

March 2002

Frank W. Nelte

HOW DO 'GREEN EARS OF CORN' AFFECT THE START OF THE YEAR?

This year the Jewish calendar starts the year in the winter. So you ask someone: can the year start ONE day before the end of winter? Yes, they answer. Well then, can the year start TWO days before the end of winter? Yes, they reply. How about THREE days before the end of winter, can the new year start that early? Oh yes, they reply. Well then, you ask, is there ANY kind of standard or yardstick we can apply to know EXACTLY how early the year may start? By then you usually get an answer that goes like this:

It is not necessary for the START of the new year to be in the spring. The ONLY requirement is that the new moon that is NEAREST TO THE EQUINOX, irrespective of whether it is before or after the equinox, be used to start the first month of the year.

Have you heard this line of reasoning? I have heard it many times. If you then ask: "But wasn't Israel in Old Testament times supposed to bring a wave-sheaf offering of barley during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and might this not result in these Days of Unleavened Bread being too early for any grain to be available?", you may receive the following answer:

The Israelites were supposed to bring a wave-sheaf from the GREEN ears of barley.

For this present year, for example, I have heard that "the Karaites", one of the Jewish sects in Israel today, have announced that they found "green ears" even before the equinox, thus authorizing the start of the new year with the new moon that preceded the equinox.

Is this really right?

Let's examine two things:

- 1) THE EFFECT of starting the year with the new moon NEAREST to the equinox.
- 2) THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS concerning "green ears".

THE EFFECT OF THE NEW MOON "NEAREST" TO THE EQUINOX

Here is the actual real-life data for three specific years: 2000, 2008 and 2019. The times have all been converted to local Jerusalem time, which is 2 hours and 21 minutes ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. In each case I present the times for the new moon preceding the equinox and the new moon immediately after the equinox, as well as the exact times for the equinox itself.

So notice these examples:

A) The Year 2000 A.D. (all in Jerusalem local time)

NEW MOON = MARCH 6 at 7:38 a.m.

EQUINOX = MARCH 20 at 9:56 a.m.

NEW MOON = APRIL 4 at 8:34 p.m.

The March 6 new moon is 14 days 2 hours 18 minutes before the equinox.

The April 4 new moon is 15 days 10 hours 38 minutes after the equinox.

IF "nearest new moon to the equinox" was really applied, THEN:

Either March 6 or March 7 should be DAY 1 of the new month, because that new moon is over 32 hours nearer to the equinox than the following new moon.

IF March 6, the actual day of the new moon conjunction, is accepted as Day 1, then Passover would have been the evening of March 18th, a full 38 hours before the end of winter. IF March 7, the sunset that immediately follows the conjunction, is accepted as Day 1, then Passover would have been the evening of March 19th, a full 14 hours before the end of winter.

RESULT: Accepting the new moon NEAREST to the equinox for the start of the first month would have resulted in the entire Passover service being conducted in the winter. Does ANYBODY actually believe that it is right before God to place the Passover service into the winter?

B) The Year 2008 A.D. (all in Jerusalem local time)

NEW MOON = MARCH 7 at 7:34 p.m.

EQUINOX = MARCH 20 at 8:11 a.m.

NEW MOON = APRIL 6 at 6:15 a.m.

The March 7 new moon is 12 days 12 hours 37 minutes before the equinox.

The April 6 new moon is 16 days 22 hours 4 minutes after the equinox.

IF "nearest new moon to the equinox" was really applied, THEN:

Either March 8 or March 9 should be DAY 1 of the new month, because that new moon is clearly nearer to the equinox than the following new moon.

If March 8, the actual day of the new moon conjunction, is accepted as Day 1, then Passover will be the evening of March 20th, about 11 hours after the start of spring. If March 9, the sunset that immediately follows the conjunction, is accepted as Day 1 of the new month, then Passover will be the evening of March 21st, about 35 hours after the start of spring.

RESULT: Accepting the new moon NEAREST to the equinox for the year 2008 will result in the Passover service being just barely into spring. [Don't confuse "barely" with "barley" .. :-)]

C) The Year 2019 A.D. (all in Jerusalem local time)

NEW MOON = MARCH 6 at 6:24 p.m.

EQUINOX = MARCH 21 at 00:21 a.m. (21 minutes after midnight)

NEW MOON = APRIL 5 at 11:11 a.m.

The March 6 new moon is 14 days 5 hours 57 minutes before the equinox.

The April 5 new moon is 15 days 10 hours 50 minutes after the equinox.

IF "nearest new moon to the equinox" was really applied, THEN:

Either March 7 or March 8 should be DAY 1 of the new month, because that new moon is almost 29 hours nearer to the equinox than the following new moon.

If March 7, the actual day of the new moon conjunction, is accepted as Day 1, then Passover will be the evening of March 19th, a full 29 hours before the end of winter. IF March 8, the sunset that immediately follows the conjunction, is accepted as Day 1, then Passover will be the evening of March 20th, a full 5 hours before the end of winter.

RESULT: Accepting the new moon NEAREST to the equinox for the start of the first month would result in the entire Passover service being conducted in the winter.

So in all three of the above examples the new moon BEFORE the equinox is nearer to the equinox than the following new moon. So, IF "nearest new moon to the equinox" really is applied to these years, THEN:

2000 = Day 1 of the year would have been March 6 or 7

2008 = Day 1 of the year would be March 8 or 9

2019 = Day 1 of the year would be March 7 or 8.

But the Jewish calendar does not do this. In each of those three years the Jewish calendar starts the year with the following new moon in April. It might be interesting to also note that in the Jewish calendar all of the Feasts and Holy Days (except for Pentecost which must be on a fixed day of the week) for all three of those years fall on exactly the same days in the Roman calendar. Thus for 2000 and 2008 and 2019 the Jewish calendar places Passover on April 19 (observed the previous evening), First Day of U.B. on April 20, Seventh Day of U.B. on April 26, Trumpets on September 30, Atonement on October 9, First Day of FoT on October 14 and the Last Great Day on October 21.

In NONE of those three years does the Jewish calendar actually select the new moon NEAREST to the equinox for the start of the first month. In all three cases the Jewish calendar has selected "the new moon" (actually the molad in the Jewish calendar only approximates the time of the new moon and may be in error by as much as 16 hours) that is FURTHER AWAY FROM THE EQUINOX to start the new year. [This is not to imply that taking the new moon "further away from the equinox is wrong, because that is not wrong. It is only to show that the Jewish calendar does not really apply the "nearest to the equinox" principle.]

Note also the year 2008. In that case the "nearest" new moon is very clearly before the equinox, and it is a new moon that would place the Passover into spring (albeit only barely), yet the Jewish calendar has rejected that new moon in favour of the one that is further away and after the equinox. This shows that even the reasoning of "the nearest new moon to the equinox on the condition that the Passover will be in the spring" is also not applied by the Jewish calendar.

This comparison also illustrates the Jewish calendar's total disregard for real new moons. Thus the new moon on April 4 at 8:34 p.m. (2000 A.D.) and the new moon on April 5 at 11:11 a.m. (2019) and the new moon on April 6 at 6:15 a.m. (2008) ALL result in Day 1 of the first month of the Jewish calendar being

April 6. These three new moons span a period of 38 hours and 37 minutes, but the Jewish calendar treats them as if they are identical in their timing.

Nor has the Jewish calendar historically always handled things this way. For the year 360 A.D., when the equinox was still on March 21, the Jewish calendar started Day 1 of Nisan on March 4, had the Passover on March 17, a full 4 days before the end of winter, and had Day 1 of the second month (theoretically the next new moon) on April 3. So for the year 360 A.D. the Jewish calendar started the year with a new moon that was 2 days further away from the equinox, BUT STILL BEFORE THE EQUINOX, than the following new moon.

THIS IS THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT THE JEWISH CALENDAR DOES TODAY!

In 360 A.D. the Jewish calendar started the year with a new moon that was FURTHER AWAY FROM THE EQUINOX than the following new moon ... thus it was BEFORE the equinox.

Today (i.e. 2000 and 2008 and 2019) the Jewish calendar starts the year with a new moon that is FURTHER AWAY FROM THE EQUINOX than the preceding new moon ... thus it is AFTER the equinox.

Thus the Jewish calendar has never consistently applied the "rule" of taking the new moon "nearest to the equinox" for the start of the year! It violated this "rule" in the 360's A.D. and it violates this "rule" today. It has always violated this "rule".

The fact is: THERE IS NO SUCH RULE! It is nothing more than an invention of people who desire to justify the Jewish calendar's feature of starting some years in the winter. There has never been such a rule. The correct principle is to start the year with the first new moon IN the spring.

The point that has been proved is this:

The Jewish calendar does NOT always select the new moon that is nearest to the equinox to start the new year. It only mostly starts the year with the new moon nearest to the equinox. At other times (as in 2000 and 2008 and 2019) the Jewish calendar clearly starts the year with THE NEW MOON THAT IS FURTHER AWAY FROM THE EQUINOX.

A MAJOR PROBLEM that an insistence on always starting the year with the new moon nearest to the equinox brings with it is that SOMETIMES this would result in the Passover ceremony being conducted before the start of spring. Another problem is that consistently applying this rule of "the new moon nearest to the equinox" would frequently place the year so early in the season that no barley would have been available in Israel for the wave offering, even when the Passover may have been placed "just barely" into spring.

Now let's look at "green ears".

THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS

The word "GREEN" appears only twice in the whole Book of Leviticus. Those two places are: Leviticus 2:14 and Leviticus 23:14.

In Leviticus 23:14 the expression "nor GREEN EARS" is a translation of the Hebrew word "KARMEL". This word does not refer to the colour "green" at all; it really means "fruitful, plentiful", and by extension that is associated with lush green growth. But the word "karmel" itself does not refer to the colour "green".

The meaning of the English word "green" is not limited to the colour "green". The word is derived from the Old English word "growan" meaning "to grow" and is thus also commonly used to refer to unripe and immature fruit and produce (as in "those apples are still green and not yet suitable for eating") without the actual colour involved having to necessarily be "green".

Now in Leviticus 2:14, the ONLY other place in Leviticus where the word "green" appears in the KJV, it does not use any of the usual Hebrew words which are at times translated as "green". Instead Leviticus 2:14 uses the word "ABIB".

The Hebrew word "ABIB" is used 8 times in the whole O.T. Of those 8 places, it is 6 times left untranslated as "ABIB" (the name of the first month until Judah returned from the Babylonian captivity, at which time it was changed to Nisan). One time this Hebrew word is translated as "IN THE EAR". And in the other place (i.e. here in Lev. 2:14) it is translated as "GREEN EARS".

Note that "abib" is in this one instance NOT translated as "GREEN", but rather as "green EARS". The intention of the translators was to imply immature ears of grain.

A comparison with the other words that are translated as "green" will make clear that "abib" does not really indicate the colour "green". Rather "green" is something the translators READ INTO THIS WORD in this particular verse because they believed it to be a reference to immature grain. Realize that in a language of just over 6000 words (i.e. biblical Hebrew excluding names of people and places) you simply don't have 10 different words that all mean "green". In a while we'll look at nine other Hebrew words which are at times rendered as "green". In most of those words the colour green is also simply inferred by the translators in SOME passages, while in other places they avoided implying the colour "green".

But let's now first look at Leviticus 2:14, one of only two verses in the KJV of the Bible that uses the phrase "green ears" (the other passage being Leviticus 23:14 where the two words "green ears" are a translation of the one Hebrew word "karmel"). This should tell you that Leviticus 2:14 is really the only "proof-text" available to those who reason from "green ears" to determine the start of the year. Let's look at this verse.

And if thou offer a meat offering of thy firstfruits unto the LORD, thou shalt offer for the meat offering of thy firstfruits ABIB ("green ears") OF CORN DRIED BY THE FIRE, even CORN BEATEN OUT OF FULL EARS. (Leviticus 2:14 AV)

How on earth can anyone POSSIBLY infer some "UNRIPE" grains into Leviticus 2:14? Can't we see that this verse is speaking about grain that has ALREADY been dried by the fire? Grain that has ALREADY been beaten out of the ears?

It boggles my mind how anyone could possibly infer that Leviticus 2:14 is speaking about UNRIPE ears of grain? Do we understand that "corn beaten out of FULL EARS" and thereafter DRIED BY THE FIRE must obviously refer to ripe and mature grain? There is no way that Leviticus 2:14 is speaking about immature and unripe ears of grain.

It should be very clear that the word "green" in Leviticus 2:14 is totally inappropriate. This verse is plainly speaking about dried grain that had been harvested and then "beaten" out of the ears. It is NOT speaking about "immature ears of corn" as the translators implied by adding the word "green" into the English text.

AND THIS IS THE ONLY PASSAGE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO WISH TO APPEAL TO "GREEN EARS" HAVE! THERE ARE NO OTHER REFERENCES!

As already mentioned, the word "abib" is used 8 times in the Old Testament, and in none of the other 7 instances did the translators feel it appropriate to add the word "green" into their translation, to infer immature growth. And here, in Leviticus 2:14, they very clearly made a mistake in including the word "green" in the translation of something that refers to dried grain that was obviously only reaped after it was fully mature. This is not speaking about "baby grain" like you might get "baby beef" or "veal" or "lamb" ... this is speaking about real fully mature grain that has been beaten out and dried! And by the time it has been "dried by the fire" you are past the end of the harvesting period for that particular grain. After reaping, the grains were left in the fields in sheaves, to allow for drying out before threshing. And only after the threshing would the grain be dried "by the fire". No way would the dried grain, that is being spoken about in this verse, have been available during the month of March or even during the first part of April!

Leviticus 2:14 does not have ANY application to the wave-sheaf that God instructed Israel to offer during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The wave-sheaf does not feature in this chapter. So gone is any justification for appealing to "green, unripe, immature" ears of grain for determining the start of a year.

Next, can we not see that the section that spells out the wave offering which was to be brought during the Days of Unleavened Bread (i.e. Leviticus 23:10-11) says NOTHING AT ALL about "green" or "immature" crops?

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, AND SHALL REAP THE HARVEST THEREOF, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: (Leviticus 23:10 AV)

There is no hint that this sheaf is anything other than a part of the harvest that is ready for reaping! If you are ready to reap the harvest, then it obviously implies that the plants are mature enough for harvesting. You don't start "harvesting" immature plants. The word here translated as "the firstfruits" simply means "BEGINNING" (it is translated 18 times as "beginning", 11 times as "firstfruits" and 9 times as "first"). So when you are ready to BEGIN harvesting the mature grain, then Israel was to bring the wave-sheaf to the priest. The word "firstfruits" does NOT imply "IMMATURE plants". That's only how the Jews have come to interpret it to justify their early placements for the Days of Unleavened Bread. "Firstfruits" simply means THE FIRST of the mature plants that are going to be harvested.

In years where the Holy Days fell a week or two later, there was no problem at all in letting the grain stand in the fields for those extra couple of weeks, something that is regularly done in Israel today. Today farmers in Israel let the barley stand in the fields until the end of April to allow for enough drying out so that the mechanical harvesting machines can be used. If that is the way barley is harvested today (letting it dry out in the fields until towards the end of April before reaping), then there is no problem at all for the crop to also have stood in the fields until the end of April for some years in biblical times. There is nothing wrong with the sheaf of the firstfruits having a lower moisture content in some years than in other years.

How can we possibly infer that Leviticus 2:14 has to apply to the wave offering? First of all, this verse is speaking about MATURE GRAIN that has been dried. And secondly, if it really was speaking about immature "green" grain: do we really believe that some IMMATURE HALF-GROWN grains of barley are fit for representing the resurrected Jesus Christ being accepted by God the Father? Was Jesus Christ "immature" to be represented by "immature" grains of barley? It doesn't make sense to claim that the wave offering could consist of immature and not fully grown grains of barley.

THE ONLY REASON FOR INFERRING A "GREEN IMMATURE" STATUS FOR THE WAVE-SHEAF OFFERING IS TO JUSTIFY STARTING THE FIRST MONTH IN THE WINTER.

There is no other reason for appealing to "green ears. The Karaites are not, and never have been, any kind of authority for God's people to turn to for guidance and direction. In this instance the Karaites are doing nothing other than upholding "the traditions" of their people.

But if you have been around the Church of God for a few decades, then it has been INGRAINED INTO YOUR MIND that "abib" means "GREEN ears of corn", right? The truth is that "abib" does not mean "green" at all! The word "abib" is really DERIVED FROM an unused Hebrew root that means "to be tender". A word that is "derived from" another word does not necessarily retain the identical meaning of the word from which it is derived. But for this word "abib" the translators INFERRED the colour "green" and the status of immaturity. And that inference is based almost totally on the mistranslation in Leviticus 2:14, which is not speaking about "green immature corn" at all; read the verse again.

So why do Hebrew dictionaries tell you that "abib" means "GREEN ears of corn"? Because the word "abib" was translated as "GREEN ears" in Leviticus 2:14. That's the only reason for claiming that "abib" refers to the word "green". It is because of this ONE mistranslation amongst 8 occurrences of this Hebrew word that dictionaries have included the word "green" in the definition of the word "abib".

When you understand that in Leviticus 2:14 God is speaking about grain that has been beaten out and dried in front of a fire, then there remains no justification for defining "abib" as "GREEN ears of grain".

But to continue, let's look at the words for "green" in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

There are a range of Hebrew words in the O.T. that are at times translated as "GREEN". They include (with the one example for each word I have in each case rendered the English translation of the Hebrew word in capital letters) the following:

- YEREQ (Genesis 1:30 = every GREEN herb)
- YARAQ (Deuteronomy 11:10 = as a garden of HERBS)
- RA'ANAN (Deuteronomy 12:2 = under every GREEN tree)
- LACH (Genesis 30:37 = rods of GREEN poplar)
- KARMEL (Isaiah 16:10 = out of THE PLENTIFUL FIELD)
- KARPAC (Esther 1:6 = where were white, GREEN, and blue ...)
- RATOB (Job 8:16 = he is GREEN before the sun)
- DESHE (Psalm 23:2 = to lie down in GREEN pastures)
- PAG (Song 2:13 = puts forth her GREEN FIGS ...)

Of the 9 Hebrew words listed above, the two that mean "green" more than the others are "RA'ANAN" and "YEREQ", with the other words meaning primarily: new, moist, fresh, grass, fruitful, etc., and the translators at times inferring the colour "green" without this specifically being stated in the Hebrew text.

Seeing these 9 Hebrew words should also make it easier to grasp that "abib" does not mean "green". However, all of us also hold many views that are powerfully etched into our minds, and a simple factual explanation like this does not necessarily dislodge such strongly held views.

Anyway, we've seen that it doesn't work when people try to choose the new moon "nearest" to the equinox for starting the year. There has never been such a rule, and there certainly should not be such a rule, and the Jews have never consistently followed such a rule. In the past they have at times started the year with a new moon before the equinox that was further away from the equinox than the next new moon; and today they at times start the year with a new moon after the equinox that is further away from the equinox than the preceding new moon.

And neither are appeals to the "green ears" of Leviticus 2:14 for determining the start of the year valid. In this regard the Bible simply does not say what some people may wish to infer.

Frank W. Nelte