

Is the Full Moon the New Moon?

by Matthew Janzen

There is a belief among some brethren involved in understanding Yahweh's calendar that the new moon is the full moon (the full moon is day 1 of the lunar month). They believe that the conjunction and first visible crescent of the moon have nothing to do with the beginning of a month. This study will examine the primary points I've seen them give, and show why this teaching is incorrect.

The irony here is that the passage most often given by the "new-full moon" advocates is the very same passage that disproves their understanding. The text is Psalm 81:3; it is used in every study I've seen promoting this view. Here is Psalm 81:3-6 in the WEB.

- 3 Blow the trumpet at the New Moon, at the full moon, on our feast day.
- 4 For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
- 5 He appointed it in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out over the land of Egypt, I heard a language that I didn't know.
- 6 "I removed his shoulder from the burden. His hands were freed from the basket.

Their main 3 points are as follows:

- 1) There is no "and" in between the phrases "new moon" and "full moon." In other words, "at the full moon" describes the new moon mentioned just prior to it.
- 2) Verse three ends by saying "on our feast day" (singular), so only one day is in view.
- 3) The day in view is the full moon, but is described as the new moon here, so the full moon is the first day of the lunar month in Scripture.

While there is no "and" in between new moon and full moon in Psalm 81:3, the Hebrew word *chodesh* (translated as "new moon" here) can also be translated as month. This is seen many times in Scripture. It's defined by Strongs as follows:

שָׁדֵחַ

chôdesh

kho'-desh

From [H2318](#); the new moon; by implication a month: - month (-ly), new moon.

Gesenius Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon adds under his #2 definition of chodesh, “a lunar month, beginning at the new moon. Gen. 8:5; Ex. 13:5, etc. ... the period of a month... Gen. 29:14; Nu. 11:20, 21.”

The last two references Gesenius gives speak of an entire month. In Genesis 29:14 Jacob stays with Laban a whole month (chodesh), and in Numbers 11:20 it is said that the Israelites wouldn't eat meat for 1, 2, 5, 10, or 20 days, but for a whole month (chodesh). The point is that the word chodesh can refer to the entire lunar month as a whole, or any given day inside of that lunar month.

Genesis 7:11 speaks of the second month (chodesh) and **the 17th day** of that month (chodesh).

Joshua 4:19 speaks of **the 10th day** of the first month (chodesh).

I could go on and on, but this is enough proof to show that the word chodesh doesn't have to mean “new moon” i.e. the first day of a lunar month. It can mean that, in certain contexts, but we must allow the context to dictate which meaning fits each usage. It would be silly (for example) to say that in Numbers 11:20 when the Israelites would eat meat for a whole chodesh that it meant they would eat meat on just the new moon day. That doesn't fit the context, because Yahweh had just told them they wouldn't eat meat for just 1, 2, 5, 10, or 20 days.

If we spend some time examining Psalm 81:3-6 we see that it refers to **the 15th day** of the chodesh. Psalms 81:3 could be rendered as “blow the trumpet at the new month (or feast month), at the full moon,” similar to the New English Bible.

Psalm 81:3, New English Bible

Blow the horn for the new month, for the full moon on the day of our pilgrim-feast.

The text is then understood to be speaking of blowing the trumpet on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles. These are actually different aspects of commemoration of the same event. When the Israelites were removed from Egypt at the time of the exodus, they were made to eat unleavened bread and dwell in temporary shelters. Both unleavened bread and temporary shelters began at the same time, it's just that Yahweh gave the Israelites two 7 day festivals at different times of the year to memorialize both occurrences, and probably to give His people more than one vacation to enjoy fellowship and worship. Look at this text again (from the New English Bible):

3 Blow the horn for the new month, for the full moon on the day of our pilgrim-feast. (The pilgrim feast is Unleavened Bread/Tabernacles.)

4 This is a law for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob, (The law is the commandments regarding the spring and fall festivals.)

5 laid as a solemn charge on Joseph when he came out of Egypt (Egypt is mentioned because the exodus originated in Egypt when the Israelites were thrust out due to the final plague coming on the firstborns of the families who didn't observe Passover.)
 6 When I lifted the load from his shoulders, his hands let go the builder's basket. (The shoulders and hands of the Israelites were delivered at the exodus. They no longer had to labor for the Egyptians.)

This is teaching us that the full moon was the day when the Israelites were delivered from Egyptian bondage. What day of the month/chodesh was Israel delivered from bondage?

They traveled from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover, the children of Israel went out with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians. (Numbers 33:3, WEB)

- 1) Numbers 33:3 tells us that Israel was delivered from Rameses **on the 15th day** of the first month (chodesh).
- 2) Psalm 81:3-6 tells us that Israel was delivered from Egypt **at the full moon**.
- 3) The 15th day of the month is the full moon.

Psalm 81:3 is telling us to blow the trumpet **in the feast month at the full moon**. While the Torah does give instructions on blowing trumpets at the new moon or beginnings of months (Numbers 10:1-10), Psalm 81 is not speaking of that.

Some people may get thrown off by the mention of the name Joseph in Psalm 81:5. I've spoken with some brothers before, and they want to go back to Genesis for a reference point; the time that Joseph (son of Jacob-Israel) was taken into Egyptian custody under Potiphar and the Pharaoh of Egypt.

If we look at some context, we will see that the name Joseph stands for the nation of Israel, most likely because it was Joseph who went down into Egypt first (recorded in Genesis), and his family came later and began to multiply greatly.

Look at the chapter just before, Psalm 80, where the name Joseph is used in this way:

Hear us, Shepherd of **Israel**, you who lead **Joseph** like a flock, you who sit above the cherubim, shine out. (Psalm 80:1, WEB)

Notice how Yahweh is described as the (1) Shepherd of Israel (the nation), and (2) the One who leads Joseph like a flock (of sheep). That's Hebrew parallelism; saying the same thing in two different ways. Israel and Joseph are synonymous, both referring to the nation as a whole. This is

the same way the name Joseph is used in Psalm 81:5, and reading further in Psalm 81 shows us this even more clearly.

7 You called in trouble, and I delivered you (the same people He delivered in verse 6). I answered you in the secret place of thunder. I tested you at the waters of Meribah.” Selah. (the nation of Israel was tested at Meribah, see Ex. 17:1-7)
 8 “Hear, my people, and I will testify to you, Israel, if you would listen to me!
 9 There shall be no strange god in you, neither shall you worship any foreign god.
 10 I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt (this happened to the nation of Israel, see Ex. 20:2). Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.
 11 But my people didn’t listen to my voice. Israel desired none of me.
 12 So I let them go after the stubbornness of their hearts, that they might walk in their own counsels.
 13 Oh that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!
 (Psalm 81:7-13, WEB)

The terms Israel (vs. 4), Jacob (vs. 4), Joseph (vs. 5), his (vs. 6), you (vs. 7), and my people (vs. 8), are all referring to the same subject: the nation or people of Israel. Yahweh’s statute and law (of the full moon festival – unleavened bread and tabernacles) was ordained when he delivered them on the full moon; the 15th day of the first month (Num. 33:3). Let me briefly add that even if the passage is speaking dually about both the nation of Israel and the singular man Joseph it does not prove anything for the “new-full moon” advocates. The same exegesis of the text in Psalm 81 stands firm.

Further evidence of Psalm 81 not speaking of the new moon festival is seen by looking at the Hebrew word translated “feast” or “festival” in verse 3. It is the Hebrew word *chag*. In studying the passages in the Scriptures which use the Hebrew word *chag*, you will find that in reference to Yahweh’s appointed times, it refers to a *pilgrimage* festival, on which the Israelites all journeyed to a head, national location to worship Yahweh and commemorate His mighty acts. In Scripture there are three pilgrim feasts (Exodus 23:14-17): Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles.

The new moon is never identified as a pilgrimage feast or *chag*. The Israelites were not required to all travel to one head location in the nation each new moon. The new moon could be observed and celebrated locally, in all the tribal allotments in the land (just like the Sabbath). The use of the word *chag* shows that Psalm 81:3 is not referring to the first day of a month (new moon), but rather the 15th day (full moon) of a **festival** month; specifically the 1st and 7th months of Yahweh’s calendar. I might also add that the Companion Bible footnote on Psalms 81:3 under the heading day states that “Some codices with two early printed editions, Aram. And Syr. read ‘days’ (pl.): i.e. festivals.” In other words, both festivals (Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles) are in view here. I don’t think it matters whether day or days is used, but it’s interesting to note that there are manuscripts that read either way.

It is also interesting that the Torah commands for the silver trumpets to be blown on the new moons (Numbers 10:1-10), but Psalm 81 is speaking of blowing the shofar or ram's horn, not the silver trumpets. I don't think it is wrong to blow the shofar at the new moon (or any time in praise to Yahweh; Psalm 150:1-3), but it is still interesting to note the difference in the trumpets that are said to be blown in these two texts. Many people try to align Psalm 81 with Numbers 10 and they never see the difference in the trumpet that is spoken of in each text.

Psalm 81:3-6, the passage usually used to "prove" the new moon is the full moon, actually disproves the belief. The passage is easily understood when examined carefully, and in its entirety.

REFERENCE WORKS

NET Bible Footnote on Psalm 81:3

Heb "at the full moon on the day of our festival." The Hebrew word כֶּסֶח (keseh) is an alternate spelling of כֶּסֶף (kese', "full moon"). The festival in view is probably the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), which began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month when the moon was full. See [Lev 23:34](#); [Num 29:12](#).

Albert Barnes' Notes on the OT (Psalm 81:3)

In the new moon - On the festival held at the time of the new moon. There was a high festival on the appearance of the new moon in the month of Tisri, or October, which was the beginning of their civil year, and it is not improbable that the return of each new moon was celebrated with special services. See the notes at [Isaiah 1:13](#); compare [2 Kings 4:23](#); [Amos 8:5](#); [1 Chronicles 23:31](#); [2 Chronicles 2:4](#). It is not certain, however, that the word used here means new moon. Prof. Alexander renders it in the month; that is, in the month, by way of eminence, in which the passover was celebrated. The word used - חֹדֶשׁ chôdesh - means, indeed, commonly the new moon; the day of the new moon; the first day of the lunar month [Numbers 29:6](#); [1 Samuel 20:5](#), [1 Samuel 20:18](#), [1 Samuel 20:24](#); but it also means a month; that is, a lunar month, beginning at the new moon, [Genesis 8:5](#); [Exodus 13:4](#); et al. The corresponding or parallel word, as we shall see, which is rendered in our version, in the time appointed, means full moon; and the probability is, as Professor Alexander suggests, that in the beginning of the verse the month is mentioned in general, and the particular time of the month - the full moon - in the other part of the verse. Thus the language is applicable to the passover. On the other supposition - the supposition that the new moon and the full moon are both mentioned - there would be manifest confusion as to the time.

In the time appointed - The word used here - כֶּסֶח keseh - means properly the full moon; the time of the full moon. In Syriac the word means either "the first day of the full moon," or "the whole time of the full moon." (Isa Bar Ali, as quoted by Gesenius, Lexicon) Thus, the word means, not as in our translation, in the time appointed, but at the full moon, and would refer to the time of the Passover, which was celebrated on the fourteenth day of the lunar month; that is, when the moon was at the full. [Exodus 12:6](#).

On our solemn feast day - Hebrew, In the day of our feast. The word solemn is not necessarily in the original, though the day was one of great solemnity. The Passover is doubtless referred to.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers (Psalm 81:3)

In the new moon.—Standing by itself this might mean the beginning of every month (comp. Num. x 10), and so many scholars are inclined to take it here. Others render “in this month.” But see next Note.

In the time appointed.—This is the rendering given of the Hebrew **kēseh** by a long array of authorities. But in [Proverbs 7:20](#), the only other place where the word is found, the Vulg. gives “after many days;” and while the English margin has “new moon” Aquila and Jerome give “full moon.” This latter meaning is supported by the fact that the Syrian version gives **keso** for the 15th day of the month ([1Kings 12:32](#)). But in [2Chronicles 7:10](#) the same word is used for the 23rd day; hence, it is supposed to denote the whole time of the moon's waning from the full. It seems, therefore, hardly possible that **keseh** as well as **chadesh** can mean **new moon** here as some think, though it is strange to find both the **new** and the **full** moon mentioned together. Some remove the difficulty by reading with the Syriac, Chaldee, and several MSS. **feast-days** in the plural, but the authority of the LXX. is against this reading. But apparently the festival in question was the Feast of Tabernacles. The word **chag** here used is said by Gesenius to be in the Talmud used pre-eminently of this feast, as it is in [2Chronicles 5:3](#); [1Kings 8:2](#) (comp. [Psalm 42:4](#)), and the Jews, always tenacious of ancient tradition, regularly use this psalm for the office of the 1st day of Tisri. Thus the new moon is that of the seventh month, which in [Numbers 29:1](#) is called especially “a day of trumpet blowing” (see Note [Psalm 81:1](#)), and the full moon denotes this feast, (See [Numbers 29:12](#); [Leviticus 23:24](#).)