

The Jewish Calendar

The Jewish Year and its Festivals and Fasts

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1 - Equinoxes and solstices.

The earth revolves around the sun. The sun, from the perspective of the observer on the earth, appears to move among the stars. The apparent movement of the sun is on a path called the “ecliptic”. The equator and the ecliptic meet at an angle of 23.5 degrees; this point at which they meet are the equinoxes [a time of equal night and day]. Where the sun is at its maximum declination north + 23.5 degrees this is called the summer solstice for the northern hemisphere, Where the sun is at its maximum declination south + 23.5 degrees this is called the winter solstice for the southern hemisphere. These equinoxes and solstices set the seasons of the year.

The equinox where the sun moves from the south of the equator to the north of the equator is called the vernal/Spring equinox; March 20-21 each year. This time serves for a fundamental reference point for the fixing of the stars.

The equinox where the sun moves from the north of the equator to the south of the equator is called the autumnal equinox; September 23 each year.

2 - Seasons.

The lengths of the different seasons are unequal because of the changing velocity of the earth in its elliptical orbit during the year. The earth is closest to the sun [perihelion] about January 2 and is moving faster then than it does mid-year. So the northern winter and autumn are shorter than summer and spring.

The approximate duration of the seasons are as follows:

Northern Hemisphere	Southern Hemisphere	Length	Average Beginning
Spring	Autumn	92 days 20 hrs	Mar 21
Summer	Winter	93 days 14 hrs	June 21
Autumn	Spring	89 days 19 hrs	Sept 23
Winter	Summer	89 days 1 hr	Dec 22

3 - Lunar calendar.

The year was divided into 12 months of 29.5 days, making a total of 354. The accurate figure was that this made up a year of 354.367056 days and the figure 0.367056 meant that 11.012 days had to be added to the calendar every 30 years. With this addition a calendar very accurate to the moon was attained.

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4 - Solar Calendar [Julian]

Following the rotation of the earth around the sun this made for a year of 364.2422 days. The figure 0.2422 meant that it was necessary the addition of an extra day every fourth year [leap year]. The calendar's accuracy was measured by how well it fitted with the two equinoxes and the 2 solstices. The calendar was considered very accurate if the equinoxes fell on or about the same day each year.

5 - Lunisolar Calendar [Jewish].

This is a calendar which tries to keep the lengths of the lunar months and the tropical year in harmony by using periodic adjustments. The lunar month of 29.5 days is made into a 29 day or 30 day month alternately. Twelve of these gives 354 days. Additional months are added at times to bring the number of calendar days to the number of days in a solar year. This was normally done by adding a 13th lunar month every 2 or 3 years. This is the form of the Jewish calendar.

6 - The Jewish Calendar

This calendar uses names which are derived from the Babylonian.

[a] The use of intercalation was necessary 7 times in nineteen years, so as to bring the month Nisan into phase with the Spring equinox and the month Tishri into phase with the autumn equinox.

[b] The Civil Year and the Sacred Year. The Hebrews had two ways of making the New Year [Rosh Hashanah – the head of the Year]. The Lord had told Moses [Exodus 12.2] that the first month of the year was Nisan. But the Jewish New Year is in Autumn in Tishri. This indicates that there was a civil year, which began in Tishri around the autumn equinox, and a religious year in Nisan in the Spring. [This information is important in fixing the dates of certain kings in the Old Testament; as to when they dated the beginning of their reigns.] It is important in Jeremiah 36.22 to note that the Tishri-Tishri year was used; and also the “ninth” month would be in winter - Kislev [November/December]; not in Sivan [May/June].

The following table is taken from La Sor, OTS page 291, in the midst of a chapter on the Chronological Puzzle concerning the dating of the kings and their years of accession and their years of death.

Hebrew	Babylonian	Approximate Equivalent [Northern Hemisphere]	Sacred Year	Civil Year
Nisan	Nisanu	Mar/Apr	1 st	7 th
Iyyar	Ayaru	Apr/May	2 nd	8 th
Sivan	Siwanu	May/June	3 rd	9 th
Tammuz	Du'uzu	Jun/Jul	4 th	10 th
Ab	Abu	Jul/Aug	5 th	11 th
Elul	Elulu/Ululu	Aug/Sep	6 th	12 th
Tishri	Tisritu	Sep/Oct	7 th	1 st
[Mar]hesvan	[W]arah-samnu	Oct/Nov	8 th	2 nd
Kislev	Kisilwu	Nov/Dec	9 th	3 rd
Tebet	Tebitu	Dec/Jan	10 th	4 th
Shebat	Sabatu	Jan/Feb	11 th	5 th
Adar	Addaru	Feb/Mar	12 th	6 th

Sources: LaSor, Old Testament Survey, page 288ff; Art. “Calendar” – Collier's Encyclopaedia vol 5/138-146
 Art. “Time” – CE vol 22/322, 20/561 ;Edersheim, Alfred, The Temple 200-207

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[Veadar]

[Intercalary Month]

7 - The Festive Days of the Jewish Year

After Edersheim and Hastings here is the Jewish calendar and the various festive days

Nisan – Spring Equinox, end of March or the beginning of April

- I New Moon
- 14 Preparation for the **Passover** and the Paschal Sacrifice
- 15 First Day of the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**
- 16 Waving of the first ripe Omer
- 21 Close of Passover

Iyyar

- I New Moon
- 15 “Second”, or “little” Passover.
- 17 Lag-le-Omer, or the 33rd day in Omer, ie the presentation of the first ripe sheaf offered on the 2nd day of Passover, or the 15th Nisan.

Sivan

- I New Moon
- 6 **Feast of Pentecost** [or Feast of Weeks] – 7 weeks or 50 days after the beginning of Passover, when the two loaves of the first ripe wheat were “waved”. [also the time for the commemoration of the giving of the Law]

Tammuz

- I New Moon
- 18 Fast - the taking of Jerusalem [on the 9th by Nebuchanezzar and on the 15th by Titus]. If the 17th occurred on a Sabbath, the Fast is kept on the day following.

Ab

- I New Moon
- 9 Fast - [threefold] destruction of the Temple.

Elul

- I New Moon

Tishri – Beginning of the Civil Year

- 1-2 New Year’s Feast – Feast of Trumpets
- 3 Fast for the murder of Gediliah
- 10 **Day of Atonement** – great Fast
- 15 **Feast of Tabernacles** until the 15th

Marchesvan

- I New Moon

Kislev

- I New Moon
- 25 Feast of the Dedication of the Temple [Candles the Restoration of the Temple after the victory gained by Judas Maccabeus [BC 148] over the Syrians.

Tebet

- I New Moon
- 10 Fast on account of the siege of Jerusalem

Shebat

- I New moon

Adar

- I New moon

Sources: LaSor, Old Testament Survey, page 288ff; Art. “Calendar” – Collier’s Encyclopaedia vol 5/138-146
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- 13 Fast of Esther
14 Purim, or the feast of Haman

8 - The Feasts and Fasts as found in the Bible.

A- Lunar Feasts

Feasts that were connected to the Sabbath. Every 7th day was a Sabbath. Every 7th month was a sacred month. Every 7th year a sabbatical year. After 7x7 years was the Year of Jubilee.

[1] Sabbath – was connected with the new moon [Amos 8.5, 2 Kings 4.22-23, Isaiah 1.13, Hosea 2.11]. On the sabbath the daily morning and evening sacrifices were doubled. For the Sabbath law and how it should be marked see Exodus 16.23-30; 20.8; where it celebrates God's seventh day rest at Creation 23.12; 31.13-16; 34.21; 35.2; Leviticus 19.3; 23.3; 26.2; Numbers 15.32-36, 28.9-10; Deuteronomy 5.12-15 where it celebrates the redemption from Egypt.

[2] New Moon – the prophets gathered the people around them [2 Kings 4.23] and the number of offerings was increased [Ex 40.2, 27; Numbers 10.10; 28.11-15].

[3] The Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the sabbatical [7th] month [Tisri] Numbers 29.1-6; Leviticus 23.24-25.

[4] The sabbatical Year - the land was kept fallow, neither tilled nor reaped Exodus 23.10-11; Leviticus 25.1-7, 26.32-35

[5] The year of Jubilee – as the sabbatical year corresponded to the 7th day, so the fiftieth year corresponded to the 50th day [Pentecost] Leviticus 25.8-55, 27.17-24. The beginning of the Jubilee year was sounded by a trumpet on the Day of Atonement [Lev 25.9]. It was concerned with [a] the emancipation of slaves and [b] the return of mortgaged property to its hereditary owner.

B – Solar Feasts

Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles followed the seasons of the year [Exodus 23.14-17; 34.23; Deuteronomy 16.16.] They were annual pilgrimages when the men of Israel were to appear before the God of Israel.

[1] Passover – [followed by the feast of unleavened bread Mazzoth] celebrated the lamb eaten as a sacrifice for its blood to turn away the wrath of God as the Hebrews and the Egyptians felt his judgment.

[2] Pentecost - [also called the feast of weeks, the feast of harvest, the feast of firstfruits] lasted a single day.

[3] Tabernacles - [also called the feast of booths, feast of ingathering] it marked the completion of the harvest of fruit, oil and wine and historically it commemorated the wanderings in the wilderness. Sacrifices were more numerous at this time.

C – Minor Feasts

[1] Feast of Purim ["Mordecai's day" 2 Maccabees 15.36] commemorates the overthrow of Haman and of his plots against the Jews.

[2] Feast of the dedication of the Temple – instituted by Judas Maccabeus to commemorate the cleansing of the temple after it had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes.

[3] Feast of Wood offering. – the last of the occasions when a wood offering was brought for the use of the Temple. Nehemiah 10.34, 13.31.

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D - The Fasts

[I] The Day of Atonement [the day of coverings, Yom Kippur] – was the only fast day prescribed by Law. On this day of the offering of the sin offering by the high priest alone in simple clothing.

9 – The Bible References for the Feasts and the Fasts

So that we can see the Scripture portions to follow through these festivals and fasts the following synopsis is taken from Hastings Dictionary of the Bible. Vol I Art. Feasts and Fasts.

SYNOPSIS OF FEASTS AND FASTS.							
Group.	Feast or Fast.	Exodus.	Leviticus.	Numbers.	Deuteronomy.	References outside Pentateuch.	References in New Test.
I. <i>Connected with the Institution of the Sabbath.</i>	1. Sabbath . . .	16 ²³⁻³⁰ 20 ⁸ 23 ¹² 31 ¹³⁻¹⁶ 34 ²¹ 35 ²	19 ³ 23 ³ 26 ²	15 ³²⁻³⁶ 28 ⁹ 10	5 ¹²⁻¹⁵	1 S 20 ⁵ 6, 2 K 4 ²³ 11 ⁵⁻⁷ , Neh 8 ⁹⁻¹³ 10 ³¹ 13 ¹⁵⁻²² , Is 56 ²⁻⁶ 58 ¹² , Jer 17 ²⁰⁻²⁷ , Ezk 20 ¹²⁻¹⁶ , Hos 2 ¹³ , Am 8 ⁵	Mt 12 ⁹⁻¹³ , Mk 3 ¹⁻⁵ , Lk 6 ⁹⁻¹⁰ 13 ¹⁰⁻¹⁷ , Jn 5 ¹⁻¹⁶ , 9 ¹⁴⁻¹⁶
	2. New Moon . . .	40 ² 17	..	10 ¹⁰ 28 ¹¹⁻¹⁴ . 31 29 ⁶	..	1 S 20 ⁵ , Ps 81 ³ 4, Is 1 ¹³ 14, Am 8 ⁵ , 1 Mac 10 ³⁴	Col 2 ¹⁶ .
	3. Sabbatical Month, Feast of Trumpets	..	23 ²⁴ 25	29 ¹⁻⁶	..	Neh 8 ⁹ 10	..
	4. Sabbatical Year .	23 ¹⁰ 11	25 ¹⁻⁷ 20-22 26 ³²⁻³⁵	..	15 ¹⁻¹¹ 31 ⁹⁻¹³	2 Ch 36 ²¹ , Neh 10 ³¹ , Jer 34 ¹⁴ , 1 Mac 6 ⁵³	..
	5. Jubilee Year . .	..	25 ⁸⁻⁵⁵ 27 ¹⁷⁻²⁴	..	..	Is 61 ¹⁻² 63 ⁴ , Jer 34 ⁸ . 14. 15. 17 (?), Ezk 46 ¹⁷	Lk 4 ¹⁸⁻²¹ , Rev 21 ¹⁻⁵ .
II. <i>Three Historical Feasts.</i>	1. Passover and <i>Mazzóth</i>	12. 13 ¹⁻¹⁰ 23 ¹⁴⁻¹⁷ 34 ¹⁸ 25	23 ⁵⁻¹⁴	9 ²⁻¹⁴ 28 ¹⁶⁻²⁵ 33 ³	16 ¹⁻⁸ 16	Jos 5 ⁹ 10, 2 K 23 ²¹ 23, 2 Ch 30. 35, Ezr 6 ¹⁹ , Ezk 45 ²¹	Mt 26 ¹ 2, Mk 14 ¹ 12. 14. 16, Lk 22 ¹ 7. 8. 11. 13. 15, Jn 21 ³ 64 11 ⁵⁵ 12 ¹ 13 ¹ 18 ²⁸ 39 19 ¹⁴ , Acts 12 ⁴ , 1 Co 5 ⁶⁻⁸ .
	2. Pentecost . .	22 ²⁹ 23 ¹⁶ 19 34 ²² 26	23 ¹⁰⁻²¹	28 ²⁶⁻³¹	16 ⁹⁻¹²	2 Mac 12 ³²	Ac 2 ¹ 20 ¹⁶ , 1 Co 16 ⁸ .
	3. Tabernacles .	23 ¹⁶ 34 ²²	23 ³⁴⁻³⁶ 39-44	29 ¹²⁻⁴⁰	16 ¹³⁻¹⁵ 31 ¹⁰⁻¹³	1 K 8 ² 12 ³² , 2 Ch 5 ³ 7 ⁸ , Ezr 3 ⁴ 8 ¹⁴⁻¹⁷ , Zec 14 ¹⁶⁻¹⁹	Jn 7 ¹ 10 ²¹ .
III. <i>Minor Feasts.</i>	1. Purim . . . .	..	..	..	..	Est 9 ¹⁵⁻³² , 1 Mac 7 ⁴⁹ , 2 Mac 15 ³⁶	Jn 5 ¹ (?).
	2. Dedication or Lights	..	..	..	..	1 Mac 4 ⁵²⁻⁵⁹ , 2 Mac 10 ⁶ 7	Jn 10 ²² .
IV. <i>Fast.</i>	Day of Atonement .	30 ¹⁰	16. 23 ²⁷⁻³²	29 ⁷⁻¹¹	..	Zec 3 ⁹ (?), Sir 50 ^{5ff.}	Ac 27 ⁹ , He 2 ¹⁸ 414-16 51-10 619. 20 7 ²²⁻²⁸ 81-5 911-15.

Sources: LaSor, Old Testament Survey, page 288ff; Art. "Calendar" – Collier's Encyclopaedia vol 5/138-146
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