

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #19

God's Months and Days

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This is Brother Kenny praying that this holy Sabbath day has brought you rest, peace, worship and fellowship before Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, and before God, our heavenly Father. It was just for that purpose that God, out of love for us, through His Word, sanctified and blessed each seventh day of our week.

While most Christians recognize the Sabbath as a day to remember and keep holy each week according to the Fourth Commandment of God, few can tell you about His seven additional commanded annual days for rest and worship. They are the First and Last Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and the Eighth Day.

In this segment of the Lord of the Sabbath series, we have been focusing on WHEN these Holy Days of God are to be observed. The majestic AND prophetic meanings of the days and their remembrance and celebration will be discussed as the sacred year of God progresses.

The annual holy days are given in Scripture and occur on specified numbered days in numbered months. Let us understand that months on God's calendar do not have names. They are merely numbered sequentially. And, the same is true for days. They do not have names. They are simply numbered or counted until a new month begins.

God's calendar for the worship which He seeks from His people is so simple a child who can see the sky and count can determine God's appointed times for group worship. God needs no printed wall calendar, no knowledge of astronomy, no computer program and no table from the US Naval Observatory to know when He expects His people to assemble before Him in awe with praise and with joy in worship.

God gave us the sun and the moon to observe with our own eyes to determine precisely every day that He commanded in His Word for annual group worship. Let's look at a typical commandment and see just how simple it is for anyone willing to use God's calendar. This is from Lev. 23: 23-24:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a Sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.'"

Here are all the elements of God's holy days: a numbered day of a numbered month is a Sabbath of rest with a special purpose for His and our holy assembly. Other scriptures give us the details of how to obey God's command to proclaim and hold a holy convocation.

So, how do we know which is the first day of the seventh month? We simply look up at the sun and the moon in the sky which God said He put there to mark His appointed times! What could be easier?

A month starts when a new moon first appears in the western sky. The process is quite simple. Moon watching is very easy and reliable. It starts with a sliver or crescent of the moon appearing on the horizon shortly after sunset. Its horns point leftward. The first night on which it becomes visible, it may rise less than 15 degrees above the horizon and then quickly sets. So it may be visible for less than a half hour.

Of course, the moon grows or waxes thicker each night and appears over the horizon more to the left and rises higher in the sky. By the fifteenth night, the moon will be full and bright rising above the eastern horizon large and often like an amazing yellow-orange color ball looking almost like the sun. Then, it will soar high in the sky, even almost overhead, getting brighter and more white. This full moon is an awesome sight. It has been the source of wonder and songs and romance throughout the ages. Praise God for the beauty and majesty of the moon that He put there to remember Him and His appointed times for worship! Is it hard to understand that He wanted us to observe the moon to know the months of His year?

If you have any doubt about whether God intended His people to be aware of each new moon, listen to the word of God concerning King Solomon found in 2 Chr. 2: 4:

Behold, I am building a temple for the name of the LORD my God, to dedicate it to Him, to burn before Him sweet incense, for the continual showbread, for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, on the New Moons, and on the set feasts of the LORD our God.

In this and numerous other scriptures, we see offerings being prescribed to be done before the LORD in the temple not just on the weekly Sabbaths or on the set feasts of the LORD, but also on the New Moons. So, just like any king or priest of Israel would be aware of the holy convocation days on the Sabbaths and during the feasts, they would also be aware of each new moon. It was God's way for His people to keep count of the months in each year. It was God's way for His people to proclaim and keep His commanded annual holy days.

You do not have to observe the moon very long before you realize that it waxes and wanes. It waxes or grows from a thin sliver with its horns pointing left to a full moon and then wanes or decreases with its horns pointing right until it disappears. Let's say you were imprisoned in a cell with no windows, or confined to a sick bed for many months or even years. Do you realize that the first night you were able to see the night sky, you would know from the size and shape of the visible moon whether you were in the start or end of a month and have a pretty good idea of just what day of the month it was. Isn't that amazing? Isn't our God awesome and wise?

Of course, most people have no idea about these things of God. To tell what day of the month it is, many have a calendar wristwatch. At a glance they know it is January 31. With a little knowledge, they know the next day is February 1. It is convenient for sure. It just does not tell us what day our appointments with God fall. The sighting and observing of the new moons each year do.

Now, people who view God's calendar and ways of determining His appointed times as not very important get by fine without ever observing a new moon. And, it is easy to scoff at God's way of keeping time by saying, "What are you going to do when it is cloudy for a week and you can't see the new crescent? Will there be no new month?"

I suppose there is no end to nay-saying about God's calendar, especially by non-believers and scientists, proud in their astronomical knowledge. But, I have not found any insurmountable problems in keeping time God's way. For example, anyone who regularly watches for a new moon will quickly discover that a new moon appears after 29 or 30 days. It also appears no later than 15 days after the full moon. So, if you kept track of the last time a new crescent appeared, or were able to note the night of the full moon in your daily dairy, you would be able to proclaim with a large degree of confidence and with an error of typically no more than one day when a new moon and new month starts WITHOUT ever even seeing it! Further, if you made an error doing that, it will be corrected the very next month when you are able to observe the new moon.

Because of our Christian traditions and today's scientific knowledge, it is easy to mock anyone trying to keep the Feasts of the LORD as commanded by God, and obeyed by Jesus, based upon the physical observation of the moon and sun. I forgive such believers because they know not what they do in ignoring God's commands. If we want to take the word of God seriously and obey His commands for worship pleasing to Him, perhaps the words of the prophet Isaiah in Is. 66: 23 should motivate us to consider His ways:

And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD.

Well, if it seems strange or foolish for you to worship before the LORD from one New Moon and Sabbath day to another today, you will have to get used to it if you are alive when the new heavens and new earth will be made by God. Such verses make it clear to me that the Sabbaths and New Moons have not been done away for believers today. Nor did they apply only to ancient Israel. I may well have the last laugh though, having already learned God's ways for worship at His appointed times.

This may be the appropriate place to review why you can't get God's appointed times from today's Jewish calendar. Oh, the Hebrew names of the months are there. And, the Feasts of the LORD are there. And, the annual holy convocation days are there. So, what is the problem?

The problem is that the modern Jewish calendar is NOT the calendar given to Moses by God or the one used by Jesus to keep the Feasts of the LORD. It has been changed. The

Jewish patriarch Hillel II is credited with the introduction of a “calculated” calendar in the middle of the 4th Century.

This astrological and mathematical calendar was formulated in 358 A.D to replace the observational calendar of the new moons in the land of “Palestine.” The Sanhedrin was prohibited by the Roman Emperor Constantius from meeting to declare the official beginning of months and the intercalation of a month necessary to proclaim the appointed times for the Feasts of the LORD. And, the Jews were also banished from Jerusalem.

The scattered Jews around the world could no longer count on the Jerusalem Sanhedrin to establish the LORD’S feast days. Hillel II, who lived in Tiberius, and befriended the Emperor, set about to establish and authorize uniform dates for the feasts of the LORD for the Jews of the Diaspora located around the world. He adopted the Greek, 19-year, Metonic cycle that rationalized the solar and lunar years by fixed, periodic additions of an intercalated month in various years to prevent seasonal drift in the agricultural Feasts of the LORD in Israel.

In seeking an accurate mathematical model, the definition of the first visible crescent as the criteria for the night of a new moon was also abandoned. In its place was the time of the conjunction of the alignment of the sun, earth and moon was used to start a month. This is a precise moment in time suitable for mathematical equations. It means that the moon is completely in the shadow of the earth and will be dark or invisible to the naked eye.

The uncertainties in actually sighting the new crescent were eliminated by the Hillel II calendar system. For example the new moon crescent could be there but be too faint to be visible in the sky with the naked eye. It would almost certainly be visible the next night. But, which night was the first day of the new month? The night of the calculated conjunction would solve such uncertainty.

But, this was not the only change made in the Hillel II calendar. The Jewish authorities also added new calendar rules which did not exist at the time of Jesus. These had to do with the fall Feast of the LORD and what have come to be known as the “postponement rules.” Basically, the Day of Blowing, known as the Feast of Trumpets (or Yom Teruah), on the first day of the seventh month (also called Rosh Hashanah by the Jews) would be postponed to keep the Day of Atonement from falling on a Friday or a Sunday. And, the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles must also be kept from falling on the Sabbath.

These changes too had good intentions as perceived by man. They made keeping both the weekly Sabbath and the annual holy days easier and more amenable regarding, for example, alternatively fasting and rejoicing and preparing the feast food. But, the point is whose holy days are they? The LORD’S days! Not the days of the Jewish rabbis!

Did man or the LORD give the holy days to Moses for His people? If they were the LORD’S to give, aren’t they ONLY His to change or eliminate? Do we not think He was aware of the nature and timing of His Holy Days and their impact on the lives of His

people? Did He just miss the boat? Had his mind become feeble? Were His appointed times and commands onerous for Jesus to keep?

My friend, I simply can't find any Biblical rationale for following the preferences of religious rulers, whether Jewish or Christian, especially when contrary to the written word of God. Can you accept the mere teachings of men as truth?

Even if, as in the case of the scribes and Pharisees, men who Jesus confirmed sat in a position of leadership and authority under God as Moses did, do we simply accept their preferences, traditions and practices? No, not unless they conform to the teachings of God, His Son and the prophets and apostles who spoke for God. Aren't we to test their words against God's words like the noble Bereans? If what they teach is NOT in Scripture, they are teaching falsely or giving a private interpretation. We need to test not only their words, but their spirit. It is so easy to be deceived by those with eloquent speech or persuasive reasoning.

There are many things about God and His ways that, in our carnal nature, we wish were different. Wives don't always like submitting to their husbands in all things. Surely God did not mean what He said, did He? Husbands don't always like loving their wives as Jesus would love His church and giving up their life for her. Children don't always act in a way that honors their parents. And, while I have washed the feet of brethren for over a decade in conjunction with eating the Passover meal, or Lord's supper, I must admit I don't look forward to doing that very much. I would like to spiritualize it away!

And, in this specific area of the worship of the LORD, whether it be on the weekly Sabbath or an annual holy Sabbath day, I see the same human tendency. We like to find our own ways that make sense to us, or make us happy, and choose to ignore the commands of God for the kind of worship He seeks. God help us to study our Bibles, learn His ways, and obey Him and NOT religious men.

So, even when I see the typical Jewish calendar with its names for the twelve months, I am troubled. The names of these months stem from the Babylonian calendar brought back by the Israelites after their captivity in Babylon. Several of these names are used in the Bible after the exile, but not all twelve. Remember, they are NOT the names of the months of the year as given by God. God gave the twelve months numbers. Why must we give them new names? [[Jewish Monthly Calendar](#)]

Why won't the people of God use God's calendar to worship Him today? It would seem the only thing that stops us is a lack of knowledge or our own calendar traditions. Does it matter to God that we change the specific days for worship that He gave us? I would have to think so, at least if we realized that He had specified other days.

I cannot use the modern Jewish calendar to establish the appointed times of the LORD for group worship. It is contrary to God's calendar in several ways, and there is no doubt about it. The modern Jewish calendar:

1) is not based upon observation of the moon, but uses a calculated astronomical model

- 2) ignores the condition of the barley needed for the feast in the first month of God's year
- 3) uses the molad/dark moon rather than the new crescent for the first day of the month
- 4) celebrates the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, always on Sivan 6, which is not the date given by God, and
- 5) has man-made rules of postponement for the start of the seventh month which alter the times of the last four holy days of the LORD.

God has given us a rather simple way to know when His appointed times for group worship fall without a complicated calendar or an official Sanhedrin. Observing the new moon gives us at least twelve months in any year. The first month of new year is the moon when the wild barley around Jerusalem is in the abib stage. If the barley is not far enough along in development at the twelfth new moon, it is not the start of a new year. Practically, a thirteenth month is added, or intercalated. Is this difficult to understand or determine? We do this all the time adding a day in February in leap years.

When names are used for the months, this intercalated month is called Adar 2. This makes the appearance of the next new moon the first day of the first month of the God's new year. Using the new moons to count the months, and the sunsets to count the days, any person can easily establish and proclaim the appointed holy days and Feasts of the LORD.

The reason that our modern Gregorian calendar becomes such a confusing subject for determining God's appointed times comes about in part because neither a month (a cycle of the moon) nor a year (a cycle of the earth around the sun) is composed of an integral number of days. So there is not a natural cycle of fixed days that fits what God commanded for His holy day convocations. So, man is foolishly trying to fit a square peg in a round hole.

The truth is that on God's calendar the number of days in a month is determined by the moon. Each of the numbered twelve months could have either 29 or 30 days as determined by the sun. God's lunisolar calendar, requiring only observation and logging of those observations, was simple for anyone wishing to keep God's appointed times for group worship. And, the next year a specific month could have the same or a different number of days. So what?

Since the Feasts of the LORD were geared to the natural agricultural cycle in the land of Israel at Jerusalem, the important characteristic of the new moon that starts a new year was the stage of the wild barley. It was not important to God that all years had an equal number of months or days. But, fallen man likes to determine for himself what is right and wrong, even if God and His truth say otherwise.

In summary, this is the current way I would suggest, based upon scripture, that congregations should establish and proclaim their Feasts and the Holy Day convocation assemblies. First after prayer and study, the elders will agree on a way to know when a new crescent moon will appear. The preferred way is to assign two or three people in the congregation or fellowship to actually go to a hill with a good view of the western

horizon to observe and confirm as legal witnesses the correct day of a new month locally.

However, a back up method for cloudy sunsets can also be agreed upon. One simple alternative is to consult the local newspaper which usually has the dates of the new moon on it locally. Remember however, most of these dates are based upon the conjunction or dark moon and the first crescent will usually be a day later.

Another way is to go to the U.S Naval Observatory web site and get the moon visibility tables for any given night in your area. Here the minimum amount of lunation and the maximum angle of rise in the sky will be factors on whether the moon would be visible to the naked eye.

If you have computer and internet access, you may want to consult a Moslem calendar site. They have very informative and graphic displays to determine whether the first crescent would be visible in various time zones across the face of the earth. Some Christians object to using the Moslem way. That is absurd. The Moslems are using God's way and the Christians are not!

Another backup would be to go to the Karaite web site. This strictly Old Testament sect of Judaism will automatically send reports on the first crescent sightings each month in Israel. One word of caution here. Just because a sighting is confirmed in Jerusalem on a given night, say March 18, does NOT mean that it would also be seen that same night in Pittsburgh, though it could be. So, this method would be equivalent to agreeing to start a month on the same Gregorian day proclaimed in Israel rather than using a local day.

While I believe that would be a viable and consistent method, it makes more sense to me that the new moon condition be observed or determined locally. For example, in observing the Sabbath at sunset, it would not make much sense to use the time of sunset in Israel rather than locally.

However, when it comes to determining the start of a new year, I would highly recommend the elders simply agree to let the state of the barley in Israel determine which new moon (whether in Israel or locally) starts the new year. The local new moon may well be on the same night anyway.

There are several reasons for this preference. First, it does make the start of the sacred year universal around the globe for all people keeping the Feasts of the LORD. So, if one travels to other nations to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, you would have the same Gregorian days set for all people keeping the feast around the globe. This is especially important for feast keepers in the southern hemisphere. If they tried to determine the new year by the state of barley locally, they would be off about six months from their northern hemisphere brethren.

While much of the symbolism of the Feasts of the LORD were concerned with the harvests in the promised land of Israel, Christians will focus their attention mostly on how the Lord of the Sabbath has become the focus of those memorials and celebrations.

We know that the feasts were originally for the nation and people of Israel. But, for the church of Jesus, Jesus fulfills the purpose of those Feasts. They were indeed shadows or a reality yet to come in Him. So, celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread when the leaves on the trees are turning colors in Sydney, Australia should not take away any of the joy in celebrating Jesus as our Passover Lamb along with other worshippers all around the world.

As I remarked at the outset of this study on the appointed times, it is on one hand quite easy, and on the other hand, can become quite confusing. What is most important I would think is that we keep the purpose of the Feasts in the forefront and seek to keep the Feasts with other believers even if there may be different opinions between congregations about what the specific days should be.

To do otherwise puts us into a legalism that supplants the love of the heart for the Lord of the Sabbath and the people of God, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

If you have questions about how best to determine when to keep the Feasts of the LORD, do not hesitate to contact me through PO Box 203, Delmont, PA, 15626. If you prefer E-mail, write to me at LawstSMinistries@aol.com. Let me repeat that, its one word spelled lawstministries@aol.com.

If you are already keeping the Feasts of the LORD, you should be counting the omer in preparation for the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. Next Sabbath, we will launch into the reasons for counting the omer and what this celebration is all about. I should warn you, that among Feast keepers, there is more disagreement about just when the holy day falls on our Gregorian Calendar than probably any other appointed time of the LORD.

So, you may want to get your thinking caps on as we search the scripture to see when Jesus might suggest we keep this next Feast of the LORD.