

Is the Jewish Calendar a Month Off in 2021?

By T.W. Tramm

A TOPIC of debate is how to calculate the biblical New Year, Nisan 1.

Some calculate Nisan 1 by first establishing the new moon of the seventh month, Tishrei. A new moon is chosen that allows at least part of the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles to occur after the fall equinox, then six months are subtracted to arrive at Nisan 1.

Others calculate Nisan 1 by selecting the new moon nearest (before or after) the spring equinox.

Still others calculate Nisan 1 by selecting the first new moon that allows the 14th day of the month, Passover, to fall on or after the spring equinox.

Employing one or more of the above rules, most Jewish calendars have Nisan 1 corresponding to March 14 in 2021.

However, some would disagree with the March 14 reckoning, based on the following Scripture:

“Observe the month of Aviv [Nisan] and celebrate the Passover of the LORD your God, because in the month of Aviv he brought you out of Egypt ...” (Deut. 16:1).

The Hebrew word translated “observe,” *shamar*, means to “keep within bounds, to preserve, protect, or guard.”

What does it mean to “keep within bounds” the month of Nisan?

Since the nearest astronomical marker, or boundary, is the vernal/spring equinox, it refers to observing the month at the correct time relative to the equinox.

Because Nisan is the month of springtime and ripening barley, it’s reasoned that it should be observed during the spring season, i.e. only AFTER the vernal equinox. To have the month of Nisan straddling the equinox boundary as sometimes occurs on the modern Jewish calendar is to fail to keep the month “within bounds” as prescribed in Deuteronomy.

Let’s consider some other rationale for the post-equinox reckoning of Nisan.

CUTTING THE YEAR SHORT

Scripture implies that Earth's annual circuit around the Sun has a starting point: "In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other" (Ps. 19:4, 6).

That the Sun makes a "circuit" connotes more than just the daily sunrise/sunset cycle but a path of travel. The logical starting point of Earth's path of travel around the Sun is the spring equinox, linked to the first month of the year (Ex. 12:1). Therefore, to place Nisan 1 before the equinox is to start the New Year before Earth has completed its annual circuit, i.e. before the preceding year has ended.

The modern Jewish calendar doesn't always place Nisan 1 before the equinox. Applying the rules mentioned at the beginning, Nisan more often than not begins after the equinox, which means some years begin in winter and others in spring. Critics of the modern Jewish calendar note that to begin the biblical year in a different season from year to year, winter OR spring, is inconsistent with the orderly character of God (1 Cor. 14:33).

The modern Jewish calendar's reckoning of Nisan creates difficulties with the main fall festival as well.

OUT OF SEASON

Placing Nisan 1 before the spring equinox sometimes causes the Feast of Tabernacles to occur out of its biblically appointed season, the fall:

"Celebrate the ... Feast of Ingathering [Tabernacles] at the turn of the year" (Ex. 34:22).

The Hebrew word translated "turn" in the above verse, *tekufah*, refers to "a revolution (of the sun), or a coming around in a circuit." The two main turning points in Earth's annual circuit are the spring and fall equinoxes, the two times a year when the Sun crosses the celestial equator and the length of day and night are equal.

Notice some Bible translations render the phrase "at the turn" more plainly "in the autumn":

"Keep the Festival of Shelters [Tabernacles] in the autumn, when you gather your fruit" (v.23 GNT).

So according to Scripture, the Feast of Tabernacles is to be observed in the autumn. Yet, as noted earlier, the modern Jewish calendar requires only part of the seven-day Tabernacles festival to occur in the fall. Observing Tabernacles partly in summer and partly in fall ignores not only the biblical command to keep the festival "in the autumn" but the emphasis throughout Scripture on all things having an appointed season:

"For everything there is a season" (Ecc. 3:1).

“Can you bring out the constellations in their [assigned] season” (Job 38:32).

Question: If the Feast of Tabernacles can occur in two seasons in the same year—summer AND fall— which season is it appointed to?

FIRSTFRUITS OFFERING

Reckoning Nisan 1 before the spring equinox, during the winter, especially during a particularly cold and wet winter, can result in the barley not being ripe enough for the firstfruits offering a few days after Passover (Lev. 23:9-14).

Alternatively, when the first of Nisan is reckoned after the equinox—when the whole month is kept “within bounds” relative to the turn of the season—the barley has plenty of time to ripen during the longer and warmer post-equinox days.

Some argue that reckoning Nisan 1 always after the equinox can result in the barley crop being left in the field too long, subject to rot, as one waits to begin harvesting on the day of the firstfruits offering. However, Scripture does not prohibit the cutting of grain before the day of firstfruits; it merely says the new grain cannot be eaten, or consumed, before this day (Lev. 23:14).

Therefore reckoning Nisan always after the equinox does not create a problem for the barley crop, whereas beginning Nisan too early, in the winter, may result in the grain not being ripe in time for the firstfruits offering.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The case for a spring reckoning of Nisan 1 centers on the vernal-equinox “boundary” and God’s command to “shamar,” or keep within bounds, the month of Aviv (Deut. 16:1).

A similar divine statute is found in Exodus pertaining to the Feast of Tabernacles being observed in the autumn (34:22). Because everything has an appointed season in Scripture, it makes sense for the whole seven-day festival, not just a portion, to be observed in the fall.

The God of the Bible is a God of order and consistency. The notion that Nisan and Tabernacles can occur in different seasons from year to year seems at odds with this fundamental truth.

With the above in view, the modern Jewish calendar’s pre-equinox reckoning of Nisan in 2021 is called into question. When we instead reckon Nisan 1 AFTER the equinox per our reading of Scripture, the first day of the biblical year corresponds to April 13, and the 2021 festival dates are as follows:

Passover: April 27

Unleavened Bread: April 28

Firstfruits: May 2

Pentecost: June 20

Feast of Trumpets: October 7

Day of Atonement: October 16

Feast of Tabernacles: October 21

It's interesting that Pentecost occurs on the June solstice, the longest day of the year and also the first day of summer.

Also noteworthy is a span of 2,550 days (1,260 + 1,290) between the Feast of Trumpets 2021 and the Day of Atonement 2028.

Is the modern Jewish calendar a month off in 2021?

A scriptural case can be made that it is.

Nonetheless, different readings of Scripture and a profusion of manmade calendar-rules make for a lack of consensus.

Jesus certainly anticipated the calendar confusion in the last days.

Perhaps this is why He tells us to keep watch (Mark 13:37).

NOTES:

1. Biblical months begin with the new moon.

2. The difference between the true biblical calendar and the modern Jewish calendar is that the latter has incorporated many rules and traditions not found in Scripture.

3. All methods employed by today's Jewish calendar to determine Nisan 1 involve some form of pre-calculation. In contrast, designating the new moon after the equinox Nisan 1 requires no pre-calculation; one simply waits for the equinox to occur and then designates the following new moon Nisan 1.

4. Hebrew "shamar" (Strong's #8104).

5. Hebrew "tekufah" (Strong's #8622).

6. Nisan 1 dates as reckoned on the modern Jewish calendar:

2015 (5775) = March 21

2016 (5776) = April 9

2017 (5777) = March 28

2018 (5778) = March 17*

2019 (5779) = April 6

2020 (5780) = March 26

2021 (5781) March 14*

2022 (5782) = April 2

2023 (5783) = March 23

2024 (5784) = April 9

2025 (5785) = March 30

2026 (5786) = March 19*

2027 (5787) = April 8

2028 (5788) = March 28

* Nisan begins in winter.

7. The Hebrew word Aviv refers to ripening heads of grain (Strong's 24).

8. Some teach that the ripened barley determines the first month of the year. However, Scripture tells us to use the lights in the firmament (sun and moon) to calculate the calendar: "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons (appointed times), and for days, and years" (Gen. 1:14). Notice there is no mention of barley or vegetation in God's instructions, only the sun, moon, and stars.

9. Day counts based on an October 7, 2021, Feast of Trumpets:

Feast of Trumpets 2021 to Day of Atonement 2028 = 2,550 days

<https://www.timeanddate.com/date/durationresult.html?m1=10&d1=07&y1=2021&m2=09&d2=29&y2=2028&ti=on>

Feast of Trumpets 2021 to spring equinox 2025 = 1,260 days

<https://www.timeanddate.com/date/durationresult.html?m1=10&d1=7&y1=2021&m2=3&d2=20&y2=2025>

10. Date alignments do not necessarily reveal anything about the timing of the Rapture. Scripture says “no man knows the day” and implores us to be prepared “in season and out of season” for the appearing of Jesus Christ (Matt. 24: 36, 44; 2 Tim. 4:1, 2).