

When Is Nisan 1?

By T.W. Tramm

A TOPIC OF CONTROVERSY is the correct reckoning of the biblical New Year, Nisan 1.

The popular view is that Nisan 1 is the sighted new moon *nearest* (on either side of) the spring equinox. An alternate view is that Nisan 1 is the first new moon *after* the equinox.

Both views acknowledge that the first month is to be reckoned with respect to the equinox.¹ The debate stems from disagreement over the meaning of a verse in Deuteronomy:

“Observe [guard]² the month of Aviv [Nisan] and celebrate the Passover of the LORD your God, because in the month of Aviv he brought you out of Egypt ...” (Deut. 16:1).

Those who say Nisan 1 is the new moon *nearest* the equinox interpret the above to mean only *Passover* must be observed after the equinox. Those who say Nisan 1 is the first new moon *after* the equinox interpret the above to mean the *entire first month* must be observed after the equinox.

Because the *nearest*-the-equinox view is prevalent, in this study we will consider the logic behind, as well as some corroboration for, the *after*-the-equinox view.

AFTER THE EQUINOX

The view that Nisan 1 is the first new moon *after* the spring equinox is based on the following logic:

- 1) The year is determined by Earth’s 365-day orbit around the Sun.
- 2) Scripture links the observance of the spring and fall feasts to the equinoxes—the two points in Earth’s orbit at which its axis is perpendicular to the Sun’s rays, resulting in equal daylight and darkness around the globe (see note 1).
- 3) Because the biblical year begins in the spring (Ex. 12), the logical starting point of Earth’s yearly circuit around the Sun is the vernal (spring) equinox.³

With the above in view, it’s reasoned that it’s illogical to place Nisan 1 *ahead* of the spring equinox, *before the Earth has completed its yearly circuit around the Sun*; to place Nisan 1 before the spring equinox is to, in effect, begin a New Year *before the prior year has ended*.

Another problem with reckoning the new moon nearest the equinox Nisan 1 is that the New Year occurs in the *winter* about a third of the time.⁴ Not only is it illogical and confusing, it is argued, to have some years beginning in the winter and some in the spring, the winter New Year sometimes results in the barley not being ripe enough to perform the Firstfruits ritual a couple of weeks later (Lev. 23:9-14). Conversely, when Nisan 1 is placed *after* the equinox, in the spring, the readiness of the barley is not an issue, as there is ample time for it to ripen during the longer/warmer post-equinox, days.⁵

Now that we understand the basic reasoning behind the *after*-the-equinox view, let's consider a couple of sources of corroboration.

TETRADS

A source of corroboration for the *after*-the-equinox view is the lunar tetrads of 1967-68 and 2014-15. Granting the notion that these Passover/Tabernacles eclipses were a sign orchestrated by the Creator (Joel 2:31), it's reasonable to believe they occurred on the correct feast days; assuming they did, the question arises: which reckoning method does God appear to be using? In three out of four instances (1968, 2014, 2015) the new moon after the equinox is *also* the new moon nearest the equinox. Because the reckoning methods *overlap*, neither method of determining Nisan 1 (nearest or after) is invalidated. The Passover eclipse of 1967, however, is a different matter. In 1967 the new moon *nearest* the equinox was March 13. A March 13 Nisan 1 puts Passover at March 27—a month *before* the “Passover blood moon” on April 24!⁶ Thus, assuming the blood-moon signs of 1967 occurred on God's true feast days, the *after*-the-equinox reckoning is validated.⁷

JESUS' LAST PASSOVER

While the year of Jesus' crucifixion is a matter of debate, a popular theory is that the Lord observed His last Passover on Wednesday, April 25, 31 AD. An April 25 Passover puts Nisan 1 at April 11. This is significant because April 11 was the new moon *after* the equinox in a year in which there was a new moon much *nearer* the equinox, occurring about a week before, on March 11. Therefore, assuming the April 25 date for Jesus' last Passover is correct, the *after*-the-equinox method of reckoning Nisan 1 is, again, validated.⁸

Do the above corroborating witnesses prove that Nisan 1 is the first new moon *after* the equinox? Not necessarily, as both depend on assumptions like the April blood moon in 1967 occurring on God's true Passover (only God knows when His true Passover is). Nonetheless, the witnesses are compelling. For this reason, and because this year's Nisan 1 is especially significant, marking the end of the Jubilee and the start of a pivotal festival season, the *after*-the-equinox scenario warrants consideration.

Speaking of the springtime and the year of redemption, it's interesting to ponder a well-known rapture typology in the Song of Solomon:

“The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice. My beloved spoke, and said to me: ‘Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away’” (Song 2:8-10).

The imagery of a shepherd coming to gather and spirit away his beloved, a Shulammitte Gentile maid is suggestive of the Lord coming for His bride at the Rapture. The verses immediately following hint at the season of the shepherd’s coming:

“For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!” (vv. 11-13).

Obviously springtime is indicated. Let’s examine carefully the seasonal clues to see if we can determine anything more precise.

“The winter is past.”

“The winter is past” means spring has arrived. Spring, as established earlier, arrives on the day of the vernal equinox, around March 20.

“The rain is over and gone.”

The reference to rain is important because in Scripture the Lord’s coming is likened to “the former and latter rains” (Hos. 6:3). The former and latter rains are such definite seasons in Israel they are actually marked on the calendars and almanacs defining the harvest times. The *former* (early) rains occur in October-December. The *latter* rains occur in March-April. Thus, late April is when things begin to dry out in Israel—the time when “*the rain is over and gone.*”

“The flowers appear on the earth.”

In Israel, flowers bloom throughout the year. Spring, however, primarily March-April and into June, is the peak season.

“The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.”

The turtledove is a migratory bird. In Israel, it is said that by mid-April one can observe clouds of doves feeding on the clovers of the plain: they overspread the whole face of the land.

“The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell.”

Green figs and tender grapes indicate the April-May timeframe in Israel.

If we’ve interpreted the seasonal cues correctly, the Song of Solomon is indicating the March-April timeframe, perhaps with emphasis on April. While the clues may be too general to determine much more, the season of the shepherd’s coming seems clear: early to mid spring—on or after the vernal equinox—when *“the winter has passed.”*

This brings us, finally, to the question of this year’s equinox/new-moon reckoning. In 2018, the sighted new moon of March is estimated to occur between the 18th and 19th, about a day before the astronomical calculated equinox on March 20. Correspondingly, most sources put Nisan 1 at March 18-19. Owing to atmospheric conditions and other considerations,⁹ however, it’s conceivable that the sighting of the new-moon crescent could actually *coincide* with the equinox. In this scenario, Nisan 1 could be reckoned March 20. The other possibility, addressed in this study, is that Nisan 1 could be the first sighted new moon *after* the equinox. If this view is correct we could be looking at an April 17-18 biblical New Year.

When is Nisan 1?

The purpose of this study is not to provide the answer but merely to show there is more than one viable possibility. For this reason, concerning the correct reckoning of the New Year and the Jubilee’s end, it’s fitting to say, *“no one knows ... except the Father”* (Matt. 24:36).

. . .

NOTES:

1. In Exodus, God instructs the Israelites to observe the harvest festivals at the year’s end:
“And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering [Tabernacles] at the year’s end” (Ex. 34:22 KJV). The word “end” in this verse is translated from the Hebrew *tekufah*, which refers to the turn of the season that occurs at both the spring and fall equinoxes. God links the festivals to the equinoxes to ensure their observance in the proper harvest seasons.

2. The Hebrew word for “observe” is *shamar* (Strong’s #8104):
<http://www.elijah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=hebrewlexicon&isindex=observe>

3. Scripture implies that Earth's circuit around the Sun has a starting point: "*In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other*" (Ps. 19:4-6). That the Sun runs a course, or circuit, connotes more than just a simple sunrise/sunset repetition as the Earth rotates on its axis but also a greater circuit as the Earth orbits the Sun, the starting point of which is presumably the equinox.

4. Employing the *nearest*-the-equinox reckoning, six out of every 19 years today begin in the winter, and never more than 9 days before winter's end. However, when Hillel II established the modern Jewish calendar in 358-359 A.D., there were some years that started 16 days before winter's end.

5. Some teach that it's the ripened barley, not the Sun or Moon, which determines the first month of the year. However, in Genesis it's specified that we are to use the *lights in the firmament* to calculate the Lord's appointed times and years: "*And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons (appointed times), and for days, and years*" (Gen. 1:14). Notice there is no mention of vegetation in this passage. In fact, nowhere in Scripture is it stated that the beginning of the year is to be determined by examining barley.

6. Torahcalendar.com reckons the new moon *nearest* the equinox (March 12) Nisan 1, putting Passover 1967 at March 26-27: <http://torahcalendar.com/Calendar.asp?PYM=Y1967M1>

Torahcalendar designates April 24-25 of 1967 *Pesach Sheni*, or "Second Passover":

<http://torahcalendar.com/Calendar.asp?PYM=Y1967M2>

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/470865/jewish/Pesach-Sheni.htm

7. The spring equinox occurred on March 21 in 1967.

The new moon nearest the equinox was March 13:

https://www.calendar-12.com/moon_calendar/1967/march

The first new moon after the equinox was April 10-11:

https://www.calendar-12.com/moon_calendar/1967/april

An April 10 Nisan 1 results in an April 24 Passover, coinciding with the blood moon eclipse of 1967.

8. The spring equinox occurred on March 23 in 31 AD.

The new moon nearest the equinox was March 11.

The first new moon after the equinox was April 10.

<http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/SpringPhenom.php>

http://www.judaismvschristianity.com/passover_dates.htm

An April 10-11 Nisan 1 results in an April 25 Passover, coinciding with the proposed date of Jesus' last Passover.

9. Scripture is not specific as to how, precisely, the Lord reckons the equinox, i.e., which factors He considers in determining the turn of the season. With this in mind, March 16 marks the *equilux*, the day when the hours of daylight become exactly equal to the hours of darkness at Jerusalem's latitude. If God were to consider March 16 the turn of the season, the new moon of March would occur *after*, on March 18-19.