

Introducing the Jewish Calendar

TEXTS

Text 1



Exodus (*Shemot*) 12: 2

Text 2



Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 15: 2

[Midrash Aggadah to the book of Exodus; compiled 7-10th century in *Eretz Yisrael*]

“This month shall mark for you [the first of months]” (Exod. 12:2)... The Holy One Blessed Be He said to Israel: ‘Up until now, [the keeping of calendar time] was in My hands...from this point onwards, though, I give it over to your hands, your authority. If you designate [a new month], then it will be so. If you do not, then it will not. In any case, “This month shall be for you.”’

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שְׁמוֹת רֵבָה טו:ב

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם ... אָמַר לָהֶם הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: לְשַׁעֲבֵר הָיָה בְּיַדִּי ... אֲבָל מִכַּאֲן וְאֵילָךְ הָרִי
מְסוּרָה בְּיַדְכֶם, בְּרִשׁוֹתְכֶם, אִם אֲמַרְתֶּם הֵן הַזֶּה, אִם אֲמַרְתֶּם לֹא הַזֶּה. מִכָּל מְקוֹם יֵהָא “הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה
לָכֶם.”

Text 3



Professor Nahum Sarna, *The Calendar*

[1923–2005] Bible scholar. Taught at Gratz College in Philadelphia from 1951 to 1957, then appointed librarian of the Jewish Theological Seminary and member of its faculty. In 1965 he joined the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University]

A people newly freed must henceforth be sustained by its own native resources if it is to achieve true national independence, if it is no longer to be a passive object of history, subservient to a dominant but alien culture. A liberated people must evolve and stress its own distinctive autonomous culture, devise its own structures of national existence, and forge its own institutions. One of its first desiderata is the establishment of a uniform calendar. Such an institution is a powerful instrument of societal, cultural, and religious cohesion.

This being so, the Israelites are informed that the month of liberation, the springtime of nature and now the springtime of Israel as a free people, is henceforth to be the start of the year. “This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you.” We know nothing of Israel’s earlier calendar, but the phrasing unmistakably points to an innovation, to a break with the past.

[Sarna, N. *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel*. New York: Schocken Books, 1986, pp. 81]

Text 4



Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Sanctification of the New Month 5: 2-3

[(1135-1204) Acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (English: Moses Maimonides); philosopher and codifier in Spain and Egypt]

And this is a “law that was [handed] to Moshe at Sinai” that at a time when there is a Sanhedrin, it is set through visual sightings, while at a time when there is no Sanhedrin it is set using the calculations that we use today,

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5 without recourse to visual sightings.... And when did all the Jews begin to use these calculations? At the end of the period of the Talmudic Sages, at the time when Eretz Yisrael was destroyed leaving it without an established court. But in the days of the Mishnah, as well as in the days of the Talmudic Sages, up until the days of Abaye and Rava, [Jews around the world] relied on the setting [of the new moon] in Eretz Yisrael.

הַרְמַב"ם, מְשֻׁנָּה תוֹרָה, הַלְכוֹת קְדוּשַׁת הַחֹדֶשׁ פָּרָק ה': ב, ג

וְדָבָר זֶה הַלְכָה לְמִשְׁנֵה מְסִינֵי הוּא שֶׁבְּזִמְנֵי שִׁישׁ סְנֵהֲדָרִין קוֹבְעִין עַל הָרְאִיָּה וּבְזִמְנֵי שְׁאִין שָׁם סְנֵהֲדָרִין קוֹבְעִין עַל חֲשָׁבוֹן זֶה שְׁאֵנוּ מְחַשְׁבִּין בּוֹ הַיּוֹם וְאִין נִזְקְקִין לְרְאִיָּה ... וּמֵאַיִמְתִּי הִתְחִילוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחַשֵּׁב בְּחֲשָׁבוֹן זֶה מְסוּף חֲכָמֵי תַלְמוּד בְּעֵת שֶׁחֲרָבָה אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא נִשְׁאַר שָׁם בֵּית דִּין קְבוּעַ אֶבֶל בֵּימֵי חֲכָמֵי מְשֻׁנָּה וְכֵן בֵּימֵי חֲכָמֵי תַלְמוּד עַד יְמֵי אַבְיֵי וְרַבָּא עַל קְבִיעַת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיוּ סוֹמְכִין.

Text 5



Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 16: 1

Text 6



Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Sanctification of the New Month 4: 1

[(1135-1204) Acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (English: Moses Maimonides); philosopher and codifier in Spain and Egypt]

5 A leap year is one to which an additional month has been added. The additional month is always *Adar*, and such a year therefore contains two *Adars*: First *Adar* and Second *Adar*. Why is it that this month is added? To accommodate the season of spring, so that Passover should fall at the right time, as the verse states: 'Observe the month of spring to perform the Passover' (Deuteronomy 16:1). Without this additional month, Passover would sometimes fall in the summer and sometimes fall in the winter.

[Grandz, S. & Klein, H. *The Code of Maimonides, Hilkhos Kiddush HaChodesh, Book 3: The Book of Seasons*. Trans. Solomon Gandz and Hyman Klein). p. 186. New Haven. Copyright © 1961 Yale University Press. Used by permission]

הַרְמַב"ם, מְשַׁנֵּה תוֹרָה, הִלְכוֹת קְדוּשַׁת הַחֹדֶשׁ פָּרָק ד: א

שָׁנָה מְעַבְרֶת הִיא שָׁנָה שְׁמוֹסִיפִין בַּהּ חֹדֶשׁ. וְאֵין מוֹסִיפִין לְעוֹלָם אֶלָּא אֶדְר וְעוֹשִׁין אוֹתָהּ שָׁנָה שְׁנִי אֶדְרִין: אֶדְר רֵאשׁוֹן וְאֶדְר שְׁנִי. וּמִפְּנֵי מָה מוֹסִיפִין חֹדֶשׁ זֶה? מִפְּנֵי זְמַן הָאָבִיב, כְּדֵי שְׂיִהְיֶה הַפֶּסַח בְּאוֹתוֹ זְמַן, שְׁנַאֲמַר "שְׁמוֹר אֶת חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב" - שְׂיִהְיֶה חֹדֶשׁ זֶה בְּזְמַן הָאָבִיב. וְלוֹלָא הוֹסַפְתָּ הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה, הַפֶּסַח בָּא פְּעָמִים בִּימוֹת הַחֲמָה וּפְעָמִים בִּימוֹת הַגָּשְׁמִים.

Text 7



Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin* 42a

[Midrash Compilation of teachings of 3-6th century scholars in Babylonia (*Amoraim*); final redaction in the 6-7th centuries]

Rav Judah says: '[The blessing over the new moon should be recited as follows]: Blessed [are You, God, King of the universe,] who fashioned the heavens with His word, and all of their hosts by the breath of His mouth. He ordained a set time for them [to complete their orbits], from which they must not deviate. They are joyous and happy to fulfill the will of their Maker. They are faithful workers, and they orbit dependably. God ordered the moon to renew its glory [lit. 'glorious crown'] for the people [of Israel] who have been sustained from the womb. They too, will one day be renewed like the moon, and will exalt their Creator concerning His glorious majesty. Blessed are You, God, Who renews the months.'

תְּלִמוּד בְּבַלְי, מְסַכַּת סְנֵהֲדְרִין מִבַּ עֲמוּד א

דְּאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה: בְּרוּךְ [וְכוֹי] אֲשֶׁר בְּמֵאֲמָרוֹ בְּרָא שְׁחָקִים וּבְרוּיָת פִּיּוּ כָּל צְבָאָם חֵק וְזִמַּן נָתַן לָהֶם שְׁלֵא יִשְׁנוּ אֶת תְּפִקֵּדָם שְׁשִׁים וּשְׁמֹנִים לְעִשׂוֹת רְצוֹן קוֹנָם פּוֹעֲלֵי אֱמֶת שְׁפָעֲלָתָן אֱמֶת וְלִלְבָנָה אָמַר שֶׁתִּתְחַדֵּשׁ עֲטֻרַת תְּפִאֲרַת לְעֲמוּסֵי בְטָן שֶׁהֵן עֵתִידִין לְהִתְחַדֵּשׁ כְּמוֹתָהּ וּלְפֶאֶר לְיוֹצְרָם עַל שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מְלִכוּתוֹ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מְחַדֵּשׁ חֹדְשִׁים.

Text 8**Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Vision and the Way***

[Contemporary American Orthodox theologian and writer]

The solar New Year occurs in January; the lunar New Year generally comes in September or October. The solar day begins after midnight, the morning comes before the evening. In the Hebrew lunar calendar, evening precedes morning and the day begins with the night before. The solar calendar knows the variation of the length of days and the seasons of the sun's distance from the earth; the lunar calendar knows the rhythm of the moon's waxing and waning in a monthly cycle. Thus, dates and anniversaries and time locations reinforce the Jewish sense of otherness. Since Jews lived amid a Gentile majority, in the realm of physical space Jewish identity was "deviant." By contrast, the calendar provided a framework of Jewish time that enveloped the Jews. It was a "total institution" into which the Jew entered. In this way, personality and identity were reworked in light of Jewish memory and Jewish values. The calendar was a vehicle of Jewish solidarity. For example, on Shabbat, when non-Jews worked, Jews stayed home and went to their own institutions. When weekdays coincided with holy days, Jews withdrew from society and came together to share the Jewish past.

The Talmud contains stories of the coincidence of Jewish festivals with Roman mourning days and ways in which anti-Semites sought to exploit the contradiction in order to harm the Jews. In America, the Fourth of July falls, in one out of three years, during the three-week period when Jews mourn the darkest days of ancient loss of national independence. The effect is jarring, and it tends to lift traditional Jews out of the present. Through such juxtapositions, the Jewish calendar guides the Jews through history even as it guides each individual through life. As long as people live in the consciousness and rhythm of the Jewish calendar, they will go on living as Jews.

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This does not mean that the march of time in the Jewish community is paced by a totally different beat. Judaism's message is dialectical. Jews are distinctive yet are part of society. In this spirit, the Hebrew lunar calendar was intercalated so as not to tear loose from the seasons of the solar year. Passover was always to occur in the spring (see Exodus 13:4) and Sukkot in the fall (Exodus 34:22). Since the lunar year is only 354 days long, an unadjusted lunar calendar would wander eleven days per year – further and further away from the original seasons. (This is what happens in the Islamic lunar calendar.) Such a calendrical arrangement would have separated Jews totally from the flow of time in their host societies—except for the later Moslem culture in which their calendar would be totally congruent with local practice. Instead, by the mandated insertion of an extra month a year (in seven out of every nineteen years), the Jewish calendar was permanently synchronized with the solar one. Thus, the Hebrew calendar remained distinctive yet integrated in all the host cultures. The Jews walked on the path of their own elected mission even as they remained in step with the general society.

The Jewish year has an inner logic of its own. The joy of Passover in the spring is linked through seven weeks of counting to the ascent of Sinai on Shavuot and the climax of the Jewish covenantal commitment to live by the Torah. In late summer, the year dips to its low point as the community retells and reenacts the greatest tragedy of its early history: the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people. Thirty days later, at the onset of the sixth month, a new cycle begins: the awakening to self-renewal and repentance – individual and national. This builds up to the thunderous climax of judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. (Because life and death hang in the balance of these days, this period is also called the Days of Awe.) Then, on the heels of the High Holy Days, comes the joyous celebration of Exodus and the harvest that is the holiday of Sukkot. Months

later come the two winter holidays – Hanukkah and Purim – that celebrate deliverances along the historic Jewish way.

So the calendar constantly shapes and deepens group memory. Individual Jews might have absorbed, through cultural osmosis, contemporary values, role models, and heroes from the street, but from the calendar and the holy days, Jewish values and ideal types enter the bloodstream. In an annual cycle, every Jew lives through all of Jewish history and makes it his or her personal experience.

[Greenberg, I. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998. pp. 21-22.]

A LIST OF KEY NAMES AND KEY TERMS

(See Glossary in the Supplementary Materials for a brief description of each Name/Term.)

- ◆ *Adar*
- ◆ Greenberg, Irving ("Yitz")
- ◆ Rav Judah
- ◆ *Nissan*
- ◆ Rambam
- ◆ *Rosh Chodesh*
- ◆ Sarna, Nahum
- ◆ *Shanah Meuberet*

SUGGESTED READINGS

Heritage Interactive DVD, Thirteen/WNET New York, 1998.

Lesson 2:

**Introducing
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Recommended are the following Bookmarks:

The Jewish Calendar: The Yearly Cycles of Life (Video > The Power of the Word > Babylon > Judean Life in Babylon > Explore Topic > The Jewish Calendar: The Yearly Cycles of Life)

Weeks and Days (Video > The Power of the Word > Babylon > Judean Life in Babylon > Explore Topic > The Jewish Calendar: The Yearly Cycles of Life > Weeks and Days)

Months (Video > The Power of the Word > Babylon > Judean Life in Babylon > Explore Topic > The Jewish Calendar: The Yearly Cycles of Life > Months)

Years (Video > The Power of the Word > Babylon > Judean Life in Babylon > Explore Topic > The Jewish Calendar: The Yearly Cycles of Life > Years)

Festivals (Video > The Power of the Word > Babylon > Judean Life in Babylon > Explore Topic > The Jewish Calendar: The Yearly Cycles of Life > Festivals)

Dates (Video > The Power of the Word > Babylon > Judean Life in Babylon > Explore Topic > The Jewish Calendar: The Yearly Cycles of Life > Dates)

Pearl, C. *A Guide to the Minor Festivals and Fasts*. London: Jewish Chronicle Publications, 1961.

Steinberg, P. "Origins of the Jewish Calendar," in *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Fall Holidays -- Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot*. New York: JPS, 2007. pp. 16-22.

APPENDIX

THE HEBREW CALENDAR AND GREGORIAN EQUIVALENTS

Babylonian (Hebrew Name)		Torah Designation	Length	Gregorian Equivalent
ניסן	Nissan	1	30 days	March-April
אייר	Iyar	2	29 days	April-May
סיון	Sivan	3	30 days	May-June
תמוז	Tammuz	4	29 days	June-July
אב	Av	5	30 days	July-August
אלול	Elul	6	29 days	August-September
תשרי	Tishrei	7	30 days	September-October
חשוון	Cheshvan	8	29 or 30 days	October-November
כסלו	Kislev	9	29 or 30 days	November-December
טבת	Tevet	10	29 days	December-January
שבט	Shevat	11	30 days	January- February
אדר	Adar I (leap years only)	12	30 days	February-March
אדר ב	Adar (called Adar II in leap years)	12 (13 in leap years)	29 days	February-March

THE JEWISH
YEAR BEGINS

JEWISH FESTIVAL GROUPINGS

Holiday	Established	Also Known As	Source	Date	Comments
<u>Pilgrimage Festivals</u>					
Pesach	Approx. 13009 BCE	Festival of Freedom	TORAH	15-21 (22) NISSAN	
Shavuot	Approx. 1300 BCE	Festival of Receiving of the Torah	TORAH	6 SIVAN	
Sukkot	Approx. 1300 BCE	Festival of Tabernacles	TORAH	15-21 TISHREI	
<u>High Holidays</u>					
Rosh HaShanah	Approx. 1300 BCE	Jewish New Year	TORAH	1 TISHREI*	*Traditionally celebrated on 1-2 Tishrei beginning some time after the destruction of the Second Temple
Yom Kippur	Approx. 1300 BCE	Day of Atonement	TORAH	10 TISHREI	
<u>Celebration of the Torah</u>					
Shemini Atzeret	Approx. 1300 BCE	Eighth Day of Assembly	TORAH	22 TISHREI*	*Celebrated in Israel on the same day (22 nd Tishrei)
Simchat Torah	15 th Century CE	Rejoicing with the Torah	TORAH	23 TISHREI*	
<u>Historical Festivals and Observances</u>					
Purim	480 BCE		WRITINGS	14 ADAR*	*Celebrated in Jerusalem as Shushan Purim on 15 Adar
Chanukah	165 BCE		TALMUD	25 KISLEV – 3 TEVET	
Sefirat HaOmer	Approx. 1300 BCE	Counting of the Omer	TORAH	16 NISSAN – 5 SIVAN	(49 Days)

Historical Festivals and Observances (Cont.)

Lag BaOmer	2 nd century CE		TALMUD	18 IYAR
Tu BiShevat		New Year of the Trees	TALMUD	15 SHEVAT

Contemporary Festivals and Observances

Yom HaShoah	1959	Holocaust Remembrance Day	MODERN	27 NISSAN
Yom HaZikaron	1951	Memorial Day for Israeli Soldiers	MODERN	4 IYAR
Yom HaAtzma'ut	1948	Israel Independence Day	MODERN	5 IYAR
Yom Yerushalayim	1968	Jerusalem Unification Day	MODERN	28 IYAR

Fast Days

Yom Kippur 10th of Tevet	Approx. 1300 BCE 6 th Century BCE	Day of Atonement Day when Babylonians broke through the walls of Jerusalem	TORAH PROPHETS	10 TISHREI 10 TEVET
17th of Tammuz	6 th Century BCE	Day when Nebuchadnezzar began siege of Jerusalem	PROPHETS	17 TAMMUZ
Tisha BeAv	6 th Century BCE	Day of Destruction of both Temples	PROPHETS	9 AV
Fast of Gedaliah	6 th Century BCE	Assassination of Gedaliah, Gov. of Judea	PROPHETS	3 TISHREI
Fast of Esther	6 th -7 th Century CE	Commemoration of Esther' fast	GEONIC LITERATURE	13 ADAR
Fast of the First Born	4 TH -5 th Century CE	Commemoration of the salvation of the first born Israelites	TALMUD	14 NISSAN

THE HEBREW CALENDAR

date	<u>NISAN</u>	<u>IYAR</u>	<u>SIVAN</u>	<u>TAMMUZ</u>	<u>AV</u>	<u>ELUL</u>	<u>TISHRI</u>	<u>HESHVAN</u>	<u>KISLEV</u>	<u>TEVET</u>	<u>SHEVAT</u>	<u>ADAR*</u>
1		16	45				ROSH HASHANA			Chanukah 7		
2		17	46							Chanukah 8		
3		18	47				Fast/Gedalia					
4		19	48									
5		Yom Ha'azmaut	49									
6		21	SHAVUOT									
7		22										
8		23										
9		24			Tisha b'Av							
10		25					YOM KIPPUR			Fast Day		
11		26										
12		27										
13		28										Fast Day
14	fast of first born	29										PURIM
15	PESACH	30					SUKKOT				Tu B'shevat	Shushan Purim
16	1*	31										
17	2	32		Fast Day								
18	3	Lag b'Omer										
19	4	34										
20	5	35										
21	6	36										
22	7	37					Shemini Atzeret*					
23	8	38					Simchat Torah*					
24	9	39										
25	10	40								Chanukah 1		
26	11	41								Chanukah 2		
27	Yom HaShoa	42								Chanukah 3		
28	13	43								Chanukah 4		
29	14	44								Chanukah 5		
30	15									Chanukah 6		

*Counting the Omer between Passover & Shavuoth
 Leap year cycles: 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, 19 (5760 is year 3 of cycle)

*Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah are on the same day in Israel
 *LEAP YEAR ADD ADAR II - PURIM FALLS IN ADAR II