

# The Key to the Calendar

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\*This article is available on the Internet at the Archival Christianity Study Library ( <http://acsl.home.ml.org>).

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## 1 Introduction

Western societies are regarded as Christian in religion, and with their religious beliefs based on the Holy Bible. Why is it then that they base their activities and lives on a calendar with pagan roots and do not use the calendar given in the Bible?

Christians today use the Gregorian calendar introduced in February 1582 under the direction of Pope Gregory. It is essentially the Julian calendar introduced by Julius Caesar in the first century B.C. with a few small but important corrections. The Julian calendar moved the start of the year from 25th March (approximately the Northern Hemisphere spring equinox) to 1st January (the start of winter), and set the length of a year to 365 days with a leap year in every 4th year. The Gregorian calendar abandoned leap years in the century years, e.g. 1800, 1900. This calendar is very different from the calendar revealed in the Bible. Why?

Consult a good encyclopaedia and you will find that the names of our months are inherited from ancient Rome and its religious beliefs. The Romans prior to Julius Caesar used ten months: Martius (for Mars), Aprilis ("open"), Maius (for Maia, goddess of growth), Junius ("youth"), Quintilius ("five"), Sextilis ("six"), Septembris ("seven"), Octobris ("eight"), Decembris ("ten"). Two more were added later: Januarius (for Janus, protector of doorways) and Februarius (the time for end-of-year sacrifices). Later Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus instituted further changes, including changing Quintilius to July and Sextilis to August. Our days today are named in honour of pagan gods and goddesses: Sunday (sun god), monday (moon goddess), tuesday (Teutonic Tiu derived from Mars), Wednesday (Teutonic Woden derived from Mercury), thursday (Teutonic Thor derived from Jupiter), friday (Teutonic Freya derived from Venus), saturday (Saturn). Why do societies which claim to be Christians use these names which honour heathen gods?

Your encyclopaedia will also show you that the major festivals of Christianity also have their roots in pagan festivals which, for political expediency, were modified and brought into Christianity.

Sadly, what is not known by most of today's Christians is that God has a calendar, based on harvests in Palestine. It was given to his chosen people when he brought them out from Egypt, their land of slavery but dates back to the time of the (re)creation of Genesis chapter one. This calendar was observed by the early New Testament Church. Why are we not using this calendar today? Why are we using a calendar which honours false gods?

The calendar which God gave as a gift and a blessing to Israel was based around three annual festival seasons, corresponding to the harvests in Israel. God is a teacher (Psalm 25) and God's calendar teaches us his plan for humanity. Ancient Israel kept these annual Holy Days, monthly New Moons, and weekly Sabbaths, but didn't understand their symbolic meanings and lessons.

Its religious lessons were intended not for them at that time, but for the called and chosen of the New Testament era <sup>1</sup>. In the next section we will take a brief look at the outline of this calendar. In the following section we will examine various opinions to try to find how to determine which new moon marks the start of the first month of a year. We will find that the major organizations claim to be unable to find any guidance in the Bible and they fall back to customs of the Rabbis as their only hope. In the following section (3) we will consider the question "Is the correct date really important?" and consider the opinions of Joseph Tkach Jr, John Wesley, and Herbert Armstrong.

## 1.1 Outline of the Bible Calendar

Genesis 1:14 tells us that at the time of the re-creation of the earth, God allocated the heavenly bodies for signs and for seasons and for days and years. God has a plan for mankind and would have allocated these bodies to support his calendar. His calendar was not an after-thought arising from an impulse at the time of Moses.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years,

Let us look a little closer at these seasons and days and years that are to be marked.

- The day  
Genesis 1:5

<sup>5</sup> God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.

- The Seventh Day Sabbath  
Leviticus 23:3

<sup>3</sup> Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.

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<sup>1</sup>Deuteronomy 29:4 tells us that the Israelites lacked the mind to be able to understand, the eyes to see, or the ears to hear, because God had not given them. Romans 15:4 tells us the Old Testament writings were made for OUR instruction, even though those at the time failed. 1 Corinthians 10:11 tells us the happenings to the Israelites were written for the instruction of those in the New Testament era.

The lights in the expanse of the sky mark this Sabbath day by sunset, viz. a day is taken as the period from one sunset to the next sunset, not midnight to midnight.

Leviticus 23:32

<sup>32</sup> It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath.

Incidentally, note that this verse concerning the most holy of the Holy Days, held on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev 23:27), tells us it is kept from the evening of the ninth day until the following evening. Hence, “evening of the ninth day” means at the end of the ninth day, not at the start of the ninth. This is significant to those who take “evening of the fourteenth” in verse 5 to date “the Lord’s Passover” as being at the start of the fourteenth. Verse 32 in combination with verse 5 shows the Old Testament Passover was intended to be held at the *end* of the fourteenth.

- The week

Genesis 2:1–3

<sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

<sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

<sup>3</sup> And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

In Exodus 16:23–16:26, God showed the week to the Israelites by the miracle of manna. This was before the Covenant at Mt Sinai. It tells us God wanted the Israelites to recognize the weekly cycle and the weekly Sabbath.

<sup>23</sup> He said to them, ”This is what the LORD commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’”

<sup>24</sup> So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it.

<sup>25</sup> “Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today.

<sup>26</sup> Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.”

For forty years God showed them this weekly cycle. That’s over two thousand times! The manna did not cease until the next generation entered the Promised Land (Joshua 5:10–12).

- Annual convocations Leviticus 23:1–39

- Passover (vv 4–5, also Numbers 9:1–14; Deuteronomy 16:1–8)
- Days of Unleavened Bread (vv 4–8)
- Wave Sheaf Offering (vv 9–14)
- Festival of Weeks or Pentecost (vv 15–21; Deuteronomy 16:9–12)
- Day of Trumpets (vv 23–25)
- Day of Atonement (vv 26–32)
- Festival of Tabernacles (vv 33–36, 39–43; Deuteronomy 16:13–15)
- Last Great Day (vv 36,39)

While much of this information is known by many<sup>2</sup>, there are further items not generally known.

- Observance of new moons, e.g. Numbers 28:11

<sup>11</sup> “ ‘On the first of every month, present to the LORD a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect.

The new moon marks the start of a new month. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, article “Early Calendar systems; Jewish and Muslim calendar” has these remarks:

- “The Jewish calendar in use today is lunisolar, the years being solar and the months lunar, but it allows for a week of seven days.”
- “The moon is based on the lunation, that period in which the Moon completes a cycle of its phases. Lasting approximately 29 1/2 days, it is easy to recognize and short enough for the days to be counted without large numbers. In addition, it is very close to the menstrual period of women and also to the duration of cyclic behaviour in some marine creatures. Thus, the month possessed great significance and was often the governing period for religious observances, of which the dating of Easter is a notable example.”

The prophet Isaiah wrote of future observances of the weekly sabbath and the monthly new moons in a world administered by God:

Isaiah 66:23

From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD.

- A seven year cycle

There is a seven year cycle of six years of work and one year of rest. Leviticus 25:1–7

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<sup>2</sup>The Worldwide Church of God once published “Pagan Holidays – or God’s Holy Days – Which?” [1] Split off organizations have continued in this tradition, for example, the United Church of God has a free booklet on this topic.

- Jubilee Year cycle

There is also a cycle of seven sets of seven years, plus one, the Jubilee year cycle. Leviticus 25:8–12.

## 1.2 When Does The Year Start?

An item in some dispute among those who seek to observe at least some of the “Festivals of the Lord” (“of the Lord” not “of Moses”) in Leviticus 23 is the way to determine the date of the start of the year. The instruction regarding which of the months of a year is to be used as the first month is given in Exodus 12:1–12:2.

Exodus 12:1–12:2

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt,

<sup>2</sup> “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.

Incidentally, the Rabbis reject this command. Their belief is that God created the world on what is the first day of the seventh month of their calendar so they follow their tradition rather than the Word of God. This was their manner in the days of Jesus, e.g. Matthew 15: 2–3.

“Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.” <sup>3</sup> He answered them, “And why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”

The Jewish calendar has its New Year celebrations at the time of the seventh month [2], but as a concession to the appearance of conformance, they number their months as starting with number one in the spring.

Each lunar month is approximately 29.5 days long so there are twelve or thirteen new moons in a solar year of 365.25 days. Each time there is a new moon (in Jerusalem) it marks the beginning of a new month. Each solar year, there are twelve new moons, sometimes thirteen. The question is which of these new moons is to be taken as the start of the first month. Obviously it must be around the Spring in the northern hemisphere because of Exodus 12:1–2. This would narrow the choice down to three or so. How do we choose the correct one? The first thought would probably to look to the calendar of the Jews. Surely they have it correct?

The “Jewish Calendar” which has been used not only by the Jews but also by Herbert Armstrong and his disciples is controversial to many in the Church of God groups because of the rules used by the Rabbis. Apart from the postponements of the Annual Holy Days of Leviticus 23, another critique is that this calendar is centred around the Holy Days of the seventh month, Tishri. These days, in particular the Day of Atonement, are firstly adjusted by the Rabbis to days of the week which are more convenient to their customs by “postponing” from the true date of the new moon the first day of Tishri, and then the Gregorian date (as used in Western societies) of the start of the year, the beginning of the first month, is calculated by counting backward the appropriate number of days from the Gregorian date of the first day of the seventh month. This “postponement” is not done every year, only when following the true dates would cause inconvenience with their customs, and this happens most years but not all.

There are two issues here: 1) the shifting of the Holy Days of the seventh month to more convenient days of the week, and 2) the determination of which month is the start of the Biblical year.

Is the Rabbinical method the correct way to determine the start of the Biblical year? Well, the rabbis obviously think so, but let's examine in the next section some views of prominent Church of God groups who have supposedly investigated the matter.

## 2 Some Published Claims About Determining the First Month

In this section we will examine the published views of a number of organizations about determining the first month of the year. Unfortunately we will find a universal claim among the major Christian groups who seek to observe these days is that the Bible fails to indicate how to determine the first month of the Biblical year, which is a peculiar oversight by God if the claim is true.

Those who accept that the Bible fails to inform us of the start of the year are forced to look elsewhere for authoritative views and the major groups accept the teachings of the Rabbis as that authority. Strangely enough, these same people reject most of the teachings of the Rabbis, including the date of Passover (the Rabbis say the 15th of Abib), the date of Pentecost (the Rabbis say it is always the 6th of Sivan), and the methods of observance of the Weekly and annual sabbaths (see later in this article for some rules for the observance of the Day of Atonement).

Many of those who believe that the Bible doesn't tell us how to determine the start of the year have concluded that the exact date doesn't matter, the important thing is that people have good intentions and the right attitude. These thoughts about exact dates are shared by Pastor-General Joseph Tkach Jnr of the Worldwide Church of God, who has put forth a view that God "looks on the heart more than on the calendar". In the Worldwide News of 22 April 1997 [3] he wrote about Easter and Passover:

If precise timing were important, should we not observe this ritual when it is evening in Jerusalem? Shouldn't everyone observe it at the same time, worldwide? No, exact time is not that important. Jesus did not assign symbolic meaning to the time.

The church does not believe it must follow the Jewish calendar, whether it is done by observation or calculation. It was designed for old covenant Israel, a people who lived in a specific region and climate. It was not designed for a worldwide church of Christians.

However, even the old covenant was not as finicky about calendar dates as we have been.

For example, when Hezekiah restored the festivals to Judah, they kept the Passover in the second month (2 Chronicles 30:2, 15).

Although the law of Moses made provision for keeping the Passover in the second month, they did not qualify for the second Passover. Hezekiah was, strictly speaking, breaking the law of Moses (verse 18).

Not only did the Israelites observe the Passover in the second month, they also observed Unleavened Bread in the second month. The law of Moses did not authorize this. They also kept it for 14 days instead of seven (verse 23). And God was happy (verse 27). He looks on the heart more than on the calendar.

The example of Hezekiah shows that it is permissible, even under the old covenant, to observe festivals at different times. It is permissible to add more celebration.

Even the old covenant shows flexibility on festivals. We have no reason to criticize Christians who observe the Lord's Supper more often than once a year, or those who observe it in the morning rather than the evening. The Lord gives us liberty, not legalism.

He then goes on to discuss the symbolism of unleavened bread and the Wave Sheaf Offering of the Old Testament, and implies that because exact dates don't really matter the observance of Easter is completely acceptable to God.

So, even the old covenant had a yearly ritual regarding the rising of Christ. It is natural for Christians to have such a celebration, too, since we have a better understanding of what was being symbolized.

Today, Christians in some countries call this resurrection festival by a Greek term for the Jewish spring festival—Pascha. After all, the resurrection celebration began in Greek-speaking areas when Jewish influence was still strong in the church.

In English, the celebration is named by an Anglo-Saxon word that might have a dubious origin—Easter. But we do not need to throw out the celebration just because of the name that some people call it.

We have many terms in English that come from pagan names. We do not need to avoid such words. The meaning of a word is established by how people use it now, not by how they used it centuries ago.

So there is no reason to condemn Christians who have an annual Sunday celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. Nor is there reason to condemn the name Easter.

Now, some people condemn the calendar on which Easter is celebrated. It did give us the irony this year of having some Christians celebrate the resurrection before other Christians commemorated his death. But that is not a reason to throw stones at other Christians.

God has simply not given us commands on how to calculate an optional celebration. The date of Easter is calculated not on the basis of the Roman calendar, but on a combination of equinox, phases of the moon, and the day of the week—similar in many respects to the way the date of the wavesheaf ritual was selected.

The early Christians simply calculated the calendar differently from the way the Jews did, and there is no sin in that.

In the next section (3) we will look closer at this matter of exact date versus any date provided the intention is good, and refer to the words of John Wesley and Herbert Armstrong.

## 2.1 The Herbert Armstrong View

Herbert Armstrong has been a very influential figure in the twentieth century in the many small churches collectively known as the Churches of God. At the stimulation of his wife, he became involved[4] in 1927 with what is now known as the Church of God (Seventh Day). Eventually he left and formed his own church, the Radio Church of God.<sup>3</sup>

Herbert Armstrong wrote of the problem of the determination of the beginning of the Biblical year in a letter to his followers, “How to figure Passover” [8], in 1940.<sup>4</sup> (The title is misleading in that the subject is how to determine the first month of the year which then sets the day of the Passover, not whether Passover should be on the 14th or 15th of Abib. A more appropriate title would have been “How to figure the first month”.) The background to this letter is given in the United Church of God doctrinal statement [9]

“In the spring of 1940, Mr. Armstrong wrote a letter addressing this very topic. There was division within the Church of God (Seventh Day). Mr. C.O. Dodd had rejected the Hebrew Calendar and was planning to observe the Passover a month earlier. Mr. Armstrong studied the issue and then wrote a letter to the membership.

Note that the issue here was about the first month of the year, not the postponements. Herbert Armstrong was not at that time concerned with postponements.

The “Hebrew calendar” mentioned is the current version of the Rabbinical calendar used by the Jewish calendar, which is not the same one in use at the time of Jesus.

For our purposes, the important statements by Herbert Armstrong are:

“Israel LOST the Sabbath, LOST time LOST even her national name and identity. But JUDAH NEVER DID. Judah has kept TIME in respect to the weekly SABBATH. The Jews rejected Christ. They apostatized in doctrine, BUT THEY WERE STRICT, STICKLERS FOR THE LETTER. Would such a people have lost their CALENDAR? If so, TIME IS LOST! There is no other source thru whom God could have committed AND PRESERVED His calendar. He did COMMIT it to them. Therefore it must be thru them He has preserved it!

and

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<sup>3</sup>The name was later changed to Worldwide Church of God. In later years of Herbert Armstrong’s reign, any who seriously questioned doctrine or internal management or exposed internal corruption were typically disfellowshipped, “marked” as dissidents, and consigned to the clutches of Satan for the destruction of the flesh and later to the lake of fire if repentance was not forthcoming. A serious expose of this technique to suppress whistle blowers is in the revealing “Kessler letter” of December 1981 to the WCG Board of Directors [5]. During Herbert Armstrong’s lifetime, and even more so after his death, individuals and groups left to form their own church groups because of disputes with doctrine or government or corruption or abuse. The numbers increased after the Pasadena administration openly adopted many conventional Protestant doctrines in 1994/95. A split-off tree showing the names of the larger groups, their leaders, and date of departure, is published by the Worldwide Church of God on its Internet site at <http://www.wcg.org>. Unfavourable histories by Bruce Rنهان[6] and Dave Robinson [7] are but two of many by former ministers, employees, or members telling of internal corruption and abuse, even at the highest levels.

<sup>4</sup>The entire document is available on the Internet in the Herbert Armstrong shelf of the Archival Christianity Study Library at <http://acsl.home.ml.org>

“In conclusion, unless God has preserved His sacred calendar thru the Jews, then WE DO NOT KNOW how to figure Passover or ANY of the holydays this year. For there is NO AUTHORITY for any other way.

“There is NO BIBLE AUTHORITY WHATSOEVER for figuring the 1st day of the 1st month from the new moon NEAREST the Spring equinox!

Firstly we see the claim that the Jews “WERE STRICT, STICKLERS FOR THE LETTER” of the Law, which, as we will see later, is the opposite of what Jesus said. Jesus condemned the Pharisees and Scribes of his day for abandoning the Law while making a pretence to fool observers into thinking they were diligently obedient. Unfortunately they also fooled Herbert Armstrong – but not Jesus!

From these quotations of Herbert Armstrong we see that Herbert Armstrong could not find in the Bible any way to determine the beginning of the year, and therefore had to fall back on the Rabbinical method of determination as his only option. If he had not used the Rabbinical method of dating, he had nothing. Consequently he accepted the dates set by the Rabbis according to rules they developed over the centuries. Incidentally, the rules in use today originated mainly in 358 AD, centuries after the resurrection of Christ.

Herbert Armstrong was unable to find anything in the Bible which would help him determine the first month of the year. That does not mean that it is not there; it just means he could not find it and quit.

Thus his solution to “How to figure Passover” was to close your Bible and go and ask a Rabbi.

## **2.2 The United Church of God Views on the Rabbinical Calendar**

This section examines the support given to the Rabbinical calendar by one of the groups which broke away from the “Born Again” [10] Worldwide Church of God. It should be noted that this writing is not an attack on this group and they have not been singled out for criticism. The writer is non-aligned and is not a member of any organization of men. It just so happens that the United Church of God has better documented its position than most other groups, and its position is similar to that of other break away groups anyway.

The United Church of God is probably the largest single descendant of the Worldwide Church of God. It was formed by many ministers and members in mid-1995. <sup>5</sup> Most of its ministers had been trained at Ambassador College, knew Herbert Armstrong personally and were known by him. Many members had attended one of Ambassador Colleges in their younger days. It is not surprising that these people have a deep attachment to Herbert Armstrong and his teachings. With this background we can now examine their first doctrinal statement on the calendar.

The United Church of God doctrinal statement on the Rabbinical calendar [9] was issued in March 1996 by the Doctrinal Committee consisting of Jim Franks, Burk McNair, Peter Nathan, Leon Walker, and Donald Ward, all with long associations with the Worldwide Church of God going back into the Armstrong years. It discusses both the start of the year and the postponements. It is a remarkable document for its utilization of the FUD technique which is probably

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<sup>5</sup>The United Church of God has an Internet site at <http://www.ucg.org>. They publish a high quality religious periodical, “The Good News”, and a small number of doctrinal booklets. As with the earlier Worldwide Church of God, all literature is professionally produced and entirely free.

unintentional but nevertheless has been used and readers should be aware of this psychological / marketing / mind-control technique.

The FUD technique is used in mind control and related applications such as marketing and advertising. The name derives from “Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt”. It is often used in marketing by a dominant group with a weak product to persuade customers not to go to a small supplier of a superior product. The rationale for use by the dominant group is that they believe that on any logical unbiased appraisal and analysis of products, their own would fare poorly, and therefore, to ensure purchasing decisions are made in their favour, they must influence the decision making processes so that they are ultimately not based on logic analysis but on personal prejudices and emotions. The object is to create sufficient fear, uncertainty and doubt about competitors in the minds of potential customers that, for the safety of their own careers in the future, the purchasers elect to stay with the dominant group and their weak product rather than risk going to the smaller supplier with the better product. IBM sales people were well known for this technique in the 1960s, for example, leading to the famous phrase, “Nobody was ever fired for buying IBM” (implying that if you buy another brand in this job, your career in this organization is at risk).

From the doctrinal statement:

5. The vernal equinox is referred to as the first day of spring. This is virtually universal in the various calendars. There is no statement in the Bible to this effect. Most calendars also make the assumption that Passover must always fall after this vernal equinox. Again, the Bible is silent on this issue.

The claim that “the Bible is silent on this issue” implies that if you have any opinion, then you have invented your own. If you have invented your own, you are like a false prophet. See the fear, uncertainty and doubt this subtle phrasing arouses in the mind of the reader? We will see later that the Bible is not silent on this issue at all.

Continuing,

6. The Bible tells us that the month of Abib is to be the beginning of months. The term Abib means “ears” or “green ears of grain” in Hebrew. Abib must be in the spring of the year. This requires the periodic addition of a 13th month to prevent Abib from occurring in the middle of the winter instead of the spring.

Here is a statement of facts, perhaps not realized by some readers. In the FUD technique used by the dominant marketer, statement of facts builds confidence in the teller of the story (the dominant marketer). The unconscious message is “There is a lot of doubt and uncertainty in the selection of these products but we are capable of stating some facts that you can rely on. Extrapolate this to mean safety can be found with us.” Having stated these facts and given some reassurance to the reader that the United Church of God hierarchy do know something, more uncertainty and doubt is introduced.

The point in all this is very simple. Every calendar is based upon some assumptions. While we can argue that some of these assumptions make more sense than others, we cannot argue the point of a “pure” biblical calendar. The question really

comes down to: Which calendar will we accept? The one preserved by the Jews for at least 1,500 years? Or one devised by others?

Later in the statement, they admit they are completely in the dark but this is masked by the subtle introduction of the fear component of FUD:

In Romans 3:1–2 Paul states very clearly that the Jews received the oracles: “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.” Could the calendar be among these oracles? We really have no evidence to believe otherwise. The oracles clearly consisted of items beyond Scripture, and most likely included the calendar.

Is it possible that the Jews are wrong in the calendar they have Preserved? We simply don't know, We could ask the same question about the Scriptures. Are we sure they have faithfully preserved the scriptural accounts? We accept the Scriptures as being the Word of God, faithfully preserved for our benefit by the Jewish people. If we don't accept the Hebrew Calendar, then which calendar should we accept? Someone has to make a decision about the calculation of the calendar. Will it be by observation, or by calculation? How will you use the vernal equinox - the nearest new moon to it, the one just before it, or the one just afterwards? All would be in the vicinity of spring. But which would be right? And how would you know?

There is much doubt and self-confessed ignorance expressed in those paragraphs but the United Church of God Committee Members are still bold enough to implicitly assert that you are in deep trouble if you do not agree with them:

Some people have taken it upon themselves to determine the calendar. God lets them do so, but does He give them the authority in this matter? The United Church of God accepts the Hebrew Calendar as being authoritative in determining when the Holy Days are to be observed. There will continue to be an ongoing study into this matter. We currently have seen no evidence that would cause us to reject the Hebrew Calendar that has been accepted in the Church of God since at least 1940.

Note that fear element in those first two sentences! Some readers will hear echoes of Herman Hoeh of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG), in *The Good News*, April 1981, “Some ... have taken it upon themselves to determine the calendar for themselves. God lets them do so, but He has given them no authority in this matter.” Hoeh also wrote, in an even stronger fear inducement, “Others can go their own way – till the judgement!” Ironically, Hermah Hoeh, once a fierce disciple of Herbert Armstrong, has totally rejected the Armstrong teachings, presumably including his own writings on the calendar, to enthusiastically embrace the Worldwide Church of God's “new teachings”.

One might ask these Committee Members what else the “oracles of the Jews” included, and which parts of those oracles they “have taken it upon themselves” to accept and which parts of those oracles they “have taken it upon themselves” to reject. In their words, “God lets them do so, but does He give them the authority in this matter?”.

Why have they “taken it upon themselves” to selectively pick and choose which of the many details of Rabbinical traditional observance of Holy Days they will follow? Why have they praised some aspects as being delivered by God yet reject other aspects?

For example, the following instructions regarding footwear [11] for the Day of Atonement are another part of the same oral law from the same Rabbis who bring you the instructions for the Jewish calendar:

It is prohibited to wear leather shoes, even if leather only covers the top. Rubber or canvas shoes are permitted. Wearing of leather shoes is also forbidden in the street and at home. A sick person, a woman who is within 30 days after childbirth, or a person with a wound on his foot may wear leather shoes. It is proper for nine or ten year old children to fast part of the day. They should not fast the whole day unless they are healthy, strong and are at least eleven years old. A boy of thirteen and a girl of twelve must fast, for they are Jewish adults. Washing and anointing are forbidden to all children. It is proper to accustom young children not to wear leather shoes.

Do these United Church of God teachers religiously avoid leather footwear on Atonement, and teach their flock to do so, or have they “taken it upon themselves” to reject these parts of what they call the “oracles of God” preserved by the Jews? The answer is very obvious to all: they have “taken it upon themselves” to reject part of the “oracles of God”. Furthermore, there are thousands of other examples which could be raised wherein they have “taken it upon themselves” to reject the “oracles of God” preserved by the Jews.

An important question raised by this Doctrinal Committee is whether a Christian should decide issues personally or should the Christian leave the decision to others who are trusted and then follow those decision makers blindly? This question is pursued further in the next section.

A more extensive statement, “Summary of the Hebrew Calendar” [12], was issued in February 1997 by the Doctrinal Committee, with similar and additional material justifying the same ends. A rebuttal, “A Candid Reply To the UCG Study Paper Titled Summary Of the Hebrew Calendar”, was released by Frank Nelte in June 1997 [13] and is available on the Internet in the Archival Christianity Study Library (see list of references at the end of this article). In the Introduction, Mr Nelte writes

And I cannot hide the fact that I am deeply disappointed by the whole approach that is taken in that paper.

The paper represents a classic example of prejudice and bias in favour of “traditions”. As such it amounts to exactly the same thing as Jesus Christ stated to the Pharisees ...

And he said unto them, FULL WELL YE REJECT the  
commandment of God, that ye may keep your own  
tradition. (Mark 7:9)

Does that sound too strong?

I will show in the rest of this reply that the Study Paper of the Doctrinal Committee of UCG clearly amounts to A REJECTION OF THE TRUTH IN FAVOUR OF HOLDING FAST TO TRADITIONS!

The paper is the work of “the Doctrine Committee” of UCG. As such it does not necessarily represent the views of every member of the Council of Elders. Nor is it necessarily a final official doctrinal statement for the United Church; the paper seems to imply in places that there is room for possible modifications. Nevertheless it is thus far the closest the United Church has come to stating the official doctrine for the Church regarding the calendar issue.

I believe that unless the flaws in this paper are CLEARLY EXPOSED, it will end up being the one and only official statement UCG will make on this subject. After Mr. Raymond McNair’s (GCG) articles stating the official views of the Global Church, I wrote a reply in which I exposed the flaws and weaknesses in his presentation. But it was perhaps not stated forcefully enough to motivate the Global Church to actually come to grips with the obvious flaws in its official statement concerning the calendar, since Global has done nothing since then to correct the flaws that were pointed out ... I do know that Mr. McNair has read my response to his articles.

### 2.2.1 A Personal View of a Typical Loyal Member

A loyal member of a Church of God posted an electronic response to “Why Is the Bible ‘Silent’ About the Calendar?” [14] to rcg-forum on 9th August 1996 in which he outlined some scriptures which show much of the framework of the Biblical calendar (but left out the seven year cycle and the fifty year Jubilee cycle).

He supports the concept of an Oral Law:

Another thing is that God surely revealed to Moses those things that he *had* to know in order to obey Him. This is what is supposed to comprise the so-called “oral” law. Even in the New Testament, the apostle Paul points out how there is a “written” law and an “oral” law for the people of God.

Therefore, brothers, stand firm; and hold to the traditions you were taught by us, whether we spoke them or wrote them in a letter. (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

He continues:

And, a final aspect is that God established a procedure by which the difficult decisions could be made, decisions that were not easily made based on instructions already given in the Bible

and quotes Deuteronomy 17:8–17:13 where civil disputes were determined by the Levites as a final arbiters. Using this Old Covenant method for settling civil disputes as a precedent, he claims it applies to the matter of the Biblical calendar, viz. leave it to the United Church of God Council of Elders and then follow whatever they decide.

Can Christians use the Nuremberg defence – “I was only following orders”? We all have to appear before the judgement seat of Christ. Who is responsible for proving what is right and holding fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21)? The individual, or a Council or a Board or an Executive Committee?

If the people currently in the United Church of God had followed the principle espoused in this email for the calendar, i.e. let the Church hierarchy determine the answer and the lay people should follow whatever they decree, the United Church of God would not exist today; all of its members would still be in the Worldwide Church of God following the decisions handed down by the Worldwide Church of God Elders in Pasadena. And Herbert Armstrong would never have left the Church of God (Seventh Day).

These remarks have centred around United Church of God but the principles – to let others determine your religious beliefs, to follow them blindly – apply to all of the Churches of God and to all organizations, e.g. churches, cults, governments, political parties, which seek to control others.

### **2.2.2 The Jim Franks Personal View**

Jim Franks is a full-time career minister of the United Church of God, an International Association, a member of their Doctrinal Committee, and pastor of the Houston North congregation. He wrote this personal view as a letter in response to questions about the Calendar. It is not the official United Church of God view (which had not been decided at the time of publication, April 1996, and still has not been at the time of writing, September 1996). It appeared in the newspaper “In Transition”, (owned and managed by United Church of God members), in the section “Questions and Answers” under the title “Questions and answers on the Hebrew calendar” [15]. A more appropriate title would have used the term “Rabbinical calendar” since the topic is the calendar rules formulated by the Rabbis. Mr Franks claimed to “have read all the material that I am aware exists from all the different church groups that have written about the calendar and the postponements.”

As with the official United Church of God doctrinal statement, this unofficial publication is noteworthy for its use of the FUD technique, no doubt quite unintentionally.

Here are some excerpts:

Question 9. What are the lively oracles presented to the Jews?

Obviously, the oracles included more than what is recorded in Scripture. Why do we say that? First of all, every scholar I am aware of accepts that this is true.

Second, the New Testament itself quotes many statements and sources that are not recorded in the Old Testament. Were these a part of the oracles?

Many believe they were. The Jews preserve the oral law, which is in addition to the written law. Was this a part of the oracles? Many believe it was. What about the calendar?

There isn't complete agreement on the question of the calendar, to my knowledge. But many scholars do believe that some form of the calendar was given to Israel during the time of Moses.

Were the rules of postponement included in the oracles? There are those who believe so. Since there is no formal record of what these oracles were, it is impossible to know exactly what was and what wasn't.

But one thing is for sure: The apostle Paul made a strong reference to them in Romans, no doubt for our benefit today.

Quite an acknowledgement of ignorance, and appeal to accept what “many” believe or are doing. If we accepted what many believe and are doing we would be Roman Catholics, Bhuddists, Hindus, etc. or even members of the Worldwide Church of God.

In response to question 11, “Are these Jews infallible?”

I know of no human being who is infallible. But these are the same individuals who were entrusted with the Scriptures. Do you accept the Scriptures as being authentic? The same people who preserved the Scriptures preserved the calendar and the oracles.

They also preserved many customs and religious procedures which Mr Franks rejects. In writing this answer, Mr Franks has now decided that the “oracles” were separate from the “Scriptures”, and separate from the calendar, whereas in answer 9 he didn’t know what comprised the “oracles”.

In response to question 13, “Why do we need to use the Hebrew calendar? Why don’t we just calculate the months as God commands?” the FUD-filled response is:

Where does God command us to calculate the months? I find no such statement in Scripture.

He gives the dates for all the Holy Days in Leviticus 23. What calendar was He using? He doesn’t tell us. If God doesn’t command us to calculate the calendar, then by what authority would we calculate the calendar?

When does a month begin? When God gave the Holy Days, we know of no method of calculation that was in use by the Israelites. They must have used observation.

Observation is inherently inaccurate. What if the new moon took place during the day and it was cloudy that night? You would be off at least one day in such a case. If you are a day off, how do you make it up? You have to subtract a day somewhere.

It would be confusing to follow this method. Is the first crescent the new moon, or is it the astronomical conjunction of the sun and the moon? Depending on which you use, you will also be a day off.

Most devisers fo calendars want to use the time of the new moon in Jerusalem. But why? Where are we given that requirement in Scripture? God gave the Holy Days to the Israelites as they were leaving Egypt and quite a ways from Jerusalem.

Where does He say we should use Jerusalem time? Why not Cairo time?

Although the use of Jerusalem time is not a problem, the point is we are not told to do so in Scripture. If we must depend on Scripture for every aspect of the calendar, then we will find ourselves at a loss. These are all questions that cannot be answered based solely on Scripture. This is all the more reason to use the calendar that has been preserved by the Jews.

### **2.3 The Philadelphia Church of God View**

Philadelphia Church of God published “God’s Sacred Calendar” by Stephen Flurry and Mark Nash in the April 1996 issue of The Philadelphia Trumpet [16]. This eight page article is a well presented defence of the Armstrong-Hoeh position (since repudiated by Hoeh) and relies for

much of its authority from quotes taken from (RCG/WCG) The Good News article by Herman Hoeh. It makes a strong defence for following the Jewish calendar (although the authors don't themselves follow the Jewish calendar, e.g. in relation to Pentecost, and don't follow the other customs the Jews claim to have been handed down to them along with the calendar).

In line with the practice of FUD and fear-religions, it introduces on the second page and finishes on the eighth page with the (repudiated) threat of Herman Hoeh – “Others can go their own way – till the judgement!”

## **2.4 Their Common View**

A common, and convenient, thread in the above positions is the assertion that the “oracles” of Romans 3:2 included the calendar, therefore the congregation must follow the Rabbinical methods, except of course where the rulers of the particular organization want to do otherwise.

It is interesting that the governing rulers tell their members to reject the methods preserved by the Jews for calculation of Passover, to reject the methods preserved by the Jews for the calculation of Pentecost, to reject the hundreds of religious customs preserved by the Jews, yet tell them to accept the methods preserved by the Jews for the calculation of the dates in the Rabbi's seventh month.

## **2.5 The Frank Nelte View**

This independent author, formerly a minister of the Worldwide Church of God, taught in 1995 the Herbert Armstrong view. More recently, he has analyzed the calendar [17] and some of the publications about it and recanted his views of the postponements. He now teaches that the postponements have no Biblical basis.

His view of the starting month of the year is to set the seventh month and then work backwards to the first, as do the Jews. He adds a further rule the rabbis did not introduce, adjusting the seventh month to ensure that the Feast of Tabernacles, or most of it, is after the corresponding equinox.

## **2.6 The Jewish View**

So far, every group has pointed to the Jews as the only people who are likely to know the answer. Let us now look at why and how the Jews know the answer from their own writings.

The modern Jewish calendar is very complicated as far as calendars go; entire books have been written to explain it, e.g. [18] [19] [20]. Most Christian people who start to investigate it are quickly disillusioned by the plethora of rules and combinations of rules for the many variations which occur. Why do they use such a complicated – some say confused – calendar?

The Jews have written many volumes about themselves and their religion. The following is an explanation of the “Torah – The Written and Oral Law”[21]:

The Torah is composed of two parts: the written law and the oral law. The written Torah contains the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings. Together with the written Torah, Moses was also given the oral law which explains and clarifies the written law. It was transmitted orally from generation to generation and eventually transcribed in the Talmud and Medrash.

Throughout the generations our people have studied these works, commenting upon them, clarifying their meanings, deriving practical applications of these principles and codifying the laws derived from them. Thus, a continuous chain of tradition extends throughout the generations, connecting the scholars of the present day to the revelation at Mount Sinai.

Note that the claim is that starting in the time of Moses, there was an oral law in addition to the written law and apparently this oral law was of equal weight with the written law. The claim is that the written Law was insufficient. Another author [2] writes

However, the scroll containing the Five Books of Moses is written in a shortened form, and in order to understand the real meaning of its words and its message, a vast amount of discussion on every letter and every word took place amongst the early Rabbis over hundreds of years. All the discussions and decisions were put into a set of holy books called the *Talmud*, coming from the Hebrew word meaning ‘to study’.

By definition, this oral law was passed down from one generation to the next in oral form. An unanswerable question is “Why?”. Why was this oral law not written down from the start? Which is easier to hand down to later generations, tens of thousands of memorized words or tens of thousands of written words? Another good question is: if this memorized oral law was intended to be handed down from a teacher to a student, why is it now written down? If it is in written form now, why wasn’t it in written form from the start?

Another explanation is that somewhere in history, possibly during the Babylonian captivity, some persons created the myth of an oral law as an excuse to introduce their own writings and teachings into their religion with equal value to that given by God.

How can we determine if these traditions of the elders contain the truth of God or if they are the words and thoughts of men? Let us look at the statement of Jesus about the Oral Law and traditions of his time.

## **2.7 Jesus’ Statements on the Rabbis and Their Traditions**

Is there safety in following the calendar of the Rabbis? Some allege so. After all, don’t they have the “oracles of God”? Aren’t they a good example to follow? What does God think? Note these words of Jesus to the Rabbis of his time:

Matthew 15:1–9

1 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked,

2 “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

3 Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?”

4 For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’

5 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’

6 he is not to ‘honor his father ’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

8 “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

What did Jesus think of their traditions? Are these really “oracles of the Jews” which a Christian ought to follow?

Mark 7:5–7:9, 7:13

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?”

6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

7 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’

8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

9 And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!

10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’

11 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God),

12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother.

13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

Recall from the quotation above in section 2.1 that Herbert Armstrong claimed the “The Jews rejected Christ. They apostatized in doctrine, BUT THEY WERE STRICT, STICKLERS FOR THE LETTER. Would such a people have lost their CALENDAR?”. Jesus did not think they were strict sticklers for the Law, and in John 7:19 he claimed that the Pharisees did not keep the Law.

John 7:19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?

How can that be? Weren’t they excessively diligent to obey the Law of God, as Herbert Armstrong claimed? They were diligent, but not for the Law of God. They had their own version of God’s Law, including their written “Oral Law”, the totality of which they called the Law, but Jesus told them that in keeping their own version of the Law they were *not* keeping the true and pure Law.

How useful are these “oracles of the Jews” for a Christian who seeks answers about the Calendar? Surely the words of the one who became our Passover tell us the “oracles of the Jews” – a term used by Paul a generation after the resurrection – do *not* include the traditions of the elders which were promulgated by the Pharisees and which Christ condemned.

### 3 Does It Really Matter?

Is the exact date all that important? Some observers of the Rabbinical calendar think details of dates are not important; God will honour good intentions even if the dates are wrong. In that case, why bother with the Rabbi’s dates at all, why not set your own dates at more convenient times of the year? After all, the Rabbis have adjusted the annual Sabbaths of the seventh month to more convenient week days. This option of holding festivals at more convenient dates has been considered by the Pasadena management of the Worldwide Church of God. If the exact date doesn’t matter, why not?

Is it really acceptable to have good intentions of keeping the Holy Days but have the dates wrong? If the Rabbinical dates are followed and a group meets on a “postponed” Day of Trumpets, are they really observing the Day of Trumpets?

So what if the exact date is wrong? “Sometimes the difference will be only a day, other times two days or even a whole month, but the intention is to please God by an observance of the Holy Day and that is what is important, not some fine details.”

#### 3.1 The View of Joseph Tkach Junior

[3]

#### 3.2 Was John Wesley a Sabbatarian?

John Wesley, a very influential preacher in the Church of England in the 18th century, claimed to be a strict Sabbath-keeper, and frequently condemned those who were Sabbath-breakers. Many of his sermons have been preserved since his death in 1791 and are even available today on the World Wide Web (<http://ccel.wheaton.edu/wesley/sermons/>). Wesley was a staunch observer of Sunday as the Lord’s Day and the weekly day of worship. Here is one of his admonitions to the youth of his day, extracted from his sermon “Scriptural Christianity” [22]:

9. Once more: what shall we say concerning the youth of this place? Have you either the form or the power of Christian godliness? Are you humble, teachable, advisable; or stubborn, self-willed, heady, and highminded? Are you obedient to your superiors as to parents? Or do you despise those to whom you owe the tenderest reverence? Are you diligent in your easy business, pursuing your studies with all your strength? Do you redeem the time, crowding as much work into every day as it can contain? Rather, are ye not conscious to yourselves, that you waste away day after day, either in reading what has no tendency to Christianity, or in gaming, or in – you know not what? Are you better managers of your fortune than of your time? Do you, out of principle, take care to owe no man anything? Do you “remember the

Sabbath day, to keep it holy;” to spend it in the more immediate worship of God? When you are in his house, do you consider that God is there?

In his sermon, “Who Will Rise Up with Me Against the Wicked?”,[23], Wesley severely castigated “Sabbath-breakers” and advocated vigilante action against them:

4. They then printed and dispersed, at their own expense, several thousand books of instruction to Constables and other Parish Officers, explaining and enforcing their several duties: And to prevent, as far as possible, the necessity of proceeding to an actual execution of the laws, they likewise printed and dispersed in all parts of the town dissuasives from Sabbath-breaking, extract from Acts of Parliament against it, and notices to the offenders.

...

7. In clearing the streets, fields, and alehouses of Sabbath-breakers, they fell upon another sort of offenders, as mischievous to society as any; namely, gamesters of various kinds. Some of these were of the lowest and vilest class, commonly called gamblers; who make a trade of seizing on young and unexperienced men, and tricking them out of all their money; and after they have beggared them, they frequently teach them the same mystery of iniquity. Several nests of these they have rooted out, and constrained not a few of them honestly to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow and the labour of their hands.

...

10. But to return. The number of persons brought to justice, from August, 1757, to August, 1762, is.....9,596

From thence to the present time: –

For unlawful gaming, and profane swearing.....	40
For Sabbath-breaking.....	400
Lewd women, and keepers of ill houses.....	550
For offering to sale obscene prints.....	2

In all.....10,588

The question is: Was John Wesley really a Sabbath keeper, or was he one of his dreaded “Sabbath-breakers”? He intended to observe the seventh day Sabbath of Exodus 20 but in reality he observed the Roman first day, Sunday, the day of the Roman Sun God. His attitude was good, but did he really observe the Sabbath.

If he were tried in a court of law on a charge of observing the Sabbath (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, Leviticus 23:32), there is no doubt that the jury would have to find him “not guilty”.

### 3.3 Jeroboam and Postponements

When Jeroboam postponed the Festivals of the seventh month to the eighth month (for political reasons), 1 Kings 12:25–12:33 were his subjects still keeping those festivals?

25 Then Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built up Peniel.

26 Jeroboam thought to himself, “The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David.

27 If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.”

28 After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

29 One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Daniel

30 And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Daniel to worship the one there.

31 Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites.

32 He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made.

33 On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings.

Note in verse 32 that Jeroboam’s festival was “like the festival held in Judah”. The main difference was that it was postponed a month, from the seventh month to the eighth month, something like postponing the Sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the eighth, i.e. Sunday. This was probably more convenient for the citizens because it gave them more time between the end of the harvest and the start of the festival, enabling a more leisurly and relaxed observance. Did God accept this? God’s response tells us.

1 Kings 14:1–14:16

1 At that time Abijah son of Jeroboam became ill,

2 and Jeroboam said to his wife, “Go, disguise yourself, so you won’t be recognized as the wife of Jeroboam. Then go to Shiloh. Ahijah the prophet is there—the one who told me I would be king over this people.

3 Take ten loaves of bread with you, some cakes and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what will happen to the boy.”

4 So Jeroboam’s wife did what he said and went to Ahijah’s house in Shiloh. Now Ahijah could not see; his sight was gone because of his age.

5 But the LORD had told Ahijah, “Jeroboam’s wife is coming to ask you about her son, for he is ill, and you are to give her such and such an answer. When she arrives, she will pretend to be someone else.”

6 So when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, “Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why this pretense? I have been sent to you with bad news.

7 Go, tell Jeroboam that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I raised you up from among the people and made you a leader over my people Israel.

8 I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes.

9 You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back.

10 “ ‘Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in Israel—slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone.

11 Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country. The LORD has spoken!’

12 “As for you, go back home. When you set foot in your city, the boy will die.

13 All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the LORD, the God of Israel, has found anything good.

14 “The LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam. This is the day! What? Yes, even now.

15 And the LORD will strike Israel, so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their forefathers and scatter them beyond the River, because they provoked the LORD to anger by making Asherah poles.

16 And he will give Israel up because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit.”

Jeroboam, among other things, postponed the festivals from the seventh month to the eighth month. History shows that his actions, including this postponement, were not acceptable to God.

### **3.4 The Plain Truth About Observing the Wrong Date**

For those who value the opinion of Herbert Armstrong, here is what he wrote in 1940:

History is vague on the subject, shedding little light that can be accepted and trusted. Yet we know God gave HIS PEOPLE a fixed rule for calculating TIME PERIODS, and for figuring WHEN to hold the Festivals of Jehovah. Otherwise, the prophecies, so full of definite time-periods, can never be understood. Otherwise God’s people could not obey Him!

Note that Herbert Armstrong wrote that if the exact days were wrong, God’s people would *not* be obeying Him when they met for worship! He reasons in that letter that God must have provided a method so those He calls can determine the correct dates.

And indeed God has, but it is not with a set of calendar rules manipulated by various Rabbis over the millenia. In section 4, we will see what that method is.

### 3.5 Summary

What does this have to do with the Wave Sheaf Offering?

In 1997, the Hillel calendar used by the Jewish Rabbis will have the equivalent of the Wave Sheaf Offering one month later than the equinox dating method. The Jews and those who follow the Jewish calendar will “observe” the Holy Days one month late. As with John Wesley, a “celebration” on the wrong date is an absence of a celebration on the correct date. An absence of a celebration of a Holy Day on the correct day is a failure to observe the Holy Day.

Furthermore, those who follow the Jewish calendar in the years when it had the first month correct, mostly have the dates wrong because of the Hillel postponements (See the CCG paper “God’s Calendar”).

John Wesley had good intentions of keeping the Sabbath of Exodus 20:8 when he worshipped every Sunday. Was he a Sabbath-keeper or a Sabbath-breaker?

## 4 The Key

In this section, we consider the “appointed times” of the festivals, why there are festivals at all, the Wave Sheaf Offering and its relation to Christ, its meaning, and our part in the harvest.

### 4.1 The Appointed Times

The seasons were designed by God around the Holy Day’s, being the appointed times of the festivals.

Leviticus 23:4

“These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at *their* appointed times:

The appointed times belonging to or owned by the sacred assemblies.

How do we determine these appointed times? In Genesis 1:14 God (Elohim) set lights in the sky for signs and seasons and days.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years,

This verse tells us to use the sun and the moon to determine the appointed times. This is very important because many use some form of a “Holy Calendar” which is divorced from the astronomical events. For example, the Hillel calendar is designed around a 19 year cycle and is only an approximation to the astronomical events and is often inaccurate, particularly when its postponement rules come into effect to facilitate the observance of Rabbinical customs. It is designed to allow the observance of Rabbinical celebrations by anyone, even someone who is permanently in a closed dungeon with no access to the outside world and its changing seasons or astronomical occurrences.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica, article “Early Calendar systems; Jewish and Muslim calendar” tells us “the (current Jewish) calendar, thus, is schematic and *independent of the true New Moon.*”

The Hillel calendar does not use the “lights in the expanse of the sky” to “mark seasons and days and years”, instead it calculates future seasons and days and years from days and years declared acceptable by the Rabbis at a time in the past.

## 4.2 God Has a Master Plan

Why would God want His people to observe “seasons and days and years”?

Some tell us the festival days were inspired by the festivals held by the Egyptians and the Canaanites. The implication is that God did not know of these or any festivals when he created Adam but was later so moved and inspired by observing the customs developed by the Egyptians and their neighbours that he decided that his people, the children of Israel, would benefit greatly by having modified versions of these heathen customs. And so the Holy Days of the Old Testament came into being! Does this sound correct? Does God operate on major issues by impulse? Is God making it up as he goes along?

An alternative is that God had intended for his people to observe these “seasons and days and years” before the foundation of the universe and arranged the solar system so that the “lights in the expanse of the sky” would “mark seasons and days and years”. Satan is the great counterfeiter and would have arranged counterfeit festivals for as many as he and the demons could influence.

The more logical view is that God knew what he wanted to do with his people, to train them and teach them, before the foundation of the world. Where would these festivals fit in? What could they teach people? We will see the answers to these questions in due course but first we should verify that God has a master plan to which he is working.

Romans 1:18–1:20 tells us we can learn about important things about God from the physical world around us. The festivals are part of this physical world because of their accompanying seasons.

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

We should look to the seasons associated with the Holy Days to learn more about those days. Firstly, let’s see that God works with plans. Our existence is not based on impulses and whims of God.

Isaiah 41:21–41:24

21 “Present your case,” says the LORD. “Set forth your arguments,” says Jacob’s King.

22 “Bring in [your idols] to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come,

23 tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear.

24 But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable.

God tells of the future, therefore He knows in advance what he wants to happen, i.e. he plans ahead. Some claim that God is omniscient, knowing everything, in the past, present and future. Knowing what will happen in the future does not imply the power to bring it about. The next quotation tells us that God can bring events to pass to achieve his goals.

God's plan for Egypt and the Israelites involved manipulating the lives of the Pharaohs.  
Exodus 9:16:

But I (God) have raised you (Pharaoh) up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Proverbs 19:21 tells us God's purpose prevails, showing God has a purpose determined from some past time.

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

Isaiah 55:11

11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

God has a purpose for humanity.  
Romans 8:28

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, [10] who [11] have been called according to *his purpose*.

Revelation 1:1; 22:6 show events to happen, and can be true only if there is a plan of the future.

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

22:6 The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

We can conclude that God has a Master Plan for his creation of mankind. Is it reasonable to think that God has not revealed this plan to us in some manner?

Lessons can be deduced from the annual Holy Days as to this plan. The Holy Days were associated with the two annual agricultural harvests. If the Holy Days show this plan, then we can learn about the important events of the plan by looking at the events of the festivals.

### 4.3 A Commanded Assembly – The Wave Sheaf Offering

At the time of Moses, the months did not have names, only numbers. The year started in the northern-hemisphere spring, in the first month, now labelled with the Babylonian-derived name of Nisan, overlapping the spring equinox.

The festivals were very important to the Israelites because they were associated with food production. Before they were allowed to eat any of the grain crops, there was an important offering to be made.

Leviticus 23:14

And you shall *eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh* until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The timing of this Wave Sheaf Offering is critical; there is only a short time window when it can be held. Get it wrong and you could go hungry.

“Corn” in the King James Version is a mistranslation. The Hebrew word means “grain” as shown in more recent translations.

What grains were available at that time? Exodus 9:31 records the grains which were grown in Egypt at that time of the year.

31 (The flax and barley were destroyed, since the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom.

Barley was planted in the autumn and winter, and was available for harvest after the spring equinox. If an attempt were made to hold the Wave Sheaf Offering too early, there would be no barley to offer. If the Wave Sheaf Offering were to be held too late, much of the barley would be lost.

Barley needs to be harvested sooner after maturity than wheat. The “Queensland Agricultural and Pastoral Handbook” [24] (Chapter 6, “Barley, Oats, Canary Seed, Linseed and Safflower”) advises:

Mature barley *does not stand* as well as wheat and *harvesting must be undertaken promptly* when the crop reaches maturity (October - December). Hence, large sowings of barley should be made only when ample harvesting machinery is available.

As with any agricultural crop, some grain heads mature faster than others. Maturity is not reached by all on the same day. Before the great majority is ready for harvest, some heads have already reached the ripe stage. Conversely, some lag and may not be quite ripe when the harvest is held. For commercial purposes, it is very desirable to have everything mature at the same time so that mechanized harvesting can be used with no waste caused by immature plants. This is the attraction of clone plants, they all behave exactly the same.

In this region of the world (Australia), the corresponding equinox is in late September. The recommended harvesting period begins in October, which is shortly after the equinox. This situation is depicted in the following diagram:



#### 4.4 Christ and The Wave Sheaf Offering

It is well known that Christ is the fulfilment of the Passover lamb sacrifice. 1 Corinthians 5:7–8

7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed.

8 Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Less well known is that Christ is also the fulfilment of the Wave Sheaf Offering. The Wave Sheaf Offering shows the resurrection of Christ and his ascension to and acceptance by the Father. John 20:1, 14–17

1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

...

14 Saying this, she (Mary Magdalene, verse 1) turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, “Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

Yet later that morning, in Matthew 28:8–9, on their way back from the tomb, “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary” (verse 1) *were* allowed to take hold of his feet:

8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Hail!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

Combining these verses tell us that early that Sunday morning, the time when the Wave Sheaf Offering was presented at the altar, Jesus ascended from earth to the Father in heaven and returned very soon after.

John 20:19 tells us he was still on earth on the evening of the same day:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

## 4.5 The Meaning

Two of the most momentous events in human history are Christ's death and his subsequent resurrection.

The first of the annual Holy Day seasons concerns Christ and what he has done and is doing now to assist each Christian in laying a foundation for a Christian life. This Passover season is recognized by many groups as commemorating the first of those two momentous historical events, the one that occurred on the Wednesday afternoon. But what about the other, the resurrection of Christ on Sunday morning?

### 4.5.1 Christ's Death

The first of the events of God's plan marked by a Holy Day is the death of the Lamb of God for the sins of all people.

The Passover is the event where the lamb was sacrificed and its blood on the houses caused the death angel to turn away from those dwelling places. This is of course symbolic of the blood of Christ which was shed to protect all humanity from eternal death.

Exodus 12:21–28

21 Then Moses called all the elders of Israel, and said to them, "Select lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the passover lamb.

22 Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.

23 For the LORD will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you.

24 You shall observe this rite as an ordinance for you and for your sons *for ever*.

25 And *when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service.*

26 And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?'

27 you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

28 Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

The blood of the lamb caused the death angel to pass over the house.

The Israelites to whom this ceremony was bestowed did not understand the prophetic meaning. Paul discusses some of these symbolic meanings in 1 Corinthians 10. In the sentence in verse 25 above "And when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service", the coming to the land could be symbolic of coming out of Egypt, crossing through the Red Sea, which is a type of baptism, and starting a new life (Acts 2:38), and so the meaning and the service are for New Testament Christians, not for Old Testament

Israelites. After starting the new life, they were to keep “this service”, which, in 1 Corinthians 5:6–8, Paul told the Greek Corinthians symbolizes purity and truth, the way of life of those who have been spared because of the Passover service, having put out the yeast of sin and wickedness.

But is there no event which relates to Christ’s ascendancy from the dead?

#### 4.5.2 Christ’s Resurrection and Acceptance

Human sacrifices were common throughout many religions but none of those were ever accepted by the Father. Christ’s death alone was worthless to us if his sacrifice had not been accepted by the Father, as Paul told the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:12–17

12 Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> *if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.* <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> *If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

These are very strong words from Paul! If Jesus’ sacrifice for sins had not been accepted by the Father, then Jesus would not have been resurrected, would not have ascended to the father, and we would still be dead and we would still be in our sins. Praise to God that Jesus’ sacrifice was accepted and he has been resurrected to become the first son of God, the captain or pioneer or author of our salvation in Hebrews 2:10.

10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, *in bringing many sons to glory*, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Christ is the first, the cornerstone, the foundation stone. 1 Peter 2:4–8

4 Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious;

5 and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

6 For it stands in scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

7 To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, “The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner,”

8 and “A stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall”; for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Ephesians 2:19–20

19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

The nature of the foundation stone is that the building cannot be constructed until the foundation stone is laid. So it is with the family of God, as shown by God's plan as outlined in the Holy Days. The first of the three seasons of the year is centered around Christ. The "spiritual house" of Peter, consisting of living stones of Christians, could not begin construction until the foundation stone were laid. This starting point is symbolized by the Wave Sheaf Offering.

Christ's acceptance as the Wave Sheaf Offering qualified him to become our High Priest and Intercessor. He has not returned to heaven and become too busy or diverted to notice what is happening on earth. He knows of the evils and sufferings here. Part of God's plan shows us what God intends to do about them, how it will be done and generally when, and it will be accordance with the plan he devised before the foundation of the earth.

Hebrews 4:14–4:16

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.

16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

He is not like High Priests in earthly religions, where the High Priest is served by others. This High Priest is a servant of others. Matthew 20:25–20:28

25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave –

28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

### 4.5.3 Offered While the Other Ears Are Green

We saw earlier in section 4.3 that the Wave Sheaf Offering had to be held in the month of "green ears", while the rest of the crop was too immature for harvest. What is the significance of this?

Writing to the Greeks about the resurrection and its importance to Christians, Paul referred to Christ as the "firstfruits".

1 Corinthians 15:20–23

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then *at his coming* those who belong to Christ.

Christ, the “first born among many brethren” (Romans 8:29), had to be harvested before any of his brethren, and this was predetermined by the order described in 1 Corinthians 15:23. He was harvested by the resurrection of the dead to become the only born son of God (Romans 1:4). The other sons of God will have to wait for the appointed time of their resurrection from the dead, and verse 23 above tells us that will be “at his coming”. The remainder of mankind have another time appointed for them but that is outside the scope of this article.

#### 4.5.4 Waved, Not Burned

There is something unusual about the Wave Sheaf Offering; it was waved, not burned like most other sacrifices.

Leviticus 23:11

<sup>11</sup> and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, that you may find acceptance; on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

What could this mean?

Romans 1:4

and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Jesus was made a Son of God (at present, the only Son, but later to be joined by many more at the next resurrection). What happens at the resurrection?

1 Corinthians 15:42–44

<sup>42</sup> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 15:53–54

<sup>53</sup> For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

The mortal physical body is replaced by an everlasting spirit body, the substance of which, for the Christians to be true sons of God, comes from the Father. The Father is eternal and indestructible and so will the resurrected Christian become by virtue of this spirit body. This has happened to the Captain of our salvation who has gone on ahead of us.

Revelation 1:12–18

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; <sup>14</sup> his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; <sup>16</sup> in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. <sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Christ is alive for evermore.

1 Timothy 6:13–16

1 Timothy 6:13–16 <sup>13</sup> In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, <sup>14</sup> I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>15</sup> and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

Of all humans, only Christ, the Lamb of God and the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev 17:14), has undergone the transformation of the resurrection and only he at this time has acquired immortality, the promise of God (Titus 1:2; 1 John 2:25). He is the first of many brethren and they will follow him in putting on immortality at the resurrection when he returns at the seventh trumpet. (See also the article “Is Christ IMMORTAL?” [27]).

The symbolism of the waving without burning fits into our picture quite well. At the actual event depicted by the Wave Sheaf Offering, Christ had been resurrected and was therefore indestructible. The Wave Sheaf Offering was not burned, symbolizing acknowledgement of Christ’s indestructibility. In contrast, his sacrifice as the Lamb of God occurred while he was a mortal human and the (remains of the) bodies of the sacrificial lambs were burned.

#### 4.5.5 The Meaning of the Harvest

Recall that the harvest could not begin until the Wave Sheaf Offering had been accepted (Leviticus 23:9–14).

In Matthew 28:18–28:20 the resurrected Jesus, then the ruler of heaven and earth (second to the Father and having all of his authority, like Joseph in Egypt), issued to his disciples a

commission to go and teach the commands he had taught them, and to make disciples of those who responded.

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

John 4:35 fields white, ready for the harvest

Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

They could do no harvesting until the Wave Sheaf Offering had been waved and accepted. The year did not commence until the month with the Wave Sheaf Offering arrived. They had a good idea from counting twelve months from the previous first month and observation of the crop refined the timing. The Israelite year went nowhere until the time of the Wave Sheaf Offering came. Once the Wave Sheaf Offering arrived, the harvest began wherever the crop was sufficiently ripe. Christians go nowhere without the personified Wave Sheaf Offering. Now that the Wave Sheaf Offering has arrived, we are to participate in God’s harvest.

Christians are part of God’s harvest of this era and God wants Christians to assist in producing more (Matthew 28:19–20).

Christians are people zealous for good works. Titus 3:8, 14:

8 The saying is sure. I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men.

14 And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful. (RSV)

In John 15:5–15:8 Jesus tells us to produce much fruit and glorify the Father.

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

A Christian will bear burdens of others. Galatians 6:1

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (RSV)

#### 4.5.6 Some Speculation About Easter Sunday

We learn from history that the early church observed the Passover for several centuries after the death of Christ, but by the end of the millenium the dominant church was not oberving Passover but had introduced Easter. Today, conventional Christians observe a Friday-Sunday Easter, with observances held early on the morning of Easter Sunday to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How did this changeover come about? Partly by point of the sword as political expediency, but here I speculate about another factor. I say “speculate” because the thought needs more research into history to verify or negate it, and hopefully this will one day be achieved.

The date of Easter Sunday is the first sunday after the first full moon after the autumn equinox in the Northern hemisphere. Why is this date chosen to represent the resurrection of Christ?

As a fact, the full moon occurs halfway through the month of 29.5 days, i.e. about the 15th of the first month, which is the date of the Passover and start of the Days of Unleavened Bread. The first sunday following would be the date of the Wave Sheaf Offering. Therefore the day chosen as Easter Sunday, the day to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, happens to coincide with the date of the Wave Sheaf Offering determined by the method outlined in this article (except for the unusual situation when the first annual sabbath falls on a sunday).

If the christians of the first few centuries had been observing the Wave Sheaf Offering, it would have been easier to do away with the “Jewish” Passover and substitute something else non-Jewish (and many heathens had their own counterparts) provided the Wave Sheaf Offering were retained to give the appearance of continuity with earlier practices. If the Wave Sheaf Offering were not being observed, then this change would have been more difficult.

The speculation is that the early Christians observed the Wave Sheaf Offering (generally) on the first sunday following the first full moon after the equinox, and this dating was retained when the Passover was abandoned and Easter was adopted, and changed to Easter sunday, thus removing the Jewish overtones associated with this date.

#### 4.5.7 Summary

God is concerned about people rather than about grains and harvests and these latter are used to teach us lessons God wants us to learn. There was no harvest until the Wave Sheaf Offering was accepted. The lesson for us is the importance of Christ, our pioneer and leader. Our harvest depends entirely on the Wave Sheaf Offering. Without Christ we are nothing and do not exist. Christ is the Bread of Life without which we starve. He is the vine, we are the branches and cannot produce fruit on our own.

There was no harvest possible until the Wave Sheaf Offering. We can go nowhere without Christ.

We cannot go off and do own thing without our captain, or we risk hearing the “I never knew you” of Matthew 7:22–23:

- 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'  
23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'

The small harvest has begun and those called now must participate.

## 5 Why the Misunderstanding?

Good understanding have all that keep your commandments. Psalms 111:10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who practice it. His praise endures for ever! (RSV)

The misunderstanding is rife because people do not keep God's commandments in relation to the holy convocation of the Wave Sheaf Offering.

Leviticus 23:2–23:4 These are the convocations of the LORD (YHVH).

2 “Say to the people of Israel, The appointed feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed feasts, are these.

3 Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.

4 “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them.

The chapter then goes on to list these convocations. A “convocation” is a calling together. The Wave Sheaf Offering is a commanded convocation.

Many of those who learned of the Holy Days from Herbert Armstrong and his disciples have strangely kept the other convocations in this chapter but have ignored this one.

A common mistake is to assume that a convocation is only held on a Holy Day. This is not true. The Wave Sheaf Offering is a convocation on the first day of the week, a common work day (except when the Lord's Supper is on a Friday night).<sup>8</sup>

As soon as the Wave Sheaf Offering ceremony was completed by the priest the harvest could begin. Leviticus 23:9–14

And the LORD said to Moses,<sup>10</sup> “Say to the people of Israel, When you come into the land which I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest;<sup>11</sup> and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, that you may find acceptance; on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.<sup>12</sup> And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD.<sup>13</sup> And the cereal offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, to be offered by fire to the LORD, a pleasing odor; and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin.<sup>14</sup> And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Deuteronomy 16:9

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<sup>8</sup>A related mistake is to assume that all Holy Days require a convocation. Isaiah 66:23 tells us that, in a future time when God is running this earth, the day of the New Moon will be a worship day as will be the weekly Sabbath, but it does not require a formal convocation (because it is not included in the list of convocations in Leviticus 23).

9 Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain.

Joshua 5:10–5:12

10 On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.

11 The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.

12 The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.

From verse 11, they ate of the grain of their new land on the day after the Passover. Because of the Wave Sheaf Offering, this would have been on the Sunday. Verse 12 tells us the manna did not fall on the Monday. Those who did not participate in the harvest on the Sunday went hungry on Monday morning.

The failure to restore the Wave Sheaf Offering ceremony has resulted in the failure to understand the Calendar.

## 6 The Root Causes of the Errors

In John 14:15–14:24 we are told to love the Father and he will then reveal the Son.

15 “If you love me, you will obey what I command.

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever –

17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

18 I will not leave you as orphans; *I will come to you.*

19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and *I am in you.*

21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and *show myself to him.*”

22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

23 Jesus replied, “*If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.* My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

But doesn't everybody, certainly all claiming to be Christians, love Jesus? Does Jesus have any particular method of telling who really loves him the way he wants? John 14:21 informs us of the method he uses.

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and *show myself to him.*”

The Son is not understood by the Rabbis, and this is manifested in their understanding of the Wave Sheaf Offering. As is typical, they have gone one better than God and instead of a Wave Sheaf Offering on the Sunday morning, they have an offering on every morning of the days of Unleavened Bread, thus the meaning and importance of the Wave Sheaf Offering is smothered and lost in their man-made traditions as condemned by Christ.

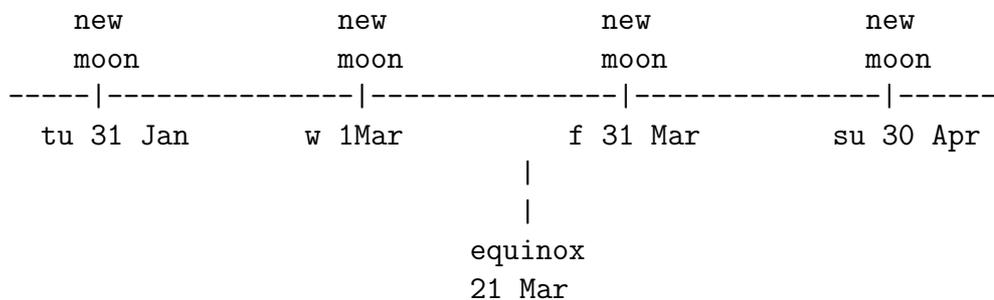
Neither the Jews nor Christians observe the Wave Sheaf Offering command of Leviticus 23:9 and, by the definition of loving Christ given in John 14:21, do not love Christ the way he wants and consequently do not know him. Not surprisingly, their worship dates are incorrect, being based either on the teachings of men such as Rabbi Hillel II or on Roman customs.

## 7 Practical Calculations

In this section we will look at some examples of the calculation of the correct month for the start of the Biblical year using the barley harvest and the Northern equinox to meet the requirement that the year starts with a new moon, around the time of the spring equinox in the Northern Hemisphere.

- 1995

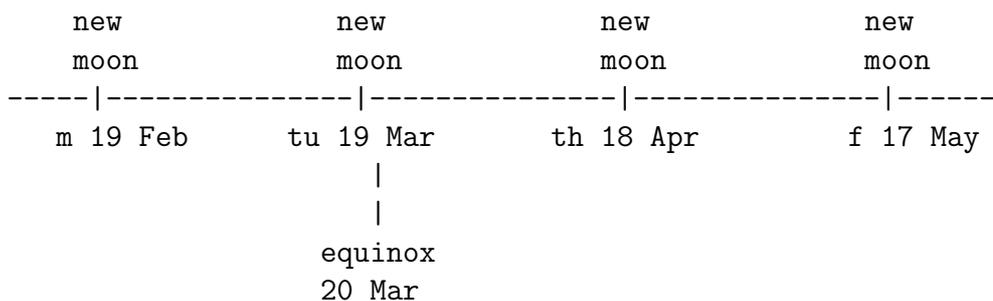
In 1995 the new moons around that time were as follows:



Looking at this diagram, we can see that selecting the new moon of 31st January as the start of the year would require a Wave Sheaf Offering sometime in February, far too early, and there would be no barley to wave for the ritual. Selecting 1st March as the start of the year would require the first of Unleavened Bread to be Wednesday 15th March and the Wave Sheaf Offering on Sunday 19th March, again too early. Selecting 31st March as a candidate we have the first of Unleavened Bread on Friday 14th April with the Wave Sheaf Offering on Sunday 16th April, which is an acceptable time. Incidentally, this agrees with the Hillel calendar.

- 1996

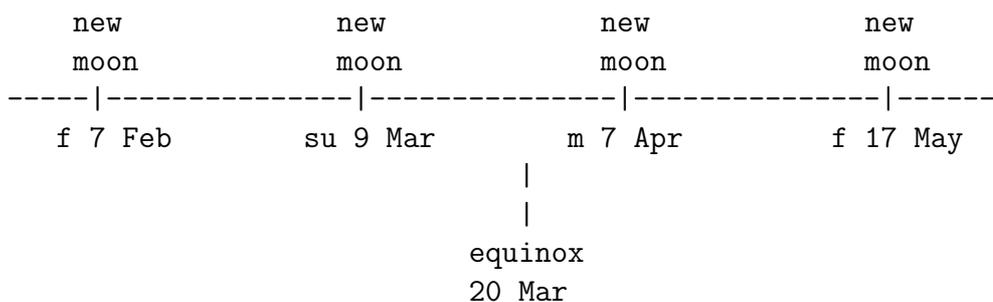
For 1996 the situation was as shown in the following diagram:



Trying the 19th February as the first of the year leads to the first of Unleavened Bread on Monday 4th March and the Wave Sheaf Offering on Sunday 10th March, which is a few weeks too early. Selecting the 19th March, we have the first of Unleavened Bread on Tuesday 2nd April and the Wave Sheaf Offering on Sunday 7th April. Again this month agrees with the Hillel calendar.

- 1997

For 1997, the Hillel calendar is one month later than the date arrived at using this method.



Obviously the 7th February is too early. Trying the 9th March gives the first of Unleavened Bread on Sunday 23rd March with the Wave Sheaf Offering on Sunday 23rd March (or Sunday 30th if the period of the Lord's Supper is ignored), making this month suitable as the start of the year. The Hillel calendar uses 7th April, with the first of Unleavened Bread on Monday 21st April and the Wave Sheaf Offering on Sunday 27th April, too late for barley (which behaves according to the equinox and lengths of days, not according to any group's religious beliefs).

Those who follow the Hillel calendar in 1997 will thus start one month late and be late for the whole year. Hillel will have the start of the year correct again in 1998.

## 8 Summary

Is there safety in following the calendar of the Rabbis, in ignoring the Wave Sheaf Offering?

Christ is the personification of the Wave Sheaf Offering. The Jews have ignored him. Why use their calendar?

Herbert Armstrong restored the annual Holy Days but not all of the annual convocations. He failed to restore the Wave Sheaf Offering, one of the convocations of Leviticus 23. Because of this mistake, he and his followers have not seen the method the Bible outlines for determining the start of the year, and consequently have had to look outside the Bible for guidance. They have seized upon the Jewish Rabbis as the most likely source of knowledge.

Unfortunately, the Rabbis consider their traditions as being of equal authority with the written words of Moses. Jesus asserted the Pharisees placed their traditions *above* the word of God. In their zeal to comply with their traditions and Rabbinical declarations, they have “modified” the original calendar and cannot be relied upon as a reliable source of God’s wishes.

For those who honour Christ with a Wave Sheaf Offering commemoration, the calendar is simple and complete: a new moon starts a month, and the Wave Sheaf Offering determines the starting month.

As we have seen in this article, the Bible is *not* silent on the way a Christian should determine the start of the year. There is no need to adopt the calendar used by the Rabbis, which, in spite of its incredibly complicated rules, does not even comply with all of the instructions in the Bible. We need not live in Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt. The truth, the Word of God, can set us free!

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