

13. Stranded on a Deserted Island

Lunar Sabbatarians Claim They Would Be Able to Accurately Determine the Day of the Weekly Sabbath – Even If Stranded on a Deserted Island With Nothing to Guide Them But the Moon

Lunar sabbatarians make quite a few bold claims, each of which they feel adds weight to their position. One of the bolder claims that we have largely left unanswered is one in which they claim that if they were caught in a storm while at sea for several days and lost track of all time, then later shipwrecked and washed ashore onto a deserted island, they would be able to quickly determine which days are weekly Sabbaths simply by observing the lunar cycle. How is this possible?

For those who aren't totally familiar with how lunar sabbatarians can "spot" the weekly Sabbath by looking at the moon, it helps to understand that the lunar cycle consists of four phases: *new moon*, *first quarter*, *full moon* and *last quarter*. Each of these phases has its own beginning point. Lunar sabbatarian Matthew Janzen, in his summarization of why he chooses to be a lunar sabbatarian, listed the following as one of his reasons:

We find in nature a phenomenon in the cycle of the moon. The moon begins at the new moon and then approximately 7 days (7.3) later builds to a half orb, followed by a full moon in seven more days, then down to a waning half in another seven days, followed by a final sliver seven days later. It is no coincidence Yahweh timed the moon to phase in these intervals, especially seeing the Bible tells us that nature itself teaches principles (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 11:15).¹

If we follow Mr. Janzen's "principle" listed above, we understand that there are some "moon markers," if you will, which indicate the timing of the special phases – phases whose beginnings coincide with what lunar sabbatarians believe are *weekly Sabbaths*. Thus, if we were to step outside and look up at a waxing moon and discern that it is precisely at the "half-orb" stage, we should immediately recognize that it is day 8 of the month, which is a lunar weekly Sabbath. Seven days later, then, is the day of the full moon, which falls on the 15th day of the month. Indeed, there have been occasions when I have happened to notice a perfect half-moon and I thought, "I'll bet this is a weekly Sabbath day for lunar sabbatarians." Sure enough, when I later accessed a current lunar sabbath calendar, that day was a weekly Sabbath day. Of course, this same method of observation has been known to also work for the full moon.

Lunar sabbatarian Troy Miller capitalizes on the above observation method to boldly claim that he can know of a certainty which day of the Scriptural month it is ... and hence whether or not it is the day of the weekly Sabbath ... simply by monitoring the various stages of the moon. In an open letter to Seventh-Day Adventists, Mr. Miller made the following claim:

You are an SDA; I'm a lunar Sabbath keeper. If you and I were on a ship that was in a terrible storm for 2 weeks before we were shipwrecked, you are in trouble. We don't know day from night for days on end, tossing too and fro. Eventually, the ship sinks and you and I wash up unconscious on the beach. Neither of us has any idea how long we have lain in the surf. We revive and drag ourselves to dry land. **It is a deserted island, no one there but us.** Unless someone tells you what

¹ Matthew Janzen, "Why I am a Lunar Sabbatarian," © 2005-2010, Ministers of the New Covenant. Mr. Janzen's article may be read in its entirety by accessing the following URL: <http://ministersnewcovenant.org/why-lunar.html>.

day it is or shows you on a pagan/papal calendar, you will NEVER know when it's saturday. I, on the other hand, will know within 24-48 hours when the Sabbath of Creation will arrive.²

As we proceed with examining Mr. Miller's claim, I believe we should keep in mind that he went to quite a bit of trouble to present an extreme case that would occur in only the rarest of circumstances. In 25 years of Sabbathkeeping, neither June nor I have ever once been confronted with the dilemma of wondering which day of the week it is. Consider all the Sabbathkeepers who, in their entire lifetimes, were never once faced with a situation in which they couldn't remember whether or not it was the Sabbath. Certainly, Troy Miller presents an extreme contingency with the hope that his reading audience will not consider the unlikelihood of ever being faced with such a situation, especially in view of how, in our shrinking world, there are now fewer and fewer deserted islands out there! Even if there *were* such deserted islands, a missing person's report, followed by the inevitable "search and rescue" mission would have the disoriented person back on track in relatively quick fashion.

Of course, we could throw the same logic back at lunar sabbatarians. How would a disoriented lunar sabbatarian, stranded on a deserted island cope with semi-permanent cloud cover? In the case of volcanic eruptions, there have been cases of ash in the atmosphere obstructing the view of the moon for months and even *years*. Consider the following excerpt from *USA Today*, which describes the March 2010 eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajokull volcano³:



² Troy Miller, Open Letter to Seventh-Day Adventists, May 2010, page 12. Mr. Miller's entire letter may be read by accessing the following URL: <http://www.creationcalendar.com/CalendarIssue/EvidenceInMiniature-SDA.pdf>.

³ From *USA Today*, April 15, 2010. Taken from the Internet at the following URL: <http://www.usatoday.com/communities/sciencefair/post/2010/04/iceland-volcano-eruption-could-last-months/1>



I believe it is safe to say that a volcanic eruption occurring anywhere near Troy Miller's place of residence would pose a nightmarish situation in more ways than one, not the least of which would involve the cloaking of his means for determining the Sabbath, forcing him to resort to calculation.

For anyone experiencing Mr. Miller's hypothetical shipwreck and subsequent marooning on a deserted island, the consequences of a volcanic eruption would prove just as detrimental as those described in the account that he created. Of course, Troy might respond, "Yes, but *eventually* the skies would clear and the lunar sabbatarian would see the 'calendar in the heavens' again! The SDA guy would *still* be left without a means of determining the Sabbath!"

I would respond, "Yes, but *eventually* the SDA guy would return to civilization, where he would become re-acclimated to the continuously-repeating weekly cycle on the day commonly recognized as *Shabbat*."

The sheer ridiculousness of this argument raised by lunar sabbatarians is such that I wouldn't think it would even *be* an argument. Yet, it is one that is persistently raised by this group of believers, and we have found many who fall for it. As such, we have decided, in our revision of *Something Different: Lunar Sabbaths*, to address the "deserted island" argument.

If Troy Miller were the only lunar sabbatarian who used the "marooned on a deserted island" argument, we might ignore it as another unreasonable claim raised by lunar sabbatarians. Indeed, there are other lunar sabbatarian claims that we haven't answered, either because they are simply too ridiculous or because we simply don't have the time. However, since Mr. Miller is joined by a host of other lunar sabbatarians in touting his "deserted island" claim as supportive evidence for lunar sabbaths, we have decided to address his argument. Another lunar sabbatarian who has offered support for the "deserted island" contention is Arnold Bowen:

We have pointed out many times that without the Jews the traditional Sabbathday keepers could not even keep the seventh day and we demonstrated this by a man being unconscious and waking up on a deserted island not knowing what day of the week it is. He would not know how to find the weekly Sabbath day but this is not the case with the creation lunar Sabbath of Genesis 1:14.

We all know that starting points are very important and if the starting point is off, you know what happens.⁴

While Mr. Bowen's terminology may not be as eloquent as Mr. Miller's, their points are both the same: *If we're on a deserted island with only the Bible as our guide, we can know how and when to determine the weekly Sabbaths.* The above quote is taken from the "True Sabbath" forum discussion on the topic of lunar sabbaths, and a gentleman named Chuck Baldwin, in response to Arnold's comment, expressed his view that the "deserted island" argument isn't conclusive. Mr. Bowen countered that, yes, his argument *is* conclusive:

⁴ Arnold Bowen, from a posting submitted under the screen name "emjanzen" on 01-14-2007 at 05:32 AM to the [b]DEBUNKING LARRY'S BOOK[/B] thread of the (now-defunct) True Sabbath forum. This forum was located at www.eliyah.com.

RESPONSE; it might not be conclusive to you Brother Chuck but it is to me. I can't seem to get you to admit that is conclusive that you cannot find when to begin the count for your traditional Sabbath from Scripture if you lost it and were on a desert island. That is conclusive and I don't believe He expects us to depend on man to tell us how to find His commandment.⁵

Other lunar sabbatarians participating in the “True Sabbath” forum discussion included a gentleman named Elijah Collette, who wrote the following:

Suppose that a person was stranded(stuck) on a deserted Island, and they had lost all track of time, how would a " Saturday sabbath observer" find his S-turday to observe it, or know exactly which day is his s-turday to observe it?

But, if you follow the scriptures, all you have to do, is LOOK UP at the moon to know the day of the week and month, as those in scriptures did in Ancient times. How else did those of ancient times know how to tell time, and which day of the week and month it was? They certainly never wore a miniture hour glass on their wrist did they?⁶

Eric Bess also participated in the “True Sabbath” forum, but he put forth his best effort in expressing his version of the “deserted island” argument in his rebuttal attempt of our original *Something Different: Lunar Sabbaths* study:

The tenable perspective on Sabbath reckoning is simply this:

The Father has set the luminaries in the sky to be used as a time keeping gage for us on earth. The moon is the primary gage for short-term events reckoning, including the Sabbath.

Think about this. We see the sun always rise and set the same way everyday, all year, right? We see the moon, however, in phases throughout the month.

But if the moon were always a “full” moon, so that we see the sun and the moon always the exact same way, rising and setting, everyday, all year long, don't you think it would be a lot more difficult to keep track of the days over a long term period of time?

You are stranded on an Island with no calendar. Heat and lack of food cause you to pass out for a day or two. When you regain consciousness, you don't really know how much time has passed, an hour? A day? Two days?

If you have to remain on this Island for an extended period of time, how will you know the Sabbath day? Or any other day?

The answer is, you would have to know how to read Yahweh's signs in the sky. The New Moon will tell you when a month has passed. The vernal equinox will tell you when a year has passed. The Sun's rising and setting will tell you when a day has passed. The stars positioning will tell you the time of year it is (i.e. the season) AND the phases of the moon, every seven days, will tell you when the Sabbath is.

⁵ Ibid, posted on 01-23-2007 at 05:58 AM.

⁶ Elijah Collette, from a posting submitted under the screen name “Elyahc” on 09-05-2005 at 06:24 AM to the “**Historical Information**” thread of the (now-defunct) True Sabbath forum. This forum was located at www.elijah.com.

This is not confusing. We just haven't learned this type of time keeping in our generations. We learn how to read a calendar and a watch. Man made systems not as stable as Yahweh's.⁷

If we felt that Eric's position had the support of Scripture, we would be inclined to applaud his effort above. No one can deny that removing those of us who observe continuously-repeating weekly Sabbaths from an environment in which we can track continuously-repeating weekly Sabbaths would throw us off to the point that we would lose track of the weekly Sabbath. Of course, to successfully throw us *all* off, *all* those who observe continuously-repeating weekly Sabbaths would have to be removed from our environment. Not only would it be extremely rare for *one* Sabbathkeeper to lose track of his continuously-repeating count, but the odds of causing all Sabbathkeepers everywhere to lose track are simply unfathomable.

The man whom we consider to be the original modern-day lunar sabbatarian is Jonathan David Brown. If anyone can demonstrate that anyone else observed weekly sabbaths on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of the month before Mr. Brown, they either have never heard of June and me or else they have kept this knowledge to themselves because we have been asking for evidence of the earliest modern-day lunar sabbatarians for *years* now.

What did Jonathan David Brown have to say about the "deserted island" argument? The following excerpt is taken from his book *Keeping Yahweh's Appointments*:

Hopefully, this last illustration will bring some understanding on how the moon works a natural calendar:

You wake up on a beach to realize that the ship you were on is not there any longer, and your new home is a deserted island. You have none of your belongings, clothing, your watch, your daytimer. You do not recall the day or the date this happened on. After you find a food source, you walk to the highest point to contemplate what to do.

Just after sunset you see a thin crescent on the horizon. You remember from science class in grade school that this is the beginning of the lunar cycle.

Day after day the sun's rising and setting provides no immediate gratification for keeping track of time. But you notice the familiar pattern of the moon rising and setting, each day bringing a larger portion of reflected light on its surface than the last. You work each day to find food, and after deciding how to make yourself a boat from the island's trees, you begin.

On the sixth day, you look up in the sky during daylight hours and see the familiar half-moon which you remember is called the first quarter. Suddenly you realize that you've been working six days, and decide to stop your labors to rest in the seventh, just as you did in civilization with your family.⁸

Although Mr. Brown isn't nearly as dogmatic as his lunar sabbatarian counterparts, the message he delivers is essentially the same: The phases of the moon, in his estimation, guide those who are marooned in an isolated location to the day of the weekly Sabbath. I cannot help but notice that the individual in Mr. Brown's illustration could not have been a lunar sabbatarian before finding himself on the deserted

⁷ From the response entitled "Something Different/Something Renewed," chapter 18, that Eric Bess e-mailed me on 9/5/2006.

⁸ Jonathan David Brown, *Keeping Yahweh's Appointments*, Springfield, MO, 1998, pp. 90-91.



island. If he had been a lunar sabbatarian beforehand, he wouldn't have gradually come to any realization with regard to the moon's phases; he would have immediately checked the moon to confirm what day it was. Notice also that the individual from Mr. Brown's illustration didn't need a Bible to arrive at his understanding about the moon's progressing cycle.

Indeed, if I may insert this comment, long before I began observing the weekly Sabbath, I remember overhearing a radio announcer make the comment that mankind can trace virtually every form of timekeeping to the heavenly bodies, which evolutionists believe came into existence quite by accident. Of course, it is the sun that determines the length of a day, and the hours of a day are simply a breakdown or division of the parts of a day. The month, of course, is based on the lunar cycle, and the year is based on the amount of time it takes the earth to revolve around the sun. The *weekly cycle*, however, can only be traced to the Creation account in Scripture and has no connection to the heavenly bodies.

As depicted by Jonathan David Brown, the individual on the deserted island most certainly did not need a Bible to "pick up" how to observe his own invented version of "resting from his labors." He did what came natural to him, which is essentially what the ancient heathens did.

We see, then, that the lunar sabbatarians with whom June and I have communicated are adamant that if you are isolated from civilization, you will be able to quickly determine "when" the weekly Sabbaths occur simply by observing the moon.

Recently, a friend named Roeben Shalom and his wife visited our home. Roeben is a dedicated student of Scripture and has given some rather detailed calendar presentations. During our conversation, the topic of lunar sabbaths came up. Roeben has apparently been exposed to some of the same lunar sabbatarians that June and I have either met or corresponded with, and he mentioned some of them by name. Roeben added, "I'll tell you right now that these 'lunar' sabbatarians claim to go by the phases of the moon, but they *really don't!*"

I was surprised by Roeben's comment, so I asked him to explain what he meant.

"The days they go by ... the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th ... they don't always line up with the phases of the moon. Some months you'll have the quarter moon on the 8th, but it'll be a full moon on the 14th instead of the 15th. What they don't realize is the fact that I have *always* been an ardent observer of the moon and its phases – probably more so than most lunar sabbatarians – so this is not something that I am making up!"

After Roeben and his wife left, I decided to take a look at a calendar that lists the phases of the moon. Usually, it shows the phases at seven-day intervals. For example, we noticed one month in which the new moon (i.e., the conjunction) was on the 10th. The first quarter was on the 17th and the full moon was on the 24th. However, we found another month in which the new moon (conjunction) was on the 7th, the first quarter was on the 13th and the full moon was on the 21st. Oops! Shouldn't the first quarter have been on the 14th? For another month, we found that the new moon (conjunction) was on the 6th day of the month. Seven days later was the first quarter, but the full moon wasn't for another eight days! Something was obviously amiss!

This plainly begs the question, "Would the guy on the deserted island *really* know for certain which day was the weekly Sabbath?" The answer is no, which lunar sabbatarians will confirm for us without our even needing to produce scholarly support for our claim.

One day I happened to be perusing a lunar sabbatarian's web site, searching for quotes on an unrelated topic, when a lunar sabbatarian commentary seemed to jump off the screen at me. It was a commentary from a lunar sabbatarian who had been keeping lunar sabbaths "off the grid" for some *four years*, yet he admitted that he occasionally kept them on the wrong days! What? Couldn't he just look up at the moon and *know* which day was the Sabbath? Among this web site's listing of "Lunar Sabbath Fellowships Around the World," which in some cases included the believer's comments, was the following listing from a California lunar sabbatarian:

Shalom Alychem forgive my spelling just writing to find a fellow believer. My name is Ytzak chy'ee ehud Ben Yah. And I'm located in the mother load area of CA. Pretty lonely up here bunch of red neck christians oh sooo blind. Been keeping scriptural shabbath 4 years with out a calendar or a computer just by sheer observance **so some months I'm off give or take a day** but I'm hoping to get correspondence from fellow believers. just to talk and communicate with the outside world. Don't get to a computer often trying to spend most of my time out of Babylon in the wilderness on the earth Yah made for us. But to keep the scripture written by Rav Sha'ul forsake not the brethren. I got a email address if any body would like to write. Shalom for now. Ytzak⁹

We suspect that we'll be waiting quite some time before any lunar sabbatarian satisfactorily explains how it should be so easy to "just know" when the weekly Sabbaths are each month while one of their own so freely admits that he is *off a day* some months. Is he an unintelligent lunar sabbatarian who just cannot seem to catch on to how it's supposed to be done? Or does his frank explanation serve to validate Roeben Shalom's observations?

Answer: The latter. Earlier, we told you that lunar sabbatarians would confirm that a man finding himself on a deserted island with no means of tracking time other than the heavenly bodies would *not* be able to consistently determine which days were weekly sabbaths. The lunar sabbatarian who provides this confirmation is Matthew Janzen. In his contribution to the book *Weekly Sabbath Days are Determined by the Moon*, Matthew testifies that lunar-based weekly Sabbaths do not always align with the phases of the moon. This testimony appears in Appendix V of the book. Mr. Janzen presents this understanding while answering an e-mail claim to the contrary from one of his fellow lunar sabbatarians, whom we strongly feel has been quoted in this chapter! In his e-mail to Matthew Janzen, his (unnamed) lunar sabbatarian friend expressed his concern with regard to a lunar sabbatarian squabble over when a particular month began (which in turn resulted in lunar sabbatarians observing different days as weekly Sabbaths that month). Matthew Janzen provides the quotes from his friend's e-mail, followed by his responses in *italics*:

Friends, the lights in the heavens do not lie. And, like it or not, if we are going to say that we keep a lunar/solar calendar and a lunar Sabbath, then we have to be consistent in doing so. By this I do not mean that we cannot disagree about which day is the Sabbath. What I mean is we have to put our money where our mouth is. **If we say that the quarter phases announce the Sabbath, but you do not observe the Sabbath in this manner, that is not being straightforward.**

⁹ Quote from a lunar sabbatarian named Ytzak chy'ee ehud Ben Yah (which we suspect is not his birth name!), as taken from "Lunar Sabbath Fellowships around the World," web site maintained by Ernie Hoch, Covenants of Promise Ministries, Chewelah, Washington. Taken from the Internet 07/17/2010. The complete listing of lunar sabbatarian fellowships may be viewed by accessing the following URL: http://www.lunarsabbath.com/lunar_sabbath_fellowships.htm.

Brother, I have discussed this with you before, and I had thought you acknowledged that the phases of the moon did not always align perfectly with the Sabbath. Please forgive me if I'm wrong, but it seems as though you've went back to this again. It is very easy to show that in any given month/moon the major phases of the moon will not align perfectly on one singular day. Such is the case this month.

*It is true that the first quarter phase showed up on mon. evening, however both the full moon and the last quarter phases show up on sun. evening. **What this shows is that the phases of the moon do not align perfectly with the Sabbath day.** The only way for us to make them perfectly align would be to keep teus. [sic] on the first Sabbath and then switch to mon. for the next two Sabbaths. Of course, both you and I know that such is ridiculous so we need to just accept the fact that the particular phases of the moon do not have to align perfectly with the Sabbath days.*

Instead we should seek to determine the new moon properly and then count from there any given month. It just so happens that the new moon method that yields a 75% success rate for the 15th day falling on the full moon is taking the first day after conjunction. This is the method I believe has the backing of Scripture.¹⁰

What we have just witnessed is a lunar sabbatarian disagreement regarding how to properly determine the first day of the month. On the one hand, the lunar sabbatarian who sent Matthew Janzen his dissenting e-mail presents what things would be like in a “perfect world” of lunar sabbatarian practice. In such a “perfect world,” the weekly [lunar] Sabbath days would consistently align perfectly with the phases of the moon.

On the other hand, Matthew infuses reality into the picture, which simultaneously disarms the lunar sabbatarian “deserted island” claim. Picture this, if you will: A lunar sabbatarian washes ashore on that deserted island with nothing but the clothes on his back, the lone survivor of a now-distant shipwreck. He has lost all concept of time. However, he looks up into the sky and notices a perfect quarter moon. “Ah!” he exclaims. “Today is obviously the 8th day of the month! It’s the Sabbath day!”

Later, however, to his amazement, on the day he reckons as the fifteenth day of the month, instead of seeing a dazzling, completely full moon, he notices a tiny sliver is not yet filled in. “*What’s going on here?!*” he mutters to himself. “There is *no question* that I saw a perfect quarter moon seven days ago, and now it’s the 15th, but the moon won’t be full until tomorrow night!”

We thus see that yet another lunar sabbatarian claim is exposed as error. To the credit of lunar sabbatarian Matthew Janzen, he concedes that phases of the moon do not necessarily match up with lunar sabbath days. Will the other lunar sabbatarians quoted here be willing to make the same concession?

As gratifying as Matthew Janzen’s admission is, his proposed solution, which involves declaring the day following the conjunction as “day one,” only offers a 75% success rate. In other words, ¼ of the time his method will *not* yield phases of the moon that line up with weekly [lunar] sabbaths.

From our perspective, lunar sabbatarians, while claiming to have found a better way, have done nothing short of making things more and more complicated. Not only do we never find a verse of

¹⁰ Arnold Bowen and Matthew Janzen, *Weekly Sabbath Days are Determined by the Moon*, Ministers of the New Covenant, Conyers, GA, November 2008, pp. 115-116. The book may be accessed online at the following URL: <http://ministersnewcovenant.org/books/b-002.pdf>.



Scripture enjoining anyone to observe the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of the month as weekly Sabbaths ... not only do we not find a record of anyone observing “extended worship days” ... not only do we never find instructions to use the moon in determining *any* weekly Sabbath day, but we never find a record of an “approved example” of any believer ever looking up at the moon and explaining that its phase indicated a weekly Sabbath day.