

March 2002

Frank W. Nelte

A SHORT REPLY TO RON DART'S CALENDAR CHALLENGE

Dear Ron,

Yesterday a friend sent me a copy of your "challenge" regarding the calendar, with his request that I respond. So below I have pasted in your message as it was sent to me, followed by my reply. I have kept my response to about 5 pages of text to keep it short, for a total of 6 pages.

HERE IS THE MESSAGE THAT WAS SENT TO ME:

Subject: Ron Dart's challenge on the calendar

I am a fair minded man. I am willing to be convinced. Don't bring me papers by Solinsky or Nelte. Don't send me off to internet links. Do not give me human reasoning, nor draw inferences. Don't show me examples of what men did. They may have been following oral tradition.

Here is my challenge. Show me from the written law:

1. That a month begins with the lunar conjunction, or
2. That a month begins with the first observed new Crescent.
3. That if the conjunction takes place just before sunset, which day is the first day of the new month?
4. If the moon is occluded, how one is to decide the first day of the new month?
5. What actually constitutes the end of a day, because the moment of observation of the crescent may happen while it is still light.
6. That there are twelve months in the year.
7. That there are thirteen months some years.
8. What determines which year is which?

If these things are absent from the written law, then the next appeal is to the oral law. But the oral law is tradition and tradition depends on the decisions made by authorities--judges.

Every calendar has to have rules. Who gets to make the rules? If every man makes his own rules, confusion is the result and God is not the author of confusion.

It is my opinion that a calendar for the observance of the holydays requires some human authority to sanctify the calendar. Where am I wrong?

Ron

Modified by Ronald Dart at Thu, Feb 14, 2002, 08:56:24

END OF MESSAGE SENT TO ME.

And here is a brief response.

1) Like you, I also believe that I am a fair minded man, and I have no ax to grind regarding the calendar. Nothing would please me more than to be able to adhere to the present Jewish calendar with a clear conscience before God. But I also have strong convictions which will not be pushed around by personal preferences or by human traditions. And there is no way that my conscience will now allow me to go along with the human traditions which the Jews accepted more than 200 years after the original apostles had lived and died.

2) Obviously none of the answers to your 8 questions are contained in the Bible. But then your logic falls short. You reason: IF it is not in the written law, THEN the next appeal is to the oral law, which leads to human judges making decisions, meaning some human authority making decisions. But there is no such thing as "THE ORAL LAW"! The only "oral" law the Jews have is A WRITTEN RECORD, known as "the Talmud". I have the Talmud on my computer and I have done numerous searches on various topics in the Talmud. The contrast between the Bible and the Talmud is almost unbelievable! They are like day and night, with the Bible representing "day". The Talmud is a shocking mess of confused and conflicting statements, whose only value is NOT to look to it for teachings and instructions, but rather to take note of it as A HISTORICAL RECORD that shows what the Jews thought and did at a certain time in their history. It does not contain any instructions regarding what we MUST do; it only contains a record of what they DID do at a certain time. Furthermore, what the Jews call "the oral law" does NOT contain any useful information about the current Jewish calendar. So you have to go one step lower down the ladder still before you come to any information about the present Jewish calendar.

3) The correct logic, I believe, is as follows: Since the direct answers to your 8 questions are not found in the Bible, BEFORE WE LOOK TO ANY NON-BIBLICAL SOURCES FOR INSTRUCTIONS, the next step is to look IN THE BIBLE for principles and statements that would assuredly HAVE A BEARING ON THE CALENDAR! Simply because there are no direct answers to your questions in the Bible, that does not justify therefore throwing the Bible totally out of the calendar question, which is what you are doing in your approach. However, you are well acquainted with the Bible, and what YOUR approach exposes is this: YOU KNOW that you cannot defend the Jewish calendar by ANY appeals to the Bible, which others who are also trying to defend the Jewish calendar would do well to take note of. Any attempt to justify using the Jewish calendar from the Bible is from the outset doomed to failure, and your approach is a tacit acknowledgement of this.

4) Your logic, it seems to me, also falls short when you say that it requires some human authority to sanctify the calendar. The only time human beings can "sanctify" something is when there is a specific instruction from God to do so. We've generally accepted the Webster's Dictionary definition of "sanctify" as: "to set apart to a sacred purpose or to religious use", right? Before any HUMAN authority can set ANYTHING apart for a sacred purpose, there must be SOME indications SOMEWHERE IN THE BIBLE that God will actually APPROVE of such "setting apart". For example, the only reason we know that God would not approve of someone "sanctifying" a pig or a horse is because of what God has revealed in the Bible. So what biblical evidence is there that "sanctifying" the present Jewish calendar is in God's eyes any different from attempting to sanctify a pig or a horse?

5) While your 8 questions attempt to sideline the Bible completely, there are certain Scriptures that surely must have a bearing on what a right calendar must make provision for. Do you intend to ignore them completely? Your challenge has also been worded very carefully to not expose ANY convictions of your own on the relevance of any Scriptures or principles to this question. Thus:

A) Do YOU have any convictions concerning when God wants us to start a day? You ask: "what actually

constitutes the end of a day?", implying uncertainty on your part. So you have no convictions on this question?

B) Do YOU have any convictions regarding in which season of the year God wants us to start the year? Or are you also without any convictions on this? Can the first month of the year start in the winter or in the autumn or in the summer? You are not at all in two minds about whether or not God would accept us sanctifying a pig because of your understanding of the Bible. So why are you in two minds about which season of the year God wants us to start the year in? For the Muslims the start of the year cycles through all the seasons. Would YOU accept their calendar if the Jewish authorities decided to accept that model? If you wouldn't, why not?

C) Do YOU have any convictions concerning when a month should start: at the time of the conjunction or at the time of first visibility; or are you content if this criterion KEEPS CHANGING every month, as it does in the present Jewish calendar? Do YOU believe that there should be some consistency in this matter, irrespective of which criterion is used, or do you believe that God is in full agreement with the constant vacillation between these two options by the Jewish calendar?

D) You know full well that Jesus Christ rebuked the Pharisees (who decided the present calendar) in the severest terms for rejecting the commands of God in order to hold fast to their human traditions (Mark 7:7-9). Aren't you at least a teeny, weeny little bit afraid that maybe, just maybe, "the postponement rules" they invented to avoid Atonement falling on "inconvenient days" are also one of those human traditions that violate God's intentions? Wouldn't you insist on at least SOME biblical indications that God is pleased with the Jews for being smart enough to postpone Atonement away from inconvenient days of the week? No opinions at all about the postponement rules?

6) Regarding some Scriptures that surely must have an impact on how the calendar is structured, let's consider the following:

A) Exodus 34:22 states that Tabernacles is to be "AT THE TEKUFAH OF THE YEAR". The meaning of the Hebrew word "tekufah" is very clearly known amongst the Jews, even if many "defenders of the Jewish calendar" try to raise numerous smoke-screens around this Hebrew word. Do you have ANY convictions that this Scripture requires Tabernacles to be in a certain season of the year? Or will you take the approach of the lawyer in Luke 10:29, who, wanting to justify himself, asked "and who is my neighbour?" ... by asking: "yes, but how do we know what the word 'tekufah' in this verse really means?"

You cannot get away from the fact that the present Jewish calendar has, since its inception by Hillel II in 358/359 A.D., CONSISTENTLY VIOLATED the intent of Exodus 34:22 several times in every 19-year period. Do you want to sweep this under the carpet by focussing on arguments about whether the month should start with the conjunction or with first visibility?

B) Leviticus 23:10-11 required the priest to wave a sheaf of the firstfruits during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Do you have ANY convictions as to whether the year can start so early that no barley will be ripe for this ceremony? I don't mean borderline by a day or two or three. I mean placing the date on which that wavesheaf ceremony used to be performed a week or two before any barley would be available. Do you just accept such early dates for U.B.? Do you shrug it off by saying: since we today don't have to bring a wavesheaf, who cares if the dates are too early for any barley? If you do, you would be saying: God may have wanted U.B. to be later in the season back in O.T. times, but since 358/359 A.D. God has fully accepted the Jews' decision to have U.B. much earlier in the year for some years in every 19-year period. Any convictions at all about Leviticus 23:10-11?

C) Answer this hypothetical question: IF, just supposing IF, God wanted to tell us at this end time period something like: "I HATE THE JEWISH CALENDAR" ... how could God possibly have said that in a

language that did not have a word for "calendar"? If you had been in God's place in Old Testament times, and you wanted to record this as a prophetic statement for people more than 2000 years later, how would YOU have worded this emphatic rejection of the present Jewish calendar? If you had been limited to biblical Hebrew the ONLY way you could possibly have said this would be to say: "I HATE AND LOATHE AND CAN'T STAND YOUR NEW MOONS"! Is it just a coincidence that that is precisely what God has said in Isaiah 1:14? This chapter is not really talking about pagan customs and it is speaking to THE JEWS (Isaiah 1:1). Can you just out of hand reject that in this book of prophecy God is in fact speaking about the Jewish calendar, which calendar makes a total mockery of any REAL new moons (irrespective of whether you take the conjunction or first visibility), and which is so obviously manipulative with its postponement rules?

YOUR NEW MOONS and your appointed feasts MY SOUL HATETH: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. (Isaiah 1:14 AV)

7) By rejecting any information that is non-biblical, you are very conveniently eliminating any historical evidence that contradicts the present Jewish calendar. Thus:

A) You are not interested in the fact that during the first century A.D. the Jews used a calendar in which Atonement did fall on FRIDAYS and on SUNDAYS. It's convenient to ignore a fact like this.

B) It can be proved very clearly that the present Jewish calendar only came about AFTER the second Roman destruction of Jerusalem in the 130's A.D. Thus it was NOT used at any time during the lives of all the original apostles. You aren't interested in information like that, right?

8) You are aware of the fact that "two wrongs never make a right". If it can be shown that there are indeed REAL problems with the present Jewish calendar, problems that involve conflicts with what God requires, then those problems can NEVER be eliminated by focussing on problems with potential solutions.

9) I AM IN FULL AGREEMENT WITH YOU THAT THE POINTS YOU HAVE FORMULATED ARE VERY REAL DIFFICULTIES, AND I MYSELF DO NOT PROFESS TO HAVE THE PERFECT SOLUTION FOR ALL OF THOSE DIFFICULTIES.

But simply because the solution to a problem involves some difficult decisions, that does not mean we therefore refuse to face the problem which we KNOW is wrong before God. Isn't it like the truth about Pentecost: first starting out with keeping Sivan 6th, then recognizing that Sivan 6th is wrong and switching to Pentecost "always on a Monday", before finally coming to understand that Pentecost must "always be on a Sunday"? What if Mr. Armstrong had refused to move away from Sivan 6th simply because he wasn't totally sure of the correct day for Pentecost ... would he EVER have come to a Sunday?

When I can see that something I am doing is wrong before God, then my conscience requires me to move away from what I know is wrong, even if I am not totally sure in which direction I should move away. And yes, maybe sometimes I move away from the wrong in a direction that isn't yet fully right either, but I have made a move, and for that I believe God will open my eyes to greater understanding, because MY DESIRE is to move away from the wrong, and I just need God's help to recognize what is right in His sight.

10) As Kenneth Herrmann explained in his Good News articles (March 1953, February 1957, October 1957), the basic rules for a calendar are quite simple and straightforward:

- A) THE DAY starts and ends at sunset.
- B) THE WEEK starts and ends with the sunset at the end of the Sabbath.
- C) THE MONTH starts with the new moon.
- D) THE YEAR starts with the first new moon in the spring of the Northern Hemisphere.

That's all the rules you need. And these rules may NOT be violated by any calendar model that is used by God's Church. These rules are not in any way negotiable.

11) Now within the context of THESE rules the genuine difficulties you raised need to be addressed and resolved. To resolve THESE matters you do indeed need some human authority to make binding decisions. And we in the Church today lack the spiritual maturity to face these matters squarely and to resolve them in ways that will meet God's approval. THAT is the sad part of this whole calendar issue to me. We, all of us, are like a bunch of bickering little school boys who are only concerned about our own standing and position, and we lack any will or desire to make decisions that would be for the good of the greater Church of God beyond our own spheres of influence. We don't really sigh and cry for the problems that exist amongst God's people. THE WRONG ATTITUDES many people have gotten into over the calendar issue (on both sides of the matter) are a far greater problem than ignorantly continuing with a flawed calendar.

12) Yes, we do need SOME human authority to make decisions on certain issues, including:

A) Do we accept "the invisible conjunction" or do we accept "first visibility", both of which can be calculated in advance.

B) Do we accept a standard new moon time for ONE location on earth (e.g. Jerusalem) and translate that into our own time zones or do we go by local new moon times for every place on earth?

C) IF we accept the invisible conjunction, do we accept the actual day of the conjunction as DAY 1 of the new month or do we start DAY 1 with the sunset that follows the conjunction, irrespective of what time of day that conjunction occurred?

On the other hand, IF we accept first visibility, then first visibility ALWAYS occurs in the western sky immediately after sunset and thus at the very start of a new day.

D) The rule of always starting the year with the first new moon in the spring (on or after the vernal equinox) AUTOMATICALLY sorts out which years will have 12 months and which years will have 13 months, and that pattern will repeat itself every 19 years. No decision of any kind by anyone is needed in this regard; you only need the rule of never starting the year in the winter.

13) You are quite right: we DO need some human authority to make THESE decisions. But the biblical example is not one of looking to THE JEWS for some kind of binding decision on the people of God! It is one thing to recognize that the text of the Bible was preserved by unconverted Jews and Greeks; but it is another thing altogether to look to the unconverted TO MAKE DECISIONS THAT WILL BE BINDING ON THE TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD! The biblical example for resolving such issues is the Jerusalem Conference of Acts chapter 15. Back then the issue of circumcision was just as divisive for the Church as is the matter of the calendar today. But the leadership of the Church back then at least had the CONCERN for God's people as a whole to say: we need to get together and talk this whole matter through so that we can resolve it, and move forward united in the customs we teach and practice.

WE TODAY lack that kind of concern and maturity. We don't recognize anybody else's authority or ability to contribute to our understanding and practices of God's ways. We are not about to get together and have the leader of some other CoG chairing some meeting that we would attend to give our input and to receive input from others. And even if we did go so far as to attend some kind of "conference" or other, we would still all walk away with our own opinions, right?

14) I DON'T KNOW what is the best option, first visibility or the invisible conjunction. I have my ideas on this, but they are far from cast in stone. I don't know what is the better option, to always take the day of the conjunction (if that's the way we would go) or to always take the sunset that immediately follows the conjunction. Again, I have my ideas on this, but they too are not cast in stone. But in the absence of any consensus of any kind, in my desire to move away from what I know is wrong, I have been forced to make some decisions, which I believe are the best ones; but they are still negotiable and not cast in stone. I am willing to learn, and for the good of the greater Church of God I would be willing to change on any of the "negotiable" problem areas you raised. But sticking with a flawed Jewish calendar that openly violates clear principles is not an option for me.

My 5 pages are almost full. So that's it for now. Keep well.

Frank