

2. Does “Logic and Nature” Indicate When the New Year Should Begin?

When does “logic” indicate that the New Year should begin? It apparently depends upon one’s perspective. Logically-speaking, I don’t believe we should feel a need to question Yahweh’s judgment when He tells us that the year begins in the spring (Exodus 12:2). While I would not think Glenn would question why Yahweh instructs his children to begin the year in the spring, he nevertheless proceeds to do just that. He cites the following commentary from an author named Godfrey Faussett, then later extolling his reasoning:

Godfrey Faussett, author of *Sacred Chronology*, also believed that the year originally started in the fall, and says this about the idea of originally starting the year from the spring:

It is worthy of notice too that even in one sacred institution the old order of the year was of necessity maintained; for if the Sabbatical year had commenced otherwise than in the Autumn, the understood relation between the seed not sown and the harvest not reaped, would have been destroyed. The year of Jubile too was proclaimed by the trumpet in the seventh month. However poetical imagination may point to the spring as the infancy of the World; if by spring is meant the vernal equinox, **nature herself** seems to repudiate an order of things which cuts off the seed time from the harvest. Even the winter solstice falls too late by many weeks for that actual spring, which is properly indicated by the earliest germs of annual vegetation.

Faussett makes several good points. For instance, how can we think of dividing the year between seed time and harvest, when the most natural division of the year would be at the time of the harvest? **Logic and nature itself seem to mitigate against the idea of starting the year after seed time (the spring equinox).**¹

Here we essentially observe Glenn subtly denying Scripture in favor of “logic and nature.” The questions I would ask are “*Whose* logic mitigates again starting the year in the spring?” and “Who are *we* to decide when the ‘natural division of the year’ is?”

Let’s compare Glenn’s remark above with what Yahweh’s Word says:

Glenn Moore: “Logic and nature itself seem to mitigate against the idea of starting the year after seed time (the spring equinox).”

Yahweh: “**This month [Abib] shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.**”

It is up to us to choose whether to believe Glenn’s philosophical view as to when he personally believes the year should begin or to believe **Yahweh**, the Creator of the universe when He tells us it begins in the spring. As we will see shortly, there is *another* perspective on when the “natural division of the year” is, and this division can make the difference as to whether the people are blessed ... or not.

¹ Ibid.

Of course, Glenn does believe he has Scriptural support for his position. He continues with his commentary as follows:

But we have more definite statements from Scripture, such that there is solid evidence for the idea that the fall was considered both the beginning and the ending of the year:

And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. (Exodus 23:16)

And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. (Exodus 34:22)

Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in Yahweh your Elohim: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. (Joel 2:23)

These texts are plainly stating that the end of the year is ingathering--an event associated with the fall harvest in preparation for the feast of Tabernacles. This places the end of the year just before the month of Tishri, even though in the religious calendar the beginning of the year is in the month of Nisan (also called Abib).²

I would hardly consider the above verses as proof texts validating when a year begins. First, we already have Yahweh's Word instructing us that the year begins in the spring. Secondly, the above verses in Exodus tell us that the year *ends* in the fall, but they do not state that the year *begins* in the fall. This is important. Third, "year's end" may be understood in more than one way. Just as a "fiscal year" can end at any time of the year, in the same way, an "agricultural year" ends when the last grains are harvested and stored. In my previous occupation as a farmer, it was generally understood that there is a "harvest year." Even though (at that time in my life) I officially recognized the New Year as beginning on January 1st, the "harvest year" had already begun in the fall with the sowing of winter wheat. We didn't maintain a "harvest calendar" because it wasn't something that needed to be officially tracked or otherwise recorded, and we certainly didn't consider October/November to be the "first month" of the year, even though that was the general time frame during which Illinois farmers sow winter wheat! Nevertheless, we knew that wheat was the first crop planted and (for us) it was the first crop harvested in early summer.

This same general understanding is expressed by the author of the "Calendars" article found in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*:

The festival calendars of the sources J and E are often cited in this context as indications that the year began in the autumn in preexilic times. The J material is found in Exod 34:18-24. There the first holiday (unleavened bread) is dated to the month of Abib (i.e., the first spring

² Ibid.

month); the festival of weeks is not dated other than by its association with the wheat harvest; but the “feast of ingathering” is to be observed at the “year’s end” (*tēqûpat haššānāh* [v 22]). The phrase here more literally means the “turn of the year” and clearly expresses the fact that at this point (this must be in autumn) the year has reached a significant juncture. In E (Exod 23:10-17) similar information appears, but the “feast of ingathering” is located “at the end of the year” (*bēṣēṭ haššānāh* [v 16]). Hence, in the two “epic” sources, the list begins with a vernal and concludes with an autumnal holiday (cf. also Deut 16:1-17). From the two Hebrew expressions just quoted, a number of scholars have inferred that the year ended in the autumn. Here, however, it should be observed that one is dealing with an agricultural cycle which is not necessarily the same as a calendar year. It is obvious that the agricultural year concludes with the fall harvest, but whether one may deduce from that fact that a calendrical year did as well is quite another question. It seems safer to say with D. J. A. Clines: “... references to the ‘end’ (*sēṭ*) or the ‘turn’ (*tēqûpah*) of the year in the autumn invariably have to do with the cycle of the agricultural year or of the festival calendar insofar as it is based on the agricultural seasons, and therefore they are irrelevant to the question of the beginning of the calendar year of months” (1974: 29).³

Again, as understood by the scholar who composed the “Calendars” article above, the “end of the year” expression found in Exodus 23:16 and Exodus 34:22 should *not* be understood as being the end of a calendar year, but rather the end of the cycle of the agricultural year. This is the way we have always understood this verse in spite of Glenn’s opposing interpretation.

We have seen that Glenn Moore presents a commentary by Godfrey Faussett as being more logical and, hence, supportive of a “fall-to-fall” calendar. As I mentioned earlier, there is *another* perspective on when the “natural division of the year” is, and I feel that this perspective is much more reasonable than the one offered by Glenn. Ronald L. Conte, Jr., in his web article entitled “Sabbatical Years Began in the Spring,” eloquently explains the problem encountered by those who reckoned the Sabbatical years from fall-to-fall:

When Sabbatical years were counted from the fall (late first century B.C. and thereafter), famine was often associated with the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. The reason is that the Sabbatical year prevented planting, **resulting in a meager harvest.** People tried to store up food to get them through the Sabbatical years, but the amount in storage was often insufficient.

When the Sabbatical year is counted as beginning in the spring, with the month of Nisan, the result is dramatically different. In the fall before the Sabbatical year begins, planting is permitted. When the Sabbatical year begins the following spring, the field cannot be harvested, but it is full of grain. And the Israelites were allowed to eat from the grainfield during the Sabbatical year. Sufficient grain is produced because the field was planted before the Sabbatical year began.

The following autumn, planting cannot occur because it is still the Sabbatical year, but **planting is unnecessary!** The grain crop from the previous spring could not be harvested and **so the grain would self-sow.** Just as occurs with wild plants, when the grain is not harvested, the ripe grain seed falls to the ground, **naturally sowing the next crop.** As a result, in the spring after the Sabbatical year has ended, there is again a full crop of grain in the field.

³ C.f., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, Doubleday, New York, NY, 1992, p. 817.

So, which makes more sense for an agricultural society, to count the Sabbatical years as beginning in the spring or the fall? When Sabbatical years are counted from the spring, a good harvest is probable. But when Sabbatical years are counted from the fall, a meager harvest is much more likely.⁴

I believe Mr. Conte succinctly explains the benefits of observing a spring-to-spring calendar, and speaking as one who has witnessed the “self-sowing” described by the above author, I completely concur with his reasoning.

⁴ From “Sabbatical Years Began in the Spring,” © 2003 by Ronald L. Conte Jr. This article may be read in its entirety by accessing the following URL: <http://www.biblicalchronology.com/sabbatical.htm>. Disclaimer: I do not necessarily agree with Mr. Conte’s Biblical chronology, but I do agree with his reasoning pertaining to the spring-to-spring calendar used by ancient Israel.