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THE DAY OF ATONEMENT ON FRIDAYS

The postponement rules of the Jewish calendar are designed to prevent the Day of Atonement from ever falling on a Friday or on a Sunday. Some people in their defense of the Jewish calendar have erroneously claimed that these postponement rules were already being applied to the Jewish calendar during the ministry of Jesus Christ. In fact the entire justification for adhering to the Jewish calendar that has been put forward by the United Church of God, an International Association, is based on reasoning that the only way Jesus Christ could have been crucified on a Wednesday is IF there was a calendar with postponement rules in effect for the year 31 A.D.

That reasoning is obviously flawed, since in 31 A.D. a Wednesday Passover day is THE ONLY POSSIBILITY for a calendar that was established by witnesses reporting having seen the first new crescent of the moon. With the system of eyewitnesses reporting the sighting of the new crescent simply no other day of the week is possible for the Passover in 31 A.D.

Following are a number of quotations from the Jewish Talmud, that make very clear that it is well-known to the Jewish authorities that prior to the time of Hillel II the Day of Atonement did indeed fairly frequently occur on a Friday. This proves that the postponement rules were NOT being used in those years. Furthermore, in a system based on eyewitness reports you cannot possibly accommodate postponement rules. What is the point of asking eyewitnesses to report seeing the new crescent if you in advance already know that it is going to be the wrong day of the week and that you will therefore postpone by at least one day anyway? A calendar based on starting every month after eyewitnesses have reported seeing the new crescent and a calendar based on postponing the start of the year away from inconvenient days of the week are mutually exclusive!

Here are some quotations from the Talmud. Numbers within the text are references to footnotes. The emphasis by means of capital letters is mine throughout, except where indicated as otherwise.

Here are the quotations:

Talmud - Mas. Shabbath 114b

When I was in Babylon¹ I thought,² That which was taught, IF THE DAY OF ATONEMENT FELL ON the eve of the sabbath [FRIDAY], it [the Shofar] was not sounded,³ while [if it fell] at the termination of the Sabbath, habdalah was not recited,⁴ is a unanimous opinion. But when I emigrated thither [to Palestine]. I found Judah the son of R. Simeon b. Pazzi sitting and saying, This is according to Akiba [only];⁵ for if [it agrees with] R. Ishmael, — since HE MAINTAINS, THE FATS OF THE SABBATH MAY BE OFFERED ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, let it [the Shofar] be sounded, so that it may be known that the fats of the Sabbath can be offered on the Day of Atonement,⁶ Whereupon I said to him, The priests⁷ are zealous.⁸

Yet let it [the Shofar] be blown, so that they might know that THE TRIMMING OF VEGETABLES IS PERMITTED [ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT] from the [time of] minhah¹¹ and onwards?¹² Said R. Joseph: Because a shebuth¹³ is not superseded in order to give permission.¹⁴ While R. Shisha son of R. Idi answered: A shebuth [of] immediate¹⁵ [importance] was permitted; a shebuth [of] distant [importance] was not permitted¹⁶ But did they permit a shebuth [of] immediate [importance]? Surely we learnt: IF A FESTIVAL FALLS ON FRIDAY, we sound [the shofar] but do not recite habdalah;¹⁷ [if it

falls] at the termination of the Sabbath, we recite habdalah¹⁸ but do not sound [the shofar].¹⁹ But why so: let it be sounded so that it may be known that killing [animals for food] is permitted immediately [the Sabbath ends]?²⁰ Rather it is clear that it is as R. Joseph [answered]. R. Zera said in R. Huna's name — others state, R. Abba said in R. Huna's name: If the Day of Atonement falls on the Sabbath, the trimming of vegetables is forbidden. R. Mana said, It was taught likewise: How do we know that if the Day of Atonement falls on the Sabbath, the trimming of vegetables²¹ is forbidden? Because it is said, Shabbathon; it is a shebuth.²² Now, in respect of what [is it stated]: shall we say. In respect of labour²³ — surely it is written, thou shalt not do any work?²⁴ Hence it must surely refer to the trimming of vegetables;²⁵ this proves it.

FOOTNOTES 1-4

(1) R. Zera was a Babylonian who studied at home first and then emigrated to Palestine,

(2) Lit., 'said',

(3) AS ON ORDINARY FRIDAYS, supra 35b.

(4) In the evening prayer, V. Glos. WHEN A FESTIVAL FALLS ON SUNDAY, habdalah is recited in the evening to signify that there is a distinction between the holiness of the Sabbath and that of Festivals.

FOOTNOTES 14-16

(14) But only where it is necessary to emphasize prohibitions, e.g., IF FRIDAY IS A FESTIVAL, so that many things permitted thereon are forbidden on the Sabbath,

(15) Lit., 'near',

(16) If it were of immediate importance, the shebuth would have been permitted. But IN ANY CASE WHEN THE DAY OF ATONEMENT FALLS ON FRIDAY, the vegetables, even if trimmed, cannot be cooked on the Sabbath. So that the sounding of the shofar would only be of importance for subsequent Days of Atonement, and in such a case the shebuth is not superseded.

MY COMMENTS:

In the Talmud you can find an enormous number of conflicting opinions about every subject imaginable, ranging from when various Old Testament individuals were supposedly born, to what is permitted on the Sabbath, to determining the guilt or innocence of people after they had committed certain things, to what was allowed or not allowed on certain days, etc. So you can also find statements about Atonement needing to be postponed away from inconvenient days (i.e. Fridays and Sundays).

The content of the whole Talmud was written and then edited over a period of several centuries, and thus it also contains information about what was done at different times, as well as the differences in the customs observed between the Jews in Babylonia and the Jews in Palestine. Conflicting opinions are the norm within the pages of the Talmud, and not the exception.

So we need to be quite clear regarding what this evidence from the Talmud is actually telling us! It is NOT that quotations from the Talmud ever prove what is right and what is wrong, as far as religious observances are concerned! The Talmud is simply not a reliable source of information for what is right and what is wrong!

THE VALUE OF QUOTATIONS FROM THE TALMUD lies in this fact: these quotations show us what

did indeed happen at different times amongst the Jews! Whether what happened was right or wrong is a totally different question!

So the quotations we have here show that the Day of Atonement DID INDEED FALL ON FRIDAYS AND ON SUNDAYS, especially in the earlier centuries (i.e. 1st and 2nd centuries A.D.). The fact that later the Day of Atonement was postponed away from such inconvenient days of the week, does not in any way change this fact, that EARLIER it had NOT been postponed away.

Notice also that some leaders did not hesitate to allow "the trimming of vegetables" ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT ITSELF! It goes without saying that IF it was acceptable for a person to actually trim vegetables on the Day of Atonement, in preparation for the meal after the Day of Atonement had concluded, then they were in effect using the Day of Atonement TO PREPARE for what they would eat on the day after Atonement. So they used a Friday Day of Atonement to prepare what they would eat on the weekly Sabbath after the Day of Atonement.

THESE QUOTATIONS SIMPLY SHOW WHAT WAS ACTUALLY DONE AT CERTAIN TIMES WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY! The right or wrong of such actions is a different question. Obviously, in this case they could equally well have prepared many food items ON THE THURSDAY, before the Friday Day of Atonement, to then be eaten on the weekly Sabbath.

Talmud - Mas. Sukkah 54b

But do we postpone it? Have we not in fact learnt, The fats [of offerings performed on] the Sabbath¹⁹ may be offered on the Day of Atonement;²⁰ and R. Zera furthermore stated, When I was²¹ in the school of Rab in Babylon²² I used to say that that which has been taught, 'IF THE DAY OF ATONEMENT FELL ON THE EVE OF THE SABBATH, they did not sound the trumpet,²³ and IF IT FELL AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE SABBATH²⁴ they did not recite the Habdalah'²⁵ is agreed to by all,²⁶ but when I came up to Palestine²⁷ I found R. Judah the son of R. Simeon b. Pazzi that he sat at his studies and taught that it was in agreement with R. Akiba only?²⁸ — THIS IS NO DIFFICULTY since the one statement²⁹ is according to the Rabbis³⁰ and the other³¹ according to 'the Others',³² for it has been taught, 'Others' say, There cannot be more than four weekdays' difference between the Pentecost of one year and the next, and between one New Year and the next,³³ and if the year was prolonged,³⁴ there would be five days.³⁵

FOOTNOTES 24 & 28:

(24) Since the Day of Atonement is no less holy than the Sabbath day.

(28) Shab. 114b. Now in any case BOTH THE MISHNAH AND THE BARAITHA CITED PROVE THAT THE DAY OF ATONEMENT MAY FALL ON A SUNDAY. How then could it be maintained that if it were to fall on a Sunday it must be postponed?

MY COMMENTS:

Again we see that at times the Day of Atonement would fall on Fridays and also on Sundays. So clearly at that point in time no postponement rules were being used by the Jews in their calendar.

Talmud - Mas. Menachoth 100b

IF A FESTIVAL FELL ON THE DAY BEFORE THE SABBATH,¹⁰ IT WOULD THEN BE EATEN ON THE TENTH DAY. IF THE TWO DAYS OF THE NEW YEAR [FELL BEFORE THE SABBATH],¹¹ IT WOULD THEN BE EATEN ON THE ELEVENTH DAY. [THE BAKING] OVERRIDES NEITHER THE SABBATH

NOR THE FESTIVAL. R. SIMEON B. GAMALIEL SAYS IN THE NAME OF R. SIMEON, SON OF THE DEPUTY [HIGH PRIEST], IT OVERRIDES THE FESTIVAL BUT NOT THE FAST-DAY.¹² (the entire capitalization here is the Talmud's own emphasis! Here my emphasis is the bold print.)

FOOTNOTE 12:

(12) The Day of Atonement. Where THE DAY OF ATONEMENT FELL ON A FRIDAY the Shewbread was then baked on a Thursday.

MY COMMENTS:

This section deals with "the Shewbread". That is important to note, because that means that this is speaking about the time BEFORE THE TEMPLE WAS DESTROYED! So here we have a clear reference to the fact that before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. the Day of Atonement did at times fall on Fridays!

Talmud - Mas. K'rithoth 19a

MISHNAH. [IF BOTH] HELEB AND NOTHAR LAY BEFORE A PERSON AND HE ATE ONE OF THEM BUT DOES NOT KNOW WHICH, OR IF HIS MENSTRUANT WIFE AND HIS SISTER WERE WITH HIM IN HIS HOUSE AND HE UNITED, IN ERROR,⁹ WITH ONE OF THEM AND DOES NOT KNOW WITH WHICH, OR IF SABBATH AND THE DAY OF ATONEMENT [FOLLOWED EACH OTHER]¹⁰ AND HE DID FORBIDDEN WORK AT TWILIGHT AND DOES NOT KNOW ON WHICH DAY: R. ELIEZER DECLARES HIM LIABLE TO A SIN-OFFERING, BUT R. JOSHUA DECLARES HIM EXEMPT. REMARKED R. JOSE: THEY DID NOT DISPUTE ABOUT WHETHER HE THAT DID WORK AT TWILIGHT WAS EXEMPT, FOR I MAY ASSUME THAT PART OF THE WORK WAS DONE ON THE ONE DAY AND PART ON THE FOLLOWING DAY.¹¹ ABOUT WHAT DID THEY DISPUTE? ABOUT ONE WHO DID WORK DURING THE DAY ITSELF BUT HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER HE DID IT ON THE SABBATH OR ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, OR IF HE DID WORK AND DID NOT KNOW WHAT MANNER OF WORK HE DID:¹² (the entire capitalization here is the Talmud's own emphasis!)

FOOTNOTE 10:

(10) I.e., WHEN THE DAY OF ATONEMENT FELL UPON FRIDAY OR SUNDAY.

MY COMMENTS:

Apart from the rather bizarre situation of a man having sex with either his own sister or his own menstruant wife and somehow not being sure of which woman he had slept with, this section once again shows quite clearly that the Day of Atonement did at times fall on both, Fridays and Sundays.

Talmud - Mas. Shabbath 133b

Rather said R. Ashi, Which [Tanna] is this? It is R. Jose. For we learnt: WHETHER IT IS CLEARLY VISIBLE OR IT IS NOT CLEARLY VISIBLE,¹⁰ THE SABBATH IS DESECRATED ON ITS ACCOUNT.¹¹ R. Jose ruled: If it is clearly visible, they must not desecrate the Sabbath for it.¹² But how so? Perhaps R. Jose rules [thus] only there, because the Sabbath was not given to be superseded;¹³ but here that the Sabbath was given to be superseded,¹⁴ it indeed is so?¹⁵ — Rather said the scholars of Nehardea: It is the Rabbis who disagree with R. Jose.

FOOTNOTE 10:

(10) Viz., THE CRESCENT OF THE NEW MOON, WHICH HAD TO BE SEEN AND ATTESTED BY TWO WITNESSES BEFORE THE BETH DIN COULD SANCTIFY THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTH, v. R.H. 21b.

MY COMMENTS:

It is very well known amongst the Jews that in the first century A.D. the start of every month in the year was proclaimed based on two witnesses who had seen the new crescent. It follows that such a calendar system also made no provision for there to be exactly 177 days in the first six months of every year, since the first and the seventh new moon are sometimes only 176 days apart, and at other times they are 178 days apart.

Talmud - Mas. Eirubin 45a

But what [indeed] was the difficulty¹⁶ seeing that it is possible that the case of those who go to save lives¹⁷ is different?¹⁸ If a difficulty did at all exist it must have been the following. We learned: AT FIRST THEY¹⁹ DID NOT STIR FROM THERE²⁰ ALL DAY²¹ but R. Gamaliel the Elder enacted that they shall be entitled to move within two thousand cubits in any direction. The enactment, moreover, was not applied to these¹⁹ only, but even a midwife who came to assist at a childbirth, or a man who came to rescue from an invading gang, from a river, from a ruin or from a fire is to be regarded as one of the people of the town²² and is entitled to move within two thousand cubits in any direction.²³ Now [this evidently implies:] No more;²⁴ but has it not been said: ALL WHO GO OUT TO SAVE LIFE MAY RETURN TO THE ORIGINAL PLACES even impliedly a larger distance?²⁴ — Rab Judah replied in the name of Rab:²⁵ The meaning is that they MAY RETURN TO THEIR ORIGINAL PLACES²⁶ with their weapons;²⁷ as it was taught:

FOOTNOTES 18-20:

18) From that of those previously mentioned in our Mishnah. The former might refer to ONE WHO WENT TO RENDER EVIDENCE ON THE APPEARANCE OF A NEW MOON or to summon a midwife. A person in such circumstance may well be forbidden to return home if the distance was more than two thousand cubits. Those, however, who went out to save lives from the violence of an attacking gang might well, as a safeguard of their own lives against possible attack, have been permitted to return to their homes even where the distances were greater.

(19) WITNESSES TO THE APPEARANCE OF A NEW MOON who went beyond their original Sabbath limit.

(20) THE COURT WHERE THE WITNESSES ASSEMBLED (cf. R.H. 23b).

MY COMMENTS:

These references makes very clear that for a long time the calendar was determined not by calculations, but by witnesses attesting to the appearance of the new crescent. There was a proper court where those witnesses would assemble.

CONCLUSION:

While the Talmud is never the judge of what is actually right and what is wrong, it is nevertheless a historical document that spans several centuries of Jewish history in its composition. And it makes quite clear that in earlier times, when "the Shewbread" was still required for the Temple, the Day of Atonement certainly also fell on Fridays and on Sundays.

The fact that the start of every month was declared based on eyewitnesses who attested that they had seen the first new crescent of the moon proves the same point, that the new moon days could not possibly have been postponed after the reports of eyewitnesses had been accepted.

So these quotations from the Jewish Talmud make clear that in the first century A.D., during the ministry of Jesus Christ and of the original apostles, the Jews used a calendar where every month was started based on the reports of eyewitnesses of the new crescent, and where the Day of Atonement was NOT postponed away from Fridays and from Sundays.

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