

The Hebrew Calendar—Part 1

Is It Valid for the Church Today?

By John H. Ogwyn

Since 1986, the calendar has been a recurring source of doctrinal controversy in the Church of God. Many articles and papers have proposed different methods of calculating the dates of the annual festivals, and at least a half-dozen different calendars and calculation methods have been offered.

This has troubled many sincere brethren who want to do what pleases God. With all the controversy, they are unsure. But does God really expect each individual Church member to become an expert on calendar matters?

We can understand the “calendar issue” by asking three simple questions, and then answering them from the Bible. Do the rules of the current Hebrew calendar conform to Biblical principles and guidelines? Does God expect each Christian to determine the calendar for himself, or did He entrust some authority to make calendar decisions? And can we really know what calendar Jesus Christ and His Apostles used?

Is the Hebrew Calendar Based Upon the Bible?

Does the Bible give guidelines regarding the calendar we should use in observing God’s festivals? If so, what are those guidelines and

where do we find them? First, let us ask whether the calendar should be based on physical sighting of the new moon, or whether it should be based on calculation. Some argue that the only valid way to begin a new month is to actually see the faint crescent of the new moon. Does the Bible resolve this argument? Absolutely!

The Hebrew word *chodesh* is translated “month” in most English-language Bibles. Its root meaning involves “making new” or “repairing.” The moon orbits the earth, going through its phases as its position changes in relation to the sun and the earth. Approximately every 29-and-a-half days, the moon comes into exact conjunction between the earth and the sun, and the three orbs are in a straight line with one another (though not necessarily on the same plane). In conjunction, the moon is totally dark, reflecting none of the sun’s light. As it moves westward, away from conjunction, it again begins to reflect light. Depending on the observer’s location and the earth’s position at conjunction, the new moon will generally not be visible until one or two days after the conjunction.

Note that basing the new month upon physical sighting of the new moon would require keeping the Feast of Trumpets for two days! An

observer cannot know, in advance, on which day he might see the new moon. Depending upon the exact time of conjunction, he might see the crescent on either the 30th or 31st day after the last new crescent. Since days begin at sunset, observers would have to keep the 30th day after the new crescent of Elul (6th month) as holy time, as they might see the new crescent that evening, though they would more commonly see it on the following evening.

For this reason, even in the land of Israel, Jews who follow the Pharisees’ traditions observe the Feast of Trumpets for two days back-to-back. Without making it a two-day celebration to ensure that the right day is observed, it is impossible to base the celebration of the Feast of Trumpets, the first day of the seventh month, on physical sighting of the new moon. Yet upon examining Leviticus 23 and Numbers 29, it is clear that the Feast of Trumpets must be observed for one day rather than two. This alone mandates a calculated calendar, in which the new moon day is determined in advance.

Another even more significant issue—the intercalary year—also requires a calendar calculated in advance. Intercalary years are those in which a 13th month is added. Twelve lunar months are equal to just over 354 days. A solar year is

equal to just over 365 days. Using a calendar based only on 12 lunar months, this 11-day difference would cause the festivals to occur about a month earlier every three years in relation to the solar year and the seasons. Yet Leviticus 23:10–11 mandates that the priests should offer an omer of barley as a wave offering to God on the Sunday during the Days

to celebrate Passover in their own area? Significant numbers would either have been a month early or a month late! Remember, they could not call ahead on the telephone or check someone's Web site! There was either an established pattern followed, or there would have been confusion among Jews throughout the Diaspora.

How could a calculated calendar have been figured anciently? In antiquity, man had only two ways of knowing the time of the new moon. One was by physical sighting of the crescent; the other was by calculation based upon the average time between conjunctions.

of Unleavened Bread, beginning the 50-day count to Pentecost. Clearly, this required that the first month, Abib or Nisan, could not be allowed to fall so early that no ripe grain would be available for the offering. This required the addition of a 13th month about every three years. But how was this addition determined?

Those who argue for direct physical sighting assert that the priests examined the grain crop each year before the end of the 12th month, and if they saw that it would not be ripe soon enough they added a 13th month to postpone the first month for about 30 days. The only alternative would be a regular cycle, calculated by the priests, to determine which years had 12 and which had 13 months. Is there biblical evidence as to the priests' practice? There certainly is!

Acts 2, for instance, reminds us that Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the known world. If the decision regarding the 13th month were made a few weeks before Passover, how would Jews all over the world have known when to come to Jerusalem—or, for that matter, when

How could a calculated calendar have been figured anciently? In antiquity, man had only two ways of knowing the time of the new moon. One was by physical sighting of the crescent; the other was by calculation based upon the average time between conjunctions.

Some today wish to offer a substitute calendar based not on averages or observation, but on figures they have obtained from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) or the U. S. Naval Observatory. These figures are derived from satellite observation and are supposed to be more exact than the averages from which the traditional Hebrew calendar was calculated.

Please understand, if there is one calendar that we can absolutely *prove* that Christ and the Apostolic Church DID NOT use, it is one based on satellite observation! The **only calculated calendar that could possibly be used until after about 1968** was one based upon the average length of time between conjunctions.

How were these averages obtained? Conjunctions of the sun, moon and earth are invisible except during a solar eclipse. Solar eclipses can occur only at the time of the new moon. Because the moon's orbit is normally a few degrees above or below the plane of the earth-sun orbit, it is usually invisible when it is lined up in a direct line with the earth and sun—the time of conjunction. However, when the moon is on the exact plane of the earth-sun orbit, it will block the sun as it moves across, thereby making an eclipse of the sun.

A lunar eclipse, which can be seen on earth far more frequently than a solar eclipse, is the exact opposite of a solar eclipse. It can occur only at the time of the full moon, exactly halfway between conjunctions, when the moon is on the opposite side of the earth from the sun. By carefully recording the time of such eclipses and calculating the amount of time between them, the ancients were able to arrive at the average length of time between conjunctions. We speak of an "average" because the actual length can vary from month to month by a few hours, primarily because of the earth's elliptical orbit around the sun and the resulting variation in the sun's gravitational pull on the moon. While satellites may enable us to record conjunctions that are invisible from earth, **ancient man could only calculate based upon averages.**

Using eclipses, the average length of time between conjunctions of the sun, moon and earth can be calculated. This figure can then be used to calculate the new moon for years—and centuries—in advance. While the exact conjunction (invisible from earth anyway, except during a solar eclipse) may vary from the calculated *molad* (a Hebrew term referring to the "birth" of the moon) by up to a few hours, the calculations average out over time. And

they are always *very* close; not accumulating lost or gained time even over many centuries.

The Hebrew calendar uses 29 days, 12 hours and 793 parts (an hour contains 1,080 parts) as the duration of the average lunar month. This works out to 29.53059 days in decimal form. According to the 15th edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, modern astronomers using satellites and computers have come up with the figure 29.530589—one one-millionth of a day difference!

How did the Hebrew calendar come to use such an accurate figure for the average length of the month? Some contend that they adopted their number from Babylonian or Greek astronomers. There is a problem with that theory, however. The figure used by the Greeks, Babylonians and Egyptians was not as accurate as that used by the Jews! If we grant that Israel of old borrowed the number from one of their ancient neighbors, then why did they modify it? How did they know to modify it just the right amount, making it more exact than the one used by anyone else? Remember, the figure used anciently to calculate the Hebrew calendar, 29.53059 days per month, was the same one used by NASA up through 1968 when satellite and computer technology allowed them to take the number out one more decimal place. How could an ancient Israelite mathematician have arrived at a more exact figure than his contemporaries? Exodus 31:1–11 shows that God's Spirit empowered two men, Bezalel and Aholiab, to have special understanding and knowledge in being able to craft the items needed for the tabernacle. Did God's Spirit also lead someone to have special ability for making astronomical calculations to fix the calendar? Clearly, someone did make a calculation that remained unsurpassed until the decade when the United States put a man on the moon!

Does the Bible support using eclipses to calculate the length of time from one new moon to another? It certainly does! Notice Genesis 1:14. God set the sun and the moon for signs and seasons. The Hebrew word for sign, *'ot*, is a term that often refers to remarkable and dramatic signs. It is used in Exodus 4:8–9 for instance, to describe the dramatic wonders that God worked in ancient Egypt. There are no more dramatic signs designed into the interaction of the sun and moon than solar and lunar eclipses. These signs provide the basis of a calculated calendar.

Additionally, the heavenly bodies were for what the *King James Version* calls “seasons” and the *Jewish Publication Society Version* calls “appointed times.” The Hebrew word is *mo'ed*. This is the term used in Psalm 104:19 where we learn that God “has appointed the moon for seasons [*mo'ed*].” In other words, the phases of the moon determine the progression of the month. God's annual festivals are either connected to the new moon at the beginning of the month or the full moon at the middle of the month.

Other biblical guidelines concern the seasonal timing of the Passover festival and the Feast of Tabernacles. We are told that Unleavened Bread is to be celebrated in the month of Abib, which means “green ears” (Exodus 23:15). From Leviticus 23 we also learn that once Israel entered the Promised Land there was to be a priestly ceremony involving the offering of the wave sheaf, the *omer*, on the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The grain harvest could not begin until after that occasion. These stipulations require that Passover come in early spring.

Also, Exodus 34:22 refers to the Feast of Tabernacles as coming at the “end of the year” (Hebrew, *tekufah*).

This term literally means a “circuit” or “revolution” of time—a cycle. In later Rabbinic Hebrew, *tekufah* became a technical term referring to the equinox and, by extension, to the season following. However, we must be careful about ascribing to Moses the technical usage of medieval rabbis. The term, used only four times in the Old Testament, was originally more general in its meaning. It is the term in 1 Samuel 1:20 that refers to the cycle of time between Hannah's conception and the birth of Samuel. In 2 Chronicles 24:23, *tekufah* refers to the time of the year when Syria attacked Judah. The other place it is used is in Psalm 19:6 where it refers to the sun's daily circuit across the heavens. Exodus 34:22 thus implies that the Feast of Tabernacles should occur when the cycle of the agricultural year is complete, about the time that summer gives way to fall. This point is made in a slightly different manner in Exodus 23:16. Again the *King James Version* translates that the Feast of Tabernacles is to occur at the “end of the year,” but this time uses a completely different word, meaning literally “the going out” of the year. It is the same term used in Exodus 13:8 to refer to Israel going out of Egypt. In other words, the Feast of Tabernacles comes at “the going out” of the harvest season of the agricultural year, right after the time when the harvest would be gathered into barns (that is why the term “Feast of Ingathering” is used), to protect it from the upcoming rainy season. This festival season of the seventh month was celebrated when summer was giving way to fall. To insist that *tekufah* could not refer to so much as one day before the autumnal equinox is to take a definition from the Talmud—not the Bible—and insist upon reading it back into scriptures written more than 16 centuries earlier.

We have seen that the Bible gives guidelines that require a calculated

calendar, such as Trumpets being celebrated for one day and not two. It also shows that the interactions of the sun, moon and earth were to be factored in so that the numbering of the days of the month would be connected with the phases of the moon. We have also seen that celebration of the festivals is tied both to the beginning of the grain harvest and to the time when crops were to be gathered into barns at the end of summer. But are other aspects of the calendar, such as the so-called “postponements,” also necessary and based on biblical guidelines?

We must note that in the Hebrew calendar, the new moon of the *seventh month* (Tishri) is calculated, rather than the new moon of the first month (Abib). As this is the only new moon that is designated as holy time, it is also the new moon that is most essential to determine. The other holy days are figured from it. There is also an astronomical reason for this practice, since the time from the vernal equinox (spring) to the following autumnal equinox (fall) is about a week longer than from the autumnal equinox to the following vernal equinox.

The “postponements” are simply calendar adjustments that determine which day should be proclaimed as the first day of Tishri. While there are generally said to be four postponement rules, actually there are two primary ones. The other two are just logical extensions of the first two, to ensure that a year does not have too many or too few days.

The first rule we should look at states that if the calculated conjunction, the *molad* of Tishri, occurs after noon on a given day, the first day of the month is “postponed” until the following day. This rule results from the way time is measured on a round earth, and the length of time the moon takes to move out of conjunc-

tion and beyond the arc of the sun. After all, the term for “new moon” in scripture refers to the “repairing” of the moon. While a calculated calendar does not require that the visible crescent be sighted, it should at least be theoretically possible to sight that crescent. And it takes six hours past the conjunction before the moon has moved far enough beyond the sun’s arc to begin reflecting light once again—the “repairing” of the moon. Whether or not a reflection is actually seen is purely incidental, as the calendar is based upon the calculated averages. Clearly though, this postponement rule is not merely based upon a Pharisaic tradition, rather, it is mandated by Scripture and by astronomy.

The other main rule is that if the calculated *molad* of Tishri occurs on a Sunday, Wednesday or Friday, the first day of the month (which will be the Feast of Trumpets) is considered to begin on the following day, i.e., Monday, Thursday or Saturday. What is the scriptural basis for this? In Leviticus 23, where God first gave Moses a detailed list of His festivals, He explained that these days’ levels of sanctity fell into two categories. For six of these days—the first and seventh Day of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, the first day of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day—Moses was to instruct Israel that “no servile work” be done. However, the weekly Sabbath and the Day of Atonement were different. On these two days, “no work whatsoever” was to be done. Clearly God placed these two days in a slightly different category than the others. Additionally, in describing Trumpets, the first day of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day, the term *shabbaton*, translated “Sabbath,” was used. For the weekly Sabbath and the Day of Atonement a different descriptive term—*shabbat shabbaton*—was used, translated “a Sabbath of rest.”

Recognizing that God set the weekly Sabbath and the Day of Atonement apart in their level of sanctity, the Levitical priesthood sought to implement these instructions in proclaiming the festivals. They realized that the Day of Atonement, a *shabbat shabbaton* upon which “no work whatsoever” was to be done, should not be the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath (which would occur if the first of Tishri came on a Wednesday). Additionally, they avoided the weekly Sabbath being the preparation day for Atonement, which would happen if Tishri 1 fell on a Friday.

This practice also avoided the weekly Sabbath, *shabbat shabbaton*, being the preparation day for the other three fall holy days which were only *shabbaton*, (this would occur if Tishri 1 came on a Sunday). Note that according to Exodus 12:16, the first and seventh days of Unleavened Bread in the spring were in a different category; God had specifically approved the preparation of food on these days. And Pentecost, of course, always fell on Sunday as a result of God-ordained calculation.

Two other rules concerning postponements are really just logical extensions derived from the first two, regulating the number of days in a year so that the first of each month stays connected with the new moon.

The calendar adjustments regarding Tishri 1 are based upon instructions God gave to the Levitical priesthood through Moses in Leviticus 23. God made clear that two days—Sabbath and Atonement—had a special degree of sanctity, and based upon those instructions the priesthood sought to conform their celebrations to His wishes.

(Editor’s note: In the January-February 2001 Living Church News, John Ogwyn will explain in part 2 of this article who has the responsibility for keeping the calendar.) ☞

The Hebrew Calendar—Part 2

Who Is Responsible for the Calendar?

By John H. Ogwyn

Does God expect individual Christians to determine His calendar for themselves? Many self-appointed calendar experts each claim that *their* calendar is the right one. Did God intend the calendar to be proclaimed by an authoritative body—or is it “every man for himself?” Increasingly, we see people simply doing what is right in their own eyes. Is God the author of such spiritual anarchy? To whom did God give responsibility for the calendar?

God told Moses: “The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts” (Leviticus 23:2). But who was to do the proclaiming, and what does this mean?

The Hebrew term for convocation is *miqra*, which refers to an officially called or designated assembly. In Numbers 10:2, Moses was told that two silver trumpets were to be made and one of their major purposes was “for the calling [Hebrew *miqra*] of the congregation.” Who was to use those trumpets? Verse 8 explains: “The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations.”

Verse 10 explains that “in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months...” the priests were to sound the silver trumpets.

The noun *miqra* is derived from the verb *qara*, the verb rendered “proclaim” in Leviticus 23:2 and 23:4. What exactly does it mean? It is the same word used in Genesis 1 where God “called” the light Day and “called” the darkness Night (Genesis 1:5), where He “called” the firmament Heaven (1:8), “called” the dry land Earth and “called” the gathered waters the Seas (1:10).

Later, we learn that God brought before Adam the animals He had created to see what he would call them. “And whatever Adam called [*qara*] each living creature, that was its name” (Genesis 2:19). So we see that *qara* means “to call”—to name or to designate. In Genesis 1 it was God, and in Genesis 2 it was Adam, who did the naming or designating.

How does this relate to the holy days? In Leviticus 23, we learned that a certain group, (“you,” plural) was responsible for naming or designating the days on which the congregation was to assemble before God. Numbers 10 explains that this refers to the priesthood, and shows the means

God gave them to announce the designation of new moons and festival days. It was not an individual matter for each Israelite to arrive at by himself; rather it was a collective matter to be proclaimed by an authoritative body.

But there is more! Most read right over the implications of *who* was to name, or designate, the days that would be considered God’s appointed festivals. The priesthood was given the right to name, or designate, those days—in the same way that God gave Adam the authority to name, or designate, the animals He had created. God gave the priesthood guidelines and principles by which they were to designate those days, but He did not spell out every single detail. He gave them the principles with which they had to make judgments!

It is important to notice the difference between the weekly Sabbath that God gave to mankind, and the annual festivals that He gave to the Church. God did not tell the priesthood that they were responsible to name or designate the weekly Sabbath. God Himself had proclaimed the weekly Sabbath at the end of creation week. Mankind was simply told to “remember” and keep holy the time that God Himself had previously

designated. The annual festivals were different, as Leviticus 23:2 and 23:4 show. While each individual could simply remember to observe as holy the seventh day of every week, this was not possible with the annual festivals. Their exact timing would vary somewhat from year to year, regulated by the principles that God gave Moses in Leviticus 23 and elsewhere. So we see that while the weekly Sabbath is to be remembered by each of us as individuals, the annual festivals are to be named or designated on the calendar each year by an authoritative body. They were never intended to be an individual matter!

If each of us seeks to determine our own calendar, we will end up celebrating the festivals on a variety of days. Yet God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) nor is He the source of the spiritual anarchy that many so effectively promote today. Paul told the brethren in Colosse that they were not to let any man judge them in matters pertaining to holy days, new moons, or Sabbaths, but rather “the body of Christ”—the Church (Colossians 2:16–17, KJV). The Church has again and again concluded that the current Hebrew calendar, preserved in the Jewish community, is authoritative for Christians today.

Which Calendar Did Christ Use?

We know from the New Testament that Jesus Christ observed the holy days and festivals commanded in Leviticus 23. Did He do so based upon a calculated calendar such as we use today—one that included the so-called “postponement” rules—or did He use a calendar based solely upon physical sighting of the new crescent? One thing is for sure: Jesus Christ did it correctly! If we know what He did, then all we have to do is to follow His example. But is it possible to know what He did? Absolutely!

The place to go to find the kind of calendar which was authoritatively proclaimed during Jesus’ human lifetime is *not* the Talmud and later rabbinical writings. These documents were written well after the fact, and record history with a Pharisaic bias. Since the Pharisees dominated the Jewish community after the fall of the temple, their traditions came to be considered normative Judaism. The rabbis who compiled the Talmud were their successors, and often sought to read later traditions back into earlier history.

Interestingly, many who claim to reject the Hebrew calendar because they consider it a tradition of the Pharisees have used the Talmud as their source of calendar information and definitions—rather than simply using the Bible itself! While later rabbis tried to harmonize the traditions of an observed calendar (favored by the Pharisees) with the principles of a calculated calendar (preserved by the Sadducee priesthood), the two are not really compatible. Much of the Talmud’s tortured logic relating to the calendar comes from its attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. However, we are not dependent on the record of the Talmud, or Josephus for that matter, to know what calendar Christ used. We have the authoritative record of the New Testament itself!

From the biblical record, we are able to match three festivals during Christ’s ministry with the days of the week on which they fell. As we will see, these three festival dates are compatible **only** with *one* calendar model—the **calendar used by Jesus Christ thus stands revealed by the New Testament!**

The year of Christ’s crucifixion, and therefore of His final Passover, can be established clearly by correlating the prophecy in Daniel 9 with the historical occurrence described in Ezra 7. Daniel explained that

there would be a time period of 70 prophetic “weeks”—i.e., 490 prophetic “days.” We are told that 69 of these “weeks” (i.e., 483 years) would run from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the appearance of the Messiah. Ezra 7 records the decree of King Artaxerxes that begins the count of the prophetic “weeks.”

Secular history makes plain that the Artaxerxes’ seventh year occurred in 458–457BC. The only question is whether or not the author of Ezra-Nehemiah (one book in the Hebrew scriptures) was figuring the years of Artaxerxes’ reign by counting from fall to fall or spring to spring. A careful comparison of Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1 shows that a fall-to-fall reckoning was used. Nehemiah refers to an event in the month Kislev (December) of the 20th year of Artaxerxes, followed later by an event in the month Nisan (April) in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. The only way that both of these events could have occurred in the king’s 20th year would be if the author was figuring the years of the king’s reign from fall to fall.

This means that when Ezra 7 says that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem with the decree in the late summer (fifth month) during the seventh year of Artaxerxes, this must refer to 457BC. If we come forward 483 years, this brings us to just before the fall festival season of 27AD. This would be when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and began His three-and-a-half-year ministry—He began in the fall of 27AD and was crucified in the spring of 31AD.

This reference in Ezra gives us a benchmark. We also know from the biblical record, apart from these calendar questions, that Jesus Christ was crucified on a Wednesday and resurrected three days and three

nights later, at the end of the weekly Sabbath. This means that the Passover of 31AD, the scripturally established time of His crucifixion, had to occur on a Wednesday. Additionally, we will see that the day of the week is made plain for two other festival dates. One is the Last Great Day of 30AD, which occurred on a weekly Sabbath. And Scripture shows that the second holy day of Unleavened Bread in 29AD fell on a weekly Sabbath. Now examine how we date these two festivals.

John 7–13 recounts the events of the fall festival period preceding Jesus' final Passover. A careful reading also shows that most of the events of John 8–10 happened on the Last Great Day. Jesus' words in the temple during the evening of this day are recorded in John 7:37–39. At verse 53, Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives for the night, returning to the temple early the next morning—the daylight portion of the Last Great Day (John 8:1–2).

If we simply read on through the next chapters, we find that the woman taken in adultery and the healing of the blind man both occurred on that same day. From John 9 we already knew that the blind man was healed on an annual Sabbath; John 9:14, using the definite article with its Sabbath reference, states plainly that it was also a weekly Sabbath, which is why such an issue was made of the healing.

John gives us the basis for reconstructing the chronology of Christ's ministry, noting Jesus' words and actions on several specific festival occasions. We have already seen that John the Baptist baptized Christ in the fall of 27AD, just when Daniel's prophecy showed the Messiah should appear. Six months later, at the Passover season of 28AD, He suddenly came to the temple and began His public ministry (John 2). When

we carefully read John 6–13, we see that this is a continuous sequence of the last year in Jesus' life, from the Passover of 30AD to the Passover of 31AD. Therefore, the only Passover not commented on in John's gospel is that of 29AD—and the events of that year's festival season are adequately covered in the other three Gospel accounts.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the disciples plucking ears of grain to eat as they walked with

with a later incident described as "another Sabbath" (Luke 6:6) when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand. This phrase, taken together with the points made in Mark 2:27–28—that the Sabbath was made for man and that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath—emphasizes that this was a weekly Sabbath day. Luke is the only writer who adds the detail that this took place on the second holy day of Unleavened Bread.

If each of us seeks to determine our own calendar, we will end up celebrating the festivals on a variety of days. Yet God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) nor is He the source of the spiritual anarchy that many so effectively promote today.

Jesus through the grain fields. The placement of this incident—in Matthew 12:1–8, Mark 2:23–28 and Luke 6:1–4—shows that this occurred early in His ministry, not during the Passover the year before His crucifixion. This only leaves the Passover season of 29AD.

How do we know that this incident occurred at the Passover season? Luke 6:1 makes this clear by describing that it happened "on the second Sabbath after the first." What does that mean? The Greek phrase used is *en sabbato deuteroproto*, which literally means "the second Sabbath of first rank." This expression can only refer to the seventh day of Unleavened Bread, the second Sabbath of first rank occurring in the year.

The rest of the story—contained in the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke—shows that this was also a weekly Sabbath. All three writers link the event in the grain fields

Do these facts provide evidence for the kind of calendar that Jesus recognized in His lifetime? Using today's calculated Hebrew calendar, notice what the dates of these events in Christ's ministry would be. Remember that today, leap years are years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19 of a 19 year cycle instead of the earlier 2, 5, 7, 10, 13, 16 and 18. How do the dates from the calculated calendar compare to what would have been obtained by sightings of the new crescent moon?

In 29AD, the last day of Unleavened Bread would have occurred on Sabbath, April 23, according to our traditionally calculated Hebrew calendar. This date results from applying one of the postponement rules, since the *molad* (or new moon) of Tishri that year occurred after noon and the reckoning of Tishri 1 would therefore have been postponed to the next day. This is the only way that the last holy day

of Unleavened Bread could have come on a weekly Sabbath in 29AD. By contrast, using computer-generated models to determine the timing based upon the observable new moon in Judea, physical sighting would have caused the last holy day of Unleavened Bread to fall on Sunday, April 24 in 29AD.

As for the Last Great Day in 30AD, calculations based on the traditional Hebrew calendar show that it would have occurred on Sabbath, October 7. No postponement rules would have been involved. But, significantly, the Last Great Day would have occurred on the weekly Sabbath *if and only if* the calendar were based upon the calculated *molad* (the mean conjunction), **not** the visible sighting of the new crescent. This is made clear by examining the computer model for the observable new moon in 30AD. The first visible crescent could have been seen from Jerusalem **no earlier** than Sunday night, September 17, thus making Trumpets Monday, September 18 and the Last Great Day Monday, October 9 by that reckoning.

In 31AD, the calculated date for Nisan 1, according to the traditional Hebrew calendar, was Thursday, April 12. This would have occurred **only** if the postponement rule that did not allow the Feast of Trumpets to come on a Friday had been in effect. The calculated *molad* of Tishri came on a Friday in 31AD, and only by having postponed Tishri 1 to a Sabbath would Passover in 31AD have come on a Wednesday. It is true that the observable new moon of Nisan would have also been seen on Thursday, April 12, thus coinciding with the calculated date for Nisan 1. However, we have just seen that the dates of the other holy days mentioned during Christ's ministry only coincide with the proper day of the

week when they are figured based upon a calculated *molad* rather than an observable crescent. As we saw earlier, the biblical calendar guidelines require calculation rather than physical sighting.

There is one additional point regarding the timing of Passover in 31AD. Passover would have come on April 25 **only** if 31AD were counted as an intercalary year. Otherwise, the Passover would have fallen a month earlier—on Monday, March 26! Unless the priests were following a fixed cycle of intercalary years, there would have been no reason to observe Passover in April rather than in March of that year! The equinox was March 23 at that time, and there would have certainly been some ripe grain for the priests to offer on the day of the Wavesheaf—March 28 by Pharisee reckoning and Sunday, April 1 by Sadducee reckoning.

The timing of three festivals during Christ's ministry is clearly shown in the New Testament. The Passover of 31AD would have occurred on a Wednesday only if there were a fixed calendar cycle making 31AD an intercalary year. A calculated calendar would have required Tishri 1 to be postponed from Friday to Saturday for the dating to work out properly. And the Last Great Day of 30AD would only have come on a weekly Sabbath if a calculated calendar were used, though no postponements within that calendar would have been necessary that year. As for the last holy day of Unleavened Bread in 29AD, it would have come on a weekly Sabbath only if a calculated calendar were used and the noon postponement rule was in effect. Clearly, the Gospel accounts show that these holy days occurred in a way that could **only have happened** if a calculated calendar using the postponement rules had been in effect in the time of Jesus Christ.

A Calendar for the Church Today

The rules of the current Hebrew calendar—the calendar traditionally used by the Church of God—are based upon Biblical principles. These rules, as we have seen, can be deduced directly from scripture and do not depend on Talmudic traditions and legends. Furthermore, Scripture clearly reveals that God assigned to an authoritative body, anciently the priesthood, responsibility to name or to designate the annual festivals. This was never intended to be a matter of private interpretation. In addition, we have the example of Jesus Christ Himself, as given in the Gospel accounts. The calendar He used is far more in accord with the one the Church uses today than are any of the alternative models that have been proposed.

The Church has clearly and consistently judged that Christians should use the received Hebrew calendar in observing God's festivals. It is interesting that we have historical witness and testimony, from no less an authority than Roman emperor Constantine, that three centuries after Christ's crucifixion, the true Church was still reckoning its festival dates by the same calendar used by the Jewish community. At the Council of Nicea, held in 325AD, the timing of the Paschal festival was discussed (the early Catholics were replacing Passover with Easter, but were still using the scriptural name—the Greek term *pascha*).

Note some excerpts of Constantine's decree as preserved by the early Church historian Eusebius. He wrote that it seemed, "a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this most holy solemnity... rejecting the practice of this people, we should perpetuate to all future ages the celebration of this

Counting Pentecost 2001

The Days of Unleavened Bread begin on a Sunday this year, and end on a weekly Sabbath. This configuration of the spring holy days does not occur very often. Whenever it does, it raises questions for some regarding the counting of Pentecost.

Leviticus 23:15 instructs us to count Pentecost beginning with the Sunday of the Wavesheaf, and going forward seven Sabbaths until the day after the seventh Sabbath. The question thus arises—which Sunday is the Wavesheaf this year? Is it the Sunday that is the first holy day of Unleavened Bread, or is it the Sunday following the last holy day?

The answer is clear when we look not only at the instructions for counting Pentecost, but also at a specific biblical example of a year when the spring holy days fell just as they do in 2001. God does not leave His people having to guess at how to obey Him in this matter.

In Leviticus 23:6–8, Moses gave the people God's instructions for observing the Days of Unleavened Bread. In verses 10–14, he explained something additional they were to do, after entering the Promised Land, when they had crops to harvest. They were told to wave before God, on the morrow after the Sabbath, an omer of the first ripe grain. Only after this ceremony were they permitted to eat the newly harvested grain from their fields (v. 14). Naturally we may ask—when the first holy day of Unleavened Bread came on a Sunday, would that day also be the day of the Wavesheaf?

The answer is found in Joshua 5, which records the first Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread that Israel celebrated after crossing the Jordan River and

entering the Promised Land. From verse 10 we learn that the Israelites observed the Passover on the plains of Jericho. Verse 11 states, “And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain on the very same day.”

There are only two alternatives. In Leviticus 23:10–14, God gave Israel clear instructions about what to do after entering the Promised Land. We must either conclude that Joshua disobeyed this instruction from God, or we must conclude that he followed the instructions that Moses had recorded.

If he followed them—which he clearly did—then the day after the Passover that year was also the day of the Wavesheaf. The Israelites could only have begun to eat grain after the High Priest waved the omer that morning. Of course, the day after the Passover is *always* the first holy day of Unleavened Bread. Therefore, the first holy day of Unleavened Bread could only have come on a Sunday that year. It was also celebrated as the day of the Wavesheaf. The year Israel entered the Promised Land must have had the same calendar configuration that we have in 2001.

Pentecost for this year thus comes exactly seven weeks after the first holy day of Unleavened Bread. It will be celebrated on Sunday, May 27, just as God's word instructs.

rite, in a more legitimate order... Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews... let us withdraw ourselves, my much honored brethren, from that most odious fellowship. It is indeed in the highest degree preposterous, that they should superciliously vaunt themselves, that truly without their instruction, we cannot properly observe this rite... [they continue] wandering in the grossest error, instead of duly reforming their calcu-

lation...” (*A Historical View of the Council of Nicea*, Eusebius, pp. 52–53). Constantine, like many self-styled experts today, considered himself more knowledgeable about the calendar than were the Jews, and asserted that they should reform *their* calculations. Constantine's attack was aimed, however, not at influencing the Jews, but rather at those Christians who followed the Jewish calendar in determining the time of the Passover. The true Church was

not following its own calendar model; rather it was using the same model that Jesus Himself had followed—the one preserved and used by the Jews!

Is the Hebrew calendar valid for the Church today? Absolutely! It adheres to the revealed guidelines of Scripture, was proclaimed by authorities accepted by Jesus Christ Himself and was kept by the Church of God from the beginning. For what more could we ask? ☐

The Hebrew Calendar and God's Church

By John H. Ogwyn

In the last decade, the Church has seen increasing controversy about its use of the Hebrew calendar to celebrate God's commanded Holy Days. Historically the Church has used the calendar preserved by the Jewish community. Some have contended that the Jews have not properly preserved the calendar, and have altered it by human tradition since the time of Jesus and the Apostles. Is this true? Do we have a Biblical basis for concluding that the calendar we now use is substantially the same as that used by Jesus and the Apostles?

Faced with this issue many years ago, Mr. Herbert Armstrong concluded that Romans 3:1–3 showed that the calendar, along with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, was among the oracles of God. As such, he concluded, the Church should use the same calendar that the Jews had preserved, including its “postponements”—the four rules that determine which day should be proclaimed as the first day of Tishri, the date from which all other days of the year are calculated. In recent years, however, some critics have asserted that the postponements represent a fourth-century rabbinical invention, and were not used at the time of the Apostolic Church.

In years past, the Church has published several articles explaining the basic principles and workings of the calendar. This brief article does not seek to duplicate that information, but is simply meant to answer the question of whether or not we can prove that the current calendar rules, including postponements, were in use during the time of Christ. The answer is that we can! Here is how.

From the Bible we can clearly prove that for Jesus to be in the tomb three days and three nights as He said, the crucifixion must have been on a Wednesday. Clearly then, whatever year Christ was crucified must have been one in which Passover came on a Wednesday and the first holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the High Day Sabbath of John 19:31) occurred on a Thursday. During the range of years that are possible for the crucifixion to have taken place, only two could have had Wednesday Passovers. One is 30AD, when the Passover would have fallen normally on a Wednesday. The other is 31AD, in which Passover would only have been on Wednesday if the current rules of the Jewish calendar (including the postponement rules) had been in effect. Can we know for sure when the crucifixion occurred?

The answer is a resounding “yes”—and the key is contained in scripture. In Daniel 9, the prophet recorded that 70 “sevens” (literal Hebrew) were determined upon

the people of God. From the going forth of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Messiah, the Prince, should come, would be 69 weeks. The Messiah would be cut off in the midst of the 70th week. This prophecy of a three-and-a-half year ministry is confirmed by a careful study of the gospel accounts.

Christ was crucified in the spring, so His ministry must have begun in the fall to accommodate the half-year. If Christ was crucified in 31AD, He was baptized by John the Baptist in the fall of 27AD. But if He were crucified in 30AD, He would have been baptized in the fall of 26AD. Which was it?

The 69 prophetic weeks from the decree until the Messiah's appearance would equal 483 years. The decree was the one recorded in Ezra 7 issued by Artaxerxes in his seventh year and delivered to Jerusalem by Ezra in the fifth month of that year. So the question is simple, **when was the seventh year of Artaxerxes?**

A reliable source for dating the reign of Artaxerxes is a book entitled *Babylonian Chronology 626 B. C. to A. D. 75* (Parker and Dubberstein, Brown University Press) which is based upon translations of ancient Babylonian documents and inscriptions. This book clearly dates the accession of Artaxerxes after the death of his predecessor, Xerxes, in 464BC. After taking the throne in July-August of 464BC, Artaxerxes completed his “accession year”—also credited as the final year of Xerxes' reign—then in the fall of 464BC began the first year credited to his own reign. We should note that the vast majority of credible extra-Biblical scholarship agrees with this 464BC date. To accept any other date introduces problems with other aspects of historiography, so we can comfortably accept this date, agreed upon by scholars who have no agendas in the calendar and postponements controversies.

To find the end-date of the 69 weeks prophecy, we must understand whether the Biblical account figured the years of Artaxerxes using a spring-to-spring reckoning or a fall-to-fall reckoning. If figured spring-to-spring, then Artaxerxes' first year began in April of 464 and ended in April of 463. His seventh year would have been from the spring of 458 to the spring of 457. This would mean that Ezra brought the decree in the late summer of 458BC. The 69 prophetic “weeks” would thus end in 26AD.

Spring-to-spring reckoning was the standard practice in Babylon. In ancient times, some nations started their new

The Hebrew Calendar
continues on page 21

year in the spring, while others started in the fall. Here, spring-to-spring reckoning and fall-to-fall reckoning refer to the way in which a king's reign was counted. Judah and Israel at different times used both methods for figuring the reigns of kings. The different methods were used for different purposes as well; the religious year always began in the spring, but the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year were reckoned from the fall (Leviticus 25:8-9).

Did the author of Ezra-Nehemiah, traditionally one book in the Hebrew scriptures, use the spring-to-spring manner of reckoning? Or did he figure the king's reign fall-to-fall? If he used a fall-to-fall system, Ezra's arrival would be dated

in the late summer of 457BC. That would put the Messiah's appearance in 27AD and the crucifixion in 31AD.

Can we know for sure which method of reckoning the Biblical author used? Can we determine whether the crucifixion took place in 30AD or 31AD? Absolutely!

Notice Nehemiah 1:1. Here is described news that Nehemiah received in the month Chislev (ninth month, corresponding to December) during the 20th year of Artaxerxes. Then in Nehemiah 2:1 we learn that the king noticed his sad countenance in the month Nisan (first month, corresponding to April) during the 20th year of Artaxerxes. Do you see the significance of this? In the following spring, four months after the news delivered in Nehemiah 1:1, the king was still in his 20th year! This conclusively proves that the author of

Ezra-Nehemiah used a fall-to-fall reckoning! If a spring-to-spring reckoning were used, then Nisan would have been counted as the beginning of the 21st year of the king's reign.

Here is conclusive proof from the Bible that 457BC is the proper date to begin the count from the decree of Artaxerxes. This means that Christ was crucified in 31AD. The only way that the Passover of that year could come on a Wednesday, as the Gospel accounts clearly show that it did, was that the current rules of the calendar, including postponements, were used by the Sanhedrin during the time of Christ and the Apostolic Church. By accepting the current Jewish calendar as our standard, we are following the example of Jesus Christ, Himself, and that of the early Church! ☞