



BIBLICAL HERITAGE REPORT & DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

Creating a better, happier and safer world through research & the distribution of factual information about our religious & spiritual histories!

<http://www.biblicalheritage.org>

The Jewish Calendar

By Jim Myers

The calendar that governs most of the western world is the Gregorian calendar, which is based on the sun. A year is 365 days long, which is the time it takes the earth to make one full revolution around the sun. It is arranged so that the vernal equinox, the beginning of spring, with twelve hours of sunlight and twelve hours of darkness as the sun passes over the equator, will always fall on or around March 21. The longest day, the first day of summer, will occur on or around June 21 and the shortest day on or around December 21. The 365 days are divided into twelve months, usually thirty or thirty-one days long, except for February.

The Jewish calendar, with one interesting exception, is based on the moon rather than the sun. The word "month" comes from the word "moon." Each month begins with the appearance of the new moon, the first sliver of light after the moon has gone dark and last twenty-nine or thirty days, the time it takes for the moon to go through an entire cycle:

- (1) new
- (2) half
- (3) full
- (4) half
- (5) dark

The Jewish year consists of twelve months, alternating twenty-nine and thirty days in length, for a total of 354 days per year. This makes the Jewish year eleven days shorter than the sun-based calendar of 365 days. The following is a table of the Jewish months and their lengths.

#	Name of Month	Length in Days	Gregorian Equivalent
1	Nissan	30	March-April
2	Iyar	29	April-May
3	Sivan	30	May-June
4	Tammuz	29	June-July
5	Av	30	July-August
6	Elul	29	August-September
7	Tishri	30	September-October
8	Cheshvan	29-30	October-November
9	Kislev	30-29	November-December
10	Tevet	29	December-January
11	Shevat	30	January-February
12	Adar	29-30	February-March
13	Adar II	29	March-April

If the rabbis had simply allowed the months to alternate between 29 and 30 days in length, every year would be shorter than the Gregorian calendar. This would also mean that every year the Jewish holidays would arrive eleven days earlier. Jews would have birthdays 3 percent more often than other people. This is what happens in the Moslem calendar, which is also moon-based. A holiday that comes in the spring this year will fall in the winter five or six years from now, and in the autumn several years after that.

Passover, however, must come in the spring every year, so the rabbis worked out a very complicated

and ingenious system to make adjustments. About every third year (seven times in a nineteen-year cycle), to prevent Passover from coming before the vernal equinox (the first day of spring), a leap month (Adar II) is added in late winter, postponing Passover into the middle of April. Let me also point out that the Jewish day starts at sunset the previous evening, rather than at midnight.

In the fourth century, Hillel II established a fixed calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. This calendar, still in use, standardized the length of months and the addition of months over the course of a 19 year cycle, so that the lunar calendar realigns with the solar years. Adar II is added in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years of the cycle. The current cycle began in Jewish year 5758 (the year that began October 2, 1997).

As I pointed out above, the months of the Jewish calendar alternate between twenty-nine and thirty days, to coincide with the new moon. However, occasionally the length of the month is juggled by a day one way or the other, so that Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement with its twenty-four hour fast, never falls on a Friday or Sunday where it would bump up against the Sabbath, and so that the seventh day of the Sukkot festival in the fall never falls on a Sabbath, when prayers for a year of abundance and economic prosperity would be inappropriate.

Holidays for Jewish Year 5765

<i>Holiday</i>	<i>Date</i>
Rosh Hashanah	9/16/04
Yom Kippur	9/25/04
Sukkot	9/30/04
Shemini Atzeret	10/7/04
Simchat Torah	10/8/04
Hanukkah	12/8/04
Tu B'Shevat	1/25/05
Purim	3/25/05
Pesach (Passover)	4/24/05
Lag B'Omer	5/27/05
Shavu'ot	6/13/05
Tisha B'Av	8/14/05

Who chose the names of the Hebrew months? Jewish tradition states that following his return from exile in Babylonia, Ezra chose the names of the Hebrew months. The Hebrew bible does not refer to months by name; it only refers to months by number such as "the first month", "the eighth month", and so on. Ezra chose the Hebrew month names from the names of the months in the Babylonian calendar in Babylonia where the Jewish people had been exiled following the Babylonian conquest of the Kingdom of Judah in 587 BCE.

Notice that the days are fixed from the first month of Nissan to the seventh month of Tishri. Here is an interesting fact: from the first major Jewish holiday to the final major Jewish holiday in the Hebrew calendar the number of days are the same, meaning that the time from Passover in the month of Nissan - the first major Jewish holiday - to the final major Jewish holiday - the festival of Sukkot in the month of Tishri - is always the same, regardless of calendar calculations based on the moon.

According to the Hebrew bible, there was a civil Hebrew calendar from Genesis 1:1 (Creation) until Exodus 12:1. In Exodus 12:2, God said to Moses that because of the Passover event, the month that Passover occurred shall be the "head month", or first month of the Hebrew calendar, so since Passover occurred in the Spring, the month name that was later assigned by Ezra and identified with the Passover event was the month of Nissan. Nisanu was the first month of the Babylonian calendar. This creates the interesting situation of the Jewish New Year coming in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. However, it must be remembered that this is the religious calendar. It is the first month of the civil calendar.

The holidays of Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, Pesach and Shavu'ot would have been significant events in the lives of the members of the original Jesus Movement. Jewish holidays also are mentioned in the New Testament, but many Christian readers miss their significance because they are unfamiliar with the Jewish calendar. **BHC**

The Biblical Heritage Center Guiding Principle

Our respective systems of beliefs serve as the foundation for our security, the basis for our values and way of life, and the standard to which we turn when faced with important decisions. Such beliefs are primary factors in forming the way we see the world – our reality.

Living in a post September 11th era, we are now facing a challenge that hits at the very heart of our spiritual foundation – the potential deadly consequences of religious belief systems. History reveals that people who blindly follow dogmatic religious belief systems represent a threat to civilized society and the quality of life of their fellow man. Religious beliefs have been at the heart of countless conflicts ranging from interfamily fights to bloody wars between nations. This cycle of conflict has been repeated countless times throughout the history of mankind.

The Biblical Heritage Center has concluded that the only healthy solution to this situation is the voluntary incorporation of factual information by individuals who sincerely desire and search for spiritual truth. The result of the inclusion of factual information is that the belief system is expanded and the person becomes more open to examining their personal beliefs, as well as becoming more willing to change when error or incomplete information is discovered. Those who follow this principle become more compassionate and tolerant, thereby making our world a safer and happier place.

You are invited to become part of the Biblical Heritage journey by using our information, sharing it with others, sharing your information with us and financially supporting BHC's work. You are encouraged to make copies of the attached article and distribute it (or e-mail it) to as many as you wish. If you find any errors or feel that additional information should have been included, please send it to us so that we may review it and update the article if needed. We appreciate and value your input.

Please use the back of this page to make other comments or suggestions.

Please make check or money orders to – **Biblical Heritage Center.**

___ I will keep BHC in my daily prayers; enclosed is my gift of \$ _____.

___ I will help BHC by sending a monthly donations of \$ _____.

___ I will help BHC by sending a special "seed gift" of \$ _____.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

E-Mail Address _____

**Print this form and mail it to: BHC – P. O. Box 79 – Cleburne, TX 76033-0079.
If you prefer to make an online donation -- go to <http://www.biblicalheritage.org> .**