



Minutes With Messiah

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WHICH CALENDAR TO USE

Anyone who reads about the last of the Russian Tsars and the Russian revolution is familiar with a disclaimer about dates. Usually the author uses dates New Style, but occasional dates are given Old Style. In 1918, after the revolution, Russia changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, as had most of the rest of the western world much earlier. (George Washington, for instance, was born on February 11 but with the British adoption of New Style when he was 21 years old his birthday became February 22.) Eastern Orthodox churches still use Old Style for their ecclesiastical calendar. Thus historians have to ask which calendar is being used.

Luke was Greek. When he wrote his Gospel he clearly began it by using Roman dating. Throughout the book of Acts, though, he uses Hebrew date references even though his primary audience is clearly Greek.

The most obvious early reference is to Pentecost, and that is understandable. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” (Acts 2:1) Mention of the Jewish holiday sets the time and place, and explains why there was such a large crowd in Jerusalem. There was really no other way to date the beginning of the church.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Passover [Easter in King James Version] to bring him forth to the people. (Acts 12:1-4)

It might even be understandable that Luke refers to the Passover here. After all, that was Herod’s specific timeline. Luke didn’t choose to mention that date; Herod did. Sometimes circumstances demand the use of a different calendar. After all, who would know the date of a Chinese New Year celebration just using the common Gregorian calendar?

Yet again, Luke chooses to mention a date based entirely on the wishes of the person about whom he writes. “For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he

hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.” (Acts 20:16) When someone else specifies a date in a different calendar, you might as well repeat that date.

The one time that Luke mentions a date in the Jewish calendar independent of specific circumstances or people is worth noting. “When sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them.” (Acts 27:9) It might have made sense to a Greek or Latin audience to use the ides of October rather than “the fast.” Nevertheless, that is a very specific and accurate way to describe the situation. The fast (*Yom Kippur*) occurs in early October by our calendar. It marks a clear beginning to the Medicean season. Winter storms on the Mediterranean can be very severe, with winds reaching near hurricane force. Because it is a shallow sea, the effect of the winds is amplified by the waves. Neither Paul nor Luke were known to be sailors, but they knew that once the Jewish fast was over it was no time to be setting out on the open waters. The sailors from Alexandria apparently did not know this or thought they could handle it. A fourteen-day storm is unusual, and may have been God-influenced.

Another way of looking at all this, though, may be reconsidering Luke’s audience. He addresses the book of Acts to Theophilus, a Greek. Whether that was the name of a real person or not is open to interpretation; still, it is Greek. Nevertheless, one of the principal messages of the book of Acts is that the gospel is available to both Jew and gentile. In that, it could be argued that Luke’s principal audience was the Jewish people, whom he was trying to convince. It makes sense, then, that he would use Jewish holidays as date references.

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SOLOMON'S PORTICO

A trip to Jerusalem is generally not considered complete without a visit to the Western (or Wailing) Wall. This wall is mostly under street level, but 62 feet of it extend upward to the top of the Temple Mount. When Herod expanded the Temple, he built four massive retaining walls, of which the Western Wall is the best preserved after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. It is considered sacred to the Jews because it would have been the closest to the Holy of Holies, and because with the Arab occupation of the Temple Mount it is the closest they can come to the actual site of the Temple. Because it is essentially all that is left of Herod's retaining walls, it is what is available to tourists today.

In the first century, the opposite wall, the Eastern Wall, was probably the more popular site. It was the entrance to the Temple compound. And it supported Solomon's Portico.

The Eastern Wall seemed to be taller than its opposite counterpart because it was built over the hillside

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at the bottom of which was the Kidron River. The southern end of the wall was topped by a pinnacle, and because of the added height of the valley would be considered the highest part of the Temple. This was probably where the devil took Jesus when tempting him. "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." (Matt 4:5-6)

One outstanding feature of the Eastern Wall was Solomon's Portico. This was a double row of columns forming a covered walkway or portico. Some historians believe it dated back to Solomon's Temple. They say that it was so beautiful that Nebuchadnezzar refused to destroy it. When the Israelites returned from Babylon they built the new temple onto Solomon's Portico. When Herod expanded the Temple, this portico was retained. Even at that time it was believed to have been part of Solomon's Temple. When Emperor Claudius gave King Agrippa the care of the Temple, he dared not tear down or remodel this part of the compound because of its antiquity.

Solomon's Portico would have been near the eastern, or main, gates to the Temple. It would have

formed the eastern wall of the Court of the Gentiles. Thus it was a popular gathering place within the Temple compound. As such, it is no wonder that it is mentioned several times in the New Testament.

Jesus was there

During the Greek occupancy of Palestine after the death of Alexander the Great, Antiochus IV Epiphanes had sacrificed a pig on the altar in the Temple, defiling it. After the Maccabean revolt, the Temple needed cleansed. Many stones were taken to an unclean place.

They discussed what to do about the altar for entirely burned offerings, since it had been polluted. They decided it was best to tear it down so that it wouldn't be a lasting shameful reminder to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar. They stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple mount until a prophet should arise who could say what to do with them. They then took unfinished stones, in keeping with the Law, and built a new altar like the former one. (1 Maccabees 4:44-47)

Many believe the "convenient place on the temple mount" was in or near Solomon's Portico. Almost two hundred years later the stones were still there, no prophet having arisen to tell them what to do with them.

"And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch." (Jn 10:22-23) Because it was the anniversary of the rededication of the Temple (Chanukah), the altar stones were on the minds of the people. Jesus was considered by many to be a prophet. Naturally someone asked, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." (v. 24) If he was the Messiah, then he would have the authority to tell them what to do with the stones.

When Jesus replied that he had shown himself to be Messiah by his works, but they refused to believe him, that wasn't the answer they wanted. Instead of a clear yes or no, he was talking about sheep and accusing them of not being in the right flock. They took up stones to execute him. Presumably these would not be the same stones as had been part of the altar, for those were holy.

Jesus asked for what work they were going to stone him. They replied that it wasn't for any of his works, but that he claimed to be God. After further discussion he "escaped out of their hand." Here they were, proving his point, and not liking it. They asked if he was Messiah, and then they wanted to stone him for saying he was. And, by the way, he never told them what to do with those old altar stones.

A healing

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple. (Acts 3:1-2)

Three o'clock in the afternoon, when a crowd would be gathered. Peter and John enter by the eastern wall. This passage refers to a gate called Beautiful. It is perhaps the only reference anywhere to such a gate. No other writings refer to a gate by that name. Perhaps Luke gives the gate this designation because of its proximity to the beautiful colonnade known as Solomon's Portico. In any case, Peter and John heal this man.

As a cripple, this man was probably not allowed into the Temple precincts proper. He would have been waiting outside the gate. He probably chose this gate because it would be one of the main gates through which people would pass, and he would get more money there. After he is healed he jumps up and entered the Temple "walking and leaping." This was the first time in his life he was able to enter, and he was able to do so under his own power. He clung to Peter and John.

And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. (Acts 3:11)

He entered the Temple and everyone saw him. Then they all came together in Solomon's Portico. Why? Why not just gather in the middle of the Court of the Gentiles, which is where he probably first went? It was because this was where Peter and John were headed in the first place. They regularly went to Solomon's Portico.

Peter took this opportunity to preach the gospel to the gathered crowd. The priests and the Sadducees objected. Acts 4:2 says they were grieved because they taught about Jesus and the resurrection, but surely part of their objection was that they were doing so in Solomon's Portico, a popular part of the Temple.

How dare they teach about Jesus in the very spot where Jesus had claimed to be Messiah? There was something about that spot that lent itself to Jesus' claims of being the Messiah. Maybe it was because he, like Solomon, was called a Son of David. He was, according to Isaiah, the Prince of Peace, which would also have referred at one time to Solomon, whose name means peace. There was, however, a simpler reason they were in Solomon's Portico.

The first place of assembly

The early church was entirely Jewish. It made sense that they would assemble in the Temple precincts. After all, the Temple was the place of worship for the

entire Jewish nation. Solomon's Portico was in a place that could be visited by men and women, natural-born and proselytes.

The church was gathered in Solomon's Portico. Members were bringing the proceeds from property sales so that the church could support some of the many people who did not live in Jerusalem but had stayed after they became believers. That was when one man, Ananias, came and brought a portion of the proceeds from the sale of his land. Apparently, however, he claimed that it was the entire sum. Peter challenged him.

Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?

How dare they teach about Jesus in the very spot where Jesus had claimed to be Messiah?

why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. (Acts 5:3-4)

Ananias fell down dead. The young men took him out and buried him. Three hours later his wife, Sapphira (properly pronounced Sap-fer-a) came in and also lied about how much they had sold the land for. Peter told her "The feet of the young men that buried your husband are at the door and will carry you out." She died. The young men, tired from burying her husband, had to pick her up, carry her out, and do it all over again.

Many other wonders happened. Because of this the people who were not associated with the Way avoided their assemblies.

And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. (Acts 5:12-14)

Solomon's Portico had become the first regular assembly place for the church. They gathered there daily. Nobody questioned that it was part of the Temple complex. Everyone just left them alone. The church did not buy a fancy building for themselves; rather they used the money to support those in need.

After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, Solomon's Portico no longer exists. Apparently the Romans weren't as concerned with beauty as Nebuchadnezzar had been. It is no longer there, but in its time Solomon's Portico held great significance for the church.

SUPPLIED WORDS

It is not uncommon in grammar to find an understood, but not stated, subject or object. Often this comes in the case of a command, such as “sit.” It is reasonably assumed that the person being addressed is the one who should sit. Similarly, if one were to say, “He drove off the cliff,” most people would think of a vehicle being driven. In fact, that would be the assumption unless a more specific object was supplied. You don’t expect the object of that sentence to be a herd of swine unless it specifically says, “He drove the herd of swine off the cliff.” In most modern printings of the King James Version and some other Bibles, certain words are in italics, indicating that they were supplied by the translators as being understood.

One example that has led to a traditional reading can be found in the plagues of Egypt. Exodus 8:21-29 relates the plague commonly called the plague of flies. You can’t even blame King James for this, because as early as Jerome’s Vulgate the word flies was supplied. What Moses actually said was that he would send swarms on Egypt. Some rabbis think this was wild animals, even though you don’t often think of them in terms of swarms. Others have said it was mosquitos, which probably makes more sense than either of the others. Nevertheless, the object of swarms is supplied by the translators.

At this time of year there is another instance of a supplied object. Rosh HaShanah will begin on the evening of September 18 in 2020. On that day it is required that the Jewish people hear at least 30 blasts on the *shofar*, and some authorities require one hundred blasts. Most Jews would be surprised to learn that the passage in Leviticus describing the holiday does not specifically mention trumpets or *shofarim*.

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing, an holy convocation. (Lev 23:24)

Most translations supply the “of trumpets” after blowing. It is a reasonable assumption. When the requirements of the holiday are repeated in Numbers, the statement is more specific. “It is a day of alarm to you.” (Num 29:1) The specific method of sounding an alarm for the Jewish people was the blowing of the *shofar*. Even though “trumpets” is still an assumed word in Numbers, it is a much more specific one than in Leviticus.

It is reasonable to ask what else it could be that is to be blown? One has no control over the blowing of the wind. What would be the point of blowing bubbles, assuming anyone did that so long ago? Blowing trumpets or blowing an alarm are the reasonable assumed objects in the passage.

But why is this day singled out for blowing? There are twelve or thirteen months. Why would the head of this one be chosen for a celebration? Probably it is because of the events ten days later.

The seventh month is noted for three holidays: Trumpets, Atonement, and Booths. The head of the month is characterized by an alarm, because the Day of Atonement is coming. The Jewish people would need to prepare their minds and actions for that day. It is a responsibility to blow the alarm.

But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand. (Ezek 33:6)

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