

Calendar Polarities

In some Fellowships, great emphasis is placed on a particular method of determining what is called the “Sacred Calendar”. An amazing array of opinions have emerged over the years, particularly in recent decades, which have injected divisions among brethren that need not be. Numerous opinions exist within our Fellowship Sphere of what is the ‘True Calendar’? Saints are divided over Issues which are in many cases largely Unsupported Conjecture. How do we respond to these challenges? What is the solution to this apparent intractable condition?

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Except perhaps for the desire to observe God’s annual Holydays, the average worshipper would have little practical interest in what is referred to as the “Sacred” or “Biblical Calendar”. After all, what use would a lunar calendar have in modern society except to identify the dates of those observances the LORD specifically calls “My Feasts”?

As if there weren’t enough theological ‘issues’ at hand to polarize God’s Church, there is the hugely important matter (as some see it) of the True Calendar of God. So many ‘experts’-- with a lot of them ‘home grown’-- have weighed-in on the matter with an impressive array of opinions, some valid, and some, can we say, surprisingly ‘original’.

But what is God’s actual position on the Calendar? And for the reader who is unfamiliar with these issues, I refer to the ancient lunar / solar calendar, which employs the lunar cycle to establish ‘new moons’ to identify the beginnings of months. These regulated religious life from the earliest days of God’s dealings with mankind, to establish observances within their seasons and to place dates for the Holy Days which are important to God in His dealings with mankind. These Holy Days are typically regarded as ‘archaic’ by most modern religions, but are actually an important structure for understanding God’s Master Plan for dealing with humanity and the processes of redemption.

Does God Even SAY?

Is there ANY indication in either Testament which would suggest that God’s attitude toward His dedicated followers is, “*IF you don’t have MY TRUE Calendar, I will not regard you. If you use*

the “WRONG” calendar, you are dirt to me”! Well, some must think that, as after all, that’s the attitude they exhibit toward their ‘brothers’ in the Faith, who in most other areas, believe identically as do they. So, with this consideration, we can see how the matter can prove detrimental to fellowship and practical Faith by creating deep-set polarizations in the minds of some believers.

When examining the basic instructions God gave regarding the calendar, we are struck by how little definitive information is actually provided. There is not a lot of detail to be found in Scripture, yet when the arguments favoring one method over another are debated, you would think specifics abound!

Perhaps as a first consideration, we should ask whether or not God knew that such variations of opinion regarding “His Calendar” would enter the minds of His most devoted servants. As we see today, there seems to be no end to the variations of opinion as to what methods should be employed in determining the “True Calendar of God”. God must have known from the beginning such variations would emerge. Had the calendar been left to each individual, we would see never ending arguments. (Such as we see today.) From this, we can better understand why there’s a need for experts in the field of astronomical observations to render decisions on behalf of the entire community, if for no other reason than unity of practice and to lessen the seemingly irresolvable areas of dispute dividing those who ought to be brethren.

One thing is evident with regard to the lunar / solar Calendar: at about every turn, we come up against a need for a ‘judgment call’. Anyone who has ever

dealt with determination issues will quickly realize the need to 'deal with' certain matters, such as the correlation between the 29.53 day lunar month and the 365.25 day solar year. Twelve lunar months is on average about 11 days short of the solar year! So to keep months in sync with their proper seasons, something must be done. But, who determines what and when? Chapter and verse, please, if you know.

Ah Yes! Interpretation!

One thing we do know, there **are** observable time pieces in the heavens, primarily the moon and the sun, with the star positions as a back-up indicators of seasons. They are accurate! It's the reading of them and the incorporation of these astronomical factors into a functional and reliable calendar that falls to humans here on earth to read and interpret in some logical, consistent and useful manner.

What better way could a person exhibit his great spiritual prowess than having the 'perfect' calendar? Or is it a spiritual matter at all?

It would be fabulous if the Bible would give us explicit instructions as to how to make all these necessary 'judgment calls', but we are not provided with more than just very basic essentials. How we deal with the many and various factors is left to fallible mortals. Months that aren't evenly divisible by either days or weeks. Years that aren't evenly divisible by months. What do we do with the eleven plus days that are left at the end of each twelve lunar months, while preserving whole months that each begin with a 'new moon'? And, for that matter, what exactly IS a 'new moon'. Does the bible explicitly state that for us? Tell if you know.

Another consideration on the rigidly established dates question: If God intended His calendar to be so rigidly exact, why would one of the major determination components He did give us be something so variable as the Abib? An agricultural component factors into determination methods that can vary year to year depending on climatological factors. When a thirteenth month is to be added was set with consideration of the state of the ripening Abib (the first-ripe barley, needed for the wave sheaf offering). Should we even use the Abib? The most widely used calendar excludes the Abib

from consideration. And, who legitimately makes that judgment call?

When IS a New Moon?

Just in this one small point, there are varying opinions. Some insist a 'new moon' is determined by the first visible crescent, seen after sunset, from the locale of Jerusalem. Others operate on the basis of its sighting from any location, anywhere on earth. Some regard the astronomical new moon as the 'new moon', that moment in time when the moon passes from a waning state into a waxing state. An event referred to as a 'conjunction'. Within that persuasion, some consider the day in which the astronomical event occurs as being the new moon, no matter how late in that day it might have occurred, while others insist that it is the next whole day following the conjunction. In other words, once the conjunction occurs, the new moon (day) begins with the next sunset in Jerusalem.

It doesn't help that some calendars regard sunset as the beginning of a new day, while most modern secular calendars employ midnight as the beginning! Consider the question: if the conjunction occurs after sunset in Jerusalem's time zone but before midnight, which day is the new moon? The western hemisphere might regard it as that day, while the eastern hemisphere, Jerusalem included, wouldn't regard it as a new moon until the day following!

What is particularly disconcerting is to notice how some persuasions soundly condemn others just on the basis of which calendar determination methods they prefer. This can be the greater consideration in this matter. What are held as "Superior" calendar methods in some groups provide the basis for a self-regarding 'superiority', a 'self-righteousness' base, from which to disparage others who may, in fact, not be the least bit 'inferior'.

The Greater Consideration?

When Christ returns, all disputations regarding the calendar will evaporate. He really won't need us to present our views on the matter. How will those who've come to determine dates **incorrectly** respond to His correction? How would they speak today regarding 'others' not of their particular calendar method persuasion if knowing that their own hard-and-fast views were shown to be not entirely correct

in all technical points? Will they be corrected more severely for their attitude toward their brethren than for their erroneous calendar presumptions? That may be the greater consideration.

There is a warning in places like Ezekiel 22:23-28, where the 'religious leader' is cautioned against saying "God says" when He really doesn't say! *"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 24 Son of man, say unto her, Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. (The necessary component for growth.)*

*25 There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have **devoured souls**; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof.*

26 Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

*27 Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to **destroy souls, to get dishonest gain.** (The support motive.)*

*28 And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, **when the LORD hath not spoken.**" (Representing their own deductions as being biblical truth.)*

Granted, this addresses greater heresies than what we might be dealing with in this calendar matter, but passages such as this expose an underlying objective among certain self-focused ministries. Needing to keep their followers **separated** from like ministries in order to garner as much personal loyalty (with that all-important financial support) from their own. What better way to keep their 'sheep' from straying than to erect an observances barrier? Keeping Holydays on differing dates creates an automatic practical schism. What is noteworthy is the destructiveness potential it can pose among fellow believers. (v.27) The 'daubed with un-tempered mortar' analogy indicates structures that lack integrity, subject to crumbling apart, not being based on correct and substantial principles. Faulty theological deductions create a similar condition. And, what a perfect instrument of

self-aggrandizement it is for those who have such intent. Using this, ministers can allege near-heretical ideas, representing them as God's explicit truth, where there isn't sufficient scriptural evidence for anyone to refute their odd allegations one way or the other. How many have represented that God set hard-and-fast calendar parameters, when there is no scripture to support such pronouncements?

Mere Hours of Difference

What should be obvious is the fact that in all of the preferred methods employed, all seem to fall within a rather narrow range: Typically, these 'great differences' fall within a day or two of each other. How exact does God require we be in order to be 'acceptable' with Him? Must our Holyday observances fall on an exact day, or is their seasonal placement the greater point? Is the date itself the over-riding factor, or is it the understanding of their meanings? What do we do when the harvest we're supposedly celebrating isn't fully ripened on the date of our observances? Is any 'adjustment' acceptable? How does one tithe on his corn and his oil, when he doesn't yet know the actual size of his harvest? The people were commanded to leave their homes and fields, bringing a tithe of their harvest to the Feast. Would it be logical for them to leave some of their crops in the field, as yet unharvested, because they weren't quite ready for harvest, and take a 'tithe' with them, not knowing for sure just how large their 'increase' would be?

In fact, it was agricultural considerations that factored into the primitive calendar. We have some evidence of that as mentioned above, in that they were to bring tithes of their gathered-in harvests with them to observe the Feasts. That would be difficult if their harvests had to be interrupted to make a pilgrimage to where the Feasts were being observed. In the spring holyday season, a sufficient ripening of the Abib is what determined which month was to be declared the 'first month'. Modern "Sacred Calendar" proponents in large part disregard these relevant agricultural considerations!

First Century Differences

We should consider if there were such calendar differences in the first century as we see today? Does the New Testament allude to any? Is there any

example mentioned anywhere of such contentions among Church brethren then as we have in the present day? Extra-Biblical sources from the first century and beyond suggest that not all were ‘on the same page’ with respect to using observational methods as opposed to just calculations. Not all employed ‘postponements’ which weren’t published until the fourth century. We’re not even certain that the rules of postponement as we know them today were even in full existence in the first century when Christ or Paul walked the Earth. And, we don’t even have such a fundamental statement as ‘the first visible crescent’ being the benchmark indicator God wants us to use to determine the beginning of each month. All comes to us by way of ancient tradition rather than explicit biblical instruction. Yet, these are regarded as being of vital importance in some circles, the acceptance of or the rejection of one or the other being declared paramount!

In Times Before Moses

Most of what we take to be so important with regard to the calendar is supposedly discerned from the writings of Moses. But there were many centuries (25) before we had the Pentateuch. Did the ancients before his time have a calendar? Did Adam’s generation have a calendar? Did Noah have one, and if so, was his the same calendar as Adam used? Did Abraham know of and mark time by a calendar? Did the children of Isaac and Jacob (Israel) have a calendar, did they in Egypt mark time differently than their Egyptian ‘hosts’? These are **not** questions that have no answer.

Cain and Abel: We read in Genesis 4:3 that there was an occasion (was it an annual occasion?) when offerings were brought before God. This event strongly suggests that it was a harvest celebration, when both crops and flocks were matured.

Noah: Being that we are given specific dates for the beginning and ending of the flood, (Gen. 7:11; 8:4 & 13), Noah must have had knowledge of the calendar. Being that Genesis was compiled by Moses, the calendar dates Moses gives us must be the same as dates on the calendar familiar to him and that he used in all his writings within the first five books attributed to him!

Job: Now the book of Job is interesting. Job was a Patriarch who worshipped God most diligently.

There are various opinions as to when Job lived. Some have suggested he was the Cheops of Egypt, who built the Great Pyramid. That would have been not long after the Flood. From the absence of any mention of the peoples of Israel in the book, we may deduce that it was prior to the times of Jacob and his sons. (Thus prior to the time of Moses.) In the longevity of Job (42:16) we see a lifespan of well over 200 years, (comparable to Abram’s longevity ¹) which logically would fall within the post-flood to Exodus time-frame. The book of Job may be the most ancient of the books of the Old Testament.

This man Job is shown to be aware of astronomical phenomena, which would indicate that he also used a complex calendar-determining formula, developed over centuries, that observed and predicted where the constellations would be in what seasons. The LORD asks him in Job 38:31-33 “*Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth ² in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?*” Here, a man who had considerable astronomical skill, professing great knowledge of the ‘ordinances of heaven’ was chided with how little power he actually had to influence any of that, compared to the speaker.

Are we going to suggest that Job, with a vast knowledge of astronomy didn’t know of the calendar, one that after all, relied on the moon, sun and stars for its determination? The point here, Job did have a calendar, as did all ancient societies. ³ Was his a continuation of the calendar that Noah had?

Abram: At least one major event in Abram’s life had correlation to the Exodus, to the development of Israel’s nationhood and the Sinai Covenant.

¹ Abram died 175 years of age; Isaac at 180; Jacob at 147. In the next generation, life spans were dropping: Joseph died at 110; Moses at 120. Whereas, those who were born prior to the Flood had much greater longevity: Noah lived to 900; and Shem 600.

² These are apparent references to the constellations, which some regard as references to the Zodiak, Mazzaroth (or Mazaloth): are the 12 lodgings or signs. Now, this could have been well before these ‘signs’ were used in pagan religions. After all, it is God who is making reference to them to Job.

³ It’s very interesting that some calendar date occasion is referred to in Job 1:6 and 2:1. Is it the same occasion we read of in Gen. 4:3?

That's recorded in Genesis 15. Now, Moses makes reference to this event, explaining that the Exodus began on the exact anniversary of this, the Abrahamic Covenant (Ex. 12:42). It was exactly 430 years to the day that the children of Israel began their trek out of the land of Egypt. (The 'selfsame day!') From that, we can know that Moses was familiar with and used the same calendar that was known in Abram's time, which was likely the same generation, or a near generation, of that of Job. Moses, in Egypt, was denoting time using the same calendar that existed in the days of Abraham, while not using the calendar that Egyptian culture did! Also of note, someone among the people kept track of this important date for 430 years!

The Egyptian Sojourn: One point of interest we realize from the Exodus narrative is the change (or at least the clarification) of the new year beginning in the spring (Ex.12:2). This instruction, without other specifics given, would indicate that there was a pre-existing calendar, only with a question of which month ought to be regarded as the first. Likely, there was some disagreement on that among calendars of that day. It is posed that since Creation was in the fall, many calendars of the ancient world originally began their year with what we today regard as the seventh month. God changed it for a specific reason, one commensurate with His Plan of Redemption.

The Melchizedek Priesthood: In that the Priesthood up until the Exodus was of Melchizedek Order,⁴ any God-directed calendar instructions from that source would **not** have been humanly derived. Thus, the calendar of ancient origin, used by Noah or Abram, was likely set up as God would have wanted, and was passed down orally. Whatever calendar employed prior to the time of Moses was pre-existing, from that source, explaining why there was so little specific instructions needed or given in setting-up a national calendar. For the greater part, it wasn't new!


So we've seen that there **was** a calendar already in existence prior to the time of Moses? With that in

⁴ Genesis 15 refers to Melchizedek as 'the King of Salem, priest of the Most High God', and Paul adds from other sources, "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days or end of life, but made like the Son of God, abides a priest continually." (see Psalm 110:4)

mind, we must remain amenable to a certain amount of basic tradition, preserved orally, unless there's positive proof that later tradition differs from what was given in ancient times, under the priesthood of Melchizedek.

With these facts, we see that there was a calendar in use long before the establishment of an Aaronic Calendar Priesthood. Was that earlier calendar then in use "Sacred" or was it merely a means of establishing dates for business purposes, of record-keeping or planting? In other words, was it more of a secular instrument? Prior to the Exodus, each patriarch, of necessity, would have discerned such calendar-determining events from his own locale. And local, individual determination was appropriate for the time. But as the nation came into being and grew, and as its worshippers spread abroad, there was need for an authority with expertise to make declarations for the nation, to keep them unified in practice and in worship. That was perhaps the greater consideration with respect to its function.

We should ask ourselves, what is it that makes a calendar "Sacred"? Would we have any interest at all in a lunar calendar, except for the fact of it identifying the dates of God's Holy Days? Our various secular calendars don't have months that correspond to the lunar cycles, and for practical purposes, it matters little. But, in obeying God, and observing the occasions He calls us together to observe, we need to revert to the lunar method of determining months. What exactly that method is, that is the modern challenge.

In any calendar method that we might elect to employ, there is always the matter of 'judgments'. Who makes those judgment calls? Someone must! But a greater question is, what should we do with regard to maintaining unity of practice? So far as we know, such calendar polarities as we have today did not exist within the early Church. Where did **we** get them? 

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