

## The Barley is Ripe in Israel

### Implications for the Dating of the Passover Celebration

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It has been reported by some within the Land of Israel that the barley is ripe in the Land. Those individuals are saying that this factor alone mandates that we change the time of the celebration of Passover to this month.

This is an important issue for all who wish to celebrate Passover at the appropriate time. The Passover celebration is scheduled for April 23 of this year. Since it appears that the barley is ripe in Israel, should we change our time for the celebration of Passover to later this month – the month of March?

I have had numerous inquiries about this issue. I have decided that the best way to deal with the issue is to write a short article about the whole issue. Hopefully, this short article will answer the questions that I am being asked on a daily basis. Those questions include:

How do we date Passover?

What role does the ripening of the barley play in the dating of the Passover?

Who has authority to change the dating of the celebration of Passover?

Does the ripening of the barley really matter to us today?

There are a few passages that I wish to examine in relation to this issue. All of those passages should tie together to give us a complete look at when Passover should be celebrated and what we should do about the apparent fact that the barley is ripe in the Land of Israel at this time.

#### How Do We Date Passover?

The first passage that we will consider and the most obvious passage that deals with the dating of Passover is found in Exodus 12:2. That passage says:

***This month*** shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

Exodus 12:2

In the Hebrew, the text reads as follows:

Hachodesh hazeh lachem rosh chadasheem rishon hu lachem l'chad'shai hashanah.

Translated directly from Hebrew without attempting to make any English sense of it, the words in English say this exactly:

The new moon, this one, to you head of new moons first it to you to new moons of the year.

That's exactly what it says. Now, let's take a look at what that means for us.

Adonai was telling Moses that the current new moon would be the new moon that marked the first moon (i.e. month) of the year. Thus, this single reference indicates that the appearance of a certain new moon would also indicate the beginning of the year.

Since we all know that Passover occurs in the Spring of the year, the new moon that Moses observed would have been a new moon in the Spring. Thus, Passover always occurs in the Spring of the year.

The modern Jewish calendar uses a rather easy method of determining exactly when Passover occurs. Yet, the common person cannot easily determine when that time is without doing some additional research astronomically.

Judaism has traditionally set the beginning of the first month of the year – the month of Nissan – in the same manner as that described in Exodus 12:2. Here are the rules.

The month of Nissan begins on the new moon that is closest to the month that Judaism traditionally recognizes as the “month” to which Exodus 12:2 applies. That is the month in which the vernal equinox occurs. We call the vernal equinox the first day of “Spring.”

It gets a little more complex – but not much. The first day of Spring (in 2005) is March 20. The new moon that is closest to the first day of Spring is March 11<sup>th</sup>. That fact alone seems to indicate that the celebration of Passover should be on the full moon that occurs on March 25<sup>th</sup>. That is not true, however, and this is where the astronomy part comes in.

The declaration of Spring is made according to the equatorial vernal equinox. That is the time when there are equal amounts of light and darkness at the equator. Since the equator is south of Israel, that means that it will take five or six more days for there to be equal amounts of light and day at higher latitudes. Thus, the vernal equinox does not occur in Israel until many days after the equatorial equinox.

Therefore, the closest new moon to the vernal equinox in Israel is April 10<sup>th</sup>. That begins the month of Nissan on the Jewish calendar because it is closest new moon to the month that Exodus 12:2 refers to as “this month.” That is how Judaism locates the month of Nissan.

### **What About the Ripe Barley?**

The celebration of Passover was not a lone Holy Day celebrated all by itself. The one day celebration of Passover is followed by the seven Day celebration of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. There is also another day celebrated shortly after the beginning of Passover that is called the Festival of Firstfruits.

On that day, green ears of barley were to be presented to the priest as a sacrifice. This celebration was an integral part of the celebration of the whole Passover series of Holy Days.

Logic tells us that if the barley was not green – in its early stages of ripening – that it could not be harvested and brought to the priest. In fact, the Torah teaches us that there could not be any harvesting of barley crop until the firstfruits of the harvest had been presented to the priest.

This presents a problem, therefore, when the barley will not be ripe in time for its presentation to the priest. If – and, when – such an occurrence were to transpire, the leadership in Israel would need to make a decision. They would need to decide if they would continue on with the celebration of Passover in the first month, or if they would postpone the celebration of the Passover until the next month when the barley was indeed ripe. Nature itself would have presented a dilemma to the Sanhedrin for which they would have to make a ruling.

Thus, there are two factors that indicate when Passover should occur. One was the timing of “this new moon” as indicated by Exodus 12:2. Rabbinically, that time is established as the closest new moon to the vernal equinox as it occurs in Jerusalem (and not as it occurs at the equator). The other factor was whether or not the barley was ripe for the secondary Holy Day that was part of the whole greater celebration of the Passover Festival. The ripening of the barley is only part of the equation. And, if the barley was ripe a month before the Exodus 12:2 new moon, then that would not indicate that the Passover Festival should be moved up. The only time that the barley could and should affect the celebration of the Passover celebration is if the barley would not be ready for “its part” in the Passover celebration.

Verification of ripened barley was part of the practice of Judaism when the Temple was standing. During the month of Adar, the barley would be examined if the next month was to be declared as “this new moon.” Therefore, if it was currently the month of Adar and the next month determined by the falling of the Jerusalem-based vernal equinox was to be Nissan, the barley would be examined days in advance so that there could be a barley sacrifice.

If the barley was ripe, then the month of Nissan would proceed as planned. If the barley was not going to be ripe in time for its part in the Passover festival, then the Great Court had to make a decision. In such cases, they could add the month of Adar II to the calendar, if indeed they were assured that the barley would not be ripe by Nissan 16.

That is the only affect that ripening barley had on the celebration of Passover and the declaration of Nissan. It was not the sole determiner of the beginning of the month. The month was primarily determined by the movement of the sun and the moon. Since the barley played a key role in the celebration, it was potentially included in the forestalling of the celebration of Passover. It would not, however, have been used for the advancing of the celebration of Passover.

In other words, if the barley was ripened earlier than the setting of “this month” (Exodus 12:2) there would be no reason for the advancement of the celebration of Passover. Passover was to be celebrated during “this month” (i.e. the month that Moses could readily observe and calculate in the future). Early barley would have still ensured that the barley could be used in the Passover and there would have been no reason to advance the date of Passover because of early barley.

### **Who Has the Authority?**

In the event that the barley was not going to be ripe, a decision had to be made regarding the movement of Passover to the next month. That decision could not be made outside of a ruling by the Great Court. The Great Court was given complete authority to enforce the Torah. The Torah clearly said that “this month” shall be the beginning of months. If anyone was going to change the time of the celebration of Passover, it had to be the Great Court and no one else.

Exodus 12:2 firmly establishes the time and the season in which the Passover should be celebrated. That is a Torah mandate. Leviticus 23 also establishes that green barley should be brought to the priest a few short days after the day of the Passover celebration. If those two cannot occur at the same time, then there is conflict between the two mitzvot of the Torah that only legal Torah authorities can resolve. These issues are not left to those who have no authority. The breach of one Torah mitzvah over the other is no small matter. In the case where the barley is not ripe someone who has ultimate authority to enforce Torah must make the decision which mitzvah is of greater authority and weight.

In the case of early ripening barley (as is the case this year) there is no conflict at all.

### **Does This Matter to Us?**

The ripening of the barley played a secondary – but yet a very key role in the Passover Holy Days. For us as believers in the Messiah that role is even more heightened by the fact that the bringing of the ripened firstfruits of barley symbolizes the resurrection of the Messiah from the dead.

In the broader scope of things, however, the ripening of the barley was only essential since there was going to be a physical presentation of that barley to the priest for purposes of sacrifice. If the barley was not ripe there could be no sacrifice.

Today, we recognize the Festival of Firstfruits. We may hold a special service on that Day in commemoration of the resurrection of the Messiah. Yet, at the same time, we do not physically bring an offering of the firstfruits of barley to a priest. We no longer continue the practice of sacrificing during our recognition of the true and teleological meaning of the Festival of Firstfruits.

There are some who are changing the celebration of “this month” as mandated by Exodus 12:2 and set by Rabbinical authorities because a group of individuals in Israel has found green barley ears. That shows an immature understanding of the setting of Festival dates according to Torah mandates. As already explained, the only time that the barley ripening could affect the celebration of Passover was if the barley was not going to be ready for its part in the celebration. The barley is ripe (according to some individuals) and that means that it will continue to be ripe for its role in the celebration of Passover as mandated by Exodus 12:2 – “this month” shall be the beginning of months.

Furthermore, let’s assume that the opposite was true. Let’s say that the Jewish calendar had March 11<sup>th</sup> of this year as the beginning of Nissan. Let’s say that the same group of individuals that has sighted the green ears of barley had come forth to say that the barley was not green nor would it be green in time for Passover.

Would that give us some reason to change the celebration of Passover from the March 11<sup>th</sup> date to one month later? Should we wait around for the barley to become green and ripe?

There are a number of issues related to this question that need to be understood.

First, the Great Court is the only agency responsible for mandating changes in Torah observance based on conflicting situations. We cannot hold the Torah to any private interpretation and decide for ourselves which mitzvah we will obey and which one we will disobey (in situations wherein a conflict arises and both mitzvot cannot be obeyed). The Great Court would have to make a decision concerning the date of Passover.

Second, this issue is only of importance when the barley will play a key role in the celebration of the greater Passover Festival. What do I mean by that? The Festival of Firstfruits occurred a few days after Passover. It demanded the bringing of ripened barley to the priest for sacrifice. That was the role that the barley played in the whole scheme of the Passover.

Thus, this issue will only have any significance if and when there is:

- A Great Court sitting that is willing to make rulings of this nature
- A High Priest
- A common priesthood
- A Temple, a Tabernacle, or an altar of sacrifice on which to perform the sacrifice associated with the barley

It is evident in Leviticus 23 that the barley involved a sacrifice. That means that there would have been an altar of sacrifice. That also means that there would have been a priesthood, including a High Priest. If there was a High Priest then there was a Great Court as mandated by the Torah. Only when all of these components are in place does the ripening of the barley have any significance that might delay the “beginning of months.”

### **An Example of a Great Court Ruling and the Harvest of Barley**

We do have an example of the Great Court (which sat on the Temple grounds) making a determination about the ripening of the barley. And, it’s right out of scripture. It is, however, in a place that no one would expect. And, the authority of the Great Court is seen clearly.

First, let’s examine the passage of scripture. Then, I will explain.

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another messenger [*angelos in the Greek*] came out

of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in your sickle, and reap: for the time is come for you to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

Revelation 14:14-16

Let's break down this portion of scripture to see exactly what is happening.

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

Revelation 14:14

It is clear that the one who is sitting on the white cloud is the Messiah. He is called the Son of man and he has a golden crown on his head.

And another messenger came out of the temple....

Revelation 14:15

There is only one group of people that are allowed in the Temple. Those are the priests. Although we might not assume that there are priests in the Heavenly Temple, we also know that John has written to individuals who will make certain inferences based on his imagery. This angelos (in the Greek) or messenger has exited the Temple and obviously has been given a message from within the Temple to deliver to the Son of man.

...crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Your sickle, and reap: for the time is come for you to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

Revelation 14:15

This messenger who was in the Temple has obviously been given a message from within the Temple itself. It is also obvious that a decision has been made by those inside of the Temple that action should be taken outside of the Temple. The decision that was made inside of the Temple was that the harvest was ripe and that the Son of man should begin the reaping process.

This indicates that those inside the Temple compound have examined the harvest. They have discussed the harvestability of the crop. They have made a decision that the crop is indeed ready for harvest.

The barley harvest as it is associated with the celebration of Passover is the only harvest wherein a Temple Court would have to make a judgment regarding whether or not it was suitable for harvest. Even Messiah himself – acting as the Great Reaper of the Final Harvest of the earth – subjected himself to the ruling of the Temple Court as we clearly see in Revelation 14.

### **Conclusion**

Should we change our celebration of Passover to March instead of April of this year? The answer is “no” for a number of reasons.

1. Exodus 12:2 has been used faithfully by the Rabbis to establish the date of Passover. That has been done as faithfully as possible in accordance with the mandate to determine what “this month” should be.
2. Barley is not used in the celebration of Passover since there is no Great Court, no High Priest, no priesthood, nor is there an altar of sacrifice upon which to offer the associated offering that goes along with the barley presentation.

3. The barley is ripe prior to the official designation of the Passover (which has been determined using the rule of Exodus 12:2). The only occasion in which the Great Court could alter the date of the celebration of Passover would be if the barley was not ripe in enough time for it to be presented with its associated sacrifices at the time of the Festival of Firstfruits. The barley is ready for the prescribed time set by Rabbinical legislation. There is no need to alter the time of Passover.

The issue of setting a date for the Passover was of primary importance to the Rabbis when they realized that Israel would be sent into exile. With the destruction of the Temple as the locus of unified worship in Israel, standards needed to be established that would continue to foster the same unity provided by the centralized Temple. Thus, the rulings of wise and learned Rabbis regarding the proper dates for celebration of all Festivals should not be nullified.

As long as there is no recognized central Sanctuary, the whole House of Israel – Ephraim and Judah – is in exile. Exile does not end when some Jews return to Israel following a galut. Exile does not end with the declaration of statehood. Galut ends when there is a centralized Sanctuary in the Land again. Until that time, the exile continues and all of the decisions of the Rabbis regarding Holy Day observances are in force.

It is of primary importance that the whole House of Israel celebrates the Holy Days as one unified body. Our witness to unbelieving Judah is greatly diminished when we rebel against those standards that have been firmly established through much insight and wisdom. Following after faulty theology from questionable sources who disavow not only the authority of Judah but the clear implications of Torah itself hampers our ability to witness effectively to them.

Until such a time that there is a Sanctuary in the Land in which the Shekinah can dwell (see Revelation 21:2-3) we must continue to follow the wisdom of those who have gone before us. As Rabban Sha'ul has said:

***Your glorying is not good.*** Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Messiah our Passover is sacrificed for us: ***Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness;*** but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8