

Could the Jubilee Begin in Nisan?

By T.W. Tramm

THIS Tuesday, March 28, marks Nisan 1 on the biblical calendar—the first day of the year, according to Exodus:¹

“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a [sacrificial] lamb for his family, one for each household” (Ex. 12:1-3).

Notice the Lord tells Moses that the month of *Passover*, the month in which a lamb is to be sacrificed for each household, is to be “the first month of the year.”

It’s important to note that nowhere in Scripture does God annul His command to observe Nisan as the first month of the year. Additionally, nowhere does He institute a *second* New Year in the fall, as practiced in modern Israel. This means, according to the Bible, the years begin and end in the spring.

Does it really matter, in modern times, whether we count the years from the spring or fall?

In most years, one could reason, it does not. In a prophetically significant year like the Jubilee, however, precision is paramount: those looking up and longing for their redemption want to know when the “year of redemption” begins and ends.

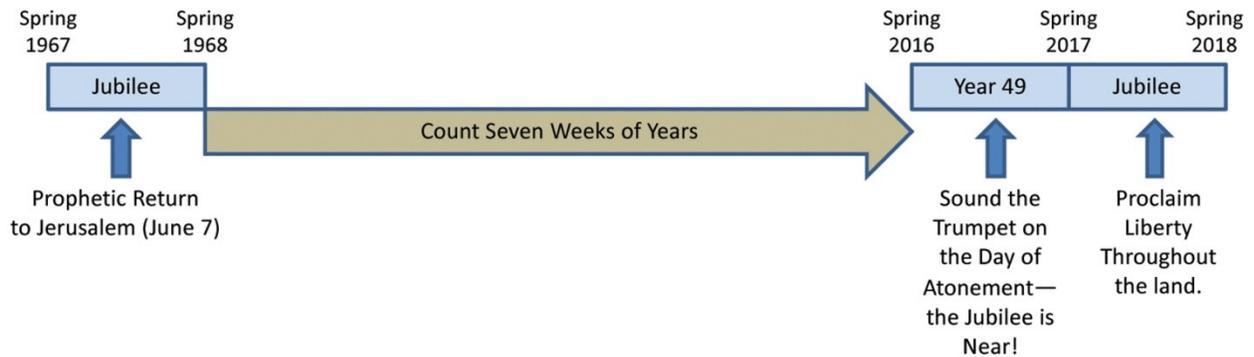
The difference a spring reckoning makes, based on an assumed 1967 Jubilee, is that instead of the 50th year beginning October 2016, as widely believed, it is only *about to begin* on March 28, 2017.

The calculus is as follows:

The 49-year cycle would have begun on Nisan 1, 1968—the first New Year following the Jews’ prophetic return to Jerusalem.² From here, following the instructions in Leviticus 25 to count “seven weeks of years,” we arrive at Nisan 1, 2016 for the beginning of the 49th year. According to the Karaites and other strict Torah observers who reckon biblical years from the spring,³ it is during *this* year, on the Day of Atonement, that Leviticus instructs us to sound the trumpet in anticipation of the Jubilee that commences six months later.

The graphic below illustrates this scenario.

“Count seven weeks of years ... so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then [during the 49th year] ... sound the trumpet throughout the land on the ... Day of Atonement. [Then] ... consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land...” (Lev. 25:8-10).



Spring Jubilee reckoning: Count seven weeks to the 49th year, then sound the trumpet in the seventh month.

While it may seem peculiar from our modern, “just-in-time,” mindset to sound the trumpet six months before the Jubilee begins, spring-jubilee proponents would argue it’s common sense: In terms of the Law, the Jubilee is when property reverts back to its original owner and slaves are freed to return to their families (Lev. 25:10). The resulting dislocation of farms, families, businesses, etc. would require advance planning, making the six-month warning essential. In prophetic terms, the Jubilee is the “year of redemption” and also a time of judgment (Isa. 61:1, 2; 63:1-6). In this case, the advance warning is even *more* crucial, as it allows time to get one’s *spiritual* house in order.

But doesn’t Leviticus say the Jubilee begins on the Day of Atonement?

Let’s read the passage carefully.

⁸ “You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. ⁹ Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. ¹⁰ And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (Lev. 25:8-10).

Notice the passage tells us to do three things:

- 1) Verse 8 says to count 49 years.
- 2) Verse 9 says to sound the trumpet on the Day of Atonement.

3) Verse 10 says to consecrate the 50th year and proclaim liberty.

The first thing to note is that verse 9 does not say the trumpet blast marks the start of the jubilee year, it merely says to sound the trumpet on the Day of Atonement.

The second thing to note is that the sounding of the trumpet on the Day of Atonement and the proclaiming of liberty in the 50th year can be read as *two distinct things*—one preceding the other.

But the most obvious problem with the Jubilee beginning on the Day of Atonement is that the specific *jubilee instructions* in Leviticus have the trumpet being sounded in the “seventh month.” The seventh month is only the *seventh month* if the *years* are being counted from the month of *Nisan*.

Some suggest that only “regular” years begin in the spring, while Jubilee years begin in the fall, but this creates a problem of overlap in which we have a jubilee year spanning two regular years. Again, Exodus mentions only *one* year—the one that begins in Nisan.

Is it possible that the *real* Jubilee is only about to begin?

It’s an interesting scenario to consider, as it puts *all* of the spring and fall feasts of 2017 within the bounds of the Jubilee. The fall scenario, on the other hand, has the Jubilee ending at the first sighting of the new moon this September, thus precluding the possibility of a (preliminary) jubilee fulfillment of the fall festivals.

A Nisan/spring Jubilee is a paradigm shift when the modern Jewish calendar reckons years from the fall and prophecy teachers follow suit by basing their calculations on a fall New Year as well. But when a view has scriptural support, as does the spring Jubilee, it is worthy of the watchman’s consideration.

If the jubilee trumpet was sounded last October but the year of redemption has not yet begun, this year’s Nisan 1 could be a turning point.

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(For a summary of the spring vs. fall New-Year debate, please see my article: [When Does the Biblical Year Begin?](#))

NOTES:

1. The Hebrew month names, Nisan, Tishrei, etc. were not assigned by God, who only assigns *numbers* to the months in Scripture, but were adopted by the ancient Jews from the pagan, Babylonian calendar. It is this same

influence, according to some scholars, that eventually led to the adoption of a *fall* New-Year celebration, which was also a feature of the Babylonian calendar.

2. This calculation assumes that the Jubilee is an *intercalary* year, meaning it is *not* the first year of the next cycle, but is a “set apart” year that interrupts the sabbatical cycles every 49 years. The other possible scenario is that the Jubilee *does* count as the first year of the next cycle. In this scenario, Nisan 1, 2017, marks the *end* of a jubilee year that began Nisan 1, 2016. (See my article: Calculating Daniel’s Jubilee.)

3. The [Karaites](#) sect of Judaism is characterized by its strict recognition of the Torah (Bible) *alone* as the supreme authority in Jewish law and theology. The [Samaritans](#) also observe only a spring New Year.