

WHAT ARE THE "POSTPONEMENTS"?

Are "postponements" to God's Calendar mentioned anywhere in the Bible? If not, why do we use a calendar that sometimes postpones the beginning of months - and even years?

Some brethren are being confused concerning whether to continue using the Hebrew calendar that God's people have followed for many years. Their main objection concerns whether the postponements used in that calendar are in some way contrary to the scanty information on the calendar contained in the Bible.

Answers to Postponement Questions

In order to better understand the postponements incorporated in the Jewish calendar, we need to ask and answer the following questions:

1) When speaking of God's Calendar, exactly what is being postponed? Do the postponements delay God's Holy Days, or simply postpone the starting point from which they are reckoned? In other words, does the Hebrew calendar merely postpone the beginning of the first day of Tishri?

The present permanent Jewish calendar employs various postponements - all of which merely delay the commencement of the first day of Tishri, which begins the civil year used in both ancient and modern times. Once Tishri 1 is established, all of the other months of the Sacred Calendar are easy to calculate. So the postponements merely delay - by either one or two days the beginning of the first day of Tishri, which is the seventh month of the ecclesiastical year.

In actuality, the postponements don't really delay the Holy Days themselves, since those days (established by Scripture) are still observed on the same biblically commanded days of the months, according to God's directions in Leviticus 23.

2) Exactly when did the postponements originate?

The origin of the postponements is not revealed - either in the Bible or by secular history. In fact, this word "postponement" (or its modern Hebrew equivalent, *dehia*) is not found anywhere in the Bible. But, as will be demonstrated later, from the very beginning certain postponements had to be incorporated in the Sacred Calendar - simply because it is not possible to construct it without them!

In order to observe a complete 24-hour Feast of Trumpets, it was sometimes absolutely necessary to delay the beginning of Tishri 1 by a whole day. Further, in order to be able to offer the "wave sheaf" (Heb. *omer*) of ripened barley during the Days of Unleavened Bread, it was sometimes mandatory that the high priest in ancient Israel postpone the beginning of Nisan 1 by a whole month. Such a postponement would, of course, delay all of the seven annual Feasts by 30 days!

3) Did the calendar used by the Jews in the time of Christ and His apostles include any postponements?

Postponements were certainly used by the Jews in the first century A.D. Secular history shows that the two major religious parties (the Sadducees and the Pharisees) used

essentially the same basic calendar. The Sadducees, as successors to the priesthood from the line of Aaron, used the same calendar information that had been passed on to them from Aaron and Moses. This included the requirement that the Feast of Unleavened Bread fall in the spring (thereby necessitating certain one-month postponements to the beginning of the sacred year). There is no record of Christ and His apostles objecting to the calendar or instituting a different one.

Whom did God Authorize to Preserve His Calendar?

4) Did God give His people the Sacred Calendar, including postponements that would facilitate the observance of His Feasts?

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, it is utterly impossible to have an accurate, viable sacred calendar without incorporating certain adjustments or postponements. That's to say, the essentially lunar months of the Hebrew calendar would not remain within their proper seasons - which are determined by the solar year unless the calendar is periodically adjusted.

Secondly, it is totally inconsistent with the Bible to believe that God would have commanded the Israelites to keep the seven annual "Feasts of the LORD" mentioned in Leviticus 23 - yet would not have revealed to them an accurate calendar showing the proper days for their observance!

God began to reveal His Calendar to the Israelites even before they left Egypt: "Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Ex. 12:1-2). Further, the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were always to be observed in that first month of Abib/Nisan (Ex. 13:4; Esther 3:7), the month in which the barley became ripe enough to offer a "wave sheaf" (Heb. omer) to God, on the Sunday during this Feast (Lev. 23:9-15).

When the Lord revealed His seven annual Festivals to Moses, He commanded him to proclaim (Heb. qara, announce officially) those Feasts to Israel (Lev. 23:1-2). God chose the entire tribe of Levi to be His ministers (Num. 18:20-22); however only Aaron and his sons were chosen to serve in the top ministerial positions as priests (Num. 17:1-13; 18:1-7, 25-32).

But the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel lost the knowledge of God's Sacred Calendar. When they seceded from the House of David (c. 930 B.C.), their first king, Jeroboam, rejected God's law and His Feasts and devised a festival to be observed in the "eighth month" (I Kings 12:19-33). Because of Jeroboam's apostasy, many of the Levites living among the Ten Tribes in the north moved south into Judah.

From then on, the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and most of the Levites composed the kingdom of Judah. After the Jews' Babylonian captivity in the 6th century B.C., some of them returned to their ancient homeland and formed a nation, which later became known as Judea. The New Testament Scriptures plainly reveal that the Jews were responsible for preserving the Hebrew Scriptures, including preservation of certain "oral" calendar instructions given by God to Moses and Aaron. "What advantage then has the Jew...? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them [the Jews] were committed the oracles [Gk. logion, words of God]" (Rom. 3:1-2; cf. Acts 7:38).

How do we know the oracles include how to reckon God's Calendar? Since the Bible does not tell us how to construct the Sacred Calendar, and since it is essential that we have it in order to properly observe God's Feasts, therefore we know God has seen to it that all essential information about the calendar was communicated to His servants.

The Four Postponements

5) How many postponements are now incorporated in the Hebrew calendar? Today's permanent Jewish calendar (established by Hillel 11 in 358 A.D.) utilizes four postponements. God Almighty gave Moses certain necessary oral instructions regarding His calendar that are not recorded in the Bible. And, through the centuries, God must have inspired the Jews in such a way as to utilize the postponements. We are specifically told that God's Spirit can impart physical knowledge (Ex. 35:30-35; 36:1-4) as well as spiritual understanding (Job 28:28).

The Bible itself says absolutely nothing about postponements. So, if God's Word does not condemn postponements, then who are we to say that the Jews, the custodians of God's Word and His Calendar, are wrong in including them - especially so, since those postponements enable God's people to avoid certain problems when the weekly Sabbath immediately precedes or follows an annual Sabbath, thereby producing two back-to-back (tandem) Sabbaths?

Though the vast majority of the members of the true Church of God today follow the Hebrew calendar, nonetheless there are numerous small groups that believe in keeping God's Feasts, yet totally reject the Jewish calendar. They claim that the Jews had no authority to introduce the postponements into God's Calendar. But is that what really happened?

Let us briefly examine the purpose of the postponements to see if they do in some way run counter to the plain teaching of God's Word. As we show in the companion article on God's Calendar, the Jews do not believe the months must always begin on what is called the astronomical conjunction. Rather, the Jews (as well as the Muslims) believe that each lunar Month begins on the day of the approximate New Moon!

What is a conjunction? "The conjunction of the moon with the sun is the point in time at which the moon is directly between the earth and the sun (but not on the same plane) and is thus invisible. This is known as the molad (birth)" (Judaica, "Calendar," vol. 5).

We are, also told that, according to the Hebrew calendar, "every month must begin on a day close to the molad. For the beginning of the year, the first day of Tishri, the calendar follows this rule: Rosh Hashanah, the first day of Tishri, must be on the day of the Molad. [But] there are exceptions, the so-called Dehioth [postponements], which take place in four specific cases" (Arthur Spier, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, p. 219).

Spier then says, "Note: In more than 60% of all years Rosh Hashanah [Tishri 1] does not occur on the day of the Molad (the actual conjunction) but is postponed according to one of the Dehioth [rules governing postponements]. Therefore the Dehioth are actually not the exceptions to the rule but the rule."

6) What, then, are the four postponements included in the permanent Hebrew calendar?

POSTPONEMENT 1: "When the Molad Tishri occurs on a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday, Rosh Hashanah [Tishri 1] is postponed to the following day" (p. 218).

What purpose does this postponement serve? Spier says postponement 1 "mainly fulfills the following three religious requirements: Yom Kippur [the Day of Atonement] shall not occur on the day before or after the Sabbath and Hoshanah Rabba [the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles] shall not occur on a [weekly] Sabbath" (p. 219).

Why does postponement 1 prevent Tishri 1 from occurring on a Sunday, Wednesday or Friday? If Tishri 1 did occur on a Sunday, this would result in four consecutive Holy Day/Sabbath combinations during that particular year. If the first day of Tishri occurred on a Wednesday, this would necessitate two consecutive combinations. And if Tishri 1 occurred on a Friday, this would once again result in four consecutive Holy Day/Sabbaths.

The Jewish calendar permits Tishri 1 to fall on a Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday. When Tishri 1 falls on these permitted days there are only two possibilities for tandem Sabbaths (not including the true Pentecost, which always involves this combination). The first permitted tandem Sabbath combination occurs when the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread falls on a Sunday, as in 1994. The second permitted tandem Sabbath combination occurs when the last day of Unleavened Bread occurs on a Friday, as in 1998. But these tandem Sabbaths occur rather infrequently.

Modern Jews don't observe Pentecost (Shavout) on a Sunday. Instead they observe it on Sivan 6. However the early New Testament Church of God (like the Sadducees) followed the biblical command to observe Pentecost by counting 50 days from the Sunday (the "morrow after the Sabbath") that occurs during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This means that when Pentecost is counted correctly, it always falls on a Sunday-thus creating tandem Sabbaths.

Why did the Jewish religious authorities conclude that the fast day (Yom Kippur) should never occur on the day before or after the weekly Sabbath? Clearly, this would have made it very difficult for the Israelite women to properly prepare for the weekly Sabbath-a feast day! Remember, anyone who did not properly observe the Day of Atonement, by refraining from all work, would be "cut off" from his people (Lev. 23:28)!

And why did the Jewish religious authorities conclude that the last day (seventh day) of the Feast of Tabernacles (called Hoshana Rabba) should never fall on a weekly Sabbath? Simply because if Hoshana Rabba did fall on the weekly Sabbath, this would be followed immediately by another Sabbath, the annual Sabbath called the "eighth day" (Lev. 23:39-44). This tandem Sabbath would work undue hardship on the women who, in such cases, would have to prepare food on Friday for both the weekly Sabbath and the following day, the eighth day, which would be an annual Sabbath (v. 39).

Another benefit of the postponements is the matter of avoiding Sabbath burials. If someone died shortly before a back-to-back Sabbath combination occurred, this would make it difficult for mourners, since the burial could not take place on either the annual or weekly Sabbaths.

POSTPONEMENT 2: "When Molad Tishri occurs at noon [the approximate 18th hour of a 24-hour day from sunset to sunset] or later, Rosh Hashanah is postponed to the next day. (Or if this day is a Sunday, Wednesday or Friday, [it is then postponed] to Monday, Thursday or Sabbath because of Dehiah)" (p. 219).

The New Moon (molad) can happen at any time during a 24-hour day. Postponement 2 ensures that "when Molad Tishri occurs at noon... or later," then Rosh Hashanah is postponed to the next day, or if circumstances demand, it is postponed another whole day. In ancient times, duly authorized religious authorities always went by "visual observation" (though they used calculations as a further check) in determining exactly when the New Moon had occurred. But if the New Moon did not appear until noon (or later), this meant that three-fourths of the 24-hour day had already elapsed-with less than six hours remaining. Since the religious authorities had to get the word out to the people throughout the land of Israel, there would have been no way the people could have learned when the first day of Tishri was in time to properly observe the Feast of Trumpets. It thus became necessary to

postpone Tishri 1 by one day, in order to allow the messengers enough time to inform the Israelites so they could observe the Feast.

POSTPONEMENT 3: "When the Molad Tishri of a common year falls on Tuesday, [about 12 minutes] after 3 a.m... or later, Rosh Hashanah [Tishri 1] is postponed to Wednesday, and, because of Dehia, further postponed to Thursday" (p. 219).

Why was postponement 3 made? The Jewish calendar, being luni-solar, is based on the fact that 19-year astronomical time cycles regularly occur in nature. During each such time cycle, the Sacred Calendar incorporates twelve common years (having 353, 354 or 355 days), and seven leap years (having 383, 384 or 385 days). Since the decision of Hillel II in 358 A.D., the leap years are always positioned to occur in years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19 of the time cycle. This postponement was made for purely astronomical reasons-to make certain that the "common year" was kept to its proper, pre-ordained length of 353, 354 or 355 days.

POSTPONEMENT 4: "When, in a common year succeeding a leap year, the Molad Tishri occurs on Monday morning [about 35 minutes] after 9 a.m... Rosh Hashanah [Tishri 1 is postponed to the next day" (p. 219).

Postponement 4 was also made for astronomical reasons-to ensure that each "common year succeeding a leap year" would always fall within the required length of all "common years," that is 353, 354 or 355 days.

The four postponements that the Jews incorporate in the Hebrew calendar were put there for specific purposes, the chief purpose being to avoid certain Sabbath observance problems that otherwise would have resulted when two successive Sabbaths (i.e. tandem Sabbaths) occurred.

Preventing or Minimizing Tandem Sabbaths?

7) Doesn't the fact that tandem Sabbaths occur annually at Pentecost (which is always preceded by the weekly Sabbath) prove that we don't need to be concerned about having Sabbaths back-to-back?

We must remember that during most of the history of mankind, the masses lived in an agriculturally based society, and did not have modern electrical appliances, running water, refrigeration, etc. Consequently, they could not have prepared food and kept it for several days without it spoiling.

The four postponements in the Hebrew calendar reduce the "tandem Sabbath" problem to a bare minimum. They were never intended to totally prevent, but merely to minimize, the number of tandem Sabbaths that could occur in any one year! Therefore the Jewish religious authorities deliberately included the postponements.

Now, there are modern "Pharisees" who think it was not proper for the Jewish religious authorities to include any postponements in the calendar; but they utterly fail to understand that God is far more concerned with the avoidance of undue human hardship on His Sabbaths (Mark 2:27-28), than in making sure the Jews always observe the beginning of their months precisely on the very day on which the new crescent moon first appears!

8) Is there further proof that God did not intend for the months to always begin at some "mathematically precise" moment?

When, for instance, the weather was cloudy at the time of the New Moon, it was sometimes impossible for anyone to see the crescent moon on the first day of its appearance. In such

cases, the Jewish religious authorities then automatically counted that day as the "thirtieth day" of the month (the months of the Sacred Calendar never had more than 30 days!), and then postponed the beginning of the first day of their next month until the following day.

Clearly, if that day hadn't been cloudy, and if the observers had seen a new crescent moon on the "thirtieth day:" they would have proclaimed that particular month to be a 29-day month. Consequently, they would have begun the first day of the next month on that very day when they first sighted the new crescent moon (cf. *Judaica*, "Calendar," vol. 8).

Reconciling Astronomy and Religion

9) How did the priests determine when to intercalate a thirteenth month?

The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar explains: "Astronomical calculation was not the only basis for intercalation of a thirteenth month. The delay of the actual arrival of spring was another decisive factor. The Talmudic sources report that the [Calendar] Council intercalated a year when the barley in the fields had not yet ripened [enough to provide the omer, Lev. 23:11]...The Council on intercalation considered the astronomical facts together with the religious requirements of Passover and the natural conditions of the country" (p. 1).

The Jewish high priests and their courts had authority to add a thirteenth month when agricultural conditions in the Holy Land indicated that, if a thirteenth month was not intercalated (thereby delaying the beginning of the new year by one whole month), the barley would not have been mature enough to present the required wave offering (Lev. 23:9-14)!

This agricultural requirement is corroborated by The Illustrated Bible Dictionary: "Pentecost...marks the completion of the barley harvest, which began when the sickle was first put to the grain (Deut. 16:9), and when the sheaf (Heb. omer) was waved 'the morrow after the Sabbath' (Lev. 23:11)" (1994, vol. 3).

The Encyclopaedia Judaica states, "The required adjustment [postponing the beginning of the year] is realized by the addition of an extra month (Adar 2) in each of seven out of the 19 years that constitute the small (or lunar) cycle of the moon (mahazor katan or mahazor halevanah). In 19 years the solar cycle exceeds the lunar cycle (of 235 lunations) by about 209 days, which are approximately 7 months.... In Temple times this intercalation was decided upon in the individual years according to agricultural conditions... later, however, it was fixed to be in the years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19 of the cycle" ("Calendar," vol. 5).

As long as the Temple stood, that is, up until 70 A.D., the Jewish religious authorities sometimes had to intercalate a thirteenth month in order to ensure that the barley would be ripe enough for the omer offering. Thus, it is clear that the Jews not only sometimes postponed the beginning of Tishri by a day or two, but they sometimes postponed the beginning of the ecclesiastical year (Nisan 1) by a whole month - thereby postponing all the Holy Days for that year! After 70 A.D., the Temple was no more. Therefore, the priests could no longer offer the required omer during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Compelling Evidence

What is the very best evidence proving decisively that it is not only permissible to use postponements, but is impossible not to use them if we are to have a viable calendar for observing God's Festivals?

Clearly, as we have seen, it is sometimes necessary to postpone Tishri 1 by a day or two. Likewise, it is indisputable that the entire year must be postponed by a whole month from time to time. These steps are necessary to synchronize the lunar and solar years.

Moreover, those who object to the postponements, which are built into the permanent Hebrew calendar, should carefully consider that when the New Moon appeared late in the day (12 noon or later), it was absolutely necessary to delay the beginning of Tishri 1 - otherwise it would not have been possible to have informed God's people (by officially proclaiming that day as Tishri 1), and consequently there would have been insufficient time in which to properly observe the Feast of Trumpets. If the New Moon appeared immediately after 12 noon, less than six hours would remain in that day, therefore one could at most only observe one-quarter of the day - not a complete day of Trumpets - that is, unless Tishri 1 was postponed. Presumably, a six-hour minimum would have given just enough time in which to notify God's people, so they could assemble in a "holy convocation" as commanded on the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24-26).

Today, there are "legalists" who object to the postponements. They would - in Christ's words - strain out a gnat [a one- or two-day postponement] and swallow a camel [a 30-day postponement]" (Matt. 23:24)! They would disallow a one- or two-day postponement at the beginning of Tishri, but would be forced to acknowledge that the Jewish religious authorities had the authority to intercalate a whole month (Ve-Adar or Adar 2), in order to make certain that the barley would be ripe enough for the omer, as demanded by God's law (Lev. 23:11).

One further question may come to mind regarding the observance of Pentecost. If we believe the Jews have accurately preserved God's Calendar, why do we differ with them on when to observe this Holy Day? The answer lies in the Jews' interpretation of the date from which to begin "counting fifty."

An Inescapable Conclusion

What is the inescapable conclusion the foregoing facts lead us to? God authorized the "Jews" (primarily the priests and Levites) to preserve the knowledge of His Sacred Calendar - now known as the Hebrew calendar. The Lord gave certain instructions regarding the calendar to Moses to give to Aaron and his sons so they could pass them down to future generations (Lev. 23:1-2). Later, God may have given further oral instructions regarding His Calendar to His holy prophets. If God has not preserved His Calendar through the Jews, then no one today has God-given authority to devise his own calendar. Why not? Simply because the Scriptures do not give sufficient information for anyone to properly reconstruct the Sacred Calendar!

Furthermore, no biblical or historical sources indicate that Christ and His apostles had any calendar disputes with the Jews (the Sadducees were then in control of the calendar and the Temple ritual until a short time before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D!) regarding the calendar that they were using in New Testament times.

When we consider all the scriptures pertaining to the calendar, it becomes clear that God's people ought to follow the example of Jesus Christ and His New Testament Church by using the Hebrew calendar (Rom. 3:2) - rather than groping around trying to devise their own unauthorized calendars! (Judges 21:25).

Astronomical Calculations and the Postponements

Some say that by using certain astronomical calculations we can actually determine the exact position of the phases of the moon for past years - including the year of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Others, however, don't believe astronomical calculations are totally reliable. They claim there are too many imponderables in regard to the use of astronomical tables to know precisely the time of day on which the astronomical New Moon. (the molad) occurred in 30 A.D., the year of Christ's crucifixion - or the precise hour when the new crescent moon

appeared on either Tishri 1 or Nisan 1 of that same year. Such astronomical calculations, intended to prove the use of postponements in Christ's time, appear to be unreliable!

In any case, there is insufficient evidence for anyone to construct an accurate, viable "Sacred Calendar" from the Bible alone! But God Almighty did not leave us in the dark. He saw to it that important knowledge of His calendar was preserved through the Jews. Of all the people of Israel, only the Jews continued keeping God's Holy Days, and only they preserved the knowledge of His Sacred Calendar!