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THE MEANING OF 'TEKUFAH'

I have repeatedly stated that Exodus 34:22 makes quite clear that the Feast of Tabernacles cannot start before the autumn equinox on September 22/23. Some people have questioned this conclusion and asked for proof. So this article presents the proof that the Hebrew word "tekufah", used in Exodus 34:22, makes quite clear that Tabernacles may NOT start in the summer.

For a start I will present 12 different extensive quotations from the Jewish Talmud, which make reference to the "tekufah". Then we can look at quotations from The Encyclopedia Judaica.

A POINT TO CONSIDER ABOUT QUOTATIONS FROM THE TALMUD:

The Talmud is a historical document. It reflects JEWISH understanding. It is not in any way "inspired". It is, however, the work Jews refer to as "the Oral Law". There is also a difference between the Jews understanding THE MEANING OF THE HEBREW WORD "TEKUFAH", and how they INTERPRET this word. Don't be confused by the various "INTERPRETATIONS" that various Jewish scholars in the Talmudic Age gave to the word "tekufah". These interpretations do not change THE CLEAR MEANING this Hebrew word has. And whenever Jewish scholars don't feel they have to defend a particular custom they hold (which custom may in fact contradict biblical instructions!), you will find that they quite openly present the true meaning of Hebrew words, such as "tekufah".

For each of the following 12 quotations I will first present the quotations and the relevant footnotes, and then make some comments on each of these quotations. So let's now start with the first quotation. (When a number is attached to the end of a word, this is a footnote.)

1) TALMUD - MAS. BERACHOTH 59B

"and I make a sackcloth their covering.¹

Our Rabbis taught:* HE WHO SEES THE SUN AT ITS TURNING POINT,² the moon in its power,³ the planets in their orbits,⁴ and the signs of the zodiac in their orderly progress,⁵ should say: Blessed be He who has wrought the work of creation."

FOOTNOTE 2:

"(2) In its apparent motion in the ecliptic, THE SUN HAS FOUR 'TURNING POINTS' WHICH MARK THE BEGINNINGS OF THE FOUR RESPECTIVE SEASONS. THESE POINTS ARE GENERICALLY REFERRED TO AS THE TEKUFOTH (SING. TEKUFAH). They are: the two equinoctial points when the sun crosses the equator at the beginning of spring and autumn respectively, and 'turns' from one side of the equator to the other; and the two solstices, when the sun is at its maximum distance, or declination, from the equator, at one or other side of it, at the beginning (*) Note 6 and the notes on the following page are based on material supplied by the late Dr. W. M. Feldman, M.D., B.S., F.R.C.P., F.R.A.S., F.R.S. (Edin.), shortly before his death on July 1st, 1939. of summer and winter respectively, and instead of progressively increasing its declination it 'turns' to decrease it progressively. (IT MAY BE MENTIONED THAT THE TERM 'TEKUFAH' IS ALSO USED NOT ONLY FOR THE BEGINNING OF A SEASON BUT FOR THE WHOLE OF THE SEASON ITSELF.)"

MY COMMENTS:

Note that the Jews understand the word "tekufah" to refer to THE 4 TURNING POINTS WHICH MARK THE BEGINNINGS OF THE 4 RESPECTIVE SEASONS! These 4 points are the two solstices and the two equinoxes. Notice also that the word "tekufah" refers to THE WHOLE OF THE SEASON ITSELF!

So to summarize what we see from this quotation:

- 1) Tekufah refers to 4 specific dates in the year: the vernal equinox, the summer solstice, the autumnal equinox, and the winter solstice.
- 2) Tekufah also refers to THE SEASONS which start with each of those 4 days.
- 3) Thus tekufah refers to a specific starting date and all the days that FOLLOW that starting date, up to the next starting date.
- 4) It follows that tekufah CANNOT refer to any number of days that PRECEDE that starting date PLUS the starting date itself PLUS any number of days that FOLLOW that starting date!

2) TALMUD - MAS. ROSH HASHANA 8A

"If you like I can say that R. Hisda explains the Mishnah here in the same way as R. Zera, since R. Zera said [that it¹⁴ means], FOR RECKONING CYCLES,¹⁵ in this following the view of R. Eleazar, who said that the world was created in Tishri.¹⁶ "

FOOTNOTE 15:

"(15) I.e., the cycle of Tishri is the first of the four cycles of the year, v. infra p. 43, n. 9. THE YEAR IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR CYCLES CALLED TEKUFOTH, the Tekufah of Nisan (Vernal Equinox); Tammuz (Summer Solstice); Tishri (Autumn Equinox); Tebeth (Winter Solstice). THE TERM TEKUFAH IS ALSO APPLIED TO THE SEASON ITSELF."

MY COMMENTS:

Again this quotation shows that the Jews understand the word "tekufah" to refer to the 4 seasons, which all START at either an equinox or at a solstice. This also does not allow for the word to refer to any number of days that PRECEDE such an equinox or such a solstice.

3) TALMUD - MAS. ROSH HASHANA 11A

"R. Joshua said: Whence do we know that the patriarchs were born in Nisan? Because it says, and it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year in the month of Ziv¹¹ — that is, the month in which the brilliant ones [zewthane] of the world were born."

FOOTNOTE 11:

"(11) I Kings VI, 1. The text says that this was the second month, but SOMETIMES THE NISAN TEKUFAH (VERNAL EQUINOX) IS LATE IN OCCURRING, in which case the month of Iyar may according to solar calculation still be Nisan (Rashi)."

MY COMMENTS:

Here we see the Jews INTERPRETING the facts in order to make them fit with their own traditions! The vernal equinox is NEVER "late"! It is a fixed date in the solar year. Here we have a very weak claim intended to support the Jewish traditions that all the patriarchs were born in Nisan, an assertion for which they have not one shred of proof.

4) TALMUD - MAS. TA'ANITH 10A

"GEMARA. R. Eleazar said: The halachah is according to R. Gamaliel. It has been taught: Hananiah says: In the Diaspora¹⁸ [we do not begin to pray] until the sixtieth day after THE [TISHRI] CYCLE.¹⁹"

FOOTNOTE 19:

"(19) THE YEAR WAS DIVIDED INTO FOUR CYCLES (v. Glos. s.v. Tekufah), Tishri, Tebeth, Nisan and Tammuz. HERE THE TISHRI TEKUFAH IS MEANT-THE AUTUMNAL EQUINOX."

MY COMMENTS:

Again the "Tishri Tekufah" is clearly identified as "the Autumnal Equinox". The autumnal equinox was THE START of the tekufah of Tishri. Note also that the text of the Talmud itself, and not just the footnote, makes reference to "the (Tishri) cycle".

5) TALMUD - MAS. TA'ANITH 14B

"The inhabitants of Nineveh³ sent to enquire of Rabbi: How should we who need rain even in THE TAMMUZ CYCLE act?⁴ Are we to consider ourselves individuals and [insert the special prayer for rain] in 'Who hearkenest unto prayer'. or shall we consider ourselves a community and [insert it] in the 'blessing of the years'?⁵"

FOOTNOTE 4:

"(4) HEB. TEKUFAH, v. Glos."

MY COMMENTS:

Again we see that THE SEASON of summer (the Tammuz cycle) is equated with the Hebrew word "tekufah". Thus "the Tammuz cycle" also CANNOT start on any day BEFORE the summer solstice on June 20/21. Consistency requires that NONE of the 4 "cycles" (i.e. seasons) can start before the date of the tekufah.

6) TALMUD - MAS. SANHEDRIN 11B

"Our Rabbis taught: A year may be intercalated on three grounds: on account of the premature state of the corn-crops;⁷ or that of the fruit-trees;⁸ or on account of THE LATENESS OF THE TEKUFAH⁹"

FOOTNOTE 9:

"(9) Lit. 'cycle', 'season'. The Jewish Calendar, while being lunar, takes cognisance of the solar system to which it is adjusted at the end of every cycle of nineteen years. For ritual purposes THE FOUR TEKUFOTH SEASONS, ARE CALCULATED ACCORDING TO THE SOLAR SYSTEM, each being equal to one fourth of 365 days, viz. 91 days, 7 1/2 hours. TEKUFAH OF NISAN (VERNAL EQUINOX)

BEGINS MARCH 21; Tekufah of Tammuz (Summer Solstice), June 21; TEKUFAH OF TISHRI (AUTUMNAL EQUINOX), SEPTEMBER 23; Tekufah of Tebeth (Winter Solstice), December 22. Should the Tekufah of Tammuz extend till after the Succoth Festival, or the Tekufah of Tebeth till the sixteenth of Nisan, the year would be intercalated, so that the festivals might fall in their due seasons, viz., Passover in Spring, Succoth in Autumn."

MY COMMENTS:

Note that the Tekufah of Nisan BEGINS on March 21 ... and the Tekufah of Tishri BEGINS on September 23. Thus any date BEFORE September 23 cannot be a part of the Tekufah of Tishri.

Note also that the seasons, as correctly delineated in Footnote (9) above, are NOT of equal length.

Spring = March 21 - June 20 = 92 days

Summer = June 21 - September 22 = 94 days

Autumn = September 23 - December 21 = 88 days

Winter = December 22 - March 20 = 89 or 90 days (in a leap year)

In the Northern Hemisphere Spring + Summer are over one week longer than Autumn + Winter.

Note further the clear statement that "Succoth" (Tabernacles) is to be "IN AUTUMN"!

Also keep in mind that while the Jews could manipulate their own calendar in various ways, they could NEVER manipulate "the tekufoth"! Each tekufah is FIXED in the solar cycle, it cannot be moved by calendrical manouverings. The number of days between two adjacent tekufoth is fixed.

7) TALMUD - MAS. SANHEDRIN 12B

"Rab Judah said in Samuel's name: A year is not to be intercalated³² unless THE [SUMMER] TEKUFAH³³ is short of completion by the greater part of the month.³⁴ And how much is that? — Sixteen days: so holds R. Judah."

FOOTNOTE 33:

"(33) The solar year which consists of three hundred and sixty-five and a quarter days is divided into four equal parts, each period consisting of ninety-one days and seven and a half hours. THESE ARE CALLED RESPECTIVELY THE NISAN (VERNAL), TAMMUZ (SUMMER), TISHRI (AUTUMNAL), TEBETH (WINTER) TEKUFOTH. The lunar year which forms the basis of our calendar comprises altogether three hundred and fifty-four days. Though according to Biblical tradition our months are to be lunar (cf. Ex. XII, 2), yet our Festivals are to be observed at certain agricultural seasons; Passover and Pentecost in the Spring; TABERNACLES, OR FEAST OF INGATHERING, IN THE AUTUMN. In order to harmonise the lunar and solar years, a second Adar is intercalated once in two or three years. Our text lays down certain principles by which the Intercalators are to be guided."

MY COMMENTS:

Notice again the clear Jewish understanding that Tabernacles (the Feast of Ingathering) is to be observed IN THE AUTUMN! And "autumn" simply does not start until the autumn equinox! This text discusses rules for adding a 13th month to some years. While this is certainly something that MUST be

done for 7 years in every 19-year cycle, the Jewish TRADITIONS do not really take the actual dates of the "tekufah" (the spring equinox and the autumn equinox) into account. Instead, they have developed traditions which will "ACCOMMODATE" a certain amount of compromise with the actual dates of these "tekufoth" ... their traditions allow them to start Tabernacles during the "Tekufah of Tammuz" (i.e. before September 23), provided that at least the 7th day of Tabernacles falls into the "Tekufah of Tishri".

The reason for this "accommodation" is that when Hillel II instituted the present Jewish calendar in 359 A.D., he actually allowed THE ENTIRE FEAST OF TABERNACLES to sometimes fall into the "Tekufah of Tammuz" (e.g. the Last Great Day was still in the Tekufah of Tammuz in 360 A.D., 368 A.D., 376 A.D., 379 A.D., 387 A.D., 398 A.D., etc.). Since the time of Hillel II the entire Feast of Tabernacles has shifted to one day later in the seasons for every 216 years that have passed. So TODAY Hillel's error does not look quite as bad as when he first instituted the present calendar. So the Jewish reasoning is an attempt to justify the error as it still exists today.

Note also the statement that "our Festivals are to be observed AT CERTAIN AGRICULTURAL SEASONS". Autumn is "the season of ingathering". WHY would God possibly have wanted one of His three annual Feasts to straddle TWO seasons, Tabernacles starting in the season of summer and then ending in the season of autumn? WHY?

8) TALMUD - MAS. SANHEDRIN 13A

"R. Jose said: Twenty-one days.¹ Now, both deduce it from the same verse, And the Feast of Ingathering at the Tekufah [season] of the year.² ONE MASTER³ HOLDS THAT THE WHOLE FEAST [OF INGATHERING]⁴ IS REQUIRED TO BE INCLUDED [IN THE NEW TISHRI TEKUFAH];⁵ the other,⁶ that only a part of the Festival [of ingathering] must [be included].⁷

Now, which view do they adopt?⁸ If they hold that the Tekufah day⁹ is the completion [of the previous season]: then, even if it were not so,¹⁰ it will meet with the requirement neither of him who holds that the whole Festival [must be included,] nor of him who holds that only part of it [is necessary]! —¹¹ One must say therefore that they both hold that THE TEKUFAH DAY BEGINS [THE NEW TEKUFAH]."

FOOTNOTE 2:

"(2) Ex. XXXIV, 22. I.e., IT MUST FALL WITHIN THE TISHRI TEKUFAH."

FOOTNOTES 8-12:

"(8) Viz., with reference to the day on which the sun enters into the new Tekufah.

(9) I.e., the day on which the new Tekufah begins.

(10) I.e., even if it were not much short of completion, as sixteen days according to R. Judah, and twenty-one days according to R. Jose, but fifteen or twenty days, respectively.

(11) For even if the Tekufah day begins on the sixteenth or twenty-first day, the new season will commence only on the following day.

MY COMMENTS:

NOTE THIS POINT CAREFULLY!! Here the Jews actually ADMIT that ..."One Master³ holds that the whole Feast [of ingathering] is required to be included [in the new Tishri Tekufah]!" And this is a part of

the text of the Talmud itself; it is not only a mere footnote. And the scriptural reason given in footnote (2) is EXODUS 34:22!

THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I HAVE BEEN SAYING FOR YEARS!

Since this has NEVER been consistently the case since the time of Hillel II (i.e. since then Tabernacles has consistently, at clear intervals, started in the summer), therefore it is obvious that "other masters" disagree with this understanding; they have to justify why they sometimes start Tabernacles in the Tekufah of Tammuz.

Note also that no biblical support is offered for the view that "only a part of Tabernacles" needs to be in the Tekufah of Tishri. It is simply asserted to be so. The Jewish view that Tabernacles "MAY" start in the Tekufah of Tammuz has NO BIBLICAL SUPPORT OF ANY KIND!

Note further that this admission makes quite clear that they UNDERSTAND that "the Tekufah of Tishri" only starts with the autumn equinox! Otherwise they would not talk about "only a part" of Tabernacles falling into the right season.

9) TALMUD - MAS. SANHEDRIN 13A

"An objection is raised: THE TEKUFAH DAY concludes [the previous season]: this is R. Judah's view. R. JOSE MAINTAINS THAT IT COMMENCES [THE NEW].¹² Further has it been taught: A year is not intercalated unless the [summer] Tekufah is short of completion by the greater part of the month [Tishri]. And how much is that? Sixteen days. R. Judah said: Two thirds¹³ of the month. And how much is that? Twenty days.¹⁴ R. Jose ruled: It is to be calculated thus: [If there are] sixteen [days short of completing the Tekufah] which precedes Passover,¹⁵ the year is to be intercalated.¹⁶ [If, however, there are] sixteen [short of completing the Tekufah] which precedes the Feast [of Tabernacles],¹⁷ the year is not to be intercalated.¹⁸ R. Simeon maintained: Even where there are sixteen [days short of completing the Tekufah] which precedes the Feast [of Tabernacles], the year is intercalated.¹⁹ Others say [that the year is intercalated even if the Tekufah is short of completion] by the lesser part of the month. And how much is that? Fourteen days?²⁰ — The difficulty remained unsolved."

MY COMMENTS:

Here we see that the Jewish arguments "REMAIN UNSOLVED"! This is because they don't really look to the Bible as the ultimate Authority. Arguments about whether the tekufah (the solstice or the equinox) is the last day of the previous season or whether it is the first day of the new season are typical of the picky approach that pervades Jewish traditions. Common sense should tell us that these 4 "turning points" are each THE START of something new, and that is also the view commonly accepted today in the way we define the seasons.

Note also that NO BIBLICAL EVIDENCE is offered for how many days before the Tekufah of Tishri Tabernacles may (supposedly) start. The fact that they ARGUE about this (some saying so many days, while others say a different number of days) proves that they have no biblical standard or guideline to appeal to ... i.e. those who choose to reject the standard that Tabernacles may NEVER start before the Tekufah of Tishri.

10) TALMUD - MAS. SANHEDRIN 13B

" — They differ as to WHETHER THE TEKUFAH DAY COMPLETES [THE PREVIOUS] OR BEGINS [THE NEW SEASON].¹ But their views were not defined.²

[Again it was stated:] 'Others say: [That the year is intercalated even where there is a shortage] by the lesser part of the month. And how much is that? Fourteen days.' Now, which view do they adopt? Do they hold that the Tekufah day completes [the previous season], AND THAT WE REQUIRE THE WHOLE FEAST [OF INGATHERING TO BE INCLUDED IN THE NEW TEKUFAH?] But surely in our case, it is so.³ [Why then intercalate?] — The 'Others', says R. Samuel son of R. Isaac, speak of the Nisan Tekufah, for it is written, Observe the month of Abib [spring];⁴ i.e., take heed that the beginning⁵ of the vernal Tekufah shall occur on a day in Nisan [when the moon is still in the process of renewal].⁶"

FOOTNOTES 1-3:

"(1) Though they both state the number sixteen, the one who holds that the day completes the previous Tekufah must count the new season as beginning on the seventeenth.

(2) I.e., it is not clear who is of the one and who of the other opinion.

(3) For THE TISHRI TEKUFAH THEN COMMENCES ON THE FIFTEENTH, WHEREAS THE FEAST OF INGATHERING, AS DEFINED IN P. 58, N. 1, COMMENCES ON THE SIXTEENTH."

MY COMMENTS:

Note again the view held by some that "the whole Feast of Ingathering must be included IN THE NEW TEKUFAH"! That's the logical deduction if you look to the Bible for guidance.

Note also that "the beginning of the vernal Tekufah" (i.e. March 21) does NOT always occur "ON A DAY IN NISAN". For example, for the Year 2000 A.D. the Jewish calendar places Nisan 1 on April 6 ... a full 16 days after the vernal equinox. Thus in 2000 A.D. the "vernal Tekufah" takes place halfway through the 13th month, Adar II. So the comment in the Talmud about "the beginning of the vernal Tekufah" (i.e. the beginning of the season of spring) is also incorrect. In practice "the beginning of the vernal Tekufah" (i.e. spring) will very seldom fall on a day in Nisan, even in the present Jewish calendar.

But this raises the question: Should the vernal Tekufah EVER fall on a day LATER than Nisan 1?? That is: Should the first month of the year EVER start before the vernal Tekufah? Should the year EVER start in the winter, before the vernal equinox? No, it should not!

11) TALMUD - MAS. SANHEDRIN 13B

"Rabina said: In reality, the 'Others' refer to the Tishri Tekufah, but THEY HOLD THAT THE WHOLE FEAST [OF INGATHERING]¹⁰ MUST FALL [IN THE NEW TEKUFAH] INCLUDING ALSO THE FIRST [DAY OF THE FEAST].¹¹ '[Including] the first day'?¹² But is it not written, The Feast of Ingathering [shall be] at the Tekufah of the year; [meaning the day on which ingathering is permitted]? — [They interpret it as] 'The Feast which occurs in the season of ingathering.'"

FOOTNOTE 11:

"(11) And being of the view that the Tekufah day completes, the season, if there is a shortage of fourteen days, in which case the new autumnal Tekufah will begin on the fifteenth day, the first day of the Feast will not be included in it, so that intercalation is justified."

MY COMMENTS:

Here is another comment about "THE WHOLE FoT" having to fall into the autumn! Again some weak arguments are presented to counter this view. But note that a number of Jewish leaders in the Talmudic

Age actually understood that THE ENTIRE FEAST OF TABERNACLES SHOULD BE IN THE AUTUMN!
This is not just an isolated opinion.

12) TALMUD - MAS. NIDAH 38B

"Mar Zutra further stated: Even according to him who holds that a woman who bears at nine months does not give birth before the full number of months has been completed,⁷ a woman who bears at seven months may give birth before the full number of months has been completed, for it is stated in Scripture. And it came to pass, after the cycles of days⁸ that Hannah conceived, and bore a son;⁹ the minimum of 'cycles'¹⁰ is two,¹¹ and the minimum of 'days'¹⁰ is two.¹²"

FOOTNOTE 11:

"(11) EACH CYCLE (TEKUFAH) consisting of three months (the year being divided into four cycles) and two cycles consisting, therefore, of six months."

MY COMMENTS:

This is another reference to show that "tekufah" is also used to refer to the four seasons.

That concludes the quotations from the Talmud. From all these quotations it should be quite clear that:

- 1) The Jews understand "tekufah" to refer to 4 specific days in the year.
- 2) They also understand "tekufah" to refer to the 4 seasons which START with those 4 days.
- 3) They also acknowledge that SOME of their sages taught that THE ENTIRE FEAST OF TABERNACLES should be in the autumn. These "sages" obviously also understood the Hebrew word "tekufah" quite well; it wasn't a word THEY had to look up in some dictionary. They UNDERSTOOD the word and its implications. The Hebrew language was their speciality!
- 4) The reasoning the Jews present to justify starting Tabernacles BEFORE the Tekufah of Tishri has no biblical support of any kind. The fact that different men allowed a different number of days before the actual Tekufah of Tishri only reinforces the point that they were without biblical support in reaching such conclusions.

Now let's examine some quotations from THE ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA. This was published in Jerusalem in 1971.

- 1) The Article "ASTRONOMY" in Volume 3 , in Column 798 has the following subheading:

"THE FOUR SEASONS (Tekufot)."

This makes quite clear that the Jews view the word "tekufah" as one of the words that means "SEASONS"!

- 2) The Article "CALENDAR" in Volume 5, in Column 46, has the following subheading:

"Tekufot ("Seasons"). As stated, the four seasons in the Jewish year are called tekufot. More accurately, it is the beginning of each of the four seasons — according to the common view, the mean beginning — that is named tekufah (literally "circuit", from quph related to naqaph, "to go round"), the tekufah of Nisan denoting the mean sun at the vernal equinoctial point, that of Tammuz denoting it at the summer solstitial

point, that of Tishri, at the autumnal equinoctial point, and that of Tevet, at the winter solstitial point."

This quotation also supports what we already saw in the Talmud ... that "tekufah" refers to THE BEGINNING of each of the four seasons, being the two equinoxes and the two solstices. It follows that tekufah does NOT refer to any days BEFORE such a solstice or equinox. Human traditions that it "may" refer to a certain number of days before, specifically the Tekufah of Tishri, have the obvious ulterior motive of wanting to justify an existing wrong practice, that of sometimes starting Tabernacles before the Tekufah of Tishri.

All the above information should suffice to make clear beyond any doubts that the Jews are in their own minds very clear about what the word "tekufah" means. With this background we are now ready to examine two verses in the Bible. Let's start with Exodus 23:16.

EXODUS 23:16

And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is IN THE END OF THE YEAR, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. (Exodus 23:16 AV)

In this verse we have the expression "in the end of the year" defined for us. It is "when you have gathered in your labours out of the field". This is NOT talking about winter or summer or spring. It is clearly referring to AUTUMN.

Some of the Hebrew words used in this verse are:

- feast of "ingathering" = feast of "acyph" (from the root verb "acaph")
- "you have gathered in" = "acaph" (a primary root verb meaning "to gather, to collect")
- "in the end" = "yatsa" (a primary root verb meaning "to go out, to go forth")
- "of the year" = "shaneh" (from the verb "shahah" meaning "to change, to repeat")

In this verse the expression "in the end of the year" is NOT a reference to the last month of the year. The verb "yatsa" is used 1069 times in the Old Testament, and it is translated 518 times as "out" and 411 times as "forth". ONLY here in Exodus 23:16 is this verb "yatsa" ever translated by the English noun "END". It doesn't really mean "end of the year". The expression "year's end" is found, for example, in 2 Kings 8:3, where it is translated from "shaneh qatseh" ("qatseh" being a noun). The verb "yatsa" has no connection to the noun "qatseh"! So the Hebrew "shaneh qatseh" DOES mean what we in English would call "the end of the year"; but the Hebrew "shaneh yatsa" means something else. The description contained in Exodus 23:16 itself shows that this expression is here used to refer to "harvest time".

So Exodus 23:16 is NOT speaking about "the end of the (Jewish) year"; it is speaking about the season of autumn.

Now let's look at Exodus 34:22.

EXODUS 34:22

And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. (Exodus 34:22 AV)

Here we have another reference to "the feast of ingathering", the Feast of Tabernacles. This is clearly a reference to exactly the same feast as in Exodus 23:16. But here a different Hebrew expression is used for "the year's end". When we read the English translations of Exodus 23:16 and Exodus 34:22, we might conclude that "in the end of the year" is exactly the same expression as "at the year's end". But that is not so. That is simply a bit of confusion that was introduced by the English translators.

Where in Exodus 23:16 "in the end of the year" is "shaneh yatsa", in Exodus 34:22 "at the year's end" is "tekufah ha-shanah".

So God chose to inspire TWO DIFFERENT WAYS of telling us when the Feast of Tabernacles is to take place. Later, in the Book of Leviticus, we will be told that it is to be "the fifteenth day of the seventh month" (Leviticus 23:34), and it is to CONTINUE for seven days. So now we have three different ways for determining the timing for Tabernacles:

1) Exodus 23:16 tells us that it is when we HAVE GATHERED IN the harvests from our fields. That is a reference to the season of autumn.

2) Exodus 34:22 tells us that it is AT THE TEKUFAH OF THE YEAR. The extensive evidence from the Talmud makes clear that this is AT OR AFTER one of the two equinoxes or one of the two solstices. With the information from Exodus 23:16 in mind, this HAS TO BE "the Tekufah of Tishri" in Jewish reckoning. Leviticus 23:34 then also confirms this.

3) Leviticus 23:34 then tells us that this is the 15th day of the 7th month, plus the following six days. The designation of "the 7th month" verifies that our conclusion, that Exodus 34:22 has to be talking about the Tekufah of TISHRI, has to be correct.

The question that now remains is:

Can A PART of the Feast of Tabernacles (1 day or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or even 6 days) fall before the Tekufah of Tishri, or must ALL 7 DAYS fall on or after the Tekufah of Tishri?

We have seen AN ABUNDANCE OF EVIDENCE of a historical nature (i.e. in the Talmud) that makes very clear that the word "tekufah" refers to TWO things:

- a very specific day in the solar year (here: the autumn equinox),
- the season that STARTS WITH AND FOLLOWS that specific day.

The only possible explanation is that "the tekufah of the year" means that the Feast of Ingathering, all 7 Days of it, must fall within THE SEASON (tekufah) of Tishri, between September 23 and December 21. Since a 7-day Feast very obviously CANNOT all fall onto one single day (the other meaning of the Tekufah of Tishri is ONE SPECIFIC DAY, the autumn equinox), THEREFORE Exodus 34:22 simply has to be a reference to THE SEASON in which this Feast is to be observed. This understanding (that "tekufah" also means "season") is in full agreement with all the historical data available to us. It also agrees with the Jewish understanding of the word "tekufah".

To be quite clear: Exodus 34:22 is not intended to pinpoint one specific day for the Feast of Tabernacles, since the movements of the new moons in a solar calendar make this utterly impossible. Exodus 34:22 is really intended to pinpoint THE SEASON in which this festival of 7 days is to be observed. It follows that therefore it simply cannot straddle TWO seasons!

As it is, in the present Jewish calendar the entire Feast of Tabernacles falls into the autumn MOST OF

THE TIME! So "most of the time" the Jewish calendar is in full agreement with this understanding. It is just OCCASIONALLY that in the Jewish calendar Tabernacles starts BEFORE the autumn equinox (about twice in every 19 years), and for those rare occasions the Jews have developed elaborate excuses and justifications, as seen in the Talmud.

And that's about it! This should be the last nail in the coffin of the Jewish calendar, as far as the Church of God is concerned!

There is only one other thing that concerns me, and that is a matter of attitude.

A MATTER OF ATTITUDE

For about 3 years any number of people have challenged my statements and explanations about Exodus 34:22. Yes, there have been those who have asked for further clarification with a desire to really understand this instruction in Exodus 34:22. But the majority have argued and disagreed in strong terms; I've received and seen many comments along that line. One went so far as to publicly (via an Internet posting) claim that my calendar articles proved that I was not fasting and praying.

And what concerns me is THE ATTITUDE!

WHAT IS IT THAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE IN THE CHURCHES OF GOD TO GIVE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT TO UNCONVERTED CARNAL AND HYPOCRITICAL PHARISEES??

What is it that motivates people to defend and to fight for hypocritical Pharisees? If we believe Jesus Christ, they were hypocrites! And the Jewish calendar in existence today is nothing more than a product of the Jewish sect of the Pharisees. Its overwhelming goal and purpose is to adhere to "THE TRADITIONS OF THE FATHERS", something Jesus Christ resoundingly condemned. Only AFTER all "traditional requirements" have been met, does the Jewish calendar concern itself with pinpointing the start of the 7th month. It never at any stage concerns itself with the REAL new moons. Biblical instructions are not really given the same amount of importance as is given, for example, to traditional requirements.

Instead of giving the Pharisees the benefit of the doubt, WHY don't more people in the Churches of God give GOD the benefit of the doubt???

Why don't we "assume" that God actually means what He says?

With the Feast of Tabernacles it is ONLY THE FIRST DAY that is singled out by God for a special mention! Check Leviticus 23:34-44 very carefully. So why don't we just "assume" that THE FIRST DAY of Tabernacles is the one that is really important to God, even though "Jewish traditions" have made a big deal out of the 7th day? So why don't we just "assume" that in Exodus 34:22 it is also THE FIRST DAY that God is really concerned about? WHY do we so readily assume that some carnal, unconverted and hypocritical Pharisees must be right in THEIR "interpretations" on this matter?

Why don't we "assume" that God is logical and methodical, and that He does things decently and in order? Why must we instead "assume" that the God who actually CREATED the seasons would place a 7-day festival in such a way that it sometimes straddles TWO different and distinct seasons? Why can we not "assume" that the God of order, whom we serve, would simply not do that?

Why can we not "assume" that the God of order would simply not have a calendar where the first month of the year MOST OF THE TIME starts in the spring, but where it SOMETIMES starts in the winter? WHY do we have to start from the premise of giving the carnal, hypocritical Pharisees the benefit of the doubt in this matter, that, BECAUSE THEIR TRADITIONS WOULD HAVE IT SO, therefore it must be God's will to sometimes have the year start in the winter, even though the intent is clearly for the year to start in the spring? Why can we not "assume" that God would be logical and consistent with something like the start of a new year?

Why do we so readily jump to the defence of people (i.e. the Pharisees and their teachings) whose minds are still very much in a state of ENMITY AGAINST GOD? How can we possibly defend the teachings of such people?

Why don't we more often start out from the premise of "assuming" that our God is intelligent enough to SAY EXACTLY WHAT HE MEANS, AND THAT HE MEANS EXACTLY WHAT HE SAYS?

Why do we so often have to resort to "INTERPRETING" God's instructions to us? When God tells us that Tabernacles is to be "at the tekufah of the year", WHY do we assume that "as long as we have at least the 7th day at the tekufah, we are still okay"?

In all my research I start out from the premise (i.e. I "assume") that God is logical and consistent, that when He gives us instructions He means THE OBVIOUS INTENT of those instructions, and not some application we have to extrapolate and reason out in convoluted ways. I "assume" God means what He says to us. I "assume" that God does things decently and in order. I "assume" that God wants me to understand His instructions without ambiguity and without insecurity.

In any conflict of views I "assume" what Paul stated in Romans 3:4 ... "let God be true, but every man a liar". I "assume" that any ideas of men that contradict clear biblical statements must be in error and that the biblical statements (assuming they are correctly translated into English!) are true. And I "assume" that God does not contradict Himself.

Don't you also have the same approach? Are those "assumptions" unreasonable? They are actually based on many different Scriptures, and I expect you probably already know those Scriptures.

So when God tells us in plain terms that Tabernacles is to be observed "at the tekufah of the year", then I just have to make sure that I clearly understand what GOD means by "the tekufah". From the dozen or so quotations I have presented in this article it is clear beyond any doubts that the Hebrew word tekufah refers to TWO things: either it refers to 4 specific days in the solar year, or it refers to the four seasons that start with those four specific days. But it NEVER refers to any days that PRECEDE those four specific days (the two equinoxes plus the two solstices). It actually wouldn't make any sense if it DID refer to days that precede the equinoxes or the solstices! After all, IF it would also include ONE day before the tekufah day, then WHY could it not also include 2 or 5 or 10 or 30 or 75 days before the tekufah day? WHERE WOULD YOU DRAW THE LINE?

Can we not "assume" that God, who gave these instructions, has enough intelligence to be clear and consistent in this matter?

To put it in its simplest form:

TEKUFAH means:

1) One of the 4 "turning days" in the year (2 equinoxes and 2 solstices).

2) ALL the days that FOLLOW one of those 4 "turning days" right up to and including (!) the last day BEFORE the next "turning day". All those days put together comprise ONE SEASON.

3) THEN the next day is the next "turning day", the next tekufah; and the process repeats itself.

4) This happens 4 times in the year, giving us 4 tekufoth, 4 seasons.

Is that so difficult to understand? Did that require long, involved processes of reasoning? Is it not consistent and logical?

I do not mean the people who have genuine questions and really WANT to understand Exodus 34:22; but I DO mean those people who have nothing more than a desire to defend the carnal and hypocritical Pharisees and their teachings, and who argue to brush aside God's instructions in Exodus 34:22 in favour of pharisaical traditions:

WHY do you argue to uphold the unbiblical views of some carnal Pharisees whose dominant characteristic, if we are to believe Jesus Christ, was HYPOCRISY!? Why don't you give God the credit that HE TOO, along with Jewish scholars, understands quite clearly that "tekufah" means both, one of 4 specific days in the year, and also ALL the days that follow each of those 4 specific days up to the last day before the next specific day? Can you not see that the Jewish arguments for justifying their starting FoT before the equinox are nothing more than "hypocrisy"?

Can we not see that:

The Jewish argument of: "Yes, FoT is to be at the tekufah of Tishri, BUT HOW MUCH OF IT MUST BE AT OR AFTER THE TEKUFAH DAY?"

... is nothing more than a re-statement of the previous pharisaical argument of:

"Yes, I know God commands me to love my neighbour as myself; BUT WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?"
(See Luke 10:29)

Both of these arguments stem from a motivation to justify self! Neither one is based on a desire to really understand the mind of God, a desire to understand God's INTENTIONS!

I know there are a lot of people on the side of the Pharisees, people who direct all their efforts towards upholding the teachings of the Pharisees. What I want to know is:

Is there anybody out there (in a leadership capacity) who is ON THE SIDE OF GOD?

There are lots of people out there, or so it seems, who will:

- defend the pharisaical "postponement rules" of the Jewish calendar,
- defend the pharisaical interpretation of "tekufah" to place FoT into summer,
- defend the pharisaical use of "molads" instead of REAL new moon conjunctions.

Is there anybody out there who is willing to stand up and be counted FOR GOD?

As Moses asked the people of Israel:

"WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?" (Exodus 32:26)

We are in the process of being scattered and divided! And the calendar question will only compound this problem. THE REASON is that we, the ministry, will simply not be corrected.

There are today THOUSANDS of ordinary members of the Church of God out there, scattered through a whole range of different organizations, who clearly understand that there are problems with using the Jewish calendar to determine the annual Holy Days. All of these "very ordinary Church members" are facing tremendous pressure on their consciences, because THE LEADERSHIP of the organization they wish to be a part of REFUSES to face the facts about these problems. The leadership of the group they wish to belong to is pressuring them to face the prospect of "having to go it alone"! Where is THE CONCERN for the well-being of God's people? Where is THE FEAR OF GOD?

When they bring their concerns to their leaders, all they get is stonewalling; they get nothing more than filibustering. The leaders direct all their efforts at upholding the calendar of the Pharisees, which they will call "GOD'S calendar" or "THE SACRED calendar" or "THE BIBLICAL calendar" when in fact it is nothing of the kind; it is neither "God's", nor is it "sacred", nor is it "biblical".

When are we going to face the truth? I have shown very clearly in this article the meaning of "tekufah", as used in Exodus 34:22. There is simply NO WAY that the Feast of Tabernacles should EVER start before the autumn equinox in the Northern Hemisphere. Who cares what the Jews may do in their calendar? It is THE WORD OF GOD (i.e. Exodus 34:22) that makes clear that Tabernacles should never start in the summer.

AND THIS POINT IS SIMPLY NOT NEGOTIABLE!

We, the people of God today, NEED TO strive for unity in our religious practices. We NEED TO be concerned for the spiritual welfare of our brothers and sisters who have been scattered by the events in recent years. The danger of being scattered even more should motivate us to seek harmony and cooperation on major questions, even if we at this time cannot overcome organizational separations.

Anyway, as I said earlier, the information in this article should really be the last nail in the coffin of the Jewish calendar!

Frank W. Nelte