

CALENDAR CONFUSION

Fundamental to understanding our proximity to Jesus' return is the biblical calendar. This is why the Devil, working through the antichrist spirit in the world, aims to corrupt it:

"He will intend to change the appointed times [religious festivals] and laws" (Dan.7:25).

One way Satan has tried to corrupt the biblical calendar is by muddying the year-count. Knowing where we stand on the year-count is crucial because, based on the pattern set at Creation Week, six days of labor followed by one day of rest, Jesus is expected to appear after 6,000 years to judge the world and set up the Millennial Kingdom.^{1,2}

How near are we to the 6,000th year? Scholars who study the genealogies in Genesis, the record of Adam and Eve's descendants and how long they lived, calculate that Creation occurred around 4,000 BC:

- Frank Klassen calculates that Creation occurred in 3975 BC.

- D. Petavius calculates that Creation occurred in 3983 BC.
- James Ussher and Dr. Floyd Nolan Jones calculate that Creation occurred in 4004 BC.

According to the above reckonings, the world is presently 5,995, 6,003, and 6,024 years old, respectively. The calculations vary somewhat as certain points in the biblical timeline are challenging to work out, requiring careful study of multiple passages. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that we are, as of 2021, at or near the 6,000th year, the time when Jesus is expected to return.

JEWISH RECKONING

That the biblical calculations indicate Creation occurred 6,000 years ago raises the question, why does the Jewish calendar reckon 2021 as only 5,781 years from Creation? The short answer is that the Jewish reckoning is off by about 220 years because it is not calculated from Scripture but rather an ancient rabbinic writing, the Seder Olam, which is known to contain timeline errors. For instance, the Seder Olam records the Persian Period to have lasted only 34 years, while secular history records it to have lasted 185 years, from 516 BC to 331 BC. This error alone amounts to a 150-year discrepancy. There are other problems and discrepancies in the rabbinic timeline as well. When we add them up, it is generally agreed that the Jewish year-count is off by about 220 years.

The next obvious question is, *why* does the ancient Jewish record compress these important timelines? Christian scholars suspect that the missing years were *consciously* suppressed to disguise the fact that Daniel's Weeks Prophecy proves Jesus is Messiah as

He appeared at the exact time predicted, based on the issuing of a Persian decree allowing the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24–27).

THE BIBLICAL NEW YEAR

Another way Satan has tried to corrupt the biblical calendar is by sowing confusion around the start point of the year. The modern Jewish calendar begins the year in what the Bible calls the “seventh month,” Tishrei, in the fall. However, God says the year begins in the month of Nisan in the spring (Ex. 12:1–3).

To justify reckoning biblical years from Tishrei, some cite a writing by Jewish historian Josephus (b. 37AD):

“Moses appointed that Nisan should be the first month for their festivals because he brought them out of Egypt in that month: so that this month began the year, as to all the solemnities [festivals] they observed to the honour of God; although he preserved the original order of the months, as to selling and buying, and other ordinary affairs” (Joseph. Antiq. Lib i. c.2. s.3.).

Josephus writes that Moses “preserved the original order of the months,” referring to the fall-reckoning, for purposes related to commerce and other ordinary affairs. One has to assume this information came solely from the rabbis, however, as there is no mention whatsoever in Scripture or the sacred history of Moses preserving any portion of the old calendar. One would think that such vital information would be mentioned at least once in Scripture. However, it is not.

Some point to a verse in Exodus in support of the fall reckoning of the year:

“And you shall observe the ... Feast of Ingathering [Tabernacles] at the year’s end” (Ex. 34:22).

The argument is that the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall is said to mark the “end” of the year. However, the Hebrew word translated “end,” *tekufah*, also rendered “turn,” refers to the turn of the seasons at the equinox (more on this coming up). Thus, Exodus 34 is simply referring to observing Tabernacles after the fall equinox.

Still others teach, based on God’s command to sound the trumpet declaring the Year of Jubilee on the Day of Atonement, that Jubilee years begin in Tishrei (Lev. 25). However, the day on which the jubilee trumpet is sounded has nothing to do with the start point of the year. The Day of Atonement is simply the day God has chosen to declare the Jubilee. The obvious problem with counting Jubilee years from the fall, while regular years begin in the spring, is that it creates a confusing six-month overlap. God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

The bottom line is that God says to count years from Nisan in the spring (Ex. 12:1–3). Nowhere in Scripture does He amend or qualify this command. Therefore, regardless of how years were reckoned before Israel became a nation, from the time of the Exodus forward, years are to be reckoned from the spring.

It is vital to count years from the correct start point as prophecies to be discussed later rely on a reckoning of years.

RECKONING NISAN 1

A third way Satan has tried to corrupt the biblical calendar is by sowing confusion around the start time of the month of Nisan. Biblical calendar observers agree that Nisan begins with a new

moon on or near the spring equinox. However, there is debate as to *which* new moon:³

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

Others calculate Nisan 1 by selecting the new moon simply 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 2021.⁴ However, a key verse of Scripture calls this reckoning into question:

“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).⁵

The Hebrew word translated “observe,” *shamar*, in Deuteronomy means to “keep within bounds, to preserve, protect, or guard.”⁶ What does it mean to “keep within bounds” the month of Nisan? Since the nearest astronomical marker, or boundary, is the spring–vernal 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 makes sense that it should be observed during the spring season, i.e. *after* the equinox that marks the transition from winter to spring. 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.

Supporting the post-equinox reckoning of Nisan 1 is a Scripture that implies 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 from “one end of the heavens ... to the other” connotes more than just the daily sunrise–sunset cycle; it signifies a path of travel with a starting point. 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, or before the prior year has ended.

We should note that the modern Jewish calendar does not always place Nisan 1 before the equinox. Applying the rules mentioned at the outset, Nisan most often begins after the equinox, which means some years begin in winter and others in spring.⁷ The problem with starting the year in a different season from year to year, sometimes in winter and sometimes in spring, is that it is confusing and inconsistent with the orderly character of God (1 Cor. 14:33).

FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The modern Jewish calendar’s reckoning of Nisan also creates difficulties with the main fall festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, by causing it to land outside of its biblically appointed season:

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

The Hebrew word translated “turn” in Exodus, *tekufah*, refers to “a revolution (of the sun), or a coming around in a circuit.”⁸ The 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. Other 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” (Ex. 34:22 GNT).

Thus, 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 festival to occur in the autumn. Observing Tabernacles partly in summer and partly in fall ignores the command to keep the festival “in the autumn” and runs counter to the biblical principal that all things have an appointed season (Ecc. 3:1; 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

A final factor supporting the post-equinox reckoning of Nisan 1 relates to the firstfruits offering. In Leviticus 23, God tells Israel that when the grain is ready to be harvested in the spring, the priest is to bring a sheaf of the first cut barley to the Temple to be offered up before the Lord (Lev. 23:9–11). Reckoning Nisan 1 be-

fore the spring equinox, during the winter, especially during a particularly cold winter, can result in the barley not being ripe in time for the firstfruits offering. 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 grain being left too long in the field, subject to rot, as one waits to begin harvesting on the day of firstfruits. However, Scripture does not prohibit the cutting of grain before firstfruits. It merely says the new grain cannot be eaten, or consumed, before this day (Lev. 23:14). Thus, reckoning Nisan after the equinox does not create a problem for the grain, whereas beginning Nisan too early, in the winter, can result in the grain not being ripe in time for the firstfruits offering.⁹

To sum up, 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 (Ex. 34:22). Because all things have an appointed season, 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, as per the modern Jewish calendar, is inconsistent with this fundamental truth. Thus, the Jewish calendar’s reckoning of Nisan 1 in 2021 is called into question. When we instead reckon Nisan 1 *after* the equinox in accordance with Exodus 34, the first day of the biblical year corresponds to April 12–13, and the 2021 festival dates are as follows:^{10, 11}

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

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the correct reckoning of Pentecost is an area of controversy. Having considered the various arguments, I believe that the biblically correct way to calculate Pentecost is to begin the countdown of seven weeks on the day after the regular (Saturday) Sabbath following Passover (Lev. 23:15). This reckoning puts Pentecost on June 20, the first day of summer and the longest day of the year in 2021.^{12, 13}

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Throughout the ages, Satan has tried to muddy the biblical calendar and thus our understanding of the times. Confusion has been sown around where we stand on the 6,000-year timeline, the month in which the year begins, and the timing of the New Year and festivals. Despite the confusion, we understand that . . .

- We are presently at or near the 6,000th year.

SUMMER IS NEAR

- God counts years from Nisan in the spring.
- The modern Jewish calendar reckons the New Year and festivals a month prematurely in 2021.

Jesus certainly anticipated the calendar confusion in the last days. Perhaps this is why He warns us to “keep watch” (Mark 13:37).