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The Jewish Calendar and Biblical Authority

by Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., 1991

The calculated Jewish Calendar that most Jewish organizations (and some Christian groups) adhere to today is ingenious, sophisticated and awe-inspiring to all who study it. Its scope is so vast in its various functions that it provides a workable calendar for the Jewish people with such precision that it can operate effectively and harmoniously for several thousand years into the future no matter where Jewish people live in the world. Those who devised it created a notable scientific and mathematical achievement. In a word, what it set out to establish for the Jewish people is a systematic calendar that blends the commands of Moses for a Holy Calendar with close reference to raw astronomical data found in the heavens in such a beautiful and precise way. Its creation has to be reckoned as one of the greatest scientific accomplishments of late antiquity. Indeed, recognizing its calendrical parameters makes it capable for the modern prophetic interpreter to comprehend some important biblical prophecies of the future (both in the Old and the New Testaments).

But in spite of these things, and no matter how valuable and marvelous the creation of the Jewish Calendar is, it still has its limitations. In fact, it can even lead people far astray from proper prophetic interpretation if its chronological factors are not comprehended properly by those who use it. There is no subject that prophetic interpreters ought to study and to understand more than this one involving the Jewish Calendar. This Prophetic Report will give an introduction to the study of the Jewish Calendar that will place it into a proper perspective of importance for Jews as well as for Christians today. Let us look at this important subject.

Authority of the Jewish Calendar

At the outset it ought to be made clear that the present Jewish Calendar is an authoritative one that is sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures though it is not in strict accord with the calendar established by Moses nor that which the Jews had in the time of Christ. The upkeep of the Holy Scriptures and the calendar was placed by Moses into the hands of the priests and elders of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:9). The apostle Paul also stated that the oracles of God (that is, the words that make up the Holy Scriptures) are committed or entrusted into the hands of the Jewish authorities (Romans 3:1,2). And even more pointed is the teaching of Christ himself which stated that the Jewish authorities in Christ's time known as the Scribes and Pharisees were those who sat in the very Seat of Moses and that those under the Mosaic Law ought to pay strict attention to what they say. Jews should do as they command, but not with their hardheaded demeanor regarding the application of those laws and regulations (Matthew 23:1-3).

In my view, these commands (and especially that of Christ) make it clear that those who wish to abide by any of the Laws of Moses -- that is, any of those laws and commandments authorized for Israel at the time of Moses -- ought to submit to the modern Jewish authorities who had these matters entrusted to them by God. This means that the calendar that they officially present to the Jewish people to observe, should be

kept and followed precisely because we find at no time in Scripture that the authority to sit in Moses' Seat was ever taken away from the Jewish authorities (or, as Christ stated, the Scribes and Pharisees). Even the apostle Paul recognized the authority of the High Priest and accepted his office as proper in matters of government judgment (Acts 23:1-5).

Thus, for those in the world (be they Jews or Christians) who submit themselves to the rule of the Law of Moses, they are obligated in the scriptural sense to abide by the official judgments of the Sanhedrin of the Jews. Though there is no Sanhedrin (the biblical Supreme Court) at the present, there was a Sanhedrin in the fourth century that made the decision to accept the present Jewish Calendar as official and that the Holy Days positioned on that calendar should be those that all adherents of the Law of Moses should follow. If a further Sanhedrin is ever raised up (that is, another "Seat of Moses"), then what that official body of Jewish authorities decides is what all keepers of the Law of Moses ought to observe. This means, simply, that since Passover is now reckoned by the Jewish officials as being on Nisan 15 and Pentecost on Sivan 6, these two days should now be observed by keepers of the Law of Moses even though different days may have been kept in Christ's time. Thus, the present Jewish Calendar and the Holy Days which God ordained under Moses and the later Sanhedrin should now be accepted by the Jews and that all Christians who feel obligated to observe the Old Testament laws and commandments of Moses should follow the Jewish officials. Christian teachings of the New Testament, however, are quite another thing.

The apostle Paul made it abundantly clear that Christians who make up what Paul called the "new man" (that is, the "new person of the Mystery" described in Ephesians and Colossians) need not adhere to the Jewish Calendar or to the Holy Days of God once given under the rulership and authority of Moses. "Let no man, therefore, judge you in eating or in drinking, or in respect to matters concerning a holy day, a new moon or of the sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but [let] the Body of Christ [judge you]" (Colossians 2:16 Greek meaning). The "Body of Christ" is your judge and it is not a group of "church leaders" who tell you what you must do.

What is the "Body of Christ"? It is ALL the *ekklesia* of God which is made up of individuals who each has a one-on-one relationship with the Father through his or her attachment to Christ (I Timothy 2:5). It is a group of people who comprise what Paul calls "the Household of God" which collectively make up a Holy Temple of God (Ephesians 2:19-22). All together they are reckoned by the Father in a legal sense to be nothing less than Christ himself. Such people as ourselves are citizens of heaven in God's eyes (Philippians 3:20 Greek) and we are presently sitting on the right hand of the Father (legally speaking) on a glorious throne in Christ Jesus even though we are actually still living on earth (Ephesians 2:6).

And as for those of us who make up the "Body of Christ," we have already been circumcised with Christ, baptized when he was baptized, died when he died on the tree of crucifixion, resurrected with him when he was resurrected almost 2000 years ago, and we have legally ascended (with Christ) to sit on the very throne of the Father in the highest of the heavens (Colossians 2:11-3:4; Ephesians 2:6). We are now citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20 see Greek) and we are no longer subject to the rules for men (whether they were intended by God for man's use or intended by man for man's use). We are no longer reckoned, in the eyes of the Father and Christ Jesus, as being citizens of this world, whether citizens of the nation of Israel or whether citizens of the variety of nations on this earth which are not Israelite.

And remember, there are only two individuals who are in religious authority over any of us in the Body of Christ -- in the *ekklesia* (erroneously called "the church"). Those two persons are Christ Jesus and God the Father. **"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"** (I Timothy 2:5). There is no longer any body of men sitting in Moses' Seat or in some kind of "church" or denomination who have the slightest authority to tell you or me what to do in matters

involving religious belief or practice. No man has the authority to demand of you what to eat or drink, when holy days are for you to obey, when sabbaths are for you to observe, or when new moon days are for you to acknowledge and to heed. You and I are "new persons" in Christ. We are reckoned as citizens of heaven and we make up the heavenly Household of God (a new Temple of God) though we are still on earth until Christ's return. The regulations that govern us are those that govern the Father and Christ and they observe no holy days or sabbaths (John 5:17).

However, for those Israelites and Christians who still wish to abide by the Law of Moses and its calendar and holy days, God places the safekeeping of the calendar and holy day interpretations in the hands of those who sit in the Seat of Moses. The Jewish authorities still have control over the calendar. And when Christ decides to return from heaven, many of the prophetic events described in the Holy Scriptures will often be governed by important commemorative days or Sabbaths on the Jewish Calendar. This is why it is profitable to know what the rules of the calendar actually are and especially to know how to interpret the calendar symbols properly.

Some Elements of the Jewish Calendar

Our present Gregorian calendar relies strictly on the motions of the Sun and pays no attention to the Moon whatever. The biblical calendar, however, combines both Lunar and Solar motions in its scheme. All months begin with their new moons (Isaiah 66:23). In fact, the word for "month" and "new moon" is the same in Hebrew.

All the ancient festival periods of Israel (other than the weekly sabbaths) were determined by the days of the Moon (month). Yet the festivals were agricultural in design and were also required to be kept in their proper seasons as governed by the Sun (Exodus 13:10). The state of the crops near Jerusalem were important in the performance of the festival ceremonies (Leviticus 23:9-21), and if the crops were not sufficiently mature, the ecclesiastical year would be postponed one month to accommodate this. While the Temple rituals were in operation, this seasonal feature always had to be taken into account. Thus, the motions of the Sun and those of the Moon were acknowledged by the priests in their determination of the calendar year. This was necessary so that the proper times for the celebration of the festivals were not disturbed. This feature shows that the rituals governed the calendar, not vice versa. The calendar was part and parcel of the ritualistic system that God imposed upon ancient Israel. Those Christians who presently insist on observing the biblical calendar of the Old Testament must remember that they are perpetuating the use of the ritualistic system which Christ supplanted.

"In which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation."

- ***Hebrews 9:9,10***

Why should Christians want to continue with ritualistic systems now made redundant?

Major Difficulties

Though astronomical calculations for the present Jewish Calendar are geographically centered on Jerusalem, the present calendar avoids the commandment in the Bible to watch the state of the crops around Jerusalem for determining the start of the year. This is because the present calendar is an entirely calculated one without actual reference to the precise motions of the Moon or Sun each month or year. It has even introduced extra ritualistic features not commanded by the biblical legislation. As a matter of fact, the present Jewish Calendar prohibits the first day of each month from occurring on certain

days of the week. For example, it will not allow the first day of Tishri (the Day of Trumpets) to happen on a Sunday, Wednesday or a Friday.

This new rule, which was devised after biblical times, prevents the weekly sabbaths in the Autumn from occurring in tandem with the annual holydays. This rule came into effect about the middle of the fourth century of our era when Rabbi Hillel the Second made the present calendar known to the Jewish people. However, in the Mishnah, the earliest part of the Talmud which was composed about the beginning of the third century, this rule did not apply. Festival days could then occur next to the weekly sabbath (*Erubin* 3:6). And though the modern Jewish Calendar prohibits the Day of Trumpets (the civil New Year) from happening on a Sunday, this was not so in the time of Christ -- nor for two centuries afterward (*Shabbath* 19:5).

Also, the month of Elul (the sixth month) sometimes had 30 days ascribed to it in the time of Christ (if the Sanhedrin so decided), yet the modern Jewish calendar never allows it to have more than 29 days (Danby, *The Mishnah*, p.125). Adding one such day that could have been legal in the time of Christ may not seem like too much, but coupled with the modern rule that three particular weekdays for the beginning of months are prohibited (as explained above), this could mean the present Jewish calendar could be two or three days astray from the type of calendar in use in the time of Christ. Besides this, if the new moon is calculated on the modern calendar to occur on or after the hour of noon, it is the next day that becomes the first of the month not the day on which the new moon is calculated. But if this day is also a prohibited day (those mentioned above), the month is further postponed another day. Again, the new moon day of the calendar in the time of Christ was reckoned by observing the crescent moon in the west from Jerusalem which could only be seen after the astronomical new moon about 18 to 20 hours later. But the present Jewish calendar can begin with only a minimum of six hours after the astronomical new moon. This was also not in effect in Christ's day and it has nothing to do with the biblical calendar.

A More Important Problem

The present Jewish Calendar is mathematically symmetrical within itself (but not in strict accord with astronomy or, as we have seen, with biblical teaching). Astronomically speaking, it has the assumed length of the year being too long by six minutes, thirty-nine and one-third seconds. This may appear insignificant, but it is not. This discrepancy causes the whole Jewish Calendar to creep forward on the true seasons one day in every two hundred and sixteen years. The Passover of the present calendar is already, in 1991, almost eight days ahead of the seasons as measured by the Sun from its initiation in the fourth century A.D. If this process is allowed to continue, the Passover of the Jews (plus those of all our Christian friends who follow the same modern calendar) will be occurring in late Springtime and finally early Summer. This feature is in complete disharmony with the teachings of Scripture about the proper time for the celebration of Passover. However, if the simple observational rules which regulated the calendar in the time of Christ were still in operation (instead of a calculated calendar which pays no attention to the actual positions of the Sun and Moon) such problems would not happen.

A Major Error Associated with the Modern Jewish Calendar

When the modern Jewish Calendar and its calculations were made known in A.D.358 by Rabbi Hillel the Second, its beginning point for calculation was determined to be in 3761 B.C. To be precise, it was reckoned as being the creation day according to Moses and this was calculated to be the first day of Tishri in 3761 B.C. These calendar computations were helpful in settling the question of whether the creation mentioned by Moses was in the Spring or in the Autumn, and with the calendar of Hillel the Second, the creation day was determined as being October 7th on our Solar Calendar in the year 3761 B.C. In the Bible, calendar dates were reckoned from Autumn in the times previous to Moses

because it was Moses who started the Springtime new year of the Jews for the sacred seasons and for all things dealing with the priesthood (Exodus 12:1,2).

Now note this point (and people have wondered about it for generations): If the calendar of our Jewish friends starts with October 7, 3761 B.C., that means that this present Jewish year of 1991 to 1992 (which began at sundown Jerusalem time on September 8, 1991) is actually the year 5752 from creation. This indicates there are still 248 years before the Millennium can begin. Is this an accurate year for the creation?

In no way is the year 3761 B.C. for creation correct. I have shown in two major Prophetic Reports on Old Testament chronology that there were exactly 4000 years reckoned between the first Adam (our first parent) and the last Adam (Christ). Please send for these Reports if you wish precise information about this. So, why are the Jewish authorities off by well over 200 years? The answer is plain. The originators simply took off from chronological time a little over 200 years from the Old Testament indications to keep the 4000 years from creation ending up in the time of Christ. They thus created a fictitious year-date for creation some 200 plus years shy of the true date as indicated in the Old Testament itself. Even the time they arbitrarily selected as their benchmark for beginning their modern calendar shows it is a fictitious date. Their beginning mark is the second day of the week, the fifth hour of the day (from 6 P.M. Jerusalem time) and about 12 minutes past the fifth hour. This, as anyone can see, is not what the Holy Scriptures state. Creation began (at least in Genesis 1:1) with 6 P.M. on the first day of the week. So, even the beginning time for the modern Jewish Calendar does not square with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

The truth is, the modern Jewish Calendar is a calendar that has numerous features that, do not agree with the plain teachings of the Holy Scriptures not with strict astronomical relationships. It is still an authoritative one for Jewish people. It was designed to last them until the Messiah arrives (or a new Sanhedrin emerges) and then they could officially return once again to the pristine calendar observations that were conducted in the Temple in Christ's time.

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