

October 1996

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A RESPONSE TO THE CALENDAR ARTICLES WRITTEN BY MR. RAYMOND F. MCNAIR

Dear Mr. McNair,

During the Feast of Tabernacles this year someone gave me a copy of the July-August 1996 GLOBAL CHURCH NEWS, which contains your two articles about the Jewish calendar. I was requested to comment on your articles.

In the lead article of that issue Dr. Meredith stated that your Doctrinal Team had spent 3 or 4 major meetings, each lasting 2 or 3 hours, in establishing the views expressed in your articles. One of the box articles in that issue also mentions that "the ministry of the Global Church of God has likewise diligently examined this subject in great detail for more than three years". Dr. Meredith made clear that your articles represent the official view of the Global Church of God.

I now find myself between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand I have no desire or intention to offend you or to embarrass you in any way; on the other hand it is quite clear to me that there are serious flaws and weaknesses in the articles you have written, and thus there are such weaknesses in the official view of the Global Church of God. Having been approached by some of God's people about these articles, I feel a responsibility to explain what these shortcomings are; yet exposing such shortcomings can easily be misinterpreted to be nothing more than criticism of you as a person or of the doctrines of the Global Church of God. That is my dilemma.

You were one of my teachers at Ambassador College in Bricket Wood, England. From you I learned the word "pachyderm", to be thick-skinned without taking everything we hear as a personal affront. You are the one who taught us to make our points by using, in your own words, "the smiling, leaning elephant approach"; and you meant that when we were sure of our facts we should just refuse to budge away from the truth, and not allow anyone to push us over, even as you simply cannot push an elephant around against his own will.

So when I practice in this article the very principles which you yourself taught me, I sincerely hope that my expressions of disagreement with your statements are not interpreted as disrespect for you as a person. I believe in clearly stating what I mean, but I hope that it will be clear that in my direct and to-the-point statements there is no maliciousness. It's just that I can't think of a way of disagreeing with your views without actually expressing disagreement, if you know what I mean.

So here are some comments about your article "Which Calendar Has God Authorized?"

YOUR APPROACH TO THE CALENDAR QUESTION

It is readily apparent that the overall approach in your article is: "I already know that the present Jewish calendar is equivalent to 'God's sacred calendar'; so what do I need to say to convince people of this point?". This bias is not difficult to see at all, as I will show. I have no objections at all against a bias towards the truth; but you still DO have to prove that it is the truth, and not just your bias. This you have not really done.

The title of your article is actually very misleading. You chose the title "WHICH calendar has God authorized?", implying that you would examine various calendars against the Word of God. But in fact

you don't actually examine ANY single calendar at all, not even the present Jewish calendar.

What you have done in your article is the following:

1) You start out by telling us that the Bible does not really reveal a full calendar, and you refer to five "PROBLEMS" that those who wish to look to the Scriptures for a calendar will have to face. In using this approach you are setting the stage for claiming that the "sacred" calendar must of necessity be sought outside of the Bible.

2) Then you proceed to state that God revealed His truth to Moses and Aaron, and you claim that God must also have "OF NECESSITY" somehow given them His "sacred" calendar at that time. In this claim you are simply following the precedent Mr. Kenneth Herrmann had set in his three calendar articles in the Good News magazine in the 1950's. He used the identical reasoning.

3) You then present a variety of quotations from various sources to support your preconceived conclusion that the present Jewish calendar is "it", the calendar God supposedly gave to Moses. In the process you present a number of assumptions without any attempts to actually PROVE these assumptions. Later I will present some examples of these assumptions.

4) Then you present some general information "ABOUT" the Jewish calendar, together with the biblical requirements which such a calendar must meet.

5) You then claim that the permanent calendar of Hillel II (about 358 A.D.) is God's "TRUE" calendar because God gave "HIS" calendar to Aaron and to Aaron's family for safekeeping. To support this claim you refer to the "ORACLES of God", though you make no attempt to explain what this expression in Romans 3:2 actually means.

6) HOWEVER, while you have presented some information "ABOUT" the present Jewish calendar, AT NO STAGE HAVE YOU ACTUALLY EXAMINED THE JEWISH CALENDAR ITSELF, TO SEE WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS!

As the old saying goes, the proof of the pudding lies in the eating. If the Jewish calendar is indeed God's "true" calendar, then it will most assuredly be in full agreement with God's instructions which are revealed in the Bible. This agreement should be clearly demonstrated in the form of practical examples. Unqualified assertions are simply not enough.

7) You certainly have not examined any alternative options or possibilities, to see how they stack up against the requirements God spells out in the Bible. It was never your intention to even look at any other option, though your readers might have inferred that possibility from the title you chose.

Now let's look at all of the BIBLICAL requirements for a "true" calendar. They are basically presented in your article. You did, however, not go as far as Mr. Kenneth Herrmann went in the 1950's in spelling these requirements out in plain terms.

THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE RIGHT CALENDAR

While the Bible does not give us a detailed discussion of exactly how the calendar should be set up, it nevertheless gives us some very specific information. Let's put all those points together and see what we then have. The following points are correctly mentioned in your article.

1) The first month of the year must be in the spring (Exodus 12:2).

2) The year must start LATE ENOUGH so that the barley is mature enough by the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread to be available for the wave offering (Leviticus 23:10-14). Never starting the year in the winter will take care of this requirement.

3) The months should all start at or very close to the "new moons". Whether this means the invisible molad or the visible first faint crescent, is a separate question.

4) The Feast of Tabernacles "was to occur AT OR AFTER the turn of the year", a reference to the equinox (Exodus 32:22). This you correctly identify as September 23. You are very emphatic, correctly so, in stating that Tabernacles should NEVER occur wholly before the autumn equinox. Your one sub-title reads: "TABERNACLES NEVER OCCURS WHOLLY IN SUMMER".

These four points are the main biblical requirements for the calendar we are to use in calculating the Holy Days. These four points are all AUTOMATICALLY met if you had given the biblical requirements in plain terms, as did Kenneth Herrmann 40 years ago. In a correct calendar:

1) The day starts at sunset.

2) The week starts with the sunset at the end of the Sabbath.

3) The month starts with the new moon.

4) The year starts with the first new moon in the spring.

With these four conditions the requirements you stated will always be met. If these four conditions are always met, then the Feast of Tabernacles will always be in the autumn and the year will never start so early that no barley would be ripe for the wave offering.

We do not need any further revelations in order to be able to construct a biblically correct calendar.

So now let's again review your approach to this subject, and compare it to another option.

WHICH OF THESE TWO APPROACHES IS THE RIGHT ONE?

Compare these two options:

1) Your approach is to START OUT with the assumption that the Jewish calendar is God's "sacred" calendar; and THEN you attempt to show that this Jewish calendar is in agreement with the biblical requirements. The Jewish calendar is the foundation on which you build your whole presentation.

As I will later show, your attempt to make the Jewish calendar "FIT" God's requirements is a bit like one of Cinderella's step-sisters trying to "FIT" her big foot into Cinderella's small shoe; it looks extremely clumsy and the incompatibility becomes very obvious upon closer scrutiny.

2) The approach I would like to suggest to you is to START OUT WITH THE ABOVE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS! These biblical requirements, all of which are listed in your article, must be THE FOUNDATION against which any calendar system is evaluated.

This still leaves wide open the possibility that the Jewish calendar, as it is today, is the correct one to use. But it removes the automatic bias in favour of the Jewish calendar, thus allowing us to examine the present Jewish calendar OBJECTIVELY and totally on its own merits.

Instead of starting out with the conclusion and gathering those "facts" that support this conclusion, while ignoring others that don't support this conclusion, THIS APPROACH starts out with God's clearly revealed and undisputed (for all those who accept the Bible as God's revelation to us) instructions. This approach then enables us to work towards a conclusion, while always keeping God's instructions uppermost in our minds.

Rather than the negative focus on the five "PROBLEMS" you started out with, this would give a positive focus on the BIBLICAL requirements. Instead of focusing on what is NOT found in the Bible, it focuses on what the Bible DOES REVEAL.

The last sub-title in your article reads: "REJECT UNBIBLICAL TEACHINGS!". I agree whole-heartedly with this sentiment, and this approach I am suggesting here ensures that any "UNBIBLICAL" ideas don't get past these biblical requirements.

I don't understand why you (under "Problem 5") argue AGAINST "THOSE WHO WOULD RELY SOLELY ON THE BIBLE" to construct a calendar. Is it WRONG to rely on the Bible? Do you grasp how much guidance for a correct calendar is actually contained in the above biblical requirements?

By including the word "solely" in your statement, you have obviously taken your example TO THE EXTREME, for the purpose of making your point. This is something the Worldwide Church of God did repeatedly in the process of dismantling the true doctrines of the Bible, present hypothetical extreme examples against which they could then readily argue. Statements that focus on the extreme always unfairly distort the picture that represents the middle of the road. When you presented this argument against those who would rely "SOLELY" on the Bible, WHY did you not immediately reassure your readers that there are nevertheless "SOME" biblical requirements for the right calendar which are FIXED and non-negotiable, requirements that simply MUST be met by the correct calendar?

Anyway, I'd like to suggest that the second approach I have presented here is the one that is more likely to reach a sound biblically-based conclusion.

EXAMINING THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS MORE CLOSELY

Spring in the northern hemisphere starts on March 21 in the Gregorian calendar. Autumn starts on September 23. This means that there are 186 days from the vernal equinox to the autumn equinox. [Comment: This also means that there are only 179 days from the autumn equinox to the spring equinox. For the northern hemisphere spring and summer combined are thus one week longer than autumn and winter combined.]

In the Jewish calendar the first six months are always EXACTLY 177 days long. Thus from the First Day of Unleavened Bread (15th of Nisan) to the First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles (15th of Tishri) there are also exactly 177 days. Now since spring and summer combined are always 186 days, this means that the First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles will always be 9 days (186 - 177) closer to the autumn equinox than the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread will be to the spring equinox.

Therefore IF the First Day of Unleavened Bread would be eight days or less after the spring equinox, then the Feast of Tabernacles would start in the summer, before the autumn equinox. The solution is to NEVER START NISAN BEFORE THE SPRING EQUINOX, to never start Nisan before March 21. In that way the First Day of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15) will never be before April 4, and this in turn means that the First Day of Tabernacles (Tishri 15) will never be before September 28, thus clearly after the autumn equinox.

THAT IS ALL YOU NEED IN ORDER TO CONSTRUCT A BIBLICALLY CORRECT CALENDAR!

You yourself acknowledged that the first month must be in the spring.

Next, you yourself pointed out in your article the biblical requirement of the barley needing to be "mature enough" for the wave offering.

I am surprised that after clearly stating this point you made no attempt to establish EXACTLY WHEN barley ripens in Palestine. After all, when you know that mature barley must be available by the time of the First Day of UB, surely one would want to know WHEN that would be? We are dealing with a clearly spelled-out biblical requirement for the correct calendar.

I have a photo-copy of a letter which was written by Mr. N. Bar-Droma on June 8th, 1983. He was at that time Director of the Field Crops Department in the Ministry of Agriculture of the State of Israel. The letter answers the question about when barley ripens in Palestine. After commenting that as a crop barley was diminishing (the prices for wheat are much better), Mr. Bar-Droma stated that ... "in the Jordan Valley there is hardly any barley left today" (i.e. in 1983). He pointed out that the main region for barley was "in the Negev between Beer Shebah and the Gaza strip" and among "the Arab farmers in the vicinity of Jericho". He points out that TODAY the barley harvest in these areas "starts AROUND THE END OF APRIL" (though it might be earlier in the Jericho valley?).

However Mr. Bar-Droma points out one significant difference between today and ancient times. He wrote: "To-day we have to wait with the harvest until the grain is entirely dry which means a moisture content of 12-13% only. Otherwise the mechanical harvester does not perform a clean threshing and the grain cannot be stored without further drying. In the Ancient times and even to-day with primitive methods the barley and wheat were harvested with a sickle and left on the land in sheaves for further drying. Therefore the crop could be harvested A COUPLE OF WEEKS EARLIER even if the barley would have been harvested with 20% moisture content."

These comments are from an official in the Ministry of Agriculture of the State of Israel. Are we really concerned about this type of information?

The point is this:

When we make an honest examination of this requirement to have some mature barley available by the 15th of Nisan, then we have to admit, even allowing for harvesting the one sheaf with a considerably higher moisture content than is desirable for storing grain, that barley simply is not mature in Palestine before the very early part of April. This again requires us to never start the year in the winter.

Consider some historical examples of the Jewish calendar in action:

- 1) In 1595 A.D. the First Day of UB fell on Saturday, March 25. Therefore the wave offering day would have been Sunday, March 26 in that particular year.
- 2) In 1690 A.D. the First Day of UB fell on Saturday, March 25 again.
- 3) In 1747 A.D. the First Day of UB fell on Sunday, March 26.
- 4) In 1842 A.D. the First Day of UB fell on Saturday, March 26, and thus Sunday, March 27 would have been the day for the wave offering in that particular year.
- 5) Even as late as 1937 A.D. the First Day of UB fell on Saturday, March 27, and thus making March 28 the day for the wave offering.

But all these dates (March 26 to March 28) are simply too early for mature barley in Palestine. There is no way around this fact. And you yourself stated this requirement for mature barley to be available. The present Jewish calendar actually ignores the biblical requirements for a correct calendar.

Next, let's ask ourselves: how would GOD want this to work?

1) Since God clearly wants the Feast of Tabernacles to be in the autumn, something the present Jewish calendar has NEVER achieved consistently for every 19-year cycle, therefore Nisan 15 can clearly never be before March 29 (i.e. March 21 + 9 days, inclusive counting), and therefore Nisan 1 can never be before March 15.

2) God obviously knows that there are four days in the year, and four days only, which can be accurately predicted well in advance. There are no other days at all in the solar year which could possibly be used as "markers" of some kind. Those four days are the two equinoxes and the two solstices.

3) So God clearly does not want the year to start before March 15, which is still six days before the equinox. But March 15 is totally insignificant in the context of the solar year. March 15 could not possibly be used as some kind of "benchmark" date, since the only way to pinpoint March 15 in the solar year is to say that it is the day that is "6 days before the spring equinox".

4) Now since God CERTAINLY does not want the year to start before March 15, can you tell me WHY God would possibly not have selected the day six days later, the "tekufah of Nisan", the spring equinox on March 21, as the earliest possible starting date for the year? WHY would God have selected some TOTALLY INSIGNIFICANT DAY, one that cannot possibly be accurately predicted in the solar year without reference to one of the four "tekufah days", as the earliest possibly day in the solar year for the first month to start? WHY?

5) Do you really believe that God would approve of the start of the year being a totally random day in the solar year, when God clearly wants certain events to be placed within specific seasons? What would God possibly have against selecting the spring equinox as the earliest possible day for the start of the year? If God really wants the first month of the year to be in the spring, as you correctly stated, then WHY would God possibly allow that month to sometimes start in the winter, as is the case repeatedly with the current Jewish calendar?

6) Why the bias against THE OBVIOUS BENCHMARK DATE AT THAT TIME OF THE YEAR being used by God as the earliest day for the year to start? The only options are: EITHER God uses the "tekufah of Nisan" to signal the earliest date for the year to start, OR God has no standard at all for when the year should always start. There are no other options as far as the start of the year is concerned.

So ... do you have some bias against the equinox being a significant marker in the solar year?

Let's look at the next point.

AN UNFAIR SLANT TO BIAS YOUR READERS

The sub-title of your article reads: "Does God approve of any of the numerous 'SACRED calendars' now existing?". Under "Problem 5" you refer to those who would try to construct "a SACRED calendar". This use of the word "sacred" automatically creates a bit of a bias against any possible suggestion which differs from the present Jewish calendar by again presenting the extreme limit. In most of your readers' minds the use of the word "sacred" will evoke the meaning of "holy, worthy of worship", etc.

And that then enables your readers to immediately REJECT any of alternative options they may come

across, since those "alternative options" are OBVIOUSLY NOT "SACRED"!

But most of the alternatives to the present Jewish calendar don't claim to be "SACRED". And whether a calendar is "sacred" or not is not the real issue. The focus on "sacred" is really only a distraction. There really is no such thing today as "a SACRED calendar" anywhere, not amongst the Jews and not amongst any other people.

What is important is that such a calendar is based on sound principles and that it fulfills ALL of the biblical requirements. IF the present Jewish calendar ALSO fulfills all of the biblical requirements, THEN that is certainly preferable to any other possible calendar. But the present Jewish calendar should be evaluated by the same standards by which any other possible calendar suggestion is evaluated.

Let's take a closer look at the word "sacred", which you have used so liberally in your article.

A "SACRED" CALENDAR?

Webster's Dictionary defines the word "sacred" as follows:

1. a. set apart for the service or worship of deity;
- b. devoted exclusively to one service or use;
2. a. worthy of religious veneration: HOLY;
- b. entitled to reverence;
3. of or relating to religion;
4. (obsolete) accursed.

Something is "sacred" not because we human beings have "set it apart", but because ALMIGHTY GOD has set it apart. The ONLY things which are really "sacred" are those things which God has clearly revealed to be so. Unless God tells us so in the Bible, we cannot assume that anything is sacred! To make such an assumption is presumptuous before God. We simply do not have the right to decide that some things are "sacred" and others are not "sacred". Only GOD can make those decisions. Do you agree?

Now you have very clearly spelled out in your article that the present Jewish calendar is not really found anywhere in the Bible. It is for this specific reason that you preface your argument with the supposed "5 Problems". Yet you confidently and repeatedly assert, without ever presenting any proof of any kind, that the present Jewish calendar is "SACRED".

That assumption is simply not warranted.

Apart from the Jewish calendar, is there anything else which is NOT spelled out in the Bible and which you also feel is "sacred"? What would that be? I put it to you that there is NOTHING that may be classified as "sacred" apart from those things which are spelled out in the Bible. If you have evidence to contradict this view, I would very much appreciate hearing it.

By labelling the Jewish calendar as "sacred" you have attempted to lend weight to your arguments without actually presenting any real proof. The word "sacred" itself carries a lot of weight. And this you

have tried to garner to your advantage.

But you have presented no proof that the Jewish calendar qualifies to be called "sacred"; you have only reasoned from your assumed premises.

Are you aware of the fact that GOD refers to the Jewish calendar in Isaiah 1:14? Old Testament Hebrew did not have a word for "calendar". So the way people in Old Testament times referred to the calendar was by speaking about "new moons". Are you aware of the fact that God says in very clear terms to the Jews:

YOUR NEW MOONS and your appointed feasts MY SOUL HATETH: THEY ARE A TROUBLE UNTO ME; I am weary to bear them. (Isaiah 1:14 AV)

Isn't that a rather strong way for God to speak about the present Jewish calendar? Shouldn't this Scripture cause you at least SOME hesitation before you glibly attach the word "sacred" to that calendar?

And when we "rely solely on the Bible" then it becomes clear that there is no justification for calling the present Jewish calendar "sacred". Are you against "relying on the Bible" in this matter?

Now let's take a closer look at the bias which is evident in your article.

YOUR BIAS IN FAVOUR OF THE JEWISH CALENDAR

Already with the very first word of the first sentence of your article you reveal your bias. The first word you have used reads: "SINCE ..."!

Webster's Dictionary defines this conjunction "since" as meaning: "in view of the fact that: BECAUSE", and this is precisely the meaning with which you have used this word "since".

Thus the opening word of your article reveals that in your very first sentence you are already going to present A CONCLUSION! Before you offer to present any information of any kind, you already present a conclusion. Does this not expose your bias?

Your opening sentence reads:

"SINCE God commanded Israel to keep His weekly Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11), and His seven annual Holy Days (Lev. 23; Ezek. 20:12-24), OF NECESSITY HE WOULD ALSO HAVE GIVEN HIS PEOPLE A RELIABLE CALENDAR showing when to observe those Sabbaths."

That opening sentence makes the entire rest of your article superfluous! If your opening assumed assertion is true, THEN there is only one possible answer to the question contained in the title of your article, and that is: the calendar as preserved by the Jews today is the one. There simply are no other possible answers to your unsubstantiated assertion. Therefore there is no need for any quotations from various sources regarding the Jewish calendar; there is no need for quoting various Scriptures; there is no need for pointing out the biblical requirements for "a RELIABLE calendar"; there is no need for pointing out supposed "problems" in relying on the Bible for calendar information; and there is no need for justifying the postponements.

IF God would "of necessity have given" a reliable calendar to Moses and to Aaron, THEN the present

Jewish calendar is the only choice available to us. And that is precisely what your whole argument is based on.

You were personally taught by Mr. Armstrong, and you heard him explain MANY TIMES how people carelessly assume things to be true. 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)

Mr. Armstrong's statements also apply to you, Mr. McNair, in regard to speaking about "a sacred calendar". I put it to you that you too have "carelessly assumed" and "accepted" the things you have heard and been taught. And you too "defend vigorously and emotionally" your convictions. But do you also "stubbornly refuse to believe" what you are "unwilling to believe"? I hope not.

Mr. Armstrong admitted that he himself was no different. We are ALL like this. All of us have at one time or another vigorously defended some of the things we were taught at some time in our lives, only to discover later that what we believed was not really the truth. This is certainly true in my case. Didn't we all feel that Mr. Armstrong was going to be the leader of the two witnesses, and weren't we wrong in this matter? Back in the 50's didn't you feel that droughts and famine and the Great Tribulation would surely affect the United States by the late 60's or early 70's at the very latest? And weren't you wrong in those views? Back in the 50's didn't you feel that by 1996 A.D. Jesus Christ would surely already have set up the Kingdom of God here on Earth? And weren't you wrong in this regard also? The same points are true for all of us.

Can we learn the lesson involved here?

Every premise we build on must stand up to proof! We need to beware of carelessly assuming something to be true. Specifically, we need to beware of using nothing but REASONING to establish our premises. Yes, we can reason; but sound reasoning will be based on sound facts, facts that can be verified. These are things you yourself taught us when you evaluated our speeches in the speech classes of Ambassador College.

It is hard to see, let alone to shake off, our own biases and prejudices. As Mr. Armstrong wrote on page xiii of the "Author's Statement" of "Mystery of the Ages":

"I have often said it is much more difficult to unlearn an erroneous supposed truth than it is to learn a new truth. Even in these past 58 years I had not fully and clearly realized the significance of the fact revealed in Genesis 3:22-24 ...".

"AN ERRONEOUS SUPPOSED TRUTH" is extremely difficult for us to identify. Please don't think that we in God's Church are immune to such problems. They affect all of us.

As far as your opening statement is concerned, IF God did indeed also GIVE Israel "A RELIABLE CALENDAR" at the time of Moses, then we should be able to PROVE this! It should not be something we have to assume or take for granted.

SO WHERE IS THE PROOF?

Specifically:

- 1) WHY is what God supposedly gave to Moses not recorded in the Bible?
- 2) WHY would God have possibly given some information to Moses, which He wanted KEPT SECRET and only revealed to Aaron?
- 3) What proof is there that what the Jews have today is the same as what God supposedly gave to Moses over 3000 years ago?
- 4) IF God indeed "gave" something to Moses, did God give anyone authority to make any CHANGES to the things He had given to Moses? Or was it to remain unchanged?
- 5) Is there any possible reason WHY the information about the calendar was supposed to be kept secret? The whole Word of God was not something that was kept secret, so why should information about the calendar be something different?
- 6) Do we understand that "secret information" ALWAYS requires an implicit trust in man? We must "OF NECESSITY" have faith that those men, who have the secret information, will indeed be faithful. But there are many examples of priests and high priests (going up to the destruction of Jerusalem at around 70 A.D.) who were NOT faithful to God. Yet "secret information" requires an unquestioning trust in such men. God giving "secret information" to certain men works against the principle of Jeremiah 17:5.

Thus saith the LORD; Cursed [be] the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. (Jeremiah 17:5)

It is not really compatible with the way God works, to claim that God gave some secret information to Moses, which God wanted kept secret until the time of Hillel II, who himself was an unconverted Pharisee, in the 350's A.D.

In other words:

The opening premise of your article is something that you have to PROVE. You are not justified in making that assumption without providing convincing proof. But you have side-stepped the requirement for proof by simply presenting what you really need to prove as something that requires no proof. That is a clear give-away that you are "vigorously and emotionally defending" your convictions. Remember Isaiah 8:20:

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, [it is] because [there is] no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20)

To paraphrase this thought: exactly WHERE in the Bible (i.e. in the law and in the testimony) do you find these calendar instructions which you claim are "sacred"? And if they are not found in the Bible, then they lack understanding (no light in them). This verse requires us to base all our claims regarding God's

instructions to us on the Bible. But the Jewish calendar is not found in the Bible, as you yourself have pointed out.

Let's now look at some facts about the Jewish calendar.

SOME PERTINENT FACTS ABOUT THE JEWISH CALENDAR

1) Let's look at 19-year cycles and compare 19 solar years with the 235 lunar months in 19 Jewish years. Here is the length, expressed in days, for both these periods.

19 solar years (earth's actual movements) = 6939.601782 days;

235 lunar months (moon's actual movements) = 6939.688171 days.

In simple terms this means that the average Jewish 19-year cycle consisting of 235 lunar months is 2 hours 4 minutes 24 seconds longer than 19 solar years. What this means is that the Jewish year is actually 1 day too long for every 216.3 solar years.

THIS IS AN ASTRONOMICAL FACT WHICH NO AMOUNT OF POSTPONEMENTS CAN COUNTERACT! IT IS NOT DUE TO ANY INACCURACY IN THE JEWISH CALCULATIONS, BUT SIMPLY DUE TO THE FACT THAT "A 19-YEAR CYCLE" IS ONLY AN APPROXIMATION AND NOT A PRECISE ASTRONOMICAL PHENOMENON!

In practice this fact means that the molad, or the conjunction, will shift to exactly 1 day later in the solar year every 216 years. And the molads or conjunctions are not something we have any control over; it is IMPOSSIBLE to shift them or to postpone them. Postponements can only be applied AFTER the molad has been calculated, BUT any such postponements have absolutely no influence at all on any future molads. They must be (and they are!) calculated without any regard for any postponements that may have been applied to previous years.

To clearly illustrate this with a PRACTICAL example, here is a short table with the molads of Tishri, spanning a period of almost 2000 years. All of the following dates are for the 17th year of a cycle, which is the year when the Feast of Tabernacles occurs at the earliest possible time. All of them are the dates of the molads. I have converted all the dates to the Gregorian calendar, in which calendar the equinoxes are constant. To view these dates in the Julian calendar is misleading, since in that calendar the equinoxes were not fixed.

[Comment: I have applied the same sequence of leap years to this entire list, the sequence which is currently being used. If you have the calendar program produced by Ambassador College, you'll find a different date for the year 75 A.D. than the one I have listed here. The reason is that that program applies a different sequence of leap years to dates before about 250 A.D.. Thus for 75 A.D. you'll find the molad given as September 28 Julian, which is September 26 Gregorian. That represents the new moon AFTER the one I have listed below. In order to see this shift of one day every 216 years we need to obviously keep the sequence of Jewish leap years consistent.]

75 A.D. = Molad was Wed., August 28 Gregorian;

322 A.D. = Molad was Wed., August 29 Gregorian;

550 A.D. = Molad was Sun., August 30 Gregorian;

797 A.D. = Molad was Sun., August 31 Gregorian;
1063 A.D. = Molad was Wed., September 2 Gregorian;
1215 A.D. = Molad was Wed., September 2 Gregorian;
1519 A.D. = Molad was Thu., September 4 Gregorian;
1804 A.D. = Molad was Wed., September 5 Gregorian;
2051 A.D. = Molad will be Wed., September 6 Gregorian.

In this table I have compared molads of the same year in the respective cycles. IF 19 Jewish years were EXACTLY equal to 19 solar years, THEN in 2051 A.D. the molad should still be on the same day of the month in the Gregorian calendar, as it was in 75 A.D.. But in fact we see that in the space of those 1976 years (i.e. 2051-75) the molad has shifted by about 9 days.

THIS INEVITABLE AND UNAVOIDABLE SHIFT OF THE MOLAD OF TISHRI TO A LATER DATE IN THE YEAR IS NOT PROVIDED FOR IN THE PRESENT JEWISH CALENDAR! NO SYSTEM OF POSTPONEMENTS CAN COMPENSATE FOR THIS SHIFT, SINCE FUTURE NEW MOONS SIMPLY CANNOT BE "POSTPONED" AWAY FROM THE CONJUNCTION.

2) In your article you present a quotation, and you then also make the same point yourself, that the sequence of leap years is arranged in such a way that sabbatical and post-sabbatical years are never intercalated. This is to somehow infer that the "metonic cycle" is in some way inferior to the present Jewish cycle, and that there is something special about the present sequence of leap years.

But this claim which you present is a mathematical impossibility!

We are dealing with two different cycles, a 19-year cycle for the calendar, and a 7-year cycle for the sabbatical years. Never mind the "post-sabbatical years"; let's just for the moment restrict ourselves to looking at the sabbatical years.

Here is what this then looks like:

The leap years are intercalated in years 3,6,8,11,14,17,19.

Let's look at three consecutive 19-year cycles. That is a total of 57 years. The Jewish leap years in those 57 years will then be years:

- 3,6,8,11,14,17,19,22,25,27,30,33,36,38,41,44,46,49,52,55,57.

Now we don't know which year was the first sabbatical year in the first of these three 19-year cycles. However, there are only seven different possibilities. It simply has to be either year 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7.

If year 1 is the sabbatical year, THEN all the sabbatical years over that period of time will be years: 1,8,15,22,29,36,43,50,57.

If year 2 is the sabbatical year, THEN all the sabbatical years over that period of time will be years: 2,9,16,23,30,37,44,51.

If year 3 is the sabbatical year, THEN all the sabbatical years over that period of time will be years: 3,10,17,24,31,38,45,52.

If year 4 is the sabbatical year, THEN all the sabbatical years over that period of time will be years: 4,11,18,25,32,39,46,53.

If year 5 is the sabbatical year, THEN all the sabbatical years over that period of time will be years: 5,12,19,26,33,40,47,54.

If year 6 is the sabbatical year, THEN all the sabbatical years over that period of time will be years: 6,13,20,27,34,41,48,55.

If year 7 is the sabbatical year, THEN all the sabbatical years over that period of time will be years: 7,14,21,28,35,42,49,56. [This last list will also include Year 19 of the previous cycle as a sabbatical year.]

If you check all seven of these possibilities (and there are no others!), then you'll see that over the space of only three 19-year cycles every possible option will contain at least TWO sabbatical years.

It should be immediately apparent that if we were to also include "post-sabbatical years" in this exercise, then every list would contain at least two more years; i.e. over the space of three 19-year cycles every possible option would contain at least FOUR sabbatical or post-sabbatical years. To readily see this combined permutation, you simply have to add together any two adjacent lists given above (i.e. if year 1 is the sabbatical year, then year 2 is the post-sabbatical year; if year 7 is the sabbatical year, then year 1 is the post sabbatical year; etc.).

So the claim that it is possible to devise a sequence of intercalation which will avoid all sabbatical and post-sabbatical years is FALSE! It is a mathematical impossibility to reconcile the seven years of intercalation in a 19-year cycle with a fixed 7-year cycle of sabbatical years. The above examples clearly expose this fallacy.

Thus there is nothing "special" or "magical" about the sequence of 3,6,8,11,14,17,19. It is inherently no better or worse than any other sequence.

Now let's look at some proof that the fixed calendar established by Hillel II is neither sacred nor inspired.

PROOF THAT THE FIXED CALENDAR OF HILLEL IS NOT "SACRED"

In your article you present one section under the title: "TABERNACLES NEVER OCCURS WHOLLY IN SUMMER"! In this section you refer to the biblical requirement expressed in Exodus 34:22, which we have already examined. You also explicitly mention the date of September 23 (Gregorian calendar) for the start of autumn.

You also explain in your article that Hillel II established "THE PERMANENT CALENDAR" which is still in force today, and you mention the date "circa 358 A.D."

So here you have given us two specific points about the present Jewish calendar:

1) The present format (present sequence of leap years, and the same postponement rules as today) has been in force since about 358 A.D. [I'll accept this for the sake of the argument.]

2) The Bible requires that the Seventh Day of Tabernacles should never precede the autumn equinox,

which is on September 23 in the Gregorian calendar.

From these two statements, which are in essence presented in your article, we can now reason logically to objectively test whether this calendar is "sacred" or "inspired".

THIS IS THE TEST:

IF THIS CALENDAR HAS GOD'S APPROVAL, THEN SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN THE 350's A.D. IT WILL ALWAYS HAVE COMPLIED WITH ALL THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS! SPECIFICALLY, IT WILL NEVER HAVE CAUSED THE SEVENTH DAY OF TABERNACLES TO PRECEDE THE AUTUMN EQUINOX!

Do you agree with this test?

If the calendar Hillel II, a leader of the sect of the Pharisees, established ever causes the entire Feast of Tabernacles to precede the autumn equinox, THEN IT DOES NOT HAVE GOD'S APPROVAL!

You yourself wrote in your article:

"Tabernacles must NEVER end before the fall equinox (tekufah Tishri), which, in the Northern Hemisphere, usually occurs on September 23." (my emphasis)

THOSE ARE YOUR OWN WORDS!

The following table presents the dates for the SEVENTH Day of Tabernacles, in the GREGORIAN calendar, for Year #17 in each cycle, starting with the year 379 A.D. Note that these are NOT Julian dates, but already converted Gregorian dates.

379 A.D. = September 18

398 A.D. = September 19

417 A.D. = September 19

436 A.D. = September 18

455 A.D. = September 19

474 A.D. = September 19

493 A.D. = September 18

512 A.D. = September 18

531 A.D. = September 20

550 A.D. = September 19

569 A.D. = September 19

588 A.D. = September 19

607 A.D. = September 19

etc. ... every 19 years right down to ...

1348 A.D. = September 22

The following table presents the dates for the SEVENTH Day of Tabernacles, in the GREGORIAN calendar, for Year #6 in each cycle, starting with the year 368 A.D.

368 A.D. = September 19

387 A.D. = September 20

406 A.D. = September 19

425 A.D. = September 20

444 A.D. = September 21

463 A.D. = September 21

482 A.D. = September 20

501 A.D. = September 20

520 A.D. = September 19

539 A.D. = September 22

558 A.D. = September 21

577 A.D. = September 21

596 A.D. = September 21

etc. ... every 19 years right down to ...

1014 A.D. = September 22

In both of the above tables all the applicable rules of postponement have been faithfully applied. It is due to these postponement rules that the lists present minor fluctuations. In some years a 1-day or even a 2-day postponement was applied, and then later there is a year when no postponements were applicable.

These facts, which I have presented here, can be independently verified by using any of the calendar programs that are available. What they show very clearly is that SINCE ITS VERY INCEPTION the calendar of Hillel has violated the plain scriptural instruction of Exodus 34:22!

In reaching this conclusion I am not using "MY" standard of never allowing the year to start before the spring equinox. No, in reaching this conclusion I am actually using YOUR standard, to have at least the

SEVENTH Day of Tabernacles reach the equinox!

Mr. McNair, you yourself plainly stated that:

"TABERNACLES MUST NEVER END BEFORE THE FALL EQUINOX"!

Your own words make clear that there is NO WAY that back in 358 A.D. the calendar Hillel II introduced could possibly have had God's approval! Would Almighty God in heaven approve a calendar which FOR THE NEXT 1000 YEARS (i.e. till 1348 A.D.) would REPEATEDLY, IN REGULAR SUCCESSION, cause the ENTIRE Feast of Tabernacles to fall before the autumn equinox? No, God would NOT approve such a calendar!

Put another way, since the time of Hillel in the 350's A.D. there have been ABOUT NINETY DIFFERENT YEARS, for which the ENTIRE FEAST OF TABERNACLES PRECEDED THE AUTUMN EQUINOX!

Please forgive me for using "the smiling, leaning elephant approach" on you, an approach which you yourself very eloquently encouraged all of us students back in the 60's to use when we were sure of our facts; but I see no other way to penetrate your bias in favour of the present Jewish calendar. Until very recently I myself had the same bias, but I couldn't deny these facts which stared me in the face. I hope that you too will be able to acknowledge these facts.

Hillel's calendar STARTED OUT in violation of God's instructions! Keep in mind the shift of one day later for every 216 years. It is this shift which TODAY, over 1600 years after Hillel's time, appears to obscure this built-in initial error. Today all the molads have shifted to dates from 7-8 days later than at Hillel's time. Thus TODAY the entire Feast of Tabernacles is never concluded before the fall equinox, though it still STARTS before the equinox. EVENTUALLY, by around 2700 A.D., the present Jewish calendar will be at the point where Tabernacles NEVER starts before the equinox. Thus it will take about 2300 years (in round numbers) for Hillel's calendar to come to the point where it will always meet this one particular requirement of never starting Tabernacles before the autumn equinox. As far as never having Nisan 1 before the spring equinox is concerned, you'll have to wait until nearly 4000 A.D., because as late as 3856 A.D. the Jewish year is scheduled to start on March 20th, with a Passover date of April 2nd.

That's a LONG time to wait for a flaw, which was introduced in 358/359 A.D., to work itself out of the system.

But even today we still have problems with Hillel's calendar. For example:

In 2032 A.D. Tabernacles is STILL scheduled to start on the evening of September 19, which is four days before the equinox. For that year the First Day of Unleavened Bread is scheduled to be Saturday, March 27. Therefore in 2032 A.D. the wave offering day would be Sunday, March 28, and that is again FAR TOO EARLY to have any "mature barley" available (to evaluate the year by YOUR standards).

Can we simply brush aside the requirements, which you yourself pointed out in your article? What is "the spirit of the law", the obvious intent of God's instructions, in this regard?

Let's now look at Exodus 34:22 a bit more closely.

EXODUS 34:22 EXAMINED

Here is this verse:

And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and THE FEAST OF INGATHERING AT THE YEAR'S END. (Exodus 34:22)

In your article you have correctly explained that the Hebrew expression translated as "the year's end" refers to the autumn equinox, which is on September 23. Your explanation here is in total agreement with Dr. Hoeh's April 1981 Good News article about "the Hebrew Calendar".

So, in applying this verse to our Gregorian calendar, it would be perfectly correct to render this as:

"And thou shalt observe ... the Feast of Ingathering AT THE AUTUMN EQUINOX, WHICH IS ON SEPTEMBER 23."

This is in agreement with the way you yourself have explained the Hebrew word "tekufah".

NOW COMES YOUR INTERPRETATION, WHICH IS INFLUENCED BY YOUR PREJUDICE TOWARDS THE PRESENT JEWISH CALENDAR.

You now INTERPRET that this means: as long as ONE of the days of Tabernacles, even if it is only the Seventh Day, reaches the equinox, THEN God's instruction is still being fulfilled.

This interpretation is openly biased in favour of the present pharisaical (the present permanent calendar was instituted by the PHARISEES) Jewish practice of sometimes (in Year #17 and in Year #6 of each cycle) still having Tabernacles start BEFORE the "tekufah".

How does GOD speak about the Feast of Tabernacles? Notice:

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, THE FIFTEENTH DAY of this seventh month [shall be] the feast of tabernacles [for] seven days unto the LORD. ON THE FIRST DAY [shall be] AN HOLY CONVOCATION: ye shall do no servile work [therein]. (Leviticus 23:34-35)

You know that the word "convocation" means "a commanded assembly"; and a "HOLY convocation" is "an assembly that has been commanded on the authority of Almighty God". I don't recall exactly, but very possibly you were the one who taught me this at Ambassador College.

We today have the custom of having church services on every one of the seven days of Tabernacles, and that is fine. BUT THE ONLY "HOLY" CONVOCATION during those seven days is ON THE FIRST DAY! Do we understand this?

We may assemble before God on any day that we may choose (I mean IN ADDITION to the days God has instructed), e.g. for mid-week Bible Studies, etc. But our decision to assemble on those days does not make them "HOLY convocations". They have only been called on the authority of the leadership of the Church.

The only HOLY convocations are the weekly Sabbath days and the seven annual Sabbath days, as spelled out by God in Leviticus chapter 23. This means that days 2-6 of the Feast of Tabernacles are not "HOLY" convocations. The HIGH POINT of the seven days of Tabernacles is without doubt THE FIRST DAY; that is the only day of the seven which God Himself singles out for any special attention.

Now when, according to the present Jewish calendar, the Feast of Tabernacles starts BEFORE the

"tekufah" (e.g. 1926, 1937, 1945, 1956, 1964, 1975, 1983, 1994, 2002, 2013, etc.) THEN the high point of the Feast of Tabernacles, the ONLY "holy convocation" during the entire Feast of Tabernacles, THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENT of the whole seven-day period, takes place in the summer, before the equinox!

When the "holy convocation" of the Feast of Tabernacles (the First Day) takes place before the equinox, then we cannot somehow call "A HOLY CONVOCATION" for the 5th or the 6th or the 7th Day of Tabernacles, just in order to fulfill the symbolism of having had a "holy convocation" AFTER the start of autumn, so we can assure ourselves that we have "fulfilled" the instruction of Exodus 34:22.

An honest and open-minded examination of Leviticus 23:34-35 makes clear that God really stresses the importance of the FIRST Day of Tabernacles. In our desire to accommodate a calendar with which we are comfortable, we are willing to accept a calendar which since its inception in the 350's A.D. has been GROSSLY IN ERROR AND CONTRARY TO THE INSTRUCTIONS OF GOD for about NINETY DIFFERENT INDIVIDUAL YEARS, when the entire Feast of Tabernacles would have preceded the equinox. How can we possibly attempt to force Exodus 34:22 into the straitjacket of justifying the demonstrated error of Hillel's calendar?

Do we ever see Exodus 34:22 from the point of view of those who are involved in the "INGATHERING", the farmers? What about the farmers? You freely acknowledged the importance of the barley being "mature" in time for the wave offering. What about the "gathering in of the harvest in the autumn"? Did God really INTEND the farmer to leave his land a week or more before the end of summer, so that he could attend the Feast of "INGATHERING" 4 or 5 days before the end of summer? Isn't the farmer being short-changed somewhere along the line when his city-dwelling brethren and ministry require him to leave his crops even before the end of summer, so he can attend a Feast, which is supposed to be linked to HIS autumn activities?

I don't see how anyone can justify the claim that Exodus 34:22 is fulfilled as long as at least the last day of Tabernacles reaches up to the equinox.

Well, I don't really want to write another really long calendar article. So I'll leave out the other things in your two articles that I could comment on. The main point has been covered.

I have clearly proved, with precise dates and facts, that the calendar you support, and which is endorsed in an unqualified way by the Global Church of God, was GROSSLY IN ERROR for up to 1000 years after the time of Hillel II. That gross error is apparent EVEN BY THE STANDARDS YOU YOURSELF LAID DOWN IN YOUR ARTICLE. Since then Hillel's calendar has continued to be in error, though today this error is not as readily apparent because people have opted to interpret Exodus 34:22 to fit in with their prejudices. However, a focus on the need to have some barley available which is "MATURE ENOUGH" to be used for the wave offering, reveals that Exodus 34:22 must mean that the FIRST Day of Tabernacles should never precede the equinox, so that the wave offering will never be required before March 30 at the very earliest. And even that is still too early!

It should really be clear that God wants the year to start in the spring. You yourself made the point that the first month should be in the spring.

Well, it's time for this "leaning elephant" to move on and to lean against some other tree. I sincerely hope that you can reconcile your mind to the facts I have presented about the present Jewish calendar.

Frank W. Nelte