

# Did God Give a Calendar?

■ If you reject the Hebrew calendar, what have you got? Does the Bible give enough information to construct a calendar?

by **Leon Walker**

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There are those who advocate that the Bible provides us with all of the specific elements of the calendar that God wants us to use to keep His Holy Days.

These individuals reject the Hebrew calendar, some claiming that it has its origin in Babylon and that it is a calendar of men. Several of these individuals have created their own calendars, each one claiming that his calendar is the one that is revealed in the Scriptures. However, these calendars differ from one another in certain respects. They are not identical, even though they all claim to come from the Bible.

The rules of postponement, which are an essential element in the Hebrew calendar, come under special attack since these individuals assume that they are merely the rules of men and are in opposition to the will of God. The Hebrew calendar, these individuals claim, should only be used as long as it conforms to the calendar given by God in the Bible. The elements of the Hebrew calendar that are not in the Bible, including the rules of postponement, must be rejected.

If God indeed has provided us with a calendar, then we should be able to see clearly from the Bible alone the specific definitions and elements needed. The fundamental question, then, is: Does the Bible provide us with the specific elements needed for a calendar? Let us look at the elements that are required and see if we can find them in the Bible.

Genesis 1:14 states: "Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years.'"

However, these elements are not specific enough for a calendar. This scripture does not tell us when a month begins (new moon, full moon, etc.); in which season a year begins (spring, summer, etc.); how many days there are in a month or year; nor even at which point the day is divided from the night (sunset, darkness, etc.).

It is important that we understand the fundamental characteristics and elements of

a calendar. A calendar is made up of days, weeks, months and years. Does the Bible give us a calendar with these elements specifically defined?

A day is defined in the Bible (Genesis 1:5; Leviticus 23:32). It is from sunset to sunset (Hebrew: *ereb*, even, evening, sunset). A week is also defined as a period of seven days, by the Sabbath being the seventh day of the week (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 34:21).

However, sunset is not a very specific point in time as long as it is dependent upon observation. (We must remember that the modern scientific methods of astronomical calculations were not available for most of man's history.) Individuals in the same area will see sunset at different times, based on their different perspective of the precise moment the sun sets.

However, this variation will not be great—perhaps only minutes of difference between the individuals. This small difference in time would not be significant even for the keeping of the Sabbath, as adjustments could be made to allow for a lack of precision in determining sunset based on observation. Of course, we today can be more precise because of the availability of sunset tables.

Does the Bible define a month? The Hebrew word for month is *chodesh*, which is translated as "month" 254 times in the Old Testament and 20 times as "new moon," the difference being determined by context (Genesis 7:11; 1 Samuel 20:5, etc.). Therefore, we can conclude that the month begins with the new moon. But does the Bible define when the new moon begins? No, it does not.

## **When does a new month begin?**

Does the new moon begin with the last faint crescent of the old moon? Does it begin with the precise point of total obscurity of the moon? Or, does it begin with the first faint crescent of the new moon?

Those who seek to create a calendar differ in their opinions regarding the precise moment when a new moon begins. Those who reject the Hebrew calendar and insist that the Bible gives us the calendar are left to their own human reasoning in determining precisely when a month begins. No scripture can be cited to define when a new moon begins.

Of course, the determination of when a new moon begins is important because the Holy Days occur on certain specific days

of the month. Those who reject the Hebrew calendar and create their own calendars based on their own opinions as to when the month begins can vary by as much as two or three days in calculating the first day of the month. This is further compounded by the fact that the actual moment of the occurrence of a new moon can take place at any time of the day or night. This means that determination of a new moon by observation (as was the case in most of man's history) would not only depend on the individual's definition of when a new moon occurred, but also on the time of day that observation determined that it occurred. This also could cause a variation of another day or more in the determination of which day is the new moon.

Does the Bible tell us which precise spot on the earth should be used for the determination of the new moon? No, it does not. Of course, some site has to be selected since the precise moment of the new moon will occur in one area before another. This can make a difference of as much as a day in determining the new moon and, hence, the Holy Days that occur in that month.

Does the Bible tell us that we should use Jerusalem? No, it does not. Jerusalem was of no importance until the time of David. Yet the Holy Days were being kept before his time. Also, a calendar existed and the Holy Days began to be revealed to Moses while he was still in Egypt.

Which point on earth was used for the precise moment of the new moon while Israel was in Egypt? Which point did Israel use prior to the establishment of Jerusalem as capital of Israel? Which point should the Church use today? Does the Bible answer any of these questions for us? No, it does not. Therefore, those who reject the Hebrew calendar have no biblical authority for the site they select for the occurrence of the new moon. They must rely only on their own authority for choosing whatever site they believe is correct.

There is another problem in determining which day is the new month. A new moon does not occur precisely 30 days after the previous new moon. A new moon occurs in intervals of about 29½ days, or to be more precise 29.53059 days. Of course, a month cannot contain partial days. Alternating the months with 29 and 30 days generally solves this problem. However, what if the precise moment of the new moon occurs just before the end of the day? Is the first day of the month the one in which the new

moon actually occurs even if only seconds are left in that day? Or, since the vast majority of the day has gone by, should the next day be considered as the first of the month? Does the Bible give us the answer to these questions? No, it does not.

Those who reject the Hebrew calendar differ in their opinions regarding this problem and are left to their own authority since there is no biblical statement. Of course, this problem is further compounded by needing a definition of when the new moon begins and by the determination by observation of when the new moon occurs, as mentioned above. If it occurs shortly before the end of the day, will all observers be in agreement regarding on which day the new moon occurred? Undoubtedly not.

### **When does the year begin?**

We now ask the question, when does the year begin? Does the Bible define for us the precise moment when the new year begins? No, it does not. We know that the year begins in the spring season of the year (Exodus 12:2; 23:15), for those who live in the northern hemisphere, but the Bible does not tell us precisely when in the spring. For example, does the first month of the new year always begin with the first new moon after the spring equinox? Or does the new year begin with the new moon closest to the spring equinox, which would mean sometimes before the equinox and sometimes after? Does the Passover always have to be after the spring equinox or can it sometimes occur before the equinox? Does the Bible give an answer to these questions? No, it does not.

Those who reject the Hebrew calendar disagree among themselves regarding the relationship of the new moon to the spring equinox. Since the Bible does not specifically deal with this issue, these individuals must rely upon their own authority in determining when the new year begins.

There are some who argue that the new year cannot occur before the spring equinox since that would mean that the new year begins in winter. Some argue that the Feast of Tabernacles cannot occur before the autumn equinox since that would mean that it would be kept in summer and not in autumn.

Those who reject the Hebrew calendar are compelled to use either the spring equinox or the autumn equinox as the beginning point for calculating their calendars. They have no other choice since once the Hebrew calendar is rejected, some other reference must be used as a starting point. However, does the Bible even mention an equinox? No, it does not. Therefore,

those who reject the Hebrew calendar must rely on their own opinion regarding the point in time when a new year begins.

There are some who believe that Exodus 34:22 does refer to the equinox. However, a careful reading of this scripture and the other places where the Hebrew word *tekufah* appears makes it clear that the word had a much broader and general meaning in biblical times than it had in post-biblical times. (Those who are interested in a full explanation of Exodus 34:22 should contact the closest United Church of God pastor or request or download the paper "Exodus 34:22 and the Calendar" from our Web site.)

The context of Exodus 34:22 is that of keeping the Feast of Tabernacles (ingathering) at a certain time of the year. It does not even mention "after," as those who associate this verse with the equinox insist, since they believe the Feast of Tabernacles can only occur "after" the autumn equinox. The reference is to a general season of the year, not to a specific day.

### **How specific is the Bible about the beginning of seasons?**

It should also be understood that seasons of the year are general. That is, they do not start with a specific day and end with a specific day. The four reference points we use in our modern world for spring, summer, autumn and winter are only the official beginning days for those seasons, based on the two equinoxes (spring and autumn) and the two solstices (summer and winter). The winter season often does extend beyond the spring equinox and spring can often arrive early, before the spring equinox. Seasons are related to weather and they are not dependent upon a specific day when the earth is in a certain position relative to the sun.

Those who reject the Hebrew calendar and insist that their calendar is the true one, based on their opinion of when a new year begins in relationship with the equinox, will state that the Hebrew calendar will permit the new year to begin in winter because the Hebrew new year can occur before the spring equinox. However, they are only speaking about the Hebrew new year occurring before what is now considered the official first day of spring—the equinox. As far as weather is concerned, spring could actually occur even before the first day of the Hebrew new year. In the same way, winter could still be around even after the spring equinox and after the first day of the new year as set by those who create their own calendars.

Those who reject the Hebrew calendar claim that the Bible gives the essential elements

needed for a calendar. But if the Hebrew calendar is rejected and if the Bible does not give the specific elements needed for a calendar, then it is impossible to have a calendar based on any authority other than that of the individual who created it.

As we have demonstrated, God did not reveal in His Word the required definitions and elements for a calendar. The Bible does not define a new moon. The Bible does not give us the specific point on earth that should be used to sight the new moon. The Bible does not explain what should be done when the new moon occurs late in the day. The Bible does not explain how we should deal with the fraction of a day that occurs in a lunar cycle. The Bible does not define precisely when the new year begins. The Bible does not define for us the relationship, if any, between the new year and the spring equinox. Nor does the Bible define other elements such as the number of days in the monthly cycles or intercalary adjustments needed to keep the years in their proper seasons.

Therefore, since God did not reveal in the Bible the essential elements for a calendar, those who reject the Hebrew calendar must rely solely on their own opinions regarding how to create a calendar. However, they cannot legitimately claim that their opinions are based on God's instructions, for He did not outline the elements these individuals must use in their calendars. Therefore, we have two options: either we accept the Hebrew calendar in its entirety or we choose one of the calendars created by one of the several who have created their own calendars in recent years. The latter is not a logical choice.

We must then ask the question, what is the origin of the Hebrew calendar? The simple answer is, we do not know. Could God have given to Moses a calendar with all of its essential elements defined? Of course, He could. Could God have used a calendar that was already in existence at that time? Of course, He could.

While we do not know the history of the Hebrew calendar, we do know that God used the Jewish people to preserve His Word. Isn't it also logical to conclude that He used the same Jewish people to preserve a calendar that will enable us to keep His Holy Days at the correct time? If we do not accept the logic of that conclusion, then we have no other alternative than to accept one of the calendars created in recent times by men with no other authority than their own. These individuals do not have any biblical basis or history to prove that their calendar is the correct one.