

Jewish Traditions and The Calendar

Among those churches who understand *some* of the truth in these lessons, there is a very popular movement today towards going back to our “Hebrew roots” and following Jewish traditions. This goes by various names, one of them being Messianic Judaism, that is, Judaism that accepts Jesus as the Messiah.

I mention this here because it's something you will run into sooner or later and you should be armed for it. You need to be able to argue why we do follow the command against eating unclean meats, yet we don't follow the apparently similar commands to wear fringes on our garments or wear our beards long (**Numbers 15:38-39, Leviticus 19:27**, respectively).

First, a Messianic Jew cannot exist. It is a contradiction in terms, an attempt to reconcile two competing religions – Judaism and Christianity. A *messianic Jew* is, by definition, a Christian. And a Christian does not need to keep Jewish observances, because those are, by definition, Jewish. So it is impossible to truly be a Messianic Jew, for you cannot serve two masters – much less two religions.

I just deeply offended any messianic Jew who might read this, but those are the facts. They believe they can tack a belief in Jesus and acceptance of the NT on top of orthodox Judaism, and that simply isn't possible. Because not only did the NT replace the law of Moses, as you've learned, **but *Judaism is not the religion of Moses!***

This was true even in the time of Jesus (**Mark 7, Matthew 15**). How much more so now, with another 2,000 years of traditions incorporated into it! **Judaism is a largely *man-made religion* loosely inspired by the OT, just as Christianity is a largely *man-made religion* loosely inspired by the NT.** It's really a direct parallel.

Both old and new testaments have strict and stern warnings about adding to the true religion or taking away from it (**Deuteronomy 12:30-32, Deuteronomy 4:2, Joshua 1:7, Proverbs 30:6, Revelation 22:18-19**, etc). Yet this is precisely what ALL religions – Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim alike – have done. There is scarcely a church on Earth that even CLAIMS to believe ONLY the Bible – much less a church that actually *does*.

This is not an anti-Semitic rant. In fact, this isn't about Jews at all, but about the Jewish *religion*. The Jewish religion is *not* the true religion, and Jewish histories like Josephus, Jewish commentaries like the Mishnah, Talmud, and Maimonides, and modern Jewish practices are *not* our guide. In fact, we were specifically commanded *not* to listen to their traditions, nor go to them to learn how to worship God.

The Jews have added extensive rules and laws to the Bible in order to “protect” the law of God. Their reasoning was, “since these laws of God are so holy, we should build a ‘fence’ around the law so there cannot be even a *possibility* of breaking the law”.

Thus, in principle, they would break one of their own laws long before one of God’s. To put it another way, they wrote new laws to create a safety zone for the laws of God. **But in doing so, they themselves broke the very law they were protecting, by adding laws to God’s worship!**

It boils down to the way you look at the law of God. The Jews look at them as a set of strict, harsh, and rather arbitrary laws from an unforgiving God. Thus, those holy laws must be protected by other, even stricter, man-made laws.

But the fact is, the law is a set of principles intended to guide us into becoming like God. **Prohibiting good things that God permits is just as bad, for furthering that purpose, as allowing bad things that God forbids.** The law is there to teach us to think like God. So if we are forbidden from doing ANYTHING that God would permit by some *other* law, it makes it harder to learn how God thinks.

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

It goes back to the parable of the talents. Read it in **Matthew 25:14-30**. The first two servants RISKED God’s money. They bought and sold with it. They MIGHT have lost it, and then God would have been angry, right? But if they had been doing their best and lost it, *they trusted that God would have understood!*

But the third servant believed God was a “hard and austere man”, who “reaped where He didn’t sow”. He was afraid to risk that talent, because he believed if he lost it God would take it out of his hide! So he buried it (you might say *he built a fence around it!*), so that there was NO CHANCE of losing it! Did that please God?

We take chances when we try to keep the law of God. Sometimes we fail. It is mathematically certain that we will. Sometimes we cut sundown just a little too close. Sometimes that pig might have been just a little bit too close to our meal. Sometimes we might put a decimal point in the wrong place on our tithes. **But if we sincerely believe we are doing the best we can, that’s all God expects from us!**

It is by making these little mistakes that we GROW in grace AND knowledge! Because we learn from them, and do better next time. But if we are so terrified of God that we dare not even RISK a mistake, then we can only eat food prepared in a certain factory, approved by a certain rabbi, shrink-wrapped with tamper-proof packaging and single-use silverware so that there is NO chance that any of our food EVER touched anything unclean.

Do you see the comparison? It’s a matter of trusting God, and having faith in His goodness. The Jewish religion is built around a lack of faith – just as they always lacked faith (**Hebrews 3**). That chapter tells us that Jesus TRUSTED God. Moses trusted God. But the Israelites who died in the wilderness did not (**Numbers 14:26-35**).

Those who died in the wilderness died because they didn’t trust God; not only to take care of them, but to forgive their sins as well. This hadn’t changed in Jesus’ time (**Matthew 23**, particularly **verses 29-32**). And what did Jesus prophesy? **Matthew 21:43**. They didn’t believe what David said in **Psalms 56:13**.

It is this same religion that so many people want to mingle with Christianity and make a new, “better” religion – Messianic Judaism. It is these faithless traditions they want to make their own. What did Paul say about that? **Titus 1:14, 1 Timothy 1:3-7**. Should you follow ANY traditions of men? **Colossians 2:18-23**.

The appeal of Jewish customs is that they SEEM satisfying. They have an *appearance* of humility – but in reality, they are an act of pride. Philips translates **verse 23** “*I know that these regulations look wise with their self-inspired [i.e., man-made!] efforts at piety, their policy of self-humbling, and their studied neglect of the body. **But in actual practice they are of no moral value, but simply pamper the flesh.***”

Did these old covenant rituals and their made-up traditions help the Jews understand God better? Did it “make them perfect”? **Hebrews 9:9-10**. Did it ever, once, help them to show more faith or be more obedient? **Hebrews 13:9**.

Read **Galatians 4:3-11**. Judaic rituals never profited them; they were a yoke of bondage to a law *God never wanted in the first place*. So why would anyone want to be back under that yoke? **For the same reason Israel demanded the yoke from God in the first place! A lack of FAITH! (Exodus 20:19)**.

People who have had a brush with the truth, have begun to understand more about God, **and then balked at forsaking their sins, develop a FEAR of God. Not a fear to disobey God, but a fear of God’s unfairness; a fear of His capriciousness**. And that FEAR leads them to religions which were DESIGNED to shelter them from God.

Judaism, at least those few portions that were borrowed from the religion of Moses, was DESIGNED BY GOD to shelter the Israelites, *at their request*, from the holy spirit! So those today who fear that same spirit find themselves irresistibly drawn into the same web – a comforting series of entertaining and mostly man-made rituals designed to hide themselves from God!

SATISFYING TRADITIONS

These traditions – whether Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant – they’re fun. More than that, they’re SATISFYING. They give you rituals to do, they tell you God loves them, and when you’ve finished doing them you get a good mental pat on the back because you’ve done what God asked. What your preacher said God asked, at least.

I’ve talked to a lot of people who told such glowing stories about the beauty of the traditional Jewish passover ceremony, how each food they eat represents some special blessing, how the candles and blue tablecloths set off the event and make it SO much more meaningful to them – and they’re exactly right. It IS much more meaningful – *with a great deal of meaning that has NOTHING whatsoever to do with what God told us to do! **That is the problem!***

Choosing a special fruit to represent a blessing has nothing to do with God. God never ordered blue tablecloths for the passover – those were reserved for the priests in the temple. He certainly never ordered candles. These trappings do add a great deal of meaning – **but not TRUE meaning. Not REAL significance, significance only in a man-made religion that only pleases other men, not God!**

But there is another side to all of these traditions. *They keep you busy*. You spend so much time preparing special ornaments and saying special long prayers and reading religious poetry and studying the pageantry that you have very little time left over for studying the Bible.

It keeps your mind busy, just like a soap opera would, *but in a way that doesn't make you feel bad about not studying the Bible!* Because instead of “wasting” time, you're doing these other things which appear so much more important... to other men.

...And Satan only has to keep you busy for 70 years or so to win.

SO WHAT SHOULD WE KEEP?

In case I was unclear, we do what the Bible says. No less, and no more. That is what God said over and over – “do not ADD to this, do not TAKE AWAY from this. Do THIS.” Yet the entire world ignores that verse while believing they are doing exactly what God wants! When God wanted us to do something, HE TOLD US! When He was tired of us doing that thing, HE TOLD US TO STOP!

The law of Moses was abolished by the death of Christ. The old covenant was replaced by the new covenant. But Leviticus is full of tiny little laws – which still apply? Which don't? Which were swept away, and which are still binding? Take this passage as representational of the process: **Deuteronomy 22:8-12**

1. You must build a fence on your roof. Yet I am willing to bet your roof doesn't have one. Why? *Because our houses are designed differently. We don't use our roof as a porch.* And when we do – we use a guardrail. So the MEANING of this command has been fulfilled and the LETTER is obsolete.
2. You shall not mix two kinds of grapes in the same vineyard. This is because the seeds will cross-pollinate and produce who-knows-what. Israel probably didn't understand genetics too well at the time (God did have to tell them to go outside the camp to use the bathroom, after all).
3. You shall not plow with different kinds of animals. One can't keep up with the other. This is a good rule then and now.
4. You shall not wear a garment of different kinds of cloth, such as linen and wool. This was first practical (with their technology, mixing was a bad idea) and probably spiritual. The pagan religions had all sorts of magic involved with their rituals, and putting two kinds of clothes together made it better “magic”. Either way, it doesn't seem to really apply to us today.
5. On the four edges of your robe put ornaments of twisted threads.

This last is most relevant to our topic today, because even today orthodox Jews will have ropes with little twists on all the corners. But why did God make this command? **Numbers 15:38-40**. These fringes were symbols to remind them to obey the law.

There were also several other symbols commanded in the Old Testament for the same purpose (**Deuteronomy 6:8-9, 11:19-20**, etc.), which the Jews also observe today. Many have a small box with the Ten Commandments written on them beside their door; there are also special lockets and boxes to put in various places for the same purpose.

But was that what God had in mind? Remember, this is NEW covenant time! Those things were OUTWARD shows of faith, they were symbols to remind a *carnal* person not to sin. But what did God – even then – REALLY want? **Deuteronomy 6:6, 11:18**. This is the CONTEXT of those

commands; and these physical rituals were only a weak crutch to help a rebellious people remember the law of God!

What really matters to God? **Romans 2:28-29**. What is the covenant we are under today? A covenant of writing the laws on our foreheads, hands, houses, gates? **Hebrews 8:10**. What does that mean to us? **Verse 13**.

So it depends on the law. The letter of the laws is no longer binding, for those are part of a different covenant; but all held a spiritual truth. Some no longer apply because society has changed. Some still apply, but in a changed form. Some are just as binding as ever.

For example, **Deuteronomy 23:12-14**. We don't do this today, because we have indoor plumbing. The point, as God plainly said, was that He "*see no uncleanness in you and turn away*". Our uncleanness is flushed down the toilet and taken "*outside the camp/house*". But the *method* in which God instructed Israel to do it no longer applies.

Still, it contains a deeper spiritual truth; that God see no uncleanness in your soul, and thus to get the filth – spiritual filth – out of your spiritual camp. Lest He see it in you when you need help and turn away from you.

NO COMMAND AGAINST MOSES

Some would say "well, maybe these rituals are not required, but *I like them*, and there is no command AGAINST them!" – but actually, there is. All the laws which commanded an external sign to help keep the law have been replaced by a covenant of the heart. **Desiring to do them again, desiring the old covenant so that you don't have to worry about the new, or even in a misguided desire to HELP the new, is... frustrating the grace of Christ.**

Read **Galatians 2:16-3:4**. The point is plainly that going back to the old law and being circumcised and trying to be a "messianic Jew" **defeats the entire purpose of the new covenant**. It is "building again the things I destroyed", **by trying to go back to those old observances that were done away in Christ. It is, in effect, a direct Biblical command against "messianic Judaism"**.

To keep the new covenant, *you must become dead to the old law in order to live in Christ (baptism)*. Therefore, if you go back and try to keep the law AGAIN... what was the point in being baptized? Once you've begun to grow in the spiritual covenant, you CANNOT be made perfect by keeping the PHYSICAL covenant.

And if you try to do it anyway, you plainly tell God the blood of Christ is not enough for your salvation; that obeying the Ten Commandments and the other spiritual laws is not good enough for you, that you must have thousands of physical commandments as well.

And not only that, but as if the Bible didn't have ENOUGH physical OT laws for you, you go to the Jews to learn their man-made laws as well. And there IS a commandment against that; for this is a textbook example of **Hebrews 10:29** – saying the blood of Christ is not holy enough for you, and spitting upon the spirit of grace.

If you want to be an Old Covenant Christian, fine. Be one. You will be blessed for it with physical life and happiness, and your family will be better for it. But if you imagine yourself to be a New Covenant

Christian, then BE ONE. Don't long for the days when your spiritual ancestors were in bondage to a covenant which could not make those who followed it perfect.

You cannot be both a NC and an OC Christian. One replaces the other. And, far worse, today's Judaism is neither – it is a man-made religion just like, and arguably just as bad as, man-made Christianity.

PART 2: THE CALENDAR

It is fitting to discuss the calendar in this lesson because most division over the calendar has come from three sources; first, those who take the Jewish traditions on the subject as the authoritative answer. Second, those who don't know the answer, so they make up something instead. And third, those who simply don't care and just keep doing what they've always done.

The calendar is one of the most complicated, divisive, destructive, and at the same time one of the least useful things in Christianity. **More people have been tortured and/or excommunicated over the calendar than over ANY other subject. Believe it or not.**

In modern times, more people have gone off the deep end over figuring the calendar than any other single subject. It's one of Satan's best tools for sorting out the true Christians from the false. When the calendar issues start to divide a church, some, if not all, of that church is doomed.

The problem is twofold; first, **the calendar cannot be perfected.** It is a simple, physical impossibility. No power in the universe can create a "perfect" calendar without making some serious adjustments to the orbits of the sun and moon. Yes, I'm serious – and I'll explain why in a moment.

The second half of the problem is that this imperfection troubles people, and some more than others. There is a type of person whom the world calls obsessive-compulsive or anal-retentive who NEED perfection. And there is nothing, strictly speaking, wrong with that – **except when they continue looking for perfection in something that cannot be made perfect.**

When that happens, when they bang their head harder and harder against the brick wall of imperfection, something shakes loose and sooner or later they find some way of rationalizing the calendar, some way of making it work no matter how much violence it does to some scriptures, and suddenly they have perfected the calendar to their satisfaction – leaving a trail of bruised scriptures in their wake.

But once they've done that, they've compromised with true perfection – the Bible – in order to bring about a false perfection in their calendar. From there, Satan has easy access to slowly and deviously drag them the rest of the way. Soon they're off using sacred names, following their "Hebrew roots", or some other handy heresy.

I mention this up front because I don't want to see any of you go down that path; although I know it's probable that some of you will, regardless. But the sad thing is, the calendar REALLY isn't that important. **Yes, we should do our absolute best to keep the holy days at the time God specifies, and in the way God specifies.**

But then again, *if the exact moment of observance were so important to God, He could have left us enough information to calculate it exactly!* A few verses somewhere, less than one chapter, would have been ample; but as it is, the Bible is almost completely silent on the calendar **because the Bible doesn't care that much – and therefore I don't care that much, either.** And with that glowing introduction, let's study...

THE CALENDAR

As I said, the calendar cannot be perfected because the universe is not perfect. The earth rotates around the sun in 365.242 days – *more or less*, because it **CHANGES** every year by a small percentage! The earth's orbit is not perfect and so these changes, or perturbations, in its orbit, mean that every year – every rotation around the sun – is a **LITTLE** bit different. This alone makes a perfect year impossible.

Also, there are two different ways of measuring the year; the number above was from equinox to equinox, so it is based on the Earth and the Sun being in the same relative position, which is called a solar or tropical year.

But if you figure the year relative to the stars, since the sun is moving through the galaxy as we rotate around it, there is a longer year, called a *sidereal* year, which is 365.256363004 days... again, more or less, as it changes from year to year, though not nearly as much. This year is a little over 6 hours longer than a solar year.

As if it weren't bad enough that the year is imperfect, the month is even worse! The moon orbits the Earth and crosses the line between the Earth and the Sun in 29.530588853 days... *again, more or less*. It changes by an even wider margin, so for rough purposes, we can say the lunar month is 29.5 days, **give or take 8 hours!** That is a large variation, and it makes a perfect calendar impossible because the **MOON** isn't perfect!

Another fun fact is, there are about a half-dozen ways to calculate the length of a month, depending what you consider the completion of a lunar cycle to be; what you just read was the *synodic* month. But a *sidereal* month – the time it takes the moon to stand in the same position against the stars – lasts 27.32-ish days – that's over 2 days difference from the *synodic* month!

I say this, not to confuse you, but to show you this is **COMPLICATED** and that it **CANNOT** be solved with a perfect, tidy, mathematical solution. At least, not in the way most people try to solve it. **Naturally, there IS a perfect solution, but not in the way most people want it.**

Why did God give us the sun and moon? **Genesis 1:14-19**. So God gave us the sun **AND** the moon to help us keep track of time, ***knowing full well they could not do the mathematically perfect job some people demand!*** I can only take that to mean that mathematical perfection as recorded by a cesium atomic clock was not that important to God!

But there is a further problem which complicates matters. There are three main types of calendars; there is a strictly solar year, which is what we have today; our months have no real relationship to the moon. They were once based on the moon, thousands of years ago, but they were abandoned for reasons that will soon be obvious.

The solar calendar is the most accurate in terms of every year being the exact same length. It's not perfect, but by inserting leap days and leap seconds, we can program atomic clocks to match the sun's imperfect motions and make a reliable solar year, where July is always hot and doesn't gradually move through the seasons.

The second type is a strictly lunar calendar, where the phases of the moon divide the year into days, with each month being an average of 29.5 or so days long. The problem with this is, every year a given month starts about 10.89 days earlier, relative to the solar year.

If we based our months strictly on the moon, January first would gradually move backwards, and in ten years would be in the season we now call early September. Why would that be a bad thing? Because very soon “years” lose all meaning, because the lunar twelve-month year (355 days or so) has no relationship to the solar 365.25+ day year.

You might plant your crops in April one year, and in a few years be planting them in June. It’s just a bad system, and God made it clear that keeping the holy days in the proper season was a big deal in **Exodus 13:10**; and although out of context, **Ecclesiastes 3:1** comes to mind.

The third type, and this is the most ambitious system, and the way God set up the Hebrew calendar – is both lunar AND solar, or lunisolar. In order for this to work, God must reconcile an irrational and variable month with an irrational and variable year into which neither twelve months NOR 24 hour days divide evenly.

And it is because of the difficulties inherent in this problem that so many mountains of paper have been written on this subject (and no, that’s not an exaggeration – MOUNTAINS of paper).

Oh, did I forget to mention that the length of the day isn’t really 24 hours, varies, and is gradually getting longer?

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CALENDAR

Matthew 23:2-3 ...*The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

This verse has been abused and stretched beyond its intended meaning by many, but it does clearly give the authority for making decisions about observances – such as when to observe the holy days – to those who “*sit in Moses’ seat*”.

Most people apply this verse to the Jews of our day, which is flawed logic; first, the Jews no longer sit in Moses’ seat, since they were cut out of the promise by rejecting Christ (**Acts 13:46**, etc). Second, Moses’ seat no longer exists, having been replaced by a higher seat of authority (**Roman 14:10**). Thus, that authority now rests with the true church of God.

Third, contrary to what the world believes, there is good evidence that the Jews of today are neither the scribes nor the Pharisees, but the Sadducees; the Sadducees kept the calendar differently than the Pharisees, as you’ll soon see, and Jesus never told us to follow the Sadducees. In fact, He pointedly excluded them from the command above.

Who did the work on the calendar in the time of David and Solomon? **1 Chronicles 12:32**. These men with understanding of “times” – that is, who knew how to figure the eclipses, conjunctions, new moons, solstices, equinoxes, and all those other astronomical things necessary to the maintenance of a calendar – these men figured out the calendar each year and “*their brethren were at their command*”. **It’s worth nothing that these men were of the tribe of Issachar, and not Jews.**

We don’t have them today, but we do have a lot of history and a lot of men who do most of the work for us. We just have to check up on them a bit.

THE HEBREW CALENDAR

The beauty of the Hebrew calendar is really quite stunning when you understand the problems it overcomes and the elegant, simple manner in which it does so. Many nations have tried a lunisolar calendar and in order to make it work, they simply had a handful of extra days each year that weren't a part of the year, or formed a minimonth, or were a holiday, bad luck days, or whatever superstition they wanted to use.

But the Hebrew calendar is perfection in its own way. Not perfection in the atomic sense, but in the self-regulating sense. The Hebrew calendar fixes *itself*. It doesn't need constant maintenance and figuring in the way that modern calendars do. It's never exactly right, relative to the seasons of the sun, **but it's never very far wrong, either.**

I won't be able to quote the Bible much on this because there ISN'T hardly any Bible on this subject, as I said up front. This is the result of a great deal of study by myself and my father, many arguments with perfectionists sliding down that slippery slope, and intensive study of what little there is in the Bible on the subject.

So here's how it works. The month is lunar, and begins on a new moon – that is, the first *visible* sliver of the moon is the first day of the month (**1 Chronicles 23:31**). The year is solar, BUT the year must also keep the months in their proper seasons (**Exodus 13:10**). Read **Exodus 12:2, 13:4**.

This was the first month of the Hebrew year and was called *Abib* in the Hebrew, or later *Nisan* in Babylonian. Now back up to **Exodus 9:31-32**. The Hebrew word *abib* is translated there as “in the ear”. It refers to a state in the life cycle of grains where the head begins to harden just before it is ready to harvest.

When the hail fell on Egypt, the flax and barley were already stiff and dry and almost ready to pick. So when the hail fell, it smashed the crop and destroyed it. But the wheat and rye were not destroyed because they were still green and had not yet stiffened. They bent, instead of breaking. This tells us beyond a doubt that the month Abib is in the springtime, early springtime at that, around March-April.

It was these hardened ears of barley that were offered on the wavesheaf day during the days of unleavened bread, about two weeks later, and until that offering was made, Israel was forbidden to eat any of the harvest (**Leviticus 23:10-14**).

Since the month is *called* Abib, it is absolutely necessary that it remain close to the season of the dry ears. Yet a solar year is ± 365.25 days, while a twelve-month lunar year is approximately 354 days – almost 11 days less than a solar year. There is only one way to fix this. We can't make the moon rotate around the Earth slower – so every so often, an additional month *must* be added to fill up the year.

The sun and moon move in reasonably regular cycles, and once in every 19 years the sun and moon come into roughly the same position relative to the Earth. This is because 235 synodic months *almost* equals 19 solar years. The margin for error is approximately 1 day every 200 years.

Each year has 12 lunar months, and 11 leftover days in each solar year. That means that over the course of a 19-year time cycle, those “leftover days” add up to 7 extra months. Therefore 7 times in every 19 years an extra month is added to the calendar at the end of the year. This month is called an “intercalary month”.

There is no Biblical proof that this is what God intended, but there is also no Biblical proof that the earth revolves around the sun, or that the moon revolves around the earth. God didn't tell us things that were painfully obvious – at least, not always.

But now the elegant part; the spring equinox is the day on which the day and night are the same length, and falls on March 20-21 in our calendar. We know that the first day of the year falls on a new moon in the spring, but which one? Simple! *Whichever one is closest to the equinox!*

If the new moon falls on March 17th, then that begins the new Hebrew year because it is only 4 days away from the equinox. The next new moon would be 25 days after the equinox – far too late to keep the seasons in balance.

Or if the new moon falls on March 30th, then *that* begins the new year. The earlier month would be too early, 19 days before the equinox. The closest new moon will never fall more than 14.75 days from the equinox, and on whichever day it falls, that's the first day of the new year.

I've heard people say "you can't have the first day of the year fall before the equinox!" and my answer is "...why not?" The Bible only has two seasons – summer and winter. **Spring and fall are not Biblical seasons.** If you insist on the new moon being after the equinox, you can wind up with the first day of the year being 29 days after the equinox – that's two weeks later than the worst case scenario with this method.

Remember God's stated requirement: the months must stay in the same season! By choosing the closest new moon to the equinox, you do that better than any other method available. And the best part is, it's self-regulating. It CAN'T get too far off. It CAN'T have leftover days, minutes, hours. Everything always fits. If there are too many days, we just add a month; it's so simple!

Now there is a wrinkle. **The new moon is first visible at different times in different parts of the Earth.** If we each view the new moon for ourselves, we'll wind up keeping it a day apart regularly and even a month apart from each other on some years.

Moses was in Egypt, on his way to Palestine, when God gave him the calendar. God told us "*the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*" (**Micah 4:2**). It's safe to say that the month begins with the visible crescent *as observed* in Jerusalem.

Another wrinkle, which is whether it should be the *calculated* new moon (i.e., when it is first *theoretically* a new moon) or the *visible* new moon – that is, when it is first spotted with the naked eye. I favor the naked eye method, just as I favor it for figuring sundown on Sabbath, because it seems like what God would have expected.

Remember, Moses didn't have a telescope nor is it likely he had the math to figure a new moon; he would have had to see it, which means the month begins at the *observed* crescent, not the *calculated* moment the moon turns "new".

The good news is, what I've mentioned above is basically how the Jews today calculate their calendar. Most of the work is already done for us – once we have the first day of the Hebrew new year, it's easy to figure the rest of it.

Now there are a few other things that are not mentioned in scripture, but which seem to be the clear intent based on how nicely they fit. For example, if you start the month on the new moon, then 15 days

later the moon will be full. This is basic astronomy. Thus, the 15th day of the first month is the night to be much observed, the night Israel walked out of Egypt *with a full moon for light*.

Likewise, the 15th day of the seventh month is the first night of Tabernacles, and it should also fall on a full moon if the first day of the month falls on a new moon (as it does). I have been keeping the holy days all my life, based on the calculations done in the manner above, and they always come out with a full moon on these two nights; almost always fuller than either of the two nights on each side.

I consider these easy spot-checks of the accuracy of the calculation. If the time comes when that is no longer true, if we start seeing fuller full moons on different nights, then we may have to dig into it and calculate it for ourselves. Meanwhile we have many much more important things to do.

PASSOVER

The single most divisive subject – and the first place Satan attacks the true church – is Passover. It is both absurdly simple and incomprehensibly complicated at the same time. The question is not the literal date of Passover, but whether it should be observed on the 14th of the month, as the Bible says, or on the 15th day of the month, as the Jews do.

This is called the *quartodeciman* controversy, meaning “14th” in Latin, and was the reason for a great many brutal tortures ever since the time of Christ. It really is absurdly simple, and boils down to one question; did Jesus keep the Passover, or not? Read **Luke 22:1-20**. How many times in that passage *alone* do you read that Jesus kept the Passover? It’s ridiculously obvious, right? ***Not if you don’t want to believe it!***

I’ve had intensive debates with people who flatly refused to believe it, no matter what the Bible said. They, in the face of all that evidence and more, stubbornly said that Jesus did *not* keep the Passover that night. I don’t want to clutter your mind with all the arguments, because it could easily fill the rest of the lesson. And two or three more.

The only reason you will need to know those arguments is if you expect to argue with people who believe otherwise – you already have the right answer and all the information you need to keep the Passover correctly. But if you do want to know more about the arguments and how to counter them, I have an extensive booklet I wrote on the subject that covers all known arguments.

SADDUCEES OR PHARISEES?

But this does give me an excuse to cover a subject that’s worth discussing. In the time of Christ there were several bickering factions among the Jews, as there always have been, and the main ones were the scribes and Pharisees, almost always said in the same breath probably because they were very similar, and the Sadducees, who were quite different. There were also, we know from history, a few other sects such as the Essenes, but they aren’t mentioned in the Bible so we won’t worry about them.

So the question is, was it the Pharisees or the Sadducees who eventually won? Neither exist today, by name. But whose philosophies wound up being the ancestor of orthodox Judaism? We can see a bit of their doctrine from **Acts 23:6-9**. Now based on these doctrines alone, it looks like the Pharisees became the modern Judaism for modern Judaism does “confess both”.

However, it’s not that simple. Warring ideologies seldom completely defeat one another; more often than not, one gets the upper hand *but ends the war with a fusion of ideas borrowed from the other*

ideology mixed in. And we can prove for a fact that the Jews of today keep the Passover exactly as the Sadducees of Jesus' day did – and even more importantly, *differently than the Pharisees did!*

Who was the high priest in Jesus' time? **Acts 5:17**. Who was in power in the temple at the time? **Acts 4:1-6**. Who examined Jesus? **Matthew 26:57**. Who delivered him to the judgment hall? **John 18:24-28**. Did you notice that key? The high priest was a Sadducee, and these men were his servants, so they were certainly keeping the Passover with him (**Exodus 12:43-44**).

And these men, Sadducees, *refused to go into the hall of Judgment because THEY had not YET eaten the Passover!* Jesus had already kept it. His disciples kept it with Him; and this was not on an unusual day, for the disciples CAME TO HIM, on the afternoon of the 13th, leading up to Passover at the beginning of the 14th just after sundown – and they asked HIM where to keep the Passover THAT NIGHT! (**Matthew 26:17-20**).

Those who don't trust the Bible and want to follow Jewish traditions say that Jesus kept it a day early. But that would have broken the law, and Jesus was not above the law – far from it, He had to keep it PERFECTLY.

And since the disciples were quick to point out anything Jesus did that seemed strange, they would SURELY have commented on any changes – yet there was no confusion on this subject. Each of the gospels record *THEM asking* Jesus where they should prepare the Passover on afternoon of the 13th, so that they could keep it at the beginning of the 14th, apparently just as they always did!

But those who believe the Passover is a day later, on the beginning of the 15th, say that Jesus could not have eaten it the next day because He was going to be dead; so He HAD to eat it a day early. Again – Jesus was going to be DEAD. ***Dead men do not have to keep the Passover!*** Better to be dead and not keep it, than to knowingly break the law and keep it on the wrong day!

But Jesus kept the Passover CORRECTLY. It was the *Sadducees* who were going to keep it a day LATE, like the modern Jews do! They, probably in traditions carried back from Babylon, planned to keep it starting on the afternoon of the 14th, and ending after sundown on the 15th.

That's why they couldn't go into the judgment hall, because if they bore the guilt of a dead body – Jesus – they couldn't keep the Passover (**Numbers 9:6**). And in their superstitious way, they thought not going into the building would somehow absolve them of their part in His betrayal.

Paul knew, very clearly, when the Passover was to be kept – the evening beginning the 14th, as we do (**1 Corinthians 11:23-34**). The WHOLE purpose of that passage was to instruct the Corinthians in that which God had PERSONALLY instructed him, that the Passover ceremony was to be observed the SAME NIGHT Jesus was betrayed – the evening beginning the 14th.

But did Paul have to repent of how he kept the Passover before? **Philippians 3:5-6**. Did Paul keep the law properly in those days? **Acts 22:3**. Paul said he was “*as touching the law, blameless*”, “*taught according to the perfect manner of the law*”. **He could not have said that if he had been keeping the wrong day all those years!** Further, Jesus could not have said “*observe whatever the Pharisees tell you to observe*” if the Pharisees had kept the wrong day, either.

So while many doctrines of orthodox Judaism today are built on the Pharisaic model, the calendar incorporated the beliefs of the Sadducees.

THE CIVIL YEAR

While we're on the subject of Jewish traditions, we must talk about the civil year. Every historian, Biblical or otherwise, without exception, blindly accepts the civil year and retroactively applies it to all dates in the Bible. They do this without a SINGLE shred of proof, based SOLELY on the word of the Jews.

The Bible makes it clear, as you read above, that *“this month [in the spring] shall be the beginning of months unto you”*. It never changes that, modifies it, or in any way gives us a reason to believe the Israelites EVER kept the years from fall-to-fall. But Judaism, going back over 2,000 years now, has kept a civil year that is reckoned from the Day of Atonement on the 10th day of the 7th month, usually sometime in September.

They retroactively have named the year God gave them and by which holy days are reckoned the “sacred year”, and use it only for figuring holy days, nothing else. The REAL year to them is the “civil” year.

The existence of a civil year is a tradition that seems to be unanimously accepted without question, despite the fact that it is not mentioned *at all* in scripture. Every chronologist that I have read, and I've read many, makes a statement like “well, since David counted his reign according to the civil year, then his reign would have extended from...”

Such statements are made by well intentioned researchers who simply never bothered to stop and ask “why do I believe in a civil year?” Throughout the Bible, the civil year is never mentioned once. **Not once.** That by itself should make you question the idea of a civil year. I've heard only two events cited as proof of a civil year, so let us consider them.

First **2 Chronicles 34:8**. The reasoning is that if he was counting his reign by the sacred year, then this had to be no earlier than the first day of the first month of his eighteenth year. After this, he commissioned the repairing of the temple, they consulted a prophetess, then gathered the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to come to the temple and read them out of the law and made them all swear to a covenant to obey it (**verses 30-33**).

Then, after destroying “all” of the abominations, he kept the Passover on the 14th of the first month (**2 Chronicles 35:1**). They reason that all of those things couldn't possibly have been done in two weeks. Whereas if he counted his reign from the fall “civil year”, there are six months in which to place these events. But Josiah was “on fire” for the Lord, so to speak, and he was serious about getting the country cleaned up (**2 Kings 23:25**).

With the resources of the kingdom at his disposal, attacking this problem with characteristic zeal, there is no reason why he couldn't have purged the relatively small territories at his disposal of idols in a matter of days, much less weeks. It certainly isn't enough to prove the existence of a civil year.

In addition, there is no proof that “his 18th year” was counted by calendar years at all; since technically, the 18th year of someone's reign begins just after the *anniversary* of their coronation! If true, then this would totally eliminate any possible proof of a civil year in this passage.

The next example involves **Nehemiah 1:1**. Chisleu is the name for the ninth month, which corresponds to parts of November and December. And this was in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, as we will see in a moment, a king of the Medo-Persian empire. In this month a friend of his came from Jerusalem and

told him of the sad state of repair the city was in, and Nehemiah was very upset by the news and fasted and prayed for some time (**Nehemiah 1:1-2:1**).

Nisan is the Babylonian name for Abib, the first month of the Hebrew sacred calendar, corresponding to parts of our March and April. So supporters of the civil calendar use the following reasoning:

“Nehemiah heard the bad news in the 9th month, during the 20th year of Artaxerxes; then on the first month of the NEXT YEAR, which was STILL the 20th year of Artaxerxes, he went to see the king. This proves that Artaxerxes didn’t count his reign from the sacred year but rather from a civil year, which started in the fall!”

Think about that for a moment. That statement is 100% correct. The reasoning is sound and so is the math. But what does that prove? NOT that Israel kept a civil year! **It proves that the PERSIANS kept a civil year! It proves that ARTAXERXES, a noble but completely PAGAN king reckoned his years from fall to fall!**

This so-called “proof” of a civil year actually PROVES where the idea came from – pagan kingdoms like Persia and Babylon! And when the Jews came back from captivity, they brought with them many pagan doctrines and ideas, INCLUDING the idea of a civil year, which they had been living under in Babylon/Persia for nearly a hundred years!

Then it was gradually incorporated into Jewish traditions along with a great many other traditions and fables which just aren’t in the Bible – because they didn’t come from God (**Titus 1:14**). The moral of the story is, don’t take the word of a man, a group of men, a church, or a people – no matter who they are. Just take the Bible. There is no civil year in the Bible. So don’t interpret the Bible to fit the assumption that there is.

ATONEMENT

Speaking of that, it’s worth mentioning why the Jews start the civil year on the Day of Atonement. As usual, God never said to do that. They took one verse out of context and built a doctrine around it – **Leviticus 25:8-10**. Does that say “the civil year begins on Atonement”? No. It says that, after you have counted a full 49 years – i.e., IN the 50th “sacred” year – on the Day of Atonement, you blow a trumpet to free the captives and announce the Jubilee!

It’s a little bit like tax refund time. The fact that you get your taxes back on a certain day is certainly something to rejoice about – but hardly means that the year begins on that day! This is simply announcing that on this day, all land reverts to its owner, slaves go free, and liberty is proclaimed throughout all the land.

The reason for this... well, it’s beautiful and amazing, but too much to explain here. I will say this much though – just as it was on the Day of Atonement that the first sin came into the world, it will be on the Day of Atonement, in the far distant future, that the first sinner will be finally destroyed and with him death and the grave.

There will be no more reason for tears, for sin will have finally been abolished from all hearts. That is why it is a day of jubilation. Or rather, a *year* of jubilation *focused around that day*. On that day at last, your tears shall be turned to laughter (**Jeremiah 31:13**).

PENTECOST

You may have noticed that Pentecost is counted the same way as the Jubilee – seven weeks of years, seven weeks of days, 50th day, 50th year, etc. That’s *not* an accident, because they are layers of the same symbol, and each helps you understand the other. But that’s all I’m going to tell you today.

This lesson is focused on how to count and prepare the calendar, and with Pentecost there is a little snag. See, in **Leviticus 23:15-16** God tells us how to count for Pentecost – from the morrow after the “Sabbath”. Unfortunately, He’s a bit vague. There are four possible interpretations.

1. The “Sabbath” means the morrow after the first holy day of Unleavened Bread (holy days were often called Sabbaths). This is how the Jews count.
2. The “Sabbath” means the morrow after the last day of Unleavened Bread.
3. The “Sabbath” means the weekly Sabbath *during* the days of Unleavened Bread.
4. It means “the morrow after the weekly Sabbath” *but the MORROW must be within the days of unleavened bread.*

So you see it’s not so simple. The original language is no clearer than the English. Hebrew has one word for “Sabbath” (*Shabbat*) and uses it for holy days and weekly Sabbaths interchangeably. But it becomes much clearer if you step back and try to ask yourself what God INTENDED.

He meant for us to understand this; therefore, the simplest, most straightforward method must be the right one. He very clearly said “*count... seven Sabbaths*”. For every other holy day God clearly said “*on the 10th day, thou shalt...*”. But here, God clearly said COUNT. That can only mean God expected us to count it every year because each year it was going to be DIFFERENT!

This means #1-2 are wrong because those days are fixed; thus, the morrow after them is fixed and Pentecost would fall on the same day every year. So it must be #3 or #4. But the same question solves the problem – what did God expect us to understand from these words?

The argument stems from the fact that the Days of Unleavened Bread are seven days long. So if you count from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath, there is only one weekly Sabbath during the days... however, what if the weekly Sabbath falls on the last holy day? Then the wavesheaf falls OUTSIDE the Days of Unleavened Bread, on what would be the eighth day.

So most people, figuring that the wavesheaf is the key and that it *must* fall inside the Days of Unleavened Bread, count from the Sabbath BEFORE the days of unleavened bread, on those years, so that the wavesheaf day falls on the first Day of Unleavened Bread.

But ask yourself – God gave us a reference point to count from, the Sabbath. Why give us a reference point, if it was the NEXT DAY that had to be in the Days of Unleavened Bread? That’s backwards reasoning. God could easily have said “from the first day of the week during the Days of Unleavened Bread” if that was what He wanted.

But He said count “from the morrow AFTER the Sabbath”. Thus, the Sabbath is the key and if the wavesheaf falls on the eighth day, that’s fine. In fact, it’s better than fine as a completely independent line of reasoning adds considerable weight to the wavesheaf sometimes falling on the eighth day – but that’s a subject for another day, too.

The point is, we keep the day of Pentecost different from the rest of the holy-day keeping community every couple of years. Most of the time it's the same, but when the last holy day is on a weekly Sabbath, we keep Pentecost a week later than almost everyone else.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The calendar's greatest significance is in the relative positioning of the days. The fact that the spring and fall feasts fall on the same days of the Hebrew months is much more important than whether Atonement is on September 9th or 10th.

We are supposed to be Christians. By definition then, we should be patterning out hearts, our lives, and our priorities after Christ's. We can infer the relative importance of the calendar quite easily simply by observing how often Christ talked about it in the Old and New Testaments; practically not at all. Therefore, that's how often we should talk about it – at least, in principle.

The work of the calendar has mostly been done for us. If necessary, we can do it for ourselves and might just barely manage to improve it by a few hours here and there, so that we can get our observance just a tiny bit better than anyone else's. But is that really important? I've known many people who have done just that, and invariably they fulfilled **1 Corinthians 8:1-2**, **Proverbs 26:12**, and most especially **1 Timothy 6:3-4**, **2 Timothy 2:23**, **1 Timothy 1:4**, **Titus 3:9**, etc.

The things in today's lesson are all "foolish questions", which are either unimportant, silly, or cannot be solved; and all of which serve to divide people. Yet that division is itself of value to us, for it was in the context of Passover observance that Paul said "*...there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you*" (**1 Corinthians 11:19**).

Division on these subject makes obvious those who are anxiously seeking a way to hide from God, a way to crawl under a man-made tradition or a slightly-more-perfect calendar and so be shielded from faith and the spirit of God.

It is these sorts of questions, and the people who follow them, who so perfectly fulfill Paul's description "*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (**2 Timothy 3:7**). and they are invariably "*Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm*" (**1 Timothy 1:7**).

Men often follow these doctrines because it makes them special and boosts their ego to believe they have some special truth that no one else has. **But if you want to be special and stand out from the crowd, you don't need a special doctrine. Just do exactly what God said, no more, and no less; believe me, you'll stand out from the crowd.**

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (**Mark 16:15**). **This publication is not to be sold**; "*freely ye have received, freely give*" (**Matthew 10:8**).

The Bible tells us to PROVE ALL THINGS, and The Simple Answers encourages people to do just that. If you cannot PROVE what you believe, you have no right to believe it! Many of the things we print are shocking because they are different from what you've heard, but if something we say offends or upsets you, we hope you will take the time to set aside your preconceived ideas and PROVE your point from the Bible to see if you truly have been right all these years.

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