

How Do We Determine the Month of the Aviv?

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Original: March 25, 2008

Supplemented: September 25, 2008

When first entering into an understanding of the applicability of the Torah to their lives, many read and quote the following text from the Scriptures: *“For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it? But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.”* Devarim 30:11-14.

In other words, Mosheh is telling us that we can all keep the Torah and it is not too difficult. It is not too far away for any of us and it is something we can all know and understand. Sadly these words do not always seem to be true when it comes to determining the month of the Aviv and celebrating the Passover. Let me explain the underlying issue in case you are not familiar with what I am referring to. According to the Torah we must celebrate the Passover between the evenings on the 14th day of the month of the Aviv. (Vayiqra 23:5). Therefore, it is important to understand when the month of the Aviv begins so that we know when to start counting the days to celebrate the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened bread and all subsequent Appointed Times which occur throughout the year. (see Vayiqra 23).

At first glance, this would appear to be a simple commandment to follow. All you have to do is count 14 days from the beginning of the first month of the year, right? That is correct, and if we had a month of the Aviv on our modern solar calendars it would be that simple. The problem is that we are not so much looking for the month OF Aviv as we are the month OF THE Aviv. These are not necessarily the same thing although they are often used interchangeably. In essence, what we are talking about is locating the first new moon of the year used by Yisrael so that we can then begin the count to Passover and all subsequent Appointed Times. This leads us back to the question of determining when the month of the Aviv begins.

To make this determination you can either create your own calendar based upon the Scriptural prerequisites, or if you do not feel qualified for such a task, you must locate a Hebrew calendar which uses the lunar cycle to determine the beginning of months. Once you have found such a calendar, you then need to determine whether the calendar is actually correct. You see over time there have been a variety of theories developed regarding the Scriptural lunar calendar, most of which have merit but also, most of which differ. So most of us find ourselves living in modern society under a solar calendar system while the Scriptural Appointed Times occur on a lunar

calendar, which is the subject of great debate. This can make for a precarious situation as we straddle between two different systems of reckoning time.

So how do we determine the beginning of the year and the first month referred to as the month of the Aviv? There are those who rely on calculations, while others rely upon the movement of the sun and the moon. Still others rely upon the sighting of the new moon when the barley is aviv. For those who rely on aviv barley, there is an underlying debate which involves confusion and disagreement concerning what is meant by the term “aviv” and whether the existence and observation of a small amount or an abundance of aviv barley throughout the land of Yisrael is necessary for the month of the Aviv to begin.

The term aviv is directly linked to the barley so it seems logical to assume that the month of the Aviv is when the barley is aviv. The important question then arises: What does it mean for the barley to be aviv? Various translations give different definitions such as: “to be tender” or “fresh” or “young green ears of grain” or “in the head”. None of these are very specific nor are they necessarily even accurate. Currently, there are several growth staging systems that have been developed which help identify the various stages in the maturing process of barley. The Zadoks system, the Haun system and the Feekes-Large system are the most popular, but sadly while they can classify the many different stages in the barley growth process, none of them can positively identify exactly what was meant by the Scriptural term “aviv”.

This is an important point because while those who inspect the state of the barley in Yisrael may be able to identify the stage of the barley according to one of the modern staging systems, they cannot necessarily state what stage equates with the term aviv in the Scriptures, a term which lacks the specificity involved in those systems. Even if you could find a correlation between the Scriptural definition of aviv and these modern staging systems, we still do not know how much barley must be matured to the level of aviv and where in the Land of Yisrael you must find aviv barley for it to be considered to be the month of the Aviv. These problems, as far as I can see, pose major obstacles for using barley to establish the new year because of the lack of Scriptural specificity and detail concerning the definition of aviv. Thus, while you would surely think that there would be aviv barley during the month of the Aviv, the Scriptures do not necessarily provide specific guidance for using the barley to make that determination.

This is where things start to get a bit confusing. I believe that the barley is an important part of the month of the Aviv and the Feasts that follow the beginning of the month, so for years I endeavored to keep the Appointed Times by following the development of the barley in Yisrael. I must say that it was, at times, both difficult and confusing. To begin, since I live in the United States I am unable to observe the barley myself so I must rely upon others to report the condition of the barley from one new moon to another. Also, because of the distance involved, making a trip to Yisrael takes a lot of planning and preparation. If I have to wait until I receive barley reports from Yisrael to know whether the month of the Aviv has begun, it leaves me with less than two weeks to clear my work schedule and arrange flights, hotel, car etc.

If, on the other hand, I make my plans in advance, a last minute change is both costly and a logistical nightmare. Remember that the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which begins on the 15th day of the month of the Aviv is a Feast which is to be celebrated in the Land, at the place where YHWH chooses, which as far as I can tell is still Jerusalem. (Devarim 16:16). This can be a very difficult task for someone living outside the Land which makes for a great argument that we should all move to Yisrael immediately. While I welcome that option and look forward to the day when all of the Assembly of Yisrael returns to the Land, that time has not yet come.

In the meantime, there are millions still in dispersion and it certainly would be helpful to know if the barley is the key to establishing the Appointed Times. Now I realize that YHWH has bigger things on His plate than my travel plans, but as I quoted Mosheh at the beginning, this is not supposed to be too difficult. Maybe “too” is the operative word, but whenever I find myself in this barley dilemma I feel the urge to start searching the Scriptures and reconsidering some assumptions. Of course, this is not the only time in history when Yisraelites were away from the land and would need to know, in advance, when to keep the Appointed Times. This issue has certainly been raised in the past and I recall writing an article in 2005 on the issue, but I have since suffered some computer crashes and cannot seem to locate it. Maybe that is a good thing so I am forced to start my research from scratch.

This year (2008), after making my initial estimated plans for Shavuot, based upon presumptions concerning the barley, I received reports from Yisrael indicating that the barley was not aviv at the sighting of the new moon in March 2008. I quickly changed my travel plans to include the intercalation (addition of a 13th month to the calendar) at significant cost. The next day I received another report that the barley was, in fact, in a state where the first month could be declared. Rather than change my plans again, I decided that I needed to look deeper into this issue because it must be happening to me for a reason. I strongly desire to do things correctly, according to Torah, so I decided not to make any rash decisions until the matter was fully examined.

I reviewed the reports and one source indicated that they did not find any aviv barley anywhere in the Land of Yisrael despite having an international team of observers. Their report indicated that they found barley in the Northern Negev in the “cotton” stage, also referred to as the “flowering” stage. They further reported that in the Jordan Valley they found a small amount of barley in the “worm” stage, also known as the “soft dough” stage. As a result of those findings, a determination was made that there must be a thirteenth month added (intercalated) to the calendar. The other group described barley found in the Jordan Valley as being “in the late milk stage to the soft dough stage of development which is 77-85 on the Zadoks, Feekes and Haun Scales.” Their findings led them to believe that there was no need to intercalate and they declared that the month of the Aviv had indeed arrived, thus beginning the count to Passover.

Now I live in a modern society where travel is quite easy and information is freely and quickly shared. I can get a barley report on the internet with lightening

speed, although even these immediate reports can be conflicting and confusing as people do not always agree on the status of the barley. With all of this information you would think that things would be easier, but that does not always appear to be the case. I think I can safely say that the average Believer does not know the difference between “worm” stage barley, “soft dough” stage barley and “aviv” barley, nor do they know or understand the numeric ratings on the Zadoks, Feekes-Large and Haun Scales.

I like to take a practical approach to the Torah and I am considering that if it is difficult for me under these seemingly optimal conditions, how much more difficult it would have been for someone two thousand years ago who was outside the Land, if they were relying on the barley determination to start their new year. They would not immediately know the status of the barley at the new moon without modern communication so how would they know when the month of the Aviv had arrived and how would they know when to return to the land for Passover? Quite frankly, even if they could obtain this information after the sighting of the new moon, they probably would not have enough time to return to the Land to celebrate the Passover properly. Maybe they wouldn't and that is why the Torah permits the observance of Passover in the second month (Bemidbar 9:10-11), but the Apostle Shaul seemed to be able to calculate the times and make his plans accordingly while he was outside the land on his journeys. (Acts 18:21). So while there was provision for those traveling outside the Land who miss Passover, it appears that the times could still be determined even by a person who is outside the Land.

There were many instances throughout history when the status of the barley in the Land of Yisrael was simply not known, yet the Scriptural calendar continued on. Some use the argument that during the flood, Noah was still able to discern the beginning of a new year without the evidence of aviv barley, which is true, so this would seem to demonstrate that aviv barley was not needed in the days of Noah to determine a new year. Tradition holds that prior to Yisrael leaving Egypt, the first month of the year actually occurred in what we now consider the seventh lunar month on the Hebrew calendar. This poses an interesting point because if you believe that aviv barley in the Land of Yisrael is the only factor which determines the beginning of a new year, along with the sighting of the new moon, then it begs the question: If the tradition is true, what determined the beginning of a year before the month of the aviv was considered to be the first month? Ponder that question for awhile if you are sold on the barley theory because it is an important question which must be answered. In either case, Noah was able to discern the progress of months and years without anything but the sun, the moon and the stars. He apparently did not need any crops to tell him when the new year began, unless you want to interpret the olive branch as something which affected the calendar. (Beresheet 8:11-13).

There was also the time when Yisrael wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, all the while celebrating the Passover (Bemidbar 9). This begs the question: How did they know when to celebrate if they were not in the Land inspecting and cultivating the barley? As with the example of Noah, they were not in the Land and they did not have a barley report or crops to look at, but they did have the sun, the moon and the

stars. Now some might argue that this was before Yisrael entered into the Land so it does not count, but remember, we are talking about the Scriptural calendar which was in existence from the beginning of creation and which continues to this day. Interestingly, they were determining the Appointed Times while they were outside the Land so they could celebrate the Passover outside the land until they were allowed to enter in. This sounds a lot like the condition in which many presently find themselves – outside the Land waiting to enter in.

In both of these instances, you could argue that YHWH Himself told them what time that it was and this is certainly plausible, and likely the case when Yisrael celebrated their first Passover while in the Desert of Sinai. I begs the question of whether there was another way to determine when the month of the Aviv occurred that was not dependant on visual observation of the barley in the Land of Canaan – I believe that there was.

Let me explain – shortly before the Passover in Egypt we are told: “³¹ Now the flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was in the head and the flax was in bud.³² But the wheat and the spelt were not struck, for they are late crops.” Shemot 9:31-32 NKJV. From this passage we know that the barley in Egypt was aviv, or “in the head,” as some translations provide, when the seventh plague of hail took place. In other words, the barley crops in Egypt were mature in the head so when the hail came it destroyed the plants because they were developed beyond simply grass. This passage in neither technical nor precise, it does not tell us exactly what stage of development the barley was in because the term aviv is subject to interpretation, nor does it tell us if all of the barley was aviv or just some of the barley was aviv. Despite the vague nature of this text, it is often used as a proof text for those who advocate the use of barley as the exclusive indicator of the new year base their claims. Those proponents use this passage as “Scriptural proof” that the barley controls the calendar but this is not what the passage is saying. Now I believe that all things are in the Scriptures for a reason and the status of the crops certainly gives us a hint as to what time of the year it was, but this passage was not giving us a technical definition of aviv nor was it giving us a technique for determining the new year.

I have read that some barley farmers consider “in the head” to mean that 80% of a field is “headed.” That information appears to be quite helpful because the Scriptural passage seems to be implying that most, if not all, of the barley in Egypt was struck down by the hail, so most of the barley would have been “in the head.” Now it is important to point out that the first time we hear about the barley as it relates to the first month is dealing with Egyptian barley, not barley in Canaan. This passage does not tell us the stage of development of the barley in the Land of Canaan, which may have been different from Egypt.

There were more plagues to come and an unknown amount of time elapsed, days maybe weeks, until Mosheh and Aharon were instructed that: “*This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.*” Shemoth 12:2 NKJV. That is all they were told, they were not told that because the barley was aviv and they spotted the new moon that this is now the first month. In fact, it could have

been a different month than when the barley was struck down in Shemoth 9:31. Therefore, I believe that it was simply a declaration that THIS month shall be your beginning of months. The word “month” in the Hebrew is “chodesh” which means “new moon” and you could just as easily translate this passage to read “This new moon shall be the beginning of your new moons; it shall be the first new moon of the year to you.”

While reading this passage, I get the distinct impression that Mosheh and Aharon were standing looking up at the new moon while YHWH was speaking to them and notice the previous verse makes the point to state: “*And YHWH spoke to Mosheh and to Aharon in the land of Egypt.*” Shemoth 12:1. So they were actually sighting the new moon from Egypt, not from Yisrael. In other words, it was that particular new moon/month, while they were in Egypt, that the Passover was to be celebrated. They were not necessarily told that they had to check the barley in Egypt or Canaan or that they had to sight the new moon in Egypt or Canaan because it appears that they already knew the month that YHWH was talking about, without being given a new system of determining months based exclusively on the condition of the barley.

Mosheh and Aharon, having been born and raised in Egypt would have certainly been familiar with the Egyptian reckoning of time which was based upon the sun and the stars. According to Flavius Josephus, an ancient historian, it was Avraham that actually brought this reckoning of time to the Egyptians. (Josephus, Antiquities, Book 1:8:2). Josephus further indicates that Mosheh used the same reckoning of time used by Avraham when he led the Children of Yisrael out of Egypt. (Josephus, Antiquities, Book 1:3:3). If this is true then Mosheh would have kept time the same as Avraham and this also makes sense due to the profound impact that Joseph and all of the Children of Yisrael undoubtedly had upon Egypt during their stay in that country.

Josephus further tells us the YHWH instructed Mosheh to: “tell the people that they should have a sacrifice ready, and that they should prepare themselves on the tenth day of the month of Xanthicus, against the fourteenth (which month is called by the Egyptians Pharmuth, and Nisan by the Hebrews; but the Macedonians call it Xanthicus), and that he should carry away the Hebrews with all they had.” (Josephus Antiquities, Book 2:14:6). The Egyptian month of Parmuth would begin on the Gregorian date of March 27 and the Macedonian month of Xanthicus would begin in early part of April. Thus in either case Passover would not have occurred until the month of April. (Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature John McClintock, Harper & Brothers 1890 Page 548). Josephus even provides the constellation that Egypt was under at the time of the Exodus. He states that “in the month of Xanthicus, which is by us called Nisan, and is the beginning of our year, on the fourteenth day of the lunar month, when the sun is in Aries (for in this month it was that we were delivered from bondage under the Egyptians) . . .” (Josephus, Antiquities, Book 3:10:5).

Therefore, Mosheh and Aharon would have known that THIS month that YHWH was referring to was Parmuth and Xanthicus, later renamed Nisan by the

Hebrews. To my knowledge, neither of these months were directly determined by the state of the barley crops although they were tied to the harvest seasons which revolved around the vernal equinox. In fact, “[s]o much is certain, that in the time of Moses the month of ears cannot have commenced before the first days of our April, which was then the period of the vernal equinox.” (McClintock quoting Ideler, *Handbuch der Chronologie*, i, 490).

Although it is not specifically mentioned in the Scriptures, the use of the equinox was a very common method of determining the beginning of the harvest season. It is also important to consider the tradition that this time of the year was not originally the beginning of the year in the ancient calendar and that YHWH shifted the first month as a remembrance of the time when Yisrael was delivered from Egypt. If true, the anniversary of creation and the first month was what is now considered to be the seventh month and that is why people to this day celebrate Rosh Hashanah (The Head of the Year) on Yom Teruah, the Day of Trumpets, which occurs on the first day of the seventh month.

This is significant because those in the west live under a 12 month system but the Hebrew reckoning of a year is not always contained within twelve months. This is a demonstration of the difference between western thought and eastern or Hebrew thought. While Hebrew reasoning and reckoning of time are circular, western thinking and reckoning of time is generally considered to be linear. To a westerner, it would seem quite odd to renumber the months because they look at it from a linear perspective. To a Hebrew, or eastern mind, this is not such a difficult concept to understand because the Scriptural calendar is divided into two seasons: summer and winter. These seasons are looked upon as cycles so a year, in the Scriptural sense, is viewed as a completion of cycles, rather than a specific counting of days, weeks or months.

There is an interesting passage of Scripture which shines a bit more light on this subject. Shemot 34:22 states: “*And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end.*” NKJV. The reference to “the year's end” in Hebrew is “tequfah hashaanah.” The word “tequfah” refers to a circuit or cycle of a planet such as the sun (Tehillim 19:6) or the moon. The word “shaanah” is defined as a year and is a division of time. In one passage of the Scriptures “at the end of the year” (tequfah hashannah) is actually translated as “spring.” 2 Dibre Hayamim 24:23 NKJV.

So we have one instance which refers to the time of year generally referred to as fall or autumn, and another instance which refers to the time of year referred to as the spring. How can it be that the Scriptures are referencing seasons which do not even exist and how can you have an end of the year in autumn and an end of the year in spring? The answer is simple enough. These references to the “end of the year” are referring to the completion of cycles. Therefore, in the framework of the Scriptural seasons the “completion of the cycle” will occur at the end of the winter season and the end of the summer season. There is a completion of a cycle which occurs during each of these seasons known as the equinox.

For those of you unfamiliar with the equinox, it is that moment when the sun passes directly over the earth's equator. It is called the equinox, because on that day at the equator, day and night are of equal length. This happens two times each year and these two events are typically called the autumnal equinox and the vernal equinox. The autumnal equinox occurs during the time often referred to as autumn or fall, while the vernal equinox occurs in what is often referred to as spring.

Mosheh was clearly familiar with the circuit of the sun (ie. the equinox and the solstice) as they related to the year and the Appointed Times based upon the fact that he made reference, at least to one tequfah in Shemot 34:22. So it appears that YHWH was using a system of reckoning which He had set in place since creation and He was telling Mosheh that THIS new moon (month) will be your first from this point forward. Understandably, many people have a problem considering the possibility that YHWH would use the equinox in determining His calendar since there is so much paganism associated with the equinox and the solstice. Honestly, I used to feel the same way, but it is important to remember that pagans twist and distort the true worship of YHWH. YHWH created the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars. They are all His and created for His purposes. There is nothing wrong or unscriptural concerning the equinox which is an important part of the harvest cycle and the reckoning of time, and just because sun worshippers have hijacked those times to conduct their festivities does not diminish their significance as they relate to the Scriptural calendar.

Many people who are attempting to rid pagan influences from their lives instinctively reject the sun as a factor in determining time because pagan sun worship has placed so much emphasis on the sun. Regardless of what the pagans have done, and continue to do, we cannot forget Who made the sun and why it was made. According to Beresheet 1:14-19: *“¹⁴ Elohim said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years;’¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth’ and it was so.¹⁶ Then Elohim made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.¹⁷ Elohim set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth,¹⁸ and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And Elohim saw that it was good.¹⁹ So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.”*

There cannot be any dispute that the Scriptures are talking about the sun and the moon. Therefore the passage is clearly telling us that the sun and the moon shall be for signs and seasons, for days and for years. The Hebrew word for seasons is “moadim” and it is the very word used to describe the Feasts or Appointed Times (Vayiqra 23). Therefore the lights are for signs, Appointed Times and for days and years. Notice that it is not light but rather lights. Thus it is the sun and the moon, and the movement and positioning of these bodies, which determine time, not the moon and barley. This was stated right from the beginning of creation when the calendar first began and we know from history that mankind used the sun, the moon and the stars to tell time because that is why they are there. This fact was confirmed in the

Psalms which declare: *“He appointed the moon for Appointed Times, the sun knows its going down.”* Tehillim 104:19.

Both of these bodies are part of the celestial clock and the sun is at the center of it all. The cycle of the sun determines the days and the cycle of the moon determines the months via the reflected light of the sun. Without the sun, the lunar cycle would not exist so it is not simply the moon which determines the months, but the sun and the moon. Finally, it is through the cycle of the sun that we determine the passing of years, or rather the completion of cycles, just as the Scriptures provide – not the barley which is never mentioned as something which determines years except through conjecture and speculation. I have heard it argued that the sun plays a part in determining the year by shining on the barley and helping it grow. That is a giant stretch since the rain and the soil also play vital roles in the maturing process of the barley. The Scriptures never refer to the soil and water being part of the process of determining the Appointed Times, days and years even though they certainly play a role because they help the harvest grow. Ultimately, I think it is a very safe interpretation that the position and movement of these lights in the heavens are what tell us the times. Also I must reiterate that prior to Yisrael leaving Egypt there is no indication that anybody ever used barley to determine the passage of time - time was reckoned exclusively by the sun, the moon and the stars.

This is a point which was so obvious that it probably did not need to be included in the Scriptures, because in ancient times people would generally look up to determine what time it was. Now we all look at our wrists or to the clocks and calendars on our cell phones, computer screens or walls. We are so used to having someone else tell us what time it is that we do not know how to tell time ourselves. This is why we find ourselves in the midst of so much confusion. We must understand that the anti-messiah described by Daniel will attempt to: *“wear out the set apart ones of the Most High, and shall intend to change appointed times and commandments. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.”* Daniel 7:25. Notice how he will first try to wear out the elect and change the appointed times and the commandments. I am witnessing a lot of people become confused and discouraged by this calendar debate. They are getting worn out and ready to throw up their arms in frustration. Most are already under enough pressure from friends and family because of their new found beliefs. Imagine the grief that they receive when they inform their critics that they do not even know when to celebrate their new “holy days.”

I desire to do everything in accordance with the Scriptures and anybody who has read my books knows that I always start by going back to the beginning because I believe that the beginning lays the foundation for everything else. In the case of telling time, I believe that YHWH established His “clock” and His calendar at the very beginning with the sun as the greater light and the moon as the lesser light. In fact, in the scheme of creation wouldn’t it seem logical that “the greater light” would be used to keep track of the years and days while “the lesser light” is used to keep track of the months? There are times when both work together while the sun sets and starts a new day the new moon confirms a new month, thus the sun and the moon

collaborate on rosh chodesh and on Yom Teruah. The inclusion of barley into this equation simply does not correspond with Scriptural or historical precedent established from the beginning of time.

I believe that YHWH instructed Adam regarding this calendar and then Adam instructed his children through Noah. Noah then continued to tell time as is apparent from the Scriptures, which was passed on to mankind through his children to Avraham and his descendants. Throughout all of this time period, tradition holds that the year began in what we now refer to as the seventh month, or the month of Tishri. If this is correct, there is no indication that the determination of Tishri was dependant on any crop or any other event other than the sighting of the new moon and potentially the autumnal equinox. There is no indication that the passing of the year was dependent on any crop or anything other than the lights.

I do not believe that mankind was given a new system of reckoning time in Egypt through Mosheh and Aharon. What happened in Egypt was YHWH telling them that THIS month will be your FIRST month from now on. In other words, YHWH was establishing or renumbering their months to set them apart from the rest of the nations. Yisrael celebrated their first Passover in Egypt and the following 40 in the wilderness. Again, they were able to tell time and determine their first month without examining barley in Yisrael and sighting the new moon from Yisrael. When they entered into the Land they performed the first Passover in the Land at Gilgal and they ate unleavened bread from the stored grain of the land so we do not know the status of barley in the land at that time. (Yahushua 5:10-11). We do not have precise records of how the Children of Yisrael celebrated the Passover once they started harvesting their own crops in the Land but let's look at a practical example of how things might have gone when they settled the land.

What if I were a part of the tribe of Dan and I was in northern Yisrael near Lebanon growing my barley. In that case I would be pretty far from Shiloh or Jerusalem, depending upon where the Tabernacle was located at the time, and my crops could possibly be in a different state of ripening than those in Judea. Maybe my crops were ripe when the new moon after the 12th month arrived and maybe those in the south were not or vice versa. What would we do at that point and who would make the determination? How could an investigation take place, a determination be made and the decision be broadcast throughout Yisrael and beyond with enough time to prepare for my trip to Shiloh or Jerusalem, get my lamb and go through the 4 day inspection period prior to Passover, along with the myriad other details necessary to make a successful pilgrimage. These are just some of the problems that can occur when the determination is based strictly on an inspection made by an individual or group. Of course, it is not as difficult today with our modern means of transportation and communication, but imagine the complexities involved thousands of years ago.

In Yisrael, at the time of Yahushua, they had established a ruling body called the Sanhedrin which would make these types of determinations, but again, it would have been difficult to implement throughout the land; that may be why the Sanhedrin developed a system where a token of barley was offered at Firstfruits during the Feast

of Unleavened Bread. (see Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, Kregel Publications, Michigan, 1997). None of that precedent is found in the Scriptures, it was tradition created by the leaders of Yisrael. What we read in the Scriptures is simply: *“¹⁰ When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. ¹¹ He shall wave the sheaf before YHWH, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.”* Vayiqra 23:10-11.

We aren't given specifics as to where the barley would come from but since all of the males were supposed to come up to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which included the Feast of Firstfruits, it seems quite apparent that they were to bring their own firstfruits so that the priest could wave their sheaf before YHWH on their behalf. This would mean that at least the firstfruits of all of the crops would have been harvested before the Feast and collected to take up to Shiloh or Jerusalem. This was confirmed by Josephus who wrote: “[o]n the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first eat of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them. And while they suppose it proper to honor God, from whom they obtain this plentiful provision, in the first place, they offer the firstfruits of their barley, and that in the matter following: They take a handful of the ears, and dry them, and beat them small, and separate the barley from the bran; they then bring one tenth deal to the altar, to God; and, casting one handful of it upon the fire, they leave the rest for the use of the priest. And after this it is that they may publicly or privately reap their harvest.” (Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 3:10:5).

Again, the system and procedures followed by the Sanhedrin were not necessarily in accordance with the criteria established by the Scriptures so the “calendar court” was not necessarily correct in their methods or practices. Many people look back to what was happening at the time of Yahushua two thousand years ago for guidance, but we must remember that Yahushua often chastised the ruling elite for their traditions, which often superseded or violated the Commandments of YHWH. (Mattityahu 15:3-10). We also know from history that the Temple service had deteriorated and the priesthood had become corrupted. As a result, it is believed that some had left and joined the Essene Sect. Can you blame them when the Temple had actually been built by Herod, a corrupt tyrant with much blood on his hands and the Priesthood was controlled by the Sadducees who were not necessarily descendents of Aharon or from the Tribe of Levi.

It is important to consider that David, a man after the heart of Elohim, was not permitted to build the House of YHWH because he had too much blood on his hands. So then how could Herod be qualified to rebuild the House? I believe that he was not and there were probably many others who felt that way, but they still followed the rehearsals as best they could, just like we do today with no standing Temple in Jerusalem and no functioning Kohanite priesthood. There was no Ark of the Covenant in this House so it was not even furnished according to the Torah. The Sanhedrin failed to recognize their own Messiah, so I do not place much credence in their spiritual insight and understanding or their interpretation and application of the Scriptures. As a result, while we may examine anything in history for information

and guidance, we must be careful what we use as a basis for our own beliefs and practices.

Devarim 16:1 specifically states: “*Observe (guard) the month (new moon) of the Aviv (the ripe ears).*” From this text we can glean much information. For one thing the word shamar tells us to guard and to observe. Shamar was the direction given to Adam in the garden and it is used throughout the Torah as we are instructed “to guard” and “protect” and “to watch” and “to keep” the ways of YHWH. The month in the Scriptural calendar begins at the sighting of the new moon which is “rosh chodesh” in Hebrew. As was stated previously, the term “aviv” can have many different meanings and men have developed different systems and methodologies for describing the stages in the maturing process of barley.

In my opinion, these systems are going beyond the basic intent of the Scriptures and are developing a tradition which was neither specified nor intended by YHWH. Whenever men develop special knowledge they typically acquire power for themselves. Determining the new year should not be something which is only known or decided by a select few, it should be evident to all of creation and I think that it was meant to be apparent and obvious. The word aviv in the general usage means “ripe ears.” The point then is that we are to watch out for the new moon of the aviv or the new moon when the barley harvest is ripening because the Feasts revolve around the harvests and an important point of going to the Feasts is bringing the firstfruits of the harvest. By telling us to watch and guard that particular new moon it is to insure that the Feasts are in synch with the harvest and above all, to make sure that we actually do what we are supposed to do.

I don't think that anyone would disagree with that statement although not everyone is diligent to guard the aviv because they might be allowing it to go awry at times by following a predetermined calendar, such as the Hillel II calendar, which does not even rely upon the actual sighting of the new moon, but rather relies on a calculation. So then the question must be asked: How do we guard the new moon of the aviv? In a very practical sense we make sure that at the new moon of the first month, the crops are such that the firstfruits will be ready for the Feasts. Does this mean that the barley is the deciding factor for the new year? Absolutely not. What I believe is that the barley is the confirming factor not the determining factor. If it is too close to call where you need to send teams about the land then I would imagine that it is not the month of the Aviv.

Let me just state that I have absolutely no agenda here to prove or disprove another's theory. I appreciate the efforts of the barley inspectors and I hope that they continue what they are doing. In fact, I always enjoyed the excitement of waiting for the barley report and found that it created a wonderful connection to the Land. I have no bone to pick with any of my brethren or any point to prove other than an attempt to answer the many practical questions that arise when attempting to determine the month of the Aviv.

When I originally looked to the barley as the determination of the month of the Aviv, I felt that it was a welcome reprieve from the traditional Hillel II calendar which was quite sterile and did not take into account the observable realities of the harvests in Yisrael. Typically, the barley would often actually confirm the Hillel II calendar or be very close to it. Since most of modern Judaism follows that calendar it was always nice when they would coincide because Jerusalem would be abuzz and you could imagine what it would have been like when the united Kingdom of Yisrael celebrated the Feasts in years gone by. When the calendar and the barley did not coincide, it was always disappointing to me because of the lack of unity amongst those who claimed to follow the Torah. It was a striking reminder that the Kingdom of Yisrael is still divided and we need Messiah to restore us.

Sadly, the conflict over the calendar is nothing new. Yisrael has been debating the calendar for hundreds of years and people have not always agreed on this issue. The current conflict appears to have arisen primarily from a dispute between Rabbinic Judaism and the Karaite sect of Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism follows the Hillel II calendar which is fairly straight forward and there is not much dispute regarding the dates that the Feasts fall upon using their accepted calculations although the calculated dates are, at times, clearly not synchronized with the harvests which they are supposed to be celebrating.

Karaitism believes in following the Tanach and not the Oral Law of the Pharisees although those that follow the reckoning according to the aviv barley in Yisrael often utilize some of the traditions of the Pharisees in doing so. Further, not all Karaites agree on the beginning of the first month because there is not a consensus on the definition of aviv barley. According to the book *Karaites in Byzantium* by Zvi Ankori, the Karaites in Babylon did not even use barley to determine the first month, instead they used the vernal equinox which again, appears to be a method that offers some degree of consistency and predictability for people everywhere who desire to discern the times. Therefore, there is certainly not a consensus in Judaism, or even within their different sects and now Messianic and Nazarene Believers are getting drawn into the argument and some are taking sides. Thus the divisions in Judaism are now spilling over into the Communities of Believers in Yahushua.

After examining the complexities of this issue a person could very well ask, "Is any of this even important since there is no Temple or functioning Kohanite priesthood?" That is a valid question with a simple answer. Knowing and understanding the calendar and the Appointed Times is a part of knowing YHWH and His ways. Keeping His Appointed Times to the best of our ability is a way to meet with Him and learn His ways. So yes, it is very important and the issue that we now have is not about obedience per se, but rather diligence and unity. Anyone can participate in a Passover meal at any given time and feel that they are being obedient to the Scriptures, the problem is that it is meant to be performed at a specific time each year so we should desire to get it right. Imagine if the Yisraelites and the multitude that left Egypt with them decided to hold off for a day or a month to perform the Passover. The consequences would have been devastating, all of their firstborn would have died. As a result, we should not take this issue lightly. On the

other hand, we do not have Mosheh telling us exactly when to hold our Feasts and we therefore lack the desired unity.

All who love and obey the Torah should consider the Shema to be a prayer of great significance. In that prayer we proclaim: "*Hear of Yisrael, YHWH your Elohim, YHWH Echad!*" Devarim 6:4. Some translate echad to mean "one" or "one and only" but it also has the meaning of "unified." Therefore, if YHWH is unified then His Assembly should be unified. We should not be fractured in struggles over power, authority and the right to determine the "true" calendar. At the same time, we should not sacrifice the simplicity of Torah observance for the sake of unity. In other words, we should not disregard a proper rendering of the Torah for the sake of unity. The point of the Feasts is that all of the males of the Assembly, at the very least, gather together at the same time, and it should be at the correct time.

We all need to press in and continue to learn His ways, recognizing that we will not get all of our answers until Messiah comes. At that time we will see the fulfillment of Yeshayahu 2:2-3: "*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of YHWH's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. ³ Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of YHWH to the house of the Elohim of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem.'*" Until that time we should not let our differences create insurmountable division. I know it is difficult when you and your family are celebrating Passover one night and your friends, family and brethren are celebrating another night, but I do not see a quick fix to this problem until Messiah returns.

The reason that I wrote this article is because I recently found myself in this very dilemma and it is not the first time that this has happened. I have friends in Yisrael who declared the barley aviv at the new moon on March 8, 2008 and thus the start of the new year while others in Yisrael declared that the barley was not aviv and we would need to wait until the next new moon for the month of the Aviv and the new year to begin. My friends and Brethren are all trying to be diligent and obey the Torah and yet they disagree and they are not in unity – this grieves my soul. This present disagreement perpetuates a reoccurring dilemma which Yisrael struggled with through the ages and never really fully resolved.

So what are we supposed to do at this point if we get conflicting reports from the Land concerning the barley? My opinion is to use the signs which YHWH has provided from the very beginning. If we do that and trust in His eternal time pieces then we can simply put our trust in Him. If we start following men and their self imposed systems, no matter how well meaning they might be, we will likely start finding ourselves getting into trouble.

From my personal experience I have seen much confusion arise from using barley exclusively to control the calendar and I just do not see a precedent in the Scriptures for such a thing. Time is a powerful, relentless constant that cannot be

subject to such a fragile variable as a head of barley in a certain geographical location. Let us take, for instance, times of famine in the land during the days of Joseph. What if there was no barley in the Land of Canaan during the 7 years of famine? Does that mean that time stood still? Of course not, the non-existence of barley would not have any effect on time. How about when Naomi moved to the land of Moab due to the famine in the Land? Again, if there were no barley it would not stop time from advancing. What if at some future date, Yah forbid, there is a famine, pestilence or war that destroys all of the barley in the Land of Yisrael - Would the lack of barley stop time? Again, the answer must be no. As long as the sun, the moon and the stars continue in their courses and as long as the Earth continues to move we will experience the progression of time. These are all hypothetical examples intended to demonstrate the point that time is not determined by barley or contingent upon the existence of barley.

In the case of determining the first month of the year we need to stick with a clear interpretation of the Scriptures in their proper context, keeping in mind the practical application of the Torah in this day and age. When Messiah comes He will show us whether we were right or wrong and we must be ready to be corrected. As far as I can see there is tradition involved in the intercalation based exclusively on the aviv barley. There are many important questions which I believe we have answered, such as: Do grains of barley actually determine years or do the sun and the moon function in that capacity? Could it be that the equinox and the new moon control the calendar and the barley merely confirms? Is the term aviv meant to describe a specific state of the barley or is simply a general time of the year? Again, we can look to men and self-appointed legislative bodies for the answers to these questions or we can look to Messiah, our firstfruit offering, the real focus of the barley and the Appointed Times.

I believe that we are truly blessed to be living in a time when we can observe the barley and guard the new moon of the aviv in order to insure that we are not following some pre-scripted playbook which is not based upon observable reality. We are also blessed by having powerful tools such as computers which allow us to not only predict future celestial and planetary movements which incredible accuracy, but we can also go back in time and see these movement and position of these planetary bodies at anytime in the past.

In the year 2008, if we use the equinox as a reference point we will see that it occurred on March 20, 2008. The new moon was visible on or around March 8, 2008 and there were barley inspection teams throughout the Land of Yisrael patrolling the fields. Most said that the barley was not aviv at the new moon while others said there was some barley in the "late milk" stage to the "soft dough" stage. The crux of the controversy using the Karaite method appears to be what stage of development is considered to be "aviv" at the sighting of the new moon and how much barley must be in that state in order for us to establish the first month of the year.

Interestingly, this is not necessarily the issue. The Scriptures never state that the barley must be Aviv at the beginning of the month. It could simply be called the

month of the Aviv because that is the month when the barley becomes Aviv. In fact, it is only necessary to bring firstfruits to the Passover in the middle of the month and even these firstfruits do not necessarily have to be in the aviv stage since the Scriptures provide for roasting of grain offerings. "If you offer a grain offering of your firstfruits to YHWH, you shall offer Aviv grain parched on the fire or crushed Carmel grain for your firstfruits offering." Vayiqra 2:14. Thus you can offer grain offerings at different stages of development ie. Aviv and Carmel.

Accordingly, there is nothing which states that the grain must be in the aviv stage at the sighting of the new moon in order to declare the beginning of the month of the Aviv and I am happy for that fact because the observations of men are obviously subjective opinions and determinations open to debate and argument, all of which lead to confusion and chaos. Further, it is all outside the Scriptures and primarily based upon Pharisaic and now Karaite tradition. If we go down this road, it will no doubt eventually lead to the establishment of a man-made ruling body, possibly subject to the now reestablished Sanhedrin in Jerusalem – a prospect which I do not relish.

Therefore, whether there was any aviv barley or sufficient aviv barley in Yisrael on March 8, 2008 is debatable but there apparently is no debate about the fact that there was plenty of Aviv barley by the 14th of the month (March 21 - 22, 2008), counting from the new moon, so that the Passover could have easily been celebrated at that time. Thus there was really no need for an intercalation (added 13th month) and most of the world is likely celebrated Passover well after the barley is aviv and likely after the actual month of the Aviv. The only calendar that I know which accurately and consistently provides for a determination of the Appointed Times is the one created by the Creator Himself. It can be found at www.torahcalendar.com and is based upon a simple calculation that determines the month of the Aviv to begin at the new moon which is closest to the vernal equinox. This calendar has been tested not only by visual observations in the land, but also has been verified to concur with historical documents and most importantly – the Scriptures. In other words, research has shown that using this calculation synchronizes with Appointed Times in the past which now allows us to align our lives the true calendar of YHWH.

If the calendar is calculated correctly, then the barley should confirm the calendar, not the other way around. Therefore, it is not the barley that controls the calendar, but rather the barley that confirms the calendar and this is exactly what happened this year. The month of the Aviv should be a month of the beginning of the harvest season which concludes at the Feast of Shavuot, approximately seven weeks after the firstfruits are offered during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

If the calendar is calculated correctly then the fall harvests should also confirm the timing of the Appointed Times. Interestingly, we are commanded to "Celebrate the Feast of Sukkot for seven days AFTER you have gathered the produce of the threshing floor and your winepress." Devarim 16:13. Sukkot is, without a doubt, the most joyous of all of the Feasts. In fact we are specifically commanded to "Be joyful" at this particular Feast. (Devarim 16:14). Part of the reason is likely because the grapes

have just been harvested and many will be bringing new wine with them to the Feast. According to the Torah Calendar Sukkot began on September 14 and ended on September 23 at sundown in 2008 – a month earlier than all other calendars. The only way that it could be shown to be true is if the wine had been harvest prior to that time. Amazingly, the wine harvest in the Land of Israel occurred 3 weeks earlier than had been anticipated and it occurred well before September 14, 2008.

I am therefore encouraging people to visit www.torahcalendar.com to investigate for themselves and review the proof concerning the validity of this system of reckoning time which is simple and appears to come straight from the Creator. My hope is that this will become an important resource for those who desire to follow truth and not men. That way we can all avoid these debates in the future and come together in unity to join in these great rehearsals as the Assembly was meant to do. Hag Sameach!

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