

The Calendar Controversy

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The Hebrew calendar has served God's people for thousands of years by determining the appropriate time to observe His commanded assemblies. Few ever questioned it, but this is no longer the case. There is a relatively small number who challenge this time-honored instrument. Some reject its use of postponements. Others believe it should strictly be based on observation. The contention over this issue has become so strident that it has prompted the formation of new fellowships with some creating their own calendar. The result has been confusion! But it does not have to be this way. We can be sure of God's will in this matter. There is a genuine Biblical answer that can put this issue to rest!

The Calendar Controversy

This month *shall be* your beginning of months;
it *shall be* the first month of the year to you.
~ Exodus 12:2 ~

The calendar is an extraordinary instrument that most people generally take for granted. Without it, our lives would be vastly different. In the world today, every aspect of society is affected by our calculation of time. Whether it is finance, agriculture, technology, construction, information systems, manufacturing, or entertainment—the calendar has played a critical role in both the things we plan and the things we do.

When it comes to God's people, this remarkable device has even greater meaning. For without a reliable mechanism for calculating times and seasons it would be impossible to celebrate God's annual holy days in accordance with His word.

It is this that now brings us to the controversy the Church faces today. How can God's people know if the calendar they have relied on for millennia is reliable? Is it possible that God's Church has followed human tradition when attempting to honor His instructions regarding His annual Sabbaths?

What is the truth? Can God's people celebrate the Biblical holy days according to the Hebrew calendar, or must they find another means of determining when to assemble before their Creator? Furthermore, does the Hebrew calendar fulfill God's Biblical requirements for calculating His festivals, or, should we look for something else? Finally, is

there a specific calendar designated by God that is revealed in His word?

This booklet examines these questions and offers insight into this important end-time issue. Because of the numerous opinions advanced by various parties, each claiming to have the truth, the arguments can seem overwhelming, complex and endless. The following pages address the most popular of these arguments, putting them in a perspective that readers can understand.

In an effort to add clarity to this analysis, the subject is presented in seven parts. Each part provides answers to one of the issues that comprise the current calendar controversy. Together they are submitted in the hope that God's people can be assured that there is an answer worthy of their trust.

Putting the Issue in Perspective

When most of us think of a calendar, we tend to envision filling in a grid of empty squares with activities we have on certain days of the year. However, the calendar does more than set up a schedule of months and days. Before one can be published, it must first harmonize what are inherently incompatible events in the earth's yearly astronomical cycle. It must reconcile the movement of the sun, which determines the year, with the phases of the moon which determine the length of a month.

If the sun and the moon were perfectly in sync, creating and maintaining a reliable calendar that combines these two cycles would be a relatively simple task. But, alas, they are not. Our twelve lunar months consist of approximately $29\frac{1}{2}$ days each. Thus a lunar year is about 354 days long. On the other hand, it takes approximately $365\frac{1}{4}$ days for the earth to orbit the sun. Therefore, a solar year is about 11 days longer than a lunar year. Add to this the fact that the orbit of the moon can vary by up to thirteen hours, and it becomes obvious that any attempt to harmonize the lunar and solar bodies in a calendar presents a formidable task.

Even the length of an entire day is not consistent throughout the year. A full day is considered to be 24 hours long. However, from sunset to sunset, there is a constant change by a matter of seconds or minutes. It is only exactly 24 hours at the spring and autumnal equinox which takes place when the sun is directly over the equator. This means that the astronomical bodies are in a constant state of flux. They are always changing in relationship to one another. As the prominent physicist Samuel Goudsmit described in his book:

The three astronomical cycles establishing the year, the month, and the day are independent and incompatible: like imperfectly matched gears, they do not mesh. Men have tried gamely to divide the year in such a way that important days—holidays, vacations, ceremonies—will be in tune with the seasons year after year, century after century. Ingenious calendars have been devised, but a fully accurate solution cannot be found, because the problem of reconciling the days, months and the year is really insoluble (*Time*, Life Science Library, 1966, p. 64).

Because the sun and moon are not in sync with one another, the lunar cycle runs ahead of the solar cycle at the rate of a little more than 11 days per year. This means that if the calendar did not reconcile the cycles of the sun and moon, after about 16 years, instead of robins singing and plants budding in the spring, there would be cooling temperatures and turning leaves. That's right, it would be fall!

In order to prevent this from happening, the Hebrew calendar employs what are commonly referred to as "postponements." A postponement is a man-made calculation in which an additional month is inserted every few years. This process is also referred to as "intercalation." By intercalating an additional month, a "leap year" or "pregnant year" is created. This additional month is inserted between the Hebrew

calendar's 11th and 12th months. In a leap year the 12th month, called Adar, is shifted and becomes Adar II. The inserted month is called Adar I.

There are 12 common years and seven leap years (postponements) in a 19-year time cycle. These leap years take place in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th years. An astronomical 19-year cycle is a repeating pattern in which the sun, earth and moon realign so that 235 lunar months match 19 solar years. In this cycle, the phases of the moon will also fall on the same days that they did during the previous 19 years.

Postponements like this have become a focal point in the calendar controversy. Those who oppose the Church's adherence to the Hebrew calendar generally reject the idea of using any postponements. They argue that such adjustments are not found in the Bible, and in this they are correct. When we search the Scriptures from beginning to end we not only fail to find any mention of postponements, but we also fail to find any specific instructions on how to create a calendar! As Schiaparelli wrote in *Astronomy in the Old Testament*:

There is no indication in the Old Testament of the way of fixing the beginning of the month (p. 103).

This fact is well known and repeatedly mentioned by various respected scholars. All agree that there are simply no written rules for creating a calendar in either the Bible or in ancient secular history. As the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* states:

Biblical literature which was written just before, during, and after the Exile provides many dates and calendrical hints but again offers no systematic statement about the nature of the calendar(s) employed in Judah (Vol. 1, p. 815).

It is clear that there are no rules for the creation of a calendar to be found in the Bible. However, this brings up an interesting question for us to consider; Why? Why doesn't the

Bible provide any instructions concerning the creation of a calendar, or the need for periodically adding an additional month to the year?

An Obvious Answer

Although the movement of the sun and moon are linked to one another, they are always changing in their relationship. This means that in order to harmonize these differing bodies, and create a workable calendar, decisions must be made by someone regarding the new moon, the full moon, and the solar year. When considering this vital question, one paramount truth must first be understood. To one degree or another, every calendar is MAN MADE!

Therefore, the Bible makes it clear that after giving the parameters for keeping His holy days, God left the calendar in the hands of a specific constituted human authority. Some may attempt to argue this point but they do not have the force of Scripture to defend them.

It is true that because God's word provides instructions for keeping His annual Sabbaths, a calendar is implied, but nowhere does it instruct man on how to create one. Yes, a calendar can be created from these instructions, but in doing so, every issue necessary for its formation is subject to human judgment. And this is where the controversy originates.

Human Reasoning and Chaos

Today there are numerous ideas concerning which calendar God's people should use in keeping His feasts. But which of these ideas can be trusted? How can God's people know for certain that they are following His command concerning when to assemble before Him? In order to approach this issue honestly, God's people must respect two absolute truths.

Nowhere in the Bible are there specific instructions for creating a calendar. Despite arguments to the contrary, such instructions simply do not exist. Additionally, God does not

now, nor has he ever, given authority to individual members of His Church to create a calendar of their own. These truths have not stopped some self-proclaimed experts from devising their own system for determining when to keep the holy days. Furthermore, these “experts” are not the least bit hesitant to presumptuously call their creation “God’s calendar.”

While each may claim that they have discovered God’s TRUE calendar, it is not surprising to find that these various calendars do not agree with one another. The truth is that they cannot agree. Why? The answer is because the rules for creating them are NOT derived from God’s commands. Instead, they come from the minds of individuals who have made a judgment based on their own personal inferences regarding certain Scriptures. People choose passages from the Bible and, using human reason, they extrapolate a meaning that suits their purpose.

To illustrate this point consider the following. One Church uses the words God spoke on the fourth day of creation as a basis for crafting their rule for determining the start of a new month. In this verse, God says:

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 [appointed times], and for days and years (Genesis 1:14).

This group reasons that because a sign is something one can see, God’s appointed times must be something visible. Therefore, they define the new moon as the first visible crescent that appears after a conjunction. A conjunction takes place when the moon is between the earth and the sun, thus rendering the moon black. This condition is sometimes referred to as “the dark of the moon.” At this point it is interesting to note that the United States Naval Observatory can determine precisely when the new moon appears. However, it is not humanly visible for up to 30 hours after this

point. Therefore, what some refer to as a “new moon” isn’t new at all.

An Opposing View

Another group advances a different line of reasoning altogether, and like the first group, they too, use the Scriptures to defend their point. However, their conclusion is 180 degrees in the opposite direction from the one just mentioned. This is because they define a new moon based on their interpretation of the verses revealing God’s proclamation regarding day and night on the first day of creation. Notice what He said.

God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day (Genesis 1:5).

This group reasons that because God has ordained the day to start with evening when darkness comes, the month must begin the same way. Based on this conclusion they look for the disappearance of the waning crescent moon to announce the beginning of a new month.

We now have two well intended Church of God groups, each claiming to rely on the Scriptures to determine God’s will. However, they arrive at entirely different conclusions. One argues that the new moon takes place when the moon first appears while the other claims it takes place when it completely disappears. Obviously, both groups can’t be right. They both cannot have discovered “God’s sacred calendar.” The question we must ask ourselves is—what makes one scriptural inference more valid than the other?

Green Ears of Barley

There are also differences between various opponents of the Hebrew calendar about which month is the first month of the year. One group makes an inference from the fact that the first month is called “Abib” several times in Exodus and

Deuteronomy. They reason that because Abib means “green ears,” the first month of the year must be determined by the ripening of the green ears of barley in Palestine (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, H24). This system of determining the first month of the year is highly subjective, not to mention problematic in its practical application.

First, consider that there is no command in the Scriptures even hinting that barley should be consulted as the criteria for setting a calendar. Furthermore, during the time of the temple, the priests did not use any common orchard or field within the land. This fact is confirmed by Dr. Albert Edersheim in his book *The Temple, its Ministry and Service*.

Already, on the 14th of Nisan, the spot whence the first sheaf was to be reaped had been marked out by delegates from the Sanhedrim, by tying together in bundles, while still standing, the barley that was to be cut down. Though, for obvious reasons, it was customary to choose for this purpose the sheltered Ashes-valley across Kedron, there was no restriction on that point, provided the barley had grown in an ordinary field—of course in Palestine itself—not in garden or orchard land, and that the soil had not been manured nor yet artificially watered [*Mishnah, Menach. viii. 1, 2*]. The field was to be ploughed in the autumn, and sowed seventy days before the Passover (p. 204).

Notice the barley was planted in this chosen field according to specific criteria for its planting and reaping. It was planted at an exact time in order to be ripe and ready for the ceremonial cutting of the wave sheaf. The point here is that it was not wild. Furthermore, God never directed His people to search the land of Israel for green ears. In the history of Israel the Priests never did this.

Since 70 A.D. the priesthood has been disbanded, the temple destroyed, and there is no sacred field of barley. As a

result, those who believe they must set the calendar according to the barley crop travel the length and breadth of the nation of Israel to find it. But—what if the barley is near an industrial site, and the nearby warm water or air has affected the crop? What if a field is next to a road congested with automobiles showering exhaust over the young barley plants? Certainly the crop would be either unnaturally hindered or accelerated in its growth. Finally, how can those seeking to find the barley know, whether or not, the field has been treated with manure or artificially watered?

On another level, consider that the grain being sought would seldom appear in the green ear stage on the first or last day of a particular month. This presents yet another problem. If the grain becomes green during the first few days of an existing month, the entire rest of the first month must be postponed. Thus, while this particular group disagrees with the concept of postponements, they must create a postponement rule for their method of calculation and yet refuse to call their delay a postponement.

Also, consider what would happen if the green ears appeared on the last day of a particular month. If such were the case, the new month would start the very next day with little time to plan accordingly. These are some of the issues making it clear that, when relying solely on observation, there is no way to predict what day or month the Feast will occur. The reality of these difficulties is clearly demonstrated by a letter sent to members of a group who only use observation. They write:

Yahshua's Memorial and Yahweh's Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread are now tentatively scheduled to be celebrated from March 26 at sunset through April 3, 1994. We will not be able to positively set Yahweh's Feast until we have seen both Yahweh's First New Moon, "Abib" scheduled for March 14 (March 13 at sunset), and the New Green Ears of barley. If the anticipated new moon is

not sighted, it may postpone Yahweh's Feast by one day, and if the Green Ears of Barley are not sighted on Mt. Zion by our Elders at this scheduled time, this will postpone Yahweh's Feast by one month. We will send a letter with "new" dates, if the current dates for Yahweh's Feast change. Please allow yourself extra time for this contingency when making your plans! (House of Yahweh—a letter to members).

As this letter demonstrates, using observation makes it extremely difficult to know exactly when to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, it must also be understood that while it may be possible to keep the Feast by observation in our modern age with the internet, letters, or phones, it would be impossible to do so before modern technology. Even the Karaites who practiced this system of observation from the 8th century could not use that method outside of Jerusalem. As the *New World Encyclopedia* states:

Karaites rely on observations of the Moon to begin their months, and on observations of the growth of the annual barley crop (called the *Aviv*) to begin their years, as deduced from instructions in the *Torah*. ("Aviv" is the next-to-last stage in the growth of barley, and is used as a marker for the first season of the Biblical Hebrew calendar, because it was during this stage that the plague of hail destroyed the barley crops shortly before the first Passover). Before quick worldwide communication was available, Karaites in the Diaspora used the calendar of Hillel II (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Karaites#The_Calendar, retr. 8/27/2012).

This makes it obvious that, the method of using observation alone could only exist in our modern age. Without instant communications, those living in other nations could not be informed soon enough to be able to keep the Feast at the

proper time. Further, the Bible nowhere states that the barley must be consulted in order to create a calendar.

Some Perspective Regarding the Word “Abib”

At this point it is important to understand that the name of the month, “Abib,” was NOT given by God. Just as He did with the days of the week, the Almighty numbered the months. That’s right! He did not give them formal names. This being the case, the term “Abib” which means “green ears” would have to have been some sort of cryptic sign from God if He intended it to be used to construct a calendar. Certainly He never gave a direct command to do such a thing. Therefore, those who employ this approach for determining the first month of the year, do so based on what they infer from the Scriptures. Once again this involves human judgment.

Ironically, the word Abib is actually of Canaanite origin. This would suggest that the Israelites were familiar with a Canaanite calendar when they were delivered out of bondage in Egypt. God evidently accepted its use based on the fact that He employed it when proclaiming His annual holy days.

Still another Approach

So far we have seen three holy day calculation theories advanced by opponents of the Hebrew calendar. However, there are even more. Some Churches of God offer what would seem to be a more objective marker for the first month of the year. They believe that God’s people must use the spring equinox when determining when this takes place. This is based on what they feel is the importance of the fall equinox. They draw this conclusion based on a passage in Exodus, in which God says:

And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at **the year’s end** (Exodus 34:22).

Those who offer this evidence contend that the term “year’s end” comes from the Hebrew word *tequphah*; which they translate to mean “autumn equinox.” They then argue that in order to ensure that the Feast of Tabernacles occurs at this precise time, the first month must be located at the spring equinox.

However, even those who hold this view are divided. Some assert that the first month of the year is the month that starts on or after the spring equinox. Others say it can begin before the spring equinox as long as the Passover is on or after the equinox. Therefore, in specific years, some of those who believe they must take the spring equinox into account will end up observing the fall festival in a different month from those who follow the Hebrew calendar.

Although *tequphah* is used in post-biblical Jewish writings as “equinox,” there exists compelling evidence from the Scriptures that this is NOT the intended Biblical meaning. This term literally means “a revolution, that is, (of the sun) course, (of time) lapse” or “circuit” (*Strong’s*, H8622). *Tequphah* only appears three times in the Scriptures:

- 1 Samuel 1:20 translates the term as “process” when referring to “the process of time” relating to Hannah’s pregnancy.
- 2 Chronicles 24:23 is rendered “spring,” referring to the best time for going to war.
- Psalm 19:6 the sun’s “circuit” is the rising and the setting of the sun.

These verses suggest that the narrow definition assigned by some Hebrew calendar critics to the word *tequphah* in Exodus 34:22 does not represent its intended meaning. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in Exodus 23:16, a parallel Scripture to this verse uses a different word altogether. It employs the word *tzet* which is translated “end.”

The reason for all this confusion is that none of these calendars are really based on Scripture as their creators

claim. They are based on inference. They are extrapolated from verses where one person's opinion can differ from another. The bottom line is that the Bible does not provide enough detailed information for everyone to come to the same conclusion.

As a result, those finding fault with the Hebrew calendar create their own. Then they generally form their own splinter groups and observe the holy days at different times. Ironically, it does not take long for adherents of any newly created calendar to realize there can be objections by others within their group. This then gives rise to further debate and the creation of still more calendars and more splinter groups. Each split can then find reasons for yet another split, and ultimately the possibilities for the creation of different calendars can seem to be endless.

To illustrate how easily this can occur, let's consider just one issue among the calendar critics. The following list gives a summary of the most common beliefs held by various critics of the Hebrew calendar regarding a topic of controversy—what defines the new moon. In every case the authors of these differing points of view state unequivocally that their chosen requirements upon which their calendar is founded are based on undeniable interpretations the Bible.

Purported Criteria Regarding the New Moon

- The new moon can only be determined by visible sighting.
- The new moon is the first visible waxing crescent.
- The new moon is determined by the actual conjunction.
- The new moon is the last visible waning crescent.
- The new moon is determined by averaging the conjunctions.
- The new moon is determined from Jerusalem.
- The new moon should be determined from a person's local area.
- The first new moon occurs after the spring equinox.
- The first new moon occurs near the spring equinox.

- The first new moon occurs after barley in Jerusalem is in the green ear stage.
- When the new moon occurs after noon, the first day of the month is considered to be the following day.
- When the new moon occurs after noon, the first day of the month is considered to have begun the day before.
- The first new moon determines the count for the weekly Sabbath. The new moon begins each month and at the end of 28 days the remaining days are not counted (lunar Sabbaths).

As this list demonstrates, there are many differing opinions regarding how to create a calendar based solely on conjecture regarding the new moon alone. Because the Bible does not give specific instructions concerning how to determine the new moon, any one of these issues can be contested. Once an issue is contested, it then becomes easy to mix and match theories to form an even newer and ostensibly, “more correct version” of the calendar.

A Powerful Admission

Despite all the claims of self professed experts that their calendar reflects God’s instructions as set forth in His word and not on human reasoning, the facts state otherwise. This was aptly demonstrated when one leader of a prominent Church of God group wrote a challenge in *The Journal*. In it, he asked if anyone could show him from the Bible that:

- A month begins with the lunar conjunction.
- A month begins with the first observed new crescent.
- If the conjunction takes place just before sunset, which day is the first day of the new month?
- If the moon is occluded (obscured from view), how one is to decide the first day of the new month.
- There are 12 months in the year.
- There are 13 months some years.

Surprisingly, a vocal opponent of the Hebrew calendar responded to this challenge. However, in the end he was forced to admit that **he could not provide such proof**. He responded:

Obviously none of the answers to your eight points is contained in the Bible... I have been forced to make some decisions that I believe are the best ones. But they are still negotiable... (<http://www.thejournal.org/issues/issue63/nelte.html>, retr. 8/27/2012).

By his statement, this Hebrew calendar critic acknowledged that he must make personal judgments when it comes to calculating God's holy days. He also acknowledged that his judgments are "negotiable." This means that they can be argued against and if found flawed, he would be willing to change. This is a striking admission and brings us to a critical point. The reason his decisions can be contested is that there is no real definitive authority for them. They are the personal interpretations of an individual.

This example powerfully demonstrates that the real issue regarding the calendar is not one of technical accuracy, but rather of authority. In other words, who is supposed to make such judgments? This particular opponent of the Hebrew calendar believes he may do so and there are others who share this opinion, but is it true?

Is there a Constituted Authority?

The Bible does not tell us how to make a calendar, but it does tell us who God had given the authority to make such decisions. God stated that He gave the responsibility to Moses.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, **which you shall proclaim** to be holy convocations, these *are* My feasts... These *are* the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations

which you shall proclaim at their appointed times
(Leviticus 23:1-4).

In this verse, God is not commanding the common people to proclaim His holy days. He spoke directly to Moses, using the singular term “you.” By this, God specifically designated who had authority to publish a calendar. In fact, it is self evident that God’s command required Moses to publish a calendar. In other words, it was not enough to simply tell the people that the fifteenth day of the first month was a holy day. God’s servant had to let the people know which day was the fifteenth day of the first month. Thus, in order to fulfill God’s command, Moses had to publish a calendar.

Another point made clear by this passage is that, the authority to proclaim the holy days and publish a calendar was passed to the Levitical priesthood. This fact is evident by the very title of the book that instructs us how to keep God’s holy days! The term “Leviticus” simply means “pertaining to the Levites.” This unique book was written to describe the statutes, laws and judgments that were to be administered by the chosen tribe of Levi. Certainly the common people were included in this volume. Like all the sacrifices, washings and offerings found in this volume, both commoner and priest had their part. However, in the verse above, the part of the Priests was to proclaim the holy days, and the part of the common people was to submit to their proclamation.

Did God Reveal a Sacred Calendar to Moses?

In the days of Moses, a calendar that combined lunar months with the solar year was nothing new. Ancient civilizations, including Egypt, had been using lunisolar calendars for quite some time prior to the Exodus. Today this type of calendar has been mostly discarded in favor of the solar calendar, but in Moses time it was the norm. This being the case, an important question must be asked. Did Moses use

the existing lunisolar calendars of the day, or was he instructed by God to create a new calendar altogether?

Did God tell His faithful servant exactly which phase of the moon starts a new month, and how to determine when to add a month to the year? Or, did He expect Moses to use a calendar formerly in use; one that already had an existing set of rules?

At this point, it is important to understand that the vast majority of those who oppose the Hebrew calendar do so based on the belief that God gave Moses His “true calendar.” In doing so He revealed the new moon to him, explaining that this specific new moon was to be the beginning of the year. This belief is based on a statement God made just prior to leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Notice His words.

Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This **month** *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first **month** of the year to you” (Exodus 12:1-2).

The Hebrew word for “month” in this passage is *chodesh*. This word can mean either “moon” or by implication “month” (*Strong’s*, H2320). It is the same word used in the very next verse.

Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this **month** every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household’ (Exodus 12:3).

Those who argue that the only proper rendering of this word is “moon” contend that these verses stand as proof that God was showing Moses the exact configuration of the new moon, and by extension, revealing a sacred calendar to him. But is this true? Or, is there a more plausible explanation of God’s instructions in these verses?

Another Explanation

It is true that the verse just cited could be translated “in the tenth day of this moon,” but it is just as possible that God used the word *chodesh* to mean “month,” and that He was telling Moses that this particular month—one he was already familiar with—was to be the first month of the year. The latter rendering becomes more probable based on what Moses stated in the very next chapter.

And Moses said to the people: “Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this *place*. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, **in the month Abib**” (Exodus 13:3-4).

Notice that the word *chodesh* is properly translated as “month” because the specific month in the Canaanite calendar is literally identified. Furthermore, this verse is evidence that when God told Moses “this month shall be your beginning of months,” that Moses understood Him to be saying that the month of Abib was to be the first month of the year.

At this point it is interesting to note that in the KJV, the word *chodesh* is translated “new moon” 10 times, “new moons” 11 times, “month” 246 times, and “months” 59 times. Clearly the most prominent rendering of this word is “month” and this is likely the proper translation of *chodesh* in chapters 12 and 13 of the book of Exodus.

Since God did not name the months, Abib was not a month in a sacred calendar He revealed to Moses. Instead, it was the name of a month in the Canaanite calendar—a calendar that was already used by the people of the land where Israel was going to reside. It was also one in which Moses was familiar. It is also important to realize that, although God may have chosen Abib to begin the months, He did not tell Moses,

or any of us, to look for green ears of barley before beginning the year.

Why the Canaanite Calendar?

Based on this evidence, it is more probable that God did not reveal the shape of the new moon to Moses, thus creating a “sacred” calendar. The calendar the Israelites used was likely a human device, a means of keeping track of time—little different than other calendars used in that day.

Almost all the nations used calendars based on the seasons, which were determined by both the sun and the monthly cycle that followed the moon. The Canaanite calendar did this sufficiently and it appears that Moses was told to use it rather than the Egyptian calendar which, some experts believe, used the end of the waxing moon as the new moon. Thus the Canaanite calendar, rather than the Egyptian calendar, more accurately followed the seasons and could be used for keeping track of holy day observances.

What Determines Which Days Are Holy?

The idea that Moses may have used an existing, secular calendar flies in the face of some assumptions made by many opponents of the Hebrew calendar. One of these assumptions is that the calendar Moses used was not calculated and laid out ahead of time, but instead was determined on a month by month basis according to the observation of phases of the moon and the progress of the crops.

Of course, on an elementary level, calculation had to have played at least a minor role in Moses’ calendar. Given that the moon behaved in Moses’ time as it does in ours, he had to have been aware that a month was always going to be either 29 or 30 days in length. Thus, he would have known to begin looking for the new moon on the 29th day of the month.

Another assumption is that from the time of creation there were certain, specific blocks of time identified and designated by God as Holy time, and that the moon, like a

giant timepiece, tells us exactly when those times are. Let's examine this assumption.

Imagine that it's the 29th day of the 6th month and Moses is looking into the sky, searching for a visual cue that will tell him whether or not the all-important seventh month of the year is to begin. However, on this crucial day, the moon is obscured from sight because the sky is overcast with clouds. Under these conditions—unless he was relying on astronomical calculations to declare the new moon—Moses would have no choice but to postpone the start of the new month for one day and declare the current month to have 30 days.

What if, on that cloudy day, the moon was actually there—signaling the start of a new month? Would Moses have been wrong? Would he mislead Israel to observe the wrong days? Would they have profaned the true Holy time God had consecrated at the beginning? Or would God honor the decision of Moses, thus making the 1st, 10th, 15th and 22nd days of the month holy as Moses declared?

The answer is obvious! Would a fair and just God play a guessing game with His chosen people when the stakes are so high? Remember, God had said that anyone who didn't fast on the Day of Atonement would be cut off from among His people (Lev. 23:29). Would God punish an entire nation simply because His appointed servant couldn't see the moon—thus causing them to fast a day late?

Some might argue that God knew ahead of time what decision Moses would make, or that He led Moses to make that decision. However, in either case, God's choice of which days were to be observed would have been based on Moses' decision, not the literal position of the moon. This should give the calendar dissenters pause to reconsider their logic. One must consider that God first set the days that each feast was to be observed. Then He delegated the authority for proclaiming these days, and by implication, the authority for creating a calendar to His servant Moses.

God Delegates Authority

The Scriptures make it clear that God empowers His leaders with authority. They are responsible for making such judgments as long as they do not contradict His law.

For example, God set up a judicial system in Israel and charged the priests and the Levites with the responsibility of rendering decisions in cases of disputes between brothers.

If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge *there* in those days, and inquire *of them*; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment (Deuteronomy 17:8-9).

God not only gave these judges the responsibility to administer His law, He also gave them authority—including the authority to dispense sentences. Furthermore, He gave very specific instructions to His people concerning their compliance.

You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside *to* the right hand or *to* the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you (Deuteronomy 17:10-11).

In these cases, God required His people to obey the judgments of His appointed authorities. It is also important to note that, as the next set of verses show, He even issued a penalty for disregarding this authority:

Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously (Deuteronomy 17:12-13).

These words are ominous indeed! They should be pondered carefully! In the light of these verses, the question for God's people today is; have some been presumptuous in taking to themselves the authority to publish a calendar for the purpose of proclaiming the holy days? This is an important question having serious consequences.

Conferring Authority

When conferring great responsibility on men, God also conveys great authority. For example, Christ gave great responsibility to Peter, stating not once, but three times to him, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). However, He also gave Peter great authority stating:

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19).

Those who do not respect the fact that authority in God's Church comes directly from the Almighty are making a big mistake. Everything in Scripture confirms that God has empowered His leaders to preside over His people.

Thus, when God bestowed upon Moses the responsibility of leading the newly formed nation of Israel, He gave him the responsibility to proclaim the holy days. With that responsibility God also gave him the authority to publish a calendar.

The Formation of the Sanhedrin

Although Moses was specifically chosen to preside over the children of Israel, he would not do so alone. God instructed him to select seventy honorable men to assist him in this duty. Moses was led by God to share the responsibility of leading Israel with seventy elders who were also inspired and given authority directly from God. This can be seen in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which came upon them. Notice the historical account of this miraculous event:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone... And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle. And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease (KJV, Numbers 11:16-25).

The Sanhedrin was a group of elders chosen by God through the prophet Moses. It is important to recognize the enduring divine inspiration these men had. Like Moses, these men were given the Holy Spirit to guide their thoughts and decisions. As long as they remained faithful, God worked with them and guided their judgment (Mat. 18:20). This is important to note because most translations of the Bible somehow misinterpret verse 25 to say that “they prophesied,

but they never did *so* again.” That would be completely out of character for God and makes no sense. Why would the Eternal tell Moses to choose these elders to assist in leading the people, and give them His Spirit, only to be led by that Spirit on a single occasion? He wouldn’t. The true translation relates that God gave authority to, and continued to inspire, the offices held by these men.

Although Moses eventually died, the institution of the Sanhedrin continued under the leadership of Joshua. As members of the group died, new members were ordained to take their place. According to the famous 12th century Jewish scholar, Moses Maimonedes, the Sanhedrin consisted of an unbroken line of ordained judges reaching all the way back to the time of Moses. He wrote:

No one is qualified to act as judge in the Sanhedrin, or even in a court of three judges, unless he has been ordained by one who has himself been ordained. Moses ordained Joshua by laying his hands upon him, as it says (Numbers 27:23), “And he laid his hands upon him, and commissioned him.” ...Likewise, Moses ordained the seventy Elders, and the Divine Presence rested upon them. The Elders ordained others, who in turn ordained their successors. Hence there was an uninterrupted succession of ordained judges, reaching back to the tribunal of Joshua, indeed, to the tribunal of Moses... (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Sanhedrin 41-2).

With this laying on of hands and ordination came the same responsibilities and authority that was originally vested in Moses and the seventy elders. This is why Christ had said, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat” (Mat. 23:2). They sat on the court of the Sanhedrin; the court that also determined the calendar. As the very God of the Old Testament, Christ had given them a lever of authority that included the authority to proclaim His holy days and to

publish a calendar. Furthermore, there is nothing in the New Testament indicating that Christ took issue with the calendar presided over by the Jewish leadership.

Another Point of Contention

There are some who contend that the calendar used in Christ's day was the Babylonian calendar, which did not contain postponements. Therefore, the Savior did not voice objection to it is because it did not artificially manipulate itself by inserting an extra month every few years. Those who advance this belief conclude that if Christ didn't keep postponements, why should God's people do so today?

Although this argument may sound reasonable, it is not without its problems. First, there is no incontrovertible evidence proving that the Jews in Palestine used the Babylonian calendar. Some experts contend that the calendar published by Hillel II during the fourth century did contain postponements, and was the one in use during the days of the Messiah.

However, even if Christ did use the Babylonian calendar, there is a greater problem. Why didn't He also reject it in favor of the Canaanite calendar used by Moses? After all, as the God of the Old Testament, didn't He instruct Moses to use it?

The fact of the matter is that God didn't give anyone a calendar, but He did empower His chosen servants to create one. This is why Christ didn't offer resistance to the one published by the religious leaders of His day. In other words, He respected the decision of the duly constituted authority placed over God's people.

The Heart of the Matter

This issue is the heart of all the contention surrounding the calendar controversy! The question comes down to one of authority and government. To whom did God give the authority to proclaim and publish the calendar? Furthermore,

are we willing to submit to the constituted authority put in place by Almighty God?

Some might argue that the scribes and Pharisees were unrighteous hypocrites; therefore they have no authority in any matter related to the Christian faith. But Christ said otherwise:

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore **whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do**, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers (Matthew 23:1-4).

Despite the personal sins of these religious leaders, they were still in authority. The scribes and Pharisees had the authority of over such things as the calendar. Christ told us to **observe** whatsoever they declare. We are then commanded to not obey them when matters contradict God’s law. When it comes to administrative decisions that are within the God given jurisdiction of the leadership, we are to follow that authority. Even in a case when a leader is wrong, that individual still holds the authority bestowed on him until God removes him from office.

To illustrate this point, consider the authority God had given to Satan. The Scriptures make it clear that Satan currently reigns like a god in this world; a fact that even Christ recognized. For example, when Satan offered to give Him all the kingdoms of this world, the Savior did not question that it was within his power to give (Mat. 4:8-10). He knew that Satan had been given authority over the earth. Even the righteous angel Michael respects the office that Satan holds and refused to bring a railing accusation against him (Jude 9).

In another example of respect for God’s appointed leaders, David could easily have taken matters into his own

hands to remove King Saul from office. He had the perfect opportunity (1Sam. 24), and could have reasoned that he was justified in doing so. After all, Samuel had already anointed him as the next king of Israel and Saul was trying to kill him. But David respected the authority of the office that Saul held. He recognized that the authority came from God. There is a significant parallel here with Christ who has been anointed to sit on the throne of the earth, but He has not yet been seated on that throne by His Father.

Additionally, none of those who advance the idea that the Hebrew calendar cannot be trusted, because the scribes and Pharisees can't be trusted, would dare question the validity of the books of the Bible. Yet the documented history of the canonization of these books was noted by several religious leaders who were not a part of the faithful Church. Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement, Tertullian, and Origen all noted the Canon of the New Testament. Eventually, the Roman Catholic Church put their stamp of approval on the books of the Bible. Would God allow heretics to take part in preserving His written word? The results speak for themselves. This being the case, how could anyone say that God would not authorize, entrust, and inspire the Jews to handle the calendar?

Authority in the Church

For those who might object to judgments made by the Sanhedrin still having authority today, consider the authority God vested in His Church. Regarding the holy days, the Apostle Paul wrote:

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; **but the body is of Christ** (KJV, Colossians 2:16-17).

Here, Paul was telling God's people that they were not to let outsiders judge them in their observance of the holy days. Only the body of Christ was to make such judgments. The body of Christ is the Church (Rom. 12:25; 1Cor. 12:12, 27), and the Church has already made a judgment regarding these things. The decision of God's Apostles down through the ages has always been to follow the Hebrew calendar. Even Herbert Armstrong, after carefully studying the issue, acknowledged its authority. Notice his words:

In conclusion, unless God has preserved His sacred calendar through the Jews, 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 way. There is no Bible authority whatsoever for figuring the first day of the first month from the new moon nearest the spring equinox.

After thorough study of the Bible, of the Hebrew calendar, of history and every angle - after going into the matter with all the Eugene brethren and other brethren who have made a special study of this question, we have unanimously agreed that the Hebrew calendar has been preserved by the Jews (*The Hebrew Calendar – Authoritative For God's Church Today* p. 27).

Thus, in concert with the Church, God's end time apostle has judged in this matter. The Church should follow this judgment unless it can prove that the Bible instructs us how to create a different calendar. But clearly, this is NOT the case!

Critics of the Hebrew calendar can only infer what they do from Scripture and the apostolic leadership in God's Church has judged that we are to use the calendar of the Jews. Therefore, by the authority of those whose responsibility it was to publish the calendar, the Sanhedrin, and by the authority vested in God's Church, we are obligated to follow the Hebrew calendar.

Beware of Contempt for the Jews

Christ said that salvation was of the Jews (John 4:22). Later, the Apostle Paul said that the keeping of the oracles of God was committed to them. That very religious body which had been given authority to keep the oracles of God was also given responsible for the calendar, which is inextricably tied to the holy days, commanded in those oracles.

In this context, it must be understood that God gave certain responsibility to the Jews. Thus, not everything Jewish is wrong. We do not want to follow the example of Constantine who rejected God's Passover replacing it with Easter simply because of his antipathy for the Jews.

Sadly, despite the words of both Christ and Paul, today there is a spirit that seems to resent such authority. It is as if everyone wants to have their own power—their own say about how things should be. This often occurs when a strong leader dies. When Moses did not return, the people thought he was dead. They rose up to play (Exo. 32:6). They did what they believed was right in their own mind, and they sinned as a result. Later, during the time of the Judges, there was a similar outcome. With no judge sent from God and no king to rule, individuals would not submit to previous authority and as the Scriptures explain, it led to disastrous results:

In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

Since the death of Mr. Armstrong, many of God's people have taken it upon themselves to make their own judgments in matters that clearly belong to the church. By doing this they reject the constituted authority put in place by God. The Bible contains ample warnings of what happens to those who are presumptuous enough to assume authority that does not belong to them. And yet, this lesson has seemingly been lost by some of God's people in this modern era.

There are Exceptions

This is not to suggest that there are never times when it is appropriate to take a stand, even against those in authority. Peter and John rightly defied an order by the religious leaders of their day, who demanded that they cease preaching Christ (Acts 4:19-20; 5:28-29). Additionally, Stephen fearlessly proclaimed the gospel of Christ before the Jewish leadership and paid for it with his life (Acts 7).

The Bible makes it clear that when God's law is rejected by His leaders, as was the case when a great apostasy infested the church after the death of Mr. Armstrong, His people must take a stand and withdraw themselves (1Tim. 6: 5).

Additionally, if church leaders advocate compromising the Sabbath or other parts of His law, it may become necessary to powerfully speak out as was done by Nehemiah to the nobles of Judah (Neh. 13:15-21).

The point here is that God does not want blind obedience. He wants genuine conviction in His people. However, He also wants His people to trust Him and those he has appointed over them. When it comes to the calendar, which requires human judgments, God has spoken forcefully concerning who has the authority to make such rulings.

Finding God's True Calendar

Many critics of the Hebrew calendar contend that God revealed His sacred calendar to man at the very beginning. Therefore, any attempt man may make to create his own calendar must go contrary to the perfect one already fashioned by the Almighty. These critics contend God set His calendar in the astronomical positions of the sun and moon on the fourth day of creation (Gen. 1:14-19).

Although this is true, there exists compelling evidence that the astronomical calendar originally set in the heavens by God during creation week was later altered by some cataclysmic event. The Scriptures reveal that, originally, a year

consisted of 360 days not 365 as we have today. Additionally, each month lasted exactly 30 days. This was the case during the days of Noah. Notice how Moses described the time of the flood. When counting months, he used 30 days for each one.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened (Genesis 7:11).

After the flood began, it continuously rained for 40 days and nights. The rain then stopped. 150 days later, the waters decreased enough for the ark to settle in a mountain range known as Ararat.

The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were also stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained. And the waters receded continually from the earth. At **the end of the hundred and fifty days** the waters decreased. Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:2-4).

By these verses we see that in the second month, on the 17th day, the waters began. Then on the 17th day of the seventh month, the waters were dried up. This process took 150 days and therefore five months were equivalent to exactly 150 days in Noah's day; with each month lasting exactly 30 days. This fact indicates that there was no difference in the solar and lunar cycles. At that time, the sun and moon were in perfect sync. However, at some point this changed.

From 360 to 365 Days

The Bible suggests that at some point after the great flood, God may have altered the course of the earth from the way it was at the time of creation. Many believe that it was

then that the yearly cycle we have today came into being. Certainly, the Almighty had the power to do such a thing. Notice how the prophet Daniel described Him.

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons (Daniel 2:20-21).

If one accepts the Biblical record, then God's ability to change the course of the heavens and the earth is undeniable. On two other occasions, God intervened to alter the normal motion of the earth. The first was Joshua's long day, and a second being the turning back of the shadow of the sun by ten degrees in the days of Hezekiah (Jos. 10: 12-13; 2Kin. 20:1-11).

How God would have caused such a change since the days of Noah is unknown, but scientists tell us that an event that would alter the course of the earth and the moon, in such a way, would undoubtedly result in a massive, worldwide earthquake.

In the book of Hebrews, God implies that He has caused such a quake by shaking the earth once before. He also reveals that He will do it again:

Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven (Hebrews 12:26).

God's Power Demonstrated

The Bible speaks of great earthquakes being used by God as an expression of His judgment. One example of this took place during the days of Uzziah, the king of Judah. Some have suggested that the force of this quake was so devastating that it was felt throughout the known world. The prophet Amos actually dates his prophecy from it.

The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in

the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake (Amos 1:1).

Zechariah also mentions this past great quake and likens its effect to the force that will rend the Mount of Olives into two parts at the return of Christ:

And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee *through* My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, **you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.** Thus the LORD my God will come, *and* all the saints with You (Zechariah 14:4-5).

Although this particular mega-quake did not likely alter the length of a year, it did shake the earth in a way that had a profound impact on history. Now imagine if such a quake was combined with a massive upheaval in the heavens.

Changing the Heavens

God's power over His creation has been manifested in many ways, not the least of which is in His shaking of the heavens and the earth. Consider the words King David used when describing God's judgment.

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry (2 Samuel 22:8; Psalm 18:7).

Returning to a 360 day Calendar

Clearly, both secular history and the Holy Scriptures suggest, that at one point, a year consisted of exactly 360 days

and that each month was 30 days in length. This was God's true calendar. However, since that time, something in the solar system changed. Admittedly, it is speculative to argue what specifically took place to cause this change, but whatever it was, it clearly had an enormous impact on the structure of both heaven and earth

With this said, is it possible, that at some point in the future, God will again shake the heavens and the earth, to such an extent, that a year will once again consist of 360 days?

Devastation in the Heavens and Earth

When speaking prophetically, the Bible makes references to time sequences that coincide with a 360-day year. The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation speak of a 3½ year period of time that equate to 1260 days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6). This same time period is also called 42 months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5). And is also said to be "times, time, and half a time" (Dan. 12:7; Rev. 12:14).

If one divides 3½ into 1260 days he will get three and one half 360-day years. Furthermore, if one divides 42 months into 1260 days he will get forty-two 30-day months. But how will this return to a 360-day year come about?

The book of Revelation describes a time during the last days when God will once again shake the heavens and the earth. The impact of this act will be absolutely devastating. Notice the words the Apostle John uses when describing this event.

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place (Revelation 6:12-14).

Clearly, the events of the last days carry a huge message with respect to what God is capable of doing to His creation. Whether things will play out as we have described them, only God knows for sure. The point here is that the Great Creator of heaven and earth is sovereign over the universe in which we reside.

This fact gives rise to a few logical questions. Why will the Messiah return earth's annual cycle to 360 days and does the Bible state that He will do such a thing?

Restoring All Things

The Bible speaks of a time when God's government, under the leadership of Christ and His saints, will be restored on earth. When that happens, the peace and prosperity our Creator intended for mankind will again flourish on the earth.

At this time, the misery and suffering man has brought on himself will end. It is a time when everything God desired in His creation will become a reality. When writing the book of Acts, Luke spoke of this time calling it the "the restoration of all things." Notice his words.

and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:20-21).

Here we see that when Christ returns He will restore "all things." This is not simply referring to the moral order of society. It also means that every casualty of human abuse and its consequences will be corrected.

When God created the universe, He fashioned it perfectly. Every piece reflected His wisdom (Psa. 104:24). Sadly, man defied his Creator and all that changed—including the structure of the heavens and the earth.

Luke's words reveal a promise that Christ is coming to restore order to all things, including the heavens and the earth. Imagine for a moment what that means as it relates to life in the millennium. Consider its impact on our weather and how that will affect agriculture. This one change will touch, for the better, the lives of every person on earth.

Finally, there will be another wonderful benefit of a world whose yearly cycle will be perfectly in sync. That benefit is the fact that no one will be fighting over calendars.

The History of the Hebrew Calendar

The history of the calendar used by God's people provides some keen insights into this debate affecting the Church today. If one honestly examines this fascinating story, a picture emerges that could put this entire controversy to rest. In truth, the calendar has undergone numerous changes throughout history; however, these changes have never compromised the integrity of God's law.

Although a calendar existed during the days of Noah as evidenced by the chronology of the flood in Genesis, its first prominent reference in the Scriptures appears during the days of Moses. By all indications, Moses used the Canaanite calendar. As was mentioned earlier, this understanding is based on the fact that God used the term "Abib" when referring to the first month (Exo. 13:4). Abib was the name of a month in the Canaanite calendar.

Although some contend that the calendar Moses used was based solely on observation, this is highly unlikely. The reason is that, in the days of Moses, it would have been impossible for the entire nation of Israel to observe the first day of the seventh month (the Feast of Trumpets), if the sighting of the moon occurred late in the afternoon. In this case, there would have not have been enough time to inform the people to keep that day. Additionally, at a later time, when Israel was scattered, it would be even more difficult to inform those living in foreign lands that the Feast of Trumpets has

begun. There had to be some sort of calculation involved in order to plan for the holy days.

The religious authorities of the day knew the length of a month, and therefore would have known when the first day of the new month began. With this understanding they informed the people in advance when they were to celebrate the holy day. Even during the days of King Saul there is evidence in the Scriptures that new moons were announced in advance of their observation (1Sam. 20:5).

The Babylonian Calendar

After using the Canaanite calendar for centuries a new calendar period emerged. This took place at some point after the Jewish people came out of exile in Babylon. During this era, God's servant Ezra adopted the Babylonian calendar which was a calculated calendar. From this time forward the Bible no longer calls the first month Abib, but rather Nisan (Neh. 2:1; Est. 3:7) which was the name of the first month of the Babylonian calendar.

Ezra also set up the great assembly after the pattern given to Moses. Like that former body, and the later Sanhedrin, this new group of chosen men inherited the authority to proclaim the holy days in their season. At this time, they calculated the date using a fixed calendar, but observed the moon as a confirmation of their calculation. God accepted these developments to the calendar.

Calendar Similarities

While the Babylonian calendar differed from the Canaanite calendar, they were similar in some aspects. Both were lunisolar calendars and evidently both were acceptable to God. What is unique in this debate is that calendar critics seem to accept the change from the Canaanite calendar to the Babylonian calendar, but do not accept the last phase in the calendar's history in which it became based entirely on

calculation. This was the calendar many authorities believe existed during Christ's life.

Furthermore, by all indications, the Savior Himself observed the holy times on the days set by the Sanhedrin of His day. At no time do the Scriptures suggest that He took issue with the religious leaders for their method of calculating God's holy days. This was true even though, by His time, the calendar had undergone several changes.

The Calendar Goes Public

The third phase of the calendar rose to prominence when its method of calculation was made public in 358 A.D. by Hillel II who served as the head of the Sanhedrin. Admittedly there is some dispute among scholars and historians as to the exact form of the calendar that was first published. However, it is generally agreed that the basic rules that pertain to the Hebrew calendar originated here.

Until it was published, the creation of the calendar had been a closely guarded secret. However, persecution from Emperor Constantius II had scattered the Jews and he threatened to disband the Sanhedrin. Fearing that such an act would prevent the Jewish authorities from proclaiming the holy days in their season, Hillel II took the bold step. He published the rules of the calendar so the Jews around the world would be unified in their sacred observance. As Arthur Spier wrote:

In order to prevent the Jews scattered all over the surface of the earth from celebrating their New Moons, festivals and holidays at different times, he made public the system of calendar calculation which up to that time had been a closely guarded secret. It had been used in the past only to check the observations and testimonies of witnesses, and to determine the beginnings of the spring season... In accordance with this system, Hillel II formally sanctified all months in advance, and intercalated

all future leap years until such a time as a new, recognized Sanhedrin would be established in Israel (*The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, pp. 2-3).

At this point it is important to note that Hillel's publication was not without some opposition. Apparently there was a dispute between Babylonian rabbis and Jerusalem rabbis over its validity. The rabbis who stayed in Babylon were using the Babylonian calendar which had no postponements.

Like the calendar critics of today, the rabbis in Babylon did not accept the fact that authority over the calendar resided with Ezra and those who returned to Jerusalem. God was working with them. They were the *bet din*—the official calendar court. Hillel II was the head of this continued court of elders which did not include rabbis who chose to stay in Babylon. It was his calendar that the Jews and the Church of God have followed for centuries—not the calendar of the rabbis who stayed in Babylon.

When publishing the calendar, Hillel made two very important proclamations. First, he stated that this calendar was to be used until a newly recognized Sanhedrin could be established in Israel. Second, he wrote that he had published the same calendar that had been observed for centuries! Some dispute this latter statement in today's wave of calendar criticism. However, if it were not true, why was there no opposition from the Church of God?

The Calendar through the Ages

The truth is that the Church of God has always followed the Hebrew calendar from the time of its birth on Pentecost. This is made clear by the fact that for two centuries they honored the Passover on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. This fact is confirmed by *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition.

There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the

writings of the apostolic Fathers... The ecclesiastical historian Socrates (Hist. Ecc. v. 22) states, with perfect truth, that neither the Lord nor his apostles enjoined the keeping of this or any other festival... and he attributes the observance of Easter by the church to the perpetuation of an old usage, "just as many other customs have been established."

This is doubtless the true statement of the case. The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed. Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it, of Christ as the true Paschal Lamb and the first fruits from the dead, continued to be observed, and became the Christian Easter... St Polycarp, the disciple of St John the Evangelist and bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome in 159 to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, on the subject; and urged the tradition, which he had received from the apostle, of observing the fourteenth day. Anicetus, however, declined to admit the Jewish custom in the churches under his jurisdiction, but readily communicated with Polycarp and those who followed it. About forty years later the question was discussed in a very different spirit between Victor, bishop of Rome, and Polycrates, metropolitan of proconsular Asia. That province was the only portion of Christendom which still adhered to the Jewish usage, and Victor demanded that all should adopt the usage prevailing at Rome. This Polycrates firmly refused to agree to, and urged many weighty reasons to the contrary, whereupon Victor proceeded to excommunicate Polycrates and the Christians who continued the Eastern usage... The few who afterwards separated themselves from the unity of the church and continued to keep the fourteenth day, were named

Quartodecimani, and the dispute itself is known as the Quarto-deciman controversy (v. 8, pp. 828-829).

It is interesting to that those who kept God's Passover were called Quartodecimani; meaning those who kept the 14th day according to the Jewish calendar. This is noted out by *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*.

The Christians of Asia Minor were called Quartodecimans from their custom of celebrating the *pascha* invariably on the 14th of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish year and falling in the springtime. The date might fall on Friday or on any of the other days of the week, which fact made no difference in the celebration of the paschal feast (vol. 4, p. 44).

During the fourth century, because Rome was the capital of the empire, the church at Rome began to think of itself as the leading congregation. An influx of vast numbers of pagans was influencing the religious observances there. As they adopted more and more pagan practices, the issue of keeping either Passover or Easter came to a head. This was finally resolved in the council of Nicea in which emperor Constantine outlawed the Passover, substituting Easter in its place. As Constantine later wrote:

When the question relative to the sacred festival of Easter arose, it was universally thought that it would be **convenient that all should keep the feast on one day**; ...it was declared particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom of the Jews, who have soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded... We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews... in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from

the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast... (A *Historical View of THE COUNCIL OF NICEA; with a TRANSLATION OF DOCUMENTS* by Rev. Isaac Boyle, D.D.; T Mason and G Lane, New York, 1839; pp. 51-54).

Constantine's letter shows that there were still Christians keeping God's Passover in 325 A.D. History confirms that the Apostle John's churches in the east continued to observe it by the Jewish reckoning.

Furthermore, the tone of this statement reveals a fierce anti-Jewish sentiment coming from the Roman church. This hostility began about 50 A.D. with the emperor Claudius who ordered the Jews to leave Rome (Acts 18:2). It continued into the fourth century under Constantine and raised its vicious head again during his successors reign.

Fearing that the Sanhedrin would be disbanded, and unable to proclaim God's feasts in their season, Hillel II published the Hebrew calendar in 358 A.D., stating that this was the calendar that had been used for centuries in the past. Thus, 33 years after the council of Nicea, with no opposition from the Jews or the Church of God, this calendar continued to be used by God's people for centuries to come.

The Quartodecimans

Karl Baus traced the history of the faithful from the third to the fifth century in his book *The Apostolic Community to Constantine*. He wrote of the Quartodecimans stating:

The quartodeciman minority remained faithful to their **previous practice** throughout the whole of the 3rd century... (later) the council of Nicea expelled the Quartodecimans from the ecclesiastical community. Thereafter, their numbers continually declined, though even into the fifth century the great church had to deal with them on occasion (p. 271).

The “previous practice” spoken of in this quote refers to the keeping of Passover on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. This also indicates the calendar’s continued observance through to the fifth century.

By the 7th century A.D. the Church became visible again. During this time, the mountains in Asia Minor and Armenia protected a people who were called Paulicians. Ivor C. Fletcher wrote of the Paulician movement in his book *The Incredible History of God’s True Church*. He confirms that this group was still keeping the Passover on the 14th day of Nisan from the early 7th century through the tenth.

(This) era came to be known as “Paulicians” (the followers of the Apostle Paul)... They preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God, baptized believers by immersion, practiced the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit, and observed the Sabbath, the **Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan** and the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Chapter 8).

The Paulicians remained visible until about the 10th century. Following Christ’s example, they kept the Passover until their era eventually became lost to history. By the 13th century the Church reappeared. This time they were identified as the Waldenses. Regarding these believers, the *New Schaff Herzog Religious Encyclopedia* states:

They had apparently determined to celebrate the Lord’s Supper only once a year... In France it was apparently the custom, from an early time, to partake of fish as well as unleavened bread and wine at this celebration (v. 12, p. 243).

Notice that the Waldenses celebrated the Lord’s Supper annually from an early time. It was the same observance

celebrated by the early Christians in which they kept the Passover on the day specified in the Hebrew calendar.

During the 17th century, the Church reappeared once again, this time in England. Dugger and Dodd's history of the true Church states:

In John Tombers' Dispute on Baptism, London, pages 12, 13, a complaint is entered on certain people for celebrating the Lord's Supper in the morning, when it is said it should be celebrated in the evening. The name "Church of God" is mentioned twice on these pages referring to people holding the Passover in the evening (Chapter 20).

This complaint lodged by God's Church demonstrates that they opposed the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or Passover, in the morning. It is interesting to note that they did not complain about a change in which day it was kept, only the time of day. Why? The answer is because they adhered to the Hebrew calendar which had been in use by God's people for centuries. Dugger and Dodd make this clear when describing the Church of God in America. In this new land, they continued to observe the Passover on the 14th of Nisan.

The church in Rhode Island was founded the year 1671, and Ephrata, Pennsylvania, May 1725, with numerous other congregations throughout the eastern states... we find companies in one place called the Church of Christ, in another place the **Church of God**, while in other communities they were simply called 'Sabbatarian Congregations' but the belief was practically the same. They stood for the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, observing the true Sabbath, **keeping the Lord's Supper yearly on the 14th** of the first month (p. 252-253).

The practice of God's people continuing to keep the Passover according to the Hebrew calendar for the next hundred years is documented in *History of the Sabbatarians*:

Some of these (western Virginia) churches, believe in the washing of one another's feet, at appointed times... but the Sabbath and Baptism are their distinguishing tenets... Concerning the Passover, or the Lord's Supper, in at least one assembly of the early Sabbatarians in West Virginia, the following is illustrative; 'March 21, 1853, it was voted that communion **service be held once in twelve months on the fourteenth day of the first Jewish Month**, ie., on the evening of the Passover (p. 201).

From the ancient past until the present day, thousands of congregations of God's Church have continued to faithfully observe the Passover based on the Jewish calendar. In more recent times, the Seventh Day Church of God has also kept the Passover on the fourteenth Day of the first month. The Worldwide Church of God under the direction of Herbert W. Armstrong kept the Passover following the Hebrew calendar, and the majority of the Church of God splinter groups continue that practice.

Every piece of historical evidence shows God's Church keeping the festivals and Passover based on the same calendar declared by the Jews. Only recently has the calendar come under attack, and one thing must be understood. The calendars that have been devised by critics of the Hebrew calendar are not, and they have never been, calendars that were accepted or used by the Church of God, or secular society!

People were not living their lives by these modern day aberrations. They did not use them for business, anniversaries, or any future planning. The vast majority of calendars suggested by critics of the Hebrew calendar are modern day creations. They are designed to keep the holy days in a way

that their creators define as important, but they were never used in the past for anything.

The Hebrew calendar has always been legitimate. It is immensely logical and highly accurate. It has been accepted over the entire world and has been used for millennia by both the Jews and God's Church.

Postponements in Perspective

Perhaps the greatest opposition to the Hebrew calendar is generated from its use of what are called "postponements." Postponements are specific rules the Jews employ when setting up their calendar. Although to many, these rules are difficult to understand, they do serve an important purpose in keeping God's law and His holy days.

The Hebrew calendar first establishes the beginning of the Tishri; the seventh month. This is the only month whose new moon falls on a holy day—the Feast of Trumpets. From that point they calculate the other months of the year. With this said, it is important to understand that postponement rules require the Feast of Trumpets to be pushed back one or two days in certain years. However, this adjustment does not damage the proclamation of the new moon as the moon's appearance can vary significantly.

As this process is followed, four basic rules of postponements are applied. These rules are very complex in their methodology and difficult to grasp because of their technical nature. However, they are founded on reasonable conclusions based on Scripture.

The Objection of Critics

Critics of the Hebrew calendar vehemently object to postponement rules on the grounds that they are not biblical. They argue that postponements add to, or, take away from the Scriptures, which we are forbidden to do (Deu. 12:32). However, these critics make several mistakes in this assertion.

First, there are no specific instructions in the Bible for creating a calendar—a point that almost all Hebrew calendar critics seem to conveniently forget. Therefore, in truth, the Bible is silent with respect to the calendar and the postponements it contains.

Second, most critics believe that God set an exact time astronomically, in which the time itself is holy. In other words, they believe God's people are to seek out a specific unchanging period of time cycling through each year, just like the weekly Sabbath. Although this may sound reasonable it couldn't possibly be the case. If it were true that God set up exact blocks of astronomical time that were holy, then on certain days He would have to spread His holy time over parts of two days instead of one. This is because regardless of what method one chooses to determine the new moon, that moon will sometimes appear in the middle of the day.

By understanding that God did not make a specific time period holy according to our existing astronomical calendar, it then becomes clear that once a calendar has been created, any postponements do not delay the observance of the holy days. These days still fall on the dates God commanded in Leviticus 23. Therefore the Hebrew calendar does not change God's days of worship. Like any other calendar, it simply provides a framework that enables us to identify and keep these days.

They all do it

It is also interesting to note that while critics of the Hebrew calendar complain about postponements, the truth is that every single calendar in existence must postpone in some way to reconcile the dissimilar cycles of the sun and moon. This means that, with the exception of the pre-flood 360-day calendar, every other man-made calendar has some form of postponements—including those calendars created by today's Hebrew calendar critics.

The first postponement rule in the Hebrew calendar occurs when a new moon appears late in the day. If it appears on, or after, twelve noon this rule requires that the proclamation of the new moon be moved to the next day; a day in which the moon is actually still new. This is necessary so that the Feast of Trumpets is a full twenty four-hour day and not just a few hours long.

Obviously this postponement is necessary. If the holy day is not postponed by moving it forward, the declaration of the new moon would have to fall back to the prior Sunset. Although such a practice is observed by the Samaritans today, it is clearly in error because it requires that the new moon be declared when there is as yet no moon present.

When the moon appears during the day, any calendar that man might devise cannot allow the day to be split in two. Therefore, a decision must be made as to which day should be proclaimed the new moon. The Hebrew calendar elects to push the new moon over to the next day. Without this postponement it would be impossible to properly keep the holy days from sunset to sunset as God commands (Lev. 23:32).

The second and third postponement rules cause the calendar to be adjusted so that the Day of Atonement does not fall on the day before the weekly Sabbath, and the majority of the annual holy days do not fall the day after it. In preparation for the Sabbath, God has commanded that we do all our work on the sixth day (Exo. 16:5-26). He has also commanded that we do absolutely no work on Atonement (Lev. 23:28). Therefore, if Atonement falls on the sixth day, it presents a conflict with God's command. The Jews resolved this conflict by adjusting the calendar so that this does not occur. While it is true that this decision required a judgment on their part, their judgment was not based on personal inference, but rather on a command in the Scriptures.

Despite this fact, critics complain that this postponement should not be done. They contend that such an adjustment is not necessary and preparation can be done on

Thursday. What they fail to realize is that by doing what they suggest, they have now postponed the preparation day, thus breaking God's direct command regarding the sixth day. While the critics wish to push the sixth day back to the fifth day, the Jews do what is legal. They adjust the calendar, an act for which there is no prohibition in God's Word.

These two rules work together to avoid many occasions when the weekly Sabbath might fall adjacent to an annual Sabbath. This postponement rule was written in consideration of the fact that there was no refrigeration to preserve food over several days. In addition, because of the labor involved in preparing a corpse for burial, there was no city authority to remove the bodies of those who might have died on the Sabbath.

A final postponement is related to the nineteen year time cycle. This rule keeps the length of the various years adjusted so that they are in sync, and none have an abnormal length, as each year goes through its sequence in the cycle.

These facts should put the postponements in perspective. While it is true that these rules are not found in the Bible, neither is sanctifying the new moon, or intercalating a thirteenth month every third year. What one must realize is that because these rules are not mentioned, it does not mean they are prohibited. In fact, some are absolutely necessary in order to perform what God has written in His word.

When it comes to issues surrounding the Sabbath, these postponements fulfill Christ's statement that the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27-28). They enable us to keep the command that work is to be done on the sixth day. They work in ways that fulfill God's law of love, and perhaps one of the least understood contributions of postponements is that they miraculously cause the Hebrew calendar to be more accurate than any other in man's history.

The Accuracy of the Hebrew Calendar

One of the most powerful arguments in favor of the Hebrew calendar is its uncanny accuracy. To best appreciate this point it is incumbent upon us to understand how this remarkable instrument functions.

The Hebrew calendar that Hillel II published during the 4th century was based entirely on calculation. The new moons were determined by calculating the average, or mean conjunction of the moon.

The first day of the seventh month, Tishri, is the starting point for the calculations of the Hebrew calendar. Once it is determined, 177 days are counted back to identify the first day of Nisan, the first month. After this, there are four rules of postponement that can push the declaration of Tishri, one, or even two days back from the mean conjunction or *molad*.

All this seems quite heretical to calendar's critics. Due to fluctuations in the moon's orbit, the mean conjunction rarely occurs at the same time as the actual conjunction; so they see the Hebrew calendar's method as being out of step with the moon and thus out of step with "God's calendar." They also object to fixing the leap years in advance. Based on the fact that God pronounced Abib (Nisan) to be the first month, they object to counting backward from Tishri 1 to find Nisan 1. They object to the rules of postponement as being unbiblical and devised by men for the sake of convenience.

Despite these objections, the fact is, there are sound biblical and practical reasons for all the rules and methods of the Hebrew calendar. This includes: Calculating the *molad* of Tishri, using postponements, and reckoning the year working backward from Tishri 1.

For example, Tishri is the only month that has a holy day on both the 1st and 15th. Psalm 81 indicates that this occurs during the month of Tishri:

Blow the trumpet at the time of **the New Moon**, at **the full moon**, on our solemn feast day (Psalm 81:3).

The moon is more than just a sign for the beginning of months; the full moon signals the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles. The reckoning of this month is critical because it must not only start at the right time, but God's people must be able to look up on the 15th and see a full moon.

In addition, the 15th day of the first month is a holy day. Remember, God says the moon is a sign of His appointed times (Gen. 1:14; Psa. 104:19). With the moon cycle being 29 ½ days and fluctuating as it does, arriving at full moons on the fifteenth days of both months is not as simple as one might think.

However, the Hebrew calendar is extraordinarily accurate in this regard. What is vital to understand is that the postponements are part of what makes it so accurate. The rules of postponement are commonly regarded as a means of preventing the annual holy days (especially the Day of Atonement) from occurring on a day adjoining a weekly Sabbath. What many people do not realize is that postponements also regulate the inner workings of the calendar to keep it in sync with the moon.

The remarkable accuracy of the Hebrew calendar is detailed in an article titled *The Feast of Trumpets 2000 AD*, written by Dwight Blevins and Carl Franklin. These men demonstrate that using the Hebrew calendar yields a more accurate placement of the full moons than one finds using the true conjunctions, as reported by the U.S. Naval Observatory. They cite the following example.

In the year 2000 the U.S. Naval Observatory calculated the conjunction of Tishri 1 to occur at 9:53 P.M., JT (Jerusalem time) on September 27. The Hebrew calendar calculated the molad of Tishri to occur more than 15 hours later - at 1:17 P.M., JT, on the afternoon of September 28. In addition, the rules of postponement required that the declaration of Tishri 1 be delayed for two full days thus making it fall on September 30th. Thus, in the year 2000, the Hebrew calendar set the observance of the Feast of Trumpets to begin almost 44 hours after the true conjunction of the

moon. But how does the Hebrew calendar in this example prove to be more accurate than the US Naval Observatory? Authors Dwight Blevins and Carl Franklin provide the following answer.

Is the Hebrew calendar leading us away from the true observance? It appears that the Hebrew Calendar is delaying the Feast of Trumpets by nearly two full days. This significant lapse in time between the astronomical conjunction and the declaration of Tishri 1 in the year 2000 has led some to claim that the Hebrew Calendar is an erroneous Pharisaic invention. But as we will see, the Hebrew Calendar was not invented by men but was revealed by God in order that his people might observe His annual holy days at their appointed times (*The Feast of Trumpets 2000 AD*, http://www.cbcg.org/franklin/feast_trumpets2000_revised.pdf, retr. 8/26/2013).

Those who rely on the astronomical conjunction would have observed the Feast of Trumpets on September 28 and the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles on October 12 in the year 2000. How did this correlate to the moon? There was no visible crescent moon on the eve of Trumpets and the moon was only 96% full on the eve of Tabernacles.

In contrast, those who followed the Hebrew calendar that year observed the Feast of Trumpets on September 30, and the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles on October 14. How did this correlate to the moon? There was a visible crescent moon on the eve of Trumpets, and the moon was a perfect 100% full on the eve of Tabernacles.

Comparing the results for the Passover season for the same year, those following the astronomical conjunction counted April 5 as Nisan 1, and observed the first Day of Unleavened Bread on April 19 (Nisan 15). This method

yielded no visible crescent on Nisan 1, nor a full moon on Nisan 15.

Those who followed the Hebrew calendar the year 2000 counted April 6 as Nisan 1, and observed the first Day of Unleavened Bread on April 20 (Nisan 15). This method yielded a visible crescent on Nisan 1, and a near-perfect 99% full moon on Nisan 15.

The overall results for the year 2000 show the Hebrew calendar to be more accurate. A visible crescent was seen on both Nisan 1 and Tishri 1, and the combined average of the full moons for the holy days on Nisan 15 and Tishri 15 was 99.5%. By contrast, the astronomical conjunction method yielded no visible crescents on the first days of the months, and a 98% average for the full moons on the 15th days of the months.

For those who may think that this is a fluke, consider the following table which shows the accuracy of the Hebrew calendar in predicting the percentage of the full moon visible on the first Day of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles. These figures are averaged and compared with the percentage of the full moon that would have been visible if postponements were not applied.

Year	% of full moon visible with postponements	% of full moon visible without postponements
2005	0.997	0.972
2004	0.989	0.979
2003	0.998	0.989
2002	0.989	No postponements
2001	0.995	No postponements
2000	0.992	0.98
1999	0.996	0.973
1998	0.987	No postponements
1997	0.993	No postponements
1996	0.997	0.991
1995	0.996	0.975
1994	0.992	No postponements

1993	0.991	No postponements
1992	0.996	0.992
1991	0.997	No postponements
1990	0.995	No postponements
1989	0.983	No postponements
1998	0.998	0.98
1987	0.997	0.989
1986	0.996	No postponements
1985	0.996	0.996
1984	0.992	0.983
1983	0.997	0.99
1982	0.987	No postponements

The Hebrew calendar is accurately aligned with the phases of the moon. As Blevins and Franklin explain:

It [the Hebrew calendar] achieves the greatest possible accuracy in matching the phases of the moon because its calculations are based on the average length of the lunar month as opposed to the specific time of the moon's conjunction. This factor is especially critical in the year 2000. When we use the astronomical conjunction to calculate the length of the six month lunar period from the beginning of Nisan to the beginning of Tishri, we find that the total number of days does not match the known average for this cycle (ibid).

The length of the six month period from Nisan 1 to Tishri 1 based on observatory data for the year 2000 was 176.07 days. But the known average for any six-month lunar period is 177.18 days. The Hebrew calendar, with its standard 177 days from Tishri 1 back to Nisan 1, comes much closer to the known average. Blevins and Franklin continue:

The use of this average figure enables the Hebrew calendar to match the lunar phases during the six-month period as closely as possible in the year

2000. Calculations that are based on the astronomical conjunction cannot lead to accurate dating because there is a full day missing in the six-month period. Despite the extreme fluctuation in the moon's cycle, the Hebrew calendar achieves an almost perfect score in matching the desired phases of the moon, as defined by Scripture. Most important of all, its declarations match the command of God in Psalm 81:3 that the feasts of the seventh month be observed on the day of the new crescent and on the day of the full moon (ibid).

With modern technology and advanced mathematics we are now able to accurately predict the time of the moon's conjunction each month, but that does not allow us to build a more accurate calendar. As Messrs. Blevins and Franklin continue to explain:

The moon is simply too variable in its movements to be measured and catalogued in such a way as to increase the reliability of lunar calendar dates... We cannot demand that the moon be at a certain position and at a precise percentage of illumination on a specific day of the month when it is not constant in its finite direction or the rate of its travel. We are able to predict where it will be, but we cannot shift the days of the month so that its position in the sky and percentage of illumination will match the desired lunar phase (ibid).

Blevins and Franklin come to a logical conclusion:

A comparison of the calculated Hebrew calendar with calendars that are based on the moment of the darkest moon or the observation of the new crescent will demonstrate that through the years, the Hebrew calendar achieves the highest percentage of accuracy in matching day of the month to the

desired lunar phase. This degree of success would not be possible without the Rules of Postponement and the use of the average lunar month (29.53 days) for calculations (ibid).

Blevins and Franklin make a strong case for their belief that the Hebrew calendar is the product of divine influence. It is man made, but God inspired.

When did Calculating Begin?

We do not know how far back the practice of calculating the Hebrew calendar goes. Some scholars believe that Hillel II's calendar was the beginning, and that even his calendar was adjusted and modified until the 10th century. Others believe the practice of calculating the calendar goes back much further. In fact, there is evidence that suggests calculation and postponements were in use at least as early as the time of Christ. Blevins and Franklin claim to have traced the practice back to the time of Ezra. They assert that the Feast of Trumpets in the year 538 BCE, as recorded in Ezra 3, was not only calculated using the mean conjunction, but was postponed one day as required by Postponement Rule One (ibid). Additionally, Hillel II claimed that the calendar rules he published were the same rules that had always been used.

A Final Thought

With so many different calendars all claiming to be "God's calendar," how can one know what to believe? One thing is certain; they can't all be right. The real calendar problem is not how to make a calendar; it is who is authorized to write the rules for the calendar.

The bottom line is that God is not the author of confusion (1Cor. 14:33). This is why He placed the responsibility of the calendar in the hands of a constituted authority. It is the only way to prevent the confusion that exists today.

Satan is a master of the tactic to divide and conquer. One has only to look at our modern society to see how successful he has been at dividing the family and one of his main objectives is to divide the family of faith, the Church. We have been divided geographically and organizationally, but the true Church of God is not limited by these physical things. The true Church of God is bound together by the Spirit of God and can neither be separated from God, nor from one another.

Christ said, "My sheep hear my voice." The sheep know the Shepherds voice, "And a stranger they will not follow." Many of the voices now being heard on the subject of the calendar are the voices of strangers. But the voice of the Shepherd can also be heard. Will we hear it?

God is faithful and just. He has not commanded us to keep His holy days and then left us in confusion about when to keep them. He committed His oracles to the Jews; not only the Scriptures that command us to keep the holy days, but the calendar as well. Without the calendar it is impossible to observe the holy days as commanded.

Just as there are no original copies in existence to prove that the Bible has been accurately preserved, there are no calendar rules in the Scriptures to prove or disprove the correctness of the Hebrew calendar. By faith we know that God preserved reliable copies of His original Word for us. By faith we also know that God committed the responsibility and authority of the calendar to the Jews.

God's original calendar was nothing like the modern ones that any of the calendar critics propose. His was 360 days long and the sun was perfectly geared to the moon. Since that time something has changed and now human decisions must be made to reconcile the incompatible cycles of the sun and moon.

God did not reveal a specific sacred calendar in the Bible in order to accomplish this. He told Moses to use Abib, a Canaanite month, as the first month of the year. Furthermore, that calendar has been modified numerous times since the time

of Moses with no apparent objection by the Jews, Christians, or by God.

Objections to postponements today are not valid. Every calendar must postpone in some way and the postponements in the Hebrew calendar do not break God's law, but rather enable us to better keep it.

The more recent calendars suggested by opponents of the Hebrew calendar have never been used in the past. They are not used presently and are not likely to be used in the future. When compared to the Hebrew calendar, these modern day creations fail. They are not practical enough to ever have been adopted by society for use, and they are not as accurate in reconciling the sun and the new moon with the full moon.

Finally, the Hebrew calendar has the authority of the Jewish Sanhedrin and its use has been agreed upon by two or more of the apostolic leaders of the Church of God. It is therefore binding on us today.

If the Hebrew calendar used by the Jews was authoritative for Christ and for the apostles after Him, it is good enough for Christians today. The Church of God has observed this calendar for the better part of two millennia. Therefore, will you follow self proclaimed authorities who create calendars based on scriptural inference and conjecture? Or, will you have the faith to follow in the footsteps of Christ and His Church by obeying the authority God has ordained?

The Eternal Church of God offers a variety of books, booklets, articles, video, and audio to help people better understand God's Word and His plan for humanity. Some of the printed material available includes:

The Truth about Lunar Sabbaths

The Sabbath Test

Keys to Understanding Revelation

Three Times in a Year

The Truth about Tithing

Why the Unclean and the Clean?

A Place of Safety

The Truth about the Resurrections

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