

Does YEHOVAH God's Year Start With the Barley Harvest?

John D. Keyser

Although barley ripens in the spring, the following considerations indicate that the barley harvest *does not* establish the first day of YEHOVAH God's year --

- 1) For two successive growing seasons (the Sabbath and Jubilee years), no grain was to be planted and, therefore, no maturing barley was available to consult for the beginning of the year -- see Leviticus 25:1-24. While it is true that barley sometimes sprouts and grows by itself with no cultivation, this was far less likely in the second year. It was illegal under YEHOVAH's law to voluntarily reap grain in the 50th year, so Israel probably allowed their flocks to graze the fields. This was perfectly legal -- see Leviticus 25:7, 11.
- 2) During the Flood, Noah was apparently quite able to determine the first day of the year without consulting the barley harvest.
- 3) During the forty years that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness (a desert), they kept a careful record of the months and years -- apparently without consulting the barley harvest in Canaan!

Calendar Considerations

- 1) The period of time from the Vernal Equinox to the Autumnal Equinox equals approximately 186 days, which leaves about 179 or 180 days between the Autumnal Equinox and the Vernal Equinox.
- 2) From one New Moon to the next New Moon (a synodic month) equals approximately 29.5 days.
- 3) From the first New Moon to the seventh New Moon equals 177 days (29.5 X 6 lunar months = 177 days).

Let's assume this is a year in which a New Moon falls 13 days *before* the spring equinox:

As noted above, from the first New Moon to the seventh New Moon equals 177 days. Now since 6 lunar months is **9 days shorter** than the 186 days between the spring and fall equinoxes, then it is a mistake to reckon the first of the year from a New Moon which is seen (as indicated above) 13 days before the spring equinox. It is true that Passover will fall on or after the spring equinox in this scenario, but what happens to the fall festivals?

Subtract the 13 days "spent" before the spring equinox from the 177 days comprising the six lunar months (177 days - 13 days = 164 days), then subtract the quotient (164 days) from the 186 days the circuit of the sun makes from the spring equinox to the fall equinox. This brings us to a time

that is 21 or 22 days BEFORE the autumnal equinox -- thereby placing most of the Feast of Tabernacles BEFORE the “turn of the year” (before the *tekufah* or equinox).

If we accept a New Moon nearest -- but 13 days before -- the spring equinox as the first day of Abib or Nisan, then the 177 days (which make up the six lunar months) causes the first day of the 7th month (Tishri) to fall 21 or 22 days BEFORE the autumnal equinox -- thus placing most of the eight days of Tabernacles into the summer season instead of the autumn or fall. This clearly violates Leviticus 23:39.

4) The sun *and* moon determine days, months, years and seasons [festivals -- including the weekly Sabbath] (Genesis 1:14-16).

Therefore, it is *not* the green ears of barley, but the sun and moon which determine the calendar and, as a result, the year. So what signals the end of one year and the beginning of another, if not the barley harvest? The equinox and the New Moon do!

Equinox = Tekufah

The equinox occurs because of the (apparent) action of the sun. The earth -- which is tilted 23.5 degrees -- circles the sun, thereby creating our seasons (spring, summer, fall and winter). The equinox occurs when the sun “crosses” the equator. The Hebrew word is *tekufah*, and refers to the solstices as well as to the equinoxes.

Tekufot (plural) means “seasons” -- literally, “circuit, to go round.” The four seasons in the year are called *tekufot*. More accurately, *tekufot* is the beginning of the four seasons and, according to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Vol. 5, article: Calendar, p. 46), *tekufah* stands for the true, not the mean, equinox.

The *tekufah* (singular) of Nisan denotes the sun at the vernal equinox.

The next *tekufah* denotes the summer solstice.

The third *tekufah* denotes the fall equinox.

The fourth *tekufah* denotes the winter solstice.

Tekufah appears in the Bible four times -- and relates to the calendar at least three times:

And it came to pass at the end [**tekufah**] of the year, that the Syrians came up against him:...(2 Chronicles 24:23).

Now this refers to the end and, therefore, the beginning of another year, demarcated by the spring equinox and the New Moon.

And you shall observe the feast of weeks, even the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year’s end [**tekufah**] (Exodus 34:22).

This passage refers to the fall equinox -- the end of the summer growing season.

In them [the heavens] he has set a tent for the sun, which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs it's course with joy. It's rising is from the end of the heavens and it's circuit [**tekufah**] to the end of them, and there is nothing hid from it's heat (Psalm 19:4, 5 RSV).

This passage is describing the sun's daily course, or it's yearly circuit through the equinoxes and the solstices -- or both.

And it came to pass, when the time was come [**tekufah**] about, that Hannah conceived, and bore a son;...(1 Samuel 1:20).

This may indirectly allude to the calendar year. In any case, the above passages from the Bible indicate that the men of YEHOVAH God in the Old Testament understood the equinox and it's place in YEHOVAH's calendar.

Which New Moon? -- Nearest, or After the Equinox?

It is common knowledge that the spring equinox usually falls on 3/20 or 3/21 as reckoned by the Roman calendar we use today. Very rarely does it fall on 3/19 or 3/22. But could the ancient Israelites locate the equinox by the Roman calendar? No -- in the Old Testament times the Romans were not yet on the scene. The irregularity of the lunar months (compared to the solar year) cause the spring equinox to fall on a different day of the month each year (and sometimes in a different month), though always in the last month of the year.

Let's assume that we live in King David's time when astronomy and communication was not what it is today. We would first have to locate the equinox, and only then could we, with any certainty, choose the correct New Moon to begin the new year with. If we hope to choose the New Moon nearest (either before or after) the equinox, we may fail because of the *uncertainty in the length of the lunar month*. Suppose we choose a New Moon 15 days before the vernal equinox on the assumption the month will have 30 days. However, suppose it turns out to have only 29 days -- we will not have chosen the New Moon nearest the equinox since there are 15 days before, but only 14 days after! We must wait until the equinox is established, and only then can we choose a New Moon -- the New Moon next after that event. Because of the uncertainty regarding the length of the month (and other reasons) the year should always begin with the New Moon next AFTER the spring equinox -- rather than the New Moon nearest the equinox.

Abib -- A Spring Month

The month of Abib or Nisan should always start in the spring -- NEVER in winter! When does spring begin? At the equinox, when the sun (apparently) crosses the equator, never earlier than 3/19 as reckoned by the Roman Gregorian calendar we use today. Is it reasonable to think the year sometimes begins in the spring -- but at other times in the winter? The Bible clearly indicates that the first month of YEHOVAH God's year should ALWAYS start in the same season of the year -- SPRING. Compare the following passage as it appears in the King James Version of the Bible and the Revised Standard Version --

And it came to pass, **after the year was expired**, at the time when kings go forth to battle...(2 Samuel 11:1, KJV).

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go forth to battle...(ibid., RSV).

Since the old year expires in the spring, it is reasonable to assume that the New Year begins in the spring as well. Notice also the following scriptures:

And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for **at the return of the year** the king of Syria will come up against thee (I Kings 20:22, KJV).

And the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, “Go, strengthen yourself; take note, and see what you should do, for **in the spring of the year** the king of Syria will come up against you” (1 Kings 20:22, NKJV).

And it came to pass **at the return of the year**, that Ben-ha-dad numbered the Syrians, and went up to A-phek, to fight against Israel (I Kings 20:26, KJV).

So it was, **in the spring of the year**, that Ben-Hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to A-phek to fight against Israel (1 Kings 20:26, NKJV).

And it came to pass, that **after the year was expired**, at the time that kings go out to battle, Joab led forth the power of the army, and wasted the country of the children of Ammon...(I Chronicles 20:1, KJV).

And it happened, **in the spring of the year**, at the time kings go out to battle, that Joab led out the armed forces and ravaged the country of the people of Ammon...(1 Chronicles 20:1, NKJV).

And **when the year was expired**, king Neb-u-chad-nez-zar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD...(II Chronicles 36:10, KJV).

In the spring of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon, with the precious vessels of the house of the LORD, and made his brother Zedeki'ah king over Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:10, RSV).

According to Henry Wylle in *Does Close Count?* --

It seems to have been understood all over the world, from ancient times until now, that the vernal equinox signals the arrival of spring and the autumnal equinox signals the arrival of fall.... Wait until the sun signals the arrival of spring at the equinox, then select the first visible new crescent for the beginning of months:...the first month of the year to you.

In *Horns of the Moon*, by Terry McKee, we find the following:

The Scriptures state that the Passover occurs,
'...at the season' [Heb. = Moed] (Deut. 16:6);
'...in his season [moed] from year to year' (Ex. 13:10);
'...at his appointed season' [moed] (Nu. 9:2)

[Since Passover is in the first month,] surely the new year begins in the same season [eth] each year, and not sometimes in the spring and sometimes in the winter. Many Scriptures seem to point to spring while none...indicate another season. A new moon nearest but before the equinox would start some years in a winter month, causing the [festivals] to occur out of their seasons.

...Look to the first new moon after the spring equinox and start the year. This will always keep Passover in spring and Tabernacles in fall. Since the festivals generally are harvest festivals how could it be any other way?

Is There a 13th Month?

Some people have been astonished to learn that some years in YEHOVAH God's calendar have 13 months. Since the lunar month consists of approximately 29.5 days, a year of only 12 months equals 354 days -- 11 days shorter than the solar year. If there was never a 13th month in the year, the harvest festivals would soon be out of season. In less than 28 years they would rotate through all the months of the year. This is exactly what happens with the Muslim Calendar.

If we truly accept the Biblical calendar we will not have a problem arranging the 13th month because YEHOVAH God will do it for us. If you always choose the New Moon that comes next AFTER the spring equinox, the 13th month will automatically fall into place in the proper year. It is interesting to realize that a 13th month is needed a little more than every third year.

Summary

- 1) The Jewish authorities admit that the Hillel Calendar currently in use by them is in error; that is, it is NOT the calendar used by the Jewish people in 30 A.D.
- 2) Israel's calendar has seen three important phases: Months established by (1) visual sightings only; (2) both visual sightings and calculation; and (3) calculation only.
- 3) The word "day," depending on its use in a sentence, can refer to 12 hours of daylight, or to the 24 hour day, **beginning at sunset**.
- 4) The week is based on the **phases of the moon** and the weekly Sabbath always falls on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th of YEHOVAH's month.
- 5) The month is from one visible new crescent to the next, consisting of 29 or 30 days each; and begins -- NOT with the conjunction -- but with the **visible new crescent**.
- 6) The year can be either 12 or 13 months in length.

7) The 1st of Abib (or Nisan) must NOT be reckoned by the barley harvest. Noah (during the flood), and Moses (during 40 years in the desert) did not have any barley crops available to consult, yet they faithfully noted the first day of each month and each year.

8) Abib (Nisan) is a SPRING MONTH and should NEVER begin in the winter season. This will always keep Passover in the spring and Tabernacles in the fall -- as is proper for the harvest festivals outlined in the Bible.

9) The sun establishes the equinox and these, along with the moon, establish the day, the week, the month, the year and the festivals (Genesis 1:14-16, NEB).

Conclusion

Terry McKee concludes by saying --

The new moons and equinoxes are the natural calendar made by the Creator [YHVH -- YEHOVAH]. That calendar can't be tampered with by man. It is always there, and was certainly understood by those who wrote the Scriptures (Ex. 34:22; Ps. 19:6). The new moon starts the month and the sun starts the year by appearing to move from solstice to solstice, passing through the equinoxes. How simple. How beautiful (*Horns of the Moon*).