

# The Cancerous Calendar Controversy

by John W. Ritenbaugh  
*Forerunner*, August 1994

From time to time, and in some specific cases seemingly endlessly, a controversy arises within the church that is never resolved to the satisfaction of all interested parties. Such an issue is which calendar should be used to set God's holy days. It continues to be a focus of research, writing and discussion, with very strong opinions—sometimes coupled with a great deal of sarcasm, even angry finger-pointing and accusation—being expressed by those of opposing views.

These angry denunciations over the calendar are taking place within the church of God, not the world! No subject, unless it is church government, has divided more people for as long a period of time.

I have seen research papers written by men of church of God fellowship with such titles as *God's Sacred Calendar*; *The Calendar God Gave to Moses*; *God's Calendar in the Heavens*; *The Hebrew Calendar*; *Postponements: Another Mystery of the Ages*; *The Original Calendar in the Twentieth Century*; *From the Beginning It Was Not So*; *What's Wrong With the Calendar?*; *Whose Calendar, God's or the Jews?*. Additionally, I have read a significant number of shorter articles and letters from church of God sources, and also materials from secular sources on the same basic subject. What is interesting is that most of them disagree with each other on major points.

An interesting fact of history is that once a split occurs, whether in a large or small group, whether calendar determination motivated the split or not, the new group soon devises their own calendar, as if to accentuate the separation and put a stamp of finality on it. J. B. Segal, in *Intercalation and the Hebrew Calendar*, p. 260, states, "There has scarcely been a single dissenting movement in Judaism that has not been associated with a desire to manipulate the calendar."

There is even a biblical reference to this. When Judah seceded from Israel in the days of Rehoboam, Jeroboam, king of Israel, almost immediately devised a method of celebrating sacred observances at different times than Judah (I Kings 12:25-33). Though not the devising of a different calendar per se, it still fits the broader definition and usage of "calendar." Doing this seems to be a natural step of identification and unity for the new group.

In the publications advocating a calendar different from the calculated Hebrew calendar, they appeal for a return to "God's calendar" or the "biblical calendar" or "the calendar God gave to Moses" because the Hebrew calendar is somehow not "biblical." The controversy revolves around several points: setting the beginning of the year, when is a new moon "new," the postponements, intercalation and observation versus calculation. Others are offended by the names of the months on the Hebrew calendar, saying they prove the calendar is not of God. Is the seven-day week, which is certainly part of any calendar, not of God because the days have pagan names?

## What Is a Calendar?

According to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, a *calendar* is a "system for fixing the beginning, length, and divisions of the civil year and arranging days and longer divisions of time (as weeks and months) in a definite order; a tabular register of days according to a system usually covering one year and referring the days of each month to the days of the week; an orderly list."

*Webster's Dictionary, A New Lexicon of the English Language*, defines *calendar* as, "a table of the days, weeks, and months of the year noting public holidays etc.; a system of fixing the length and divisions of a year for the purposes of a community; a register or schedule of persons, events etc., usually arranged in chronological order."

All of us are familiar with the calendars we carry in our wallets or purses, set on a desk or hang on a wall. Using the above definitions, there is nothing even remotely approaching such a "table" in the Bible. One cannot turn to any book, chapter or series of verses and refer to a biblical table that clearly shows God's commanded days, months and years arranged in exactly the way He ordered them. "Calendar" does not appear in the Scriptures.

He gave us the Ten Commandments in table form, as is the civil and sacrificial law, though in a somewhat "looser" form than the Commandments. But there is no equally clearly enunciated table on which we can set the observance of the holy days!

The closest thing to a "calendar" is the list of holy days in Leviticus 23, which fits the definition of "a register or schedule of persons, events, etc., usually arranged in chronological order." But where is the underlying "table" or "tabular register" to set them on?

Since the Bible does not contain one, men begin looking for scriptural evidence of a "system for fixing the beginning, length, and divisions of the civil year and arranging days and longer divisions of time (as weeks and months) in a definite order." They look for clearly defined rules contained in verses or implied in a story or example. The few rules in the Bible pertaining to producing a tabular calendar are unclear, written in such a way as to allow for much "private interpretation." Other factors necessary for producing an accurate calendar are either missing entirely or are so vague that one is forced to make arbitrary decisions. Does the Bible grant just anybody the authority to do that? Are the resulting decisions scriptural?

## **Dissenting Opinions**

For example, when does the new moon occur—at the first faint crescent, when it "disappears" on its way to conjunction with the sun, or at conjunction? What new moon do we use—the one nearest the spring equinox, either before or after it, unless it is too far before it, causing Passover to fall in winter? Or the first new moon after the spring equinox? Or should we not even consider the spring equinox, but determine it visually by the "green ears" of barley in Palestine? From what area of earth should the new moon be calculated or observed? From Jerusalem, from where one is, or a location one arbitrarily establishes as a "mean" line for calendar calculations? For that matter, where are the rules regarding whether we should use observation or calculation?

Those who believe that the present fixed Hebrew calendar should not be used because some of its rules are not biblical also insist we should continue to intercalate. But, they say, it should be by a "naturally occurring method." But where does the Bible give any rule at all regarding intercalation? Intercalation is the necessary insertion of a period of time (usually a day or lunar month) to bring the

calendar into harmony with the heavens. We are most familiar with the insertion of February 29 every four years into the Gregorian calendar.

There are other needful points of reference within a system for producing a calendar, especially one that might work on a worldwide basis. However, even the few questions asked above have produced a variety of differing opinions.

I have been shown eight different ways of calculating the beginning of the new year! Does that not seem like a great number of options for a device that is supposed to be calculated from something as precise as the movements of heavenly bodies? Each has its adherents and each quotes scriptures to support his opinion. Can they all be biblically correct? Is each one truth? Is it possible each has its own inaccuracies, misplaced authority and/or assumptions? Men obviously have reached conclusions regarding these things, but *what does God clearly state in His Word* ?

Notice these quotations from secular sources concerning a few items just mentioned.

- From *Astronomy in the Old Testament* by G. Schiaparelli: "There is no indication in the Old Testament of the way of fixing the beginning of the month" (p. 103).
- From *Empires of Time* by Anthony F. Aveni: "The Hebrew calendar with its strictly lunar base did not observe the equinox with any precision. In fact, we have no details how they actually determined the month of Nisan." (p. 115).
- *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Calendar": "Little is known of the procedure of determining the beginning of the month."
- From *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Calendars": "Bible literature written just before, during, and after the Exile provides many dates and calendrical hints but again offers no systematic statement about the nature of the calendars employed in Judah."

Something is becoming clear and as we move along it will become more so: The biblical calendar is not the simple device some would lead us to believe. Reconstructing that calendar from vague and inexplicit scriptures does not meet the precise requirements needed for an accurate calendar. It is not just a matter of looking up at the moon once a month to check on its phase.

## Asynchronism

Even a cursory check of Genesis 7:11 and 8:1-4 shows that the figures given by Moses for the time the Flood occurred show a period of 150 days, from the 17th of the second month to the 17th of the seventh month. That is exactly five 30-day months and indicates a year of 360 days. This means that a lunation would occur exactly every thirty days and that twelve lunations would also harmonize precisely with the earth's annual journey around the sun. In other words, the lunar year and solar year were exactly the same length.

It is **not** that way now. The average solar year is 365.24 days. An average lunation is 29.53 days, and twelve lunations today add up to only 354.36 days. The lunar year is over eleven days short of the solar year! Also, the familiar nineteen-year cycle is not perfect: The earth, sun and moon fall 7½ hours short of being in perfect conjunction.

The heavenly bodies—by which time is measured and calendars function—are asynchronous. With respect to time, their orbits no longer function perfectly in relation to each other. This is important in regard to setting the holy days, as they are determined by the movements of the moon within the longer cycle of the earth's yearly trip around the sun. If we paid attention only to the moon, we would hold the holy days eleven days earlier each year, and soon they would be observed out of their seasons. If we began by keeping Passover in the spring when it is commanded, we would soon keep it in the winter. In approximately eight years, its observance would pass into the fall. In another eight years we would hold it in the summer and then back to spring again. To prevent this, the lunar year must be coordinated with the solar year—but they do not harmonize perfectly.

Thus, an additional lunar month is inserted seven times in nineteen years to bring the two systems very close to harmony. But where does the Bible tell us what pattern of intercalations God wants? The current method is to insert a month in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years of the nineteen-year cycle. Moses Maimonides, one of the greatest Jewish scholars, states that the Jews intercalated according to the barley harvest (*The Sanctification of the New Moon*, p. 16). But he later says that they also intercalated when roads were bad, bridges washed out, rivers swollen (thus affecting travel) and the earthen ovens in Jerusalem used to roast the Passover lambs were destroyed by rain (p. 17)!

That might work in a small country the size of New Jersey, but what about applying that to a worldwide Work? Also, if we use observation only, what happens when the moon is not visible during the critical period for several months in a row? We have to consider this because through the centuries this has undoubtedly occurred.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th ed., vol. 4, "Calendar," p. 989) states:

When regard is had to the sun's motion alone, the regulation of the year, and distribution of the days into months, may be effected without much trouble; but the difficulty is greatly increased when it is sought to reconcile solar and lunar periods, or to make the subdivisions of the year depend on the moon, and at the same time to preserve the correspondence between the whole year and the seasons.

Most calendars begin on a fixed day each year, but neither the cycle of the moon nor the appearance of a barley harvest will permit this because they vary from year to year.

### **Observation Versus Calculation**

Those opposed to the Hebrew calendar frequently attack the "postponements," as well as the "calculated" method of devising it. They claim that the Bible says nothing about the postponements. They generally proclaim that the method of devising a calendar should be by "observation." But none of those three terms appears in the Bible in reference to a calendar.

*Observation* is the term used to describe the annual setting of the beginning of the new year and each month as it occurs. It functions according to the visual observation and judgment of such things as the green ears of barley in designated locations, weather conditions and a visual sighting of the new moon.

*Calculated* (or "fixed") is the term generally used to designate the present Hebrew calendar. Dates are set by astronomical and mathematical computation based upon the average speeds of the heavenly bodies in their respective orbits.

Observation of the new moon is certainly inferred in the Bible, as well as being clearly stated in secular and religious writings. But the argument that observation is the *only* biblical method, or that Israel did not use calculation, is simply not true. The truth is that observation by itself is subject to a number of variables, rendering sole dependence on its accuracy as questionable at the very least.

That ancient Israel used observers to pinpoint the arrival of the new moon is a well-established historical fact. But because observers were used does not automatically mean the authorities did not know from their calculations when the month was to begin.

From written records we know that observers still brought their witness of observing the new moon to the Sanhedrin late during the Second Temple period, the time of Christ and the early church. But if weather made sighting impossible during and through the period of the critical new moons of the first and seventh months, it threw planning for the holy days into great uncertainty. One might think this to be impossible, but just this past month, it was overcast and rained in much of Georgia for longer than two weeks!

Other astronomic and locational factors also affect sighting, but for this article, it is enough to know that God is not the author of confusion (I Corinthians 14:33). Not knowing until the last minute when the month is to begin does not lend itself to orderly preparation. Preparing for myriads of pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for festivals requires more than erratic visual observation.

Even at the time when observation was the basis [for determining the recurrence of the New Moon Day], the court used to ascertain by calculation, and with great precision, according to the methods of the astronomers, the exact time of the [true] conjunction of the moon with the sun, in order to find out whether the moon could be visible [on the night of the 30th day] or not (Maimonides, pp. 26-27).

We should note that Jesus made no comment regarding the calendar. In fact, He kept the festivals on the same days as the Jews when calculation was, at the very least, being used in conjunction with visual observation. This suggests He respected this specific operation of the Sanhedrin.

*The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* says that witnesses of the new moon could not always be trusted to give honest testimony. They were often zealous but misled. Community leaders, therefore, had to study astronomy to ascertain by means of calculation when the new moon should appear, and thereby check up on the testimony of witnesses. Eventually, the calendar was determined entirely by calculation, and the hearing of witnesses only retained to encourage individuals to carry out their religious duties.

The weaknesses of observation alone, when combined with slow communication with central authority, became painfully apparent as the Jews became dispersed throughout the world. To "make up" for their uncertainty about whether they were observing the festivals on the proper day, they began observing them for two days rather than the biblically commanded one. This practice began with the observation of the critically important *Rosh Hashanah* (Feast of Trumpets) but soon included the others as well (except Atonement). The practice continues to the present among

Orthodox Jews except for those in Israel, since they are no longer dispersed. They are in their own land and believe they can accurately reckon the important calendar dates.

James Hastings gives a brief history of an early period of the Karaites, a Jewish sect (*The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, "Calendar"). Sometime shortly after AD 750, they repudiated the fixed Hebrew calendar and reinstated lunar observation as the method of determining holy days. They later called astronomical calculation "stargazing" and "cloud-peering," and said approximate calculations were permitted only if weather made observation impossible. However, the Karaites in scattered locations fell into confusion and began celebrating the same festival on different days. They were eventually compelled—for the sake of unity—to once again accept the nineteen-year cycle and resort to calendar calculations. They devised astronomical tables very similar to the fixed Hebrew calendar.

Nobody knows with absolute certainty when calculation of the calendar began. Maimonides claims it has been calculated from the beginning (with Moses). Secular history shows that "Israel used at least three and possibly four different calendars during its long history" (Julian Morgenstern, *The Calendar of the Book of Jubilees, Its Origin and Its Character*, p. 35). "At different periods of time the Israelites used different systems of months, one after another, and sometimes more than one at the same time" (Schiaparelli, p. 104). "As is the case with all other calendars, the Jewish calendar as now observed is the product of a long historical development" (*The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Calendar").

Some secular historians place the sole use of calculation for determining the calendar in Judah as early as the sixth to fifth centuries BC. J. B. Segal says more conservatively that certainly by the second century BC the Jews had acquired this proficiency, and it was in use before the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. This puts calendar calculation clearly within the time of Jesus Christ.

### **The Moon Is Devious**

In studying the early chapters of Genesis, one cannot but be impressed that the brand new re-creation was one of breathtaking beauty and symmetry of operation. God Himself "saw everything that was made and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Genesis 7 and 8 strongly indicate a year of 360 days with twelve thirty-day months. Deuteronomy 34:8 and Numbers 20:29 imply the possibility that the same solar year may still have existed at the time of Moses. That is an intriguing possibility, but not one we will rely on. Nevertheless, the solar system no longer operates in harmony so as to make a 360-day year possible. The circuits of the heavenly bodies, including earth, are no longer compatible.

Kelly, Dresser and Ross (*Religious Holidays and Calendars*, p. 6) state, "The fact is that the movements of the sun and moon do not neatly coincide with the calendar systems of any human civilization." Of the three most important heavenly bodies—earth, sun and moon—the moon is the most erratic. Maimonides says, "You will realize how devious and sinuous are the movements of the moon in its orbit" (p. 72). In fact, it is so erratic that though its mean lunation is twenty-nine and one-half days, it is entirely possible for five thirty-day months in a row to occur! "Ingenious calendars have been devised, but a fully accurate solution cannot be found because the problem of reconciling the days, months and year is really insoluble" (Samuel Goudsmit and Robert Claiborne, *Time*, p. 64).

Exactly how or when it became this way is something nobody can accurately pinpoint. We all know that a titanic battle took place between God and Lucifer sometime in the distant past. We could point to that, but Genesis 1 strongly implies a symmetrical system, and Genesis 7 and 8 clearly asserts

thirty-day months and a 360-day year following the preparation of the earth for mankind. Is it possible something happened *since then* that affected calendar measurements?

At this point, it is good to reflect upon Daniel 2:20-21, where Daniel exclaims in praise and thanksgiving God's unlimited power and wisdom to control the whole expanse of history. Whether controlling human politics or nature, God determines when in history events will take place and how long each process or phase in history will continue. He can alter or allow to continue at His will.

### **Catastrophes!**

Bible scholars have been joined in recent years by worldly scholars in asserting that a catastrophe of awesome magnitude devastated major portions of the earth. This event wiped whole species of animals from existence and almost completely altered earth's climate by suddenly tilting earth on its axis to its present twenty-three and a half degrees.

Bible scholars point to the Noachian Flood as the most likely time. The world's scholars think that quite possibly the earth was struck by a comet or large asteroid some sixty-five million years ago.

If something of this magnitude occurred at the time of the Flood, it could account for Moses using the dating he did in Genesis 7 and 8 because up until that time planet earth was operating on a 360-day year. However, other events since then had an impact on time and the calendar: Joshua's "long day" (Joshua 10) and God's ten degree reversal of the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz during Hezekiah's reign (II Kings 20:1-11).

Another event that should also be considered is one we know even less about. Perhaps we would not even consider it except for when it occurred relative to information unearthed by archeologists in the Mideast in the last thirty to fifty years. This event is the earthquake that occurred in Uzziah's reign as recorded in Amos 1:1). It was so massive that the great earthquake at Christ's return is compared to it (Zechariah 14:5).

What caused the earthquake in Uzziah's day? Nobody knows exactly, but it occurred about midway through the eighth century BC. What archeologists have uncovered are written traditions of people all over the Mideast and elsewhere of extensive calendar calculation and alterations during the eighth and seventh centuries BC! This butts up against the sixth-century BC "Axial Period," when power in the ancient world shifted, Babylon rose to greatness and the "times of the Gentiles" began.

*Worlds In Collision* by Immanuel Velikovsky is entirely devoted to giving evidence of catastrophic events that have happened within man's written history. He writes of one catastrophe occurring during the eighth or seventh centuries BC that affected the computation of time. While one may not agree with his every conclusion, the evidence he has collected and collated is impressive. Something was happening in the heavens that forced men to rethink their calendars!

Because of the limited scope of this article, there are far too many quotations from Velikovsky's book to cite, but he shows that from India westward across the Mideast to as far away as Peru and back around the globe to China, archeology has revealed that at one time these nations all calculated or observed a 360-day year. But at sometime during the eighth and seventh centuries, calendars were reconfigured to show 365 and one-quarter days. Velikovsky states that great cosmic changes took place from 747 to 687 BC. All around the earth in the years following 687 BC, calendar reforms took place.

It is an interesting sidelight to consider that the Greek astronomer Thales (born 640 BC) should be given credit for discovering that there are 365 and one-quarter days in a year. Is it not strange that though men were on the earth for over thirty-three hundred years before Thales' birth, no one before his day ever figured out that the year has 365 days? Could men who lived lives of nearly a thousand years not notice the length of a year?

Ridiculous! That kind of thinking makes the ancients seem primitive and undeveloped compared to us moderns. This understanding in no way diminishes Thales' accomplishment. He certainly may have discovered (along with others whose names were never recorded) the new length of the year following the disturbances in the heavens.

These disturbances may have been the very reason why Jeremiah, who lived and prophesied in the seventh and sixth centuries BC wrote, "Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them" (Jeremiah 10:2). History also records that the superstitious Gentiles took a dim view of what was occurring in the heavens and viewed the added days as "bad."

### **Rome, Christianity and the Calendar**

Control of the calendar was of great importance in Jewish life because much of their communal activity revolved around the Temple and its religious observances. During the Second Temple period (515 BC to AD 70), this authority appears to have been vested in the high priests. However, with the Temple's destruction by the Romans in AD 70, the rabbis seized control of this important responsibility. They could do this because the priesthood no longer had the Temple as the place of central authority from which to operate, and because the Jewish population was gradually becoming dispersed into all parts of the Roman world. The rabbis thus became central to Jewish religious life.

By the middle of the fourth century AD, "Christianity" and "Christian" rulers were rapidly becoming dominant in the Empire and bringing persecution upon the Jews. Among their persecutions was that the Jewish religious leaders were not permitted by their "Christian" rulers to proclaim leap years or to communicate with the Diaspora. The rabbinate then decided to abandon the method of official proclamation of the months and years and to fix (not "repair," but "set") the calendar in a permanent form. Thus, from AD 359 the calendar has been stabilized (*cf. The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Calendar").

The immediate cause of the rabbinate's action was that Emperor Constantius had forbidden the Jews to hold meetings to determine intercalations. The setting of the annual calendar became virtually impossible, yet all the dispersed Jews depended upon the calendar set by their highest religious authorities still located in Galilee. Hillel II was the leading rabbi when this crisis occurred, and he is generally given credit for constructing the present fixed calendar, as well as making public the methods of calendar calculation. This was a radical step, as it severely limited the religious power of the Galilean rabbis by essentially cutting the dispersed Jews loose, as it were.

This action played a major role in preserving Judaism, and it also led to the preservation of the calendar down to our present time. As the Jews dispersed by both migration and persecution, observation became increasingly chaotic and confused. Different villages celebrated festivals at different times and division was rapidly occurring. The fixed calendar made it possible for dispersed Jews to observe the festivals in unity, worldwide. Jews everywhere could determine the first day of



the month without using unreliable, highly variable observation. According to Philip Birnbaum in *A Book of Jewish Concepts*: "The Jewish calendar is regarded to be the most brilliant achievement of its kind. During the time of Hillel II the system of intercalation was extremely accurate" (p. 309).

To give Hillel II credit for the present day Hebrew calendar overstates his influence. He is undoubtedly responsible for publishing the rules as they existed in AD 359, but that is not exactly the same calendar as today's. Hillel II should receive the credit due him, but the evidence is clear that the calendar had been developing before and continued after him. Some of the elements of the calendar are from earlier times and others were added in the following centuries. Julian Obermann in the introduction to *Sanctification of the New Moon* states, "The system of the fixed calendar was not developed until fully three to four centuries after the close of the talmudic period, about AD 485" (p. xli).

Sometimes men object to the fact that the calendar was not made official until after the Bible was canonized. But that is not an entirely true statement. As far as the world can see, the New Testament was not canonized until the end of the fourth century AD (by Catholic bishops no less!). The Old Testament did not arrive in its present form until the Masoretes (Jewish textual critics) began their work around AD 500, but they did not finish it until sometime between AD 900 and 1000! If we reject something having to do with obedience to God based on an artificially established time line, then we must also consider throwing out as useless any Bible revisions after that same arbitrary line.

## Postponements

The postponements are probably the issue about which Hebrew calendar dissenters express themselves most passionately. They claim that the postponement rules are not in the Scriptures, and this is absolutely true! But as we have seen, other necessary factors for devising a calendar are also not in the Bible. They may be inferred, they may be seen to be a natural necessity, but the "hows," "whys" and "whens" are not explicitly stated.

It is true that when using the fixed calendar, the first day of any particular month may or may not arrive at exactly the same time as the new moon. It may be one or two days off. But what is the problem? Those who want to take us back to visual observation would like us to believe that that method is simple and highly accurate. But the Sanhedrin, back in the days when observation was supposed to be the primary method, had the authority to postpone the beginning of the year *for a whole month* for a wide variety of reasons! It was up to a priest's judgment as to whether the barley would be ripe, whether roads were in sufficiently good condition for pilgrims to travel, whether bridges were safe, etc. Meanwhile, the heavenly bodies moved right on in their courses.

History shows the operation of the calendar was a rather loose affair. Records show that if the moon could not be sighted because of weather, the court had the authority to determine arbitrarily the beginning of a new month. It had to be this way because observation is not precise. The Jews in the dispersion found this out very quickly, and it almost destroyed their unity. The same happened to the Karaites later, but they seem to have forgotten what happened to their fellow Jews a few centuries earlier.

We might think this would no longer be a problem because we are now so technologically advanced. Yet an invitation of a church of God group welcoming people to celebrate Passover with them this year (1994) shows this is not the case. This announcement is reproduced exactly as published:

Yahshua's Memorial AND Yahweh's Passover & Feast of Unleavened Bread are now **TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED** to be celebrated from **MARCH 26 at Sunset Through APRIL 3, 1994**. We will not be able to **POSITIVELY** set Yahweh's Feast until we have **SEEN BOTH Yahweh's First New Moon, "Abib" {scheduled for MARCH 14 (MARCH 13 AT SUNSET)}**, and the **New Green Ears of Barley**. If the anticipated **New Moon is NOT SIGHTED**, it may **POSTPONE Yahweh's Feast by ONE DAY**, and if the **Green Ears of Barley are NOT SIGHTED on Mt. Zion by our Elders** at this scheduled time, this will **POSTPONE Yahweh's Feast by ONE MONTH**. We will **SEND A LETTER with "new" dates**, if the current dates for Yahweh's Feast change. **Please allow yourself extra time for this contingency when making your plans!**

Plainly, they anticipated the possibility of the same problems the Jews confronted when they lived in Palestine and used only observation. It is difficult to imagine this system working with any effectiveness except in a very small area of earth.

As stated earlier, we live in a solar system that no longer harmonizes. And regarding the calendar, it is one of the penalties of sin we must deal with. It makes life more difficult, but it is a fact we must work around.

The fixed calendar is calculated according to the average speeds of the heavenly bodies in their orbits. This fact is the foundational reason for the postponements rules. Very simply put, the postponements are primarily calendar adjustments that bring the calendar into harmony with what is happening in the heavens. It must be done because the heavenly bodies move at irregular speeds while the calendar is calculated using average speeds.

Is it perfect? Does it always hit the new moon right on the mark? Of course not. Earlier, we saw that nobody in the world has a calendar that works perfectly. It is an impossibility, given the terms we must work with. But the Hebrew calendar works marvelously well. It is consistent, enables people to plan and prepare and it keeps widely diverse peoples—even on a worldwide basis—unified in the observance of God's holy days.

Several papers use the terms "convenience" and "expediency" to explain why the postponements exist. They propose that the Jews devised the postponements for reasons of comfort for themselves. The people who wrote those articles against the postponements picked up on those words from the Jews' own writings on calendar rules. However, they have misunderstood the Jews.

What is the New Testament's testimony about the Jews? Jesus says they made burdens difficult to bear; strained at gnats and swallowed camels; tithed of mint, anise and cumin; and made strenuous efforts to win one convert. They are a punctilious, exacting people, which are just the characteristics needed to preserve something that needed more than ordinary care. "Comfort" does not seem to be part of their vocabulary regarding worshipping God.

*Convenience* is usually associated with comfort by us, but notice *Webster's* first definition of its usage: "fitness or suitability for performing an action or fulfilling a requirement." *Expedient* means "suitable for achieving a particular end in a given circumstance." What were the circumstances?

There are at least two. First, they had to work within the constraints of keeping the festivals, the moon, the sun, the calendar and the seasons in harmony, not just for one month or one year, but for at

least nineteen years, when they could make a new start. Convenience and expedience are terms used relative to appropriate calendar adjustments made to harmonize diverse factors. They are not used relative to human comfort.

Second, and more important, is Exodus 16:23, which implies—the Jews see it as a command—that a preparation day should fall before each Sabbath, weekly or annual. We tend to ignore the preparation day because of our reliance upon technology. However, the implication very clearly exists that preparation is an integral part of proper Sabbath observance.

The postponements reflect a desire to protect the sanctity of and respect for the Sabbaths. They have to do with keeping the holy days, as much as possible, from interfering with each other, and thus allowing the greatest amount of respect to be given to each. If they fall before or after one another, preparation becomes more difficult, to say the least.

Raymond Cole makes a fitting comment in his paper "The Hebrew Calendar: Is it Reliable?":

Considering the postponement rules a principle surfaces. They reflect a reverence for both the weekly Sabbath and the annual holy days. Those who reject the calendar because of the postponement rules reflect the kind of a God they worship—one who is uncaring, unfeeling, who has no consideration even for His own law regarding the weekly Sabbath. This is not a God of love and concern for His people (p. 38).

In all, the postponements keep the calendar fine-tuned and prevent the Sabbaths from piling one on top of another. Through proper preparation and observance, they enable God's people to show more reverence for each in its time, as well as to receive the blessing of instruction on each that is meat in due season.

### **History Since the First Century**

Not many sources can easily be found to provide information about which calendar the true church used to set the dates for observing the festivals. However, one source with a church of God connection is obtainable: *A History of the True Religion*, by A. N. Dugger and C. O. Dodd. Both of these men were elders in the Church of God, Seventh Day. Their work is not comprehensive, giving only an overview tracing the practices and doctrinal beliefs of groups that the authors believe show them to be part of the true religion.

Writing of a first-century group called by the world "Nazarenes," they say, "Eusebius, who wrote of the church of the first centuries, speaks of the church observing the Lord's supper at the same time the Jews kept the Passover; viz, on the 14th of the first month, Nisan" (p. 44).

Of the Nicene Council held in AD 325: "At this council, the Passover [Easter] was placed on the Sunday after the Jewish passover, which fell on the Fourteenth of Nisan, or Abib. This made Easter a fixed festival, instead of falling on any day of the week, according to the day of the fourteenth of this month. The Eastern churches to this time had celebrated the passover once a year on the fourteenth of Abib" (p. 78) .

Covering the period from AD 500 to 600: "The Vaudois, known as such by the world, but holding to the true Bible name, were persecuted for the true faith. They observed the seventh day of the week, according to the commandment, immersed for believers baptism (sic), and kept the Passover, or the

Lord's Supper, once a year, in the first month" (p. 101). Personally, I cannot verify if these people were of the true church, but Dugger and Dodd feel they were.

They make at least one reference to the Waldensians during the period from AD 1330 to 1400, saying they kept the Lord's Supper yearly, but giving no date (p. 177).

Writing of churches of God established on the east coast of North America between AD 1671 and 1725: "Thus being isolated from fellowship with one another, we find companies in one place called the Church of Christ, in another place the Church of God, while in other communities they were simply called 'Sabbatarian Congregations,' but the belief was practically the same. They stood for the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, observing the true Sabbath, keeping the Lord's Supper yearly on the 14th of the first month" (pp. 252-253).

From this same period: "Many historical statements have been printed on previous pages of this work, proving beyond doubt that the Cathari, Puritans, and Waldenses were the same people, and that they observed the seventh day of the week, held the Lord's Supper on the 14th of Abib, immersed for baptism, accepted the Bible name for the church, and, in general, held the truth as now taught by the Church of God" (pp. 266-267).

From a chapter covering from 1800 to 1935: "The truth of the matter was that the church had met on the night in question, which was the fourteenth day of the month Nisan, in the spring time, which was the month and day which were kept as a passover by the children of God from the night that God by the hand of Moses led them out of the land of Egypt" (p. 314). Discussing the same occurrence, they also write, "In other words, the Wilbur [West Virginia] brethren were celebrating the annual observance of the Lord's Supper. Being on the fourteenth day, it was the same as when Jesus ate it with His disciples. Being at night, it was the same time that He ate it" (p. 315).

What calendar did these church of God members use when celebrating the Passover? No calendar is directly mentioned, but when mention is made as to time or date, it is always done in reference to the Jews. Which calendar did the Jews use? What other recourse did the church of God have except through the calendar God made available to them through the Jews?

## **Twentieth-Century Work of God**

I have no problem calling the calendar the church of God has used all through the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong "God's sacred calendar." *Sacred*, according to *Webster's Word Histories*, merely means "religious in nature, association or use," as in "sacred music" or "sacred trust."

The record of the past sixty years shows that God blessed the labors of Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong on His behalf. Did not Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong begin keeping the holy days based on dating arrived at through the fixed Hebrew calendar? Did they not then pass on to us the understanding of their meaning and the keeping of them based on dates calculated on that calendar? And we kept them, some of us thirty to forty years!

Did not God bless those labors spiritually and financially, in conversions and open doors to proclaim the Gospel? Did He not continually and progressively open our understanding of things formerly hidden in His Word? Based on the evidence of the last sixty years or so, God has shown that He has given His approval for using the fixed Hebrew calendar to date His holy days.

By contrast, what has the study into the calendar proven to produce? What has been its fruit? Has it produced a Work similar to what was done under Herbert Armstrong? Do not think it is too early to tell, because people have been looking critically into the calendar for millennia and in the church of God for decades.

All it has produced are accusations, offenses and divisions. The effect has been to weaken the church by drawing people's attention away from the things they should be doing. It has been time wasting, divisive and futile.

### Final Considerations

In closing, consider the following: It cannot be shown from the Bible that one calendar was consistently used from Moses till the time of Christ. On the contrary, secular history reveals Israel using at least three and possibly four different ones. Where is the calendar God gave to Moses?

The Bible does not give *specific* instruction as to when the moon is new; where on earth the new moon should be determined (especially in light of a worldwide operation like the church); or whether it should be solely by erratic visual observation, astronomical mathematical calculation or a combination of the two. It contains no **clear** rules or pattern of intercalation, thus leaving it up to man to determine when and how to balance the difference between the lunar and solar year. A calendar must operate from specific rules or, as history shows, chaos results.

Consider that it was the children of Israel who received the calendar and kept God's holy days set according to it. From the time of Israel's captivity, the Jews alone proclaimed and kept God's holy days. They have preserved and developed it into its present form. They alone of all nations have taken the festivals into consideration in developing and using their calendar. It has come to us from them.

Consider the wealth of material from cultures all over the world that indicate calendar recalculations occurring at the same period of history some seven centuries before Christ. Ancient writings from China, India, Assyria, Babylon, Phoenicia, Israel, Greece, Rome, Peru and Mexico all show a 360-day calendar before this time. Then at some time during the eighth and seventh centuries BC, they changed over to a 365 and one-quarter day calendar. This casts some doubt on the unbroken continuance of the calendar God gave Moses.

Consider also that history shows that the fixed Hebrew calendar produced a unity that probably saved Judaism from extinction because it enabled Jews worldwide to observe the festivals at the same time. Also, whenever we get a peek into the festival practices of the True Church, we find them keeping at least Passover at the same time as the Jews, thus they must have used the same calendar. Could God have preserved the Jews as a unified group through the calendar so that they would carry it into the areas where His Church would need it?

Consider especially the last sixty years and the fruits of the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong and the use of the calendar to set the festivals during those years.

I believe there is sufficient evidence to conclude that God directed or allowed the fixed Hebrew calendar to be developed so that His church could observe His holy days in unity on a worldwide

basis. History has shown that the observed calendar's limitations lead to every man doing what is right in his own eyes. Thus division invariably occurs when distances become greater and communication with a central, decision-making authority is weakened.

As marvelous a device as it is, the calendar is not perfect. It cannot be perfect because it tries to measure heavenly bodies affected by sin. Is there anything in creation sin has not defiled?

### **Calendar Changes May Come**

You may have noticed that many of the authors' names quoted in this article indicate probable Jewish ancestry. Those Jews who research into calendar matters share our desire to do things more perfectly and feel the same sense of concern we do about this. Some feel the time has come to make a few small corrections to adjust the calendar to the difficulties of the solar system.

The rebirth of the state of Israel rekindles in us the hope that a new Sanhedrin, recognized by the whole people of Israel, will be established again in our time. It will be the task of the Sanhedrin to make a decision as to when and how the sanctified calendar of Hillel II is to be modified in accordance with the requirements of astronomy and the Torah (Arthur Spier, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, p. 227).

He is saying some adjustments need to be made because none have been made in centuries, but it will take Divine Guidance and Authority to come up with an improvement over what we have.

Spier wrote that in 1952. Another comment, from a letter written by Kenneth Hermann to a Worldwide Church of God member who asked questions about the calendar, is dated 1969. Mr. Hermann, a former registrar of Ambassador College, has an astronomical background:

The conclusion is inescapable, there is no way to avoid it. If man is to have any calendar at all it must come from Authority. Apart from Authority on the Calendar and the Sabbath every man would go his own way, and the Calendar that had been intended to give unity to mankind would disintegrate into thousands of conflicting designs. . . . We are coming to the end of 6,000 years. Whether God will take the Master Clock of the heavens and make a few adjustments of His own remains to be seen. The Sacred Calendar as it is today could go on for many years without any adjustment. It is an oracle and a very dependable one.

Isaiah records that once again God will do something dramatic that will probably affect the measurement of time:

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger (Isaiah 13:9-13).

Perhaps then the earth and moon will synchronize in their orbits, and we will once again have 30-day months and a 360-day year.

God has blessed the use of the fixed Hebrew calendar in the past. Why should we change from a calendar that has proved its value for—at the very least—over 1,500 years to others that are far more erratic and do not carry the authority of the one that both biblical and secular history show the people of God using? Given the foregoing considerations, there is no reason to change.