

## Chapter Nine: TWO DAY NEW MOON FESTIVITIES

A question sometimes arises about how the New Moon and Sabbath synchronize in counting, especially since there are an uneven number of days in any particular lunation. Seeing that nature teaches us that there are approximately 29 ½ days in a month or moon, where does the “half day” fit into the picture?

I once read a short rebuttal to the teaching of the lunar Sabbath that went something like this: "If the moon's cycle was an exact 28 days then I might be persuaded that the Sabbath was originally regulated by the moon, because 7 is divisible evenly into 28 (4 x 7 = 28). However, we know the moon cycles every 29 or 30 days so this means you will have either 1 or 2 days left over each cycle of the moon." This argument completely misses the concept of the New Moon as a special day in Scripture. If we ignore the New Moon (as the authors of this book did for many years) then yes, it does seem that the Sabbath will not fit into a 29 or 30 day cycle. If we acknowledge the abundance of Scripture that teaches the New Moon to be a distinct, special day, different from the Sabbath and the working days, then we recognize how there can be 4 Sabbaths in any given moon/month, while at the same time have a period left over for the New Moon to take place.<sup>1</sup> Picture in your mind a month which consists of twenty-nine days. You will have a New Moon at the beginning of that month, and then four consecutive Sabbaths (totaling 29 days). A New Moon arrives again after this, and we start over again, having this New Moon first and then the four consecutive Sabbaths. However, we face the dilemma of the two ½ days adding up to an entire additional day. What does one do with this additional day? This last 29<sup>th</sup> day (Sabbath) would be followed by day 30 and then day 1. These days do not necessarily have to be counted as day 30 and day 1, but rather as a two day festival of the New Moon. At first, many think of this as silly or illogical, but let us examine some thoughts and most importantly some Scriptures in light of this two-day feast. The *Encyclopedia Biblica* states on this issue:

At a New Moon the clans also were accustomed to hold their yearly family sacrifices; so for example the Bethlemite clan to which David belonged (1 Sam. 20:6). **The second day of the New Moon seems also to have been solemnly observed (1 Sam. 20:27).** The story related in 1 Samuel 20 shows us clearly what importance was attached to the feast; it was permissible for no one to absent himself from court on this occasion without adequate reason.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philo, in his work titled *On the Creation* (pp. 81, 83 Colson-Whitaker Translation) states: "...the circuits of the moon... begin at 1 and add each number up to 7 and it produces 28. This is a perfect number and equal to the sum of its own factors. And the number produced is the number which brings the moon back to her original form, as she retraces her course by lessening till she reaches the shape from which she began to make perceptible increase; for she increases from her first shining as a crescent till she becomes a half-moon in seven days, then in as many more she becomes full-moon, and again returns the same way like a runner in the double race-course, from the full to the half-moon in seven days as before, then from the half to the crescent in an equal number of days: these four sets of days complete the aforesaid number." Notice here that Philo speaks of the number 28 being produced, but he leaves out the conjunction or the period of time known as the new moon. Elsewhere in his work titled *The Special Laws I* (p. 201 Colson Translation) he writes "In the first seven from the conjunction we have the half moon, in the second the full moon, and when she is reversing her course she passes first into the half moon and then dies away into the conjunction." Here, Philo includes the conjunction/new moon period, and does not speak of the number 28 because of his inclusion of the period of the new moon, a period having the sum of either 29 or 30 days.

<sup>2</sup> *The Encyclopedia Biblica*, p. 3402.

A few paragraphs down in this same encyclopedia we read the following:

There seems to be in 1 Sam. 20:27 compared with verses 18, 24 that **in old times the feast of the New Moon lasted two days...**<sup>3</sup>

We find yet another reference to what may be a vestige left of this ancient observance mentioned in the book, *A Treasury of Jewish Holidays*, which states:

The Jewish month, which is in accordance with the lunar and not the solar calendar, consists either of twenty-nine or thirty days. When the previous month has twenty-nine days, only one day of Rosh Hodesh [New Moon] is observed. **When the preceding month has thirty days, two days of Rosh Hodesh [New Moon] are observed, the first day of which is the thirtieth day of the preceding month.**<sup>4</sup>

Yet another reference to this is found in the popular *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*.

The festive nature of the New Moon is suggested by the **two days of feasting hosted by Saul** (1 Sam. 20:5, 18, 24-27).<sup>5</sup>

Zvi Cahn writes this concerning the two-day festival of the new moon:

According to Nahawendi, the new moon is to be proclaimed "by sight" in the months of Nissan and Iyar only, because the holidays occur in these months, while other months are to be computed in such wise that **when the month has 30 days, that month's New Moon is celebrated on two successive days, and not on one day.** He quotes as evidence the passage of... (Samuel 20, 27) interpreting this to mean the second day of [Rosh Chodesh].<sup>6</sup>

Solomon Gandz quotes translates (quotes) the ancient Rabbi Maimonides in his work saying:

According to this method of procedure (of the fixed calendar) based on calculation, **the 30th day is always observed as the new moon day** (but the difference between the defective and the full month is as follows): **If the past month was defective, the 30th day is the first day of the new month; if the past month was full, the 30th day is still observed as the new moon day, inasmuch as part of it belongs to the new month, but it is counted as the completion, i.e. as the last day, of the past full month, whereas the 31st day is counted as the first day of the new month.** The latter is the day of the establishment of the new month and with it the count of the new month begins. According to this method of procedure, therefore, we observe alternately one day only in one month and two days in the next month as the new moon's festival.<sup>7</sup>

Gandz goes on elsewhere to describe the keeping of two days at the new moon as what he believes to be the ancient practice:

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *A Treasury of Jewish Holidays*, by Hyman E. Goldin, p. 17

<sup>5</sup> *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 1987, p. 761

<sup>6</sup> *The Rise of the Karaite Sect (A New Light on the Halakah and Origin of the Karaites)* by Dr. Zvi Cahn, M. Tausner Publishing Company, New York, NY 1937, pp. 84-85

<sup>7</sup> *Studies in the Hebrew Calendar II, The Origin of the Two New Moon Days*, by Solomon Gandz, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Oct., 1949), p. 158

From the story of David and Jonathan, as related in I Sam. 20, **it appears clearly that according to the author of this chapter 6 King Saul, prior to 1,000 B.C.E., was in the habit of observing two new moon days.** When he sat down on the first day to his festive meal he missed David but said nothing about it for he thought that David was absent on account of ritual uncleanness. But when David's seat remained unoccupied on the second new moon day Saul became suspicious and asked Jonathan for the reason of David's absence... And then we read further (in verse 34 *ibid.*) that Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food on the second day of the new moon festival... **There can be no doubt that [this Hebrew phrase] has the same meaning as [the Hebrew phrase in vs. 27] and that both phrases refer to the second day of the new moon festival,** on which a festive meal was given at the King's table and in which David was supposed to take part.<sup>8</sup>

It is also interesting to note that in the works of the 1st century Israelite author Flavius Josephus, he gives an account of the story of David, Jonathan, and Saul in 1 Samuel 20 (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 6, Chapter 11, Section 9[235-236]). In this section Josephus states:

But when he [Saul] saw that he [David] was not there **the second day of the new moon either**, he inquired of his son Jonathan why the son of Jesse did not come to the supper and the feast, neither the day before nor that day.

Josephus uses the Greek word *noumenia* (transliterated) a word used throughout the Septuagint and one time in the Greek New Testament to describe the special first day of the month on the Hebrew calendar.<sup>9</sup>

Author Harold Hemenway made reference to this observance in a booklet he wrote saying, "...Saul held a two day festival (1 Sam. 20:27-34). David and Jonathan knew in advance that there would be a New Moon festival the next day (1 Sam. 20:5, 18), and the day after that, because of their mentioning waiting until the third day (1 Sam. 20:5, 12, 19)."<sup>10</sup>

Are all of these claims made by non Lunar Sabbatarians erroneous, or can we conclude that it is not illogical to at least consider the possibility that the New Moon did anciently consist (at times) of a two day length? The Scriptural reference puts it in this manner:

1. 1 Samuel 20:5 - And David said to Jonathan, "Indeed **tomorrow is the New Moon**, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field **until the third day** at evening.
2. 1 Samuel 20:24-25 - Then David hid in the field. And **when the New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat the feast**. Now the king sat on his seat, as at other times, on a seat by

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 161, the bracketed words have been inserted by me as an explanation of what the author (Gandz) wrote in Hebrew. I have purchased the article if anyone would like to look at the original.

<sup>9</sup> Numbers 10:10; 1 Samuel 20:5, 18; 4 Kings 4:23; Ezekiel 45:17; 46:1, 3 (all LXX), and Colossians 2:16.

<sup>10</sup> *What's Wrong With the Calendar?* Harold Hemenway, 1993, p. 20. Hemenway, among other authors, believe that the reason there were 2 days celebrated at the time of the new moon is because the ancient Israelites could not predict when the waxing crescent in the western sky at sunset would be visible to the naked eye. They claim that there would be no reason for the Israelites to celebrate two days at the new moon unless the new moon was based upon the visual crescent. I believe this is a faulty understanding when one recognizes that with a lunar based Sabbath, you will inevitably have either 1 or 2 days "left over" at the end of each month of counting Sabbaths. Thus a 1 or 2 day festival at the new moon would always be in order.

- the wall. And Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, **but David's place was empty.**
3. *1 Samuel 20:26-27* - Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him; he *is* unclean, surely he *is* unclean." **And it happened the next day, the second *day* of the month, that David's place was empty.** And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "**Why has the son of Jesse not come to eat, either yesterday or today?**"

In the New King James Version above, we find the English phrase, "the second *day* of the month." The first thing to point out is the italicized word "day," showing that this word is not found in the Hebrew text, causing the more literal reading in English to be, "the second of the month." The literal reading of the Hebrew text is - *ha chodesh ha sheniy* - translated most literally as "the New Moon the second." Thus, verse 27 is translated in the Young's Literal Translation as:

And it cometh to pass on the **second morrow of the New Moon**, that David's place is looked after... [1 Samuel 20:27 YLT]

Verse 34 of this same translation also states,

And Jonathan riseth from the table in the heat of anger, and hath not eaten food on **the second day of the New Moon**, for he hath been grieved for David, for his father put him to shame.<sup>11</sup>

Author Herb Solinsky comments on the Hebrew syntax of these verses in 1 Samuel 20:27, 34 by saying:

The Hebrew syntax in verses 27 and 34 is the same for one phrase **that is not like any place in the Hebrew Scriptures where a numbered day of the month is mentioned.** The Hebrew word order is "the chodesh the second", which occurs that way four times in the Hebrew Bible: 1 Sam 20:27, 34; 2 Ki 6:1; 1 Chr 27:4. In the latter two places it means "the second month". This expression "the chodesh the second" does not have the Hebrew word yom for "day", does not have a preposition attached to the beginning of the number, and has the number after the word chodesh. **These three factors do not occur in any place where a numbered day of the month is mentioned in the Tanak... There is no example in Scripture with the syntax as in 1 Sam 20:27,34 to indicate that [it] could mean a numbered day of the month.**<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore (as has been alluded to) the *context* of the passage in 1 Samuel, considering the mentioning of the New Moon, the two-day feasting, and the hiding in the field unto the third day, lends credence to the belief that a two-day festival was held at this place in Scripture. Some have presented the Septuagint rendering of 1 Samuel 20:27, 34 so as to lend credence towards the belief that day two was literally day two of that individual month in lieu of being day two of the feast of the New Moon. However, noticing the Hebrew text and context of 1 Samuel 20, and coupling that with the context

<sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel 20:27 NASB reads: "And it came about the next day, the second day of the new moon, that David's place was empty; so Saul said to Jonathan his son, Why has the son of Jesse not come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" Verse 34 in the NASB reads: "Then Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved over David because his father had dishonored him." Likewise the New English Translation (bible.org) translates both phrases in verse 27 and 34 as "the second day of the new moon."

<sup>12</sup> *The Treatise on the Biblical Calendar*, Herb Solinsky, April 8, 2009, p. 105

of 1 Samuel 20 in the Septuagint (where the word *mene* can be used interchangeably with *noumenia*)<sup>13</sup> you can conclude that a two-day festival of the New Moon was held from reading the text of the LXX.

The fact of the matter is this: there are commentators and Bible encyclopedias on both sides of the issue here. There are some who say: *no*, this was not a two-day New Moon feast, while others state the contrary, as I have shown. The issue though is what does the Hebrew text of Scripture teach us? What does the context depict in 1 Samuel 20? You must ask these questions yourself when reading Scripture.

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter eight of this work for more detail.