

# Biblical Months Begin With the New Moon

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

We live in a time of growing doctrinal confusion in the various churches of God. This paper addresses the push for beginning biblical calendar months with a full moon instead of the historical new moon. Proponents of a full-moon start of the biblical month appeal for support principally to Psalm 81:3 and Exodus 23:16. The historical new-moon start of the month ensures the Moon is full around the fifteenth day of the first and seventh months when people arrive for the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Ingathering or Tabernacles and then have light after sunset at unfamiliar feast sites. The new-moon start of the month has a history that goes back without change to not only our Lord's earthly ministry but even to Moses. This short paper shows that Psalm 81:3 and Exodus 23:16 do not support a full-moon start of the biblical lunar month and that there is no justification for departing from the historical new-moon start of the biblical month.

Unless stated to the contrary, all scriptures are quoted from the King James Version (KJV) Bible.

## 2.0 PSALM 81 EXAMINED

The claim for a full-moon start of the biblical lunar month is principally based on verse 3 of Psalm 81. Although this claim has no support from the King James Version (KJV) it seems supported by modern translations, such as the New International Version (NIV).

### 2.1 *The Hebrew Word for Moon is Different!*

Let us begin by examining the Hebrew word that actually means Moon because it is used side by side with the word 'Sun'. Two examples will suffice. The first concerns Joseph's unpopular dream and the other Joshua's long day. The examples are taken from the KJV because the NIV translations are similar.

- Gen 37.9 And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon (Strong #3394) and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.
- Josh 10.12 Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon (Strong #3394), in the valley of Ajalon.

The Hebrew < ya:reah > (Strong #3394) is here correctly translated by the English proper noun 'Moon'. This is the only Hebrew word used in reference to the Moon. It will be seen that this word is not even used in Psalm 81:3 and after that verse is studied in the next section, it will become clear that Psalm 81:3 may not be used for claiming that biblical months start with a full moon.

### 2.2 *Psalm 81:3 Examined*

(KJV) "Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day"

(NIV) "Sound the ram's horn at the new moon, and when the moon is full, on the day of our feast"

This verse contains two key Hebrew words, the first being < bachodesh > rendered by the KJV 'in the new moon' and by the NIV 'at the new moon'. The second being < bake:seh > rendered by the KJV 'in the time appointed' but by the NIV 'when the moon is full'. Both these words carry the Hebrew prefix < ba- > which is a combined preposition-definite article and means 'in the' or 'at the'. So the actual key words are < chodesh > (Strong #2320) and < ke:seh > (Strong #3677).

The Hebrew for verse 3 does not contain adjectives corresponding to the English 'new', 'appointed' and 'full' found in the KJV and NIV translations; and so these English words reflect preconceived ideas held by the translators. Also verse 3 does not contain the Hebrew word for our Earth's natural satellite, the 'Moon'. As a result considerable doubt exists over especially the NIV translation.

The Hebrew < chodesh > (Strong #2320) rather means 'month' and because historically months begin with the new moon, the meaning 'new moon' became associated with this. However this word is not at all related to the notion of the Moon as Earth's satellite.

Likewise the Hebrew < ke:seh > (Strong #3677) does not mean ‘full moon’. It derives from a root suggesting fullness but it is also used for an appointed time and so the KJV’s rendering ‘appointed time’ should not be dismissed out of hand as does the NIV. The only other occurrence of < ke:seh > is in Proverbs 7:20.

Proverbs 7.20

KJV “He hath taken a bag of money with him, *and* will come home at the day appointed.”

NIV “He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon”

This concerns the tale of a young man being reassured by an adulteress that her husband will return only on the date he appointed for his return. In this context the KJV translation seems correct for why should her husband synchronize his return with the full moon as the NIV claims? The KJV translation ‘at the day appointed’ seems the more realistic one. In which case we should also prefer the KJV translation of verse 3 of Psalm 81, which too omits any reference to the full moon.

The evidence shows Psalm 81:3 is not a sound basis for claiming biblical months begin with a full moon.

### **2.3 Reading Verse 3 of Psalm 81 in Context**

Let us now read Psalm 81 so that we may know the actual context of verse 3.

Psalm 81 (KJV)

1. Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.
2. Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.
3. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.
4. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.
5. This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.
6. I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.
7. Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.
8. Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;
9. There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.
10. I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.
11. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.
12. So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels.
13. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!
14. I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.
15. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.
16. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.

Verses 5 and 6 show that this psalm concerns events surrounding Israel’s Exodus from their Egyptian captivity.

The psalm begins in verses 1 to 3 with a plea that Israel should rejoice in God by singing a psalm set to music played by various instruments. Verse 3 links this to a festival and considering the Exodus context of this psalm, this must be either the feast of Unleavened Bread or Pentecost.

It could be Pentecost for that was the feast Moses told Pharaoh Israel should observe (Exod 5:1; 10:9) and which took place during the Assembly at Mt Sinai. However with the emphasis of this psalm being on Exodus, the feast of Unleavened Bread, which commemorates the Exodus, is the more likely candidate.

Many travelled to Jerusalem for the feast of Unleavened Bread and since this feast starts on the fifteenth day of the first (new) month, with < ke:seh > Psalm 81:3 is likely to point to the ‘appointed time’ this feast starts (Abib 15) and which occurs around the full moon.

Obviously any reference to ‘full moon’ by < ke:seh > is not for the start of the month but for the start of the feast referred to in this verse, and which the context of this psalm suggests is the feast of Unleavened Bread.

The psalmist then reminds in verses 4 and 5 that the God of Jacob ('he' in verse 5) ordained this feast with celebration in Joseph (Israel) as a law (Leviticus chapter 23). It was a commanded feast. Not a command to start the month at the full moon for that is nowhere commanded in the Bible.

In verse 6 the psalmist begins speaking in the name of God as marked by the first person pronoun 'I'. God must have inspired the psalmist to depict God's very thoughts. For example, "I removed his shoulder from the burden..." refers to God releasing Israel from her Egyptian bondage.

In verse 7 God reminds Israel that they called out in their trouble and that He delivered them. Also how he tested them at Meribah and marks this with a 'selah'.

The selah marks a key point in a psalm. Here in verse 8 that Israel failed because she did not listen to God. In verse 10 God reminds Israel that He is the LORD God, who brought them out of Egypt and she only has to open her mouth and God will fill her needs. But Israel did not listen to God and rejected His way (Cp Exod 20:19, and Deut 18:15-18).

In verse 13 follows God's plea that His people should have listened to Him instead of walking in their own counsels. I leave the reader to read the remainder of this psalm.

From Psalm 81 it is plain that verse 3 should not be taken out of context to justify changing from the historical new-moon start of the month to a full-moon start of the month. In particular that there is no connection between Psalm 81:3 and the Tisri-1 feast of Trumpets that begins the 7<sup>th</sup> month (Ethaniam or Tisri) as is sometimes claimed.

### **3.0 EXODUS 23:16 AND THE NONEXISTENT TISRI-1 HARVEST MOON!**

Exodus 23:16 is also used to advance the case for starting biblical months at the full moon.

Exod 23.16 And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.

To advance a full-moon start of months the requirement of this verse, that the feast of Ingathering follows the harvest, is claimed to be met when the Tisri-1 full-moon is also the so-called Harvest Moon, because then the harvest would precede by a fortnight the Tisri-15 start of the feast. But let us remember that the Bible mentions neither a full-moon start of months, nor a Tisri-1 start of the harvest, nor a Harvest Moon.

It is important that the notion of a Harvest Moon be understood. When the Moon is full it rises in the east at the time the Sun sets in the west. This extends the period of useable light beyond dusk with the full moon's light, which is especially bright for the northern Harvest Moon and allows harvesters to work well after sunset: not only on the day of the full moon but also on the day before and after the full moon.

So much for the Tisri-1 Harvest Moon theory but let us now look at its fatal flaw and other shortcomings!

Even if the full Harvest Moon did occur around Tisri 1, then no harvest could take place for that day is the holy day of Trumpets! Nor could the day before this be utilized for harvesting for it is the preparation day for Trumpets. That would defeat the very notion of a Tisri-1 Harvest Moon and shows this theory is fit only for the dustbin.

That is not the only problem because there remains the post-harvest work, such as threshing, winnowing and storing wheat and other produce. It may seem that the fortnight from Tisri 1 to the Tisri-15 start of the feast is sufficient but the reality is different because at least six days are lost for various reasons. First there is the Tisri-10 Atonement holy day and its preparation day. Then there is at least one intervening weekly Sabbath and its preparation day. Lastly departure for the feast site may have to be as early as Tisri 12.

It is plain that a Tisri-1 Harvest Moon is an impractical pipe dream.

#### **3.1 When Is The End of The Year?**

We still need to examine what is meant in Exodus 23:16 with '*in the end of the year*' and how this relates to a similar expression in Exodus 34:22.

A couple of verses may cause confusion over the start and end of the sacred or biblical year. For example, Exodus 12:2, "*This month shall be the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you*" but Exodus 23:16 says, "*...and the feast of ingatherings, which is in the end of the year,...*" Since Leviticus 23:34 and 39 defines the feast of Ingathering (Tabernacles) as starting on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, this could suggest that the sacred year begins with the 1<sup>st</sup> month but ends with the 7<sup>th</sup> month. Since a solar year counts at least 12 lunar months, the sacred year can not end with the 7<sup>th</sup> month. So what is meant by '*end of the year*'?

#### **3.2 Exodus 23:16 Compared with Exodus 34:22**

Let us return to Exodus 23:16 and compare this with Exodus 34:22.

- Exod 23:16 And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingatherings, which is in the end (#3318) of the year (#8141), when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.
- 34:22 And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's (#8141) end (#8622).

In the KJV both verses indicate that the feast of Ingathering (Tisri 15-21) is at the end of the year. Modern translations, such as the New International Version (NIV) use the term 'end of the year' in Exodus 23:16 but 'turn of the year' in Exodus 34:22. The foregoing quotes give the Strong reference numbers for both 'end' and 'year'.

The Hebrew for Strong # 8141 (year) is < shanah > and is usually taken to mean 'year'. The Hebrew for Strong #3318 (end) is < yatsa: > and means 'to go out' but is translated in a large variety of ways throughout the OT. The Hebrew for Strong #8622 (end) is < t<sup>e</sup>qufah > and means 'a revolution'. This suggests the NIV rendering of Exodus 34:22, "...*at the turn of the year*" is the better one. The reference apparently being to the northern autumnal equinox, when the Sun 'crosses' the Equator and days first become shorter than nights; a condition that will persist till the Sun crosses the Equator once again at the northern spring or Vernal equinox. In other words at the equinoxes the year or season turns of changes: or indeed ends. That does not mean the count of months start afresh after the northern autumnal equinox.

Although that is a reasonable conclusion to draw from Exodus 34:22, it is less clear for Exodus 23:16 for there Strong #3318 Hebrew < yatsa: > means 'end' rather than 'turn'. However, these two verses can not contradict each other and so it seems fair to see them both pointing to an end of something. But what? Not the literal calendar year but the growing season or summer: the period between the northern Vernal and autumnal equinoxes.

### 3.3 Examining the Hebrew Usage of 'Shanah', 'Yatsa' and 'T<sup>e</sup>qufah'

The Hebrew < shanah > (Strong #8141) corresponds to the reference number TWOT 2419a of the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (See section 5.0). Similarly the Hebrew < yatsa > (Strong #3318) corresponds to TWOT 893 and < T<sup>e</sup>qufah > (Strong #8622) to TWOT 2001a. The TWOT numbers allow us to examine the Old Testament usages of these Hebrew words.

TWOT 2419a for < shanah > gives 'year' but it is also used in the sense of 'change' or 'being different'. So in Malachi 3:6, "*For I am the LORD, I change not...*" and Esther 3: 8 declares of the Jews "... *their laws are diverse from all other people*". These usages should be allowed for when considering Exodus 23:16 and 34:22.

TWOT 893 for < yatsa: > gives 'go out, come out, go forth'. This word is used in connection with God and Moses bringing Israel out of Egypt, which we call Exodus. The basic notion of < yatsa: > is 'to go out'. Since we know the year starts with the first day of the first month (Abib 1), it can only be that the feast of Ingathering (Tabernacles) is when the year or season *goes out* or *changes* – the northern summer ends and winter begins. The harvest must be gathered before that and the feast of Ingathering must not precede that change, which change appears to be the northern autumnal equinox.

TWOT 2001a for < t<sup>e</sup>qufah > gives 'coming around', 'circuit of time or space' and points to Psalm 19:6:

- Psalm 19:6 His (i.e. Sun's) going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Therefore in Exodus 34:22 < t<sup>e</sup>qufah > denotes the '*recurring time cycle*' known as the northern autumnal equinox.

Indeed the Jewish calendar uses Exodus 34:22 to link to the solar year's autumnal equinox and so keeps step with the precession of the equinoxes. The equinoxes move approximately 50 arc seconds annually, which over the some 3,500 years since Moses amounts to approximately  $3,500 \times 50 / 3,600 = 49$  degrees. Had the Jews over the millennia failed to apply the Exodus 34:22 restriction, that the feast of Ingathering be after the northern autumnal equinox, then that 49-degree error would have thrown their calendar way out of step with the seasons.

The northern autumnal equinox occurs typically on September 22 and for the period 1980 to 2020 the feast of Ingathering begins no earlier than September 23 and no later than October 18. Therefore the full moon of the feast of Ingathering is the September-October one and the preceding full moon of August-September would be the Harvest Moon. So instead of there being only a handful days for post harvest work as with the Tisri-1 Harvest Moon theory, there is plenty of time with the Jewish calendar whose months begin with a new moon.

The theory that biblical months should start with a full moon is pure invention by self-wise men who lack understanding and have no authority to wrest from the Jews their God-given calendar stewardship. My paper

*Noah's 365 Days In The Ark* (see section 5.0 References) shows that today's Jewish calendar can accommodate the dates given in Genesis chapters 7 and 8 and that therefore we have no reason for departing from the Jewish calendar.

#### **4.0-EZEKIEL 46:1'S GATE THAT LOOKS TOWARDS THE EAST**

Some cite Ezekiel 46:1 to claim this marks biblical months as starting with a full moon.

Ez 46.1 Thus saith the Lord GOD; The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon (Strong #2320) it shall be opened.

Since the first crescent of the new moon is observed shortly after sunset above the *western* horizon but the first view of the full moon is observed shortly after sunset above the *eastern* horizon, some conclude the gate is opened on the day of the full moon and that this is the start of the month. As explained in Section 2.2 the Hebrew rendered "the new moon" (Strong #2320, < chodesh >) means primarily 'month' rather than "new moon" and besides in this verse too there is no Hebrew word for 'new'. The argument that Ezekiel 46:1 marks that months start with the full moon is inconclusive because this verse only states that the gate is to be opened, (1) on weekly Sabbath days and (2) on the day of the month but without specifying the moon's phase for either. Since Ezekiel 46:1 links neither months nor the opening of this gate to any particular phase of the moon, this verse may not be taken as defining that months begin with a full moon.

#### **5.0 REFERENCES**

The following books were consulted in addition to the computer program *The Logos Library System 2.1*.

- *Analytical Key to the Old Testament* by Owns (Baker Book House, ISBN 0-8010-6714-6 etc)
- Hendrickson's *Interlinear Bible* (O.T. Hebrew-English)
- *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* by R.L. Harris etc (Moody Press, ISBN 0-8024-8631-2)
- *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Hendrickson, ISBN 0-913573-20-5)
- *Strong's Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible* (World Bible Publishers, ISBN 0-529-06334-3)

The following papers are relevant and may be downloaded from my Home Page at [www.rightly-dividing.net](http://www.rightly-dividing.net) . Of these P6 demonstrates that the current Jewish calendar fits the dates of Genesis chapters 7 and 8 and that therefore there is no reason for rejecting the Jewish calendar. Paper P11 refutes claims that biblical days begin at sunrise.

- (P6) *Noah's 365 Days In The Ark*
- (P11) *The Biblical Sunset-to-Sunset Day*

#### **6.0 IN CONCLUSION**

It has been shown that neither Psalm 81:3 nor Exodus 23:16 provide justification for changing from the established new-moon start of the biblical month to a full-moon start of the month. Indeed the reader is advised to read the paper *Noah's 365 Days In The Ark*, which demonstrates that the current Jewish calendar fits the dates given in Genesis chapter 7 and 8 and so supports our continued use of this calendar.

In particular a Tisri-1 full moon that is also a Harvest Moon would be unworkable for it is not practical to harvest around the Tisri-1 Trumpets holy day, which is also soon followed by the Tisri-10 Atonement holy day and so would greatly interfere with the post harvest labour.

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