

Deciphering the importance of December 25

Is it more than the date?

On Faith, by Brent Emery

Every year around Dec. 25, there arises an inevitable focus on the birth date of Yeshua (Jesus) by those within mainline denominations. During my formative years, I assumed that if the culture celebrated Yeshua's birth on Dec. 25, then that must be the date that it occurred. As I researched the birth date of Yeshua on a more in-depth level, it became apparent that Dec. 25 was not only an arbitrary date, but one that could not be Biblically sustained.

I readily admit there is no "smoking gun" verse that says, "Yeshua was born on the 14th day of the third month," but I do believe that if we piece together the evidence from the Bible, we can arrive at a more likely time for Yeshua's birth. I want to state my presuppositions about the Bible and Yeshua up front.

I believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of G-d from Genesis to Revelation. I believe that Yeshua was Jewish in His ethnicity and must be understood within the culture of the First Century. I believe that Yeshua is the incarnation of Adonai/YHVH. Finally, I believe that "the Bible" that Yeshua read, studied, and followed was the Hebrew Scripture and that the key to unlocking the birthdate of Yeshua lies within these Hebrew Scriptures.

In order to trace the birthdate of Yeshua, we will need to start in Luke 1 and work our way back.

1. First, according to Luke 1:5, Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth, is a priest and he is listed in the order of Abiyah. Elizabeth is a cousin to Miriam, the mother of Yeshua.

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2. Second, in 1 Chronicles 24:1- 18, King David divides the priestly descendants of Aaron into 24 orders.
3. Thirdly, the assignment of the priests is given to them in 1 Chronicles 28:11-13 by King David. Fourth, each priest would serve in Jerusalem for one week according to 1 Chronicles 9:25. Fifth, the week of service in the Temple would start on the Sabbath and end on the following Sabbath according to 2 Chronicles 23:8.
4. Lastly, we know that there are three pilgrim "moedim" (feasts) in which every male is required to appear "before the L-rd" (Deut 16:16). These three feasts are Unleavened Bread (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot (Booths). For a complete listing of all the Appointed Times, read Leviticus 23.

With the aforementioned texts governing our inquiry, 'we are now ready to find the timing of Yeshua's birth. The Hebrew calendar is lunar-based, with each month having either 29 or 30 days for a total of 51 weeks in a normal year. A leap month (Adar II) is added every second or third year to recalibrate the calendar.

Most likely, the determination of one's order was determined by the casting of lots, although this is speculative. If we take the 24 orders, plus three pilgrim feasts, we have 27 weeks, leaving us with another 24 weeks, in which case each order would serve twice every year. These numbers are confirmed by the Mishnah. We know that the order of Abiyah (Zechariah's order) is the eighth order, according to 1 Chronicles 24.

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Two of the three pilgrim feasts occur before or during the eight weeks and thus the order of Abiyah would not serve until the 10th week.

This timing would mean we are into the second Sabbath of the month Sivan (which would start on the 12th and end on the 18th). We must now return to the book of Luke and focus our attention on chapter one. Verses 23-24 state, "When the time service was complete, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion."

Thus, Elizabeth conceives on the third week of Sivan (between the 19th and the 25th). If we take a standard 40-week pregnancy as the norm, then Yochanan the Immerser (John the Baptizer) would have been born on or about the 15th of Nisan, which coincides with the feast of Passover. Now that we have the date of Yochanan's birth, we can calculate the time of Yeshua's birth.

According to Luke 1:26-33, Miriam visits her cousin Elizabeth in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. This text also reveals that Miriam becomes pregnant with Yeshua six months after her cousin Elizabeth. If Yochanan is conceived on Sivan 25, then Yeshua is conceived on Chislev 25.

The 25th of Chislev just happens to be the start of the festival of Hanukkah, which commemorates the rededication of the Temple following the Maccabean Revolt. If we count 40 weeks from Chislev 25, we arrive at Tishri 15 as the day of Yeshua's birth, which just so happens to be the feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles/Booths).

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If our calculations are accurate, then the forerunner of Messiah was born on Passover, Yeshua was conceived on Hanukkah and born on Sukkot. Now, all of this could just be coincidental, but what is the likelihood that the significant births of both Yochanan and the even more important birth of Yeshua would occur on feasts found in the Hebrew Scripture?

I truly believe that the festivals of Leviticus 23 are significant not only for the past but for the future as well. Those who want to understand the calendar of G-d and the timetable He has for humanity might, in light of the evidence presented, want to rethink the idea of using the Gregorian calendar and once again align themselves with the Biblical calendar.

Why should those who want to commemorate the birth of Yeshua do so on the arbitrary day of December 25 when the evidence from the Scripture indicates that the dates were already laid out for us by the Holy One Himself in the Scriptures He gave us? Yeshua's birth – Pope Gregory or Hebrew Scripture – you decide.

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