

# THINKING ABOUT *ABIB*

## (THE PASSEVER MONTH)

### Time – Part of Creation’s Fabric

The world was created in six days – each being numbered. The record then says: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (Genesis 2:1).

Then, God rested from that completed work by setting aside the seventh day as a holy time to recall the creation story and His great authority. “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:2-3). This “seventh” period became a unique block of time commissioned for worship.

Thus, the cycle of a week was introduced by a divine imperative committed to a new and perfect creation.

How a “day” was determined before the sun was created is unknown. But God said there was an evening and a morning. The celestial bodies (sun, moon and stars), brought into existence on the fourth day, were given as additional time pieces.

- “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, and for days, and years” (Genesis 1:14).
- What this all meant to a sinless world is not recorded.
- But later, scores of divine issues would hang on those appointed “clocks.”

Apparently months and years were part of the calendar of reckoning in the 1,600 years of the antediluvian world. The ages of the ancient patriarchs were given in years (Genesis 5). Also, great detail as to what day and month the flood came and went is revealed in Genesis 8:4-5, 13-14! This would be recorded later in the Torah by Moses. It appears as though there were 30-day months.

God knew that man needed to have an orientation to time – the “when” factor. It became part of the fabric of this earth when God spoke and it was done (Psalm 33:9).

### Prophetic Importance Predicated by Time

Abraham was identified by God as the progenitor of a divinely chosen people (Genesis 15:5-6, 18). Then He told him that his descendants would be strangers and even be persecuted for 400 years, but at the end they would be a wealthy people occupying freely much land. God said that after a fourth period (referring to 100 years) this would end.

Paul tells us that it was 430 years later that the Israelites came out of Egypt (Galatians 3:16-18), fulfilling the covenant promises (cf. Exodus 12:40). This longer period appears to have begun when Abraham left Haran in the northern Mesopotamian plains (557 B.C.).

The record of when this prophetic timing was fulfilled was recorded by Moses.

- *“And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians”* (Numbers 33:3).

Expositor White notes: “But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay. Through the symbols of the great darkness and the smoking furnace, God had revealed to Abraham the bondage of Israel in Egypt, and had declared that the time of their sojourning should be four hundred years. ‘Afterward,’ He said, ‘shall they come out with great substance.’ Genesis 15:14. Against that word, all the power of Pharaoh’s proud empire battled in vain. On ‘the self-same day’ appointed in the divine promise, ‘it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.’ Exodus 12:41. So in heaven’s council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined. When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.”<sup>1</sup>

Though Abraham didn’t see that day, his descendents – Jacob’s posterity – would know that Egypt would be first a place of peace and prosperity – then affliction. BUT – the timing prophecy foretold that that oppression would come to its end at a point in the calendar of God’s revealed future.

### **The Jewish Calendar Refined**

The month the Children of Israel left Egypt was to become a new referenced way to count time. God called it *Abib* (Nissan – Babylonian name). It was on the 14<sup>th</sup> day, when the lambs were slain. The “death angel” “passed over” all those who applied the “blood of the lamb” correctly! Then on the 15<sup>th</sup> day they began that remarkable journey towards Canaan.

God told Moses that this would forever be a time to honor: *“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.... This day came ye out in the month Abib”* (Exodus 12:2, 13:4).

*Abib* became like our January to the Jewish people. It was to begin at a new moon (invisible phase) and that 14<sup>th</sup> day of celebration would be at full moon. *“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt **by night**”* (Deuteronomy 16:1).

For many centuries the Jewish people and those of the Mesopotamian region began their calendar year on this spring month (March/April period) – *Abib*/Nissan. After the northern

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<sup>1</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 32.

tribes (Israel) ceded from the south (Judah), the kingdom of Judah began to count their year from Tishri (the seventh month) 1 – the time of Rosh Hashanah (Feast of Trumpets).<sup>2</sup>

Over hundreds of years many creative calendars were introduced. Novel ways to tell when a “new moon” was came in and, geographically, where all the calculations/observations should occur. Their moral implications sprang into myriads of rules. Many traditions emerged out of the opinions of Jewish leaders, later recorded in the Talmud, especially the Mishna portion. All this led to incredible complications in *how to tell time*. These man-directed laws brought rigidity so that the precise moment to celebrate, count a period or worship would be “legalistically right.”

The stories of those who claim to have the right methods are long and wearisome. The beauty, however, of the simple principles in God’s Word always convey rules that anyone anywhere can apply with astronomical precision.

### **Looking at God’s Clues**

The seventh plague against Egyptian rebellion was of fire and hail.

The record notes that the barley was smitten: for the barley was in ear” (Exodus 9:31). That is helpful.

How long it took from that calamity to the tenth plague and exodus isn’t totally clear. The order to “borrow” items from Egyptian neighbors was not until after the ninth plague of darkness. Since God called the month of exodus “*Abib*,” which means “barley” (when in the green – i.e., not fully ripe), the events of the last few plagues to the exodus apparently went quickly.



John Martin’s painting of the plague of hail and fire (1823).

Looking at the exodus celebration, later called Passover, God instructed very specific steps:

- The Lamb was to be chosen on *Abib* 10 for a blood sacrifice.
- The evening of *Abib* 13 (Gregorian calendar vernacular) was really the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> by Jewish reckoning.
- That is when Christ and His disciples celebrated (John 18:28, 19:14) before the true Passover Lamb was killed.
- The 14<sup>th</sup> of *Abib* was called the “Lord’s Passover” (Exodus 12:11). That night the lamb was eaten.

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<sup>2</sup> Thiele, Edwin; *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1951; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Kregel, 1983).

- *“It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations”* (Exodus 12:42).

There was no “barley harvest celebration” initially tied to Passover! It is noted to be at the **time** of the “green heads” of barley. Much of that didn’t harvest until the next month in Egypt. The barley was later to be a “timing marker” for the Israelites **after** they arrived in Canaan (Deuteronomy 16:2b).

Since God specifically notes numeric days within *Abib*, there is, therefore, a day “one.” The day Israel left Egypt was on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The Feast of Unleavened Bread would later begin also on *Abib* 15 (Numbers 28:18). The Israelites did eat unleavened bread, however, and took dough with them on their shoulders (Exodus 12:8, 39). If the feasts were to be timed by crops, amazing variables would be introduced that God never addressed. They were seasonal reminders – not theological dictums. The solilunar calendar, however, was to set the time for the feast celebrations.

### **How to Figure the Cycles**

During the creation week, as we have noted, *“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, and for days, and years”* (Genesis 1:14).

This was before sin and feasts existed (contrary to the claims of many). But, those celestial objects were set to tell us time. They were God’s original clocks. The seasons (*moed*) in Genesis referred to the moon cycles (Psalm 104:19).

It is interesting that those monthly cycles were not based upon “moon observations” at the first glimpse of a “crescent at Jerusalem.” God simply informed us that man was to know ahead of time when the “new moon” would occur:

- *“Then Jonathan said to David, To morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty.... So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat”* (I Samuel 20:18, 24).
- In fact, this was so precise that He said: *“Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day”* (Psalm 81:3).

If *Abib* is the month that begins a year and a new moon begins a month (*hodeah*), when the barley is ripening (a seasonal timing relevance point), then there must be a solar (sun) reference point associated with that beginning.

The record states that *Abib* “shall be the first month of the year for you” (Exodus 12:2). The word for “year” is *ahana*. This refers to a “change” or something “different” from one thing or another. It could be anything from time (Ezekiel 46:17) to clothes (II Kings 25:29), to religious laws (Esther 3:8). But there is more to this than the word “year.” If *ahana* is used with qualifiers, it becomes very specific. Examples:

- Year of favor (Isaiah 61:2)
- Year of release (Leviticus 25:10-11)
- Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:13)
- Year of vengeance (Isaiah 63:4)

Related to the yearly cycles at an equinox (NIV wording):

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|---|---------------------|--|
| • Fall                                      | Exodus 34:22        | “turn of the year” ( <i>ahana tequphah</i> )<br>(fall equinox)   |
| • Spring<br>(return to a<br>starting point) | II Samuel 11:1      | “in the spring” ( <i>teshurah ahana</i> )<br>(spring equinox)    |
|   | II Chronicles 24:23 | “turn of the year” ( <i>teshurah ahana</i> )<br>(spring equinox) |
|   | I Kings 20:22, 26   | “turn of the year” ( <i>teshurah ahana</i> )<br>(spring equinox) |

If we associate *Abib* with the “turn of the year” at the vernal equinox, barley would be coming on and ready for the wave sheaf (Leviticus 23:10-15). We don’t have to look for the heading of barley around Jerusalem, see a crescent moon or rely on a Jewish system that has long been “extra-Biblical.”

From the Mishna and Talmud to the system of Hillel II (358 A.D.), the visible crescent was “confirmatory” and began a month. But a contemporary of Christ, Philo (20 B.C. to 50 A.D.), noted:

“Decal. 1:1 – the greatest festivals, those of the longest duration, *at the periods of both the vernal and autumnal equinoxes in each year; appointing two festivals for these two epochs*, each lasting seven days...seven days have very appropriately been appointed to the seventh month of each equinox...”

Spec. 2:204 The last of all the annual festivals is that which is called the Feast of Tabernacles, having a time at ***the autumnal equinox***.

Flacc. 1:116. This was the unexampled misfortune which befell Flaccus in the country of which he was governor, being taken prisoner...at the time of his [Flaccus’] arrest, it was the general festival of the Jews ***at the time of the autumnal equinox***, during which it is the custom of the Jews to live in tents.

Spec. 4:233 Nature, therefore, has marked out those periods in every year, which are called the equinoxes, from the state of things which exists at that time, namely, the spring and the ***autumnal equinox***, with such distinctness, that *even the most illiterate persons are aware of the equality which then exists between the extent of the days and of the night.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Philo In Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Series – Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Ad Novum Testamentum), Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1993 as quoted in: <http://americanpropheticdestiny.com/THEHEBREWCALENDARindex.htm>

Since Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> of *Abib* is in the middle of a month at full moon, the new moon would be 14 full days previously. Thus, the first full moon **after** the spring equinox would be a Passover, and the “new moon” would then fall within 14 days of the equinox. This time period would begin the sacred festival year from *Abib* through Tishri – to the recycling of the next solar year. All this related to the celestial objects established on the fourth day of creation.

Expositor White appeared to have this in mind when she noted: “The time of the Passover corresponded to the close of March or the beginning of April, and the whole land was bright with flowers, and glad with the song of birds.”<sup>4</sup>

Many contend that an “equinox” was impossible to calculate for God’s ancient people, so it is not a viable application. We noted above that it was calculated in Christ’s day. Archeological discoveries from the Ur of Chaldees (Abraham’s original home) show that it was a center of advanced culture. There were libraries with grammars, dictionaries, encyclopedias and textbooks on mathematics, astronomy, religion and politics.<sup>5</sup>

Edward Chiera noted of the heyday of the Babylonians: “They noted ... with great care ... the precession of the equinoxes. Eclipses of the sun, moon, and stars were so carefully described that part of the ancient chronology has now been fixed without fear of mistake by just such [records].”<sup>6</sup>

There is a great temptation to reconcile the Jewish lunar months with the solar year by calculating in a leap year month. That is nowhere found in the Bible. The timing of the spring, summer and fall feasts are **specific**. They relate to the “turning of the year.” If we associate the onset of *Abib* to the spring equinox, there are no inconsistencies in seasonal **timing** for Passover and the other feasts!

By astronomical calculations (which may go back to the Sumerians ~2000 B.C.), we can determine the new and full moons and the equinoxes. What about the Hebrew calendar, the Karaite method of calculation, the difference between the solar and lunar cycles? It doesn’t matter! The “calendar” issue has been the debate for centuries and remains a contentious subject.

When we follow the timing points God has given in His key clocks, the proper understanding of those *feast cycles*, *Shemitas* and *tarrying time* concepts can be wisely applied. Could all this be the reason why God named only four of the months and numerically referred up to only the eighth month – that is to be our focus in how He wanted us to tell His time?

The Scriptures place great parameters on how we use time.

The feasts were not to be kept until Israel entered Canaan (i.e., Exodus 12:21-25). Nothing is said regarding “where” in Palestine barley was to be gathered for the wave sheaf. The

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<sup>4</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Lindsell, Harold; *Study Bible*, footnote on Genesis 11:27, RSV 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Chiera, Edward; *They Wrote on Clay* (University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 156-157.

discussion of a 13-month to a solar calendar is missing. God never told His people to use “postponement rules” that came in Hillel II.

“Jesus plainly told the Samaritan woman at the well that the time was coming, and was even present as he spoke, when *Jerusalem would no longer be the center of worship* (John 4:21, 23). Thus, in Galatians 4:22-26, Paul speaks of two Jerusalems to illustrate two covenants, comparing them to Hagar and Sarah. He draws the conclusion that *believers are no longer bound to Jerusalem in the land of Canaan*. His desire to be in Jerusalem for the Passover, as recorded in Acts 18:21, is explained by Ellen White as having to do with the opportunity to meet with Jews from various places, in order to persuade them as to the validity of Jesus’ claim to messiahship; she then notes that at Philippi he “tried to keep the Passover” (Acts 20:6) and did not make Jerusalem until Pentecost. While Luke, a Gentile convert, dates events in his letter *to another Gentile by the holy calendar*, yet mentions of Jerusalem seem only coincidental to the descriptions given.”<sup>7</sup>

Since the Jews became a rejected nation (Matthew 21:43; 23:37-38), a new and elevating understanding of the festivals and months comes. They were/are stunning prophecies of how the conflict between Christ and Satan will be resolved – with timing application.<sup>8</sup>

There is grave danger in bringing opinion, tradition and historicism into prophetic views and miss the stunning value of the “simple things” that God portrays. The heavens and their celestial body cycles help us to tell what time it is. Amazing! Getting back to the rules when everything began helps us to really know how it will all end.

**Simple example for a 2016 year application:**

<b>2014</b>	<b>New Moon</b>	<b>First Full Moon – Passover</b>
Spring Equinox Mar 20 16 57	March 30 18 45	April 15 7 42

If April 14 or 15 is *Abib* 14 (notice the early timing above), and it is, then March 30 is *Abib* 1 (again notice the timing). All this can be calculated astronomically, which has been done for millennia. Following God’s celestial signs, we can replicate the Feast cycles with accuracy – which in turn identifies the timing of many end-time prophecies.

These times and dates are based on astronomical data from:

- <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/MoonPhase.php>
- <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/EarthSeasons.php>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.midnightcryministries.com/Sacred\\_calendar.htm](http://www.midnightcryministries.com/Sacred_calendar.htm)

<sup>8</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 399-400.

2014 Phases of the Moon Universal Time															
New Moon				First Quarter				Full Moon				Last Quarter			
	d	h	m		d	h	m		d	h	m		d	h	m
Jan	1	11	14	Jan	8	3	39	Jan	16	4	52	Jan	24	5	20
Jan	30	21	38	Feb	6	19	22	Feb	14	23	53	Feb	22	17	15
Mar	1	8	00	Mar	8	13	27	Mar	16	17	08	Mar	24	1	46
Mar	30	18	45	Apr	7	8	31	Apr	15	7	42	Apr	22	7	52
Apr	29	6	14	May	7	3	15	May	14	19	16	May	21	12	59
May	28	18	40	Jun	5	20	39	Jun	13	4	11	Jun	19	18	39
Jun	27	8	08	Jul	5	11	59	Jul	12	11	25	Jul	19	2	08
Jul	26	22	42	Aug	4	0	50	Aug	10	18	09	Aug	17	12	26
Aug	25	14	13	Sep	2	11	11	Sep	9	1	38	Sep	16	2	08
Sep	24	6	14	Oct	1	19	32	Oct	8	10	51	Oct	15	19	12
Oct	23	21	57	Oct	31	2	48	Nov	6	22	23	Nov	14	15	15
Nov	22	12	32	Nov	29	10	06	Dec	6	12	27	Dec	14	12	51
Dec	22	1	36	Dec	28	18	31								

**Notation**

The year for Christ’s crucifixion astronomically remains of interest. A full moon on a Friday appears to occur only in 30 or 33 A.D. (other years by some calendars).

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