat about to pounce on that bird".

Yet the writer continues, "*The word observe is the Hebrew shamar (Strong's 8104) meaning to hedge about; guard; protect; mark; look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard*".

The majority of these meanings do not require us to observe physically with the eyes!

The Hebrew word "shamar" is very common in the Bible. There is no real need to even look in the dictionary for its meaning. The places where God uses the term make it very clear.

According to Young's Analytical concordance, the word is translated 284 times as "KEEP". It is translated a further 45 times as "observe", and 19 times as "preserve" -- and then a handful of times as the other words given in the definition above. Some of the over 300 usages are:

- Ex 12:17, "And ye shall observe (shamar) the Feast of Unleavened Bread..." (not "look at", but keep).
- Deut 4:40, "Thou shalt keep (shamar) therefore His

statutes, and His commandments..." (not just "look at" them).

• Deut 5:20, "Keep (shamar -- observe) the Sabbath day to sanctify it..."

• Ex 31:13, "...Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep (shamar)..."

When we are driving our cars we "observe" the speed limit (hopefully!). That doesn't mean we just "look at" the road signs as we whizz by -- it means we keep, adhere to, follow and obey the instructions.

Deut 16:1 appears to be the main (and probably only) Scripture used to justify a visible crescent new moon. Yet this verse in reality refers to our keeping or celebrating the month of Abib, just as we keep, celebrate -- or "observe" -- the Sabbath.

There is, in fact, no Biblical support at all for a visible crescent moon. That is why virtually all of these writers refer to dictionaries, historical records, and calendar "experts" rather than provide us with a collection of "proof scriptures".

The Hebrew calendar uses the *molad* in calculating the beginning of the months (for those with a technical interest, the *molad* is that particular moment in each month when the moon comes directly between the earth and the sun; this occurs, on average, every 29 days 12 hours, 44 minutes and a few seconds). The molad is obtained by calculation, and has been worked out for decades to come.

You may wonder, "If the Bible doesn't command that the month begin with the visible crescent, does it then command that the month begin with the molad?" The answer, quite simply, is NO --

the Bible itself does not give any instruction as to what, exactly, should constitute the "new moon".

As we look further into the subject we will see that the Bible itself does not contain sufficient information to set up a calendar whose rules are beyond dispute. If it did, we wouldn't see more than a dozen different "true Bible calendars" circulating among the Churches of God!

We will see why an authoritative standard must be established to ensure the safekeeping of God's Holy Days.

Some who argue for a visible crescent have said that a calculated conjunction (e.g. a molad) was an impossibility, because the ancients didn't have the astronomical skills to calculate an "invisible" conjunction. This "logic" is flawed. A Jewish rabbi, Hillel II, is generally regarded as having made public the molad calculations somewhere around 390 A.D. A number of calendar writers demonstrate that these calculations go back to at least 300 B.C. However, bearing in mind that there was no new "technology" in use in those eras (no telescopes, radar, dopplers, computers!) then, if it was possible to calculate the molad in 300 B.C., it was also possible in 1,300 B.C or 3,300 B.C.

There is historical evidence that the ancient Chinese calculated the conjunctions as far back as 1,850 B.C.

Indeed, a Plain Truth article in July 1965 shows that Abraham was an outstanding scientist, astronomer and mathematician (who taught astronomy and mathematics to the ancient Egyptians), so we should not be surprised to find out that the ancients were a lot smarter than some of today's writers think!

So ... we find no Biblical proof of a "visible crescent moon". We

see no reason logically to prefer a visible crescent over a calculated conjunction -- both were accessible to the ancients.

The New Year

If the Bible itself is rather quiet as to when the month begins, does it at least give us a clear starting point for the year?

Well -- not according to the calendar experts, who will give you a choice of: the date of equinox itself, the new moon *nearest* the equinox, the first new moon *after* the equinox, the new moon when the "ears are green", and one writer gives the date when the sun appears in the constellation of Aries. Not much agreement here!!

One critic, commenting on the Church of God calendar that we are following this year states, "*This year you will recognise the first day of the year in the Winter, but next year you will recognise it in the Spring. This year you will keep the Feast of Trumpets in the summer, and next year you will keep it in the Fall.*" The writer states that he finds no scriptures for such, but that he does find a scripture "*that demands that the Festivals be observed in their seasons*".

Is this correct? Are we keeping the Holy Days in the wrong *seasons*? Are we disobeying God's scriptural instructions?

Well ...we need to be a little careful here not to read our own ideas into the scriptures.

In the context of the calendar it is easy to interpret the term "seasons" as applying to Spring, Summer, Fall, and so on. These are of course "seasons", in the agricultural sense.

We do, however, also hear of the "Yuletide season" -- or the "football season" -- or the "mating season", and similar. These are just recognised "periods of time" when certain things come about or happen.

So what is the Biblical usage of "seasons", when referring to the Holy Days?

As mentioned previously, Gen 1:14, when talking of the sun and moon, states that they are "for signs and for seasons". Psalm 104:19 says, "He appointed the moon for seasons..."

The Hebrew term is *mo'ed* (Strong's 4150). According to Strong's the meaning is "properly *an appointment* i.e. a fixed *time* or season; specifically a *festival*... by implication an *assembly* (as convened for a definite purpose)..." It is translated as "congregation" 149 times, as "time appointed" 9 times, as "solemn feast" 9 times, as "set time" 6 times, "set feast" 5 times, "feast" 6 times, "appointed season" 4 times.

There is no implication of a direct connection to any agricultural "season" such as spring or autumn.

People often quote Lev 23:4, "These are the Feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons..."

However, the Hebrew here is *mo'ed* -- meaning "time appointed", rather than "spring" or "autumn".

The NIV translates the verse as, " These are the LORD'S appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times".

The Good News Bible puts it, "Proclaim the following festivals at the appointed times."

The RSV: "These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them".

Perhaps a critic might use Num 9:2? In the KJV it reads, "Let the children of Israel also keep the Passover at his appointed season".

However, here again we have mo'ed. The NIV gives "Make the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time". The RSV translates as, "Let the people of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time".

So where are the scriptures that demand that the Passover be observed in the "season" of spring?

The only use in the Bible of the word "spring" is with regard to "springs of water" and so on -- there is no "spring" season mentioned anywhere. The only agricultural seasons mentioned are summer and winter, and there is no Biblical definition as to when winter ends and summer begins.

[There is a separate Hebrew word for "seasons" as used agriculturally. Strong's 6256, "*eth*", as in Deut 11:14, "the rain of your land in his season", or Job 5:26, "...like a shock of corn cometh in his season", etc. *God did not use this word in connection with His holy days.*]

What the scriptures require therefore is that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread be kept at their appointed times.

Likewise the other Holy Days. That's all the Bible says.

The Equinox

On the topic of the "seasons", some writers -- and critics -- make much of the importance of the "equinox" in producing "a true Bible calendar".

Perhaps the equinox is important -- but where do we find the clear, explicit, scriptures which tell us so -- where is the clear Biblical proof?

The word "equinox" does not appear in the Bible. One writer, commenting on the vital importance of the equinox, states that "equinox" is the "correct" translation of the Hebrew *tequwphah* (Strong's 8622), as used in Ex 34:22. However, the actual meaning given in Strong's is: " a *revolution*, i.e. (of the sun) *course*, (of time) *lapse*". It is used only 4 times in the Old Testament, being translated (in the KJV) as "circuit" (2), "end" (1), "come about"(1).

It is true that a number of writers identify one of the possible meanings of *tequwphah* as "equinox" -- but others stand by its basic meaning of "revolution" or "end", meaning, for example, "the end of the growing season" or "the end of the year's activities".

In Ex 34:22 we read, "Thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end".

One critic writes of us, "*This year you will keep the Feast of Trumpets in the Summer, and next year you will keep it in the Fall*". We agree -- by our customary definitions of summer, fall

and so on, that is correct. But we cannot find any Scripture saying that that is wrong. The feast days still fall at their "appointed times".

The verse just quoted says we are to keep the Feast of Ingathering "at the year's end" (Hebrew, tequwphah). If that does mean "equinox" (although there is no biblical proof), then isn't it interesting that this year the Hebrew calendar has the Feast of Tabernacles commencing "at" the time of the equinox (within two or three days), whereas the calendar being put forward by many others -- based on the visible crescent etc. -- has the Feast commencing almost 5 weeks later than the equinox (late October, and stretching in fact into early November)? If the Hebrew in Ex 34:22 means "equinox", how can something happening five weeks later be said to be kept at the equinox?

Church History

We could look at several other points, but this article is already long enough.

One useful principle in all of this is: *we do not want to move away from something, to something else, unless we have clear and unequivocal evidence that it is better.*

Many men have put in a tremendous amount of work investigating and debating the calendar. One writer has spent more than twenty years researching the subject. We perhaps cannot doubt their sincerity.

However, despite all the work and scholarship, there is no single agreed alternative to the Hebrew calendar. That is very interesting!

I've read of at least eight different ways of beginning the New Year, and five different ways of starting each month -- and you can "perm" those any way you want to get over a dozen different calendars, all claiming to be Biblical or Sacred calendars.

And they obviously can't all be right!!

Although the Church of God lost much truth over the centuries, it seems that they generally held on to the truth of the Passover, or Lord's Supper. During some eras of the Church they also kept the Holy Days. For example, Lesson 52 of the Bible Correspondence Course, referring to the Thyatira era in the late 1500's, gives a history of the brethren in Transylvania, saying, "They also kept all the *annual* Sabbaths or holy days. They kept the true Passover with unleavened bread... Their civil New Year was the Feast of Trumpets".

Let us ask: What calendar did the Church of God use during these nearly 2,000 years?

The only calendar available to them is the calendar that we accept today -- the Hebrew calendar!

In our generation, for nearly seventy years, most of the Church of God has followed the Hebrew calendar, during which time God has given us many blessings, and much fruit has been borne.

Whilst the "novelty" of the other calendars can prove quite a fascination, and they can initially appear plausible, the end result seems to be just more division among God's people.

As we saw earlier, the Bible nowhere gives us a clear and unambiguous definition of what constitutes the "new moon", or beginning of the month. It does not give us a clear statement of

what constitutes the "new year" -- either when there are "green ears" or an equinox, or whatever. It does not give us details of the various other calendar rules that are necessary for a fully functioning calendar.

So -- if we cannot find the "calendar rules" clearly stated in the Bible, where can we look to find out about the Holy Day calendar? Surely somebody must have them?!

Interestingly, Mr Herbert Armstrong came across the self-same problem some sixty years ago. Let's read his comments, taken from the Good News Letter 1940 (the full text of which can be found in the "Key of David" CD from Mr Don Tiger):

"Research reveals two basic points on this question. 1st, GOD DID NOT RECORD IT IN THE BIBLE, which gives us absolutely NOTHING more to go on than I have stated above. 2nd, History is vague on the subject, shedding little light that can be accepted and trusted....We learn in the Bible that men of old did have understanding of the times. They knew how to figure time. 'Of the children of Issachar, which were men that HAD UNDERSTANDING OF THE TIMES, to know what Israel ought to do', 1 Chron12:32"

Mr Armstrong continues, "The true sacred calendar is no more lost than the weekly Sabbath. Then WHO HAS PRESERVED THIS TIME, this sacred CALENDAR? To whom did God give it? To whom were "the oracles of God COMMITTED"? To ISRAEL and JUDAH, of course! Israel LOST the Sabbath, LOST time, LOST even her national name and identity. But JUDAH NEVER DID. Judah has kept TIME in respect to the weekly Sabbath. The Jews rejected Christ. They apostatised in doctrine, BUT THEY WERE STRICT STICKLERS FOR THE LETTER. Would such a people have lost their CALENDAR? If so, TIME IS LOST! There is no other

source thru whom God could have committed AND PRESERVED His calendar. He did COMMIT it to them. Therefore it must be thru them He has preserved it!"

Mr Armstrong adds, "In conclusion, unless God has preserved His sacred calendar thru the Jew, then WE DO NOT KNOW how to figure Passover or ANY of the holy days this year. For there is NO AUTHORITY for any other day.... There is NO BIBLE AUTHORITY WHATSOEVER for (for example) figuring the 1st day of the month from the new moon NEAREST the spring equinox!"

It's hard to disagree with Mr Armstrong's conclusions of sixty years ago.

God has not left us with a confusion of a dozen or more "biblical calendars", and every man doing that "which is right in his own eyes."

Jesus Christ kept the Holy Days according to the Hebrew calendar when He walked the earth nearly 2,000 years ago. *We can do the same safely today!*

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The Truth About the Calendar

The Visible Crescent?

By Jamie McNab

Part Two of Three Parts

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*In Part One we looked at some of the alternative calendars being “marketed” to God’s people today. We saw what the Bible does, and does NOT say, about new moons and new years. We looked briefly at church history. We saw that Mr. Herbert Armstrong had thoroughly looked into this subject as far back as 1940. We continue in Part 2 to look at how impractical it would have been for God’s people—especially over the past 2,000 years—to have kept a **VISIBLE CRESCENT!***

Part 2 is the content of a letter written to a member of God’s church who wished for additional clarification of the calendar topic.

You've asked in your e-mail if I can let you have *proof* of God's Holy Day calendar. That's what I call a challenging question!! There are all sorts of people out there who have "proof" of “their version” of God's calendar. I think the last time I counted, I came

to over a dozen *different* calendars -- all claiming to be the original Biblical Holy Day calendar. Some people, like Herbert Solinsky, have spent DECADES studying the calendar — only to have fundamental disagreements with other very sincere "church scholars" who have reached an entirely *different* opinion. It all reminds me of 2 Tim 3:7, "Ever learning, and *never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*"!

I am enclosing a copy of an article I wrote for one of the recent Church of God Newsletters (*this now appears as **Part One** of this series*). It sets out, as clearly as I can, why we accept the calendar maintained by the Jews.

Despite what some may say, the Bible itself does NOT give adequate information from which to develop a working calendar -- and that is a FACT. Compare the incredible amount of detail given in the Bible about LEPROSY (over *110 verses* in Lev 13-14 alone!!), with the almost non-existent, and rather unclear, references to "new moons" and "the beginning of months". God could have made it *crystal clear* in the scriptures if He had wanted to. He chose not to, and yet He did leave us a standard -- an authority over the calendar -- as I hope my paper makes plain.

Probably the main alternative to the *calculated* new moon of the Jewish calendar is the *visible crescent* new moon. This point is explained at some length in *Part One*, where hopefully I show that you can't prove a visible crescent *from the scriptures*.

It seems to me, however, that even common sense shows that a visible crescent is simply NOT POSSIBLE as a measure of the commencement of the new month. A visible crescent, by definition, has to be VISIBLE -- it has got to be SEEN. Historians will explain how witnesses had to appear before the Sanhedrin in

ancient times to confirm that they had *seen* the new crescent -- at which point the Jewish leaders would allegedly make the new month "official". Well, that might be very convenient for those Jews living in Palestine -- but makes life rather tricky for those Jews living in Egypt, Ethiopia, Russia, Spain and so on! Without the benefit of telephones, faxes and e-mail -- how are they supposed to know when a new month has begun? Bonfires, and fast horseback riders, have been suggested, but come on -- if you are over 2,000 miles away from Jerusalem, you probably wouldn't find out for a week or longer! It is totally impractical! It couldn't work.

In some parts of the Diaspora, the Jews tried keeping TWO Holy Days at a time, so that at least ONE of them might be right! In fact the custom still exists among the Jews to this day. (Though, strangely, they don't double up on the Day of Atonement -- I wonder why?!).

Consider also the true Church of God in Britain back in the first and second centuries. As begotten members of God's family, they were certainly keeping the Holy Days. How could they know for certain when the crescent moon had appeared over Jerusalem 4,000 miles away? What about the Church down *through the centuries*, through its various eras? What about the early Church of God in the USA back in the 1600's? How could they determine when the visible crescent had appeared over Jerusalem? Don't forget, the Jews had long since been driven out of Palestine, so there was in fact *nobody there* to look for the crescent, anyway! And certainly no way to tell people thousands of miles away.

But some will no doubt say that nowadays COMPUTERS allow us to work out the times of the visible crescent. So let's just ignore the "inconvenient" problem of how the Church figured God's Holy Days over the past 1,900 years when it didn't have effective

access to Jerusalem, and didn't have Pentiums and Lap-tops. Let's revert to the visible crescent, even though IT COULD NOT HAVE WORKED for most of God's people since the time of Christ. Well -- what about the computer calculations of a visible crescent? Are they foolproof? Guaranteed? Can those who want to "observe" a "visible crescent" actually rely on a computer program? As far as I can tell, the answer is a big NO!

The sighting of the first thin visible crescent is not just a matter of calculating how much of the moon will be visible, and whether the sky will be dark enough to make it out and so on. The visibility is also affected by such things as temperature and humidity, which vary by the day and hour and *cannot be predicted*. If you go by the visible crescent, then, to be absolutely sure, you must physically observe it with the human eye (or would God allow binoculars? Once again the Bible is silent!).

Following are two quotes, one from the Royal Greenwich Observatory in England, and one from the US Naval Observatory, which explain the difficulty of any computer providing a perfect calculation of a visible crescent (emphasis added):

ROYAL GREENWICH OBSERVATORY

"It is NOT POSSIBLE to predict accurately the dates on which the new crescent Moon will first be seen each month since there is no collection of reliable, fully documented, observations that can be used to establish the conditions that must normally be satisfied at the time of first visibility.

“The simplest basis for prediction is that the Moon should be more than a certain age (measured from the time of astronomical new moon) at the time of sunset at the place concerned.

“It is, however, better to use the true elongation (the angular

separation) of the Moon from the sun at this time, rather than the age. The new crescent is not normally visible until the Sun is below the horizon and so it is desirable to take into account the altitude of the Moon during twilight. The chances of seeing the new crescent depend slightly on the distance of the Moon from the earth, being greatest when the Moon is closest (i.e. at perigee). The local conditions, especially the height of the observer above sea level and the character of the surrounding surface, are important, and **even when the sky is free from cloud there can be considerable variations in clarity of the atmosphere from day to day.**

“The *visual acuity* of the observer is also significant. It must be realised too that there are considerable variations in the astronomical conditions with both longitude and latitude on the earth so that even if the weather conditions were good everywhere, the dates of the first sightings would differ from place to place. Predictions can, therefore, only be valid, for restricted areas. Under ordinary conditions, the first sighting will not occur until the age of the Moon exceeds about 30 hours, but a few reliable reports are known of sightings, under very good conditions, when the age has been only 20 hours or even less. It is unlikely that the new crescent will be visible unless the elongation exceeds 10 degrees and the Moon exceeds 5 degrees when the Sun is 3 degrees. It is interesting to note that the new moon can always be seen 30 days after the previous one and in half the cases it can be seen 29 days after, because the length of the synodic month is 29.53 days...

“Since it is clear that any prediction of the date of first visibility MUST BE UNCERTAIN, it is necessary to decide whether to prefer an early prediction that could not be substantiated by direct observation if conditions prove to be good, or a late prediction that could be vitiated by an observer on the previous day. The simple rule that this Office recommends

is that the age of the Moon should be 30 hours at the time of sunset at the place concerned, but this rule is not so reliable in middle and high latitudes."

US NAVAL OBSERVATORY

"Under optimal conditions the crescent moon can be sighted somewhat less than 15 hours after astronomical New Moon. Usually, however, it is not seen until it is more than 24 hours old. Often it is not seen for more than 48 hours... But **despite these advances we still CANNOT PREDICT THE EXACT TIME** or geographical location at which the young crescent will first be spotted."

And so we see that even scientists and astronomers, with the benefit of modern computer technology, are unable to **GUARANTEE** a predicted *visible crescent*! So **HOW** would the church members in fifth century Britain, or 18th century America, possibly calculate the exact time of the visible crescent over Jerusalem, **MANY THOUSANDS OF MILES** away?? Yet they certainly couldn't **SEE** it themselves. And they couldn't wait for a telephone call from a friend in Judea, to let them know the crescent had been sighted!

So **HOW DID THEY KNOW** when to keep Passover and the other Holy Days? Simple—go find the nearest Jew, and **ASK HIM** what the date is! God's True Church has always relied on **GOD'S FAITHFULNESS**. God did not leave us without an accurate calendar for nearly 2,000 years.

Let's be sure to **HOLD FAST** to what we have been given!

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The Hebrew Calendar And Its Postponements

By Jamie McNab

Part 3 of our calendar series

In the final part of our series on the calendar we review the entire subject one more time. We look at the various alternative calendars put forward by various calendar “experts” in the Churches of God. We also examine the Hebrew Calendar again and, in particular, look closely at the Postponements. And we answer the question: Is God FAITHFUL?

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As we look closely at God’s Holy Day calendar, it can all seem rather complicated. We come across unfamiliar terms such as *molads*, *conjunctions*, *equinoxes*, *intercalary months*, *postponements*, and so on.

Do we need a *university education* in mathematics and astronomy in order to understand how to find God’s Holy Days, and OBEY HIS LAWS?

Of course not!

So, let's have another look at the calendar. We'll do this in *two parts*. We'll firstly remind ourselves of some *very basic principles* which should allow any of us to reach an understanding of how to KNOW when God's Holy Days fall.

Even though these basic principles are clear, and most church members are generally happy with them, some have been troubled by certain *objections* that are raised by several of the calendar experts. We will try to complete the picture in the second part by looking briefly at some of these so-called objections — such as the *visible crescent* — or the “barley being green” — and especially those “nasty postponements”!

Basic Principles

We know that THE SUN and THE MOON play the major part in God's calendar.

“Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and *seasons*, and for days and years’”, Genesis 1:14.

In Psalm 104:19 we read, “He appointed THE MOON for *seasons*”.

The Hebrew word for “seasons” in these verses is *moed*, which commonly means *congregation, FEAST, solemn assembly, APPOINTED TIME*. And we can see from Psalm 104 that *the moon* is particularly important in arriving at God's *appointed times*.

The SUN divides the day from the night. For example, we all know that the setting of *the sun* determines when the Sabbath begins and ends.

The sun also determines THE YEAR. Spring, summer, fall and winter are all controlled by the movement of the earth in its orbit around *the sun*.

The MOON determines *the months*. We are probably all familiar with the cycle of the moon — from when we see the slim crescent in the sky, getting slowly bigger till we get the big bright *full moon*, and then slowly diminishing night by night till it disappears from view. It takes about 29½ days from one part of the cycle to another. This is the average length of a *lunar month*.

This is different to the calendar that we are used to today. Most of our months have 30 or 31 days (with 28 or 29 for February), and our months have no connection to the phases of the moon.

So, we can see as a *basic principle*, that we need to use *the sun* and *the moon* to determine the dates for God's appointed times.

Where Do We Find the Dates?

In Leviticus 23:4 we read of “the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at their appointed times (*moed*)”. God says, for example, that we are to observe Passover on the 14th day of the first month. We are to keep the Feast of Trumpets on the 1st day of the seventh month. If we want to meet God at HIS appointed times, it is clearly important that we know how to correctly calculate the various dates. If we turn up early — or late — then God won't be there! In fact, God says He will “cut us off” if we DON'T observe His days!

So where do we go to find the dates that God will be honouring?

Well, let's establish another *basic principle*.

The Church of God has *existed continuously* from the days when Jesus preached throughout Galilee and Judea. Jesus said to His disciples, “Lo, I am with you *always*, even to the END OF THE AGE”, Matthew 28:20. See also Matthew 16:18.

Since God's Church has existed since 31 AD, unto today, we should expect that God's people have — to a greater or lesser degree — kept His Holy Days throughout that period. Certainly the Passover on 14th Abib would be the very minimum we would expect, even allowing for periods of neglect or spiritual lethargy. And no doubt for many years, all of God's Holy Days would have been kept. So WHAT calendar has God's church used throughout the past almost 2,000 years? The answer is really self-evident, but let's establish one more *basic principle*.

Is God Faithful?

If God requires us to *keep His commandments* — and to keep HIS HOLY DAYS — shouldn't we expect our God *to ensure* we have access to His CALENDAR?

Over the past 2,000 years, God's people have been keeping the Passover and at least some of the Holy Days. From the first century ... through the middle ages ... right up to modern times. Could God have COMMANDED that we keep His Holy Days, but then leave us *without the knowledge* of His calendar ... for generation after generation? We need to recognise as a *basic principle* that God has always been FAITHFUL to fulfil HIS responsibilities!

“Forever, O LORD, Your Word is settled in heaven. Your *faithfulness* endures to ALL generations”, Psalm 119:89-90.

“What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make *the faithfulness of God* without effect? CERTAINLY NOT! Indeed, let God be true and every man a liar”, Romans 3:1-4. Even though God's people may not always conduct themselves right before Him, we can be confident God will do HIS PART! And making sure we have His calendar is part of that faithfulness. It is *our decision* as to whether we will KEEP His Holy Days, or not, but God

makes sure we have the *right days* to choose from!

We can conclude the following:

- God has given us His Holy Days for *our good* — to teach us His purpose and plan
- He commands us to KEEP THEM
- It is SIN to transgress God’s commandments, and He will “cut us off” if we do not keep them
- So could God be FAITHFUL to *require* this of us ... and then NOT ensure we have His calendar?

In Matthew 7:9-11 we read, “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, HOW MUCH MORE will your Father who is in heaven give GOOD THINGS to those who ask Him!”

God is a Giver of good things. He is a *responsible Father*! He is dependable and RELIABLE. He is not out to mock us, or seek *to trick us*. He wants us to KEEP HIS HOLY DAYS. And He has made sure we can know WHEN His Holy Days fall!

God IS FAITHFUL! He has not left His people — His children — in the dark for the last 2,000 years about His calendar!

Objections to the Jewish Calendar

The *only calendar* God’s church has had access to over the past 2,000 years has been what is commonly known as the *Jewish Calendar*, or the *Hebrew Calendar*. If any member of the Church of God ever wanted to keep the Holy Days, say in 100 AD, or 500 AD, or 1850 AD, they would just need to find the nearest Jew, and ask, for example, *when is the 14th day of Abib?* It has been as simple as that!

But hold on, say the “experts”, the Hebrew calendar is *all wrong*! It is

the product of CARNAL MEN. It starts the months on THE WRONG DAYS. It starts THE YEARS at the *wrong time*. And it POSTPONES God's true Holy Days over 60% of the time!

These are serious allegations. And, if we think about it, they are really an indictment against *God's faithfulness*. Because what *other calendar* could God's people have used over the past 20 centuries??

Let's look at some of the alternative calendars.

The 'Visible Crescent' Calendar

The MAJOR alternative view to the official Hebrew calendar is one where *the months* start with the VISIBLE CRESCENT. When you can just see the tiniest thin sliver of the moon in the sky — in the west, usually very soon after sunset — that is *the first day* of the month, they say.

Historically, that has been a popular method of keeping track of the months. It was used in ancient times in a number of countries, and is still used today in the Islamic world (such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt). It is the most popular *alternative* in the Churches of God. But let's consider some of the difficulties:

- how do you identify *day one* of the month if the sky IS CLOUDY? And remains cloudy for several days!!
- *who* has the AUTHORITY to decide if the crescent was or was not seen? The Jewish priesthood? There are none today. Perhaps Jewish astronomers? Or, *American* astronomers? Since identifying day one is *vitaly important* in arriving at God's true Holy Days — WHO is in AUTHORITY? Some people may have better eyesight ... some may use binoculars ... some may mistake an unusual cloud formation for the moon (after all, some have mistaken clouds for UFO's!). Perhaps the pilot of a Jumbo Jet arriving at Lod airport may see the moon more easily

from his altitude of several thousand feet. But WHO is authorised to *make the decision* in the event of a dispute?

- WHERE must the crescent be observed? Over Jerusalem? That seems logical *humanly*, but where is there a scripture that clearly states God's instructions? Some visible crescent enthusiasts have decided that the month begins when the crescent is first visible where *they* live — whether England, Kentucky, or Hawaii.

- And if, for the sake of argument, we decide to use Jerusalem as the place where the visible crescent must first be seen, HOW was that information provided to people living *in other parts* of the world over the past 2,000 years? How would church members living in England in 1500 AD find out that a new crescent moon had been observed over Jerusalem? How would Church of God brethren in 1860 AD in Virginia or Pennsylvania know that the crescent for the first day of Tishri had been seen? The Feast of Trumpets falls ON the first day of the seventh month, so there isn't much time to get the word out!! We might be all right today with telephones and e-mail, but IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE for God's church historically to have kept a calendar based on observation of the visible crescent. Even the pony express, or carrier pigeons, would take days or weeks to carry the information several thousand miles. And, of course, don't forget that the Jews had been *driven out* of Palestine, anyway, so there was no one there to even look out for the crescent!

In order to prove that God's calendar is based on the visible crescent, we have to do the following:

- find BIBLICAL PROOF that we are to use JERUSALEM
- find BIBLICAL PROOF that we are to use the VISIBLE CRESCENT
- find BIBLICAL PROOF as to who has THE AUTHORITY

- find BIBLICAL EVIDENCE of what to do when the moon is NOT VISIBLE due to poor weather
- find EVIDENCE that God's church has kept such a calendar for 2,000 years

So what does the BIBLE actually say about all of these features of the visible crescent calendar?

One particular calendar writer has a web page devoted to the visible crescent, and runs occasional large advertisements for his calendar in the Journal. The *new moon*, as he points out, is absolutely critical to working out when God's true holy days occur. In his major calendar article, he devotes *one entire chapter* to the New Moon. Yet in this entire chapter, only ONE BIBLE VERSE is given to show that the visible crescent (allegedly) must *be seen*. The verse is Deuteronomy 16:1, which reads:

“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night”.

We are told that the word for *month* should be translated as “moon”, and then asked to accept that “observe” means *to look at visibly and see with the eye*. However, the Hebrew word for *observe* is translated 284 times as KEEP. This is its *most common* meaning as, for example, in Exodus 20:6, where we are told to “remember the Sabbath to KEEP it holy”.

The instruction in Deut 16:1 is not so much about *looking at* any moon, but about *remembering*, and KEEPING the time holy before God. And, as we'll see later, the actual moon that is important to God in the month of Abib is *not* the new moon, but the FULL MOON that occurs at the Feast of Unleavened Bread!

The Beginning of the Year

Let's look at another problem of the alternative calendars — figuring out WHEN the new year actually BEGINS!

We know that Passover and Unleavened Bread fall in the *first month*. Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles fall in the *seventh month*.

Okay — just WHEN is the first month ... and the seventh month?

Our British and American calendars are quite straightforward in this regard. There are 12 months in the year, and after the twelfth month (December) is finished, we start with the first day of the NEW YEAR — January 1st. That's easy!

A lunar-solar calendar is not so simple. There aren't 30 days from the beginning of one month to the beginning of the next. The average time from one phase of the moon to the same phase of the next month is 29 days 12 hours 44 minutes and 3.3 seconds — near enough to twenty-nine and a half days.

So, over 12 lunar months this comes out at 354 days — about *11 days short* of a normal solar year (we have 365.25 days in a year). Over a three year period, the Hebrew calendar would be out by 33 days — effectively an *entire month* missing!

This is rectified by ADDING IN an extra month about every three years. This is known as an *intercalary month*. This evens things up. The Hebrew calendar adds an extra month in *seven years* out of a nineteen year time-cycle, and it fits everything together almost perfectly. [This is also the origin of the NINETEEN-YEAR TIME CYCLE that we are so familiar with in the Churches of God.]

So, having got this far, a very obvious question is: WHEN is the start of the year in God's calendar? When is *the first* "new moon"?

Very simply — the Bible doesn't say!

Various calendar experts can provide at least 7 or 8 DIFFERENT ways of identifying the first month of the year. And each expert will claim he has the one, true, definite date — with everybody else being in error!

All we are told in the Bible is Exodus 12:2, “THIS MONTH shall be your beginning of months; it shall be *the first month* of the year to you”.

But how do we identify “this month”?

The Month of Green Ears

Some say there is a clue in *the name* of the first month. The first month is named Abib — which means *green ears*. So, we are told, we need to look out for the month when *the barley* first starts to *be green* in the ear. If we get to a new moon (whatever we believe *that* to be!), and there are no green ears yet, then the year has not begun. If, however, the ears do start to show, then the *next* new moon is *first month* of the year.

Indeed, some of the Churches of God do follow this procedure. They rely on individuals going out into the barley fields in Palestine every spring, looking for green ears of barley. And, as soon as they are spotted, the word goes out by telephone and e-mail.

But, again, what were God’s begotten saints supposed to do in England or the USA one hundred or five hundred years ago? How were they supposed to know that the barley was in ear in Palestine, without the benefit of telephones, and modern methods of communication?!

Also, *whereabouts* was the barley to be green? Barley will ripen at different stages, depending upon whether it is in the warmer climate of the Jordan valley near Jericho, compared to the cooler area of the Galilee. Or should we look for the barley ripening *in Egypt*? After all, that is where Israel was when God revealed the first month to them.

And how, for example, did Noah keep track of the months and changeover of the year, when there was no barley around to ripen anyway, during his time on the ark?

The Spring Equinox

A number of calendar experts choose to use *the spring equinox* as their benchmark for working out the beginning of the year. In the Northern Hemisphere, the spring equinox falls around the 21st March.

The logic here is that spring “officially” begins with the equinox (at least that’s how we work things out in our calendars). Since Passover and Unleavened Bread are said to be *spring festivals*, they must fall shortly afterwards. But it’s no surprise that the calendar experts find areas of *disagreement*:

- should you start with the new moon *nearest* the equinox (the nearest moon sometimes falls *before*, and sometimes *after*, the equinox)?
- should you go only by the new moon which falls *after* the equinox?
- should you go by the visible crescent ... or the astronomical conjunction ... or even the “dark moon” — whether nearest, or before, or after?
- should you go by the visible crescent over Jerusalem, or in your local area, nearest to the equinox — or before or after or whatever?

As is so often the case with the calendar, we see nothing but confusion and disagreement!

We can conclude this section by recognising that the Bible itself does not clearly specify

- **WHEN** a month actually begins

- WHEN the new year actually starts

That's just the way it is!

The Hebrew Calendar

We've looked at some of the alternative calendars "in the marketplace", so now let's take a closer look at the Jewish or Hebrew calendar. And keep in mind that this is the ONLY calendar that the Church of God has kept THROUGHOUT HISTORY. Have God's people been wrong all this time?

And let's take a very close look at the POSTPONEMENTS, since they are the source of most of the criticism which is levelled at the Hebrew calendar.

What is the Molad?

The months in the Hebrew calendar are based upon what is called *the molad*.

The molad is very similar to what astronomers call *the conjunction*. A conjunction is that *precise moment* in the month when the earth, moon and sun come into a straight line with each other. [If all are in the exact *same plane* at the time, there will actually be a solar eclipse].

It can be very difficult to calculate the precise moment of a conjunction, since the moon's movement in its orbit around the earth is quite erratic at times (caused largely by the effect of the sun's and the earth's gravitational forces). The time from one month's conjunction to the next month's conjunction can vary up or down by as much as 12 hours.

The Hebrew calendar overcomes this difficulty by using *the molad*.

The molad is arrived at by using the *average time* from one conjunction to the next (rather than the actual time). The *average lunar cycle* is 29 days 12 hours 44 minutes and 3.33 seconds. Molads are therefore regular and predictable.

The POSTPONEMENTS

The molad of Tishri, the seventh month of the year, is the most important date in the Hebrew calculated calendar. All other dates are derived from this one.

For much of the time, the actual day of the molad is used as the *first day* of the new month. Over half of the time, however, this is NOT the case, and the start of the month may be set back — or postponed — by one day, or sometimes even by *two days*, after the molad.

There are *four rules of postponement* that may be applied in the Hebrew calendar, and this is the area that upsets a number of people. “You can’t postpone God’s Holy Days”, they say, “that’s just Jewish jiggery-pokery ... it’s not right ... this is the rabbis introducing their own weird ideas for their own carnal convenience”.

In some ways, such criticisms “miss the point”. ALL calendars have rules. In our western calendar, the month of February usually has 28 days. But every fourth year, we add an *extra day*, and February then has 29 days. No one shouts that this is jiggery pokery — that we are wrongly *postponing* the start of March! Everyone understands that it is necessary to add an extra day every so often so the right number of days fit into the year.

The Hebrew calendar is no different. It has rules and procedures which are necessary to keep it properly organised with respect to the movement of the sun and moon.

However, there is NO BIBLE RULE that says a month MUST BEGIN with the day of the molad. The molad is *part* of the exercise, but there are certain circumstances which allow for the actual start of a

month to *be adjusted* by a day or two.

WHY the Postponements?

But people want to know WHY? *Why* do the postponements exist? What is the REASON?

Firstly, we need to acknowledge that there is nowhere in the Bible where it says we should postpone — or should NOT postpone. The Bible is silent on the issue.

There are at least *two basic reasons* given to explain the postponements. Let's look at each.

“More Convenient?”

The reason given by the Jews themselves is that the postponements are there *mainly* to prevent the Day of Atonement from falling *on a Friday or a Sunday*. How does it do that? If the molad of Tishri falls on a Sunday, a Wednesday or a Friday, the start of the month is put back — or postponed —by one day.

The reason for the postponements, say the Jews, is that it is not appropriate to have Atonement fall, for example, on a Friday, since it would make it difficult to properly sanctify the weekly Sabbath. Friday is the *preparation day* for the Sabbath, and a fast day then would interfere with the keeping of the Fourth Commandment.

Some people are quite happy with this explanation. It makes sense to them that God would have made suitable arrangements for the keeping of His Holy Days, so that we can focus on *the real meaning*, rather than being distracted by physical issues (especially when Yom Kippur is involved!).

But quite a few people are still uneasy with this explanation. They

don't really trust the views of the Jewish rabbis. Is there not ANOTHER reason for the use of the postponements, they wonder?

Astronomical Reason for the Postponements

We have already seen that the average length of a lunar month is 29.5 days. So *day fifteen* of the month is clearly the halfway point. This would mean that on day fifteen of the month, we should expect to see a FULL MOON in the sky, since the full moon falls halfway through the moon's monthly cycle.

And we know, of course, that in the month of Tishri, the Feast of Tabernacles begins on the 15th day of the month. So, we should expect to see *the full moon* in the sky at the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles, shouldn't we?

Now it gets interesting! Let's look at Psalms 81:2-4. This will turn out to be a KEY SCRIPTURE, which can help us understand *the reason* for the postponements.

In these verses, in the New King James' Version, we read:

“Blow the trumpet at the time of *the New Moon*, at the FULL MOON, on our solemn Feast Day. For this is a STATUTE for Israel, and a LAW of the God of Jacob”.

[Although the KJV gives “in the time appointed” in verse 3, most modern translations — and the Hebrew — show that the meaning is the FULL MOON]

These verses refer to a time of the year when we are to honour God at the time of a *new moon* AND at a *full moon*. And notice that this is a LAW and a STATUTE. There is only one time in the year when there is such a LAW, and that is in the seventh month, Tishri. In the seventh month we are required to keep the first day of Tishri — *the new moon* — the Feast of Trumpets — and the fifteenth day — *the full moon*

—the Feast of Tabernacles.

So, according to Psalms 81, any calendar we use must ensure that we are keeping the Feast of Tabernacles at the time of the FULL MOON!

There is a similar situation in Abib, the first month of the year. The Feast of Unleavened Bread falls on the 15th day of the month and, since this falls halfway through the month, should again be a FULL MOON. Unlike the month of Tishri, however, God's law does not require us to sanctify the first day — or new moon — of Abib. Psalms 81:2-4 is referring to Trumpets and Tabernacles in Tishri.

So, let's put the Hebrew calendar, and its postponements, to the test.

Do the postponements help in making sure that Tabernacles falls at the time of the full moon, as required by Psalms 81, or are they just carnal inventions of the rabbis that move us *away* from the full moon?

The year 2,000 is an excellent test, because there were, in fact, *two postponements* that year!

Since the molad that year fell shortly after midday (on Thursday September 28th), one of the rules of postponement requires day one to be postponed *to the following day*. But another rule of postponement prohibits the first day of Tishri from falling on a Friday, so day one of Tishri was therefore postponed *to Saturday*, the weekly Sabbath.

So, according to the Hebrew calendar, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles in 2,000 was the weekly Sabbath of 14th October. As we gathered on the Friday night for the traditional "get-together" service, how close to the full moon were we? Answer: the moon on that Friday evening was 99.7% full! As far as the human eye is concerned that is *a perfect full moon!* Even after two days of postponement.

If the beginning of Tishri had NOT been postponed, and we had used

the day of the molad to start the month, the moon would have been only *97% full* at the “revised” time for Tabernacles. This would be quite easy to detect with the human eye.

So, despite the criticisms, the postponements actually ensure we arrive at the Feast of Tabernacles at exactly the full moon — as required by Psalms 81!

And how did some of the other calendars do?

Those Churches of God who start their months with the *astronomical conjunction* found that the moon was only 96.7% full when they arrived at “their” Feast of Tabernacles. The particular Church of God who use the “dark moon” for their months, came to their Feast with the moon only 92% “full”! Woefully adrift of God’s requirements.

On this basis, the Hebrew calendar wins “hands down”! And the postponements turn out to be *absolutely necessary* to ensure we coincide with the moon’s movements, and comply with Scripture.

Postponements in Other Years

Was the year 2,000 just a coincidence? Just a “happy accident” for the Hebrew calendar? What about some other years? Is the Hebrew calendar with its postponements *consistently* more accurate?

We mentioned earlier that the calendar should also ensure that the 15th of Abib — at Unleavened Bread — should ALSO be a full moon. This would coincide with the Night to be Much Remembered. [And, of course, it should be no surprise to us that God would have arranged to take His people out of Egypt at the time of *the full moon*, when the extra illumination would make their night time travel as convenient as possible].

In the year 2,000, the Hebrew calendar gave us a moon on the Night to be Much Remembered that was 98.8% full. Again, that’s pretty

close to a perfect full moon.

The average of the two “festival moons” was therefore 99.2%. WITHOUT postponements, the average would be only 98%. So, although there is not a huge difference, a calendar with the postponements is clearly MORE ACCURATE!

If we run a similar check over, say, the last 19 years (a time cycle), we find that the Hebrew calendar is much more accurate — year after year. [Full details of the comparison are given in *the Appendix* at the end of this article].

From the figures shown in the Appendix, we can determine that, over a 19-year cycle, the Hebrew calendar comes on average to *within 99.4%* of the festival full moons. Quite impressive for an ancient calendar “cooked up” by some rabbis!

And note that the postponements IMPROVE THE ACCURACY of the calendar. Without the postponements, the correlation is only 98.8%. And in 1995 and 1999, in particular, the calendar would fall *a long way short* without the postponements!

So there is a clear ASTRONOMICAL NEED for the postponements to ensure that we “blow the trumpet at the time of *the New Moon*, at the FULL MOON, on our solemn Feast Day”.

What about the Mishnah?

Despite all of this evidence, some still want to argue against the Hebrew calendar. “Well”, they say, “there may be something to these postponements, but *they weren't in use in Jesus' day*”. The usual argument is that the postponements were not in the “original” Hebrew calendar, but were added by Hillel II, around 360 AD. “So”, they say, “since Jesus didn't follow them, neither should we”.

Well ... how do *we know* whether the Jews kept the postponements at

the time of Christ ... or even hundreds of years before? The Bible says nothing.

The usual answer is that they are not mentioned in THE MISHNAH.

What is the Mishnah? These are collected writings of rabbis and Jewish scholars, debating and arguing about the meaning of scripture, and how the “traditions of the elders” should be understood. The Mishnah is a major work, and fills the equivalent of *about 18 volumes* of an encyclopaedia. It is Jewish commentary, and is riddled with contradiction, confusion and, at times, complete nonsense. [The religion of *Judaism* is actually based on the writings and teachings of the Mishnah, and not, in fact, on the teachings of the Bible].

In the 200's AD, a Pharisee, by the name of “Rabbi”, collected many of the so-called *oral laws* into the Mishnah. In the process he discarded *over 90%* of the material then available — one can only imagine how much additional confusion and chaos was in the material he chose to destroy!

These Jewish elders did not understand God's purpose and plan, and Jesus often upbraided them for making the COMMANDMENTS OF GOD of no effect by their traditions. There is little, *if anything*, we can learn about God's ways from the Mishnah.

Some of the comments within the Mishnah make reference to the rules and regulations the rabbis had introduced to “protect” the sanctity of the Sabbath and various Holy Days. Mostly, they just made the Holy days burdensome, with lots of rules about what could or could not be done on a Sabbath. Some of the comments *imply* that the postponements were not being kept at around 200 AD (for example, instructions are given as to what is allowed when Atonement falls *on a Friday* — something which is, in fact, prohibited in the Hebrew calendar, as we saw earlier).

However, we are probably all familiar with the fact that the Jews

disputed over almost EVERYTHING! The gospel accounts record how they argued over divorce — over whether there are angels — over whether there could be a resurrection — over what could be done on a Sabbath — and so on. History shows that some of the arguments among the Pharisees themselves led to bloodshed! Not to mention the disputes between the Sadducees and Pharisees (and other groups).

We also know that even the *time of Passover*, and the correct day for *Pentecost*, gave rise to disagreement and dispute at certain times.

We can see their arguments often involved very important, yet BASIC, areas of God's Law.

The *calendar itself* did NOT ESCAPE these disputes. There were plenty of calendar “experts” around in early New Testament times, just as there are today! And, just like today, these experts “knew better” than the official Hebrew calendar! For *centuries* the calendar caused debate and argument!

History shows that the Mishnah we have today emanated largely from the very sizeable colony of Jews living *in Babylon*. They were perceived as being among the more liberal thinkers, and continually were in competition with those Jews based in Palestine.

The calendar, however, was determined by the *official Sanhedrin* based IN JERUSALEM. The Sanhedrin had to WORK HARD to preserve the unity of the Jewish people, and the calendar was carefully preserved by them against all attempts to corrupt it. Its rules were kept relatively secret, to avoid well-meaning amateurs from producing erroneous conclusions about the calendar.

The Sanhedrin were faithful in this regard. However, in the late 300's AD, as persecution and oppression were threatening the continued existence of the Sanhedrin, Hillel II took the difficult but very necessary decision to MAKE PUBLIC the underlying rules that regulated the calendar and its calculations. This was to ensure that *all Jews* — no matter where they were scattered across the earth —

would have access to the true calendar and its dates, and would not end up keeping a myriad of different dates. The calculations, and the postponements, were NOT NEW! They were simply now being REVEALED for all to see.

As we've already seen, the postponements are necessary for us to comply with God's STATUTE in Psalms 81. And the Sanhedrin always knew that.

Really, the position we see today is no different to that faced by the Sanhedrin 2,000 years ago, or by ancient Israel over 3,000 years ago. "And in those days there was no king (or authority) in Israel; everyone did what was right *in his own eyes*", Judges 21:25. So, today, some still want to follow a calendar that is right in their "own eyes".

Conclusion

We could continue to investigate and write about the calendar for years to come — and we'd always come across someone who wants "to do it differently" — who has now really figured out the original, correct, true Bible calendar that God gave to Moses, etc.

But, in essence, the position *is simple*:

- is God FAITHFUL?
- would He have left His Church without knowledge of His calendar for 2,000 years, making it IMPOSSIBLE for His saints to worship on His Holy Days?

Surely the answer is clear? God IS FAITHFUL, and He HAS given us His calendar — the Hebrew calendar WITH its postponements!

As the apostle Peter wrote, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us ALL THINGS that pertain to life *and* godliness ...", 2 Peter

1:2-3.

Does the calendar “pertain to life and godliness”? Yes, for it tells us WHEN to come before God on HIS Holy Days — at HIS appointed times.

Peter assures us that God has given us ALL THINGS that are necessary. That includes the knowledge of His calendar.

So, let’s HOLD FAST to the Truth once delivered to us!

APPENDIX

A 19-Year Comparison, Showing How the Postponements of the Hebrew Calendar Bring Us Nearer to the Festival Full Moons, as required by Psalms 81:2-4

Column 1 gives the year

Column 2 gives the percentage of the Full Moon visible on the first Holy Day of the Feast of UB and the Feast of Tabernacles (averaged)

Column 3 gives the percentage of the Full Moon which would be visible if postponements were not applied

| Year | Hebrew Calendar | Without |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Postponements | | |
| 2000 | 0.992 | 0.98 |

| | | |
|------|-------|-----------------------|
| 1999 | 0.996 | 0.973 |
| 1998 | 0.987 | no postponements this |
| year | | |
| 1997 | 0.993 | no postponements this |
| year | | |
| 1996 | 0.997 | 0.991 |
| 1995 | 0.996 | 0.975 |
| 1994 | 0.992 | no postponements this |
| year | | |
| 1993 | 0.991 | no postponements this |
| year | | |
| 1992 | 0.996 | 0.992 |
| 1991 | 0.997 | no postponements this |
| year | | |
| 1990 | 0.995 | no postponements this |
| year | | |
| 1989 | 0.983 | no postponements this |
| year | | |
| 1988 | 0.998 | 0.98 |
| 1987 | 0.997 | 0.989 |
| 1986 | 0.996 | no postponements this |
| year | | |
| 1985 | 0.996 | 0.996 |
| 1984 | 0.992 | 0.983 |
| 1983 | 0.997 | 0.99 |
| 1982 | 0.987 | no postponements this |
| year | | |

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