

CALENDAR AND SPRING HOLY DAYS

Recently a document was circulated, signed "Sincerely, Promise Liberty." It is 24 pages long, and in two parts with captions: "God's Feast Days Are to be Kept on Correct Days/Does the Jewish Calendar Ensure Keeping Feast Days Correctly?" and "The Meaning of the Spring Holy Days." Documents such as this speak for themselves when no personal name is inclosed.

Nevertheless, it is important that ministers are aware of the facts on the Calendar and the determination of the Holy Days.

The author first claims: "You will find in all cases that the first day of the month began when the first crescent of light was seen on the moon by observation, not by calculations as the Jewish calendar is done today." By this statement the author challenges the authority of the Jewish calendar, the fact that the Jews have correctly preserved this oracle from God, and the authority of Herbert W. Armstrong, who defined in the 1930s that the Jewish calendar was authoritative today for the Church.

By saying the Jewish calendar is authoritative today, the Church of God does not deny that the calendar may have been and indeed was regulated by observation at various periods. The Jews themselves say so. But the Jews also say that to Moses God made known both the principles of observation and of calculation, for both would be necessary and not observation alone.

The author says: "The Jewish calendar was developed in Babylon...." This is a great overstatement. It is the names of the months that derive from Babylon. The Jews' calendar long antedated the Captivity. The Jews understand this clearly, for in calculating the calendar they go back to 3760 B.C. This fact alone makes it clear that the calendar did not originate in the Babylonian captivity, not with Moses, not with the Jews, not even with the Hebrews, but long before the Flood.

Colossians 2:16, in the reference to the new moon, would indicate that observation was the mode of determining the calendar in the middle of the first century A.D. But by A.D. 359 calculation became the dominant method because the Romans prohibited announcing the first visibility of the new moons by witnesses.

Now let us consider the fact that the same questions that are asked about the sabbath "on a round earth" may also be asked about the new moons when observed or calculated. First, it should be apparent to all that the new moon is generally observable earlier to the west. For example, take the case when the new moon first becomes visible to the human eye in Hawaii. In this instance the new moon was not visible in North America nor in Europe or Asia on that day. Now let us assume that the calendar was determined from Jerusalem as the point of

observation. For Asia, Africa and North and South America the next day would have been the day of first visibility, but in Hawaii the next day was the second day of visibility! Now who decides? Remember, no matter who decides, there will commonly be some area to the west of Jerusalem where observation would have been on the preceding day. The same issue would exist for a calendar regulated by calculation from the conjunction (the central point of total darkness) as in the Hebrew calendar today. The first of the month would from time to time be the last day of invisibility to the east of Jerusalem and often the first day of visibility to the west of Jerusalem. On a round earth there must be some authority to settle the difference each month, for the problem occurs nearly every month! That responsibility God gave to the Jews.

Furthermore, the end of the old month and the beginning of the new month technically occurs at the conjunction (confirmed on occasion by an eclipse of the sun). Yet the moon will not become visible for upwards of a day or so. The new moon always begins with invisibility, but God allowed those in authority to determine whether the numbering of the days of the month should begin with invisibility, first visibility or (on rare occasions) second day of visibility (far to the west of Jerusalem).

The author also criticizes the fact that the present Jewish calendar has certain postponements that tend to make the calculated or fixed calendar begin the months with first visibility rather than invisibility. An example is that of the postponement of the seventh month by one day so that Atonement may not fall on a Friday, which is the preparation for the Sabbath. In this instance the new moon or Tishri 1 is placed on the day of first visibility rather than on the day of invisibility. That is an administrative decision vested in the Jews just as the ministry today in the New Testament Church has certain administrative authority to bind and to loose. The calendar and the choice of day for the new moon serves the Holy Days, not the reverse! This is possible for by nature the new moon always begins with invisibility, but it is not seen as a new moon until a day or two later.

The author criticizes the fact that this year the 13th month should not have been added as the Passover could have fallen one month earlier and still been in the beginning days of spring. Anciently the Jews made the decision based in part on weather. Today no Levitical ceremonies are performed in a temple so that the sequence of the 13th months is fixed worldwide in advance. Certainly this year the weather has been such that much of North America and Europe suffered an extension of wintry weather at the very time the author would have placed the Passover if he were in charge of the calendar.

The author "Promise Liberty" also insists that the wave sheaf was always cut and offered on the morrow after the first High Day of Unleavened Bread. He cites Joshua 5:10-12 as

evidence. The author apparently does not know that the word "old" appears erroneously twice in these verses in the Authorized Version. Modern versions have it correct. These verses prove that the sheaf was cut that year, when Jordan was crossed, on the first Holy Day. That was possible only if the Passover fell on a Sabbath. In that year the children of Israel cut the sheaf after the Sabbath, on the High Day and prepared what they needed for food as the law permits (Ex. 12:16).

(Submitted by Herman L. Hoeh)