

Several are asking questions about the Karaite Calendar. This paper is a brief criticism of the Karaite Calendar.

1. The Karaite Calendar is an observed calendar which differs from the Calendar of the Second Temple in the following aspects:

- A. For most Karaites, observation of each month's new crescent must be observed from Jerusalem, or its surrounding area, in contrast to starting each month as the new crescent becomes visible in your own area.
- B. Determination of the first month of the year is primarily based upon the condition of the barley harvest in or around Jerusalem, in contrast to using the astronomical vernal equinox.

2. The Karaite Calendar claims to be the authentic and the original calendar of antiquity. Such a claim is not new. The Noah Calendar and the Calendar used by the Worldwide Church of God (prior to about 1995) also claim to be the authentic and original calendar of antiquity. But the question is: "Where is the **objective historical evidence** for these claims?" This paper will present some objective historical evidence which directly refutes the Karaite claim of using the barley harvest.

3. Maimonides, a famous Rabbi of circa 1150 to 1200 AD, argued hard against the Karaites. "The Teachings of Maimonides", by Jacob S. Minkin, copyright 1993 by Jason Aronson Inc. Northvale, New Jersey London, pages 36-37, quote: ". . . **he was confronted with a community of Jews torn by strife . . . Because of the old family quarrel between the traditionalists and the Bible literalists (or, as they came to be known, the Rabbanites and the Karaites), . . . The Babylonian Talmud was not more than 200 years old when rumblings of dissatisfaction with its minute rules and regulations made themselves heard on the part of Jews . . . But it was not until about the middle of the eighth century that, through one Anan ben David, a learned Jew of high station in Babylonia, the tiny voice of dissent rose to a clamorous demand to get back to the basic truths of the 'old-time religion of the Bible' without the interpretation of the Rabbis. . . . a new sect, almost a new religion, calling itself Karaite, or the 'Religion of the Bible', came into existence with adherents in Palestine, Persia, Syria, Babylon, and Egypt. . . . The yoke of the Law was not made easier but harder to bear. Rejecting the old interpretation of the Rabbis, they were drinking their own legal brew instead. The Sabbath ceased to be an oneg, a joyful day, and became a gloomy and dismal day; no light was permitted on Friday night; no warm food on the Sabbath; prisoner-like, one had to keep himself indoors all day long. Stern and rigorous was the law of the Karaites; feast-days were reduced, the number of fast days was raised. **Drastic changes were made in the synagogue ritual, in the calendar, in the marriage and divorce laws, etc. . . .** When Moses Maimonides arrived at Fostat, the Rabbanites and Karaites were to all intents and purposes two separate and distinct communities. There was no religious**

accord between them, no social relations, not even trade or business dealings with each other. There was no intermarriage between members of the two groups; they would not circumcise each other's children, they would not eat at the same tables; . . . "

Note that this Rabbinic criticism of the Karaites says that the Karaites dramatically changed "the calendar". However, the context is not the Lunar Calendar determining the Holy Days, but a synagogue/social calendar determining rituals, ceremonies, and events.

The primary point is that the Karaite Calendar is the calendar system of a religious group that began circa 850 AD. Most reading this criticism will not suggest that Christians should start living lifestyles just like the Karaite Jews, nor start to adhere to all of their other religious tenets regarding the Sabbath, etcetera. Therefore, when discussing the Karaite Calendar, we are singling out one and only one tenet of their religion. In essence, this is saying that they are "right" in this one tenet, and "wrong" in nearly all of the other tenets of their religion.

This is not a minor point. As their calendar is a single tenet of a religious movement having a known starting point, 700 years (35 generations) after the Second Temple, it is mandatory that any claims made regarding their calendar's antiquity must be substantiated by objective historical evidence, written prior to 800 AD, and further, such evidence must assert that their calendar was actually used by the priests of the Temple Era in determining the Holy Days for Israel. I am unaware of any such historical evidence.

When the website "Karaite Korner" was asked to provide any historical evidence, and to answer the criticisms given within this paper, others and myself received no reply, none at all.

4. Evidence against the Karaite Calendar's antiquity claim: the reader needs to understand that it will not be possible to go to an ancient source and say: "Hear, read this, this directly says that they did not use the barley harvest as the primary basis for determining the first month of the year." Why? Because if they actually never used any such criteria, then they would have no reasons to even write about it. Thus, the absence of finding any documentation is actually significant evidence against the antiquity claim of the barley harvest criteria.

5. "The Talmud the Steinsaltz Edition", Volume XIV Tractate Ta'anit Part II, Copyright 1995 by Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications and Milta Books, ISBN 0-679-44398-3, pages 68 – 71: The topic is "when to sound an alarm". This section tells people to begin to fast in order to avert a natural crisis; in this case the lack of rainfall which would result in the crisis of crop failure. Certainly the lack of rainfall would affect the barley harvest, which would affect the Karaite Calendar's barley criteria. In fact, in years of severe drought the barley harvest could fail entirely. This would certainly be a crisis

situation, if the barley harvest were used as the primary criteria for determining the first month. However, when you read the instructions, it is obvious that the crop failures did not effect the determination of the Holy Days. This section tells us that the Holy Days were known, but it was the harvest which was in question.

Quote: **"Even if the first and second rainfalls have failed to arrive on time, it is not yet time to begin fasting, . . . But if the third rainfall fails to arrive, it is time to begin observing the series of fasts decreed in times of drought. . . . But if the crops have dried up completely, so that there is no longer any chance of saving them, there is no purpose in sounding the alarm, for any prayers offered in this case would be considered prayer said in vain. . . . [the topic turns to discussing droughts effecting trees] . . . For trees close to Pesah. If Pesah is approaching and the rain has not fallen in sufficient quantities for the trees, fasts are proclaimed and special prayers are recited until there is adequate rain. Similarly if Sukkot is approaching and the storage cisterns contain little water, fasts must be observed until there is adequate rainfall."** (read it online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/t04/taa08.htm> .)

Note that Pesah is approaching. For Passover to be approaching, it's date must have already been established. Yet the situation is that of a drought. The lack of having a barley harvest had no effect in their determination of the first month, nor the future date of Passover.

Inversely, these ancient writers obviously thought about and wrote about the absence of rainfall, which naturally affects the timing, quality, and existence of the barley harvest. If this harvest were a criterion for determining the calendar, they certainly had the opportunity to write something about its impact on the calendar, and specify what to do when the barley harvest failed or was delayed. But, they did not write about the barley harvest's effect on the calendar. This demonstrates that the Karaite's claim, that the barley harvest affects the calendar, was not an important topic to even write about. This absence of explanation demonstrates that the barley harvest was not used to affect the calendar.

6. Page 75 - 76, Quote: **"On one occasion all Israel went up to Jerusalem for one of the Pilgrim Festivals, and there was not enough water in the city for everyone to drink. . . . The Roman official scoffed at Nakdimon, saying: 'All year long, rain has not fallen, and yet you still think that rain will fall now before the day is over?' . . . Nakdimon said to God: 'Master of the Universe! You know full well that I made the agreement with the Roman official, I did not act for my own personal honor, nor did I act for the honor of my father's house. Rather I acted for Your honor, O God, so that water would be available for all the pilgrims who arrived in Jerusalem for the Festival. Cause it to rain now, so that Your holy Name is not desecrated. Immediately the sky became filled with clouds, and rain fell heavily until the twelve wells were filled with water and overflowed."**

Certainly a year's drought would have affected the barley harvest and all other non-astronomical natural circumstances. If the barley harvest effects the calendar and it is failing and not normal, then how could "all Israel" still know when to pilgrimage to Jerusalem to keep the Festivals?

The ancient writers were concerned with droughts and crop conditions, but they write as if they always knew when the festivals were to be held. In years of drought, in years in which the barley harvest is adversely affected, if the barley harvest were criteria for determining the calendar's postponements, then why are the ancient writers ignoring the much more important topic, writing only about rain and prayers, and not about the effected calendar and the effected dates for the Holy Days? The only possible answer is that the barley harvest **was not** a criterion for the calendar; therefore there was nothing to write about.

7. There is an important footnote on page 258 in Alfred Edersheim's book: "*The Temple its Ministry and Services*", Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, Reprinted, March 1975. Chapter XIII of the book is titled: "The Feast of Unleavened Bread and the day of Pentecost". It is about harvesting the first-fruit barley from an ordinary cultivated field in the Kidron Valley. It was done by a delegation from the Temple sent out specifically for that purpose. The footnote reads:

"Mishnah, Menach. viii. 1, 2. The field was to be ploughed in the autumn, and sowed seventy days before the Passover."

This is very important! It demonstrates that they knew how to determine the next Passover without a barley harvest. Consider, how did they know 70 days ahead of time when the next Passover was going to be, if determining this date required the yet-to-be-planted barley to ripen? How would they know if the future barley harvest would actually be ripe enough for the future Passover date?

Also, theoretically, sowing barley seventy (70) days before Passover would cause the barley, depending upon the barley species, to be about nineteen (19) days from full maturity, not ripe yet.

This quote has the following ramifications:

(a) It would tend to ensure the heads of the Passover barley crop would have kernels which would be pasty-firm to dry.

(b) It would enable the first-fruit of the barley crop to be cut on the first day after the weekly Sabbath after Passover, *regardless* which day it fell upon within the seven Days of Unleavened Bread. The barley would only get closer to full maturity toward the end of the feast-week.

(c) Cutting the first-fruit barley would *always* be in accordance with Deuteronomy 16:9 “begin to count seven weeks from the time when you put the sickle to the grain.”, whenever that happens to be.

(d) In order to count seventy (70) days to the next Passover, they had to be able to determine when the next New Year would begin without a barley harvest. Obviously, their yet-to-be-planted barley harvest was not a criterion for making that determination. The above footnote tends to show that barley **was not, and is not**, a determinate for beginning the New Year.

8. Noah, while afloat in his ark could not observe any barley harvest. Yet it is manifest that Noah was still able to accurately record months and days throughout the year, even though he had no witness of barley ripening in Jerusalem.

9. Other Lessor Objections:

- A. Moses and the Exodus calendar events were measured from Egypt, not Jerusalem. The barley harvest in Jerusalem was not a criterion for them.
- B. Moses and Israel in the desert for 40 years: is it being claimed that they were using the wrong calendar because they could not observe the Jerusalem barley harvest or new crescents, and therefore could not know the true first month of the year and first days of the months?
- C. Where in Genesis 1:14 is the Jerusalem barley harvest and new crescents over Jerusalem decreed to be the criteria for determining the appointed times?
- D. Prior to modern communications, observers of YHWH's appointed times in lands outside of Jerusalem, like China, America, and Europe, are without hope of using the Karaite Calendar.
- E. Not all Karaites use the barley harvest calendar. Other Karaites use the observed calendar, with the astronomical equinox as the criteria for determining the seasons.
- F. The Observed Calendar Is The Same As Was Used In 2180 BC: “The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible”, Vol. 1, 1962, Abingdon Press, “Calendar”, Page 484, quote: **“Calendars combining both solar and lunar reckoning were, however, widely used throughout the Near East even in very ancient times, and the Hebrews probably always had a lunar-solar calendar. . . . A lunar-solar calendar was adopted by the first Babylonian dynasty (ca. 1830-1550 B.C.), and became effective in Assyria during the first millennium B.C. The Babylonians gave Semitic names to the months, but in most other respects this calendar was substantially the Sumerian calendar of Nippur as observed in the third dynasty of Ur (ca. 2180–1960). This calendar reckoned the year from one vernal equinox to the next, while counting months from new moon to new moon, with an added month when this was needed to**

make up the discrepancy. These lunar months were of thirty days length except when a new moon occurred on the thirtieth day, in which case this would become the first day of the new month.”

Notice that the Lunar Calendar of Ur computes the years from equinox to equinox, and adds a 13th month when needed. Thus, the only difference between the calendar of Ur, or any other similar calendar of any other land, and the observed calendar of Ezra are:

- 1) the definition of when a day begins,
- 2) the definition of the circuit of the year, and
- 3) the specific rules to employ upon “close-calls”.

Consider, if there were no years with close-calls, then the calendar of 2180 BC would yield the exact same calendar as the observed calendar of the Second Temple Era, 70 AD.

10. The preponderance of evidence converges upon the same conclusion: the use of the barley harvest as criteria for the calendar is an invention. Of course there are logical reasons and Biblical scriptures which can be used to "make the case" for its use. But this logic is still human reasoning, when it is compared to the calendar that was actually used by the priests of the Second Temple as the one official calendar of Israel and the Temple's Holy Day ceremonies.

11. There are many different types of barley; all ripen at different times of the year. And, of course, there are many other issues along this line of debate. Be sure and read the information at this website: <http://www.truthofyahweh.org/barl2002.html> .

12. In 2008 a controversy erupted regarding the “Avi-ness” of the barley stalks around Jerusalem. To solve the controversy two prominent leaders did their own fact-finding trips near and around Jerusalem. They made a statistical analysis of the ripeness of the barley stalks. This is how they concluded about what they found:

“We took an honest random sampling of 50 stalks from the field and found that out of those, only 40% were Aviv, **4% were harvest ripe**, and 56% were less than Aviv. Now mind you, IF these results had been found at the beginning of the new biblical month, it would have been a completely different story, but as it was, our study of this barley field was being done on the eleventh (11th) of the new biblical month (Wednesday March 19, 2008), **and in our opinion**, this small quantity of Aviv barley found in the middle of the month **does not justify** changing the decision made at the beginning of the month, on March 7th that we must add another month—a 13th month to the year.” (emphasis mine)

This controversy demonstrates just how subjective it is to use barley-ripeness as a determiner for the calendar. Who says that 4% harvest ready stalks is too small of a

percentage? Where in the Bible does it say anything about 4% cutoffs? The fact is you do not need that many ripe barley stalks to glean enough grains to make the two loaves for the wave-offering. Such a small amount of grains can easily be argued to exist within the 4% of harvest-ready barley stalks. Perhaps the barley was in fact ready, but they still decided otherwise.

The real situation is that in March of 2008 people could look out their windows and see that it was way too early to start the next year. The lunar month in March started in winter, and winter conditions are what people saw. Yet even so, it was still found that 4% of the barley was ready to be harvested. What if there were unusual sunlight conditions and they found 10% ripe? Would they declare the New Year then, even in winter? What about 49.9% ripe?

Consider carefully at what really happened. They tried to base the New Year on the randomness of finding ripened barley, and then even when finding 4% ready for harvest they still did not declare the New Year, only because they then decided to say that the barley harvest has to be more than 4%. All this is very subjective. Why not just say that the New Year will be declared when we “feel” like declaring it? You can imagine how many people will argue about such an arbitrary “ruling”. But such “rulings” demonstrate my point about barley. The entire premise of using barley is nothing more than “man-made rulings” that are ultimately expressed in the arbitrary “feelings” of its administrators.

In Conclusion:

The Karaites’ claim to have the official calendar of antiquity, but yet fail to provide any objective historical evidence to substantiate their claim. Conversely, there is significant objective historical evidence to refute their claim.

Consider, we can find significant objective historical evidence that the observed lunar calendar was officially used from at least 2180 B.C. If you are looking for an official calendar of antiquity, certainly 2180 B.C. would qualify as a candidate.

Consider, we can demonstrate through the ancient records of astronomical sightings that the priests of the Second Temple used the same Sumerian observed calendar. Other historical records demonstrate that the same observed calendar was used from Ezra until at least 163 AD.

Babylonian and Palestinian Calendar Authorities Diverging Circa 163 AD: “The Jewish Encyclopedia”, Vol.3, 1901, 1910, p. 500, quote: **“Under the patriarchate of Simon III (140 – 163 AD) a great quarrel arose concerning the feast-days and the leap-year, which threatened to cause a permanent schism between the Babylonian and the Palestinian communities – a result which was only averted by the exercise of much diplomacy.”**

In 163 A.D. there appears to be a significant divergence in the rules for calendar determinations. **Up until that time** both eastern and western communities were still using **the same observed calendar**, they had no significant disputes. But in 163 A.D. either the Babylonian or the Palestinian calendar authorities tried to deviate from the ancient rules. Other evidence shows that it was the Rabbinical line of Palestinian authorities which began to add extra rules to the calendar. By trying to implement their new rules they caused a major schism with the eastern communities, which obviously refused to accept their changes. Notice that the split was between eastern and western communities, and therefore between Rabbinical and non-Rabbinical academies.

This evidence also demonstrates that Christian communities in the east were still following the unchanged observed lunar calendar as late as 163 AD, that is, seven generations of Christians lived and died using the ancient observed lunar calendar.

If you are looking for an official calendar of Israel, certainly the ancient observed lunar calendar used by the priest of the Second Temple would qualify as a candidate.

In Service To The Brethren,
Wayne L. Atchison, an Elder in the Body of the Messiah

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