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THE CALENDAR PROBLEM IN A NUTSHELL

For a number of years now there have been major differences amongst us regarding the Jewish calendar. Basically we fall into TWO groups of people: those who support the Jewish calendar in an unqualified way, and those who feel that some changes need to be made to the Jewish calendar. In practice, those who feel that some changes need to be made are divided into many different factions, each advocating its own particular "solutions" to the problems with the Jewish calendar. That is a rather unfortunate situation, but that is regrettably the way it is right now.

It seems to me that most of us don't really see the whole situation as clearly as we should. We don't really see what the real issues are.

So in this article I want to try to present the whole problem in its most basic form, by looking at both of these groups.

SOME "COMMON FACTORS" FOR BOTH GROUPS?

Before noting the differences between these two basic groups, let's first clarify the things both groups SHOULD have in common. Here they are:

- 1) We all accept the Bible as the revealed Word of God. We all accept it as the final authority for how we are to conduct our lives.
- 2) We all accept that God requires us to observe both, the weekly Sabbaths on Saturdays, and also the annual Sabbaths and Feasts as listed in Leviticus chapter 23.
- 3) We all recognize that in order to observe the annual days we must have some calendar. We also all accept that this should be a solar-lunar calendar, in which the months are determined by the new moons.
- 4) Very likely all of us also started out observing the annual Holy Days based on the present Jewish calendar. But some of us believe we should continue using the Jewish calendar, while others amongst us (including me) believe that certain problems with the Jewish calendar need to be addressed.

So whatever side of this debate we identify with, let's see if we can at least BETTER UNDERSTAND why the other side feels differently.

Let's now examine both groups.

THOSE WHO ADVOCATE CHANGING THE JEWISH CALENDAR

This group (i.e. "we") approaches the calendar from the following premises:

- 1) THE BIBLE is our highest source of authority for everything we believe, and for how we are to conduct our lives.
- 2) ANYTHING that conflicts with, or that contradicts, instructions we find in the Bible is to be rejected. THE BIBLE is to always come first in our lives, even ahead of anything ANY MAN may tell us.

- 3) Specifically, biblical instructions ALWAYS take precedence over any non-biblical instructions. Whatever "traditions" we may have, they must ALWAYS be in submission to clear biblical instructions.
- 4) We believe that PLAIN BIBLICAL STATEMENTS must always take precedence over REASONING FROM CERTAIN SCRIPTURES! Reasoning from certain Scriptures must NEVER be used in an attempt to do away with CLEAR STATEMENTS in other Scriptures! Reasoning may only be used to support other Scriptures, but NEVER to do away with clear biblical statements.
- 5) We recognize that we have never yet had "all truth", that there has ALWAYS been room to learn more and to come to greater understanding on any subject. We also recognize that in some areas at various times in our recent past (i.e. within the past 50 years) we have had to make major changes in our understanding.
- 6) We also recognize that during Mr. Armstrong's approximately 50 years of leadership within the Church of God, he repeatedly changed and modified his understanding of many different doctrines. For him this process continued until the time of his death.
- 7) We believe that EVERY TEACHING we accept must be in agreement with the Bible. All appeals to authority outside of the Bible need to be examined and scrutinized very closely, to ensure they are not merely appeals to support our personal biases.
- 8) As far as "the calendar" is concerned, we believe that IF the present Jewish calendar is indeed "God-given", THEN this will become obvious from THE FEATURES of the calendar itself. They will ALL be in agreement with all biblical instructions and requirements for a calendar.
- 9) The prospect that rejecting the Jewish calendar may cause insecurity and uncertainty regarding how it should be replaced does NOT blind our eyes to OBJECTIVELY evaluating the present Jewish calendar against the Bible itself.
- 10) We believe that the instruction "to live by faith" is LIMITED TO THE BIBLE! Jesus Christ said that we are to live "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God", a clear reference to THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD! So we do NOT believe that God expects us to have faith in anything that is not stated in the Bible! Specifically, Jesus Christ warned us to be on guard against "special non-biblical claims to divine revelation"; we are not to believe those who claim Christ is "in the desert" or "in the secret chambers" (Matthew 24:26).
- 11) We understand that during Christ's ministry and during the entire first century AD the Jews used a calendar that was based on visual observations of the first new moon crescents. This is also FREELY ADMITTED in "the very first calendar article" the Church ever published; see The GOOD NEWS of March 1953 and the article "God's Sacred Calendar" by Kenneth Herrmann.
- 12) We have no problems of ANY kind with the calendar that was in use during Christ's ministry and the subsequent decades.
- 13) We believe the Bible very clearly defines all the components of a correct calendar. The Bible shows that:
- A DAY starts and ends at sunset;
 - A WEEK starts and ends with the sunset at the end of the Sabbath;
 - A MONTH starts with the sunset after the new moon;

- A YEAR starts with the new moon on or after the spring equinox.

All of this is also FREELY ADMITTED in that "very first calendar article" by Kenneth Herrmann.

14) We also believe that the Bible makes some very clear demands on the calendar. These demands include that the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread must NEVER be so early in the season of spring that NO BARLEY would be ripe for the "wavesheaf offering", which represented Christ ascending to God the Father in heaven.

This requirement is also FREELY ADMITTED in that "very first calendar article" by Kenneth Herrmann.

15) We believe there is NO BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATION for the Jewish "postponement rules". We accept that the historical evidence of the Talmud makes very clear that during the first century AD (i.e. during Christ's ministry and during the lives of the original apostles) the Day of Atonement was NOT POSTPONED away from a Friday or from a Sunday! This state of affairs is even briefly ACKNOWLEDGED in Dr. Herman Hoeh's April 1981 GOOD NEWS article entitled "The Hebrew Calendar -- Authoritative For God's Church Today!".

16) We believe that without biblical proof to support these "postponement rules" we cannot just glibly accept that they have God's approval.

17) We recognize that the present Jewish calendar is NOT found anywhere in the Bible. Therefore the only way to prove its acceptance by God is to show that it agrees with all biblical instructions.

18) We understand the Hebrew word "tekufah" to mean precisely what the Jews themselves understand this word to mean. It means exactly TWO things:

A) It refers specifically to 4 days in the year ... the two equinoxes and the two solstices.

B) It also refers to THE SEASONS that start with each of those 4 days.

C) It NEVER refers to any days that precede one of those 4 "turning days" in the year.

These two meanings are precisely how the Jews have always understood the word "tekufah", as is shown by its use in the Talmud. This is how they STILL understand this word today. These two meanings of "tekufah" are also a clear parallel to the two meanings of the Hebrew word "chodesh", which means "a new moon", and also "the month which starts with that new moon day".

19) Therefore we believe that Exodus 34:22 is A BIBLICAL REQUIREMENT that the Feast of Tabernacles must fall IN THE SEASON (tekufah) OF AUTUMN, and may NEVER start in the summer! This is also acknowledged by Dr. Hoeh in his April 1981 GOOD NEWS article, though Dr. Hoeh attempts to justify A PART of the Feast of Tabernacles falling into the summer.

20) We recognize that when Hillel II introduced the present fixed Jewish calendar, he REPEATEDLY placed the entire Feast of Tabernacles into the summer. This violated the instruction in Exodus 34:22, even by Dr. Hoeh's own standard!

21) We recognize that Hillel's calendar also frequently starts the year IN THE WINTER. This is something the Church's "very first calendar article" by Kenneth Herrmann freely admitted should not be; that article repeatedly stated that the year is to begin in the spring.

22) We also recognize that the calculations of the present Jewish calendar produce AN ERROR of up to

15 hours in the calculation of "the molad of Tishri", when compared to the real new moon conjunctions. An error of this magnitude does not seem like something we should accept without question. Nor does such an error look like "divine revelation".

23) We also recognize that "the CONVENIENT way of determining the new moon of the first month" employed by the present Jewish calendar (i.e. assuming there are exactly 177 days between the new moons of the first and the seventh month) is not always correct. There may be anything from 176 to 178 days in this period. Should a correct calendar sacrifice correctness (i.e. being closely linked to the real new moons) in favour of "convenience"? We do not believe that "convenience" is a valid criterion in God's eyes.

24) We recognize that the Jewish "justifications" for the postponements (i.e. Atonement may never fall on a Sunday because that would represent 'a hardship') are VERY FLIMSAY AND SHALLOW! We don't believe God would have the approach of saying: "Now I want you to AFFLICT your souls for one day, but I am very concerned that such a 1-day fast may under some circumstances be a real hardship for you. Therefore I don't want you to EVER have to observe the Day of Atonement on a Friday or on a Sunday. That would simply be too much of a hardship for you."

25) We don't believe that raising questions about potential difficulties, that would have to be resolved if we reject the Jewish calendar, should deter us from openly admitting and facing up to the real problems with the Jewish calendar.

26) We do not believe that the authors of the expression "the oracles of God" (used only 3 times in the New Testament, in Romans 3:2, Hebrews 5:12, 1 Peter 4:11) had ANY EXTRA-BIBLICAL INFORMATION in mind when they used this expression. Therefore it is not right for us to read ADDITIONAL MEANINGS into their letters. Specifically, neither Paul nor Peter was thinking of "the preservation of the Sabbath" or "the preservation of the 'sacred' calendar" when they used this expression.

27) We do not believe that the expression "unto the Jews were committed the oracles of God" is in any way a reference to some AUTHORITY being committed to the Jews. This should be self-evident because NOWHERE is "the Church of God", any congregation of it, ever instructed to somehow "look to the Jews" for any kind of guidance or leadership. The history of the early Church (as shown in the Book of Acts) makes quite clear that "the Jews" were ENEMIES of the Church of God; they constantly stirred up trouble for Paul. And Paul himself acknowledged this when he wrote: "As concerning the gospel, THEY ARE ENEMIES ..." (Romans 11:28). There is not the slightest hint that new converts were ever encouraged to look to the Jews for some of their instructions (i.e. for the calendar).

28) We believe there is a difference between the Jews having "a responsibility" to preserve the Scriptures, and the Jews having "AUTHORITY over the calendar". We believe there is a big difference between PRESERVING the Scriptures on the one hand, and MAKING CHANGES TO THE CALENDAR on the other hand. We do not believe that "making changes to the calendar" can be classified as "PRESERVING the calendar". Preserving and making changes are mutually exclusive concepts. "The very first calendar article" by Kenneth Herrmann shows quite clearly that the Jewish calendar did indeed CHANGE over a period of time.

29) We believe the ways in which the present Jewish calendar violates biblical instructions is PROOF that it is neither "inspired by God", nor is it something that has been "faithfully preserved from NT times, let alone from the time of Moses". The Jews themselves do NOT claim or believe that their present calendar was in use before the third century A.D..

30) We believe that the Babylonian origin of the Jewish calendar can be clearly demonstrated. We do

NOT see this as a problem in itself. We believe the important thing in the eyes of God is not: "where did the calendar used by the Jews originate?" Rather, what is important is: "did the calendar used by the Jews from the time of Ezra onwards ACCURATELY reflect reality, the actual time of the new moons?"

31) We believe that there MUST be some mechanism for taking the Jewish calendar's "drifting away from the seasons" to the tune of 9 days for every 2000 years into account. We do NOT believe that God ever intended the calendar to drift away from the seasons; yet this is something that has never been taken into account in Hillel's fixed calendar in use by the Jews today.

32) We believe the Jewish calendar, in its present form, is nothing more than a reflection of "THE TRADITIONS of the Jews". We believe it is a part of the traditions which Jesus Christ very forcefully criticized (Mark 7:8-13). As such we believe that we must apply the principle of Acts 5:29, to obey GOD rather than men whenever there is a conflict between the two.

33) We do not believe that whether or not the Jews sin has anything to do with whether or not their calendar is right. The issue is NOT with "whether or not the Jews sin"; the issue is really with "whether or not THEIR CALENDAR complies with biblical requirements".

These points sum up to a large degree the premises, which those of us who reject the Jewish calendar, basically accept.

Now let's look at the other group, those who support the Jewish calendar in an unqualified way.

THOSE WHO EXPRESS UNQUALIFIED SUPPORT FOR THE JEWISH CALENDAR

This group (i.e. "they") approaches the calendar from the following premises.

- 1) They also accept the Bible as their ultimate authority.
- 2) But they ASSUME that God's instructions to us to observe His Holy Days PROVE that therefore there must be a "divinely revealed" calendar SOMEWHERE.
- 3) THIS PERCEIVED NEED for such a divinely revealed calendar is to them PROOF that therefore there IS such a divinely revealed calendar somewhere.
- 4) They are quick to acknowledge that such a "divinely revealed" calendar is NOT found in the pages of the Bible.
- 5) However, they are EXTREMELY RELUCTANT to actually list all the requirements for a calendar that ARE FOUND IN THE BIBLE! They just don't want to see a list of such BIBLICAL requirements. In this regard they differ from that "very first calendar article" by Kenneth Herrmann, who quite freely acknowledged the biblical explanations for a day, week, month, and year. He also quite freely acknowledged the need for ripe barley during the Days of Unleavened Bread.
- 6) Therefore THEY ASSUME that God expects them to look OUTSIDE OF THE BIBLE for this divinely revealed calendar.
- 7) So they appeal to what the Jews call "the ORAL LAW", the Talmud. It is a historical document alright; but it does not contain ANY INFORMATION that would hint at the calendar having been "divinely revealed". And they have no quotations in this regard. The views that are found in the Talmud about various aspects of the calendar are historically interesting, but also conflicting, exposing a clear lack of inspiration.

8) THE KEY SCRIPTURE they quote is Romans 3:2, about "the oracles of God" being committed to the Jews. EVERYTHING THEY BELIEVE HINGES ON THIS SCRIPTURE. Without it their whole case is demolished. That in itself exposes a weakness. Any time we have to hang a specific doctrine on ONE verse, to which we have to apply a questionable interpretation, this creates a dubious case at best.

9) To avoid making their dependence on this Scripture too obvious, they attempt to hang THREE things on "the oracles of God": the Scriptures, the Sabbath, and the Calendar. In so doing they have appealed to TWO things that are biblical, the Scriptures and the Sabbath. This is to encourage acceptance of their THIRD point, which has NO BASIS IN SCRIPTURE, the Calendar! So into this list of 3 things they have slipped ONE item that can not be substantiated by appeals to other Scriptures. But this one item (the calendar) is then boldly asserted to be on a par with the other two items, which are thoroughly supported by the Bible.

10) It is then asserted that this Scripture (Romans 3:2) also confers AUTHORITY OVER THE CALENDAR to the Jews. But the Jews have never had any "authority" over the Sabbath or over the Scriptures. Furthermore, they have been very meticulous in "PRESERVING" the Old Testament. But, as that "very first calendar article" by Kenneth Herrmann so readily shows, they did not use anywhere near the same "meticulous approach" when it came to the calendar; there they CHANGED things as time went by.

11) They turn applying Romans 3:2 to the Jewish calendar into AN ISSUE OF FAITH! This enables them to TUNE OUT all valid challenges to the Jewish calendar. They don't have faith IN THE BIBLE in this regard, but rather IN THEIR OWN INTERPRETATION OF ONE SPECIFIC VERSE! The calendar simply "must" be included in "the oracles of God", or their entire case for the Jewish calendar collapses.

12) Their efforts are NOT directed at finding positive proof that the Jewish calendar is divinely revealed. Rather, their efforts are directed at DEFENDING the Jewish calendar against every criticism that is brought up.

13) They can maintain "their faith" in the Jewish calendar by carefully IGNORING all the flaws with the Jewish calendar. They simply don't want to know what is wrong with the Jewish calendar, because they have no BIBLICAL answers to such valid criticisms. And carefully "examining" the problems with the Jewish calendar would only lead them into trouble. So they ignore all genuine problems with appeals to "faith".

14) And they have forgotten the lesson Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong so often tried to teach us. For example, on pages 11-12 of "Mystery of the Ages" Mr. Armstrong wrote:

"Most people accept carelessly what they are taught from childhood. And, coming into maturity, they accept that which they have repeatedly heard, read or been taught. They continue to go along, usually without question, with their peers. MOST PEOPLE DO NOT REALIZE IT, BUT THEY HAVE CARELESSLY ASSUMED WHAT THEY BELIEVE WITHOUT QUESTION OR PROOF. Yet THEY WILL DEFEND VIGOROUSLY and emotionally their convictions. It has become human nature for people to flow with the stream -- to go along with the crowd -- to believe and perform like their peers around them. Further, MOST PEOPLE STUBBORNLY REFUSE TO BELIEVE WHAT THEY ARE UNWILLING TO BELIEVE. There's an old saying, 'He who is convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.' I was no different." (pages 11-12) (my emphasis)

Note: "MOST PEOPLE STUBBORNLY REFUSE TO BELIEVE WHAT THEY ARE UNWILLING TO BELIEVE"! So said Mr. Armstrong.

15) This group can NEVER be convinced by a barrage of facts. They simply don't care about facts and

don't want to know the facts that show that the Jewish calendar is NOT divinely revealed. So "facts" will not get through to them. That's sad but true.

16) Instead they focus on THE SUPPOSED DIFFICULTIES with accepting an alternative to the Jewish calendar. They focus on unsuitable alternatives that SOME people have already implemented on their own, and then claim that rejecting the Jewish calendar "is not going to be blessed by God".

And they have forgotten Mr. Armstrong's admonition that TWO WRONGS NEVER MAKE A RIGHT!

17) For support they appeal to Mr. Armstrong's status as an apostle. They reason from Mr. Armstrong's acceptance of the Jewish calendar, but they don't present any BIBLICAL proof!

18) They appeal to the status of men like Kenneth Herrmann and Dr. Hoeh, but they don't refute the BIBLICAL charges against the Jewish calendar.

19) They reason that since the disobedience of the Jews didn't stop them from preserving the Old Testament, THEREFORE they must also still be "preserving the 'sacred calendar'", even though they have clearly made CHANGES to the calendar which they had in the first century AD.

20) They also attempt to divert attention from the genuine problems with the Jewish calendar by presenting a multitude of Scriptures about faith and God's faithfulness and God's sovereignty, etc., NONE OF WHICH negate the flaws in the Jewish calendar, and none of which really have anything at all to do with the Jewish calendar.

21) When cornered by the obvious flaws in the Jewish calendar, they disclaim any responsibility for rectifying those problems, claiming that it is UP TO GOD to sort out the problems with the Jewish calendar. They compare attempting to deal with those obvious problems to the presumptuousness of Uzzah who tried to "steady the ark".

22) They never spell out "what additional revelation" (in addition to the principles found in the Bible) is needed for a correct calendar, what it is that God supposedly gave to the priests and which was not preserved in the Bible itself. They accept carte blanche whatever features the Jewish calendar incorporates.

23) They lack consistency in their claims as to WHOM God supposedly gave this "extra-biblical" information about the calendar; sometimes it is "to the priests", at other times it is "the men of the tribe of Issachar" (1 Chronicles 12:32), and at other times it is the non-priestly, non-levitical Pharisees (Hillel II).

24) To justify the Bible's total silence about this additional calendar information, they claim that it was "a secret that was closely guarded by the priests", even though the exact calculations of the Jewish calendar had been discovered and made known by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus about 500 years before the time of Hillel II.

25) They never face the fact that THE ONLY PURPOSE of the Jewish calendar calculations is to establish dates for the new moons IN TERMS OF THE JULIAN CALENDAR. In other words, the Jewish calendar calculations presuppose the existence of the Julian calendar. And without the existence of the Julian calendar the Jewish calendar calculations are impossible to use! This proves that the Jewish calendar calculations cannot possibly predate the Julian calendar. Half the data in the Jewish calendar calculations consists of information pertaining to the Julian calendar, which data could not possibly have existed before the Julian calendar was established. This fact they are not willing to acknowledge.

That about sums up this group. It should now be clear why these two groups can never reach

agreement.

THE CONFLICT

It is unlikely that this conflict will be resolved.

Those who support changing the Jewish calendar focus on:

- THE FEATURES OF THAT CALENDAR
- FACTS WHICH PROVE IT VIOLATES GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS
- THE TOTAL LACK OF EVIDENCE FOR ANY INSPIRATION
- THE HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT THE JEWISH CALENDAR
- REAL NEW MOONS INSTEAD OF FICTITIOUS MOLADS

Those who support the Jewish calendar focus on:

- ASSUMING A NEED FOR A DIVINELY REVEALED CALENDAR
- REFUSING TO LOOK AT ANY FACTS THAT DISCREDIT DIVINE ORIGIN
- THE STATUS OF MEN (Mr. Armstrong, Dr. Hoeh, etc.)
- POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH ALTERNATIVE CALENDARS
- FAITH IN THE JEWS TO HAVE PRESERVED A CALENDAR
- GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CORRECT THE JEWISH CALENDAR
- SCRIPTURES ABOUT FAITH IN GOD
- INTERPRETING BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS TO AGREE WITH THE JEWS
- DEFENDING AND JUSTIFYING ALL PROBLEMS

This should help us to understand why a solution to the calendar problems continues to elude us. Most of those who simply don't want to see any problems with the Jewish calendar will in all likelihood continue with that position.

And so, in this year of 2000 with a 2-day postponement in the Jewish calendar, we face the bleak prospect of being divided and scattered even more, because of these opposing views about what form of calendar to use for observing the Holy Days and the Feasts.

It is a sad state of affairs indeed.

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