

Barley or Equinox?

By Judith Koch Lawson

INTRODUCTION:

Holy Scripture tells us in 1 Peter 3:15 that we should be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

As a feast keeper of the last several years, I did not understand and have a reason for why I was keeping different days a month later than others were keeping. I knew that the two schools of thought were that the new year was based on beginning with the new moon after the barley reached a certain state of development, and that the new year was based on beginning with the new moon after the spring equinox. I had no idea which was Biblical. Realizing that I could not give an answer for myself, but knowing that the answer must be available to us, as YHWH would not command us to keep days that we could not determine, I decided to search out the matter for myself. Following is the study I did, rebuttals I have heard from people who made the opposite conclusion and my thoughts on their points, and my final conclusion based on the weight of evidence. I write this not to persuade anyone else, as you alone are responsible for giving your own answers. I write it only because many people are confused on this topic and I wanted to put my study on paper if it could help anyone else.

SOURCES:

My sources included: King James Bible, The Scriptures (a Messianic translation published by Institute for Scripture Research), Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament (commonly called a "lexicon"), the Interlinear Bible by Sovereign Grace Publisher, NTC's Hebrew and English Dictionary (secular). I intentionally avoided writings and opinions outside of Scripture as I wasn't taking a vote on the topic and knew that plenty of writings must exist on both sides of the arguments. I was looking at Scripture alone, plus reference materials to help me understand the scripture. *(Hebrew words may appear in any or all of the following forms: 1) transliterated into their English sound, 2) spelled out using the names of Hebrew aleph-bet characters, 3) printed in Hebrew font, 4) by their Strong's number. Remember that Hebrew reads right to left, so anything in English will appear left to right, and Hebrew right to left. Different sources transliterate somewhat differently, as there is no "correct" way to spell a Hebrew word using the English alphabet, so please excuse any differences of opinion in trying to write a Hebrew word into English.)*

THE STUDY - WORDS:

I began by looking up several words in the Hebrew/English Dictionary, Strong's, and lexicon. I began with "Equinox", "Spring", "Barley", and "Abib". Here is what I found for these four words:

Equinox – the Hebrew language has no single word for equinox. Instead it was listed in the dictionary in two forms, the word: **השתוות** (hishtavut), and the three word phrase:

שויון יום ולילה (shivyon yom laila). Each of these words when looked up was as follows:

1. Histavut (hey shen tav vav vav chet) = equivalence, similarity (not found in Strong's or lexicon, if found, it would be in the area of word 2044). Although I found this word in the Hebrew dictionary, because I didn't find it in Scripture, and I knew that the first letter, hey, can be a prefix meaning "the", I also looked for this word without the first letter hey, even though there was no basis to assume a silent "the" in this phrase. I was trying to be as thorough as I could, and to compensate for my limited knowledge. The closest words, starting with shen, tav, vav but ending in other letters, appeared unrelated to this study. They were words meaning participation, cooperative, unknown paternity, and others. As such, I concluded that the hey did not mean "the".
2. Shivyon (shen vav yod vov nun) = equality (not found in Strong's or lexicon, if found, it would be in the area of word 7760)
3. Yom (yod vav mem) = day
4. Laila (vav lamed yod lamed hey) = night, darkness

You might say it as "equal daylight and darkness". Neither the individual word nor the three word phrase was found to have appeared anywhere in Scripture. As such, if the feast days are to be based upon the equinox, it will have to be revealed in some other form.

Spring - I had been told that the word "spring" in Hebrew implies equinox. When I looked up "spring" in the secular dictionary for its Hebrew translations, it gave 19 different definitions. I did not look up all 19. The first definition translated to "leap", the second to "come out", and the third to "rise or go up". Nowhere on the list was the phrase shown above that translates into equinox. Way down the list at number 18 it show "abib" **אביב** (aleph bet yod bet), which is translated in Strong's (entry 24) as "to be tender, green, young ear of grain". Also at the 18th definition, next to the word Abib, was the word "resheet" **ראשית** (resh, aleph, shin, yod, tav). Some Messianic students will recognize this word as a root word in the very first word of Scripture, "Beresheet" translated "In the beginning". In the NTC Dictionary, resheet is defined as "beginning, start, first fruits, first of all, firstly". Another form of this word is "reshon", which appears in Lev 23, as shown later in this study.

Abib **אביב** (aleph bet yod bet) Strong's 24. (Sometimes written and pronounced as Aviv, as the "bet" can sound like B and V, while modern Hebrew distinguishes by putting a dot in the center if it is B and no dot if it is V, but this was not the method used in Moses' time). See the above section under Spring for more on Abib. I had been told that "Abib" means "green", but when the word "green" appears in King James, it is Strong's 3418, "yerek" Yod, resh, koph {**ירק**}. Abib is used only in reference to describe an agricultural state or remains untranslated as a synonym for the first month of the year, as the scripture study below will detail.

Barley: The dictionary for barley shows: shen, ayin, vav, resh, heh. This is Strong's 8184. It appears in Torah in Exod 9:31, Lev 17:16, Num 5:15, Deut 8:8. It is clearly a separate word from abib, and means the plant itself, while abib refers to the state of maturity of a plant.

THE STUDY - TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE:

Next, I started looking up the texts that had Abib in them. Abib appears in six verses of Torah: Exodus 9:31, 13:4, 23:15, 34:18; Lev 2:14; Deut 16:1. In most verses it is not translated, but rather says “Abib” as in “the month of Abib” as if that is the name of the month, although no other months had names, just numbers as in the fourth month, the seventh month, etc. I liken this to the days of the week only being numbered, except Sabbath was given that name, although it is also “the seventh day”. On the two verses which did translate Abib, I have italicized the word or words that read Abib in Hebrew, so you can see how it was translated into English:

- Exodus 9:31 – “And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley *was in the ear* and the flax was boiled.” (The Scriptures version translated “was in the head” for barley, and “was in the bud” for flax. Interlinear translated “was in the ear” for barley and “was in blossom” for flax.) This implies that Aviv is a stage of agricultural development. (Strong’s 1392 was the word describing the flax, defined as “bolloed”, which in my Webster’s the root “boll” is the pod or capsule of a plant.) This verse was comparing and contrasting the agricultural stage of development of the two different crops.
- Exodus 13:4 – “This day came ye out in the month Abib.”
- Exodus 23:15 – “Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty;)” (parentheses in this text were supplied by the KJV, not me)
- Exodus 34:18 – “The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, in the time of the month Abib: for in the month Abib thou camest out from Egypt.”
- Lev 2:14 – “And if thou offer a meat offering of thy firstfruits unto the LORD, thou shalt offer for the meat offering of thy firstfruits *green ears of corn* dried by the fire, even corn beaten out of full ears.” (Please note: KJV supplies the word “corn” as part of the translation. The Scriptures version says “green heads of grain” and the Interlinear says “fresh ears” without specifying the crop.)
- Deut 16:1 – “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.”

Then I went to the Interlinear Bible to see how it appeared in the Hebrew language. I discovered that in many instances, the article “the” appeared before Abib, as in “the Abib”. In Hebrew, the definite article “the” is not a separate word. Rather, the letter “hey” is shown as the first letter of the word to mean “the”, similar to how in English an “s” is added to the end of a word to mean plural. In the following texts, (every text in which KJV did not translate the word, but left it as saying “Abib”) the letter hey does appear before the word abib, so it should correctly be translated “the abib”. (**הַאֲבִיב**) Exodus 13:4 (month of the Abib); Exodus 23:15 (month of the Abib); Exodus 34:18 (month of the Abib); Deut 16:1 (both instances it would read: month of the Abib).

Since the word, when translated or defined, always denotes a stage of agricultural development, would not the “month of the Abib” be the month when that stage of agricultural development exists? Would the first month of the year be called Abib if sometimes the first month of the year

was the month the barley was in the state of Abib, and sometimes the first month of the year was the month after the barley was in the state of Abib? Is God the author of confusion?

Other sections of Scripture I studied to see if they shed light to understand the beginning of the year, which I did not see as helpful, but put them here for your reference, and to show that I did search beyond texts with the word Abib:

Numbers chapter nine:

- Vs 1: first month (reshon 7223 chodesh 2320)
- Vs. 2&3: appointed season (moed 4150)
- Vs 5: first month (reshon 7223, “month” is supplied by the translators but does not appear in Hebrew)
- Vs 11: at even (beyn 996 erab 6153) Erab is defined as “dusk, even, night”
- Vs 13: Moed

Exodus 12:2 – “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.” In Hebrew, using Strong’s numbers, it reads 2320 (month) 2088 (this) 7218 (rosh, beginning) 2320 (month) 7223 (first) 2320 (month). All other words (shall be, to you, etc) are supplied by translators. Nothing in this text, on its own, shows how the first month was established, however, it is part of the narrative that began earlier in Exodus. Coupled with Exodus 9:31 and reading the entire passage, the abib barley is linked with the first month of the year. Other than the 9th plague of darkness, no reference is given that has any association with the sun or would link the equinox to the first of the year.

Leviticus 23:5 – “In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD’s Passover.” In Hebrew, using Strong’s numbers, it reads: 2320 (in the month) 7223 (first) 702 (on fourteenth) 6240 (day) 2320 (of the month) 996 (between) 6153 (the evenings) 6458 (is the Passover) 3068 (to Yehovah). The word for first is “reshon”, which is a form of “resheet”, which was covered earlier.

Please note that this original study was done in May and was put in writing in September, largely from notes I took in May. I believe that there were other texts I searched at that time that I did not put in my notes as I deemed the results unhelpful to understanding the topic. I no longer recall exactly which or how many verses fell into this category. I do know that I scrutinized all of Leviticus 23, but found verse 5 to be the only verse establishing timing as the first of the year.

EQUINOX RATIONALE:

All of the above, in my feeble mind, was pointing directly to barley being the superior method over equinox, so I decided to study the explanations given by three dear valued teachers of mine, all of whom support equinox over barley, to see what I was missing. I beg their forgiveness if any of the below offends them, as that is not my intent at all. All I am trying to do here is to be able to give an answer for the reason of my belief, and to try to study it from all angles. Since some people reading this paper know all of the parties involved, I am going to say “he/she” or “him/her” so as not to divulge the gender of each person in a probably futile effort to retain their anonymity, but I’ll try!

Person One:

One (my first teacher on the feasts, and one that I consider like a parent) recently said in a newsletter that barley keeping was not ordered by heavenly Deity, although no order by heavenly Deity or any other rationale was offered for equinox. (In all fairness to my dearly loved and appreciated teacher, he/she may have taught on this in the past and I am not aware of it.) The newsletter then went on to say (I paraphrase for brevity) that barley keepers were basing it on a word study, but that Hebrew was too complex to do a word study by an English speaking person. If this is true, then why read the Old Testament at all, or even the New Testament for that matter? Neither are written in original English. And is not every single instance of picking up a Bible a word study? How would we use Luther's response "show me from the word of God my error" or EG White's "thus saith the Lord" if we can't go to the words written in Scripture to seek truth? Why do English speaking teachers often quote several different translations to get clarity of a verse's meaning? Furthermore, why do Hebrew linguistic scholars such as Nehemia Gordon keep the year based on barley? Surely he is qualified to make such a word study. (I tried to avoid non-scriptural writing in this study. To see more of his works, I refer you to his website: <http://www.karaite-korner.org>)

Person Two:

Another (again, a dear teacher to me whose Bible study skills I respect greatly) said, based on the number one rule to dump all preconceived notions, and on the second rule to use the first and last appearance of a subject in scripture: (the rest I quote in part from an email I received from him/her):

The rest of the Bible only adds "color and flavor." There are other Cardinal Rules in my approach to study, but with only these two Rules, I have fundamentally rejected what I had (without deeper examination) accepted as "making sense" and seeming to follow the Word. I am speaking of the subject of barley verses the illuminaries in the sky. Barley makes a lot of sense, but it isn't sense that we need (in a certain "sense"); it is adherence to what the Word is saying. The first scripture that deals with this calendar hot potato is found in Genesis 1:14. It forms the fundamental for the whole question, so that there is no valid question. Simply: "I have put the lights in the heavens to tell you signs and seasons, days and nights." End of the subject. All other scriptures must be brought into harmony with the Creation Explanation, plus the last, when in Revelation we need no illuminaries to tell us when to congregate for The Lamb is the Lamp (or lights). Ever notices the similarities in those two words? Interesting.

Let's look at these points. First, by listing the two rules of Bible study, I took this that he/she implies that I went into this study with a pre-conceived notion. I honestly believe that I did not. If I did, I suspect it would have been the notion to "follow the leaders" and follow the equinox timing being kept by all of my respected teachers and the nearest feast camp where I have attended the last several years. That certainly would have been the easy way out. Secondly, while first and last meanings may be of great value, I have never heard a cogent argument for throwing out everything except Genesis and Revelation, so obviously the middle must be weighed as well. Nonetheless, let's look at these two verses as if they are the only verses that address this matter (despite the fact that neither mentions barley or equinox):

As to Genesis 1:14, “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.” (King James). The Scriptures says “appointed times” in place of “seasons”. The words in Hebrew are:

- Signs comes from Strong’s 226 (transliterated owth; spelled **אוֹת** aleph vav tav; defined mark, miracle, sign, token)
- Seasons from Strong’s 4150 (transliterated moed; spelled **מוֹעֵד** mem ayin dalet as the root, with some suffixes added for gender and plurality; defined fixed time or season, festival, assembly, congregation, place of meeting, et al)
- Days from Strong’s 3117 (transliterated yom; spelled **יוֹם** yod vav mem; defined as day, sometimes sunrise to sunset and other times sunset to sunset, et al)
- Years from Strong’s 8141 (transliterated shawnav; spelled **שָׁנָה** shem nun hey; defined as year)

If the word “seasons” was from a word that could be translated as the equinox or four seasons of the year, there might be some merit to the thought that this means equinox, but to say that this verse implies equinox seems to me to be reading in more than the verse says. Leviticus 23 translates this word as “feast” and “holy convocation”. If Genesis 1:14 had been translated in the same manner (let them be for signs, and feasts, and days, and years), would this verse still be used to justify equinox? Can the heavenly lights show the feast days without them being dependent on the equinox? The moon tells us how to calculate the dates of each feast, and the sun tells us the hour they start and end based on sunset. I don’t see a disharmony with the creation explanation by looking at them as pointing to the days and hours, and I also don’t see a mandate for the equinox.

As to Revelation 21:23: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” This text seems to show the sun and moon as being a source of light. I guess I’m too thick-skulled to see how it fits into the barley vs. equinox study. If it did, I might suggest it says the opposite as my teacher believes it does. Since we know that there will be the feast days in heaven, and from this text that there will be no sun and moon in heaven, then the equinox must not play a role in determining the first of the year, as there will be no equinox without luminaries. We do know, from other texts, that there will be crops in heaven. So, in heaven, if we have crops but no sun and moon, which is the more likely source of timing the first of the year?

Person Three:

This equinox keeper (someone who I respect greatly and has taught me much) gave a number of reasons for preferring an equinox to barley interpretation. Much of the below comes from an email I sent him/her prior to having seen his/her DVD on this topic. Please excuse my laziness at copying much of this rather than fully rewriting these many points, although I have edited and changed some of them. He/She made several points, which I start with, and then provide my thinking on them. Then I added some counterpoints as well. I am not sure that this is an exhaustive list of the points in the DVD, as I have misplaced those notes, so I am not claiming this to be a complete list of equinox supporting points from this dear person.

Point One: Genesis 1:14.

This was covered above. A more relevant verse, in my opinion, is one that explicitly states when the start of the year would be. In the Passover story of Exodus, chapter nine talks about barley, and chapter eleven that this would be the time of the new year. No where in that section are any references to the heavenly lights. Conclusion: barley

Point Two: The word Teshuva, Strong's 8666 (תשובה tav, shen, vav, bet, hey) used in 2 Samuel 11:1 means equinox.

2 Samuel 11:1 "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle..." The phrase "after the year was expired" comes from 8666. According to the lexicon, it is first used in 1 Samuel 7:17, speaking of someone returning from one location to another. It is then used as the return of the year in 2 Samuel 11:1, 1 King 20:22, 1 King 20:26, used as the year "was expired" in 1 Chron 20:1 and 2 Chron 36:10, and twice in Job (21:34 and 34:36) where it is translated as "answers". Taking the first use as our guideline, or in all the uses collectively, I see no suggestion that this has any reference to the spring equinox at all, but rather just to the start of a new year without establishing how the start of that new year was calculated. Strong's defines it as "recurrence of time or place, reply as returned, answer, be expired, return." The NTC's Hebrew and English Dictionary defines it as "1. answer, reply, 2 rejoinder, retort, 3 repentance." Again, no hint of a meaning of the equinox. I do not see these passages as shedding any light on the topic at all, and certainly not as persuasive to an equinox timing. Conclusion: neutral

Point Three: Barley fields were fallow during jubilee years, so barley could not have been used at those times.

One site on the net when I was searching Jewish sites talked about how barley can grow wild and be very difficult to intentionally keep out of fields of other crops. It made me think of dandelions here. When was the last time you planted dandelions? Or like the rest of us, have you hoed, pulled, sprayed, etc, and still have them coming back as volunteers year after year? To think that having the fields fallow for a year or two would stop their growth, in reality that is probably backwards. When left to their own unchecked, they would probably flourish. Imagine what dandelions unchecked would do in your yard after two years. Conclusion: barley

Point Four: There was no crop to establish the timing of the year after the flood.

The ark rested in the seventh month (Genesis 8:4), the waters decreased continually until the tenth month (Gen 8:5). Verse 13 speaks of the first month of the following year and the ground was dry. The Hebrew calendar has 12 months most years, 13 months some years. That left at least five, maybe six, months from the time the ark came to a rest for things like the olive tree to sprout. In the timing of chapter 8, no mention is made of sun or moon, but one is made of a green olive leaf. This speaks more to me of an agricultural timing, rather than equinox. Conclusion: barley

Point Five: The children of Israel were not in Canaan to see the stages of barley.

Exodus 9 through 11, the barley was in Egypt at the first Passover. Where is there a reference to the barley in Canaan as the only location that counts? While Deut 16:6 states the place where Yahweh has put his name, this is in reference to a burnt sacrifice, not barley, and was His in name in Egypt before? His presence certainly was. I've never been to the desert of the Exodus, but I've seen plenty of California and Arizona desert, and it is far from barren sandy land. Many

types of brush and wildflowers grow there. Maybe barley, maybe not. I don't know. But there would be green growth of some type. Conclusion: barley

Counter Point One: To use the timing as it was this year (2007), with barley in abib prior to March 21 and the full moon just before the equinox, the so-called first fruits being waved in May is way off of the typical barley harvest. If no barley was harvested until the dates of firstfruits calculated by the equinox method, a great deal of the crop would be destroyed by leaving it in the field far too long. Conclusion: barley

Counter Point Two: It is to be so simple that a child can understand. Any child can look at barley and look at the moon. But how does a little child (or even an adult without a computer) tell if the equinox is before or after a new moon when the computer models tell us that the equinox was just an hour or so within the new moon in years like 2007? Also, according to some websites, (this is outside my scope of astronomical understanding) with the sun setting and new moon visible in Jerusalem long before it is visible in the United States, this year apparently we would have had equinox before new moon in Jerusalem and after new moon in the US. Would God make it so the eastern hemisphere has their holy days a full month after the western hemisphere? That would have happened this year if equinox and new moon were the standards. Conclusion: barley.

Counter Point Three: EG White says that Passover was in March or April. It would never be in March if the equinox was a requirement. It would always be either April or May. This teacher's DVD taught correctly that she later uses the date of October 22 for Atonement, which is also undisputed, and would not happen unless Passover was in May. As such, I don't see that she (EGW) had clarity on this issue, and she acknowledges that not all of her expositions are correct. This teacher's DVD states that EGW relied on other people for information such as dates, and therefore the April/May was not valid, but the October date is because it was verified in prophecy. That argument could be used to throw out dates on either end of the spectrum, as the same author penned both contradictory points of view. Based on the discrepancy, I don't think we can use her writings to either prove or disprove either theory. Conclusion: neutral.

(POSTSCRIPT: A well known Adventist feast keeper has informed me that he/she has evidence that in 1844 there was a late barley harvest and that our pioneers believed in keeping the feast days by barley. You can read about this by visiting www.godsholidays.com and reading the July 2007 newsletter. I did not search this out, as I tried to limit this study to Scripture and feedback on arguments that went contrary to what I believe Scripture says.)

CONCLUSION:

As you just saw from my email with Person Three, which did not even cover the material from my study, the conclusions were heavily on the side of barley. The study I did (the first four or so pages of this report) was the same way, nothing to point to the equinox and everything pointing to barley. I am not telling anyone else what to believe. I am only setting forth my study and sharing what I believe it means. From there, what you do with it is up to you.