

CHAPTER 6

PENTECOST EVIDENCE FROM THE MISHNAH AND THE TALMUD

“The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines.”~King Solomon

The above quote from King Solomon is an interesting one. Many fine Generals who have developed and executed great strategies have had their plans fine tuned and improved through peer evaluation and examination. Even geniuses like Einstein sometimes have “holes” in their theories, that left unchecked can detract from other truths contained in their dissertations. Through peer review and questioning, any errors in their work can be exposed and resolved so that the overall theory can be proven and stand the test of unbiased intelligent scrutiny. This allows for a more accurate picture of the truth for others to follow.

Books on God’s Feasts are being written by a growing number of Messianic and Christian authors because there is a growing interest and realization that God’s Feasts were not abolished by Christ or the New Testament Church. In 1976 the Worldwide Church of God published a valuable booklet authored by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. It was entitled *“Pagan Holidays or God’s Holy Days, Which?”* It was, arguably, one of the most distributed and thus most influential works on the subject of God’s Feasts. In this booklet Mr. Armstrong did a fine job of exposing the reader to a brief but rich view into the New Testament

meaning and application of God's Holy Feasts. Though its brevity made it incomplete, overall this was one of the better summary books on God's festivals, and one of the better works Mr. Armstrong produced. That being said, the Pentecost section lacked factual support for its conclusions, and presented a perceived bias due to certain assumptions and misunderstandings. Many of the beneficial truths surrounding the Feast of Pentecost were lost to this book. The result was that it revealed only half of the precious truths on Pentecost, while it concealed other truths and embraced errors. The valuable lessons and understanding of the Biblical system of each person numbering *EACH DAY* "for themselves (Lev 23:15)" was lost to this feast being fixed on a Sunday that always fell seven weeks from Easter. The Story of how numbering each day of Israel's journey out of Egypt - 50 days to the Law on Mount Sinai - and how that points to Christ, was concealed.

The annual recounting of Israel's lessons and experiences as they journeyed from Egypt to Mount Sinai are a fitting point of meditation as we compare them to the lessons we learn today as we too are on a journey toward freedom with our just and merciful God. Annually as we count Pentecost day by day, we are to consider our calling and our journey out of this world as we follow Christ our Passover out of worldliness toward the day that represents God's righteousness being written on our hearts. Today, this truth has become lost to many. Those valuable lessons were replaced with a simple count that begins on the wrong day and ends on the wrong day. This booklet conveys a misunderstanding of who controlled temple and its relevance to numbering Pentecost today. Because this booklet was so widely distributed, it is appropriate to

“cross-examine it,” and close up the “holes” in its teachings.

In its support for a Sunday Pentecost, the above mentioned booklet *Pagan holidays or God's Holy Days, Which?* quotes from the Mishnah out of context, and in such a way as to give the impression that the Mishnah was in agreement with this booklet's thesis of a Sunday Pentecost – when just the opposite is the case. I wonder, of those who have seen that booklet, how many have ever checked the context, accuracy or completeness of the Mishnaic quotes in it? One day, I decided to take up the Mishnah and read those quotes in their context. A totally different picture began to appear.

One wonders if this was the work of junior researchers desperately trying to find or create support for the perceived inclinations or “conclusions” of their superiors. Did some editors willingly accept quotes into that booklet that seemed to justify their inclinations and prior conclusions, without adequately checking the facts? Who knows? But when truth is exposed, the facts speak for themselves.

We have already seen the new evidence (of which that booklet's author was unaware since parts of it had not yet been published or discovered by the time of his death). This evidence exposes “holes” in his understanding on how Pentecost was to be counted. That need not take away from the credit due for the many truths about God's Holy Feasts that he did correctly share. Still, clarifying the true content of what the Mishnah was saying about Pentecost *is* important and it *IS* relevant for us today. Many readers may

have seen this much-read booklet. Notice what it said in the section “How to Figure Pentecost”:

Before that time, however, the high priests of the family Boethus, who were Sadducees, had been in control of matters concerning the festivals in Jerusalem. The Boethusians always counted from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath, the day we call Saturday, which usually fell within the Days of Unleavened Bread or immediately before the first day of Unleavened Bread. This historical information has been preserved for us in the Mishna[sic], which was set in writing about AD 200: ‘The Boethusians say: “The cutting of the sheaf does not take place at the end of the day of the feast [the first of the seven days of unleavened bread], but only at the end of the next regular Sabbath.”’ (Menahoth, 10,3). *Pagan Holidays or God’s Holy Days, Which?*, Pentecost section, copyright 1976, Worldwide Church of God.

For years, this author (and many others) was led by the wording of the above booklet to believe the Mishnah confirmed the practice of a Sunday Pentecost.

For those of you who care enough to check, and who do realize why it is important for us today, you will be interested and amazed to discover that the quotation in the booklet, “*The Boethusians say: ‘The cutting of the sheaf does not take place at the end of the day of the feast...’*” is a very incomplete quote of only one small part of one verse, quoted out of context!

The way this quote is presented can tend to leave the reader with the idea that the Mishnah confirms the Boethusian

Sunday Pentecost, when, in reality, the actual point of the Mishnah was to discredit the Boethusian Pentecost and their Pentecost alliance with the pagan Samaritans. When one reads the entirety of (Menahoth, 10, 3), it is clearly seen that the cutting of the sheaf was done on the evening of Nissan 16, with great pomp, Why?, “*BECAUSE of the Boethusians who say....*” It was “*BECAUSE of the Boethusians,*” i.e., in order to publicly counter the Boethusians’s and Samaritan’s argument for a Sunday Pentecost, public pomp and ceremony was made of cutting the sheaf on the 16th of Nissan. The 1st Day of Unleavened Bread is Nissan 15th (Lev.23:6). It was a Holy Sabbath day (Lev.23:7). Therefore, “the morrow” after this Sabbath, would naturally be Nissan 16. The 16th of Nissan is the day on which the Mishnah actually says the sheaf was to be cut, thus beginning the count toward Pentecost! Why was this not clarified in the Church’s Holy Day booklet?

Later, this same Holy Day booklet again quotes from the Mishnah. Once again, it seems to give readers a misimpression as to what the Mishnah actually teaches about how to count Pentecost. After mentioning that the Gentile Samaritans and Karaites also kept a Sunday Pentecost, Mr. Armstrong quotes again from the Mishnah – out of context – in support of his teaching. The quote is found under the section entitled “On a Sunday”:

Quoting again from the Mishna[sic], and speaking about the correct practice which had been followed in Jerusalem before the Pharisees took complete control, “[The Boethusians say:] Pentecost always falls on the day after the Sabbath’ (Chagigah, 2,4).” (*Pagan Holidays or God’s Holy Days, Which; Pentecost* section, Worldwide Church of God, copyright 1976.)

Many have found this second quote from the Mishnah even more misleading than the first, for it is actually quoting only one-half of one sentence, thus it is quoted out of context! One would like to at least be quoted in full sentences or statements! In cases where accuracy matters, it is even more important to be quoted in context! Notice how a completely different meaning appears when one reads the full sentence of this Mishnaic quote in its context:

And the high priest does not put on his garments. And they are permitted to conduct a lamentation or to hold a fast, so as NOT to affirm the opinion of those who say, The date of Pentecost [must always fall] after the Sabbath [on Sunday] (Chagigah, 2,4). (emphasis added)

The Mishnah is actually going out of its way to point out that the Sadducees and Samaritans who wished to impose a Sunday Pentecost were NOT permitted to do so, and that their opinion was NOT to be affirmed!

God's Word says to "prove all things." By just reading a few words in front of the quoted reference, (IN ITS CONTEXT), a different picture appears. As to why those misleading quotes were used and allowed to remain in the WCG booklet, perhaps no one knows. We are better served by pursuing truth than we are by trying to judge the unknown motives of others. Suffice it to say that the Mishnah was not lending support for a Sunday Pentecost.

As shown in Chapter Two of this book, early in the New Testament dispensation there was a move to try to find support for a Sunday "Sabbath." Many of the Samaritans

and other Gentiles, who were newly exposed to the Gospel, already had Sunday tendencies. Simon exploited this. The work and influence of Simon Magus upon the Church began quite early. Paul marveled at how quickly the church was turning to a different gospel!

Mr. Armstrong quoted from the Boethusians and referenced the Samaritans in his booklet regarding Pentecost, (as have many who try to defend a Sunday Pentecost). Were he and his editors aware of the historical record of DECEIT and “evil courses” the Boethusians and the Samaritans often employed in attempting to tamper with the Hebrew calendar by claiming fake sightings of the new moons – all to try to create a Sunday Pentecost by trickery?

There are two important historical facts to note:

- 1 The Boethusians and Samaritans attempted to deceive the Rabbis by claiming they sighted a new moon, (when in fact they did not) with the intended goal of manipulating the calendar so that Pentecost would fall on Sunday!
- 2 The fact that they attempted to deceive those who controlled the calendar is evidence that the Boethusians or Sadducees DID NOT CONTROL THE CALENDAR! It is evidence, that they clearly did not have any authority over the calendar!

Further evidence is given in the following excerpts from the Talmud:

ORIGINALLY TESTIMONY WITH REGARD TO THE APPEARANCE OF THE NEW MOON WAS RECEIVED FROM ANYONE. Our Rabbis taught: What evil course did the Boethusians (9) adopt? Once the Boethusians sought to mislead the Sages. (10) They hired two men for four hundred zuzim, one belonging to our party and one to theirs. The one of their party gave his evidence and departed. Our man [came and] they said to him: Tell us how you saw the moon. He replied: I was going up the ascent of Adumim (11) and I saw it couched between two rocks, its head like [that of] a calf, its ears like [those of] a hind, and its tail lying between its legs, and as I caught sight of it I got a fright and fell backwards, and if you do not believe me, why, I have two hundred zuzim tied up in my cloak. They said to him: Who told you to say all this? (12) He replied: I heard that the Boethusians were seeking to mislead the Sages, so I said [to myself], I will go myself and tell them, for fear lest untrustworthy men should come and mislead the Sages. They said: You can have the two hundred zuzim as a present, (13) and the man who hired you shall be laid out on the post. (14) There and then they ordained that testimony should be received only from persons who were known to them.

MISHNAH. ORIGINALLY THEY USED TO LIGHT (15) BEACONS. (16) WHEN THE CUTHEANS [SAMARITANS] ADOPTED EVIL COURSES, (17) THEY MADE A RULE THAT MESSENGERS SHOULD GO FORTH. HOW DID THEY LIGHT THE BEACONS?

THEY USED TO BRING LONG POLES OF CEDAR AND REEDS AND OLIVE WOOD AND

FLAX FLUFF WHICH THEY TIED TO THE POLES WITH A STRING, AND SOMEONE USED TO GO UP TO THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN AND SET FIRE TO THEM AND WAVE THEM TO AND FRO AND UP AND DOWN UNTIL HE SAW THE NEXT ONE DOING THE SAME THING ON THE TOP OF THE SECOND MOUNTAIN; AND SO ON THE TOP OF THE THIRD MOUNTAIN. WHENCE DID THEY CARRY THE [CHAIN OF] BEACONS? FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES [IN JERUSALEM] TO SARTABA, AND FROM SARTABA TO GROFINA, AND FROM GROFINA TO HAURAN, AND FROM HAURAN TO BETH BALTIN. (18) THE ONE ON BETH BALTIN DID NOT BUDGE FROM THERE BUT WENT ON WAVING TO AND FRO AND UP AND DOWN UNTIL HE SAW THE WHOLE OF THE DIASPORA (19) BEFORE HIM LIKE ONE BONFIRE (20). (*Talmud* - Mas. Rosh HaShana 22b:1-20)

The TALMUD then states by way of explanation:

(10) By making them believe that the new moon had been seen on the thirtieth of Adar, which was a Sabbath, when in fact it had not, so that the second day of Passover might be on a Sunday and the counting of the 'Omer might commence literally 'on the morrow of the Sabbath', according to their interpretation of the words (Rashi)." (*Talmud* - Mas. Rosh HaShana 22b:1-20)

These Mishnaic and Talmudic references not only show the deceitful approach of both the Sadducees and their allies, the Samaritans, but the references also show that the

Sadducees' and their allies, the Samaritans' lying attempts to control the calendar did not prevail. It is confirmed, then, that the authority of the calendar and NUMBERING PENTECOST was OUTSIDE of the Sadducees' power or control!

One more reference from the TALMUD:

(20) "Abaye said: Logic supports Rab; for we have learnt: In early times they used to light bonfires, (21) but on account of the mischief of the Samaritans (22) the Rabbis ordained that messengers should go forth." (Beitzah 4B: 20-22)

By giving deceptive fire signals from the hilltops, the Samaritans sought to affect the beginning of the month in an attempt to alter the day of the week on which Pentecost would fall (Sunday). Here we have ancient evidence from the TALMUD that *both* the Boethusians (a group of Sadducees) *and* the Samaritans tried to falsely proclaim new moons when there were none to be seen, all to push their hope for a Sunday Pentecost. No wonder they are described historically as being "together" in this deceitful effort to change the way Pentecost was counted.

You have seen the evidence from a variety of sources of history, (also confirmed by considerable new archeological evidence), showing that it was indeed the Pharisees – not the Sadducees – who controlled temple ritual and calendar issues before Acts 2, during Acts 2, and after Acts 2. This evidence is convincing and unambiguous. When God's Scriptures are examined, without the veil of a preconceived ideology, they are just as clear!

There will be additional scriptural *AND* historical references to come in this book. Thank God for the freedom to study His Word, without which Godly ignorance would remain the devil's enslavement of the mind!

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