

The Hebrew Calendar And Its Postponements

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Part 3 of our Calendar Series: Updated 2017

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In the final part of our series on the calendar we review the entire subject one more time. We look at the various alternative calendars put forward by various calendar "experts" in the Churches of God. We also examine the Hebrew Calendar again and, in particular, look closely at the Postponements. And we answer the question: Is God FAITHFUL?

As we look closely at God's Holy Day calendar, it can all seem rather complicated. We come across unfamiliar terms such as *molads*, *conjunctions*, *equinoxes*, *intercalary months*, *postponements*, and so on.

Do we need a *university education* in mathematics and astronomy in order to understand how to find God's Holy Days, and OBEY HIS LAWS?

Of course not!

So, let's have another look at the calendar. We'll do this in *two parts*. We'll firstly remind ourselves of some *very basic principles* which should allow any of us to reach an understanding of how to KNOW when God's Holy Days fall.

Even though these basic principles are clear, and most church members are generally happy with them, some have been troubled by certain *objections* that are raised by several of the calendar experts. We will try to complete the picture in the second part by looking briefly at some of these so-called objections — such as the *visible crescent* — or the "barley being green" — and especially those "nasty *postponements!*"

Basic Principles

We know that THE SUN and THE MOON play the major part in God's calendar.

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

In Psalm 104:19 we read, "He appointed THE MOON for *seasons*."

The Hebrew word for "seasons" in these verses is *moed*, which commonly means *congregation, FEAST, solemn assembly, APPOINTED TIME*. And we can see from Psalm 104 that *the moon* is particularly important in arriving at God's *appointed times*.

The SUN divides the day from the night. For example, we all know that the setting of *the sun* determines when the Sabbath begins and ends.

The sun also determines THE YEAR. Spring, summer, fall and winter are all controlled by the movement of the earth in its orbit around *the sun*.

The MOON determines *the months*. We are probably all familiar with the cycle of the moon — from when we see the slim crescent in the sky, getting slowly bigger till we get the big bright *full moon*, and then slowly diminishing night by night till it disappears from view. It takes about 29½ days from one part of the cycle to another. This is the average length of a *lunar month*.

This is different to the calendar that we are used to today. Most of our months have 30 or 31 days (with 28 or 29 for February). Our months have no connection to the phases of the moon.

So, we can see as a *basic principle*, that we need to use *the sun* and *the moon* to determine the dates for God's appointed times.

Where Do We Find the Dates?

In Leviticus 23:4 we read of "the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at their appointed times (*moed*)."
God says, for example, that we are to observe Passover on the 14th day of the first month. We are to keep the Feast of Trumpets on the 1st day of the seventh month. If we want to meet God at HIS appointed times, it is clearly important that we know how to correctly calculate the various dates. If we turn up early — or late — then God won't be there! In fact, God says He will "cut us off" if we DON'T observe His days!

So WHERE DO WE GO to find the dates that God will be honouring?

Well, let's establish another *basic principle*.

The Church of God has *existed continuously* from the days when Jesus preached throughout Galilee and Judea. Jesus said to His disciples, "Lo, I am with you *always*, even to the END OF THE AGE," Matthew 28:20.

Since God's Church has existed since around 30 AD, unto today, we should expect that God's people have — to a greater or lesser degree — kept His Holy Days

throughout that period. Certainly the Passover on 14th Abib or Nisan would be the very minimum we would expect, even allowing for periods of neglect or spiritual lethargy. And no doubt for some years, all of God's Holy Days would have been kept. So WHAT calendar has God's church used throughout the past almost 2,000 years? The answer is really self-evident, but let's establish one more *basic principle*.

Is God Faithful?

If God requires us to *keep His commandments* — and to keep HIS HOLY DAYS — shouldn't we expect our God *to ensure* we have access to His CALENDAR?

Over the past 2,000 years, God's people have been keeping the Passover and at least some of the Holy Days. From the first century ... through the middle ages ... right up to modern times. Could God have COMMANDED that we keep His Holy Days, but then left us *without the knowledge* of His calendar ... for generation after generation? We need to recognise as a *basic principle* that God has always been FAITHFUL to fulfil HIS responsibilities!

"Forever, O LORD, Your Word is settled in heaven. Your *faithfulness* endures to ALL generations," Psalm 119:89-90.

"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. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make *the faithfulness of God* without effect? CERTAINLY NOT! Indeed, let God be true and every man a liar," Romans 3:1-4. Even though God's people may not always conduct themselves right before Him, we can be confident God will do HIS PART! And making sure we have His calendar is part of that faithfulness. It is *our decision* as to whether we will KEEP His Holy Days, or not, but God makes sure we have the *right days* to choose from!

We can conclude the following:

- God has given us His Holy Days for *our good* — to teach us His purpose and plan
- He commands us to KEEP THEM
- It is SIN to transgress God's commandments, and He will "cut us off" if we do not keep them
- So could God be FAITHFUL to *require* this of us ... and then NOT ensure we have His calendar?

In Matthew 7:9-11 we read, "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, HOW MUCH MORE will your Father who is in heaven give GOOD THINGS to those who ask Him!"

God is a Giver of good things. He is a *responsible Father*! He is dependable and RELIABLE. He is not out to mock us, or seek to *trick us*. He wants us to KEEP HIS HOLY DAYS. And He has made sure we can know WHEN His Holy Days fall!

God IS FAITHFUL! He has not left His people — His children — in the dark for the last 2,000 years about His calendar!

Objections to the Jewish Calendar

The *only calendar* God's church has had access to over the past 2,000 years has been what is commonly known as the *Jewish Calendar*, or the *Hebrew Calendar*. If any member of the Church of God ever wanted to keep the Holy Days, say in 100 AD, or 500 AD, or 1850 AD, they would just need to find the nearest Jew, and ask, for example, *when is the 14th day of Nisan?* It has been as simple as that!

But hold on, say the "experts", the Hebrew calendar is *all wrong!* It is the product of CARNAL MEN. It starts the months on THE WRONG DAYS. It starts THE YEARS at the *wrong time*. And it POSTPONES God's true Holy Days over 60% of the time!

These are serious allegations. And, if we think about it, they are really an indictment against *God's faithfulness*. Because what *other calendar* could God's people have used over the past 20 centuries??

Let's look at some of the alternative calendars.

The Visible Crescent Calendar

The MAJOR alternative view to the official Hebrew calendar is one where *the months* start with the VISIBLE CRESCENT. When you can just see the tiniest thin sliver of the moon in the sky — in the west, usually very soon after sunset — that is *the first day* of the month, they say.

Historically, that has been a popular method of keeping track of the months. It was used in ancient times in a number of countries, and is still used today in the Islamic world (such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt). It is the most popular *alternative* in the Churches of God. But let's consider some of the difficulties:

- how do you identify *day one* of the month if the sky IS CLOUDY? And remains cloudy for several days!!
- *who* has the AUTHORITY to decide if the crescent was or was not seen? The Jewish priesthood? There are none today. Perhaps Jewish astronomers? Or, *American* astronomers? Since identifying day one is *vitaly important* in arriving at God's true Holy Days — WHO is in AUTHORITY? Some people may have better eyesight ... some may use binoculars ... some may mistake an unusual cloud formation for the moon (after all, some have mistaken clouds for UFO's!). Perhaps the pilot of a Jumbo Jet arriving at Ben Gurion International airport near Jerusalem may see the moon more easily from his

altitude of several thousand feet. But WHO is authorised to *make the decision* in the event of a dispute?

- WHERE must the crescent be observed? Over Jerusalem? That seems logical *humanly*, but where is there A SCRIPTURE that clearly states God's instructions? Some visible crescent enthusiasts have decided that the month begins when the crescent is first visible where *they* live — whether England, Kentucky, or Hawaii.
- And if, for the sake of argument, we decide to use Jerusalem as the place where the visible crescent must first be seen, HOW was that information provided to people living *in other parts* of the world over the past 2,000 years? How would church members living in England in 1500 AD find out that a new crescent moon had been observed over Jerusalem? How would Church of God brethren in 1860 AD in Virginia or Pennsylvania know that the crescent for the first day of Tishri had been seen? The Feast of Trumpets falls ON the first day of the seventh month, so there isn't much time to get the word out!! We might be all right today with telephones and e-mail, but IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE for God's church historically to have kept a calendar based on observation of the visible crescent. Even the pony express, or carrier pigeons, would take days or weeks to carry the information several thousand miles. And, of course, don't forget that the Jews had been *driven out* of Palestine, anyway, so there was no one there to even look for the crescent!

In order to prove that God's calendar is based on the visible crescent, we have to do the following:

- find BIBLICAL PROOF that we are to use JERUSALEM
- find BIBLICAL PROOF that we are to use the VISIBLE CRESCENT
- find BIBLICAL PROOF as to who has THE AUTHORITY to accept witnesses' statements
- find BIBLICAL EVIDENCE of what to do when the moon is NOT VISIBLE due to poor weather
- find EVIDENCE that God's church has kept such a calendar for 2,000 years

So what does the BIBLE actually say about all of these features of the visible crescent calendar?

One particular calendar writer has a web page devoted to the visible crescent, and in the past has run large advertisements for his calendar in the Journal. The *new moon*, as he points out, is absolutely critical to working out when God's true holy days occur. In his major calendar article, he devotes *one entire chapter* to the New Moon. Yet in this entire chapter, only ONE BIBLE VERSE is given to show that the visible crescent (allegedly) must *be seen*. The verse is Deuteronomy 16:1, which reads:

“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night.”

We are told that the word for *month* should be translated as “moon”, and then asked to accept that “observe” means *to look at visibly and see with the eye*. However, the Hebrew word for *observe* is translated 284 times as KEEP. This is its *most common* meaning as, for example, in Exodus 20:6, where we are told to “remember the Sabbath to KEEP it holy.”

The instruction in Deut 16:1 is not so much about *looking at* any moon, but about *remembering*, and KEEPING the festival time holy before God. And, as we’ll see later, the actual moon that is important to God in the month of Abib is *not* the new moon, but the FULL MOON that occurs at the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread!

The Beginning of the Year

Let’s look at another problem of the alternative calendars — figuring out WHEN the new year actually BEGINS!

We know that Passover and Unleavened Bread fall in the *first month*. Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles fall in the *seventh month*.

Okay — just WHEN is the first month ... and the seventh month?

Our British and American calendars are quite straightforward in this regard. There are 12 months in the year, and after the twelfth month (December) is finished, we start with the first day of the NEW YEAR — January 1st. That’s easy!

A lunar-solar calendar is not so simple. There aren’t 30 days from the beginning of one month to the beginning of the next. The average time from one phase of the moon to the same phase of the next month is 29 days 12 hours 44 minutes and 3.3 seconds — near enough to twenty-nine and a half days.

So, over 12 lunar months this comes out at 354 days — about *11 days short* of a normal solar year (we have 365.25 days in a year). Over a three year period, the Hebrew calendar would be out by 33 days — effectively an *entire month* missing!

This is rectified by ADDING IN an extra month about every three years. This is known as an *intercalary month*. This evens things up. The Hebrew calendar adds an extra month in *seven years* out of a nineteen year time-cycle, and it fits everything together almost perfectly. [This is also the origin of the NINETEEN-YEAR TIME CYCLE that we are so familiar with in the Churches of God.]

So, having got this far, a very obvious question is: WHEN is the start of the year in God’s calendar? When is *the first* “new moon?”

Very simply — the Bible doesn't say!

Various calendar experts can provide at least 7 or 8 DIFFERENT ways of identifying the first month of the year. And each expert will claim he has the one, true, definite date — with everybody else being in error!

All we are told in the Bible is Exodus 12:2, "THIS MONTH shall be your beginning of months; it shall be *the first month* of the year to you."

But HOW do we identify "THIS month?"

The Month of Green Ears

Some say there is a clue in *the name* of the first month. The first month was originally named Abib — which means *green ears*. So, we are told, we need to look out for the month when *the barley* first starts to *be green in the ear*. If we get to a new moon (whatever we believe *that* to be!), and there are no green ears yet, then the year has not begun. If, however, the ears do start to show, then the *next* new moon is *first month* of the year.

In practice, some Churches of God do follow this procedure. They rely on individuals going out into the barley fields in Palestine every spring, looking for green ears of barley. And, as soon as they are spotted, the word goes out by telephone and e-mail.

But, again, what were God's saints supposed to do in England or the USA one hundred or five hundred years ago? How were they supposed to know that the barley was in ear in Palestine, without the benefit of telephones, and modern methods of communication?!

Also, *whereabouts* was the barley to be green? Barley will ripen at different stages, depending upon whether it is in the warmer climate of the Jordan valley near Jericho, compared to the cooler area of the Galilee. Or should we look for the barley ripening *in Egypt*? After all, that is where Israel was when God revealed the first month to them.

And how, for example, did Noah keep track of the months and changeover of the year, when there was no barley around to ripen anyway, during his time on the ark? There are *very specific dates* for the Flood account in Genesis 7 and 8.

The Spring Equinox

A number of calendar experts choose to use *the spring equinox* as their benchmark for working out the beginning of the year. In the Northern Hemisphere, the spring equinox falls around the 21st March.

The logic here is that spring "officially" begins with the equinox (as far as *astronomical* spring is concerned; there is also a meteorological spring which starts

with 1 March each year). Since Passover and Unleavened Bread are claimed to be *spring festivals*, they must fall shortly afterwards. But it's no surprise that the calendar experts find areas of *disagreement*:

- should you start with the new moon *nearest* the equinox (the nearest moon sometimes falls *before*, and sometimes *after*, the equinox)?
- should you go only by the new moon which falls *after* the equinox?
- should you go by the visible crescent ... or the astronomical conjunction ... or even the "dark moon" — whether nearest, or before, or after?
- should you go by the visible crescent over Jerusalem, or in your local area, nearest to the equinox — or before or after or whatever?

As is so often the case with the calendar, we see lots of confusion and disagreement!

We can conclude this section by recognising that THE BIBLE ITSELF does not *clearly specify*

- WHEN a month actually begins
- WHEN the new year actually starts

That's just the way it is!

The Hebrew Calendar

We've looked at some of the alternative calendars out there "in the marketplace", so now let's take a closer look at the Jewish or Hebrew calendar. And keep in mind that this is the **ONLY** calendar that the Church of God has kept **THROUGHOUT HISTORY**. Have God's people been wrong all this time?

And let's take a very close look at the **POSTPONEMENTS**, since they are the source of most of the criticism which is levelled at the Hebrew calendar.

What is the Molad?

The months in the Hebrew calendar are based upon what is called *the molad*.

The molad is very similar to what astronomers call *the conjunction*. A conjunction is that *precise moment* in the month when the earth, moon and sun come into a straight line with each other. [If all are in the exact *same plane* at the time, there will actually be a solar eclipse].

It can be very difficult to calculate the precise moment of a conjunction, since the moon's movement in its orbit around the earth is quite erratic at times (caused largely by the effect of the sun's and the earth's gravitational forces). The time from one month's conjunction to the next month's conjunction *can vary* up or down by as much as 12 hours.

The Hebrew calendar overcomes this difficulty by using *the molad*. The molad is arrived at by using the *average time* from one conjunction to the next (rather than the actual time, which would vary month by month). The *average lunar cycle* is 29 days 12 hours 44 minutes and 3.33 seconds. Molads are therefore regular and predictable.

The POSTPONEMENTS

The calculated molad of Tishri, the seventh month of the year, is THE MOST IMPORTANT DATE in the Hebrew calculated calendar. Why? Because all other calendar dates are derived from this one!

For much of the time, the actual day when the molad occurs is used as the *first day* of the new month. Over half of the time, however, this is NOT the case, and the start of the month may be pushed back — or postponed — by one day, or sometimes even by *two days*, after the molad.

There are *four rules of postponement* that may be applied in the Hebrew calendar, and this is the area that upsets a number of people. “You can’t postpone God’s Holy Days,” they say, “that’s just Jewish jiggery-pokery ... it’s not right ... this is the rabbis introducing their own weird ideas for their own carnal convenience.”

In some ways, such criticisms “miss the point.” ALL calendars have rules. In our western calendar, the month of February usually has 28 days. But every fourth year, we add an *extra day*, and February then has 29 days. No one shouts that this is jiggery-pokery — that we are *wrongly postponing* the start of March! Everyone understands that it is necessary to add an extra day every so often so the right number of days fits into the year.

The Hebrew calendar is no different. It has rules and procedures which are necessary to keep it properly organised with respect to the movement of the sun and moon.

Now notice, there is NO BIBLE RULE that says a month MUST BEGIN with the day of the molad. The molad is *part* of the exercise, but there are certain circumstances which allow for the actual start of a month to *be adjusted* by a day or two.

WHY the Postponements?

But people want to know WHY? *Why* do the postponements exist? What is the REASON?

Firstly, we need to acknowledge that there is nowhere in the Bible where it says we should postpone — or should NOT postpone. The Bible is silent on the issue.

There are at least *two basic reasons* given to explain the postponements. Let’s look at each.

“More Convenient?”

The reason given by the Jews themselves is that the postponements are there *mainly* to prevent the Day of Atonement from falling *on a Friday or a Sunday*. How does it do that? If the molad of Tishri falls on a Sunday, a Wednesday or a Friday, the start of the month is put back — or postponed —by one day.

The reason for this postponement, say the Jews, is that it is not considered appropriate to have Atonement fall, for example, on a Friday, since it would make it difficult to properly sanctify the weekly Sabbath. Friday is the *preparation day* for the weekly Sabbath, and if the fast day of Atonement fell on a Friday then would interfere with the keeping of the Fourth Commandment. You would not be able to prepare for it properly.

Some people are quite happy with this explanation. It makes sense to them that God would have made suitable arrangements for the keeping of His Holy Days, so that we can focus on *the real meaning*, rather than being distracted by physical logistics (especially when Yom Kippur is involved!).

But quite a few people are still uneasy with this explanation. They don't really trust the views of the Jewish rabbis. Is there not ANOTHER reason for the use of the postponements, they wonder?

Astronomical Reason for the Postponements

We have already seen that the average length of a lunar month is 29.5 days. So *DAY FIFTEEN* of the month is clearly the halfway point. This would mean that on day fifteen of the month, we should expect to see a FULL MOON in the sky, since the full moon falls *halfway* through the moon's monthly cycle.

And we know, of course, that in the month of Tishri, the Feast of Tabernacles begins on the 15th day of the month. So, we should expect to see THE FULL MOON in the sky at the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles, shouldn't we? We're right at the half-way point of the month.

Now it gets interesting! Let's look at Psalms 81:2-4. This will turn out to be a KEY SCRIPTURE, which can help us understand *the reason* for the postponements.

In these verses, in the New King James' Version, we read:

“Blow the trumpet at the time of *the New Moon*, at the FULL MOON, on our solemn Feast Day. For this is a STATUTE for Israel, and a LAW of the God of Jacob.”

Although the KJV uses the expression “in the time appointed” in verse 3, most modern translations show that the meaning is the FULL MOON. For example:

“Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the FULL MOON, on our Feast day,” NASB.

“Sound the ram’s horn on the day of the new moon, and on the day of the FULL MOON when our festival BEGINS,” NET.

The Hebrew is *kese* which the Hebrew lexicons define as “full moon.”

These verses refer to a time of the year when we are to honour God at the time of a *new moon* AND at a *full moon*. And notice that this is a LAW and a STATUTE. There is only one time in the year when there is such a LAW, and that is in the seventh month, Tishri. In the seventh month we are required to keep the first day of Tishri, the Feast of Trumpets, at *the new moon* — and then the fifteenth day, at *the full moon*, we start the Feast of Tabernacles.

So, according to Psalms 81, any calendar we use must ensure that we are keeping the Feast of Tabernacles at the time of the FULL MOON!

There is a similar situation in Nisan, the first month of the year. The Feast of Unleavened Bread falls on the 15th day of the month and, since this falls halfway through the month, there should again be a FULL MOON. Unlike the month of Tishri, however, God’s law does not require us to sanctify the first day — or new moon — of Nisan. Psalms 81:2-4 is referring to Trumpets and Tabernacles in Tishri.

So, let’s put the Hebrew calendar, and its postponements, to the test.

Do the postponements help in making sure that Tabernacles falls at THE TIME OF THE FULL MOON, as required by Psalms 81? Or are they just carnal inventions of the rabbis that move us *away* from the full moon?

The year 2,000 is an excellent test, because there were, in fact, *two postponements* that year!

Since the molad that year fell shortly after midday (on Thursday September 28th), one of the rules of postponement requires day one to be postponed *to the following day*. But another rule of postponement prohibits the first day of Tishri from falling on a Friday, so day one of Tishri was therefore postponed *to Saturday*, the weekly Sabbath.

So, according to the Hebrew calendar, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles in 2,000 was the weekly Sabbath of 14th October. As we gathered on the Friday night for the traditional “get-together” service, how close to the full moon were we? Answer: the moon on that Friday evening was 99.7% full! As far as the human eye is concerned that is a *perfect full moon*! Even after two days of postponement!

If the beginning of Tishri had NOT been postponed, and we had used the day of the molad to start the month, the moon would have been only 97% full for Tabernacles. This would be quite easy to detect with the human eye; those who would have

looked up at the moon that evening would clearly have noticed that it wasn't yet FULL.

So, despite the criticisms, the postponements actually ensure we arrive at the Feast of Tabernacles at exactly the full moon — as required by Psalms 81!

And how did some of the other calendars do?

Those Churches of God who start their months with the *astronomical conjunction* found that the moon was only 96.7% full when they arrived at "their" Feast of Tabernacles. The particular Church of God who use the "dark moon" for their months, came to their Feast with the moon only 92% "full!" Woefully adrift of God's requirements.

On this basis, the Hebrew calendar wins "hands down!" The postponements turn out to be *absolutely necessary* to ensure we coincide with the moon's movements, and comply with Scripture.

Postponements in Other Years

Was the year 2,000 just a coincidence? Just a "happy accident" for the Hebrew calendar? What about some other years? Is the Hebrew calendar with its postponements *consistently* more accurate?

We mentioned earlier that the calendar should also ensure that the 15th of Nisan — the first day of Unleavened Bread — should ALSO be a full moon. This would coincide with the Night to be Much Remembered. [And, of course, it should be no surprise to us that God would have arranged to take His people out of Egypt at the TIME OF THE FULL MOON, when the extra illumination would make their night time travel as convenient as possible].

In the year 2,000, the Hebrew calendar gave us a moon on the Night to be Much Remembered that was 98.8% full. Again, that's pretty close to a perfect full moon.

The average of the two "festival moons" was therefore 99.2%. WITHOUT postponements, the average would be only 98%. So, although there is not a huge difference, a calendar with the postponements is clearly MORE ACCURATE!

If we run a similar check over, say, the last 38 years (equivalent to two time cycles), we find that the Hebrew calendar is much more accurate — year after year. See *the Appendix* at the end of this article.

From the figures shown in the Appendix, we can see that, over a couple of 19-year cycles, the Hebrew calendar comes on average to *within 99.4%* of the festival full moons. Quite impressive for an ancient calendar "cooked up" by some rabbis!

And note that the postponements IMPROVE THE ACCURACY of the calendar. Without the postponements, the correlation is only 98.7%. And in 2011 and 2016, in particular, the calendar would fall *a long way short* without the postponements!

So there is a clear ASTRONOMICAL NEED for the postponements to ensure that we “blow the trumpet at the time of *the New Moon*, at the FULL MOON, on our solemn Feast Day.”

What about the Mishnah?

Despite all of this evidence, some still want to argue against the Hebrew calendar. “Well,” they say, “there may be something to these postponements after all, but THEY WEREN’T IN USE IN JESUS’ DAY.” The usual argument is that the postponements were not in the “original” Hebrew calendar, but *were added* by Hillel II, around 360 AD. “So,” they say, “since Jesus didn’t follow them, neither should we.”

Well ... HOW DO WE KNOW whether the Jews kept the postponements at the time of Christ ... or even hundreds of years before? The Bible says nothing; so WHERE are we getting this information from?

The usual answer is that they are not mentioned in THE MISHNAH.

What is the Mishnah? This is a collection of what were previously referred to as the “oral laws” of Judaism. It consists largely of the writings of rabbis and Jewish scholars, debating and arguing about the meaning of scripture, and how the “traditions of the elders” should be understood. The Mishnah is a major work, and fills the equivalent of *about 18 volumes* of an encyclopaedia. It is essentially a Jewish commentary on the scriptures. I think most scholars would agree it is riddled with contradiction, confusion and, at times, complete nonsense. [Incidentally, the religion of *Judaism* is actually based on the writings and teachings of the Mishnah, and not, in fact, on the teachings of the Bible].

In the 200’s AD, a Pharisee, by the name of “Rabbi,” collected many of the so-called *oral laws* into the Mishnah. In the process he discarded *over 90%* of the material then available — one can only imagine how much additional confusion and chaos was in the material he chose to destroy!

In the main, these Jewish elders did not understand God’s purpose and plan. Jesus often upbraided them for making the COMMANDMENTS OF GOD of no effect by *their traditions*. There is little, *if anything*, we can learn about God’s ways from the Mishnah.

Some of the comments within the Mishnah make reference to the rules and regulations the rabbis had introduced to “protect” the sanctity of the Sabbath and various Holy Days. Many of their rules just made the Holy days burdensome, with lots of regulations about what could or could not be done on a Sabbath. Some of

the comments certainly *imply* that the postponements were not being kept at around 200 AD (for example, instructions are given as to what is “allowed” when Atonement falls *on a Friday* — something which is, in fact, prohibited in the Hebrew calendar, as we saw earlier).

However, we are probably all familiar with the fact that the Jews disputed over almost EVERYTHING! The gospel accounts record how they argued over divorce — over whether there are angels — over whether there could be a resurrection — over what could be done on a Sabbath — and so on. History shows that some of the arguments among the Pharisees *themselves* were so fierce they led to bloodshed! Not to mention the disputes between the Sadducees and Pharisees (and other groups).

We also know that even the *time for Passover*, and the correct day for *Pentecost*, gave rise to disagreement and dispute at certain times. Their arguments often involved very important, yet absolutely BASIC, areas of God’s Law.

The *calendar itself* did NOT ESCAPE these disputes. There were plenty of calendar “experts” around in early New Testament times, just as there are today! There is nothing new under the sun. And, just like today, these experts “knew better” than the official Hebrew calendar! For *centuries* the calendar caused debate and argument!

History shows that the Mishnah we have available today originated largely from the very sizeable colony of Jews living IN BABYLON. They were perceived as being among the more liberal thinkers, and were endlessly in competition with their fellow Jews based IN PALESTINE.

The calendar, however, was historically determined by the *official Sanhedrin* based IN JERUSALEM. The Sanhedrin had to WORK HARD to preserve the unity of the Jewish people, and the calendar was carefully preserved by them against all attempts to corrupt it. Its rules were kept relatively secret, to avoid well-meaning amateurs from producing erroneous conclusions about the calendar. The Sanhedrin were faithful in this regard.

However, in the late 300’s AD, as persecution and oppression were threatening the continued existence of the Sanhedrin, Hillel II took the difficult but very necessary decision to MAKE PUBLIC the underlying rules that regulated the calendar and its calculations. This was to ensure that *all Jews* — no matter where they were scattered across the earth — would have access to the true calendar and its dates, and would not end up keeping a myriad of different dates. The calculations, and the postponements, were NOT NEW! They were simply now being REVEALED for all to see.

As we’ve already seen, the postponements are necessary for us to comply with God’s STATUTE in Psalms 81 and ensure we have a full moon available for the start of the Feast. And the Sanhedrin always knew that.

Really, the position we see today is no different to that faced by the Sanhedrin 2,000 years ago, or even by ancient Israel over 3,000 years ago. "And in those days there was no king (or authority) in Israel; everyone did what was right *in his own eyes*," Judges 21:25. So, today, some still want to follow a calendar that is right in their "own eyes." No doubt in most cases such individuals are sincere; many are technically very able. But where is their authority to set the dates for God's people, when the BIBLE ITSELF is silent on so many details?

Conclusion

We could continue to investigate and write about the calendar for years to come — and we'd always come across someone who wants "to do it differently" — who has now really figured out the original, correct, true Bible calendar that God gave to Moses, etc.

But, in essence, the position *is simple*:

- is God FAITHFUL?
- would He have left His Church without knowledge of His calendar for 2,000 years, making it IMPOSSIBLE for His saints to worship on His Holy Days?

Surely the answer is clear? God IS FAITHFUL, and He HAS given us His calendar — the Hebrew calendar WITH its postponements!

As the apostle Peter wrote, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us ALL THINGS that pertain to life *and* godliness ..." 2 Peter 1:2-3.

Does the calendar "pertain to life and godliness?" Yes, for it tells us WHEN to come before God on HIS Holy Days — at HIS appointed times.

Peter assures us that God has given us ALL THINGS that are necessary. That includes the knowledge of His calendar.

So, let's HOLD FAST to the Truth once delivered to us!

APPENDIX

Comparison, over 38 years (equivalent to two 19-year time cycles), showing how the Postponements of the Hebrew Calendar bring us NEARER to the Festival Full Moons ... as required by Psalms 81:2-4

Column 1 gives the year

Column 2 gives the percentage of the Full Moon visible on the first Holy Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles (averaged across both evenings)

Column 3 gives the percentage of the Full Moon which would be visible if postponements were NOT applied

Note: *all calculations based on visibility at Jerusalem.*

Year	Hebrew Calendar	Without Postponements
2020	0.993	0.981
2019	0.999	0.992
2018	0.988	no postponements this year
2017	0.993	no postponements this year
2016	0.996	0.977
2015	0.997	0.974
2014	0.998	0.985
2013	0.981	no postponements this year
2012	0.998	0.991
2011	0.995	0.978
2010	0.998	no postponements this year
2009	0.985	no postponements this year
2008	0.99	no postponements this year
2007	0.999	0.988
2006	0.995	no postponements this year
2005	0.997	0.98
2004	0.991	0.978
2003	0.999	0.990
2002	0.989	no postponements this year
2001	0.996	no postponements this year
2000	0.992	0.98
1999	0.996	0.973
1998	0.987	no postponements this year

1997	0.993	no postponements this year
1996	0.997	0.991
1995	0.996	0.975
1994	0.992	no postponements this year
1993	0.991	no postponements this year
1992	0.996	0.992
1991	0.997	no postponements this year
1990	0.995	no postponements this year
1989	0.983	no postponements this year
1988	0.998	0.98
1987	0.997	0.989
1986	0.996	no postponements this year
1985	0.996	0.996
1984	0.992	0.983
1983	0.997	0.99
1982	0.987	no postponements this year