

What Is the *REAL* “New Moon”?

When does the Biblical month begin? The Hebrew word for “Month” also means “New Moon.” But what is the Biblical definition of a “new moon”? Is it the actual conjunction? The “dark” of the moon? The first faint sliver of the new crescent as seen by human eyes? Or a mathematical construct? Since God’s Holy Days are based on the New Moon, we need to know the truth so that we can observe them on the right day!

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What is the Biblical definition of the “new moon”? Throughout history, the Jewish rabbis and ancient Sanhedrin have said the “new moon” is the first faint crescent of the moon as it is seen each month by “witnesses” in Israel. Later they began to ignore the command to view the new moon each month, and just determined it by mathematical calculations based on the nineteen year time cycle, which kept their calendar within a day or two of the actual new moon when the Jews were dispersed around the world, after the fall of ancient Judea to the Romans in 135 A.D.

Other people claim that the “new moon” or month is actually the time of the “conjunction” of the earth and the moon, that is, during the time of the “dark of the moon.” But what is the truth?

This is important because the beginning of each month on the correct day determines the actual date of the annual holy days which occur in that month. The annual holy days fall in the first month (Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread), the third month (Pentecost), and the seventh month (Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, and Shemini Atzeret – the “Eighth Day”). If we begin those months on the wrong day, then we would celebrate God’s Holy Days on the **WRONG DATE, AT THE WRONG TIME** – and that would constitute **SIN** – disobedience to God!

Therefore, it is important that we know just what a Biblical “new moon” is!

Blow the Trumpet on the New Moon

God’s Word says, “Blow the trumpet at the time of the **NEW MOON** (*CHODESH*); at the full [keseh] moon, on our solemn feast day. For this is a statute for Israel, a **LAW** of the God of Jacob” (Psalm 81:3-4).

The word ‘keseh’ here in Hebrew means ‘appar. From 3680; prop. Fullness or the full moon,’ but the root 3680 is *kacah* and means ‘to plump, i.e. fill up hollows, by impl. to cover (for clothing or secrecy): -- clad self, close, clothe, conceal, cover (self), hide, overwhelm.’

Interestingly, the Jews called Yom Teruah or Rosh Hashanah by other names as well. It is known as *Yom HaDin* (Day of Judgment), *Yom HaDat Olam* (Day of the Birth of the World, or the Ages), *Yom Zikhron Teruah* (Day of Memorial of Shouting, Blowing or Sounding the Ram’s Horn). But perhaps most interestingly, it is known as *Yom HaKeseh* (Day of Concealment)!

This last name alludes to the position of the new moon on the first of Tishri, as well as the limited amount of information provided in the Torah or Word of God as to its nature and significance. It is also as if God said for us to learn, pray, meditate, and figure it out for ourselves! It is a Day of Mystery – a day involving judgment, repentance, creation, memorials, and beginnings (as it begins the civil year, for which it is New Year’s Day). As Solomon wrote in Proverbs, “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out” (Prov.25:2, NRSV).

Philip Goodman, in *The Rosh Hashanah Anthology*, provides this insight into the meaning of this Holy Day:

“On the first day of Tishri is New Year for years.

“R. Nachman b. Isaac explained the Mishnah to refer to the Divine judgment, as it is written, *From the beginning of the year to the end of the year* (Deuteronomy 11:12), which means, From the beginning of the year sentence is passed as to what shall be up to the end of it. How do we know that this takes place in Tishri? Because it is written, *Blow the horn at the new moon, at the COVERED TIME for our feast day* (Psalms 81:4). Which is the feast on which the moon is COVERED OVER? You must say that this is New Year; and it is written in this connection, *For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance for the God of Jacob* (v.5).

“. . .” (Rosh Hashanah 8a-b, quoted on page 17).

Why does this passage refer to the moon as “COVERED” on the Feast Day? The King James has this, “Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day” (Psalm 81:3). The word “appointed” here is the Hebrew word *keceh* which means “fullness,” i.e., “festival, time appointed.” It is apparently from #3680, *kacah*, meaning “to plump,” “fill up hollows,” by implication, “to cover (for clothing or secrecy).” It is variously translated “clad, clothe, conceal, cover, hide, overwhelm.”

Since the verse says to blow the shofar on the New Moon, and calls it “the covered time,” this suggests that the moon is *covered over and concealed, and just beginning to emerge from darkness* – so the Feast Day begins with the first faint crescent of the New Moon, after it has been covered or concealed. Light is just beginning to emerge from being completely concealed or “covered over.”

Its usage here is strange – very interesting. Since the verse is speaking of the NEW MOON, it follows that the new slender crescent of the moon is ending of the concealing of the moon, and the beginning of the “plumping up of the moon – its growing into fullness, becoming fully visible, no longer “concealed” or “hidden” from view by the earth’s shadow.

God’s commandment then is that we blow the trumpet – announce the “new moon” – WHEN IT BECOMES VISIBLE – WHEN IT IS SIGHTED – and not to “proclaim” it until or unless we KNOW it is truly the “New Moon”!

The Ancient Practice

In ancient times, Alfred Edersheim reports,

“THE DETERMINATION OF THE NEW MOON

“We have already shown of what importance the right determination of the new moon was in fixing the various festivals of the year, and with what care and anxiety its appearance was ascertained from witnesses who had actually seen it; also how the tidings were afterwards communicated to those at a distance. *For the new moon was reckoned by actual personal observation, not by astronomical calculation*, with which, however, as we know, many of the Rabbis must have been familiar, since we read of astronomical pictures, by which they were wont to test the veracity of witnesses. *So important was it deemed to have faithful witnesses, that they were even allowed, in order to reach Jerusalem in time, to travel on the Sabbath, and, if necessary, to make use of horse or mule (Mish. Rosh ha Sh. i. 9; iii. 2)*. While strict rules determined who were not to be admitted as witnesses (*Mish. Rosh ha Sh. i. 8*), every encouragement was given to trustworthy persons, and the Sanhedrin provided for them a banquet in a large building specially destined for that purpose, and known as the *Beth Yaazek (Mish. Rosh ha Sh. ii. 5)*.”

God says, “Observe [watch, carefully regard, guard, hedge about, protect, etc.] THE MONTH OF ABIB” – *NOWHERE DOES HE SAY TO CALCULATE THE MONTH OF “TISHRI”!*

And the word for “MONTH” in this verse is “CHODESH” and means by definition “NEW MOON” IN HEBREW (Strong’s #2320 – “the new moon: by impl. a month”).

Historical Reality

There is no historical evidence that the Jews ever began the new month with the disappearance of the old moon. If the Pharisees had been wrong in their month declarations, you would think that Christ would have clearly corrected such an egregious error and the matter would be clearly discussed in the four gospels. No such controversy

is mentioned however, because there was none. Such a thing is not even hinted at in the four gospels.

There is no historical evidence, or Biblical evidence, that the month begins with the time the moon is invisible to the naked eye, that is, during the actual conjunction, when no light would be reflected from the moon. No evidence at all.

The evidence should be crystal clear as to how the Jews determined the beginnings of new months. If the new month began at the time the moon disappeared from visibility, then you would think there would be clear Biblical evidence showing this to be the case, but there is none.

Also, you would think that there would be much discussion of this belief in the Jewish literature, but, alas, there is none. It was a complete ‘non-starter.’ Nobody in ancient Jewish history taught this idea.

But Jesus Christ did say clearly that the scribes and Pharisees sat in “Moses seat,” and we should DO as they taught (Matt.23:1-3), and during the time of Christ, they clearly taught that the new month began when the new crescent of the moon was sighted and verified in ancient Israel. If you have not read it, I suggest you read our article, “What Is Moses’ Seat?”, which gives a careful, thoughtful analysis of Jesus’ comments in Matthew 23:1-3.

The Term “Chodesh”

Says Nehemiah Gordon, of the Karaite Jews in Israel, “‘Hodesh’ (New Moon), is derived from the root H.D.SH. meaning ‘new’ or ‘to make new/ renew.’” Says Gordon, “The Crescent New Moon is called Hodesh because it is the first time the moon is seen *anew* after being concealed for several days at the end of the lunar cycle. At the end of the lunar month the moon is close to the sun and eventually reaches the point of ‘conjunction’ when it passes between the Sun and the Earth. As a result, around the time of conjunction very little of the moon’s illuminated surface faces the Earth and it is not visible through the infinitely brighter glare of the sun. After the moon moves past the sun it continues towards the opposite side of the Earth. As it gets farther away from the sun the percentage of its illuminated surface facing the Earth increases and one evening shortly after sunset the moon is seen anew after being invisible for 1.5-3.5 days. Because the moon is seen anew after a period of invisibility the ancients called it a ‘New Moon’ or ‘Hodesh’ (from Hadash meaning ‘new’).”

Gordon continues: “Many people have been led astray by the inaccurate use in modern languages of the term ‘New Moon’. Modern astronomers adopted this otherwise unused term, which had always referred to the first visible sliver, and used it to refer to *conjunction* (when the Moon passes between the Earth and the Sun, at which time it is not visible). The astronomers soon realized that the inaccurate use of ‘New Moon’ to refer to conjunction would lead to confusion so to be more accurate scientists now distinguish between ‘Astronomical New Moon’ and ‘Crescent New Moon’. ‘Astronomical New Moon’ means New Moon as the term is used by astronomers, i.e. conjunction. In contrast, ‘Crescent New Moon’ uses the term in the original meaning of

the first visible sliver.”

It has also been suggested that the ancient Israelites could have looked at the “Old Moon” and determined the Day of Conjunction by when the Old Moon was no longer visible in the morning sky. However, such a method would not work in the Middle East where the so-called “concealed moon” can remain concealed for as many as 3.5 days! It is in fact common for the moon to stay concealed for 2.5 days and in such instances how would the ancient Israelites have known which day was the Day of Conjunction?

Writes Gordon, “In contrast, the ancient Israelites would have been well aware of the Crescent New Moon. In ancient societies people worked from dawn to dusk and they would have noticed the Old Moon getting smaller and smaller in the morning sky. When the morning moon had disappeared the ancient Israelites would have anxiously awaited its reappearance 1.5-3.5 days later in the evening sky. Having disappeared for several days and then appearing anew in the early evening sky they would have called it the ‘New Moon.’

The Testimony of Philo

The ancient Jewish philosopher Philo makes the truth plain. He lived in the time of Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, and knew the apostle Peter. Philo wrote, ““First of all, it is the beginning of the month, and the beginning, whether of number or of time, is honorable. Second, because there is nothing in the whole heaven destitute of light. (141) Thirdly, because at that period the more powerful and important body gives a portion of necessary assistance to the less important and weaker body; *for at the time of the new moon, THE SUN BEGINS TO ILLUMINATE THE MOON WITH A LIGHT WHICH IS VISIBLE to the outward senses*, and then she displays her own beauty to the beholders. And this, as it seems, an evident lesson of kindness and humanity to men, to teach them that they should never grudge to impart their own good things to others, but, imitating the heavenly bodies, should drive envy away and banish it from the soul” (page 581, *The Works of Philo*).

Alfred Edersheim in his wonderful book *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, explained, “For the new moon was reckoned by ACTUAL PERSONAL OBSERVATION, not by astronomical calculation, with which, however, as we know, many of the rabbis must have been familiar . . . So important was it deemed to have faithful witnesses, that they were even allowed, in order to reach Jerusalem in time, to travel on the Sabbath” (page 230).

It only makes sense that the new moon would be when the first faint sliver or crescent of the moon is seen after a period of total darkness of the moon. Ancient nations did not have the incredible tools of astronomy that we have today. The Hebrew word Hodesh means both “moon” and “month.” The month and new moon are both represented by the same word, showing that the new month is determined by and begins with the “new moon” – which MUST be visible, in order for people to KNOW when it occurs.

Proof of the Crucifixion

Another “proof” the New Moon must be determined by observation rather than the moment of conjunction is the crucifixion of Christ.

Astronomical tables and calculations today can give us the time and occurrence of every “new moon” as it would have been seen from Jerusalem (or other major cities) backwards in time for centuries and millennia.

The “Swift Guide to the Galaxy”, a software program for computers, under “Lunar Calendar,” provides such a program. For the first month of Nisan or Abib, 30 A.D., it gives a calendar showing all the moon’s phases, as seen from Jerusalem, for every day of the month.

In A.D. 30, for the month of March, the *molad* or conjunction of the New Moon occurred on Wednesday, March 22. The crescent New Moon was seen in the evening of Thursday, March 23, making Abib 1 Friday, March 24. Therefore, in A.D. 30, the 15th day of Abib – the First Day of Unleavened Bread – was *Friday, April 7th!*

This means that in 30 A.D. the day of the Passover sacrifice, Abib 14, was NOT ON WEDNESDAY, BUT RATHER ON THURSDAY, April 6th! In other words, the date of the crucifixion was THURSDAY, APRIL 6TH, 30 A.D.!

Corroborating this witness, Dr. Monzur Ahmed, author of the “mooncalc” software program, was contacted by Nick Wood in England. Dr. Ahmed sent him the dates and times of all the lunar conjunctions for the years 29, 30, and 31 A.D. These figures agreed with his own software “COSMI Guide to the Galaxy,” which show the positions of all the heavenly bodies, including the Sun and Moon, for any given day or hour, all the way back to way before 1 BC. As he says in an e-mail, “I am sure that the Solar System has been stable since the Exodus and Joshua’s ‘Long Day’, so there is no need to really dispute these figures.”

There is a website devoted to the Phases of the Moon, called *Obliquity*. You can go on their website and obtain the New Moon conjunction data – time and date for the New Moons for the year 30 A.D., especially March (which New Moon would correspond with the Hebrew month Nisan or Abib). Just go to <http://www.obliquity.com/cgi-bin/lunar.cgi?Year=30&Month=3>.

You will find that the conjunction of the Nisan New Moon was on March 22, at 17:29 GMT. This would have been 19:29 Jerusalem time (the Jerusalem time zone is two zones before GMT). 19:29 would have been 7:29 PM, Wednesday evening. Since Hebrew days begin at sunset, this would have been the beginning of the next day by Hebrew reckoning. Thus the first sighting of the new crescent would have most likely been Thursday evening, around sunset, about 22 ½ hours later. Thus would mean that Friday, March 24th (beginning Thursday evening) would have been the first day of the

New Moon/Month of Nisan/Abib. This means the 14th day of the month – the day the Passover was killed – would have been Thursday, April 6th, and Friday, April 7th was the annual holy day (First Day of Unleavened Bread).

Roger Rusk, Professor of Physics at the University of Tennessee, has also provided astronomical evidence that in A.D. 30 the New Moon crescent for the month of Nisan would make Nisan 14 occur on a Thursday. So reported *Christianity Today*, a well-known Christian magazine (March 24, 1974).

Biblical Chronology and the Crucifixion Date

Jack Finegan in *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* says absolute astronomical evidence proves the crucifixion date could not have been on a Wednesday for the years A.D. 29 to A.D. 33. He points out April 25 could NOT have been a possible date in 31 A.D. because it would involve an extra lunar month, and the barley would have been ready to begin harvesting much sooner, by March 27th. (If the previous winter had been long and cold, the necessary barley sheaves could have also been obtained from the region of Jericho. Passover (Nisan 14) on March 27 would not have fallen on a Wednesday, not on a Tuesday.

In addition to this, a major article appeared in the journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol.27, back in 1870, entitled “The Crucifixion on Thursday – Not Friday,” by J. K. Aldrich (p.401-429). Then Professor Wescott of Great Britain maintained Thursday was the proper day, in *An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (Cambridge, 1881).

Modern Astronomical Tables

Finally, to check these things out for myself, I recently purchased a book entitled *Astronomical Tables of the Sun, Moon and Planets* by astronomer Jean Meeus (second edition, published by Willmann-Bell, Inc., PO Box 35025, Richmond, Virginia 23235). Part four deals with the “Phases of the Moon.” This remarkable work provides tables by which readers can compute the phases of the moon, including the New Moons (molads) with an accuracy within 10 minutes or less, for any year from 1500 B.C. to 2999 A.D. (The calculations of course may not work for years prior to the Exodus or Noah’s Flood, if the earth’s orbit or the moon’s orbit were changed during those periods of upheaval). However, the tables work just fine for the year 30 A.D., when the Messiah was crucified!

Using these tables, and doing a little math, it turns out that this witness concurs completely with the previous witnesses! My calculations, using the tables in this book, show that the conjunction of the New Moon for March, 30 A.D., was on the 22nd day of the month (Wednesday), at 17:32 GMT– that is, 5:32 PM, Wednesday evening! This would have been about 7:32 Jerusalem time. Since the conjunction occurred Wednesday evening, the New Moon crescent for the month just beginning – Abib – could not possibly have been seen before *Thursday* evening. You cannot see the crescent the same evening the conjunction occurs! Normally it is visible about one day or 24 hours later – which fits the picture perfectly.

This information means that Abib 1 was a Friday that week, and Abib 14 – the day of the crucifixion – had to be on a Thursday, not a Wednesday! There is no disputing these facts – and the Jews plainly state that in those days the months were determined by the sighting of the New Moon crescent by confirmed, authorized witnesses who were posted to watch for it.

The Bottom Line

So, the year of the crucifixion, the New Moon had to be determined by VISUAL SIGHTING of the New Moon because the 14th of Nisan, the date of the crucifixion, had to be on a Thursday, in order for Sunday to be the “third day” since the crucifixion (Luke 24:17-21).

This could only be true if the first day of the month was the date the first faint sliver of the new moon appeared in the sky, Thursday evening, making the 14th of Nisan that year fall on a Thursday (beginning Wednesday night, at sunset).

For purposes of the Hebrew Calendar, then, when ALL the evidence is put together, we discover that the true “new moon” as the Bible refers to it is the first faint crescent as seen from Israel and Jerusalem. God’s annual Holy Days must be “counted” from the true beginning of each month, and the first day of the month is the day the “new moon” is seen and witnessed and declared by the authorities.

Otherwise, people will end up in CONFUSION, and observe God’s Holy Days on the *wrong dates!* Almighty God is not the author of confusion – but Satan the devil is! (I Cor.14:33).

Isn’t it time we get “back to the faith” and truth ONCE and for all delivered to the saints, and observe God’s Holy Days at the RIGHT TIME? Isn’t it time the Jewish people themselves return to the true Biblical calendar, and once again use the original calendar which God gave them?

God is not happy with our continued disobedience, self-will, and stubborn pride! As the apostle Paul wrote, “What advantage then has the Jew . . .? For what if some did not believe [they altered the calendar and made uninspired changes to it in 357-358 A.D.]? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar” (Rom.3:1-4). God’s Word is true – always. Even the Jewish calendar has been compromised for expediency, but now is the time to return to God – in every way, whole-heartedly, with zeal and determination, without holding back or making excuses!

As God told Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, SIN lies at the door” (Gen.4:7). And Paul declared, “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (I Cor.11:31). “But let a man examine himself” (v.28). Let us do what God says, and admit our mistakes, and return to God’s way!