

Redeeming the Firstborn

When is a baby considered firstborn? Why are firstborns special? God once required that firstborn humans be redeemed. Why? How was that done and what did it cost? Is this still practiced today?

By Gregory Dullum
Part 1

The Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread are a little over three months away. That may seem like a long way off, but they will be here before we know it, and we will begin another cycle of keeping God's Feast days.

Instructions We Keep Today

Notice the instructions from God in Exodus 34: "The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, in the appointed time in the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out of Egypt" (v. 18). We, TODAY, obey this instruction. This year the Feast of Unleavened Bread—Abib 15-22 on God's sacred calendar—coincides with April 23-29 on the Gregorian calendar we use.

God's instructions continue: "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest" (v. 21). Today, we still keep the Sabbath from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday.

"And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end" (v. 22). We, today, observe these Feasts, but we call them by names used elsewhere in the Bible: Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles.

"Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the LORD, the God of Israel" (v. 23). We, today, bring offerings to God during the three holy day seasons (spring, summer and fall).

"You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning" (v. 25). We observe Passover today with unleavened bread



NAPS photo

God told the Israelites, "All that open the womb are Mine." Why? What was to be done with the firstborns? Does God expect us to do this today?

(representing Christ's body) and wine (representing Christ's blood), destroying any leftovers before morning of the next day.

"The first of the firstfruits of the land you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God..." (v. 26). We today, will bring the firstfruits from our gardens to church and give them to a minister.

What About Firstborns?

Now notice some instructions that are tucked *in the middle* of these verses.

"All that open the womb are Mine, and every male firstling among your livestock, whether ox or sheep. But the firstling of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem him, then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed" (vv. 19-20).

Should we be observing this TODAY?

Why did God say firstborns belonged to Him? How did the Israelites give their firstborns to God? Wasn't it by sacrificing them? It was *illegal* to sacrifice *unclean* animals or *humans* so they were to be redeemed instead. How was that done? How much would it cost TODAY to redeem our firstborns? Does *anyone* TODAY still do it? Should we?

Were *firstborn girls* redeemed or *ONLY firstborn boys*? If a girl was born first and then a boy, was the boy considered the *firstborn SON*, since he was the *first BOY*? What if the first son was preceded by a miscarriage or stillbirth—was he still a *firstborn SON*? We'll answer all these questions!

But first let's answer the question, "What's so special about being a firstborn son?"

Why Firstborns Are Special

Jacob had 12 sons. Let's let him tell us what's so special about a firstborn son.

"And Jacob called his sons and said, 'Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the latter days: Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father. Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength'" (Gen. 49:1-3).

Every man likes to have a son to carry on his family name. Most couples, if they have a girl first, will try to have at least one more baby, hoping for a boy.

If we die and leave behind no children, what impact have we made on the world? It's difficult to make a contribution to society that will leave a mark for all time. Some people invent things, write classic literature or create lasting

FIRSTBORN

Continued on Page 2

Firstborn

Continued from Page 1

pieces of art. However, those who become famous are few and far between.

Now imagine the impact we have on the world if we have a son, and grandsons and great-grandsons. And they keep multiplying into a large extended family, and then into tribes, and then into nations! That's what happened to Jacob.

Today, the descendants of Jacob populate North America, Australia, much of Europe, the state of Israel and South Africa! And to think it all started with one firstborn baby—Reuben. The firstborn son is the *beginning* of his father's STRENGTH.

Firstborns Get Greater Blessings

Jacob called his two grandsons before him to bless them. He did the UNUSUAL: he gave the *greater* blessing to the *younger* son instead of the firstborn. This was NOT usually done, and Joseph, the boys' father, told Jacob that: "Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, 'Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head'" (Gen. 48:17-18).

The firstborn *usually* receives a greater blessing. The blessing is called the BIRTHRIGHT. What is a birthright?

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary says: "The term applied to the peculiar advantages, privileges, and responsibilities of the firstborn among the Israelites. The firstborn was the object of special affection to his parents and inherited peculiar rights and privileges. ... The firstborn received a double portion of the estate, the other sons single and equal portions. For example, if there were five sons the property would be divided into six portions, of which the eldest son received two-sixths, each of the others one-sixth" ("Firstborns in Israel," *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* by Merrill F. Unger, 1988, p. 428).

This double inheritance is mentioned in Deuteronomy 21: "If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, who is truly the firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (vv. 15-17).

Must a Birthright Be Kept?

Must a firstborn keep his birthright? No. It could be transferred to another son. This could happen *two ways*.

1. It could be SOLD. We're all familiar with Esau selling his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew (Gen. 25:29-34).

2. It can be TAKEN AWAY by the father (or grandfather) and given to another son. We have read the account of Jacob giving the birthright blessing to Ephraim, the younger brother of Manasseh.

Why Given a Double Portion?

Why did the firstborn receive a double portion? Because he had more responsibility. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* tells us: "The firstborn was the head of the whole family. ... The firstborn enjoyed an authority over those who were younger similar to that possessed by the father" (p. 429).

When a king died, the firstborn usually inherited the throne: "And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Jehoram his son reigned in his place. He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azaryahu, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. Their father gave them great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, with fortified cities of Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn" (2 Chron. 21:1-3).

What other responsibilities did a firstborn have? According to *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, "As head of the family he had also, according to patriarchal custom, to provide food, clothing, and other necessities in his house for his mother till death, and his unmarried sisters till their marriages" (p. 429).

What About Firstborn Girls?

In ancient Israel, the firstborn were *sanctified to God*: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Sanctify to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and animal; it is Mine'" (Ex. 13:1-2).

Did this include GIRLS? It may seem like it when we read verses 1-2, but the instruction is clarified in verse 12: "that you set apart to the LORD all that open the womb, that is, every firstling that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the LORD's."

Females were NOT sanctified to God; only males were—and not even all of them. It had to be a male that *opened the womb* for the FIRST TIME. According to the Jewish "Shulkhan Arukh," (which is the Code of Jewish Law—the most authoritative code

of Judaism), if a son was born after a female or after a stillbirth or after a miscarriage past the third month of pregnancy, or was born by C-section and not naturally, he was NOT considered the firstborn son ("Pidyon haben," wikipedia.org).

Sacrificed or Redeemed

The firstborn male belonged to God. Why? God says it was because He killed all the firstborns of the Egyptians on Passover, but He "passed over" the firstborns of the Israelites. Because He allowed the Israelite firstborns to live, they became his (Ex. 12:12-13, Num. 8:17).

How did the Israelites, who were *physical*, give their firstborn, who were *physical*, to God, who is a *spirit* Being? Moses gave this instruction: "Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb" (Ex. 13:15b). SACRIFICING the firstborn to God was how the Israelite passed the *physical* to the *spiritual* realm.

God did NOT allow Israelites to sacrifice unclean animals (or humans) to Him. So what were the Israelites to do instead of sacrificing the firstborns of unclean animals?

"But every firstling of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem" (v. 13). Donkeys were to be redeemed by sacrificing a LAMB *instead*. Apparently lambs were initially used to redeem firstborn humans as well.

The Cost of Redemption

Later, God put a price on redemption. How much did it cost? "And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to

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the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerah” (Num. 18:16).

How much is five silver shekels today?

If we base it upon a shekel from the state of Israel today, the Israeli shekel is worth about 26¢, so five shekels is about a buck and a quarter. That’s probably too low.

Since these were silver shekels, and the shekels weighed about half an ounce, you can figure the price was equivalent to 2-1/2 ounces of silver. The price of silver keeps changing, but it reached a high price in recent years between \$30 and \$40 an ounce. So five shekels would equal between \$75 and \$100. This is probably closer to the equivalent of what the ancient Israelites paid to redeem their firstborns.

Although there are orthodox Jews who still practice the redemption of firstborns, we do not practice this in the Church of God today. Why not? Because we no longer sacrifice animals. We no longer have a temple. We no longer have a Levitical priesthood.

Levitical Priesthood Required

There must be a Levitical priesthood in order to redeem a firstborn, because the RULES concerning firstborns *changed*.

Instead of taking everyone’s firstborn sons, God took an *entire tribe* to be his. “Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying: ‘Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn of Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine, I am the LORD. ... And you shall take the Levites for Me—I am the LORD—instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the livestock of the children of Israel’ ” (Num. 3:11-13, 41).

Why did God make this change? Because under the old system, every firstborn son was redeemed by the family and



Photo by Greg Dullum

Five half-ounce silver coins like these silver dollars were required to redeem a firstborn.

he *remained with the family*, taking care of family needs. God needed a people to *serve Him* and DO A WORK.

“Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. ... For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. For the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself. I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary’ ” (Num. 8:14, 16-19).

Why Wasn’t Reuben Chosen?

Why didn’t God choose the Reubenites to be the priests? Reuben was firstborn and it was their right to be the priests!

Reuben should have been selected for the priesthood, but he was disqualified. “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to birthright” (1 Chron. 5:1).

The BIRTHRIGHT *blessings* went to Joseph. But the priesthood was given to the Levites. Why? Because at the time of the golden calf, the Levites declared themselves to be on God’s side (Ex. 32:26). God rewarded their loyalty by giving them the priesthood.

Firstborns Still Redeemed

Did Israelites still have to redeem their firstborns after the priesthood was established? God told Aaron, *the high priest*, “Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. Everything that first opens the

womb of all flesh, which they bring to the LORD, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless, the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD. And their flesh shall be yours, just as the wave breast and the right thigh are yours” (Num. 18:14-18).

The clean animals provided food for the Levites and the redemption money gave them finances, for they received no land inheritance as did the other tribes (v. 20).

After Babylonian Captivity

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, did they continue this practice of giving the firstborn to the Levites?

Nehemiah tells us what happened at that time: “And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the LORD; and to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstlings of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God” (Neh. 10:35-36).

In New Testament Times

Was the practice of redeeming firstborns still going on in New Testament times *while the Temple and priesthood existed*?

We have the example of Mary redeeming the baby Jesus: “Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;’)” (Luke 2:21-23).

When the temple was destroyed by the Romans A.D. 70, the Levitical priesthood was disbanded and animal sacrifices ceased. From that time on, God no longer required the redemption of the firstborn.

Mary’s redeeming of the baby Jesus is an interesting case of a firstborn being redeemed. Not only is Jesus the firstborn of Mary, He is the firstborn Son of God! Does God have *any other* firstborn sons? Yes! According to scripture, God has FIVE firstborn sons! Can we name all five? We’ll discuss them next month!

(To be continued!)

Know Your Bible

By Charles Nenninger

1. What does the word *Bible* mean?
2. Where did Adam and Eve live at first?
3. Who lived on earth before man?
4. Where did Joseph and Mary flee to get away from Herod?
5. Who was Jesus’ stepfather?
(Answers on page 4)

Test Your Bible Knowledge

A small feature every month is our "Memory Scripture" on page 5. Do you remember these scriptures?

Each month, we feature a Memory Scripture on page 5 of *The Sabbath Scoop*. This month, we review some of these scriptures. Write the number for the correct answer on the line before each scripture. Match as many as you can before checking your answers with your Bible.

We published a similar review using different scriptures in December 2010.

Chapters to Remember

- ___ Baptism
- ___ Clean and unclean meats
- ___ Faith
- ___ Gifts
- ___ Holy spirit
- ___ Love
- ___ Resurrection

What Is Man?

___ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

God

___ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Man's Need for Repentance

___ In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

___ And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."

___ If My people who are called by My name, will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

___ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

___ And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

Our Duty

___ Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to

1. Gen. 1:27	14. 1 Sam. 8:7	27. Mat. 24:13
2. Gen. 3:19	15. 2 Chron 7:14	28. Mat. 24:14
3. Gen. 19:26	16. Ps. 119:172	29. Mat. 24:22
4. Ex. 20:2	17. Prov. 11:14	30. Mark 7:7
5. Ex. 20:8	18. Prov. 15:1	31. Luke 4:4
6. Ex. 20:9-10	19. Prov. 17:22	32. Romans 6
7. Ex. 20:11	20. Prov. 19:9	33. Romans 8
8. Ex. 20:15	21. Prov. 23:23	34. 1 Cor. 12
9. Lev. 11, Dt. 14	22. Prov. 29:15	35. 1 Cor. 13
10. Deut. 12:32	23. Mat. 5:13	36. M1 Cor. 15
11. Deut. 16:16	24. Mat. 5:16	37. Heb. 11
12. Josh. 1:9	25. Mat. 7:14	
13. Judges 21:25	26. Mat. 10:8	

it nor take away from it.

___ But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

___ Be strong and of good courage, do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

___ Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also get wisdom and understanding.

___ You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

___ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

___ But he who endures to the end will be saved.

___ But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"

The Commandments

___ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

___ You shall not steal.

___ For all Your commandments are righteousness.

Sabbath

___ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

___ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

Finances, Tithes & Offerings

___ Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

___ ... Freely you have received, freely give.

Success

___ Where there is not counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

Health

___ A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.

Dealing With Others

___ A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

___ A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish.

End Time

___ And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

___ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Love, Marriage & Family

___ The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

Death & Afterlife

___ ... For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.

Know Your Bible Answers

1) Books. 2) Garden of Eden. 3) Angels. 4) Egypt. 5) Joseph.

Remembering the Commandments

Here's one way to remember the Commandments in order!

By Gregory Dullum
Part 16

A young boy was attending a confirmation class in one of the churches of this world. He was asked to list the 10 Commandments *in any order*. He replied, “3, 6, 8, 2, 5, 7, 9, 1, 10, 4.”

We have just completed our study of the 10 Commandments. Can we remember them in the correct order—not just the numbers—but (at least) the short version of the words?

When I was younger, I had problems remembering Commandments 6, 7, 8 and 9 *in order*. During a youth activities weekend in Memphis, Tenn., March 2, 1991, my former pastor, Arnold Clauson, gave a sermon on the 10 commandments that helped me to remember the commandments in their proper order.

After learning the method I am about to share with you, I have been able to keep all 10 straight in my mind. This method involves visualization, which is a memory aid.

1. “You shall have no other gods before Me.” To remember this first commandment, think of a large numeral “1.” That large numeral “1” stands for “one God.” We are to worship *only* ONE God—the ONE true God!

2. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image.”—We should have no idols. Picture a large Roman numeral “II.” These are the sides of a carved statue. Between these two sides imagine there is a carved wooden or stone idol. This will help us remember that the second commandment is summarized as “no idols!”

3. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.” Imagining the profile of a face, the numeral “3” looks like a pair of lips resting between the nose and chin. It is with our lips that we may take God’s name in vain.

4. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” If you look carefully at the numeral “4” you will notice it has a triangular shaped “hole” at the top of it. This “holey” numeral can remind us of the fourth commandment—keep the Sabbath holy!

5. “Honor your father and your mother.” The shape of the numeral “5” is such that it’s possible to imagine two

faces in the open spaces. Father, with his short hair—wearing a “flattop” or crew cut—occupies the open space on the top right of the numeral, and Mother, with longer hair that curls around her face, fills the bottom left open space. This image can help us remember that the fifth commandment is to honor our father and mother.

Another option is to remember “five” starts with the letter “F” and so does the phrase, “father and mother.”

6. “You shall not murder.” Tip the numeral “6” on its side, embellish it a little, and it becomes a pistol, or “six-gun.” You can straighten the line to make a barrel; add a trigger inside the hole and a handle; or picture the “6” as a handle and the bullet chamber, and add a barrel on one end and a trigger underneath. Just remembering the phrase “six-gun” is enough to help me remember the sixth commandment is “You shall not murder.”

7. “You shall not commit adultery.” Tip the numeral “7” on its left side, add a line, and you form an “A” which stands for “adultery.” If it helps, picture it being bright red in color, as in the classic novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, which deals with adultery.

8. “You shall not steal.” Turn the numeral “8” on its side and it becomes a pair of handcuffs, ready to be used on a thief who has been apprehended and is going to jail. These handcuffs remind us of the eighth commandment—Don’t steal!

9. “You shall not bear false witness.” If you have learned about wildlife in the north woods, you have learned that bears can climb trees and poles, so you shouldn’t climb a tree to escape a bear. You may also have seen a cute and cuddly looking Australian koala bear clinging to a tree branch. Picture the numeral 9 as a pole with a bear clinging to it. This image will help us remember that the ninth commandment is to not bear false witness.

10. “You shall not covet.” If you bend the “1” so that it has a curve to it, it forms the letter “C.” The zero can also be read as the letter “O.” Thus the numeral “10” forms the first two letters of the word, “COvet.” This imagery will help us remember that the 10th commandment is “Do not covet.”

Fun Fact



Drawing and Fun Fact are courtesy of NAPS

According to scientists, more than 99.9 percent of the species that ever lived on the earth were extinct before the coming of man. [If this is true, imagine the variety of life that existed on earth prior to Lucifer’s rebellion—life that was destroyed and left under the watery grave we find in Gen. 1:2.]

Witerature

Wit and wisdom to complement the truths of the Holy Bible can be found in secular writings.

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L’Engle., Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964, p. 62.

Few Words

“‘Oh, we don’t travel at the speed of *anything*,’ Mrs. Whatsit explained earnestly. ‘We *tesser*. Or you might say, we *wrinkle*.’ ...

“*Tesser*, Meg thought. Could that have anything to do with Mother’s tesseract?”

“She was about to ask when Mrs. Which began to speak, and one did not interrupt when Mrs. Which was speaking. ‘Mrs. Whatsit iss yyoungg andd nnaïve.’

“‘She keeps thinking she can explain things in *words*,’ Mrs. Who said. ‘*Qui plus sait, plus se tait*. French, you know. The more a man knows, the less he talks.’”

Prov. 10:14, 12:23, Eccles. 6:11

Quotable Quotes

“If a man has done his best, what else is there?” —Gen. George S. Patton

Memory Scripture

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.”

—James 4:10

Naming the Seven Days of the Week

It's a new year on man's calendar. It's time to toss out the old wall calendars and pin up new ones for 2016.

I have an Almanac Calendar that emphasizes the phases of the moon, growing cycles, etc. On its first page is a lengthy article titled, "Explanation of Signs of the Zodiac Shown on Weather Chart and Almanac Calendar."

Part of this article gives us an explanation as to how the days of the week were named. In the beginning, God named only one day—the seventh—which He called the Sabbath. The others were simply referred to as the first day, second day, third day, etc. (See Genesis 1-2.)

Where did the other names come from? The Almanac Calendar explains:

"The names of the week days are another expression of the astrological teachings of the ancients. Centuries of observation had convinced them that each day of the week is ruled by a certain planet, and so they named the day in honor of its ruling planet. It is not so apparent what the names mean in our language, which comes from the Anglo-Saxon tongue, as it is in the French language, which comes from Latin, the same language in which the planets are named.

"Thus Monday is the moon's day. Tuesday, or Mardi, as it is called in French, is Mars' day. Wednesday, or Mercredi, as it is called in French, is Mercury's day. Thursday, or Jeudi, as it is in French, is Jupiter's day. Friday, or Vendredi, as the French call it, is Venus' day. Saturday is Saturn's day; and Sunday is the Sun's day.

"Thus if you wish to do anything which requires the sun's aid alone, such as destroying germs in bedding from a sick room, Sunday is the day to put it out in the sun.

"Friday, being Venus' day, is the best day for proposals of marriage. Tuesday, being presided over by Mars, is the best day for any new undertaking."

We are not to worship the stars and planets (Deut. 4:19). In ancient Israel the penalty for this was death (Deut. 17:2-5).

"Astrologers, stargazers and monthly prognosticators" were condemned to the flame in Isa. 47:13-14.

People in society around us may think there is some truth to astrology, but we shouldn't let astrology run our lives. "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them" (Jer. 10:2).



Britain Considers Leaving E.U.

"Prime Minister David Cameron on Tuesday [Nov. 10] formally laid out Britain's conditions for remaining in the European Union, seeking changes in his country's relationship with Brussels that he is betting are substantial enough to win over a majority of British voters but modest enough for the rest of Europe to swallow.

"In a speech here [London] and a written letter of proposals for reform, Mr. Cameron called on fellow European leaders to grant him a series of concessions to help persuade wavering Britons to remain in a bloc that critics say has become a vast bureaucracy impinging on their national sovereignty and way of life. Mr. Cameron has promised to put the issue to a referendum by the end of 2017, and his aides suggest that he might do so as early as next June. . . .

"The negotiation over Britain's demands will also be a crucial test for nations, starting with Germany and France, that are struggling to maintain cohesion and a sense of progress within the bloc after years in which economic stagnation, rising populism and assertive nationalism have undercut their plans to bind the Continent's governments and people more closely together" ("Seeking Changes From E.U., David Cameron Outlines Conditions for Britain to Stay" by Stephen Castle and Steven Erlanger, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, Nov. 10, 2015, pp. 1-2).

Bible prophecy and an understanding of history tell us there will be a 10-nation revival of the Roman Empire in Europe before Christ returns (Dan. 2:40-45). Britain, descended from the Israelite tribe of Ephraim, will NOT be part of the European Union. The union will be used by God to punish Britain, America, and other English-speaking nations for their sins by taking them into captivity. As the European Union takes its final shape, expect Britain to exit.

Again, we see that union as it now stands is not strong, and neither will be the final 10-nation union. "As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they

will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay" (Dan. 2:43). This final world-ruling power will be crushed when Jesus Christ returns to this earth (Dan. 2:44).

China Currency OK'd as a Main World Currency

"The Chinese renminbi was anointed as one of the world's elite currencies on Monday [Nov. 30], a milestone decision by the International Monetary Fund that underscores the country's rising financial and economic heft.

"The move will help pave the way for broader use of the renminbi in trade and finance, securing China's standing as a global economic power. Just four other currencies—the dollar, the euro, the pound and the yen—have the I.M.F. designation" ("China's Renminbi Is Approved by I.M.F. as a Main World Currency" by Keith Bradsher, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, Nov. 30, 2015, p. 1).

God promised to break the pride of our power if we reject Him. We are losing our economic power in the world and other nations are taking the lead, as God has promised.

Shooting Kills 14

"A heavily armed man and woman terrorized this city [San Bernardino, Calif.] on Wednesday [Dec. 2], killing at least 14 people and wounding at least 17 at a social services center before leading the police on a manhunt culminating in a shootout that left the two suspects dead, the authorities said" ("San Bernardino Shooting Kills at Least 14; Two Suspects Are Dead" by Adam Nagourney, Ian Lovett and Richard Pérez-Peña, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, Dec. 2, 2015, p. 1).

These types of mass shootings will increase. "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors . . ." (2 Tim. 3:1-4).