

Sunday, January 5, 2025 am

Learning from our Calendar (1) **A NEW BEGINNING**

Today, I present the first sermon of 2025. This year, as I have announced, I will attempt something a little different. Throughout the year, our calendars remind us of various holidays and other events to remember something – some are purely secular, some exclusive to the United States, and others have religious foundations. While there is much misunderstanding about the purpose of specific holidays (for many its just about a day off or party) and their observances, I believe that we can learn some valuable lessons from what we are thinking about and current events. Holidays often make us think about something in particular. What I want to do is think about these days from a Biblical perspective.

NOTE: As I do this, we first need to understand that as a church belonging to Christ, the Bible is silent about observing these days. The church is not a political or nationalistic organization. We are the body of Christ governed by His word in what we do, teach and observe (Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 3:17). That is why we do not have “special services” for various holidays. Many believe that Easter, Christmas and numerous other observances are taught in scripture and what God EXPECTS the church to do and teach. But it is NOT there, NOR is it the intended purpose of the church. Our purpose as the church is simple, to support the truth of God’s word by strengthen faithful brethren and trying to reach the lost (1 Timothy 3:15, Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Thessalonians 1:8, etc.). A church that fails to make this distinction is NOT faithful. Read the condemnations, rebukes and concerns to the churches of Asia in Revelation 2 & 3 and Paul’s letters to the Corinthians to see what God thinks of secularizing the Lord’s body. Our society has blurred the spiritual distinction of the church by seeking to incorporate nationalistic observances into its purpose and teachings. The result is a society that expects the church to be something other than what God intended. And sadly, some of our brethren have “jumped on the band wagon”. Brethren, let it be our goal to keep the church pure (Ephesians 5:27).

So, why am I presenting these lessons? Because if we are thinking about the purpose of a holiday, I believe it is a good time to remind ourselves of what the Bible teaches on given subject. The Bible has much to say about love, fathers and mothers, freedom, labor, leaders, memorials, race relations, the birth and resurrection of Jesus. My goal will be to present what the Bible ACTUALLY says about these and other subjects. In these lessons, where appropriate we will address the history of these holidays, what the Bible says about them and their observance, and lessons we can learn from them.

As I begin this study throughout this year, I want to make this observation. The observance of national holidays is an individual matter. Should you choose to observe some of these holidays, it must be based upon your personal convictions (cf. Romans 14). You CANNOT bind such matters upon others. AND do not expect the church to participate in your celebrations. It simply is NOT her purpose! Sadly, some of my progressive brethren do not get this.

Having said this, today we begin by examining the beginning of a new year. Hopefully you will see what I intend to present throughout 2025 with this lesson.

I. Reminders

- a. We need reminders. Both Peter (2 Peter 1:12, 3:1) and Paul (Philippians 3:1) wrote letters with this in mind. The Hebrew writer spoke of being reminded of first principles (which they should have been beyond – Hebrews 5:12-13).
- b. Why do we need reminders? Because we are human and we have a tendency to forget.

- c. There are many memorials in scripture
- i. Israel, because it was a nation (a theocracy) had many observances, most instituted by YHWH Himself –
 1. Israel had a number of annual feasts – each reminding them of various blessings from God. Leviticus 23:1ff reminds them of the various feasts they were to observe and when.
 - a. Sabbath every week – 23:1-2. Instituted by God in the 10 commandments (Exodus 20:8-11).
 - b. The Passover – 23:4-8 – 1st month, 14th day. Exodus 12:14-20 – it was a reminder of how YHWH safely delivered them from Egyptian bondage.
 - c. First fruits – a wave offering associated with the Passover. And a reminder of bountiful harvest – God’s provisions for them.
 - d. Feast of weeks (Pentecost – 23:15-22) – 50 days after the Passover Sabbath. It would ALWAYS be on a Sunday.
 - e. Feast of trumpets – 23:23-25 – 7th month, 1st day. A call for repentance leading up to the day of atonement.
 - f. Day of atonement – 23:26-32 - 7th month, 10th day. An annual day when special offerings were made to YHWH seeking His forgiveness.
 - g. Feast of tabernacles – 23:33-44 – 7th month, 15th day. A memorial of their wilderness wanderings.
 2. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 – parents were to continually teach their children.
 3. Deuteronomy 31:9-13 – every 7 years, Israel was to gather at the feast of tabernacle and read the law before all the people. This served as a reminder of what was expected of them.
 4. There were other reminders for them – e.g., the memorial stones after crossing the Jordan – Joshua 4:6-7.
 - ii. The rainbow – Genesis 9:12-17 – a promise that God would never again totally destroy the world by flood.
 - iii. Lord’s Supper – as Jesus instituted the Lord’s supper He said, “*Do this in remembrance of Me.*” Luke 22:19-22. Paul reminded his audience of what Jesus did and why in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
 - iv. Sunday – Acts 20:7 – the disciples assembled on Sunday and partook of the Lord’s Supper. As Christians, there is great significance with Sunday, including that is the day Jesus arose (Matthew 28:1-2) and the day the church began (Acts 2:1-4 – Pentecost, cf. Leviticus 23:15-16). It is no accident that we are EXPECTED to assemble – Hebrews 10:24-25. In so doing, we are strengthening and encouraging each other as God’s people.

II. Calendars and the Bible

- a. The word “calendar” is not found in the Bible. But the basis of a calendar is.
- b. First, God established the year based upon the earth in relation to its rotation and orbit around the sun. Ecclesiastes 3:1 – to everything there is a season. There is a time for everything. This requires that we know WHEN that time is. A calendar is involved in keeping time. Psalm 104:19 - *He appointed the moon for seasons; The sun knows its going down.* Genesis 1:14 - lights in the sky for seasons, days and years. Gen. 1:5ff – first day.

- c. Jews even had 2 calendars – a civil calendar observing seasons & keeping time for farming and life (Tishrei - around September), and a ceremonial calendar for religious observances (their month of Nissan – typically March to April).
- d. Genesis 7:11, 8:4, 13-14 – concerning Noah and the beginning of the flood and end of the flood. In the text we are told Noah was 600 years old, and the flood began in the 2nd month, 17th day. The listing of dates has always been important Biblically.
- e. Many dates were tied to the ruling of world leaders – e.g., Daniel 1:1 – first year of Nebuchadnezzar, Ezra 1:1 – first year of Cyrus (of Persia); Nehemiah 2:1 – month of Nissan, 20th year of King Artaxerxes, etc.
- f. Days, weeks, months & years – addressed in scripture. The concept of a week is from God. Genesis 1 gives us the 7 day week that would be the foundation of Judaism, and the foundation of our week. NOTE: Every other aspect of the calendar has geographic significance. But explain the week! It is a declaration of God's doing.
- g. The significance of a calendar – it keeps us on track with various seasons as well as dates. It also gives us a timeframe for reminders – including days of remembers (which we often call holidays and special days). This will be my starting point for various days of the year that I believe can have spiritual lessons attached to them.

III. **New beginnings in the Bible**

- a. Typically, we celebrate the beginning of a new year. We stay up late and count it down. Why do we do this? We are celebrating a new beginning. Life as we know it goes on, BUT personally, I cannot help but think of a new beginning. This is a time of reflection and resolve to make some needed changes, both physically and spiritually.
- b. Throughout the Bible we find new beginnings. We also find God forgiving and starting over with a clean slate.
 - i. Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
 - ii. Genesis 8:13ff, 9:9-11 – Noah, after the flood God establishes His covenant with him.
 - iii. Exodus 12:2, “*This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.*” As Israel prepared to EXODUS Egypt, the LORD declared that it would be the beginning of a new year for them. NOTE: This was the ceremonial (religious) “new year” (Nissan). As I understand, their lunar calendar supposedly traced its origin back to when God created the world.
 - iv. Isaiah 6:5-7 – the call of Isaiah. As he is called, he declares he is unworthy, “a man of unclean lips”. But an angel touched his tongue with a live coal and said, “Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.” It was a new beginning for Isaiah.
 - v. Micah 7:18-19 – If they repented, God promised to forgive Israel and give them a fresh start. It reads, *Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.*
 - vi. Zechariah 3:3-5 – Joshua the High Priest (as Israel resumes repairing the temple) is given new garments. It is as if to say, “you can start again”.
- c. Acts 2:1 (called the beginning in Acts 11:15). Note: Galatians 4:4 – it was the fullness of the times. This was in God's plan from the beginning. This was the beginning of the church/kingdom that we are now a part of.

IV. **Learning from new beginnings**

- a. God is a God of 2nd chances.
 - i. He does NOT desire that any perish – 2 Peter 3:9, 1 Timothy 2:3-4. Even though sin separates us from God, through Jesus He is ready to let us start over. (Romans 6:23)
 - ii. When we obey the gospel, it is a new beginning for us – 2 Cor. 5:17, Romans 6:3-4.
 - iii. Even as Christians, when we sin – we can be forgiven – 1 John 1:9. Luke 15:17-21 – the prodigal son is an example of this. John 21:17 – Jesus restored Peter.
- b. Resolutions
 - i. From time to time we need to take a “spiritual inventory” – 2 Corinthians 13:5.
 - ii. What better time than as we start a new calendar year (NOTE: If you need to make changes, PLEASE do not wait for the new year. If changes need to be made, TODAY is the day, regardless of when it is (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). BUT, having said that, “a new beginning” is on our mind. Use that as motivation to improve.
 - iii. Start where you are at right now – Revelation 2:5 – remember from where you have fallen (to the church at Ephesus).
- c. Forgiving others –
 - i. Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus emphasized that way we forgive others is the way we will be forgiven by God. That is a monumental declaration. Do you need God’s mercy and forgiveness?
 - ii. Matthew 18:21-22 reminds us that our disposition of forgiveness needs to exponentially exceed what the world expects. Jesus said, 70x7. In Luke 17:4 noted, “seven times in a day” you forgive.
 - iii. Will we give each other a second chance? Sometimes our failure to forgive others leads to a miserable life. It can include bitterness, depression, skewed judging of others, alienation, etc. If a failure to forgive others is burdening you – forgiveness can mean a new beginning.
- d. Our future and final “new beginning”
 - i. Hebrews 4:9-10 – there remains a rest for the people of God. A reference to heaven.
 - ii. We walk by faith because we know that when this life is over, we will spend eternity somewhere (cf. Matthew 25:46, John 5:28-29, etc.). As Christians, our desire is to go to heaven.
 - iii. We live knowing that the Lord is going to return, and when He does this world will melt and cease (2 Peter 3:10-13). But we do not mind this. In fact, in a sense we hasten that day because we know it mean “*new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*”
 - iv. This will be the final “new beginning”. As Paul noted in 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 – thus we shall always be with the Lord.

And thus, we are reminded of new beginnings. 2025 has just started. Are you where you ought to be? If not, there is no better time than the present to start making the changes you need to make. God is willing to forgive and give you that “second chance” (or third, fourth or hundredth). Just make up your mind that today is the day. How can we help you? Think about it!