

BIBLICAL CALENDAR- Part III- Establishing the Biblical New Year

New Year

How was one to know when a new year would begin? The Scripture tells us in Exodus 12:1-2,

And YHWH spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

And again in Exodus 13:4,

This day came ye out in the month Aviv.

We are told that the year begins in the first month (obviously!), which is then defined as the month Aviv. This is the month in which the Passover sacrifice is made and the firstfruits of barley are waved in the Temple.

Red Herring – Seventh Month New Year

From the Rabbinical Jewish understanding, the new year (called *Rosh HaShanah*) starts in *Tishri*, which is the seventh month counting from *Aviv*. This has been the Jewish understanding which is why you will find that all Jewish calendars today start with *Tishri*. However, Orthodox Jews define *Tishri* as the seventh month and state that the religious calendar commences with *Aviv* (or *Nisan* as it is known as today) and that the civil year commences with *Tishri*. According to popular Jewish tradition, *Tishri* was the time when the Almighty was acknowledged King by Adam when he was first created, so *Rosh Hashanah* on the 1st day of *Tishri* is the day that man was created (and the world was of course created 6 days earlier).

Interesting as this concept sounds, it has no precedent in Scripture. Even looking at the Talmud, there were two schools of thought. One claims that *Rosh Hashanah* was on 1 Nisan while the other claims it was on 1 Tishri. Thus, even tradition does not conclusively point to 1 Tishri as the new year. Historically, the reason for Tishri becoming the new year was due to the Jewish exile in Babylon. There in Babylon, the Jewish people picked up the customs of their captors. Before the exile, the months did not have names but were known by their numbers, ie. first month, second month and so forth. Some of the months were known by names but these were descriptions more than names. However, during the exile, the Jewish people adopted the Babylonian names for the months, which is evident from the fact that the names are distinctly not of Jewish origin. Further, since the Babylonian calendar had two new years, one in *Tishri* and the other in *Nisan*, the Jewish people seem to have adopted *Tishri* and *Nisan* as their new years too. Below is a table of the names of the months:

Month Numbers	Pre-Exile Names	Post-Exile Names	Babylonian Month Names
1	Abib = Green Ears	Nisan	Nisanu
2	Zif = blossom	Iyyar	Ayaru
3		Sivan	Simanu
4		Tammuz	Du'uzu

5		Av/ Ab	Abu
6		Elul	Ululu
7	Ethanim = flowings	Tishri	Tashritu
8	Bul = rain	Marcheshvan/ Cheshvan	Arach-samna
9		Kislev	Kislimu
10		Tevet	Shabatu
11		Sh'vat	Tebetu
12		Adar	Adaru
13 (intercalary month)		Ve-adar (Adar Bet)	

Aviv New Year

The Scripture clearly points to a new year in *Aviv*. But how do we determine what and when this month is?

First, the fact that the month is known as *Aviv* tells that it describes something that happens during that month, since all the names as seen from the pre-exilic names were agricultural terms. This is further confirmed by the literal translation of Exodus 13:4,

This day came ye out in the month of the Aviv.

The literal translation shows that the month was not known as *Aviv* but was the month of *the Aviv*, ie. when *Aviv* happened.

So what is *Aviv*? It is a stage in the development of the barley crop. Barley goes through several stages in its development.

First, there is a vegetative state when the barley stalk grows. At this point, it is dark green and may be called "dark". Thereafter, it flowers and is pollinated. The barley flower forms a pod, wherein forms the seed. The stalk begins to yellow.

The seed's first stage is very watery, which then becomes thicker (looking like milk) as it solidifies. The milky fluid then hardens into a dough like consistency, and then into a soft grain. This soft grain is called *Aviv* and the head is brittle and starting to turn golden. At this stage of development, it is not fully ripe but will ripen within another two weeks. Although not fully ripe, it can be parched in the fire and eaten but cannot be crushed and made into flour as it is still too soft for that.

When fully ripe, the barley is called *carmel*. The barley has turned golden by then. The *carmel* barley could be crushed and ground into grain. In ancient times, barley had to be

harvested once it went into *carmel* stage since if it was left to ripen further, it would fall of the stalk and the barley, which was harvested by sickle, would be lost.

The stages of growth are illustrated in Exodus 9:31 – 32,

And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley was *Aviv* (ripening in the head), and the flax was *Givol* (ripening in the bud). But the wheat and the spelt were not smitten: for they were *Afilot* (dark).

and Leviticus 2:14,

And if thou offer a grain offering of thy firstfruits unto YHWH, thou shalt offer for the grain offering of thy firstfruits *Aviv* (ripening) grain parched in the fire, or crushed *carmel* (ripened ears).

In the judgment of hail on Egypt, the barley was destroyed because it had come to *Aviv* where it was brittle and thus, affected by the hail. The wheat and spelt were in their earlier stages of development and were still dark, ie. dark green and as such, flexible and not susceptible to damage by hail.

Thus, the month of *the Aviv* would be the time when the barley would come to *Aviv* ripening. Within two weeks, the barley would come to *carmel* and had to be harvested. However, harvesting could only start after the firstfruits of the barley were offered in the Temple. If the month of *Aviv* was declared late, the harvest would be lost. If the month of *Aviv* was declared too early, there would be no grain to offer in the Temple. Thus, *Aviv* grain was crucial to celebrate the Feast of Firstfruits and thus, declare the new year.

Thus, the Israelites would in the last weeks of the 12th month check whether the barley had come to *Aviv*. If it had, the new year was declared. If it had not, the year was intercalated with an extra month, and the new year started after the 13th month.

The new year was very simply and practically established.

Talmudic New Year

Although the Scriptures gave a very simple test for the new year, the Israelites had begun to add their own rules (fences) to the Torah and come up with extra tests to determine the new year. One of the reasons was probably the fact that the Samaritans attempted to confuse the Israelites. Another was probably the astrological/ astronomical influence of the Babylonians.

According to the Talmud, 1 *Aviv* was decided by a few points. In Babli Sanhedrin 11, Rabban Gam'liel made a note that the doves are still tender and the lambs are still too young and the *Abib* is not yet ripe, thus a further month was added to the year. The method of reckoning was the doves, lambs and the barley. In other sources, the vernal equinox, the ripening fruit and the barley were considered. Why these signs? The sages knew that the question was whether spring had come. The doves and lambs had to be ready for sacrifice. Fruit will start appearing in spring. However, their method of reckoning spring used extraneous tests not set out in Scripture.

Hillelite Calendar

The extraneous tests were already a move away from the simple Scriptural test for the new year. However, it was still an observed calendar.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and the ensuing persecution, the Jewish leaders seemed to have adopted a mathematical or calculated calendar. Tradition has it that Rabbi Hillel II and his contemporaries in the Sanhedrin in 358 AD ordered the switch to a computed, rather than observed calendar. This tradition has been disputed since it is not recorded in the Talmud which only reached its final form in the 6th century. It seems more probable that the calendar was formulated earlier by the 1st century using the theories of a Greek astronomer, Meton of Athens (5th century BC) and is Metonic cycle to form the Jewish calculated calendar. The Metonic cycle calendar is based on a 19 year cycle with seven leap years. Although called the Metonic cycle, it seems to have originated at least 400 years before him and was known in some form by the Babylonians and even by Homer who presumably lived around the 8th century BC.

The Hillelite calendar is calendar has worked well for the Jewish people for about two millennia. However, as is already known, the Metonic cycle loses one full day every 219 years. This causes problems over time, just like the lunar calendar and the solar calendar. Thus, it is truly Divine providence that Israel has now been restored to her land, and can once again, use the divinely instituted observed calendar instead of the calculated calendar.

Unfortunately, although there has been a call from different quarters (which has been growing in recent years), the secular Jewish authorities have not reformed the calendar, leaving that to the religious authorities. The religious authorities, due to a lack of a clear consensus of who is the true authority who may decide on the intercalation of the calendar, have also declined to act.

In 2008, the search for Aviv was carried out in Israel by certain groups but was not found at the end of the 12th month, and thus an additional month was added. The new year was thus declared on 7 April 2008 at sunset. However, if one were to use the vernal equinox (as is used by the Catholics to declare Easter), the date would have been 8 March 2008.

However, as the Scripture does not command us to calculate by the vernal equinox but using *Aviv* barley, the vernal equinox is irrelevant.

The move towards the observed calendar causes us to be off from the traditional Jewish calendar by a few days or up to a month.

Some may ask, why disturb the time of the keeping of the feasts? Would it not be better to follow orthodox Jewry in this regard?

For the reasons stated above, it is not preferable to follow the traditional Orthodox calendar. Further:

- (1) The Scriptures command that the feasts be kept in their proper appointed times, and for calculation, has given us the month of *Aviv*. If we do not use the proper calendar, we will be celebrating the agricultural aspects of the feasts at a later date than is correct.
- (2) The proper method of determination of the new year (ie. By observation) has also been corroborated somewhat by the Talmud since the *Aviv* barley was one of the tests used. The calculated calendar seems to have been instituted due to persecution and since Israel is back in the land and is not faced with persecution anymore, there is no reason why the observed calendar should not be reused. Further, the calculated calendar has been found to be slightly inaccurate and newer and better astronomic calculations have been found.

- (3) Although we give Jewish tradition much respect, it cannot be the standard for true believers. Only the Scripture can be our standard. Thus, where tradition has been found to be out of date or contradictory to Scriptures, it should be discarded.
- (4) Once we realise the truth, it is against our conscience to disregard it.

Having said the above, there is no issue ALSO celebrating with Orthodox Jews on their feast days to show solidarity with them, as long as we obey the Scriptures to the best of our knowledge.

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Mishkan Torat Chaiim (Tabernacle of the Living Word)