

New Year's

What does God's Word have to say about it?

In the Church of God back in the early 1990's, during the time when "the faith once delivered" was under severe attack and the waters of the pure truth of God were being diluted, muddied and made less clear among the brethren, some interesting and disappointing attitudes came to light during our local Spokesman Club meetings. (For those of you who may not be familiar with Spokesman Club, it was a church-based speech training club, similar in format to the well-known Toastmasters Club).

During one meeting that was memorable to me and which took place about this time of year, in the Table-topics session, the Topics-master asked the following question:

We all know that Christmas is wrong.... *{of course, that knowledge was soon changed!}*... but what about New Year's? Is it OK for God's people to participate in New Years celebrations?

Due to my faulty memory, I cannot remember all of the members' responses. But I do remember that this topic generated a surprising amount of discussion and debate, and that some members seemed to believe that it *was*, in fact, OK for God's people to participate in New Year's celebrations.

What about you? In God's church seventeen years later – today as 2010 turns over to 2011? Do *you* think it's OK? If so, what do you base your belief on? And if not, why not?

As we have not looked at this subject for some time and as the majority in our western nations are observing this holiday at this time, let us dig into this topical subject today. Let us ask and answer the question: Should a true Christian participate in New Year's celebrations?

What is the history of New Year's?

Just like in God's church, out there in the world, there has historically been much confusion regarding the calendar, and even more confusion about when the beginning of the year should fall. For some reason, calendars and New Year's dates have historically been topics for much disagreement. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, even the ancient Mesopotamians could not agree on when the New Year should fall:

The earliest-known record of a New Year's festival dates from about 2000 BC in Mesopotamia, where the New Year (Akiu) commenced with the new moon nearest the spring equinox (Babylonia) or nearest the autumn equinox (Assyria).

Even our modern encyclopedias cannot seem to agree on this thorny subject! Encyclopedia Americana moves the oldest New Year festival to Egypt and moves it back another 800 years than Britannica:

Among ancient peoples the beginning of the year was determined by one of various events, such as the spring or autumnal equinox or the winter or summer solstice. In Egypt, for example, beginning about 2773 BC, the year began with the... rising of Sirius... *{the brightest star in the night sky}*... which coincided with the start of the flood period of the Nile and came not long after the summer solstice

The ancient Phoenicians and Persians began their new year with the autumn equinox, while the Greeks, up until the 5th Century BC, observed their new year with the winter solstice.

What about the Romans? The names we use for some of our months today – September, October, November and December were derived from the Romans' Latin names Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten. If you count backward from September being their ninth month, you'll see that the Romans' first month was March. Yes, they originally kept their New Year in March – some historians say the 1st – some say the 15th (the infamous Ides of March when Julius Caesar was murdered in 44BC).

As far as we know, the January 1st date was first adopted as New Year's Day in 153 BC, when two Roman consuls chose that date – for military reasons.

However, in 525 AD, for most European countries, New Year's Day was moved back to the month of March, when a monk by the name of Dionysius Exiguus set the start of the Julian Calendar at March 25th (nine months before December 25th) to celebrate the occasion on which it was revealed to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God. Of course, the December 25th date for Jesus' birth was greatly in error; and so must this date be for “the Annunciation” as it is called.

This confusion continued throughout the Middle Ages, during which a variety of professing-Christian feast dates were used to mark the New Year, while calendars often continued to display the months in columns running from January to December in the Roman fashion. Even more confusion!

With the introduction of the Gregorian Calendar in 1582, many European Roman Catholic countries again began to celebrate New Year's Day on January 1st. Many more countries adopted the January 1st date during the 16th Century. Others held out until the 18th Century. And surprisingly, Britain and its colonies (including what would later become the United States and Canada) were among the very latest to adopt the January 1st date – in 1752.

Time and education has not diminished the confusion. Because of differences of opinion regarding the calendar, various countries still hold their New Year's celebrations at different times. The Vietnamese, the Islamic states, the Japanese, the Tamils, the Thais and, of course, the Chinese all keep totally different dates. The influx of Chinese people into North America has brought their colourful New Year celebrations with them – to which many of their Caucasian neighbours participate in to some extent. The Chinese celebrate New Year's Day sometime between January 10 and February 19 of the Gregorian calendar and it is their most important holiday.

But let us get back to our discussion of the western world's January 1st New Year's Day.

How is it observed by the world today?

Traditionally the day was observed as a religious feast; but in modern times the arrival of the New Year has also become an occasion for “spirited celebration,” Polar Bear swims in frigid waters, and the making of personal resolutions. Other New Year traditions are less acceptable. God’s Word accurately describes the goings-on at many New Year’s celebrations where some choose to let their hair down and throw all moral inhibitions to the wind:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Although this scripture does not specifically target Christmas and New Year activities, many of the sins described here are common to the season. It has long been known that the whole Christmas/New Year period spawns more violence and murder than any other time of year. More alcohol-related traffic deaths occur on the New Year’s holiday than any other day of the year.

In the British Commonwealth countries, including Canada, many of the New Year’s customs – the unrestrained immoral revelry, the partying, and the excessive drinking – have been adopted from the Scottish New Year, which they call “Hogmanay.”

And again, why should we be surprised at this? A little more history: The roots of Hogmanay reach back to the celebration of the winter solstice among the Norse, as well as incorporating customs from the Gaelic New Year's celebration of Samhain. In Europe, winter solstice evolved into the ancient celebration of Saturnalia, a great Roman winter festival, where people celebrated completely free of restraint and inhibition. The Vikings celebrated Yule, which later contributed to the Twelve Days of Christmas, or the "Daft Days" as they were sometimes called in Scotland. “Daft” is an English word that means “silly” – and silliness just about sums up this celebration – although it is perhaps too mild a term.

The winter festival was forced underground by the Protestant Reformation and ensuing years, but re-emerged near the end of the 17th Century.

When is the true New Year?

What does God say about all this heathenism and confusion?

**For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints... Let all things be done decently and in order.
(I Corinthians 14:33, 40)**

More later on what God thinks about His peoples' adoption of these heathen ways; but for now, let us ask the question, when is God's New Year? When is the true New Year? Does His written Word have anything to say on the subject? Yes, it does.

Here is the first scriptural mention of a New Year's Day – a very significant day:

And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry. (Genesis 8:13)

There is some disagreement between Bible commentators as to which of God's two New Year's Days this was referring to.

Two New Year's Days? Yes, there are actually *two* true New Year's Days that were given by God. The first and most important, as clearly stated in His Word, comes in the spring-time and is understood to be the beginning of His Sacred Year, and the second – in the autumn of the year – is understood to be the beginning of the Civil Year. Let us deal with the spring one first:

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." (Exodus 12:1-2)

This first month of the year was initially called "Abib," which means *greenness, green ears of corn or barley*. The first mention of the Hebrew word "Abib" is in Exodus 9:31 where it is translated into the English word "ear" (NKJV: "head") referring to ears of barley:

And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was bolled.

This gives a solid marker as to the time of year being mentioned. The first mention of the word Abib as the name of the first month is given in Exodus 13:3-4:

And Moses said unto the people, “Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten. This day came you out in the month Abib.”

In just two other scriptures, the first month of God's sacred year is called “Nisan” which may have been of foreign origin, and means “their flight,” probably referring to the month when the Israelites fled Egypt.

God clearly commands us to observe this month of Abib or Nisan, and He tells us exactly *how* we should observe it:

Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover unto the LORD your God: for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you forth out of Egypt by night. (Deuteronomy 16:1)

We are to begin counting God's sacred year on the first day of Abib. We are to follow it up on the 10th day of the month by “beholding the Lamb” (Exodus 12:3-5; John 1:29, 36) shortly to be followed by the keeping of God's Passover and His Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:5-8).

There was also another hugely significant event that took place on God's New Year's Day:

And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up. (Exodus 40:17)

Now, what about the second New Year and the counting of the months? The Jewish historian Josephus and many modern commentators state that, before God's command in Exodus 12:1-2, the commonly-accepted New Year's Day was Tishri 1, which we believe to have been the civil New Year.

God's civil year begins on the Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month which is commonly called "Tishri" or "Tisri," meaning "beginning." Elsewhere, including one scripture, this seventh month is called "Ethanin" (meaning *enduring* or *ever-flowing*):

And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanin, which is the seventh month. (I Kings 8:2)

This autumn New Years Day was the date that marked the end of the harvest and at which the people would begin counting their Third Tithe year, their seven year agricultural cycle, their Year of Release cycle and their Jubilee cycle. Just two scriptural references on this:

**And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of your labours, which you have sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when you have gathered in your labours out of the field.
(Exodus 23:16)**

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

The Feast of Ingathering which God here tells us falls "at the year's end."

The Hebrew is "tequwphah" which means "turning" or "the turn of the year" and is referring to what we now call "the Fall Festivals" – the Feast of Trumpets (Tishri 1), the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10), the Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri 15 to 21) and the Last Great Day (Tishri 22).

Rosh Hashanah, the well-known Jewish term for the Feast of Trumpets, may be literally translated "The Head of the Year." Here is the Jewish historian, Josephus' reference to this second New Year:

This calamity {the Flood} happened in the six hundredth year of Noah's government [age], in the second month, called by the Macedonians Dios, but by the Hebrews Marchesuan; for so did they order their year in Egypt; but Moses appointed that Nisan... should be the first month for their festivals, because he brought them out of Egypt in that month: so that this month began the year as to all the solemnities they observed to the honour of God, although he preserved the original order of the months... {i.e. with Tishri 1 as New Years Day}... as to selling and buying, and other ordinary affairs. (Antiquities of the Jews Book I: Chapter 3: Verse 3)

If Josephus is correct, this would indicate that in “the original order of the months” (as he puts it), the year began with Tishri 1, and God superceded this when He spoke to Moses in Exodus 12.

But if God's Holy Days were in effect from creation, as many believe they were, then perhaps His command to Moses in Exodus 12 was actually reinstating – rather than initiating – Abib 1 as His sacred New Year's Day to the Israelites who had been in Egypt for four hundred years – perhaps in a similar way as He found it necessary to remind them to “remember the Sabbath Day” in Exodus 16 and 20.

Here is another reference which is not so clear as to which of God's two New Years it refers to:

In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of the LORD was upon me, and brought me there. (Ezekiel 40:1)

In this verse, the phrase “in the beginning of the year” is translated from the Hebrew words, “rosh” (*head* or *beginning*) and “shaneh” (*year*). Although the Jews have adopted this verse for their Rosh Hashanah, there remains some disagreement among the commentators as to which New Year this verse refers to – the spring one or the autumn one. If it refers to the spring one, then this event took place on Abib 10 – the day when the Passover lamb was chosen and examined. If it refers to the autumn one, then this event took place on the Day of Atonement.

We have often wondered at the possibility that Jesus might have been, in fact, born on God's second New Year's Day – on the Feast of Trumpets – on Tishri 1 in the beautiful autumn of 4BC.

I am also one of those who have wondered whether God might have re-created the earth four thousand years earlier than Jesus' birth – around that same time of year – and that the first man, Adam, might perhaps have drawn his first breath on Tishri 1 – the Feast of Trumpets.

We have also wondered at the possibility that the second coming of Jesus Christ – the second Adam – might fall on some future Feast of Trumpets.

Satan's counterfeits

Allow me to paraphrase from Revelation 12:9:

The great dragon, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, deceives the whole world.

Part of Satan's role as arch-deceiver is that he is also the great counterfeiter. His New Year's Days are counterfeits. The one that he has foisted upon the modern-day western nations of Israel is one of his greatest counterfeits.

Notice how he timed it! God's first New Year's Day comes in March or April – in the beauty of the spring-time of the year (in the northern hemisphere).

God's second New Year comes in September or October – “in the beauty of the autumn” of each year (in the northern hemisphere). Our South African, Australian and New Zealand brethren have told us that the spring and the autumn are also the loveliest times of year down there in the southern climes too.

When Satan planned his counterfeit New Year, he obviously wanted to keep it as far away as possible from God's true New Year's Day and from His true Holy Days. “As far away as possible” translates to half way between God's two true New Year's Days – or three months between the two.

Satan could have placed his counterfeit New Year's Day three months in between Abib and Tishri – in God's fourth month (Tammuz) which falls in our summer months of June or July. But why would he do that? It would fall right in the middle of God's Holy Day season and too close to the Feast of Pentecost.

No, Satan set it as far as possible outside of God's Holy Day season as he could - three months between Tishri 1 and Abib 1 – in the tenth month (Tebet or Tebeth) of God's year!

Come out and stay out!

So there are the facts and the history. But what should God's people *do* with this information? Here is the short answer – directly from the mouth of Jesus Christ:

**But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”
(Matthew 4:4)**

We are not to live by man's heathen traditions! We are to live by God's Word – including the very same words that God spoke to ancient Israel through Jeremiah:

Hear the word which the LORD speaks unto you, O house of Israel: Thus says the LORD, “Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain.” (Jeremiah 10:1-3)

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God. After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein you dwelt, shall you not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, shall you not do: neither shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall do my judgments, and keep my ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.... Defile not yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomits out her inhabitants. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourns among you: (for all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) that the land spew not you out also, when you defile it, as it spewed out the nations that were before you. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Therefore shall you keep my ordinance, that you commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that you defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 18:1-5, 24-30)

The ancient Israelites ignored God's loving, merciful warnings and were punished:

They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yes, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions. Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against His people, insomuch that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. (Psalms 106:34-42)

Our modern Israelite nations are doing exactly the same – ignoring God's loving, merciful warnings. Once again, God's punishments in the form of captive rule and oppression are gradually coming upon our rebellious nations. But without realizing it, how many years have our peoples been duped by Satan into the keeping of the traditions of their heathen enemies?

He answered and said unto them, "Well has Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do.'" And He said unto them, "Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition..."

Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which you have delivered: and many such like things do you. (Mark 7:6-9, 13)

Again, as Jeremiah wrote, the customs and traditions of men are vain! God is the only One who has the authority to set or to change the calendar, the New Year, and the order of the months. Referring to God, Daniel wrote:

And He... {GOD!}... changes the times and the seasons: He removes kings, and sets up kings: He gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. (Daniel 2:21)

He does not take kindly to puny men trying to usurp His authority to themselves – yes, even men as relatively great as the fourth Beast of Daniel 7:

Thus he said, “The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” (Daniel 7:23-27)

Yes, this Satan-inspired Beast will have the effrontery to take the power to himself to change times and laws. But thankfully, his power will be short-lived and he will have his dominion taken away from him. He will fall. He will be consumed and destroyed – as will the Great Whore also named Babylon the Great:

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.” (Revelation 18:1-3)

Yes, *all* nations – the *whole* world – all have been deceived by Satan the Devil. The whole world commits spiritual fornication with the Great Whore. And we – God's people – must be on our guard. We are not so inherently very clever. In the days to come, Satan will, by giving his power to the Beast and the Great Whore – Babylon the Great – exert a last-ditch effort to deceive God's very elect. Perhaps pressure for us to observe the heathen celebrations of Christmas and New Year's – or maybe some newly-concocted "times" – will be part of their super-vain end-time efforts.

God's warning voice will then boom out from heaven. But it is also booming out right now with an advance, stern warning in verse 4 of this same 18th chapter of the book of Revelation:

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues."

What then is the answer? The answer is to come out and to stay out! To reject Satan's counterfeit times and dates and holidays! And to observe God's times and dates! To observe God's New Year's Days! And by so doing, to look forward to and to prepare for God's spring and fall Holy Days.

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December 31, 2010