

May 2000

Frank W. Nelte

DON'T BASE YOUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAWS ON: 'A SNAPSHOT IN TIME'

In God's Church we understand that God requires us to obey Him and His laws. But our obedience must go further than just a ritualistic compliance with all of God's laws. As Jesus Christ explained at one point during His ministry:

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:10 AV)

Here Jesus Christ was pointing out that if we do ONLY those things that God has clearly commanded us to do, THEN we are still only "UNPROFITABLE servants", not a very desirable situation to be in at all. God clearly expects MORE from us. So the question arises:

IN WHAT WAY does God expect "MORE" from us than is clearly commanded?

There are TWO ways in which we should grow in order to produce "MORE" than just doing "those things which we are commanded to do".

1) The first and obvious way is TO DO MORE in every area of our lives, to go the extra mile, to go above the call of duty. This applies to those areas where God's instructions are clear and obvious. Thus: God has commanded us to tithe on our increase and to give offerings to Him at His three Feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16-17; etc.). We can "do more" by rounding UP our tithe in God's favour and by carefully planning ahead for our offerings at His Feasts, rather than just meeting the minimum requirements. God has commanded us to keep His Sabbaths holy. We can do more by planning ahead for each Sabbath to be fully prepared, rather than having to continually deal with "oxen in the ditch", which a little forethought could easily have anticipated and planned for. We can do more by even avoiding things that may perhaps be acceptable, but which could have "the appearance of evil". etc.

2) The second way is to do more BY UNDERSTANDING MORE! I am NOT talking about academic head-knowledge that doesn't translate into how we live and what we do one way or the other (e.g. knowledge about prophecies and about how many resurrections there will be and the truth about "the soul", etc.). No, I am talking about UNDERSTANDING THE MIND OF GOD more fully. We need to not only understand WHAT God commands us to do; we need to also strive to understand WHY God commands us to do the things He commands us to do. Understanding WHY God commands us to do certain things and to behave in certain ways lifts our obedience from the level of being "ritualistic" to the level of "thinking like God"!

[Comment: By "ritualistic obedience" I mean ALL obedience that is carried out without understanding WHY God has given this instruction. I am NOT using this term to mean "picky" or "meticulous" obedience (which are often the same thing but seen from different viewpoints).]

These two areas were mentioned by the Apostle John in the following way:

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those

things that are pleasing in his sight. (1 John 3:22 AV)

The first area is implied by the expression "because we keep his commandments". The second area is implied by the expression "because we do those things that are pleasing in his sight".

The Greek expression here translated as "in his sight" is "enopion autou". "Enopion" is a preposition meaning "before", and "autou" is the genitive case of the pronoun "he", thus meaning "of him". Thus Young's Literal Translation renders this expression as "... and the things pleasing before Him we do", and Green's Literal Translation renders this as "... and we do the things pleasing before Him".

Now in order to be able to do the things that are "PLEASING BEFORE GOD" there is ONE requirement we have to meet: WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND HOW GOD THINKS!

You cannot please a person whose thinking you do not understand. If you do not understand how their mind works, then your attempts to please that person will at best be hit-and-miss efforts. And if their mind works in ways that are DRASTICALLY DIFFERENT from the way your own mind works, then your chances of displeasing them at various times are actually quite great!

Perhaps some of the best biblical examples of this point can be seen in the life of King David. Other examples can be found in the gospels, which show that people on many occasions simply did not understand how Jesus Christ's mind worked. Here are several examples that illustrate that people around David did not really understand how his converted mind worked.

1) The young Amalekite who came to David THOUGHT that David would give him a reward for having killed King Saul. That's what was "logical" to the mind of this young Amalekite. He didn't understand that David would have him killed for having killed "the LORD's anointed". See 2 Samuel 1:2-15.

2) When two men of the tribe of Benjamin killed Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David, they, too, thought that David would reward them for having killed one of David's "enemies"; that was "logical" to their way of thinking. They also didn't understand that David would have them killed for their foul deed of murder. See 2 Samuel 4:5-12.

3) While the child born to Bathsheba was very sick, David fasted to seek God's intervention for the child. But when the child died, then he broke his fast and asked his servants to bring him food. His servants didn't understand how David could do this. To their minds it was "logical" to INCREASE in the expression of grief after the child had died, whereas David stopped grieving as soon as he knew that the child was indeed dead. They didn't understand David's mind. See 2 Samuel 12:15-23.

So the point is quite clear:

IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO PLEASE SOMEBODY WE MUST UNDERSTAND HOW THAT PERSON'S MIND WORKS!

So in order to be able to do the things that are pleasing before God, we must FIRST understand the mind of God. We must first understand God's real INTENTIONS and His PURPOSES! Let's understand the process that is involved.

THE PROCESS OF COMING TO UNDERSTAND

In Isaiah chapter 55 we are told by God:

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9 AV)

This is our STARTING POINT! That's how we human beings start out, not really understanding God's mind and God's ways. However, it is NOT God's intention that it should stay this way. Not at all! We need to change that so that MORE AND MORE "our ways" become a reflection of "God's ways", and "our thoughts" become a reflection of "God's thoughts".

The first step in this process is for us to repent! When you counseled with a minister for baptism, he may have told you that you not only need to repent of all the things you have DONE, but that you also need to repent of what you ARE. I know of many people who have had a hard time trying to understand this second aspect of repentance, repenting of "what they ARE".

The Greek word in the New Testament for "repent" is "metanoeo" and really means: "CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK". This Greek word is not directed at the outward actions of the person; rather, it is directed AT THE MIND! The word "metanoeo" is made up from "meta" + "noeo". "Noeo" means "to think", coming from the noun "nous" which means "MIND" and "UNDERSTANDING".

Our English word "repent" is derived from the Latin "repenitet", which means "to be sorry again". This is somewhat misleading, because the New Testament instructions "TO REPENT" were NOT a call "TO BE SORRY AGAIN"! The New Testament instruction "to repent" is really a call "TO CHANGE OUR WAY OF THINKING AND OUR CONDUCT"! It is the LATIN word that has introduced the concept of "being sorry" into the repentance process.

It is not a matter that a focus on "being sorry" is wrong. But that focus on "being sorry" should not obscure THE REAL FOCUS of the New Testament instruction, which is on CHANGING OUR WAY OF THINKING!

So we can summarize repentance with three brief points:

- 1) Have real sorrow over past sinful conduct.
- 2) STOP sinning.
- 3) CHANGE THE WAY WE THINK!

And the third point is by far the most important part of the whole process. It is the foundation on which the first two points must be built. The expression "repent of what you ARE" should really be taken to mean "change the way you think"! We are to change our way of thinking from the carnal way of the world to thinking with God's point of view as our foundation.

Having taken that first step of repentance (i.e. changing the way we think), God then does HIS PART in the process by giving us the free gift of His Holy Spirit. When we receive the Holy Spirit this then CONVERTS our minds (i.e. it CHANGES OUR MINDS). So after we have first indicated our desire and our willingness to change our way of thinking (i.e. by repenting), THEN God makes such a change in thinking possible by giving us His Holy Spirit (i.e. by converting our minds). This process Paul referred to as having our minds RENEWED.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2 AV)

With our minds having been "renewed" by the receipt of the Holy Spirit, THEN we are in a position to start thinking like God, and to understand God's will and God's intentions. And so Paul instructed God's people as follows:

Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*. (Ephesians 5:17 AV)

The Greek words here translated "the will of the Lord" are "to thelema tou kuriou", and Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines "thelema" as "WHAT ONE WISHES OR HAS DETERMINED SHALL BE DONE". Paul is talking about what God "WISHES" we are to do! It is Paul's way of saying what John wrote in 1 John 3:22, that we do the things that are pleasing before God.

The receipt of the Holy Spirit has enabled us to do this, by enabling us to understand THE MIND OF GOD, His thoughts and His ways.

Now the mind of God is far more concerned with wanting to know what goes on in OUR minds than it is concerned with our outward actions. Through the power of the Holy Spirit God knows what goes on in our minds and what motivates us to do the things we do. As Paul wrote:

For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 AV)

So here is the point we should understand:

God knows our innermost thoughts and intentions and motivations. And once we have received the Holy Spirit, then WE SHOULD UNDERSTAND GOD'S THOUGHTS AND INTENTIONS! The Holy Spirit should enable us to understand "THE INTENTS OF GOD'S HEART", because He has REVEALED His heart and mind and intentions throughout the pages of the Bible!

As Paul explained:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10 AV)

Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit reveals to us the mind of God, the deep things of God, how God thinks and what God's real intentions and purposes are.

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:3-5 AV)

The "mystery" reveals God's intentions and God's purposes.

After he had presented a very clear overview of God's plan and purpose, Paul then concluded that section in the Book of Romans by saying the following:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! FOR WHO HATH KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36 AV)

Certainly no human beings have been God's "counsellor". But Paul did not mean to imply that no human beings CAN know the mind of God; after all, he had just spent 11 whole chapters explaining "the mind of God", the plan God has set in motion and how it will be achieved.

Paul asked the identical question in his letter to the Corinthians. But in that place he also provided the answer to this question. Notice:

For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16 AV)

By "the Lord" Paul is referring to Jesus Christ. So here Paul asks the question: "WHO has known the mind of Jesus Christ?", and then he answers this question by saying "WE (ministers) HAVE the mind of Jesus Christ". His answer is: we DO understand the mind of God. We do this by submitting our minds and our wills to God, and by SEEKING to understand His mind.

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S REAL INTENTIONS

For converted Christians Paul said:

For we know that THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (Romans 7:14 AV)

In other words, we, who have God's Spirit dwelling within us, can understand that God's laws are SPIRITUAL! We can understand that NONE of God's laws are an end in themselves; NONE of God's instructions to us were given without some underlying purpose and intention. We can understand that all of God's laws and instructions are an expression of God's character and God's mind, translated into our physical circumstances. There are REASONS for all of God's actions.

Our Christian journey STARTS OFF by learning WHAT God tells us to do and HOW God wants us to live. But that journey CONTINUES by learning WHY God tells us to live a certain way and WHY we are to adhere to certain laws. It is only after we have come to understand the WHY of all of God's instructions that it will become evident whether or not OUR MINDS are not only submissive to, but also, and even more so, IN FULL AGREEMENT WITH all of God's ways.

That "Christian journey" is far more important than "the starting point". People can have the right "starting point" and still end up being "unprofitable servants". It is THE JOURNEY that is important. As David wrote in the Psalms:

Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. (Psalm 25:4 AV)

Learning "God's ways" is a process that overcomes the obstacle of Isaiah 55:8, which we looked at earlier. Learning about "God's paths" involves understanding God's purposes and God's intentions.

Teach me to do thy will; for thou *art* my God: thy spirit *is* good; lead me into the land of uprightness. (Psalm 143:10 AV)

Learning to understand God's mind and God's intentions is a process that takes effort and study and meditation. It goes beyond looking at the letter of the law and determining to abide by that letter of the law. There are TWO things that help us to come to understand God's mind and God's intentions. They are:

- 1) The Bible
- 2) God's whole creation

Paul explained the second point as follows:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE: (Romans 1:20 AV)

Notice! "The invisible things of God" can be understood by looking at the physical creation all around us. This goes so far that even God's eternal power and His plan to create a Family can be understood from the way God has created everything that we can see. The physical creation all around us clearly reveals God's intentions and God's way of working.

So we have a responsibility to seek to understand God's mind and His intentions and His purposes. There is no excuse, as Paul pointed out, for not making the effort to do so.

TRANSLATING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING INTO ACTIONS

The more fully we come to understand the mind of God, the more this should translate into our daily actions, how we conduct our lives. Understanding God's real intentions for any specific instruction should result in "doing more" than we are commanded to do, and so avoiding being classified as "unprofitable servants". Head-knowledge alone is of no value. It is the putting into practice of that knowledge that can produce things of value.

One clear lesson we will learn if we are striving to really understand the mind of God is this:

SOMETIMES THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD'S REAL INTENTIONS AND THE WAY SOMETHING WAS DONE AT A SPECIFIC POINT IN TIME!

The way something was done at a specific point in time I have referred to as "A SNAPSHOT IN TIME".

To better understand the mind of God let's take a look at some of these "snapshots in time" and compare them to God's REAL intentions.

SOME SNAPSNOTS IN TIME

Here are a number of different areas to examine.

1) Marriage and divorce:

At the time of Moses God gave Israel instructions that REGULATED the process whereby a marriage could be terminated by divorce. These instructions were still in existence about 1500 years later, at the time of Christ's ministry. So any Israelite who lived between the time of Joshua and the time of Christ's birth would have known that God's laws allowed him to divorce his wife in certain circumstances. But Jesus Christ then explained:

... Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but FROM THE BEGINNING IT WAS NOT SO. (Matthew 19:8 AV)

So anyone living at the time of David or of Hezekiah or of Ezra might well have thought that God is quite agreeable to the concept of divorce. But Jesus Christ here made very clear that GOD'S INTENTION had never been that there should ever be such a thing as divorce. As God said through the prophet Malachi: "I HATE DIVORCE" (Malachi 2:16).

So to understand the mind of God on this matter, we must go back "to the beginning". The fact that God created ONE man and ONE woman revealed God's intentions that marriage should be for life. We cannot base our understanding of this subject on "a snapshot" that might have been taken at the time of David or of Hezekiah.

2) Polygamy:

During Old Testament times God also gave Israel laws that regulated polygamy. This did not mean that God ever INTENDED for people to engage in polygamy. Again "from the beginning it was not so"! Yet "a snapshot" taken in the time of King David would reveal that IT NEVER EVEN CROSSED DAVID'S MIND that it might be contrary to God's intentions for him to have more than one wife. After all, God told David through the prophet Nathan:

And I GAVE thee thy master's house, and THY MASTER'S WIVES INTO THY BOSOM, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. (2 Samuel 12:8 AV)

So what could possibly have been wrong with David having numerous wives? Yet God's creation of ONE man and ONE woman made quite clear that God's INTENTION was monogamy.

3) Slavery:

During Old Testament times God also gave Israel laws that regulated the practice of slavery. This practice existed throughout the time of the Old Testament. Even someone as brilliant as the Apostle Paul didn't seem to see any problems with the practice of slavery. Instead, Paul encouraged slaves to be faithful and loyal to their masters.

Yet we today should be able to see quite clearly that "FROM THE BEGINNING IT WAS NOT SO"! It was never God's INTENTION that some human beings would end up being THE PROPERTY OF other human beings, without any of the freedoms that we today take for granted as being the inalienable rights of every human being. To understand God's mind on the question of slavery we cannot look at this from "a snapshot in time"; we must look at what God intended FROM THE BEGINNING!

4) Marriages between close relatives:

It is clear that God INITIALLY intended for the sons of Adam and Eve to marry their own sisters. When God then brought exactly 8 human beings through the flood (Noah, his wife, their 3 sons and their 3 wives), it is also clear that God AT THAT POINT IN TIME intended for Noah's grandsons to marry either their own sisters or their first cousins. Even the 9th generation after Shem (i.e. Abraham) still had marriages to close family ... Abraham had married his half-sister Sarah, and Abraham's brother Nahor married his own niece, Milcah, the daughter of Haran. Even the father of Moses had married his own aunt Jochebed (see Numbers 26:59). Through his mother Moses was a grandson of Levi, but through his father Moses was a great-grandson of Levi.

It was only at the time of Moses that God made clear that FROM THEN ONWARDS people should NOT make marriages between close family members. This was approximately 2500 years after God had created Adam and Eve.

This is an example where God's intentions are not seen from what God did AT THE BEGINNING, but only at a later point in time. The reason is found in THE WAY God creates. God creates by setting processes in motion. God's real intention of people marrying outside of immediate family only came into effect once humanity had reached a certain size and diversity. Had mankind's perverse ways not resulted in God bringing on the flood in the days of Noah, the time for this instruction to not marry close family may well have come much earlier?

5) Military service and warfare:

At the time of Moses God gave Israel specific laws that regulated the process of military service. And God at various times instructed Israel to go to war against specific nations and to destroy them. Military service and warfare have continued with us to this time. We still have wars.

BUT FROM THE BEGINNING IT WAS NOT SO!

It was never God's intention when He created Adam and Eve that some human beings would kill other human beings. That process started when Cain killed his brother Abel. And in the New Testament Jesus Christ made clear that we are not to engage in killing and warfare.

So while "a snapshot" at the time of David would show that God actually helped and supported David in all the warfare he was involved in, this would NOT give us a true reflection of God's intentions on this question.

6) The way to keep the Old Testament Passover:

Exodus 12 makes clear that God INTENDED this observance to be carried out at people's homes by one or two families getting together for this observance. The Passover lambs were to be killed by each household at their homes.

"A snapshot in time" will show that at later times they killed the Passover lambs at the Temple (perhaps in the time of Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 30, or at the time of Josiah, 2 Chronicles 35, or even at the time of Christ's ministry). To understand God's INTENTIONS we need to look at the instructions God gave AT THE BEGINNING (i.e. when God FIRST commanded the Passover to be observed). This becomes clear from Jesus Christ's own observance.

Jesus Christ very plainly said that He was eating THE PASSOVER with His apostles.

And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat THIS PASSOVER with you before I

suffer: (Luke 22:15 AV)

"This Passover" that Jesus Christ ate had not been killed at the Temple, but in complete accordance with the original Passover instructions. [Jesus Christ also then changed the instructions for us by replacing the Passover meal with the unleavened bread and the wine.]

Again the point is that if we want to understand God's real INTENTIONS regarding the Old Testament Passover, then we must look at God's original instructions, and not at "a snapshot in time".

7) Building "booths" for the Feast of Tabernacles:

The original instructions for observing the Feast of Tabernacles (i.e. Leviticus 23:34-42) say NOTHING AT ALL about "building" anything! There is NOTHING in those instructions about making some kind of shelter to dwell under. On the first Day of Tabernacles, A HOLY DAY, and not before (Leviticus 23:40), they were to take branches from certain trees to symbolize rejoicing, much like what happened when Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem shortly before He was killed (see Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8; John 12:13). This was NOT an instruction to somehow BUILD some kind of shelter ON THE HOLY DAY! By then they would already have spent their first night at the Feastsite.

"A snapshot in time" will show that the only time since the days of Joshua, when anyone actually MADE booths, was at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (see Nehemiah 8:14-17), about 1000 years after Moses. And even then, they didn't actually attempt to "DWELL" in the booths they had made ... they only "SAT UNDER THE BOOTHS" they had constructed on their roofs and in their courtyards and on the street (Nehemiah 8:16-17). When people went to Jerusalem for Tabernacles during Christ's ministry and during the lives of Peter and Paul, nobody attempted to LIVE in some kind of "booth constructed from branches torn off the trees surrounding Jerusalem". People from out of town lived in rented accommodation, like the upper chamber that Jesus Christ rented for observing His last Passover.

To correctly understand God's INTENTIONS regarding the Feast of Tabernacles, we need to carefully read the original instructions in Leviticus 23 without reading our own ideas into those verses. We cannot rely on "a snapshot" from the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, something that even Ezra and Nehemiah did not repeat in subsequent years.

Nehemiah 8:17 also shows that AT NO TIME did Samuel or David or Solomon or Hezekiah or Josiah or Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel or Daniel EVER "build booths" to dwell in for Tabernacles. The verse says:

"... and sat under the booths: FOR SINCE THE DAYS OF JOSHUA THE SON OF NUN UNTO THAT DAY had not the children of Israel done so."

The above seven examples illustrate that there may indeed sometimes be a difference between God's original instructions, or God's clear INTENTIONS, and the way something is done in subsequent ages, even to the point where "this different way of doing something" appears to have God's stated or implied approval.

WHY IS THIS SO? HOW CAN THAT BE?

God tells us:

For I *am* the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. (Malachi 3:6 AV)

People have sometimes read their own interpretations into this verse, to draw conclusions that are not really justified. The verse tells us that GOD does not change. This means God's character doesn't change, His purposes and intentions don't change, His goals don't change. However, God's ways of interacting with man HAVE changed at various times! And the things God has required of us HAVE also at various times changed.

To illustrate this:

1) God didn't require Abel or Enoch or Noah or Shem to be physically circumcised. From the time of Abraham onwards physical circumcision became a requirement. Since the time of Jesus Christ's ministry physical circumcision has again ceased to be a requirement.

2) In Old Testament times God required people to observe the Passover by killing a lamb. Since the time of Christ's crucifixion God has required us to observe the Passover by doing the footwashing and taking the unleavened bread and the wine. This is a change.

3) In Old Testament times God "allowed" men to be polygamous. For a member of God's Church today to have two or even five wives at the same time would be considered by most of us to be A MAJOR SIN (unless perhaps (?) the man was living in a primitive third world area and had become polygamous long before coming into God's Church).

4) It wasn't a sin for David to kill 200 Philistines and to collect their foreskins as a dowry for King Saul's daughter Michal. Yet it would be A MAJOR SIN for any man today to try to collect that kind of "dowry" for his bride-to-be. God will not permit us today to do what David was allowed to do in this context.

5) God had NOT required His people before the time when Israel left Egypt to implement any kind of "official sacrificial system". God only commanded the sacrificial system a full year after Israel had come out of Egypt. And since the time of Christ's death this sacrificial system has again been removed from being "a requirement". Something has changed.

6) None of the people God used and worked through in Old Testament times were required to be baptized by being fully immersed under water. Today ALL those who profess to submit their lives to God are COMMANDED to be baptized by full immersion. This is a change.

7) In Old Testament times people were allowed (even encouraged) to make oaths. Today God has very strictly FORBIDDEN us to make any oaths (see Matthew 5:34). This is a change.

None of these things have changed God! They haven't changed God's character or God's intentions and purposes. But they DO represent God dealing with man in different ways in different ages.

There is a reason why God will at times change the way He interacts with us human beings.

SIN IS THE REASON

God's original intention in creating man was to guide man through a process that would enable man to develop the kind of character that God will be willing to share His own existence with, to have as sons and daughters in His eternal Family. That original intention has never changed. Everything God has done in His dealings with mankind has been aimed at achieving this goal. Nothing has drawn God away from that goal.

BUT AS MAN HAS SINNED, SO GOD HAS CHANGED THE WAY HE WORKS WITH MAN!

When Adam and Eve sinned, then God CHANGED the plan for mankind from the way God would have implemented it, had Adam and Eve NOT sinned during that 1-day test God initially exposed them to.

When man's sins became so great and so perverse that God could no longer put up with those sins, then God CHANGED the course He had intended for human history, by bringing on a worldwide flood.

When after the flood man's sins again increased dramatically, then God CHANGED the plan by dividing man into different language groups. This language barrier was a direct consequence to man's sins.

When Israel in the wilderness continued to sin, then God CHANGED the plan and no longer drove the Canaanites out of the land for Israel; from then onwards God required the Israelites to do the driving out themselves.

When Israel continued to sin even more, then God again CHANGED His requirements for them, and imposed the ritualistic sacrificial system "as a schoolmaster" (see Galatians 3:24) upon them.

When Israel continued to sin even more, then God CHANGED the course of history for them, by at various times bringing in foreign invaders who subjugated them.

When Israel continued to sin even more, then God CHANGED the course of history again, by allowing them to be taken into foreign captivities.

When men dealt selfishly within marriage, then God CHANGED from His initial intentions for marriage by "allowing" both, polygamy and divorce. While God officially "allowed" these things in order to prevent society descending into total chaos, these things nevertheless carried AUTOMATIC penalties; all polygamy and all divorce entailed automatic pain and suffering for someone.

When greed became the driving force in economic dealings, then God CHANGED from His initial intentions and "allowed" slavery.

SIN HAS ALWAYS CAUSED GOD TO CHANGE THE WAY HE DEALS WITH MAN!

At the very least sin caused God to separate away from man. Sin creates a barrier between us and God. On top of that, sin causes God to impose ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS on man, like a burden that is intended to teach us the lesson that sin does not pay. At the most serious level sin causes God to destroy rebellious mankind. But sin ALWAYS ushers in changed conditions. AFTER sin has been committed, things are NEVER the same again as they had been before!

Sin always ushers in changes!

As we grow in our understanding of the mind of God, and of God's initial intentions, we need to be sure that our obedience is not just to the letter of the law, but also to THE SPIRIT AND THE INTENT of the law. When there appears to be a difference between God's original intention (e.g. that marriage is to be for life) and "a snapshot in time" (e.g. that God appears to have sanctioned divorce from the time of Moses onwards), then our obedience needs to be based on God's original intention, rather than on "the snapshot in time".

Now let's look at one particular area in which this understanding can also help us, and that is in the question about THE CALENDAR.

THE CALENDAR AND "A SNAPSHOT IN TIME"

We have already seen from Romans 1:20 that God's INTENTIONS can be seen by looking at the physical creation around us. So what can the creation tell us about the calendar?

Let's note the following points:

1) At the end of the sixth day of the re-creation week in Genesis 1 we are told:

And GOD SAW EVERY THING THAT HE HAD MADE, AND, BEHOLD, *IT WAS VERY GOOD*.
And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31 AV)

The "everything" God had made in that re-creation week specifically included: the daily cycle (on the first day), the monthly lunar cycle and the annual solar cycle (on the fourth day), in addition to all the plants and all animal life and the creation of human beings. So in Genesis 1:31 God also pronounced THE MONTHLY LUNAR CYCLE to be "very good", and likewise the YEARLY SOLAR CYCLE to be "very good".

2) The only direct references God ever makes to the length of a month are to EXACTLY 30 DAYS, and the only direct references God ever makes to the length of a year are to EXACTLY 360 DAYS. These references are found in prophetic messages. No other lengths for the month and for the year are ever directly referred to in the Bible.

3) In the days of Noah we find that a period of EXACTLY 5 months was equal to EXACTLY 150 days (i.e. compare Genesis 7:11 and Genesis 7:24 and Genesis 8:4). This translates into 5 consecutive months of exactly 30 days each.

This is the only place in the Bible where a specific length of time is identified in TWO different ways, by the number of days involved, and also by the starting date and the ending date being identified by their positions within the yearly cycle (i.e. the 17th day of the 2nd month and the 17th day of the 7th month). Nowhere else do we find such meticulous data, spanning two or more months, preserved.

[Comment: In the Book of Ezekiel we find a period of 437 days elapsing between Ezekiel 1:1 and Ezekiel 8:1, and the dates are: Year 5 Month 4 Day 5 and Year 6 Month 6 Day 5. So Ezekiel 1:1 and Ezekiel 8:1 are EXACTLY 1 year and 2 months apart. This cannot fit into a yearly cycle of 360 days, as that would give us a maximum of 420 days between the two dates. By the time of Ezekiel, approaching 1800 years after the time of Noah, the Babylonian calendar was in use with its months alternating between 29 days and 30 days in length, and with a 13th month added seven times every 19 years, to avoid the start of the year drifting away from spring into winter. But even with that Babylonian calendar, which was identical to the Jewish calendar, you cannot fit exactly 15 lunar months into 437 days. This tells us that SOME DAYS which are not accounted for passed between Ezekiel 1:1 and Ezekiel 8:1. So the record in Ezekiel is NOT as accurate in identifying a specific period of time as is the record from the days of Noah. However, this record in the Book of Ezekiel DOES show that by that time SOME years already had 13 months with anywhere from 383 to 385 days for the length of such a year, which means that anywhere from 442 to 445 days ACTUALLY elapsed between Ezekiel 1:1 and Ezekiel 8:1. Of these only 437 days are accounted for.]

4) The record of 150 days being equal to EXACTLY 5 months in the days of Noah certainly implies a year being exactly 360 days long, consisting of 12 months of exactly 30 days each. Some people have tried to argue that it is supposedly THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE with OUR PRESENT LUNAR CYCLES for 5 consecutive lunar months to have exactly 30 days each.

THIS IS NOTHING BUT AN ABSURD ARGUMENT INTENDED TO GET AROUND THE EVIDENCE FROM THE DAYS OF NOAH!

I have a record of ALL the lunar phases from 1582 AD to 3000 AD into the future, a period of over 1400 years ... and NOWHERE in that more than 1400 year-period is there a period of 150 days that makes up exactly 5 lunar months! Nowhere!

Now let us just "SUPPOSE" that with our present lunar cycles it is occasionally possible to have 5 consecutive lunar months of 30 days each. HOW OFTEN would it be "LIKELY" for this to occur? The answer is LESS THAN ONCE IN 10000 YEARS! Now supposing that "once in 10000 years" situation would have happened to hit jackpot, and occur in the year of the flood. HOW LIKELY would it be for those 5 lunar cycles of 30 days each to have occurred for the 2nd - 6th months ... as opposed to for the 1st - 5th month, or the 3rd - 7th months, or 4th - 8th months, or 5th - 9th months, or 6th - 10th months, etc., etc.? What about the likelihood of those 5 lunar months of 30 days each bridging TWO years ... such as from the 12th month of the year before the flood to the 4th month of the year of the flood; or from the 10th month of the year of the flood to the 2nd month of the year after the flood? That chance (of exactly the months we need being the 5 consecutive months of 30 days each) is certainly less than one in ten.

So when we assume our present lunar cycles to have been extant at the time of Noah, then the chances of 5 months of 30 days each having occurred EXACTLY from the 2nd to the 6th months in the year of the flood are MUCH LESS THAN ONCE IN ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND YEARS! But man's whole existence is only about 6000 years long.

Those kind of odds are hardly something a gambling man would take a chance on!

With our present lunar cycles there is ONLY ONE WAY that in the year of the flood the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th months could have had EXACTLY 30 days each, and that is:

FOR GOD TO HAVE DIRECTLY INTERVENED IN THE MOVEMENTS OF THE MOON AROUND THE EARTH, AND TO HAVE INTENTIONALLY PLANNED FOR THOSE 5 MONTHS TO HAVE EXACTLY 30 DAYS EACH!

There is no other way. It is ABSURD to claim "coincidence" for such a rare, if ever (!), event to have occurred THE ONLY TIME when the Bible just happens to identify a period spanning two or more months by the exact number of days involved.

But if we say that God DID intervene to ensure that those specific 5 months had exactly 30 days each, then the question is: WHY would God have intervened in this way in the movements of the moon around the earth? Such intervention can hardly be seen as support for the present Jewish calendar with its inaccurate molads.

This record in Genesis presents us with a choice:

EITHER we believe that a less than once in one hundred thousand years coincidence occurred, OR we accept that at that time the yearly cycle was still "VERY GOOD", still consisting of each year being exactly 360 days long with 12 months of exactly 30 days each. Let's understand that the biblical record of 5 months being equal to exactly 150 days will simply not go away!

5) TODAY we are faced with a lunar cycle (as viewed from our perspective here on earth) that is rather irregular, but that AVERAGED OUT is equal to 29 days plus 12 hours plus 44 minutes plus 2.8 seconds.

The solar cycle (the earth's journey around the sun) is equal to exactly 365 days and 5 hours and 48 minutes and 46 seconds.

Now if YOU had the responsibility to create lunar and solar cycles that are "VERY GOOD", what would YOU make the length of the lunar month ... exactly 30 days OR 29 days plus 12 hours plus 44 minutes plus 2.8 seconds? And what length would YOU give your "VERY GOOD" annual cycle ... exactly 360 days OR 365 days plus 5 hours plus 48 minutes plus 46 seconds?

If YOU would create lunar cycles of exactly 30 days and solar years of exactly 360 days, THEN you would in fact be in 100% agreement with the way these cycles were at the time of Noah.

Keep in mind what I mentioned earlier, that we have a responsibility to try to understand the mind of God and to try to understand God's original intentions. We cannot plead ignorance, as if the state of these cycles somehow has nothing to do with us. We have to show God that we have A DESIRE to want to understand His intentions. Without such a desire we cannot really "PLEASE" God!

We need to acknowledge that GOD would not refer to our present lunar and solar cycles as "very good", ESPECIALLY SO when God Himself always refers to months in terms of 30 days and to years in terms of 360 days. Do we understand God's mind on this matter or not?

6) We have seen that sin always results in changes. Things are never the same after sin as what they were before sin entered. Even real repentance does not restore external things to the state they previously had. We have seen that God gave laws to regulate the matter of divorce. Yet God would hardly call those laws "very good", when God Himself tells us that He HATES divorce and when Jesus Christ explained that divorce never even featured in God's original intentions.

In view of the many areas where, because of sins, God CHANGED conditions and circumstances, we should be able to see that, BECAUSE OF HUMAN SINS, God also CHANGED the length of the lunar month and the length of the solar year. These changed cycles no longer reflect something that is "very good". Man's sins have contributed to the corruption of this universe.

Note what the Apostle Paul explained:

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (Romans 8:19-22 AV)

[For the word "creature" (Greek is "ktisis") we should read the more accurate translation of "CREATION", which is the way most translations have rendered this word in this passage.]

The whole creation, INCLUDING THE MONTHLY AND ANNUAL CYCLES, is in a state of corruption and decay. Can we not understand that IF, as Paul here claims, the whole creation is in a state of corruption, then it doesn't make sense to assume that a monthly cycle of 29 days plus 12 hours plus 44 minutes plus 2.8 seconds is still somehow "VERY GOOD"!? If anything, WE TODAY can understand far better than Paul exactly how far the monthly and the annual cycles, amongst the rest of this whole creation, have been "CORRUPTED" ... we can calculate that corruption down to the nearest second!

7) So we should be able to understand that the present corrupted cycles we have to live with are A PENALTY FROM GOD FOR OUR SINS! We (humanity) have sinned grievously and God has punished us by giving us, amongst other things, corrupted monthly and yearly cycles, yet still maintaining the sequence of spring, summer, autumn, winter, just as He promised Noah after the flood (see Genesis 8:22).

Now let's think this through very carefully!

WHAT IS GOD'S INTENTION with giving us these corrupted cycles? WHAT IS GOD TELLING US TO DO?

A parallel should help us to understand how God operates when we sin. Consider the following case:

A) God said that He would GIVE the land of Palestine to Israel.

B) God said He would DRIVE OUT the people who were already living there.

And I will send HORNETS before thee, which SHALL DRIVE OUT the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. (Exodus 23:28 AV)

By little and little I WILL DRIVE THEM OUT from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land. (Exodus 23:30 AV)

And I will send an angel before thee; and I WILL DRIVE OUT the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: (Exodus 33:2 AV)

C) When Israel sinned, the "giving" of the land was postponed by 40 years.

D) Then God told Israel that THEY THEMSELVES would have to drive the people out; God was (because of their sins!) no longer going to do it for them. God was, however, going to help them and be on their side in this "driving out" process.

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; THEN YE SHALL DRIVE OUT all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: (Numbers 33:51-52 AV)

E) By the end of Joshua's life, because of more sins, God wasn't even going to help them any longer in this process. From then on they were totally on their own in these efforts to drive other people out.

Know for a certainty that THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL NO MORE DRIVE OUT ANY OF THESE NATIONS FROM BEFORE YOU; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. (Joshua 23:13 AV)

THE LESSON?

When we sin, then God no longer does things for us, thus forcing us to do more ourselves!

Consider another example of how God works:

A) GOD made two tables of stone and wrote the ten commandments on them.

B) MOSES lost his temper and smashed those two tables of stone.

C) THEN God told Moses: now YOU make two new tables of stone and ...

THE LESSON?

When Moses sinned by losing his temper, God forced Moses to DO HIMSELF what God had previously done for him.

So what is God telling us by having given us these corrupted monthly and yearly cycles?

God is telling us, in plain language:

NOW YOU DO IT YOURSELF! I'LL STILL GIVE YOU THE CONDITIONS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR A CORRECT CALENDAR. BUT YOU YOURSELF WILL NOW HAVE TO SORT OUT HOW TO COPE WITH THESE CORRUPTED CYCLES!

8) A vital key to understanding the whole question is whether or not we can see that the corrupted cycles which confront us today are A PENALTY FOR SINS. IF we can see that they are indeed a penalty from God for our (humanity's) sins, THEN we should also be able to understand that penalties from God often INVOLVE US DOING THINGS THAT GOD HAD PREVIOUSLY DONE FOR US!

In plain language:

If we can understand that God has PUNISHED us with these corrupted cycles, then we should be able to

see that God is telling us:

You didn't want to do things My way; therefore you yourself will have to sort out the mess you have gotten yourself into. Doing things My way would have left you with the very predictable and consistent year of 12 months with 30 days each. Doing things YOUR OWN WAY means you will have a varying number of days in the months (sometimes 30 and sometimes 29); you will also have a varying number of days in the year; and you will have to have a varying number of months (mostly 12 but sometimes 13) in the year to avoid the start of the year from moving away from the spring. That's what sin does to you; it always creates problems and makes things more complicated and puts more of a burden on us ourselves.

9) In dealing with this penalty, God has forced US to make some decisions! And God has NOT made those decisions for us. He expects US to come to grips with the penalty He has imposed on us. By the very fact that God has forced us to make some decisions, this means that there are SOME things which could perhaps have been decided differently.

Keep asking yourself: WHY did God present us with these corrupted cycles? WHAT did God expect us to do to cope with such corrupted cycles?

In plain terms God has said:

A) You are to start the year IN THE SPRING for the area of Palestine.

B) You are to start each month with THE NEW MOON.

C) Make sure that Tabernacles is ALWAYS in the autumn.

D) Make sure that you ALWAYS have ripe barley available during Unleavened Bread.

E) Now you go and figure it out for yourself! Just be sure that you act in integrity and don't try to manipulate any of these instructions.

10) It shouldn't really come as a surprise to find out that the Jews with their calendar have broken ALL of these points from God:

A) They DON'T always start the year in the spring. Some years they start in the winter.

B) They DON'T always start a month with the new moon. Some months they just postpone to more convenient days of the week.

C) They DON'T always have Tabernacles in the autumn. Sometimes they start it in the summer.

D) They DON'T always have ripe barley available during Unleavened Bread.

E) They DO MANIPULATE God's instructions to suit their own unbiblical traditions.

11) Here are some of the decisions that God has FORCED us to make:

A) A round planet requires that SOMEWHERE on earth we have "an internationally recognized dateline". God has NOT told us where that dateline should be placed. Had He done so, rebellious humanity would probably have tried to place it somewhere else. As it is, this is something God left up to us to decide, just like He left it up to Adam to name all the animals that He, God, had created. And further, running the International Dateline through the Pacific Ocean is probably the best choice that could have been made.

But this is a decision that God left up to us to work out. There was no need for God to impose such a decision on mankind, and He did not do that. God recognizes the decision in this regard that has been accepted by all nations in the form of "the International Dateline".

B) God has not really legislated whether a month should start with the invisible conjunction (called "the new moon") or with first visibility of the new crescent. That is something God has also left up to us to sort out.

Consider this: whenever there is a total eclipse of the sun, THEN we can actually "SEE" the new moon conjunction. In its orbit around the earth the moon constantly cuts through the imaginary plane formed by the earth and the sun (the ecliptic), and when this happens at the time of the new moon, THEN the new moon conjunction becomes visible in the form of a solar eclipse. This will always be about 16 to 20 hours before the first new crescent of the moon will be visible SOMEWHERE on earth, and it may be as long as 40 hours before the first new crescent becomes visible at OUR specific location on earth.

Now do you know what would happen if God were to change the moon's orbit around the earth in such a way that the moon's orbit would ALWAYS be in the same plane as the sun and the earth? Why, EVERY NEW MOON would be a solar eclipse and thus EVERY new moon would actually be visible in those areas of the earth that would be facing the sun at that point in time. A small area would experience a total solar eclipse, and a larger area would experience a partial solar eclipse.

I have no doubt that our present monthly and yearly cycles are different from what God pronounced "very good" in Genesis 1:31. The question that remains is: when God CHANGED the length of the lunar cycle, did He also CHANGE THE PLANE in which the moon orbits around the earth? Had God back in Genesis 1 perhaps placed the moon in exactly the same plane as the earth and the sun? IF God had done it that way, THEN every month would have started with a solar eclipse and every month would have had a lunar eclipse in the middle of the month. That certainly would have provided profound punctuation for God's statements in Genesis 1.

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons (Hebrew "mow'ed", meaning appointed meetings like Holy Days), and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that *it was good*. (Genesis 1:14-18 AV)

IF that had been the case back in Genesis 1, THEN they would also have started every month with the actual new moon conjunction, something they could actually SEE in a very dramatic way. It would NOT have required sharp-eyed witnesses to observe such solar eclipse new moon conjunctions. There would have been no point in trying to establish the first visibility of the new crescent, when EVERY new moon was visible in the form of a solar eclipse.

A total solar eclipse only has a diameter here on earth of about 167 miles maximum; areas outside of that area will only experience a partial solar eclipse. While a rare total solar eclipse may be as long as seven-and-one-half minutes, usually total solar eclipses are no longer than 3 minutes.

In trying to understand HOW God does things, it certainly seems to me to be a possibility for the moon's orbit to have been identical to the ecliptic back in Genesis 1. Here is why I believe this to have been a possibility:

A) With the 30-day months we see in Genesis 7-8, these solar eclipses would have been exactly every 30 days. A solar eclipse to start the month; then 15 days later a lunar eclipse to show the midpoint of the month; then 15 days later a solar eclipse again to start the next month, followed 15 days later by another lunar eclipse, followed 15 days later by ... etc., etc.. That would have been the perfect "clock" in the sky!

B) This would have made it SO EASY for Adam to keep track of the calendar and the years. Adam had no past experience to help him sort out calculations for a calendar. With these eclipses at such regular intervals, there was NOTHING ELSE he needed to know or learn in order to keep track of the passage of months and years. It would be like God giving Adam a calendar "on a silver platter".

C) God had made everything SO EASY for Adam in the Garden in Eden (all his food was right there on the trees and required no effort on his part to produce). And a calendar regulated by solar eclipses would show the same kind of planning and concern in providing for Adam's needs. Such a calendar could function from Day 1 WITHOUT Adam having to have any kind of knowledge of astronomy or of lunar orbits of varying lengths ... every 30 days you have that solar eclipse.

D) An interesting parallel is found in the way the moon's orbit cuts through the ecliptic. The corrupted solar and lunar cycles have produced months of varying lengths (29 days or 30 days) and years of varying lengths (sometimes 12 months and sometimes 13 months; and sometimes less than 365 or even than 360 days and sometimes more than 365 days). It is all really somewhat like a pendulum swinging from one extreme to the other in its attempt to be correct. The orbit of the moon is also somewhat like

that, fluctuating from being about 5 degrees above the ecliptic to being about 5 degrees below the ecliptic. And twice each lunar month it actually cuts through the ecliptic (the times of potential eclipses). That "5 degrees" intersection of the ecliptic by the moon's orbit seems so much like the change from 360 days to 365 days plus 5 hours plus 48 minutes plus 46 seconds, and like the change from 30 days to 29 days plus 12 hours plus 44 minutes plus 2.8 seconds.

E) If the 15th day of EVERY month was originally a lunar eclipse, THEN two of the three annual Feasts (i.e. Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles) would always have started with a lunar eclipse. The Holy Day of Trumpets would ALWAYS have been a solar eclipse. That would have made things EASY to follow in a society that had no access to printed calendars and books.

Now I obviously don't know at all that this was the case, that the moon's orbit in Genesis 1 was the same as the ecliptic. And none of the points I have mentioned above are intended to be proof for such a claim. The only conclusion I myself draw from the above speculations is this:

I BELIEVE THAT THERE IS AT LEAST THE POSSIBILITY THAT ORIGINALLY GOD INTENDED THE MONTHS TO START WITH THE NEW MOON CONJUNCTION RATHER THAN WITH FIRST VISIBILITY OF THE NEW CRESCENT!

12) Reasons why I believe that originally God MAY have wanted the months to start with the actual new moon conjunction:

A) The timing of the new moon conjunction is one specific point in time and it is independent of your location on this planet. This makes it suitable for use as an absolute standard. You only have to agree as to which place on earth you choose to evaluate this conjunction from.

B) The timing of first visibility of the new crescent is very subjective, as it depends totally on your specific location on this planet. It takes a full 24 hours for all places on earth to experience first visibility. While this presents no problems at all for a calendar that is only applied in a small geographic area, it does make it somewhat unsuitable for a worldwide application.

C) The subjective nature of "first visibility" is also exposed when only a very few sharp-eyed people may claim to have seen the first new crescent, while the overwhelming majority of people with average eyesight would not be able to see anything at all. Relying on the conjunction eliminates such subjective assessments.

D) If God did indeed originally place the moon's orbit completely into the ecliptic, THEN the solar eclipses at the start of each month would have been FAR EASIER to establish by a far larger group of people with only average eyesight than trying to establish first visibility. With such a solar eclipse at the start of each month, there would be MUCH MORE TO TAKE NOTE OF than with the almost invisible first faint crescent.

E) The on average 3-minute duration of a total solar eclipse (and longer for a partial eclipse) is long

enough to take note of this occurrence, yet short enough to basically pinpoint a very brief point in time. I say this from the perspective of people during Adam's lifetime who would have relied more on observation than we would today. For us today mathematical calculations can pinpoint the conjunctions to within a few seconds of accuracy; we don't really need observations.

13) Whenever the solar year changed from 360 days to approximately 365 and one quarter days, this obviously made the maintenance of a correct calendar MUCH MORE DIFFICULT! The calendar that was still in use as late as the time of Noah was obviously far easier to administer. Changed conditions required SOME DECISIONS to be made!

IF at that same time the moon's orbit was changed away from the ecliptic to an angle of intersection of about 5 degrees, then it meant that THE NEW MOON CONJUNCTION could no longer be used to start each month BECAUSE the conjunctions could no longer be seen! With the conjunctions now invisible, and without any means to accurately predict the time of these conjunctions (the monthly and yearly cycles had also just been altered by God), FIRST VISIBILITY of the new crescent was really THE ONLY OPTION that was available. Without the conjunctions now being visible, they also took on less significance; there was nothing to see!

14) Until the twentieth century the precise time for each new moon conjunction was not really "FREELY" available to a large number of people. Since about 150 BC the calculations for determining the length of a lunar cycle had been available, and even Hillel II employed those calculations in his fixed calendar, BUT they were only "averaged out" calculations, and they did NOT take the fluctuations in the lunar cycles into account. And while they may have been "freely" available to scholars, they were not freely available to the larger populations. Today very precise and highly accurate calculations are available, and there are numerous different sources virtually anybody can turn to for finding out the precise times of the new moons well into the future.

So up to approximately the start of the twentieth century there were only two possible options open to people: EITHER rely on first visibility of the new crescent by going out and looking for it, OR rely on the Greek calculations employed in Hillel's fixed calendar (which do however contain an error of up to 15 hours when applied to specific new moon conjunctions in the year).

15) Consider the following point:

A) Many people in the Church will strongly challenge the idea that back in Genesis 1 each lunar cycle was exactly 30 days long, and each solar year was exactly 360 days long, and that the moon's orbit was identical to the ecliptic, and thus each month started with a solar eclipse.

B) Those same people will usually be quite willing to accept that NONE of the animals God had created in Genesis 1 posed a physical threat to Adam and Eve. Adam did NOT have to fear any of the animals God brought to him in Genesis 2:19-20 (lions, tigers, leopards, crocodiles, grizzly bears, polar bears, elephants, etc.). They are quite willing to believe Isaiah 11:6-8:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and THE LION SHALL EAT STRAW LIKE THE OX. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. (Isaiah 11:6-8 AV)

So they will believe that ORIGINALLY animals like lions and bears were harmless to Adam, that at some point these animals became dangerous to human beings, and that in the future they will again become harmless to human beings. They are willing to believe (as I myself also am most assuredly!) that lions are in the future going to eat grass and straw. The fact that the lion's jaw and teeth and stomach and digestive system are not really equipped to handle a vegetarian diet consisting of grass and straw does not deter them from believing that Isaiah 11:6-8 is indeed going to happen after Jesus Christ has returned to this earth.

They fully accept Isaiah 11:9.

THEY SHALL NOT HURT NOR DESTROY IN ALL MY HOLY MOUNTAIN: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9 AV)

They fully accept Isaiah 65:25.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust *shall be* the serpent's meat. THEY SHALL NOT HURT NOR DESTROY IN ALL MY HOLY MOUNTAIN, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 65:25 AV)

C) Whether they have thought the whole matter through or not, it should be clear that it will take SOME MAJOR MIRACLES FROM GOD to bring about these changes with animals. It is not just a matter of making these animals "tame". It really requires THEIR DIGESTIVE SYSTEMS AND THEIR TEETH to be changed in such a way that their bodies will actually be able to process a diet of grass and other vegetable products.

The miracles that are required to achieve such changes within animals are of the same magnitude as the miracles required to change the lengths of the solar and the lunar cycles and the orbit of the moon around the earth! One set of miracles is not "more difficult" for God than the other set of miracles.

D) There doesn't seem to be any direct connection between our (humanity's) sins and the solar and lunar cycles changing in their lengths. How could human sins here on earth possibly have caused such changes in these cycles?

But then neither does there seem to be any direct connection between our sins and tame and friendly animals, that had lived on a vegetarian diet, suddenly being changed into dangerous carnivores. If lions had previously eaten grass and straw, how could our sins POSSIBLY have caused lions to become dangerous carnivores?

Can we understand the mind of God? Can we understand how God RESPONDS to our sins? Can we not see that God's RESPONSE with the changes in the animals is the same type of thing as God's response in our monthly and yearly cycles?

16) Do we understand that we are dealing with THE ALMIGHTY CREATOR GOD, a Being whose powers know no limits!?! Do we understand that God is not limited to just letting physical processes run their course? Do we understand that, while God is supremely merciful and always willing to forgive transgressions upon genuine repentance (a genuine turnaround in our way of thinking and behaving), that this does not mean that our sins cannot PROVOKE God?

Do we understand that God responds to provocations with PUNISHMENTS? God does not pussyfoot around with His creation; He is in supreme control over EVERYTHING! It is a fearful thing to provoke the Eternal God! Consider some of the punishments God has poured out upon us human beings because of our hostility towards His way of life:

A) When Adam and Eve sinned, God took away from them what would have been an ABSOLUTELY BEAUTIFUL EXISTENCE! Nothing this world has ever seen since that time even remotely approaches the absolutely fantastic life-experiences God had planned out for mankind, if only mankind would have obeyed Him.

B) Because of Adam's and Cain's sins God put CURSES upon the ground (Genesis 3:17-18; Genesis 4:11-12). God CREATED WEEDS (thorns and thistles, Genesis 3:18) specifically in response to human sins, even as God has created germs and viruses in response to our sins.

C) In response to human sins God CHANGED the nature of animals, with MANY animals becoming dangerous to human beings.

D) In response to human sins God WIPED OUT all human beings, except for 4 men and 4 women, in a worldwide flood! This was a very SEVERE penalty, one that said that God BASICALLY wanted to make a new start, to start all over again! That's how far humanity had provoked God.

E) In response to more sins God CREATED CONFUSION amongst human beings by dividing the languages at the tower of Babel. All of these penalties are being COMPOUNDED, coming on top of all the penalties previously imposed.

F) In response to sins God just WIPED OUT whole cities with fire from heaven (Sodom and Gomorrah).

G) In response to Israel's sins in the wilderness God repeatedly poured out upon them plagues of various kinds, with multiple thousands of people dying in each incident. At one point God even threatened to wipe out ALL OF ISRAEL, except for Moses.

H) When Jesus Christ returns God is going to pour out terrible plagues upon rebellious humanity and SEVERAL BILLION PEOPLE will die in horrible circumstances! The destruction that will take place at that point in time is going to be ABSOLUTELY HORRIFYING, beyond our ability to even comprehend, except in some abstract, academic way. God says that those penalties will include that HE WILL SHAKE THE HEAVENS!

Therefore I WILL SHAKE THE HEAVENS, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and IN THE DAY OF HIS FIERCE ANGER. (Isaiah 13:13 AV)

The LORD also SHALL ROAR out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH SHALL SHAKE: but the LORD *will be* the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. (Joel 3:16 AV)

God's anger is going to be FIERCE and His voice will ROAR and He will SHAKE this whole planet and also THE HEAVENS! These verses show us how God responds when we provoke Him with our sins and our perverse ways. These responses by God are so terrifying that many people will literally be "scared to death"; their hearts will just fail them (Luke 21:26).

Understand that "shaking the heavens" refers to interfering with what are "established circuits" for the heavenly bodies, the stars and planets and even galaxies. And since that is something God is going to do in the future, why should He not have responded to human sins with some kind of "shaking the heavens" in the past?

When we take note of ALL the ways God has and will respond to our sins, what is so strange or unusual in accepting that God has ALSO changed the monthly cycle and the yearly cycle and the course of the moon's orbit around the earth? What is so strange about accepting that God's "INITIAL INTENTION" was for every month to have exactly 30 days, with every month starting with a solar eclipse and having a lunar eclipse at its midpoint, and with every year having exactly 360 days, but that because of our sins God has in this present age taken these perfect cycles away from us?

What would the supreme Creator God refer to as "VERY GOOD"? Does the above proposal sound "too utopian" or "too idyllic" for God to have planned for man's existence? Or would God have judged "29 and one half day cycles" and 365 and one quarter day cycles" as "GOOD ENOUGH" for man's existence?

How well do you think you understand the mind of the God who has created us?

Let's move on.

17) Now we come to "THE SNAPSHOT IN TIME"!

There is no question in my mind that at the time of Christ's ministry the calendar used by the Jews to determine the Feasts and Holy Days was based on starting each month with "first visibility" of the new crescent.

However, what the Jews did in the first century AD gives us A SNAPSHOT IN TIME! There is nothing wrong with it. But the question is still:

Is that the way God INTENDED the calendar to always be calculated, based on starting each month with first visibility of the new crescent?

What was God's real INTENTION back in Genesis 1?

A) Irrespective of whether the moon's orbit coincided with the ecliptic or not (i.e. whether or not each month started with a solar eclipse), it seems quite clear to me that the present corrupt cycles, which make up our months and years, are A PENALTY FOR SINS! The 5 months that were equal to exactly 150 days back at Noah's time will simply not go away. They MUST be taken into account. And "a penalty" means that God then placed responsibility on us human beings to do something that He had done before. A penalty implies God saying to us: "now YOU see to it how you can cope with this penalty", which is basically what God had said to Adam and later to Cain.

B) So man is responsible to construct his calendar within the framework of (or with taking into account) all the requirements and limitations for a calendar that God has spelled out in His Word.

C) IF every new moon conjunction would be visible, THEN the solar eclipses would be THE OBVIOUS CHOICE for starting a new month. Perhaps they were visible up to the time of Noah? That would certainly express the care God had taken to "provide" for His creation. But they are not visible today (except rarely).

D) IF the new moon conjunctions are NOT visible, THEN precise determination of these conjunctions is FAR MORE DIFFICULT to determine than is first visibility of the new crescent. First visibility of the new crescent may only be "second best" when compared to the actual conjunction; BUT it is far more reliable than when you do not know how to ACCURATELY calculate the invisible conjunctions in a system where the lunar cycles fluctuate from one month to the next. So basing the start of each month on first visibility is THE ONLY WAY TO GO when you don't know how to accurately calculate the conjunction.

E) If you are NOT concerned about having a calendar that will ALSO be followed by everyone else around the world, then basing your calendar on first visibility does not create any conflicts with other people. But IF you are intending your calendar to be followed by all people around the world, THEN basing your calendar on first visibility IMMEDIATELY creates conflicts. First visibility for WHO becomes the immediate question. And IF your focus is on "first VISIBILITY", THEN you either have to demand that people IGNORE first visibility in their local area in favour of first visibility in the area you have selected as your standard, OR you have a multitude of calendars around the world, with every community following their own local standard without regard for what people in other areas may do. This is so because "first visibility" takes 24 hours to complete. But such a system would be "tohu and bohu" ... confusion.

F) When God caused the sun to "stand still" at the time of Joshua (see Joshua 10:12-13), God MUST HAVE done something to the circuits of the heavenly bodies. When the shadow went backwards ten degrees (or steps) in the days of Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 20:11 and Isaiah 38:8), here too God MUST

HAVE intervened in some way in the movements of the heavenly bodies. So God DOES intervene in the movements of the heavenly bodies.

G) So the calendar in the later centuries of Old Testament Israel was based on first visibility. The geographic area in which this calendar was applied was very small, just the Middle East. Thus first visibility would never have created any problems. Communications with other areas (e.g. between Jerusalem and Babylon) generally took several weeks. There was no need to be concerned about people on other continents following the same calendar, since there weren't any people on other continents who were going to observe God's Feasts and Holy Days.

H) The Babylonian calendar was based on first visibility of the new crescent, and the year started in the spring. And the Babylonian calendar had no "postponement rules" of any kind. Thus God's servant Ezra instituted the Babylonian calendar for use by the Jews who had returned from the Babylonian captivity. It continued to be used by the Jews right into the time of the New Testament. **THERE WAS NOTHING OBJECTIONABLE TO THE WAY THIS BABYLONIAN CALENDAR FUNCTIONED!**

I) This calendar was used by Jesus Christ and His apostles in determining the Feasts and the Holy Days.

J) By 300 years later the Jews had scattered all over the Roman world. In the 350's AD Hillel II recognized that a calendar based on first visibility of the new crescent **HAD WEAKNESSES AND SHORTCOMINGS** when applied to people spread over very large geographic areas. He recognized that a more objective standard than "first visibility" was needed. So Hillel resorted to the 500-year old calculations of the Greek astronomer Hipparchus to try to determine the times of the actual new moon conjunctions. **THE STRENGTH** of those calculations is their very high degree of accuracy for **AVERAGED-OUT** calculations. **THE WEAKNESS** of those calculations is that they are **NOT** accurate when applied to any **SPECIFIC NEW MOON CONJUNCTION**.

K) However, since these 500-year old calculations were the best ones available, their error of up to 15 hours, when applied to specific new moons, was not really a problem. In selecting these calculations Hillel was doing **THE BEST** he could possibly do!

L) **THE REAL PROBLEM** was that Hillel did two things: first, he applied these calculations **WITHOUT REGARD FOR ANY SEASONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CALENDAR!** And secondly, he **MANIPULATED** the results obtained from these calculations by means of his postponement rules, to control the calendar! Such manipulation had never been possible in a system based totally on first visibility.

M) **THIS BRINGS US TO OUR TIME!**

Having recognized the above-mentioned flaws in the present Jewish calendar, we have to ask ourselves: **WHAT IS GOD'S REAL AND ORIGINAL INTENTION WITH THE CALENDAR?**

N) It is not enough to base our decisions on "a snapshot in time". Simply because at the time of Christ's

ministry the Jews started each month based on first visibility, this does not mean that this is automatically God's original INTENTION, just like the practices of slavery and polygamy and divorce and military service at the time of Christ's ministry do not mean that those practices have God's approval. The key is to determine what was God's intention "FROM THE BEGINNING"?

O) A question we should ask: if Jesus Christ was on earth today and wanted to have a calendar that would not only be applied in the small area of Palestine, but all around the world, what would He do? Would He base it on first visibility and why? Or would He base it on the new moon conjunctions and why?

P) How something was done at any specific point in history is not really the deciding factor. The deciding factor should always be: what was God's real intention FROM THE BEGINNING?

In this quest it becomes imperative that we seek to constantly come to a greater and greater understanding of the mind of God.

Q) For these reasons I personally feel that, while there are no objections to a calendar that will only function in a small geographic area being based on first visibility, for a calendar that will be applied worldwide by God's people it is preferable in the eyes of God to base such a calendar on the objective standard of the actual new moon conjunctions. I suspect, though I obviously cannot prove this, that this is what was the case with the calendar that was used from the time of Adam down to the time of Noah. This (i.e. my preference of the conjunction to first visibility) is based more on my desire to want to understand the mind of God than it is on specific clear biblical instructions.

Basing our obedience to God on "snapshots in time" is fine, PROVIDED THAT those snapshots are also in full agreement with what God's intentions were FROM THE BEGINNING!

There is just one more point I'd like to make.

"THE BAPTISM OF JOHN, WHENCE WAS IT ...?"

The most basic biblical instruction for the calendar is Exodus 12:2.

THIS month *shall be* unto you the beginning of months: it *shall be* THE FIRST MONTH OF THE YEAR TO YOU. (Exodus 12:2 AV)

The word "month" used three times in this verse is the Hebrew word "chodesh" and it means "new moon". It is the Hebrew word for "month" BECAUSE every month is to start with a new moon. So we can also read Exodus 12:2 as follows:

This NEW MOON *shall be* unto you the beginning of NEW MOONS: it *shall be* the first NEW MOON of the year to you. (Exodus 12:2)

There is no question that God had a specific new moon at a specific time in mind for STARTING the year. God said: "THIS new moon shall be ...". We'll come back to this in a moment.

Now let's look at something that took place during Christ's ministry. Jesus Christ asked the religious leaders of His day:

The baptism of John, was *it* from heaven, or of men? answer me. (Mark 11:30)

Notice how the religious leaders responded:

And they reasoned with themselves, saying, IF WE SHALL SAY, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But IF WE SHALL SAY, Of men; they feared the people: for all *men* counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. (Mark 11:31-32 AV)

They weren't really interested in THE TRUTH! They were only concerned with THE IMPLICATIONS of whatever answer they would give. They knew that IF they gave the answer they themselves believed to be the right one (that John's baptism was of men), THEN they would lose credibility with the common people, who all held John to have been a prophet.

So therefore they evaded the issue by giving an "expedient", but untruthful, reply. They said:

And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell ... (Mark 11:33 AV)

Now we have in this article talked about looking for GOD'S ORIGINAL INTENTIONS. Jesus Christ is the One who showed us that our real focus should be on the instructions God gave "FROM THE BEGINNING".

So let me ask you a question:

Regarding the new moon which GOD in Exodus 12:2 designated to be the FIRST new moon of the year ... WHEN DID GOD INTEND THAT NEW MOON TO OCCUR: IN THE SPRING OR IN THE WINTER? ANSWER ME!

The people who defend the Jewish calendar will reason as follows:

"IF WE SHALL SAY, in the spring, THEN he will say to us: how can you then support and defend

the Jewish calendar which frequently places that first new moon into the winter? BUT IF WE SHALL SAY, in the winter, THEN we fear the people, for all the people know that the Church has ALWAYS correctly taught that God starts His year in the spring."

And therefore such people who still wish to defend the Jewish calendar will answer my question expediently with:

"WE CANNOT TELL!"

In our modern terms they may express it slightly differently as: "It doesn't really make a difference." Or they may say: "It's all the same to God whether the year SOMETIMES starts in the winter and SOMETIMES in the spring." That is just a variation of saying "we cannot tell". And it is an answer of expediency.

In a previous article I presented about A DOZEN quotations from Church literature, including several quotations from Mr. Armstrong himself, that freely state that God wants the year to start IN THE SPRING!

For example, in Volume 5 of the Bible Story we stated: "... whereas God tells us that the new year BEGINS in the spring" (my emphasis).

This is not a light matter!

IF WE DO NOT MAKE THE EFFORT TO FIND OUT WHAT GOD'S REAL INTENTIONS WERE FOR THE START OF THE YEAR IN EXODUS 12:2, THEN WE ARE IN DANGER OF BECOMING "UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS"!

It is also a fact that NEVER ONCE did the Church ever publish a statement that said: "It's quite okay for the year to start EITHER in the winter OR in the spring", or words to that effect, because such a claim would have been biblically unjustifiable.

I have REPEATEDLY cut down the trunk of the tree, as far as use of the Jewish calendar is concerned! People KNOW that they cannot defend the trunk of the tree. THEREFORE they will always try to find fault with some of the picky little side-branches.

THE TRUNK OF THE TREE is the time of year when GOD "intends and desires" the year to start! Are we earnestly striving to understand "THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF GOD'S HEART" or not?

THE TRUNK OF THE TREE is God's clear statement that the Feast of Tabernacles is to be in the autumn!

THE PICKY LITTLE TWIGS are things like arguing about whether or not barley perhaps "COULD" be ripe a few days earlier than I have stated in my articles. THE PICKY LITTLE TWIGS are arguments about "how ripe is ripe?", etc. THE PICKY LITTLE TWIGS are things like trying desperately to read the Jewish calendar INTO "the oracles of God", because "the oracles of God" is not a statement about the calendar one way or the other, and was never INTENDED by its author Paul to be applied to the calendar.

So to those who defend the Jewish calendar I say:

ANSWER ME: DID GOD INTEND FOR THE YEAR TO START IN THE WINTER OR DID GOD INTEND FOR THE YEAR TO START IN THE SPRING? WHAT ARE GOD'S REAL INTENTIONS AND DESIRES IN THIS REGARD?

Frank W. Nelte