When and *Where* Does the Scriptural Month Begin?

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One of the first things we learned as we began our efforts to live by Yahweh's every Word was that the calendar we had been using is far removed from the one ordained by our Heavenly Father. Of course, this generation is so deeply entrenched in what is known as the Gregorian calendar that we don't foresee any changes in the near future, barring direct intervention by Yahweh Himself! Therefore, if we are to keep the appointments that Yahweh has commanded His children to keep, notably His ordained festivals, we have to delve into both Scripture and the historical record to see how Yahweh wants us to do it. I realize many folks, upon observing that I mentioned both "Scripture" and "the historical record" in the same sentence, are going to conclude that we put the record of history on the same level as Scripture. Nothing could be further from the truth. For example, while we often agree with the historical record as presented by first-century Jewish historian Josephus, we do not always agree with his interpretations of Scripture.

We have turned to Josephus many times for confirmation of various understandings we've gleaned from Scripture. Not only did he offer support for when the weekly Sabbath begins (at sunset), but he also provided supportive evidence in favor of our conviction that the weekly Sabbath is governed by a continuously-repeating weekly cycle, as opposed to those who insist that the true weekly Sabbath is interrupted by a monthly cycle. We could go on and on, not only throwing in the fact that he agreed with our understanding pertaining to the count to Pentecost, but that he was also in harmony with our view regarding such issues as birthday celebrations and abortion. However, we recently learned that Josephus wrote a brief commentary in which he offered support that the original calendar began in the fall. If we put this particular historical writing above our understanding of Scripture, we would regard the originally-ordained calendar as having been a fall-to-fall calendar. However, this is not when Yahweh, through Moses, enjoins His children to declare "the beginning of months." Here are Yahweh's instructions to Moses and Aaron, as found in Exodus 12:2:

> [2]This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

For anyone unfamiliar with the setting in which the above instruction was given, it was shortly before the first Passover, when the Israelites were delivered from the clutches of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The above directive was also communicated after the Plague of Hail, which had destroyed the Egyptians' barley crop. Since we know Passover generally occurs during the month we know as April, we can be fairly certain that the new moon preceding Passover is the first month of the year. Even Josephus, although he may have written something to the effect that he believed the original calendar was a fall-to-fall calendar, understood that Passover occurs during the first month of the Scriptural year:

> In the month of Xanthicus, which is by us called *Nisan*, and is the beginning of our year, on the fourteenth day of the lunar month, when the sun is in Aries (for in this month it was that we were delivered from bondage under the Egyptians, the law ordained that we should every year slay that sacrifice which I before told you we slew when we came out of Egypt, and which was called the *Passover*; and so we do celebrate this passover in companies, leaving nothing of what we sacrifice till the day following.[1]

If we can agree that the first month of the Scriptural calendar begins in the spring, the next question is, "How do we know when that first month *begins*?" This is a question that has divided many believers, and June and I are among those who have experienced first-hand how divisive the calendar issue can be. We are persuaded that Yahweh ordained the new month to be determined by visual observation. This is a simple method, allowing both educated and uneducated people alike to easily recognize when the new month has begun: Having observed the moon go through its regular waxing and waning cycle, after which it disappears for a few days, we know to start watching the western sky after sunset. Anyone keeping track would know when "day 29" arrives, and since there will always be either 29 or 30 days in a month, we understand that the new moon will either be sighted that night or the following night.

Visual Sighting or Conjunction?

We were surprised to learn that many believers out there are persuaded that the conjunction of the moon (sometimes referred to as the "astronomical new moon") determines the first day of the month, which, of course, also determines the first day of the Scriptural New Year. I have always felt that it makes sense to believe that when Yahweh told Moses and Aaron that "this month" is the beginning of months, they were looking at a crescent new moon. Otherwise, what was the connection (or *context*) to "this month"? Were they looking at calculations that determined the conjunction had just occurred, and in the process of discussing those calculations Yahweh interrupted them to say, "By the way, this month that you just calculated is the beginning of months?" Or were Moses and Aaron looking up at a crescent new moon when Yahweh clarified that that new moon was the first new moon of the year? This latter option makes the most sense to us.

When we combine the logic of this option with the understanding of first-century Judaism, it makes even *more* sense. Notice what Philo wrote with regard to "when" the new moon is:

> XXVI (140) Following the order stated above, we record the third type of feast which we will proceed to explain. This is the New Moon, or beginning of the lunar month, namely the period between one conjunction and the next, the length of which has been accurately calculated in the astronomical schools. The new moon holds its place among the feasts for many reasons. First, because it is the beginning of the month, and the beginning, both in number and in time, deserves honour. Secondly, because when it [i.e., *the new moon*] arrives, nothing in heaven is left without light, for while at the conjunction, when the moon is lost to sight under the sun, the side which faces earth is darkened, when the new month begins it resumes its natural brightness.
> (141) The third reason is, that the stronger or more powerful element at that time supplies the help which is needed to the smaller and weaker. For it is just then that the sun begins to illumine the moon with the light which we perceive and the moon reveals its own beauty to the eye.[2]

According to first-century Jew Philo, when the new moon arrives, "nothing in heaven is left without light." He contrasts this with the *conjunction*, which he describes as the time when the moon is "lost to sight" and the side that faces earth is *darkened*. However, as Philo continues, when the new month begins, it (the moon) "resumes its natural brightness." As if those words aren't plain enough in describing when

Philo believes the new month begins, he added that at the time of the new moon "the sun begins to illumine the moon with the light which we perceive and the moon reveals its own beauty to the eye."

Another ancient testimony is that of a work known as *The Book of Enoch*. Some individuals have supported the belief that *The Book of Enoch* was written under the inspiration of Yahweh. We do not agree with this proposal; nevertheless, *The Book of Enoch* offers historical evidence of what certain Jewish believers living during the first century BCE believed. In chapter LXXVIII, vv. 10-13, we read the following understanding:

> 10. And [the angel] Uriel showed me another law: when light is transferred to the moon, and on which side it is transferred to her by the sun. 11. During all the period during which the moon is growing in her light, she is transferring it to herself when opposite to the sun during fourteen days [her light is accomplished in the heaven], and when she is illumined throughout, her light is accomplished in the heaven. 12. And on the first day she is called the new moon, for on that day the light rises upon her. 13. She becomes full moon exactly on the day when the sun sets in the west, and from the east she rises at night, and the moon shines the whole night through till the sun rises over against her and the moon is seen over against the sun.[3]

Although the majority of Judaism today bases their religious calendar on the astronomical new moon, they agree that, originally, the calendar was based on visual observation. For example, the following concession appears in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*:

> Until Hillel II instituted a permanent calendar based on astronomical calculations (in 358), the fixing of Ro'sh Hodesh (the new moon) was determined by observation and the evidence of witnesses.[4]

Medieval Jewish rabbi, physician and philosopher Maimonides (frequently referred to as "the Rambam") authored a treatise entitled "Sanctification of the New Moon" in which he went into considerable detail outlining how the new moon was determined in ancient times. Rather than quote all 40+ pages of his work, we'll just cite the following paragraph:

> 3. Each month the moon disappears and becomes invisible for about two days, or somewhat more or less for about one day at the end of the old month, before it reaches its conjunction with the sun, and for about one day after its conjunction with the sun. Then it reappears in the evening in the west, and this night, on which it becomes visible in the west after its disappearance, is the beginning of the month. From this day on 29 days were counted, and if the new crescent appeared on the night of the 30th day, this 30th day was the first day of the *new* month. If, however, it did not appear on that night, the 30th day would belong to the *old* month and the 31st day would be the first day of the new month. And no matter whether the moon did or did not appear in the night of the 31st day, no attention was paid to it, for the lunar month never lasts longer than 30 days.[5]

In spite of all the above evidence, which happens to align with our understanding of Scripture, a large contingent of believers insists that the original calendar was (and is) based on the astronomical new moon. In fact, June and I briefly attended such an assembly back in 1999. Although we disagree with this particular teaching, it certainly has no bearing on Sabbath fellowship, or so we *thought*! The leadership of this group eventually became aware that June and I are not in agreement with their calendar position, and one Sabbath we were greeted with a PowerPoint presentation/lecture designed to promote their "astronomical new moon" position while portraying the opposing view as having heathen roots. This led to a private e-mail exchange between myself and the gentleman who gave the presentation. In the end, after determining that he wasn't going to *ever* respond to the final e-mail I sent him, we decided that it would be better to discontinue attending that assembly. As we discovered with that incident, the issue of the calendar is, for many, a test of fellowship.[6] Our exposure to this divisive issue has not been without frustration, but at the same time, it has offered us the opportunity to more diligently examine our reasons for believing as we do. In the case of visual observation versus the conjunction method of determining the first day of the new month, June and I are persuaded that the above historical evidence is sufficient validation of our understanding of the Scriptural model.

Do We Go by Israel Sightings or Local Sightings?

Even among those of us who agree that the beginning point of each Scriptural month is determined by the visual observation of the new moon, controversy abounds. Should the "visual observation" be based on an Israel sighting or should it be local sighting? "Local sighting," by the way, can have more than one understanding, but in general it means that when reliable witnesses *anywhere* on the earth report a sighting of the new moon crescent, the new month has begun. There are variations of how various groups accept reports of local sightings. For example, we are aware of some folks here in Texas who will accept a report of a local sighting so long as the sighting occurred at a point east of the Rocky Mountains. Other groups are responsive to a reliable report *anywhere* around the globe. June and I, however, are not willing to declare the new month until we receive confirmation that the new moon was sighted in Israel. June and I have found that both the proponents of local sightings and the supporters of Israel sightings have very strong opinions that have resulted in more than a few heated discussions. We try to avoid the heated discussions, but this doesn't mean we aren't challenged on this topic from time to time.

We have heard some of the reasons that believers prefer to go with the local sightings, and while we respect their position, and we're not about to label them as contentious or deceived, nevertheless, we are obviously not in agreement, so here's an overview of why we believe we should go with the sightings over Israel: In a nutshell, it's all about being "on the same page" with Yeshua.

When Yeshua was here, we are persuaded that He went by the new moon sightings over Israel. Although we are nowhere expressly told that this is how He reckoned the months, I believe the reasoning we supplied above, combined with the fact that He would not have heard about reports from Texas, Arizona or South Africa, suffices to explain our reasoning for believing as we do. In fact, those who go with the local sightings are quick to agree with us on this point. A few years ago, I participated in an Internet discussion forum in which this very topic came up. One individual, who only identified himself as "Arkie-Toma," while conceding that Yeshua went by the new moon sightings over Israel, explained why, in this day and age, he goes by "local sightings," which in fact amounts to "wherever in the world the new moon is first sighted." Here is what he wrote:

> I am reasonably certain that YAHshua went by the New Moon when it was in Israel because that is where he was residing. However, if I keep all Sabbaths (both weekly and annual) at the same time He did, I would have to start and end them around the middle of the day here in Oklahoma USA, as we are about 5 or six hours behind Israel.[7]

In response to the above commentary, my first observation was that "Arkie-Toma" should have done his homework before posting his reasoning for believing as he does. First, the state of Oklahoma is in the same time zone as Texas, where June and I live, which is the Central Standard Time zone. This time zone is *eight* hours behind Israel, not the five or six hours as proposed above.

Secondly, whether intentionally or otherwise, "Arkie-Toma" diverted the issue from the actual *day* on which the new month begins to the *time of day* on which it begins. While this is a tactic that June and I have been exposed to on a few occasions, "Arkie-Toma" intentionally created a problem that doesn't really exist; hence, it is what is known as a "straw man argument." He *seems* concerned that if he were to keep Sabbaths (weekly and annual) at the same time that Yeshua did, he would need to begin those days in the middle portion of the day. However, once again, this issue is *not* about the time of day on which to begin the month—or when to begin observing the Sabbath—or *any* day.

By following the principle of allowing the day to begin in Israel before it does here in the United States, we are observing the same day that Israel is keeping; by not beginning our day until sunset, we follow the Scriptural principle of when an actual day begins. We don't need to synchronize our clocks to sunset in Jerusalem. Thus, when it comes to determining when a *day*, such as the weekly Sabbath, should begin, everyone seems to agree that the proper way of doing it is to allow that day to begin at sunset in Israel, then, eight hours later, it comes to those of us in Oklahoma, Texas, or whatever state in which you happen to live.

Equipped with the understanding that the weekly Sabbath, week after week, comes to us here in the United States after having already begun in Israel, the following question arises: *Why do those who*

support local sightings of the new moon suggest that we should change that rule when it comes to beginning a new <u>month</u>? Since a new *month* begins with the same event as the weekly Sabbath (i.e., the setting of the sun), why incorporate a separate rule for "first day of the month" as opposed the rule of when the "last day of the week" begins? Thus, if the weekly Sabbath always arrives in *Israel* before it makes it to the United States, why would we want to begin a new month in the *United States* before it begins in Israel? Clearly, those who support local new moon sightings must likewise support two sets of rules for how and when to begin the first day of the month versus when to begin the last day of the week. We find this determination method to be very inconsistent, not to mention confusing.

Of course, we realize the natural progression of this argument brings us to where in the world the new day begins. Does it begin in Israel? Does it begin at the International Dateline? The issue of where the Scriptural new day should begin is actually a separate argument that we really do not need to address here, but for those who are interested in our opinion, June and I personally like having the International Dateline right where it's at! In fact, we believe a reasonable argument can be made that this is more or less where the original dateline was, but again, that's another topic for another day. For now, we would like to stick with answering the question as to why we agree that the weekly Sabbath comes to Israel before it makes it to the United States, yet we do *not* agree with changing that rule insofar as determining when the new month begins.

Of even greater concern to June and me involves that of following the example of Yeshua the Messiah. As we have already mentioned, we are persuaded that a solid case can be made for believing that He reckoned the new months based on the sightings over Israel, and proponents of the "local new moon sightings" tend to agree with us on that point. Thus, when Yeshua was here living "in the flesh," even though there were certainly many months wherein the new moon would have been first sighted outside of Judea, such as in what is now known as the United States, Yeshua would not have recognized the beginning of "day one" until sunset over Israel the following day.

We don't know about you, but we don't feel comfortable declaring a "New Moon Day" until we know the crescent has first been sighted over Israel. Otherwise, we're taking it upon ourselves to begin observing a "holy day" that's on a different day than what is observed in Israel, which in turn means observing it on a different day than Yeshua would have. The year 2009 offers a classic example of what we find most disturbing about declaring a "New Moon Day," even though the crescent new moon hasn't yet been sighted over Israel. For the observance of Yom Teruah (a.k.a. the Feast of Trumpets), which is the first day of the seventh month, a new moon report surfaced that the crescent was first sighted over Durban, South Africa at 6:25 PM local time. South Africa is only one hour behind Israel, so here's the scenario for Yom Teruah 2009:

September 19: Jerusalem, Israel: The sun set at 6:40 PM local time. The new moon of the seventh month was not sighted, so September 20th was regarded as being a regular work day instead of a holy day.

September 19: Durban, South Africa: The sun set at 5:50 PM local time. Shortly afterwards, at 6:25 PM, the new moon was sighted (this was 7:25 PM in Israel). September 20th was thus declared a "holy day" for the believers in Durban, South Africa. Since that day actually began at 5:50 PM—which was 6:50 PM in Jerusalem—the believers in Durban, South Africa began observing Yom Teruah ten

minutes after the day had begun in Israel.[8] This may be a little difficult to follow, so I hope the following chart will help to better illustrate the way things unfolded at sunset on September 19, 2009:

September 19-20 (Gregorian Calendar) & Yom Teruah Observance Chart

Durban, South Africa	Duration of Yom Teruah Observance	Jerusalem, Israel	Duration of Yom Teruah Observance
5:50 PM (sunset)	0 hrs., 0 min.	6:50 PM (sun had set 10 min. earlier at 6:40 PM)	0 hrs., 0 min.
6:50 PM	1 hr., 0 min.	7:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.

As displayed by the above chart, the believers in Durban, South Africa, to this point (6:50 PM local time), have been observing Yom Teruah for one hour. Of course, if we put ourselves back into the conditions present during Yeshua's day, at a time when first-century Judaism would not have known about a South Africa sighting, nor had they seen the new moon in Judea, the above date (September 20th of our society's Gregorian calendar) would have represented the last day of the old month. The question is, "How long would the believers in South Africa have been observing Yom Teruah that year before the Jews in Israel began observing it?" We will find out shortly.

The same gentleman who submitted the posting cited above added some commentary regarding the fact that when the new moon is first sighted west of Israel, such as in the USA, we still observe Yom Teruah within the same twenty-four hour period. Here is what he wrote:

> Many times the moon for the feast of the seventh moon (month) is sighted as it was here in the USA this year [2004] about 18 hours ahead of Israel. When that is the case people in Israel and people in all countries both East and West of Israel could begin keeping the first day of the seventh Moon (month) at sundown sometime in the same twenty-four hour period while it is still the first day of the sighted New Moon as commanded. On the other hand, if we had to follow Israel we would start keeping the feast of the first day of the seventh Moon (month) one day after the New Moon was sighted here it would then already be the second day of the seventh moon (month) and not the first day as commanded.[9]

In the scenario described above, "Arkie-Toma" explained that in 2004 those who went by the local sighting in the United States kept Yom Teruah about 18 hours ahead of Israel. Given this scenario, presuming this is the way Yahweh ordained it to be done, the United States and Israel were "on the same page" with Yom Teruah observance for six hours. That may not seem so bad on the surface, but remember that we are generally "on the same page" with Israel for 16 hours on any given Sabbath day. Also remember that with weekly Sabbath observance, all believers we know of in the United States are more than willing to allow that day to begin in Israel *before* it makes its way to the United States. With the Yom Teruah new moons, however, the first day of the month is determined by these individuals as having its beginning point wherever that new moon is first sighted.

In 2004 there was a controversy regarding the Yom Teruah new moon due to the fact that some observers in Israel claimed to have observed the new moon, yet they weren't absolutely positive that it

was actually the new moon that they saw. One experienced observer described it as "a line or a smudge" and would not state with absolute certainty that the "line or smudge" was the crescent moon. Others claimed to have spotted it, but only with the aid of binoculars. Many agreed that during Yeshua's day, what they saw would not have been sufficient for declaring the new moon. Of course, as the moon made its way westward, it was eventually sighted here in the United States and thus, for those who go by local sighting vs. Israel sighting, that day was declared "Yom Teruah." This is why, as "Arkie-Toma" explained above, the United States kept Yom Teruah about 18 hours ahead of Israel, which in turn would mean that we kept Yom Teruah for six hours of the same 24-hour period that Israel observed it. Frankly, I believe "Arkie-Toma" was a little inaccurate with his time sequence because, at least for those of us in the Central Standard Time zone, it's more like 16 hours.

For those who enjoy math, you can see where we come up with the 16 hours. If the sun sets here at 6:30 PM Central Standard Time, it is 2:30 AM in Israel, and they'll have to wait until 6:30 PM their time before the sun sets, which is a total of 16 hours. Thus, if we begin observing the first day of the month at sunset here in the USA, the believers in Israel won't start that first day of the month for another 16 hours. This leaves us with eight hours of being "on the same page" of that 24-hour period with Israel. Again, we wouldn't be so concerned about this matter if it weren't for the fact that, for the other days of the month, we're "on the same page" with Israel for 16 hours—that's right, *double* the amount of time proposed by supporters of "local sightings."

However, to this point we've been *lenient* with the scenario practiced by those who go by "local sightings." Consider the case for what unfolded for Yom Teruah observance in 2009. In 2009, as the day of Yom Teruah approached, proponents of local sightings called upon brethren in the southern hemisphere for assistance in determining the day on which to declare Yom Teruah. For example, we received a newsletter entitled *Beginning Anew* in which an entire page was devoted to soliciting assistance from new moon watchers for determining the first day of the seventh month. A chart was displayed depicting that here in the United States, the new moon would only be visible with the assistance of "optical aid," whereas in much of the southern hemisphere, including South Africa and most of South America, it should be "easily visible with the naked eye." The author commented, "If at least 2 veteran new moon watchers visibly locate Yahweh's new moon on Saturday evening, September 19, 2009, then the new moon will signify the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets."[10]

As it turned out, believers in Durban, South Africa sighted the new moon that evening. What makes this sighting so interesting lies with the fact that Durban, South Africa is only one time zone west of Israel, which means they're only one hour behind Israel. Even *more* interesting is the fact that on September 19, 2009 the sun set over Israel a mere *ten minutes* before it set over South Africa. Thus, from a Scriptural perspective, the new day began in South Africa ten minutes after it began in Israel. However, the big difference lies in the fact that the new moon wasn't seen in Israel, but it *was seen* in South Africa.

Now I suppose that if I were of the "local sighting" persuasion and I lived in Israel, I would stay tuned to the proceedings in South Africa to see if they saw the new moon, and then I would declare that day as Yom Teruah. However, in the first century this was not an option. The inhabitants of Israel would have looked for the new moon and, not having seen it, determined that there was still another day left in the old month.

Such being the case, what follows is the complete chart illustrating the amount of time on which Israel and South Africa would have been "on the same page" whenever a scenario unfolded like the one of 2009:

How Long Were Durban, South Africa Believers "On the Same Page" With Jerusalem, Israel Believers for Yom Teruah in 2009?

Durban, South Africa	Duration of Yom Teruah Observance	Jerusalem, Israel	Duration of Yom Teruah Observance
5:50 PM (sunset)	0 hrs., 0 min.	6:50 PM (sun had set 10 min. earlier at 6:40 PM)	0 hrs., 0 min.
6:50 PM	1 hr., 0 min.	7:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
7:50 PM	2 hr., 0 min.	8:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
8:50 PM	3 hr., 0 min.	9:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
9:50 PM	4 hrs., 0 min.	10:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
10:50 PM	5 hrs., 0 min.	11:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
11:50 PM	6 hrs., 0 min.	12:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
12:50 AM	7 hrs., 0 min.	1:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
1:50 AM	8 hrs., 0 min.	2:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
2:50 AM	9 hrs., 0 min.	3:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
3:50 AM	10 hrs., 0 min.	4:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
4:50 AM	11 hrs., 0 min.	5:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
5:50 AM	12 hrs., 0 min.	6:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
6:50 AM	13 hrs., 0 min.	7:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
7:50 AM	14 hrs., 0 min.	8:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
8:50 AM	15 hrs., 0 min.	9:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
9:50 AM	16 hrs., 0 min.	10:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
10:50 AM	17 hrs., 0 min.	11:50 AM	0 hrs., 0 min.
11:50 AM	18 hrs., 0 min.	12:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
12:50 PM	19 hrs., 0 min.	1:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
1:50 PM	20 hrs., 0 min.	2:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
2:50 PM	21 hrs., 0 min.	3:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
3:50 PM	22 hrs., 0 min.	4:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
4:50 PM	23 hrs., 0 min.	5:50 PM	0 hrs., 0 min.
5:51 PM	24 hrs., 1 min.	6:50 PM (sun had set 11 min. earlier at 6:39 PM)	0 hrs., **11 min.**

As revealed by the above chart, if first century believers in South Africa saw the new moon on the Gregorian date of September 19th and thus observed Yom Teruah for the ensuing 24-hour period, yet the Jews in Jerusalem didn't see the new moon until the *following* evening, the two groups observed Yom Teruah for only *11 minutes* of the same 24-hour period. To put this in proper perspective, please bear in mind that on September 19th (the day of the weekly Sabbath), South Africa was "on the same page" with Israel for nearly a full 24 hours of Sabbath observance. Why were they essentially "on the same page" for the day of the weekly Sabbath, yet they only shared 11 minutes of the Yom Teruah high day Sabbath?

Putting the above scenario on a more personal level, if I were an early first-century believer living in South Africa who saw a new moon under the same conditions as noted above, I would have observed Yom Teruah for nearly a full day before Yeshua observed it. I realize some folks may have no problem with such a scenario, but hopefully they can at least catch a glimpse of why June and I are not comfortable with their approach to Yom Teruah observance, at least not in this day and age when we can know whether or not the new moon was sighted over Israel.

I would ask the proponents of local sightings if they would be equally comfortable observing the weekly Sabbath virtually 24 hours earlier than the Jews in Israel. If the answer is no, then I can only wonder why those believers think the rules should change for new moon observance versus weekly Sabbath observance. As some would say, "You can't have it both ways!" Well, from my perspective, those who go by local sightings *do* have it both ways. That is their choice, which I am compelled to disagree with.

Of course, the supporters of local sightings have lots of questions for those of us who go by the Israel sightings. One of the more common questions is, "Well, you only know when the new moon is sighted in Israel because of the Internet and modern technology! What would you do if you were a first-century believer here in the USA and you didn't have access to reports of the Israel sightings?"

In response to this question, if I didn't have access to anyone who lived in Israel, I would simply go with the best method available to me and use the visible crescent as it came to me here locally. This having been said, June and I have, on many occasions, sighted the new moon and we could readily tell that, due to its obvious young age and low position, it could not have been sighted in Israel. If we lived in the first century and we knew enough about astronomy, we would be able to make accurate determinations most of the time, and that's really what it's all about: Doing our best to be "on the same page" with Yeshua, which we all should simultaneously understand as being "on the same page" with Yahweh.

Of course, now that we have modern technology to assist with new moon reporting, June and I believe we have found a better way than making educated guesses as to whether or not the crescent new moon we see was also sighted over Israel. We appreciate knowing that the day we're observing as Yom Teruah dovetails exactly with the same day the Messiah would have observed when He was here. Thus, regardless of which methods we may have been relegated to use in ancient times, we have found a modern tool that helps us to know which day the Messiah would have observed, and that's what we strive to do each year. We are glad that progress has enabled us to better determine which day the Messiah would have recognized as new moon day. Frankly, we do not believe Yeshua would have recognized the new moon sighting as reported in 2009 by the believers in South Africa. However, for those who disagree, that is their prerogative and we wish them no ill will. All we are doing here is explaining why we disagree.

Questions and Objections

From time to time, we receive general inquiries regarding our calendar views, and as time allows, I will post those inquiries, along with our responses, here. Recently, I had a brief e-mail exchange in which a gentleman identifying himself as Jacob, who posed the following questions:

> Trying to reckon months by new moons with or without visibility can lead to some hair-splitting type decisions having to do with them falling right about time of sundown from physical locations maybe.... perhaps you and Jim[11] make very valid points and you both reckon time 100% correctly for all I know.

My reply: All I know is, we've been doing it this way for nearly 20 years without any problems. Of course, it is true that we often do not observe holy days on the same day as those who go by local sightings, but from our perspective, "They do it their way," and that's their prerogative. We can't worry about those who do it their way. If we did, we would have a perpetual headache!

Jacob goes on to ask the following question: "What if it is stormy for days and days in Yerushalom just after an astronomical new moon or the moon is below the horizon from there for virtually a whole night that starts 12 hours after an astronomical new moon though?"

My answer: You make a reference to the "astronomical new moon," which is something the ancients never wrote about. As a result, from my perspective, you are inventing a problem that doesn't even exist. I realize that for you, it may seem to be a problem. For us, it's not.

I'm not sure, but maybe you're wondering what we would do if all reports from Israel were that it was too cloudy over there to see the new moon. In such cases as this, we go with a 30-day month. I say this even if we would have still seen the new moon crescent here in Texas. To me, this is no big deal at all, and it's so easy with the new moon reports we receive from sources in Israel.

Jacob continued: "The moon actually fell below the horizon in [Texas] less than an hour after you saw it at 9:52 PM central or so [on June 23, 2009] and it did not rise again from there until well after the next sunrise perhaps."

My reply: I guess I don't see your point. From our perspective, we saw the new moon, and it was a beautiful sight. It's not supposed to be visible for very long ... that's just the way it works. If we hadn't seen it, we would have been disappointed (of course), but hey, the times we don't see it serve to make the times that we DO see it all the more special. Since it had already been sighted in Israel, it didn't really make any difference as to whether we saw it here or not. As soon as it was declared "new moon" over Israel, we knew the new month had technically already begun before the sun even set here in Texas that evening.

Jacob's next question: "Does Dawid say stuff in 1 Samuel 20:5 within 24 hours of having seen a sliver himself?"

My answer: Before I answer this question, we need to read I Samuel 20:5. Here is what it says:

> [5]And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, tomorrow *is* the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third *day* at even.

Personally-speaking, I believe Dawid told Jonathan that "tomorrow" was the new moon because the day on which they had their discussion was the 30th day of the month. Since there cannot be more than 30 days in a month, it would have been rather obvious that the next day was (by default) the first day of the new month.

Jacob continues with the same line of reasoning that he addressed above with I Samuel 20:5: "Maybe we should not assume that there were not ancients who had moon cycle timing calculated down to within a few minutes."

My reply: I'm not assuming anything. All I know is what I've read from various ancient sources (such as Philo and *The Book of Enoch*) that the new moon was *not* a calculated event, but an event demarcated by the moon first giving its light. Judaism recognizes this as fact, even though they currently go by a calculated calendar based upon the conjunction.

The method that June and I use sure makes sense to me. Having been raised on a farm, I understand looking at the stars in bewilderment, and the moon has always amazed me with its beauty ... it's one of the reasons I became convinced that there is a Creator. As I reminisce on those days, I know that it would never have occurred to me to begin counting "day 1" with an event that I couldn't even see. I cannot imagine the ancient shepherds of Israel coming up with calculations to determine when the conjunction would occur, and to then count that day as "day 1." It is so much easier to just look up above the western horizon after sunset and (after diligently scanning the sky), jubilantly shout, "There it is!"

[1]*C.f., The Works of Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews*, Book III, chapter X, section 5, translated by William Whiston, A.M., Vol. II, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, p. 218.

[2]*The Works of Philo*, Vol. 7, "The Special Laws, II," Ch. XXVI, sections 140-141, translated by F. H. Colson (Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, 1937), p. 391, 393.

[3]*The Book of Enoch* (I Enoch), translated by R. H. Charles, D.Litt., D.D., Hollen Street Press Ltd, at Slough (Great Britain), 1991, p. 105.

[4]*The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, Editors in Chief, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 145.

[5]*The Code of Maimonides*, Book Three, Treatise Eight, "Sanctification of the New Moon," translated from the Hebrew by Solomon Gandz, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1956, chapter I, pp. 3-4. Note: Maimonides lived from 1135 until 1204.

[6]I realize some folks may come away with the impression that June and I raised the issue of our calendar disagreement and that we were contentious in our approach, essentially putting the group on the "defensive." This has been suggested by certain individuals who have heard of our experience.

Thankfully, we have acquaintances who have vouched for our *not* having made this an issue. Like many of our beliefs, this is a topic that is bound to eventually surface in conversation, and although we don't remember exactly *how* it was brought up, we do remember that when it was, we established that this was not something that we felt should separate us. Those with whom we share this difference agreed, so it was not an issue …until the day it was addressed by the leadership as a practice stemming from heathen worship.

[7]Excerpt from a posting submitted by a gentleman who only identified himself with the screen name "Arkie-Toma" to the Discussion forum at www.eliyah.com. This posting was submitted on 09-29-2004 at 10:31 PM in the forum thread entitled "**Baruch Yom Teruah!!!**"

[8]We fully respect and support receiving new moon reports from anywhere around the globe, including reports from fellow believers in South Africa.

[9]Excerpt from "Arkie-Toma's" 09/29/2004 posting, op. cit.

[10]Beginning *Anew*, a publication of Yahweh's Assembly in Messiah, Rocheport, MO, Oct./Nov. 2009, Vol. 30, No. 6., p. 3.

[11]This is a reference to a believer named Jim Hollands, who put together what I feel is an outstanding comparison of the various methods used in determining which is the Scriptural day of the new moon. The article was *originally* posted to http://www3.sympatico.ca/james.h/determination.html, but the last I checked, that website no longer exists. Thankfully, I had also photocopied the article, so I scanned it and created a PDF file that can be accessed here.