

What about Local Sightings and “*Potential*” New Moons?

Having forsaken God’s true calendar, the world today has no regard for the New Moons, the day of the beginning of each one of God’s true months. The western world follows the pagan Roman calendar. Then there is the Chinese calendar, the Muslim calendar, the Mayan calendar, the ancient Egyptian calendar. But which is the TRUE Calendar of God? Is there a BIBLICAL Calendar? Should each region decide the new moon by their own observation? Are there times a month should be declared even when not visible to the eye?

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According to the Bible testimony, God commands to begin each month with celebration of the “New Moon” – the first visible faint crescent of the moon. But who is to do this? Should every region of the earth do its own New Moon sightings, and have their own calendar months, and observe God’s Holy Days accordingly? Or should we go by sightings in Jerusalem or Israel, today?

And what if there is cloud cover in Israel, so the New Moon is not seen – even though it normally would be? Should we then postpone the month till the following day? Or should we go by “potential visibility”?

These are volatile questions, and deserve answers.

Calendars have been invented by nations to record the passage of days and times, the length of days required for the earth to circle the sun, and the moon to circle the earth. However, different societies attacked the problem from different viewpoints, and came to contrasting solutions and therefore different calendars were produced around the world.

Which system of time keeping is divine in origin? Or does it really matter?

To most men, probably not. To churches, however, it does matter, for each has its own holy days and system of beliefs. The Muslim calendar is based solely on the lunar months, and the year is 12 lunar months of about 29 ½ days each, thus their year is

about 11 days short of the solar year (one circuit of the earth around the sun). This causes their seasons to pass through every month, beginning 11 days earlier every year.

The Roman calendar is solely sun based, so the year is 365 ¼ days in length, with no regard to the lunar months at all. Each month is 30 or 31 days, disregarding the appearance of “new moons.”

Does time matter? Is it important to God?

Jesus Christ said, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He reiterated, “Thy Word is TRUTH” (John 17:17). And the Scriptures tell us that God set the sun, moon and stars to divide the days, months, and years. “Then God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for *signs and seasons, and for days and years*. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good” (Gen.1:14-18).

As for the moon, God said, “He appointed the moon for seasons [Hebrew *moadim*, meaning festivals, which are determined by the beginning of months]” (Psalm 104:19).

In fact, the Word of God commands, “Blow up the trumpet IN THE NEW MOON, *AT THE TIME APPOINTED*, on our solemn feast day” (Psalm 81:3, KJV).

The whole world has gone sadly, perversely, astray from the simple commands of God! Every nation on earth has altered and changed and repudiated God’s true Biblical Calendar instructions! Even the Jews have forsaken the true Biblical Calendar to maintain their “traditions” and ritual instructions, contrary to the Scriptures!

But how do we determine these basic principles?

Back to the Basics

Alfred Edersheim, in his book *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, writes:

“Scarcely any other festive season could have left so continuous an impress on the religious life of Israel as the 'New Moons.' Recurring at the beginning of every month, and marking it, the solemn proclamation of the day, by – 'It is sanctified,' was intended to give a hallowed character to each month, while the blowing of the priests' trumpets and the special sacrifices brought, would summon, as it were, the Lord's host to offer their tribute unto their exalted King, and thus bring themselves into 'remembrance' before Him. Besides, it was also a popular feast, when families, like that of David, might celebrate their special annual

sacrifice (1 Sam. 20:6,29); when the king gave a state-banquet (1 Sam. 20:5,24); and those who sought for instruction and edification resorted to religious meetings, such as Elisha seems to have held (2 Kgs.4:23). And so we trace its observance onwards through the history of Israel; marking in Scripture a special Psalm for the New Moon (in Tishri – Ps.81:3); noting how from month to month the day was kept as an outward ordinance, even in the decay of religious life (Isa.1:13; Hos. 2:11), apparently all the more rigidly, with abstinence from work, not enjoined in the law, that its spirit was no longer understood (Amos 8:5); and finally learning from the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel that it also had a higher meaning, and was destined to find a better fulfillment in another dispensation, when the New Moon trumpet should summon 'all flesh to worship before Jehovah' (Isa.66:23), and the closed eastern gate to the inner court of the new Temple be opened once more to believing Israel (Ezek. 46:1). And in New Testament times we still find the 'New Moon' kept as an outward observance by Jews and Judaising Christians, yet expressly characterised as 'a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ' (Col. 2:16,17)" (pages 229-230).

The great irony today is that both Christians AND Jews have in effect both ignored and rejected God's divinely ordained calendar and replaced it with either the pagan Roman calendar, for the so-called "Christians," and the "permanent" Jewish so-called calendar of Rabbi Hillel II of the fourth century after Christ – a calendar which was based on mathematics and the study of heavenly cycles, and no longer based on divine commands of physical sighting of New Moons.

The Hebrew Month

The Hebrew word for "month" is actually "chodesh" – it means, literally, "THE NEW MOON; by implication a *month*" (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance). A month, according to God's Word, should begin with a "new moon." It is so simple! But look at the Roman calendar – a "month" there can begin on ANY day, new moons are utterly disregarded! How far we have removed from the ways and teachings of God!

The Jews give lip service to the new moons with their approximating the new moons, by means of mathematics, but they do not really "observe" real, genuine NEW MOONS – except for a few, such as the Karaites of Jerusalem and Israel!

God Almighty says, in Exodus, "This month (CHODESH – "NEW MOON") shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exo.12:2).

But the Jews today reject this command and declare Tishri 1, the SEVENTH month, as the beginning of the year, basing all their calculations on Tishri 1, and ignoring Nisan or Abib 1, in the spring, which God says is the true "first month of the year to you."

The Word of God says, “He appointed the MOON for seasons” (Psalm 104:19). The Hebrew word for “seasons” is *moadim* and means “festivals,” the annual Holy Days of God. Without knowing the true new moon days, how can we possibly observe God’s annual holy days correctly, on the right days? It is ludicrous – insane – utterly ridiculous to think we are correctly observing the holy days on the right day if we cannot even get the first day of the month right! Says Strong’s Concordance on “Moadim,” “an appointment, i.e. a fixed time or season; spec. a FESTIVAL . . .”

When are we going to get serious and get back to the “faith ONCE DELIVERED to the saints”? (Jude 3).

Neither Abraham, Moses, or Christ Himself ever heard of the traditions added to influence the calendar in 358 A.D. by the Rabbis! In their day, a “new moon” had to be SEEN to be recognized as such! Observers were stationed each month to watch carefully for the New Moon’s first faint crescent. But in 358 A.D. the Jews abolished this principle, exchanging it for mathematical formulas and calculations instead, creating in the process a hybrid calendar with holy days occurring on different days, because they are calculated differently!

God says, “There is a way that *seems right* to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov.14:12).

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and LEAN NOT on your own understanding” (Prov.3:5).

God says, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:7-9).

In fact, God’s Word says, “Blow the trumpet at the time of the NEW MOON (*CHODESH*); at the full [keseh] moon, on our solemn feast day. For this is a statute for Israel, a LAW of the God of Jacob” (Psalm 81:3-4). To blow the trumpet to celebrate any OTHER day than the true New Moon would constitute disobedience to God’s LAW – an act of flagrant rebellion and stubborn iniquity!

The word “keseh” here in Hebrew means “appar. From 3680; prop. Fullness or the full moon,” but the root 3680 is *kacah* and means “to plump, i.e. fill up hollows, by impl. To cover (for clothing or secrecy): – clad self, close, clothe, conceal, cover (self), hide, overwhelm.” Its usage here is strange – very interesting. Since the verse is speaking of the NEW MOON, it follows that the new slender crescent of the moon is the beginning of the “plumping up” of the moon – its growing into fullness, becoming fully clad, covered, no longer ‘concealed’ or ‘hidden’ from view by the earth’s shadow. It means, in my view, the “manifestation” of the new moon!

God's commandment then is that we blow the trumpet – announce the “new moon” – WHEN IT BECOMES VISIBLE – WHEN IT IS SIGHTED – and not to “proclaim” it until or unless we KNOW it is truly the ‘New Moon’!

In ancient times, Alfred Edersheim reports,

“THE DETERMINATION OF THE NEW MOON

“We have already shown of what importance the right determination of the new moon was in fixing the various festivals of the year, and with what care and anxiety its appearance was ascertained from witnesses who had actually seen it; also how the tidings were afterwards communicated to those at a distance. *For the new moon was reckoned by actual personal observation, not by astronomical calculation*, with which, however, as we know, many of the Rabbis must have been familiar, since we read of astronomical pictures, by which they were wont to test the veracity of witnesses. *So important was it deemed to have faithful witnesses, that they were even allowed, in order to reach Jerusalem in time, to travel on the Sabbath, and, if necessary, to make use of horse or mule (Mish. Rosh ha Sh. i. 9; iii. 2)*. While strict rules determined who were not to be admitted as witnesses (*Mish. Rosh ha Sh. i. 8*), every encouragement was given to trustworthy persons, and the Sanhedrin provided for them a banquet in a large building specially destined for that purpose, and known as the *Beth Yaazek (Mish. Rosh ha Sh. ii. 5)*.”

Today, unfortunately, the Jews place too much reliance upon rabbinical innovations and halakah and reject the Torah and its principles and precedents. They rely too much on TRADITIONS and ignore the plain Word of the living God!

No wonder Christ rebuked them, saying, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matt.15:3). He denounced them, saying, “*Thus you have made the commandments of God of no effect [null and void] by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in VAIN they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the COMMANDMENTS OF MEN’*” (Matt.15:6-9).

In the gospel of Mark, He declared to them, “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition making the word of God of no effect [null and void] through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do” (Mark 7:8-13).

In ancient times, even on a Sabbath day, upon seeing the New Moon, Jews would saddle up a donkey or a horse and gallop for miles to report it to the Sanhedrin, it was deemed so important an event! But today, they will not even pick up a telephone and

phone in a new moon sighting on the weekly Sabbath – even on a month where a festival observance is at stake!

Truly Isaiah prophesied,

“Inasmuch as these people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught *by the commandment of men*, therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden” (Isaiah 29:13-14).

The times of this ignorance and foolishness God winked at. But as the apostle Paul says, “Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, BUT NOW COMMANDS ALL MEN EVERYWHERE TO REPENT, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:30-31).

What about “Potential” Visibility?

But the question arises, what “new moon” should we use to begin the month? A question has arisen about the sighting and declaring of the New Moon if the skies are cloudy in Jerusalem and Israel, and the faint crescent is not seen – even when it has already been seen EAST of Jerusalem, as the earth turns upon its axis – in the Americas, Asia, and points east of Jerusalem.

In other words, today we have virtually instant communication, via telephone, telex, and the internet, so sightings of the New Moon can be verified at all points and communicated everywhere. So if we know the moon *should* be seen in Jerusalem because of its astronomical illumination, azimuth, and location in the sky, but only cloud cover or inclement weather prohibits the Jews from seeing it, then should a New Moon be declared anyway? Or should it be declared automatically the NEXT day?

For example, if we know on the 29th day of a month, that the New Moon SHOULD be easily visible the next day, weather permitting, but the weather intrudes, should we declare it based on “potential visibility” or should we wait till the next day?

The fact that the New Moon has already been seen EAST of Jerusalem should tell us that we should go ahead and declare it, even if it is obscured in Jerusalem or Israel. The earth is a very small planet today – due to rapid modern transportation and communication.

As Daniel foretold of the time of the end: “Many shall run to and fro, and *knowledge shall be increased*” (Dan.12:4). We live in a time of exponentially exploding knowledge! Therefore, unlike previous ages of mankind, today we can KNOW if the

Moon has been sighted EAST of Jerusalem, showing us the New Moon has begun, even before its crescent reaches the skies over Jerusalem. Should we just ignore this fact, and stubbornly insist that we delay the month a day, or should we not go by the SPIRIT of the law?

To ignore knowledge is the way of death. God says, “My people are DESTROYED FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the LAW of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hosea 4:6).

As Nick Wood of England pointed out in a message sent to me, “All the evidence we have from Scripture and ancient history shows that the original calendar had a 360 day year consisting of 12 x 30 day months. Although I have no concrete proof to offer, it would seem entirely biblical and logical to me, to believe that every month would begin with the first crescent new moon visible over what is now known as the Holy Land. There is no indication from either Scripture or ancient history, as far as I am aware, that these 30 day months varied in any way for whatever reason. If a cloud obscured the view of the first crescent moon, would there have been a postponement giving a 31 day month? Would the next month then have been a 29 day month? This original calendar is the one that Christ will restore after He returns to usher in the Kingdom of God. In a sense it would be a ‘fixed’ calendar.”

Nick goes on, “After major disturbances in the moon and earth’s orbit at the time of the Flood and Exodus, the moon no longer orbited the earth in exactly 30 days, nor was the year any longer exactly 360 days long. It now began to orbit the earth in approximately 29.5 days, so again it is entirely logical to me that the Jews would manage their calendar so that each month would have either 29 or 30 days. To neglect some form of management of the calendar would in my view, quickly lead to chaos and confusion.”

What about the issue of scientific advancement? Must we rule it out in determining the New Moon? Although using a telescope or binoculars would “cheat” in viewing the New Moon with the human eye, to determine its beginning or not, that does not mean we must rule out modern marvels of communication! If it has been seen by the naked eye east of Jerusalem, then obviously IT EXISTS, and it has BEGUN! If it has been seen clearly enough, and is not a “borderline” sighting, then it should be easily visible in Israel and it would be logical to declare it as seen based on “potentiality.” I see no problem with that.

Of course, in any “borderline” sighting situation, all bets are off, and we should go based on true objective sighting – and if it is not seen at the end of the 29th day, then we should declare the month a full month and declare the next day as the 30th day of the month, and the following day would be the New Moon!

Nick Wood asserts, “I don’t see any real consistency in saying that we shouldn’t use scientific knowledge when it comes to determining the visibility of the crescent new moon, but we are quite happy to use computers and emails to pick up the message that

the new moon has been seen and verified by at least two or three witnesses. The ancients were very clued up on astronomy and were very accurate in their predictions. After all Hillel II was able to mathematically calculate the fixed calendar, which is still accurate to within 2 days nearly 1,700 years later. No mean feat. Surely we should be using all our God given talents in the pursuit of true and right knowledge.”

Nick goes on: “When the potential visibility of the new moon over Israel is uncertain on the 29th day, and there is some cloud cover making visibility impossible, I have absolutely no problem in postponing the new moon one day in this situation, even on the 1st of Abib or Tishri. These cases are the only ones where it is truly justified in my view.”

In conclusion, he writes: “Where I do have reservations is when there is real potential visibility over Jerusalem on the 29th day and there is some cloud cover. The position on the earth of the first crescent new moon sighting, varies every month. Let us take the example of the first crescent sighting over say New York and the eastern seaboard of North America. As the earth turns, the crescent grows more visible each hour until it is much clearer over Japan. Then as the earth turns further and the crescent is physically over Jerusalem, some high, wispy cirrus cloud obscures the new moon till it goes below the horizon. I cannot see any logical justification in postponing for a day if the astronomical calculations show that the new moon will be easily visible over Jerusalem. If the crescent has already been seen with the naked eye hundreds and even thousands of miles to the east, then the crescent is physically there. No doubt about it.

“In the case above, if you were to postpone a day, and the new moon was still obscured on the 30th day, then would you continue to postpone until the moon was actually seen, maybe 2 or 3 nights later on the 32nd or 33rd day? This does not make any sense and the moon would be far from new by then. Or would you declare the new moon anyway on the 30th day? If so then you are in effect using the principle of potential visibility,” Nick concludes.

Living in the scientific age of vast knowledge and communication, we must not ignore the established knowledge that we possess when it comes to the New Moon sightings, lest we become like the Pharisees who sought to cross every “t” and dot every “i” as they interpreted the Law of God, adding their own pronouncements and rules when there was insufficient evidence in the Law itself!

A Little Common Sense

Interestingly, according to the Karaites, the Bible never explicitly states that we should determine the beginning of months based on the New Moon. This is because the Hebrew word “CHODESH” itself *implies* that the month begins with the crescent New Moon. Nor does the Bible say we MUST observe the crescent of the new moon in order to declare the month! It is silent on the subject. It simply states that the month equals or begins with the new moon. Obviously, in ancient times, human sighting was the only real way to observe the first faint crescent of the new moon.

However, the fact is that the ancient Hebrews knew the moon circles the earth every 29 ½ days – not 28 or 31. Therefore, a month would have to be either 29 or 30 days long – partial days don't count!

This suggests that we should never postpone beyond the 30th day, because after that the moon would be far from new. If there is bad weather for five days in a row, so the Moon cannot be seen in Israel for five days, must we 'postpone' the New Moon declaration UNTIL it is finally "sighted" by the human eye? By then it would almost be a quarter Moon!

That would be absurd!

On the other hand, if we literally went ONLY by lunar sightings of the crescent, that could lead to amazing calendar problems. For example, if there were cloud cover in Israel, when the new moon should appear, and the new moon date was therefore postponed till the 30th day, and that happened the next month as well, it also being declared a 30-day month, even though it normally would have been visible, then the next month the new moon might be seen by observers at the end of the 28th day – *making a 28-day month!*

This would be absurd as well, cutting the month short by a day!

What Would David Do?

Was David as ignorant about the movements of heavenly bodies as some suppose?

In the Psalms we read, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork*" (Psalm 19:1).

David also wrote, "*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained*" (Psalm 8:3).

No doubt David spent a lot of time in the fields as a shepherd and spent a lot of his time praying and meditating on the glory of the night sky. He, along with the astronomers of the time, would surely have understood something as relatively simple as the fact that a lunar month always has 29 or 30 days.

The following information is from the Jewish website www.chabad.org. I have capitalized some areas to emphasize what I consider to be extremely important points.

CHABAD.ORG

The Jewish Month

The Sanhedrin Sanctification

The following is a brief description of the procedure the Sanhedrin followed in days of yore to determine the date of the onset of a new month.

On the 30th day of every month, (see footnote *A*) the Sanhedrin would “open for business” in a large courtyard in Jerusalem called Beit Ya’azek. Witnesses who claimed to have seen the new moon on the previous night would come to give their testimony and be cross-examined.

The members of the Sanhedrin were WELL SCHOOLED IN ASTRONOMY. They knew EXACTLY WHEN THE NEW MOON WOULD HAVE APPEARED, and where it would have been visible. Nevertheless, the sanctification of the moon depends on the crescent new moon actually being seen by two witnesses.

The rabbis of the Sanhedrin would question the witnesses in the order of their arrival. They knew what the proper responses to their questions ought to be, and were thus quickly able to identify fraudulent claims. Starting with the elder of each pair, they would ask: “Tell us how you saw the moon:

- In which direction was it in relation to the sun?
- Was it to the north or south?
- How high in the sky did the moon appear to be?
- In which direction were the crescent’s tips facing?
- How wide was it?”

After they had finished questioning the first witness, they would bring in his partner and question him in similar fashion. If the two accounts corroborated, the evidence was accepted.

That day, the thirtieth day, was now declared Rosh Chodesh of the new month. The head of the Sanhedrin would proclaim: “*Mekudash!*” (“Sanctified!”) and everyone would respond, “*Mekudash! Mekudash!*” The previous month was now retroactively determined to have had only twenty-nine days.

The 30-Day Month

If no witnesses came on the thirtieth day—either because the moon had not been “reborn” yet, or because it was not visible—then the next day, the thirty-first day, was automatically declared Rosh Chodesh, retroactively rendering the previous month a *malei* month.(see footnote *B*)

Members of the Sanhedrin would go to a highly visible location, where they would partake in a celebratory meal to signify the new month. No fires were lit that night. The new month is ALWAYS EITHER ON THE 30th OR 31st DAY; if they hadn’t lit fires the night before, it was understood that the new month started on the 31st day.

Footnote (*A*)

If their ASTRONOMICAL CALCULATIONS indicated that the new moon could not possibly have been seen on the previous night, the Sanhedrin would not convene on the thirtieth day.

Footnote (*B*)

On certain occasions, IF THE ASTRONOMICAL DATA REQUIRED SO, the Sanhedrin would establish Rosh Chodesh on the 30th day even in the absence of witnesses who saw the new moon. For example, suppose that the land of Israel was COVERED WITH CLOUDS on the 30th night for several consecutive months. If the Sanhedrin would allow all these months to be malei, then several months down the line the new moon could appear on the 25th day of the month! The Sanhedrin always ensured that the new moon should never possibly appear on any night other than the 30th or 31st.

As the documentation from CHABAD shows, we can clearly see from the above extract from the CHABAD website, the Sanhedrin were very much aware of whether a new moon was “potentially visible”. And, “on certain occasions [when necessary due to astronomical data] . . . even in the absence of WITNESSES WHO SAW THE NEW MOON” they would do so! In other words, the crescent did not actually have to be seen by witnesses, if astronomical evidence showed the new moon should be seen clearly if it were not for cloud cover or bad weather or other extenuating factors!

Also, we find on www.emishnah.com the following quotation:

Rosh Hashanah:2:8.

On another occasion two witnesses came and testified: We saw it in its expected time [on the night preceding the thirtieth] but on the night of its intercalation [the thirty-first] it was not seen, and Rabban Gamliel accepted their testimony. Said Rabbi Dosa ben Harkinas: They are false witnesses. How can they testify that a woman has given birth when on the next day her belly is still [swollen appearing to be] between her teeth? Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: I approve of your words [and Rosh Hodesh should be on the thirty-first. However, Rabban Gamliel KNEW THROUGH ASTRONOMICAL CALCULATIONS that the new moon should have been visible on the evening of the thirtieth and explained the discrepancy to cloud cover or similar reasons].

Our Interconnected World

Here from the Mishnah itself is clear proof that those observing the new moon in Temple times were able to CALCULATE which night the new moon would be visible. Those of us who use the “observed” new moon calendar must admit that the calculated, mathematical calendar is indeed still accurate to within one or two days, even after nearly 1,700 years.

We read in the books of Kings and Chronicles of the ships of Solomon sailing to distant parts of the world. Sometimes the voyages lasted THREE YEARS.

“For the king had merchant ships at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every THREE YEARS the merchant ships came bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys” (I Kings 10:22).

These sailors had to be able to NAVIGATE around the world and to do that they would undoubtedly have had a good knowledge of the heavens and the movements of the sun, moon and planets.

Surely we must think very carefully about arbitrarily postponing a new moon day because of cloud cover in Israel, even though the new moon is visible in countries hundreds of miles to the EAST of Israel. To have even the possibility of ending up with a month of 28 DAYS OR LESS should tell us that this is most definitely the wrong path to go down.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings” (Proverbs 25:2).

Our Creator has given us wonderful minds to search and discover knowledge and truth. If we can be scientifically certain of a new moon (i.e. potential visibility) then surely it should be acknowledged regardless of cloud cover or hazy conditions. We have astronomical observatories today and even space telescopes, which can track the movements of the moon and planets down to the microsecond. I am simply unable to conceive in any way that our Heavenly Father would want us to just IGNORE this knowledge that, when put simply, is based on scientific fact. Surely we want to base our New Moons on TRUTH as opposed to ERROR.

There are times however, when God does indeed “conceal” from us when a new moon will be. When we have a genuine borderline case, or when there is not absolute certainty of a crescent sighting according to all the astronomical data, then we must wait until its visual sighting is verified from the land of Israel. If it is not seen after 29 days then of course it would be correct to have a full month of 30 days and declare the new moon the following evening.

Local Sightings?

Nehemiah Gordon, a Karaite Jew, wrote an article (8/27/14), “*New Moon, full moon, Karaite moon, or local moon?!?*” Nehemiah admits, “For approximately 15 years, I have been a zealous advocate of using the moon in the Land of Israel to determine when to observe our holidays in the Diaspora. I set this forth in a book. I stated this in a Karaite Fact Card. But over the last year, I’ve come to realize that I *might have been* wrong. Some of my hesitancy in admitting that I was in fact wrong is *because so much of my identity has been wrapped up in this.*”

It is a fact that Nehemiah has been wrong on other things: (1) keeps Pentecost [Shavuot] wrong because he follows the Karaites. (2) Does not worship Christ who has already come as the Messiah, because Karaites do not accept this fact.

But now Nehemiah has decided local new moon sighting is the way to go.

This reminds me of the words of James, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5-8).

God will not withhold knowledge or wisdom from people, but gives to all liberally. All you have to do is ask. In faith! God does not want us to be double-minded, unstable or rash because of someone else’s misgivings. He wants us to be sure and steadfast, carefully proving the truth.

Why does Nehemiah think he “might have been wrong” about using the moon in the land of Israel to determine when to observe the new moons in the Diaspora? He says, “When I was in the fourth grade, I showed up to school on the Rabbanite Yom Kippur with a handwritten note from my mom explaining that I would be absent the following day for my religious observance. In that year, the new moon was seen in Israel one day after the Rabbinic calendar set the new month. And that year was the last year the Karaite Jews of America set their holidays in accordance to the new moon sightings in Israel.”

He continues: “In law school, I eagerly awaited news of new moon sightings from the Land of Israel (as disseminated by the Karaite Korner, and others) and often fasted for Yom Kippur or observed Passover (*Hag Hamatzot*) on different days from my Rabbinic brethren – and even from my Karaite brethren in the U.S. who were observing most holidays in accordance with the Rabbinic calendar. So it has been very difficult for me *even to consider* that maybe it is the local moon that matters. Maybe the Jerusalem (or Israel) moon matters for those living in the Land of Israel, but the local moon matters for us living in the Diaspora.”

Well, this has to be a question that has to be faced. If we have faced it before, we can surely face it again. Just because someone else is wavering and having doubts, we need to analyze it and be SURE what the truth is.

Nehemiah then talks about the Karaite sages of the Middle Ages. These sages all believed that the local new moon is what mattered. Then he talks about the Exodus and what the Israelites did in Egypt before the Exodus; what the Israelites did in the desert before entering the Land. Exodus 12:1-2—“Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.”

Since Israel was all then in Egypt they went by the new moon they saw while in Egypt. Of course! If all God's people were in an isolated region, everybody would go by the new moon where they were. That is obvious.

In the Middle Ages the Karaites in Europe went by the new moon they saw in Europe. What else could they do?

On the other hand, today we do not live in isolated communities anymore. We live in one big world of 24,000 miles in circumference, with seven billion people. We have finger-tip communication through radio, TV, computer, fiber optics, phones, cameras, satellites, and we have incredible astronomical, mathematical knowledge and telescopes that have "shrunk" the world down to one big community. Modern science provides immediate worldwide communication no matter where you live, around the world.

We know what percentage of the moon is visible and that its cycle is definitely 29 ½ days. It is now a science. Now that our knowledge is increased and communication is instant, should everybody still act as if they live in the "dark ages" or "horse and buggy" period? Should everybody have their own local calendar, depending on THEIR *own* sighting of the new moon? Does this make sense?

The result of this would be CONFUSION over calendars! If you traveled from one region to another, you would have to keep changing what "day" it was! This would result in a multiplication of calendars with different holy days, from region to region, city to city, depending on local cloud cover and visibility!

WHAT SHEER MADNESS!

God's calendar should be ONE calendar and his people everywhere should keep the same appointed times *together, unified as one in body and spirit!*

Nehemiah however, continues. "Now don't get me wrong. As I read the *Tanakh*, it is clear that the preference is for us to be living in the Land of Israel. That way, your local moon is the Israel new moon. But what if you are living somewhere else? I am coming to the conclusion that the second best way to deal with it is to use the local new moon. If someone finds this odious, then I offer the best way to deal with that imperfection: make *aliyah*." [Go to Israel.]

That sounds like a tongue-in-cheek comment, a "joke," and not at all necessary, today. Today, we are able to receive communication immediately by the *Internet* around the world. When the new moon is seen in Jerusalem, Israel, we can go by what God says according to his true calendar. He has made it possible to go by the new moon sighting in Jerusalem.

I Corinthians 14:33—"God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

God is the author of unity and peace—agreement; not confusion and disorder where everybody has their own local calendar.

The following comment was sent to Nehemiah by Gabriel Moskovitz on August 27, 2014, and puts the case very well. He wrote:

“I think the Halacha to make the moon sighting Israel-centric stems from historical precedents and the recognition that standardization of our Festivals is important. The standardization gives us a sense of Klal Yisrael, *the unity* of Jewish people, in that we are all one people and not a collection of local adherents celebrating the same Festival on different days. During the First Temple Period we all lived in Israel and all celebrated Festivals based upon the local moon observance. We do not know what was done during the Babylonian Exile but it is not a stretch to speculate that appointed observers were established whose role it was to witness the moon’s rebirth in Israel and report back. Upon the return to Zion for the 2nd Temple Period, the Court was re-established in Israel and it is safe to assume that it established the lunar sightings and promulgated such to the Diaspora. Time of travel would/could delay word of the exact date and thus was born the practice in the Diaspora of observing two days of the Festival out of doubt.

“Karaites do not follow this astronomically based calculation of the Calendar but prefer to establish their Calendar based upon the age old practice of lunar observation in the Land of Israel. This Karaite practice is contrary to the vast number of Jews who follow the Rabbinite practice however; Karaites can argue convincingly that their practice of lunar observation is certainly much older and more Halachically correct. However, to depart from this practice and relegate the Calendar to local geographical observation will take an already miniscule sized community and further marginalize it. Take Scripture to heart and ‘do not stray from it right or left.’”

History of the Jewish Calendar

Arthur Spier, in his book *The Comprehensive Jewish Calendar*, points out that the Jewish people have sanctified the new moons throughout the ages. In the early times, the beginnings of the months was determined by observation of the new moon. New moons were sanctified “after witnesses had testified that they had seen the new crescent and after their testimony had been thoroughly examined, confirmed by calculation and duly accepted” (p.1).

In the fourth century, however, when oppression and persecution threatened the continued existence of the Sanhedrin, Rabbi Hillel II took drastic measures to preserve the unity of Israel. Spier notes, “In order to prevent the Jews scattered all over the surface of the earth from celebrating their New Moons, festivals and holidays AT DIFFERENT TIMES, he made public the system of calendar calculation which up to then had been a closely guarded secret. It had been used in the past only to check the

observations and testimonies of witnesses, and to determine the beginnings of the spring season” (Spier, p.2). The Jews understood how important UNITY is to a people!

Does it not seem obvious, therefore, that today we should all have ONE calendar, and it should be valid anywhere on earth? And to accomplish this, new moon observation should be made at the place where God put His name – Jerusalem, Israel!

What the Scriptures Reveal

We read that when the Messiah returns, “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give Him the *throne of His father David*” (Luke 1:32). The throne of David was in Jerusalem! In fact, the Messiah will rule over ALL the nations FROM His royal city of JERUSALEM!

Jeremiah declares, “At that time *Jerusalem* shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts” (Jeremiah 3:17).

Isaiah the prophet tells us:

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths.’ For *out of ZION shall go forth the LAW, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*” (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Micah the prophet also records a very similar prophecy:

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:1-2).

Notice! God’s LAW and His WORD *shall* go forth FROM ZION – from the city of JERUSALEM! God’s Law and His Word *includes His sacred CALENDAR, and the proclamation of every NEW MOON, every NEW MONTH, every annual HOLY DAY, and every WEEKLY SABBATH DAY!* Judging by this Biblical criteria, then, it would certainly appear that in God’s great Plan *everything should begin with His people Israel – Mount Zion – and His headquarters city, JERUSALEM! – and it WILL, in the Kingdom of God!*

God’s system of day and time keeping would cause the new day, weekly Sabbath, and Holy Days to arrive FIRST AT JERUSALEM, and then be proclaimed there, and THEN follow the sun and moon around the globe of the earth, westward, until all the earth then observes that very same day, *as it arrives at their location.*

Beware of Doctrinal Confusion

There are many ways people can go astray, but for the unity for God's people, we all need to be on the same page and not everyone doing what is right in their own eyes. As Solomon wrote, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; Proverbs 16:25).

In Ephesians 4:1-6, the apostle Paul says, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; *one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God* and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

"One faith" means one body of beliefs and practices – not a hodge podge of different beliefs and practices, or a smorgasbord of local new moon calendars all over the earth!

God's Kingdom is UNITED – it is ONE KINGDOM!

The apostle Paul made this clear. He declared, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all *speak the same thing*, and that there be *no divisions among you*, but that you be *perfectly joined together in the same mind* and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' *Is Christ divided?* Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect" (I Corinthians 1:10-17).

We live in a one world generation today. Therefore, there is no excuse today not to have unity and one calendar. God is not divided against himself.

Satan the devil is always set to ambush God's people. This current division over the month and new moon is an example of Satan's devious work. He is always plotting to lead God's people astray, to subvert their cause, to lead them blindly into error.

As for me and my house, we will follow the Lord, and serve Him.

The moon's orbit does not change. Every 29 ½ days the moon completes its orbit going from crescent to crescent so it will be seen every 29 or 30 days. Therefore a true month cannot have 28 days, or 31 days, unless God performs a stupendous miracle, and changes the moon's orbit!

Nowhere in the Bible does it say we have to literally observe the new moon crescent, in every case, in order to declare a “new moon.” What it does say in Exodus 12:1 is simply — “This month (*chodesh*) shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.”

Notice also Isaiah 66:23—“And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD.”

The month begins with the new moon, but Scripture does not say that you have to *see* it visually for the month to begin. Otherwise, if cloud cover concealed the new moon for several months, and you kept “postponing” it until you SAW one, you could arguably end up with a very long month, until you saw the crescent, or a very short month eventually, as you were eventually forced to acknowledge the visible crescent!

If you can calculate it and know because of science and celestial mathematics the new moon should be easily seen if there were no clouds, then the new moon day can be declared.

In other words, the Scriptures do not say exactly how we determine the new moon. The principles are clear. We are to “observe” it. That can mean visibly or intellectually. How we determine it we understand by the precedent of the ancients and by common sense. Now we have science and technology in a worldwide environment where we can get reports from Israel, within hours of the new moon. We know the exact orbits of the sun and the moon and the earth, so we can calculate the new moon in a very finely tuned manner which enables the people of God to be unified in this matter today.

The new moon can be observed in Jerusalem and reported around the world with today’s technology with lighting speed. Therefore when necessary we can utilize “potential visibility” to declare the new moon. This is the logical, common sense thing to do to preserve the unity of the faith.