



What Is A Biblical
NEW MOON?

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Yahweh in His wisdom has given us a calendar in the sky for all to see. He uses the sun and moon to establish days, months, years, and also His appointed observances, Genesis 1:14. A critical component to His calendar is the new moon, which starts each Biblical month. Yahweh commanded special offerings on each new moon, and one special new moon is even a Feast day called the Feast of Trumpets, Isaiah 66:23.

Yahweh uses the new moon to establish *moedim*, or commanded observances, Psalm 104:19. Special offerings were also given on the new moons, 2Chronicles 2:4; 8:13; 23:31.

We find many references to the new moon or beginning of months in the Scriptures, including the obligation for True worshipers to observe them, Numbers 10:10; 28:11-15; 1Chronicles 23:31; 2Chronicles 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Ezra 3:5; Ezekiel 46:1, 3, 6; Colossians 2:16.

Apostolic Believers, who remained true to His Word, continued to honor new moon days as well as observe Feast days in the New Testament, Acts 18:21; 27:9; 1Corinthians 5:7-8.

Further, we learn from Ezekiel's prophecy (46:3) that new moon days will be kept in the coming Kingdom: "The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before Yahweh on the sabbaths and on the new moons."

Make no mistake. The Biblical admonition to observe the new moon as a special marker in the Biblical calendar is not a pronouncement about worshipping the moon itself. Yahweh prohibits worshipping any celestial body: "And beware, lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which Yahweh your Elohim has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven" (Deut. 4:19). At the same time He commands us to watch for and observe the new moon each month so that we honor and follow His unique calendar and the setting of His special holy days.

What Constitutes a New Moon?

What exactly is a new moon according to the Scriptures? The Jewish calendar creates some confusion because it uses the conjunctions of the moon (Hebrew *molad*) in setting the beginning of each month. Also somewhat

confusing, a certain verse of Scripture seems to equate the new moon with the full moon.

If you are baffled about what the new moon is, we hope this study will settle the issue for you.

Let's first look at the astronomical conjunction. A lunar conjunction is when the sun, moon and earth are directly in line. Because the sun is behind the moon, no sunlight is reflected from the lunar face. The moon is a total blackout during a conjunction. No part of the moon can be seen in an astronomical conjunction.

The average wall calendar portrays the conjunction with a large black dot and calls it a "new moon." But in reality it is a "no moon." It is invisible, and a "no moon" conjunction is **not** what the Bible means by a new moon, which we will see.

The Bible uses the same Hebrew word for both "new moon" and "month." Therefore, the new moon is linked to and sets the beginning of the month. But on our Gregorian wall calendars the "no moon" conjunction floats all over the 12 calendar months. Modern calendars completely ignore the Biblical way of setting the first day of the month by the visual new moon, even though the word "month" is derived from the word "moon" and should be oriented to the moon as it was intended by the Creator.

Historically, new moon spotters in Israel watched for the thin crescent to establish the beginning of each month. Once seen they reported their sighting to the calendar court authorities of the Sanhedrin. Note what one authority says, "Originally, the New Moon was not fixed by astronomical calculation, but was solemnly proclaimed after witnesses had testified to the reappearance of the crescent of the moon," **Encyclopaedia Judaica**, Vol. 12, p. 1039.

The switchover from watching for the first visible crescent to calculating conjunctions to determine the month's beginning came with Hillel II's calendar revisions in the 4th century C.E. "By the middle of the fourth century, the sages had established a permanent calendar and the public proclamation of the New Moon was discontinued" (*Ibid*).

Going by the calculated lunar conjunction contradicts the command in Deuteronomy 16:1: “Observe the month [*chodesh*, new moon] of Abib and keep the Passover...” Here, the word “observe” in the Hebrew is *shamar* and also means “look narrowly for, search” (No. 8104 in **Strong’s**). **The Holladay Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon** defines it as watching in the sense of looking. **Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words** includes the definitions “mark, watchman, wait, watch, look narrowly.” The command is to look for, wait for, watch and mark the new moon.

The problem is that you cannot see a moon that is completely black or dark, as it is during a conjunction. It would be lunacy sending out new moon watchers on the night of a conjunction to look for a moon they cannot see. To visually confirm the new moon there must be something to identify. Obviously, the invisible conjunction is not that something.

Another predicament is created by the use of the conjunction because during the period surrounding the conjunction there are as many as two or even three nights when no moon is visible. This leads us to wonder which three invisible moons are we commanded to “look narrowly for”? On which of three invisible starting points does the month begin? Yahweh’s calendar is based on observation. Man’s calendars are based on calculation.

No U.S. Naval Observatory existed in the time of the prophets or Apostles. The ancients had to have something tangible to go by that was visible on only one day each month. They needed to see the first thin crescent of a moon as it began its building or waxing phase.

Philo was a prominent Jewish leader who lived in Alexandria from about 20 B.C.E. to about 50 C.E. and was a contemporary of both Yahshua the Messiah and Paul. He was aware of what the Savior and His followers considered was the new moon. In his *Treatise on the Special Laws*, Book II, XI (41), Philo discusses the Biblical observances. Note how he describes the new moon:

“[It] is that which comes after the conjunction, which... [is] the day of the new moon in each month.” In his detailed discussion of the new moon, Philo describes what constitutes a new moon: “...at the time of the new moon, the

sun begins to illuminate the moon with a light which is visible to the outward senses, and then she displays her own beauty to the beholders.”

As Philo noted, the new moon follows the conjunction but it is not the conjunction itself. His observation reveals to us what was considered the new moon in Yahshua’s day and what the Savior Himself also observed as the new moon. That is all we need to know to realize what still constitutes the Biblical new moon today.

Does ‘New’ Mean ‘Full’?

Some read Psalm 81:3 and conclude that the new moon is a holy feast day, and also (because of mistranslation) that the new moon is the full moon and not the first light of the moon. The KJV reads, “Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.” Time “appointed” is the Hebrew *kacah* and means “to plump, i.e. fill up hollows” (**Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**). This appointed time is a full moon totally filled with light and on which a solemn Feast day occurs. Does that mean that the new moon is the full moon?

The New King James and some other translations add to the confusion by not translating Psalm 81:3 precisely enough: “Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day.” One immediate problem we note is that nowhere in Scripture is the regular monthly new moon referred to as a Feast day, nor is it a full moon, as we shall see.

Other translations clear up the problem by showing two completely different and separate observances in this verse: “Sound the ram’s horn at the new moon, and when the moon is full, at the day of our feast” (NIV).

In Psalm 81:3 Yahweh is speaking of a new moon as well as another observance or appointed time that comes at a full moon. During each of these separate times the trumpet was to sound.

The Hebrew in fact reveals two distinct clauses in this passage, making a definite division of thought. The first is the trumpet as applying to the new moon. The second is the trumpet as it applies to a solemn feast day, which is by Biblical definition different from a regular monthly new moon.

From the **Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia**, one would translate Psalm 81:3 this way: “Blow the trumpet at the new moon, and in the fullness of our festival day.”

The **Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament** also makes a differentiation between the two clauses of verse 3: “Sound the ram’s horn at the New Moon, and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast.”

The **Complete Jewish Bible** reads: “Sound the shofar at Rosh-Hodesh [new moon], and at full moon for the pilgrim feast.”

The **Psalms for Today: A New Translation from the Hebrew into Current English** translates the verse: “Sound the trumpet at the new moon, and at the day of our festival, when the moon is full.”

These Hebrew-based translations show that the new moon is different from the full moon and different from a Feast day. The Hebrew shows that the new moon and the full moon are not synonymous. The first is barely visible, the second totally visible. Different words are used for each.

The Hebrew word *levanah* meaning white, occurs three times in the Hebrew text and poetically refers to the white brilliance of the full moon (see Song of Solomon 6:10; Isa. 24:23; 30:26). And the Hebrew word *kehseh*, meaning fullness, is twice translated full moon (Ps. 81:3; Prov. 7:20). *Chodesh*, on the other hand, refers to the new moon and is never used for full moon.

Counting Backward from the Full Moon?

Some postulate that all that is necessary is to wait for the full moon and then count back two weeks for the beginning of the month.

First, such a method ignores Scriptural mandate and practice. Why would one need to “narrowly look for” and diligently search for a full moon? A full moon is in plain sight all night long.

Second, by this reckoning there would historically have been no need for special moon watchers to search the evening sky and report their findings to the Sanhedrin.

Third, those moons immediately preceding and following a full moon have nearly full lumination and are difficult to distinguish from the actual full moon without side-by-side comparison and an expert, discerning eye. This is not the case with a new moon crescent that is either seen or not seen, as by a shepherd boy like David out in the sheep fields.

Fourth, the astronomical full moon does not consistently fall at the exact midpoint between two lunar conjunctions. The full moon may follow the lunar conjunction by as little as 13 days, 21 hours and 53 minutes, or by as much as 15 days, 14 hours and 30 minutes. That is why months vary in length between 29 and 30 days. This anomaly is because the moon's orbit is not perfectly circular.

Fifth, this method is based on the conjunction, which we have shown is not the Scriptural new moon.

Consequently, determining the new moon by counting backward from the full moon is anything but scripturally ordained and at times quite inaccurate. And in one special case doing so would even be out of the question: the Feast of Trumpets, itself a new moon and the first day of the seventh month, would be two weeks past by the time the full moon arrived and the backward count is made.

Scimitar-shaped New Moon

Scholars who know the Hebrew language also know that the new moon is defined as a thin, crescent moon. Vine's says, "*Chodesh* means 'new moon,' 'month.' The word refers to the day on which the crescent reappears."

The **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament** says of (*c*)*hodesh*, "Although this word properly means 'new moon,' it is commonly used as an equivalent to our word 'month' because the month began when the thin crescent of the new moon was first visible at sunset."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says *hodhesh* (*chodesh*) means "'new,' 'fresh.' As the Hebrews reckoned their months from the actual first appearance of the young crescent, *hodhesh* is most frequently translated 'month' " (Vol. 1, p. 303).

The verb form of (*c*)*hodesh* is *hadash*, a primitive root meaning to rebuild, renew, repair, refresh. This gives us additional proof as to what constitutes a

new moon. A full moon is not in the rebuilding or renewing stage. It is already rebuilt, complete, and as full as it will get before waning back down to nothing, where it starts to re-grow from complete blackness once more.

According to **Gesenius Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon** the word *hodesh* derives from a word which means to be new, or to polish a sword. Etymologists have observed that the basic sense is that of cutting and polishing. And the significance of newness relates to a polished sword. The new moon resembles a scimitar or curved sword.

The **New Brown Driver Briggs Gesenius** says *chodesh* is rooted in the meaning of conceal, as in “to conceal behind a curtain.” A full moon is anything but concealed. A crescent, on the other hand, is nearly all concealed by a curtain of darkness except for just a curved sliver of light along the right edge.

An Act of Worship

Looking for the new moon crescent each month is, above all, an act of worship. It is axiomatic that we cannot let our worship be done by someone else. James tells us, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only...” 1:22. Do we have the dedication to go out and search the evening sky for a sliver of moon that is often very difficult to locate? Or do we just rely on others in our area or in some other part of the world to do it for us?

As we learn through hundreds of lessons in the Scriptures, True Worship takes effort and self-sacrifice to search out Yahweh’s ways in order to honor Him. It takes no effort or sacrifice to see a full moon or follow computer calculations.

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