

Messiah Born in the Spring? An Exegetical Argument

by
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This being the season of *Sukkot*, I was reminded of a paper I wrote back in 1997 that sought to show that Yeshua was born in the Spring – not during *Sukkot*, when many people would like to believe he was born. I confess that over the years, most people who have read my paper first yawned and then ignored it, preferring to hold to their longstanding conviction. I even received the same indifferent response from Bible scholars, and I would have conceded the matter long ago, except that none of the scholars could ever show me why my exegesis of the Scriptures or my logic was incorrect. So, with renewed hope that someone will either acknowledge that I am right, or show once and for all that I am wrong, I herewith present my paper to the members of Ohev Yisrael. I concede that it is technical and somewhat dry to read, but please do try to follow its logic and let me know your opinion.

The New King James Version translates Luke 1:26-27 as follows:

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Miriam.”

The unmodified phrase¹ “in the <ordinal number, eg. 1st, 2nd, etc.> month” appears numerous times in the *Tanakh*,² and only once in the Scriptures of the *Brit Chadasha*. Since in every one of its Hebrew occurrences it refers to a numbered month of the biblical calendar, it is reasonable to suppose that its meaning in the Greek Scriptures is the same, and that verse 26 in Luke 1 is saying that Gabriel visited Miriam in the sixth month of the calendar year.

While most commentaries are silent on the matter, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries expresses an opposing view. Seemingly because verse 24 states: “Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months...,” Leon Morris interprets verse 26 to mean the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy -- not the sixth month of the year as I believe it means.³

Although it is true from verse 36 that it was also Elizabeth’s sixth month of pregnancy, that is not the meaning of verse 26. If it were, verse 26 would have been rendered (in the Greek) in the same manner as verse 36 -- in the possessive case -- eg., “in her sixth month” or “in the sixth

¹ “unmodified” meaning that it stands alone, and is not accompanied by either an adjective or an explanatory phrase.

² Acronym for the Hebrew Scriptures.

³ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Revised edition, p. 80, (Leicester, England / Grand Rapids, Michigan: Intervarsity Press / William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).

month of her.” I therefore conclude that it was both – the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy and also the sixth month of the year.

Scripture states that Miriam began her journey to visit Elizabeth “with haste” (Luke 1:39) when she learned from Gabriel that she (Elizabeth) was six months pregnant; but the point that is often lost is that it was also the sixth month of the year. The reason for the “haste” was probably that Elizabeth was not only six months pregnant, but was also “in her old age” (verse 36), and Miriam wanted to be with her when she gave birth. When Miriam arrived, Elizabeth had not yet given birth, and she stayed with Elizabeth for “about three months” (verse 56), the time that would have carried her through a normal pregnancy.

A likely assumption is that Miriam was impregnated by the Holy Spirit immediately upon Gabriel leaving her (in the sixth month of the year), so she would have already been pregnant when she arrived at Elizabeth’s home (verses 40-44). This would be consistent with Miriam’s conversation with Elizabeth in verses 41-44:

“And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Miriam, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! "But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? "For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.”

Assuming Miriam had a normal nine month pregnancy, in a twelve-month year, Yeshua’s birth would have fallen in the third biblical month -- *Sivan* on the Rabbinical calendar. *Sivan* is the month in which *Shavuot* occurs, and it is in the Spring. In the less likely case that it was a leap year with 13 months, Yeshua’s birth would have fallen in *Iyyar*, a month earlier, but it would still have been in the Spring.

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