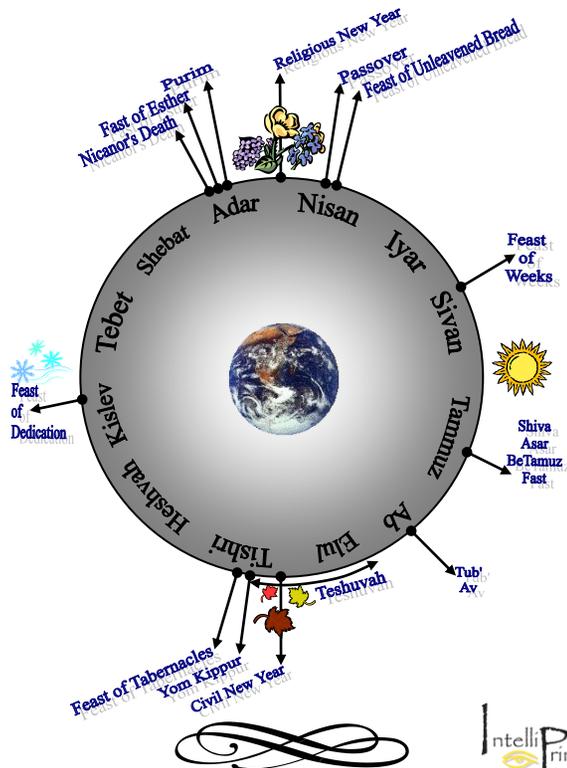


The Feasts of Holidays



of the Ancient Jews



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Prior to discussing the Jewish Feasts and Holidays one must first understand the Jewish method for monitoring times, months, seasons, and years. The Jews monitored time in hours much like we do; however, their day started and ended with the setting of the sun. Consequently, our day will not evenly correspond to a Jewish day. The Jewish week is based on the Sabbath. It starts on the equivalent of our Friday evening and ends on the equivalent of our Saturday evening. It has its origin in the Creation account. The days of the week numbered 7 and were not named but rather numbered from the Sabbath, with the Sabbath being the 7th day. Additionally, our present calendar is based on a solar year, while the Jewish Calendar is based on a lunar year. It was instituted by Moses. Each

month begins with the start of the full moon. Thus, months alternated between 30 and 29 days. One year equals 354 days. However, a solar year takes about 365.25 days corresponding to earth making a complete circle around the sun. The difference distorts the start of the seasons. In order to bring the lunar year in line with the solar year the Jews compensate by adding an extra 29 day month called Adar II, about every three years (or 7 times in 19 years). The Jewish Calendar starts its year based on the commemoration of the Passover, which takes place in the month of Nisan.

The Jewish Calendar

Order	1	2	3	4
Month's Name	Nisan	Iyar	Sivan	Tammuz
Also known as	Abib	Zif	-----	-----
Length	30 Days	29 Days	30 Days	29 Days
Present Day	Mar.-Apr.	Apr.-May	May-June	June-July

Order	5	6	7	8
Month's Name	Ab	Elul	Tishri	Heshvah
Also known as	-----	-----	Ethanim	Bul
Length	30 Days	29 Days	30 Days	29/30 Days
Present Day	July-Aug.	Aug.-Sept.	Sept.-Oct.	Oct.-Nov.

Order	9	10	11	12
Month's Name	Kislev	Tebet	Shebat	Adar
Also known as	-----	-----	-----	Adar I
Length	29/30 Days	29 days	30 Days	30 days
Present Day	Nov.-Dec.	Dec.-Jan.	Jan.-Feb.	Feb.-Mar.

Though the Jews measured hours in much the same way in which we measure them, they kept track of them in a much different way.

Old Testament System of Measuring the Day

Night Watch	Start	End
First Watch	Sunset	Midnight
Middle Watch	Midnight	3 am
Morning Watch	3 am	Sunrise

Day Watch	Start	End
Morning	Sunrise	Approx. 10 am
Heat of Day	Approx. 10 am	Approx. 2 pm
Cool of Day	Approx 2 pm	Sunset

New Testament System of Measuring the Day

Night Watch	Start	End
First Watch	Sunset	9 pm
Second Watch	9 pm	Midnight
Third Watch	Midnight	3 am
Forth Watch	3 am	Sunrise

Day Watch	Start	End
Third Hour	Sunrise	9 am
Sixth Hour	9 am	Noon
Ninth Hour	Noon	3 pm
Twelfth Hour	3 pm	Sunset

With this, we can summarize the Jewish Holidays as follows;

Jewish Feasts and Holidays

1st Nisan – New Years Day. The Jews had actually 2 new years; one religious (1st Nisan) and one civil (1st Tishri).

10th Nisan – Obtaining the Pascal Lamb. This day was not a holiday per say; however, in preparation for the coming Passover all the lambs were to be brought to the Temple on this day for inspection. Each family was required to select a male lamb without blemish, usually done by the head of the family. The days following, (11th - 13th Nisan), lambs were washed and prepared for the Passover.

14th-21st Nisan – Passover Feast of Unleavened Bread

14th Nisan – The Day of Passover, or 'Erev Pesah' or 'Ta'anit Bechorim'. The Jews consider this day to actually be the day before the angel of death Passed over (Pesah) the firstborn prior to the Exodus. The actual 'Passover' takes place on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After midday on the 13th, a Passover meal was eaten; however, it was not the Passover lamb, it consisted of unleavened bread and wine. Such a meal was specified in the early hours of this day (Exodus 12:18) in anticipation of Passover. On the 14th, the Passover lamb was slain. By the time of Jesus, the Jews killed one Passover Lamb as a nation between 3:00 – 3:30 pm (Exodus 12:6). After which time thousands of individual lambs would be slain for families. According to tradition, family lambs were to be slain at dusk. The blood of the lamb was to be collected and sprinkled on the lintels of the doors. The lamb was then roasted and eaten in haste. On the evening of the 15th (Remember that the date changes at sundown, so it would have been our evening of the 14th), the family was to eat the Pascal meal standing with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Any meat remaining was to be burned. No one was allowed to leave the house until morning. It is interesting to note that Jesus died at approximately the same time as the Nation's Pascal Lamb was slain and was hastily put into a borrowed tomb. The 14th was not a Sabbath day; however, it was a holy day. No public gatherings were to be held. Note that Jesus was put on public trial that day. The Jews also observed a tradition called 'Ta'anit Bechorim', which is a fast observed by the first-born. It commemorates the last plague to fall on Egypt. Below are dates for Passover surrounding the Savior's death.

Jewish Date	Modern Equivalent	Modern Day
14 th Nisan 3,783	22 nd March, 23 AD	Wed./Thurs.
14 th Nisan 3,784	10 th April, 24 AD	Wed./Thurs.
14 th Nisan 3,785	31 st March, 25 AD	Mon./Tues.
14 th Nisan 3,786	20 th March, 26 AD	Fri./Sat.
14 th Nisan 3,787	7 th April, 27 AD	Wed./Thur.
14 th Nisan 3,788	27 th March, 28 AD	Mon./Tues.
14 th Nisan 3,789	14 th April, 29 AD	Sat./Sun.
14 th Nisan 3,790	3 rd April, 30 AD	Wed./Thurs.
14 th Nisan 3,791	24 th March, 31 AD	Mon./Tues.
14 th Nisan 3,792	12 th April, 32 AD	Mon./Tues.
14 th Nisan 3,793	1 st April, 33 AD	Fri./Sat.
14 th Nisan 3,794	20 th March, 34 AD	Mon./Tues.
14 th Nisan 3,795	9 th April, 35 AD	Mon./Tues.

15th Nisan – The 1st Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

This day celebrates the release of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 13:6-10). Like the ancient Israelites who were required to free their homes of all leavening so that the destroying angel would pass by, Jews celebrating this day remove all leavened bread, called 'hametz' and replace it with unleavened bread called 'matzah'. It was required to be a Sabbath. If it fell on a Sabbath, it became a High Day. If it didn't it became an extra Sabbath. It was especially meaningful to the firstborn of each house and required that all men of the covenant travel to Jerusalem and worship in the Temple. It is also considered to be the day Israel began to eat corn and manna ended (Joshua 5:11).

16th Nisan – The 2nd Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, also called The Day of First Fruits (The Omer).

This was the day when the first fruits were offered to the Lord (Leviticus 23:10-11). The Jews would take the first sheaf waving or first fruit of the barley harvest and offer it as a sacrifice. It was designated as a holy day; however, it was not to be a Sabbath day. If the 16th of Nisan fell on a Sabbath, the Day of First Fruits would fall on the 17th of Nisan. In Jewish Tradition, the period called the Omer begins on 16 Nisan and extends for the count of 50 days to the Feast of Weeks or 'Shavuot'. It is also the day that Manna ceased to fall from the sky (Joshua 5:12).

21st Nisan - 7th and last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, also called 'Yom Tov'.

This day was said to be the day that Moses lead the children of Israel through the Red Sea. It was the culminating event of their freedom. It was a sacred day so it was set aside as a Sabbath day. If it fell on a Sabbath it became a High Day, otherwise it was extra Sabbath. Later, a tradition of offering sacrifices on this day was established.

6th Sivan – The Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22), The Day of First Fruits (Exodus 23:16, Numbers 28:26), The Feast of the Harvest (Exodus 23:16), or as it became in the New Testament 'Pentecost' or 'Shavuot' (Acts 2:1).

This Day occurred 50 days after 'Omer'. Like the Omer, it deals with presenting the first fruits to the Lord. It celebrated the first fruits of the wheat harvest with the offering of two wave loaves of leavened bread (Leviticus 23:17, 20). The day is set apart as a Sabbath Day. Like other Feast days, if it falls on a Sabbath it becomes a High Sabbath Day. If not, it becomes an extra Sabbath. It required all men of the covenant to travel to Jerusalem and worship. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, they were unable to celebrate the festival as commanded, and substituted a celebration of the revelation of the Torah, which they admit has no biblical basis.

17th Tammuz - Shiva Asar BeTamuz Fast. Commemorates the breaching of the walls surrounding Jerusalem.

17th Tammuz – 9th Ab - The Three Weeks or 'Bein Hametzarim'. The Three Weeks are a period of mourning over the events of 17 Tamuz and 9 Av, the Babylonian siege.

9th Ab – 'Tisha BeAv' Fast. Commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Holy Temples.

15th Ab - TuB'Av - This day marks the time when permission was given to enter Canaan. It is a time when the marriageable women dress in white and dance, and men choose Brides!

About 1st Elul to 10th Tishri - Teshuvah - the Season of Repentance. A 40 day period that ends on Yom Kippur. Marked for the first 30 days by the blowing of the Shofar (Rams Horn). The last horn sounds on 'Rosh Ha-shanah'.

1st Tishri - The Feast of Trumpets or 'Rosh Ha-shanah'. Rosh

Hashanah - This starts the Civil New Year. It is a solemn time of repentance and preparation for the Day of Atonement, which follows ten days later. It begins at sundown, 6 p.m. Jerusalem time, and is known as the feast of trumpets. As the trumpet is sounded, Jewish people around the world are called to the "Ten Days of Awe" that ends on Yom Kippur. Gathering for this solemn assembly the Jewish people contemplate their lives, and deeds making note of the things that call for repentance. During the ten days they seek to right any wrong that they have done. It was also a Sabbath day, or High Day.

10th Tishri - The Day of Atonement or 'Yom Kippur'.

This was the holiest day of the year and signified a cleansing of sins and reconciliation with God (Judgment day). The people were to afflict their souls and fast. On this day only the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. It is the day of atonement for the world. It is believed that God seals the books as to who shall live and who shall die during the year on this day. The Jews were to humble themselves with fasting and prayer, seeking the Lord's forgiveness (Leviticus 23:26-32). As a holy day it was an extra Sabbath, unless it fell on a Sabbath in which case it became a High Day. The Jubilee year begins on this day (Leviticus 25:9). The day after Yom Kippur was the day families started building their 'sukkah's' for the Feast of the Tabernacles. A 'sukkah' is a temporary structure made of perishable things which grow from the earth. The roof must be of thatch, and loosely thatched enough that the sky shows. There must not be any tree or balcony overhanging the roof. Walls must be at least three partial walls. Every able-bodied male dwelt in the sukkah during the festival.

15th – 22nd Tishri - The Feast of Tabernacles or The Feast of Booths or 'Sukkoth', or The Feast of Ingathering.

This feast commemorates Israel's wanderings in the desert for forty years. Since the children of Israel wondered because of their transgressions, this feast became one of repentance and thoughts of judgment. In preparation, on the 14th of Tishri, the pilgrims would arrive in Jerusalem. When the shofar sounded at evening, the festival began. 'Sukkah' are built a reminder that they lived in tents or tabernacles before they came into the promised land.

15th Tishri - The priests would start the feast by cleansing the altar

of burnt offering from sundown to midnight. Just after midnight, the temple gates were opened to the pilgrims bearing lulavim (Palm Fronds), myrtle and willow branches in their right hands and etrogs in their left hands. The time from midnight to the ordinary morning sacrifice was spent examining the sacrifices brought. A musical procession led by a priest would go to the Pool of Siloam to fetch three logs of water in a golden vessel. (When the feast fell on the Sabbath, the water was brought the night before). At the same time, another procession would go to a place called Motza in the Kidron valley, from whence they would bring back willow branches to be used for building a sukkah over the altar. The water procession was so timed that it would arrive at the temple just as the other priests were bringing the sacrifice out to the altar. At which time they were greeted by three blasts on a shofar. The priest would carry the water up the steps of the altar, in the company of another priest who would be carrying a pitcher of wine for a drink offering. The water and the wine were poured into separate basins, each with a hole in the bottom. These holes were sized so that each would be drained in the same time. The willow branches that had been brought by the Kidron procession

were used to build a sukkah over the altar, and as soon as that was done the morning sacrifice was offered, followed by the special festival sacrifices. On the first day of the festival, the sacrifices would be 13 bullocks, 2 rams, 14 lambs, and a goat, as a sin offering. During the sacrifices, the Levites would chant the Great Hallel. The people would wave their lulavs toward the altar and sing praises often referencing scripture. At night, the Court of Women was illuminated by four giant lamps, using the cast-off breeches and girdles of the priests as wicks. To burn all night, the lamps required tending, so each lamp had a Levite boy, who kept the fire burning. The light from the lamps illuminated the entire city. Distinguished men would dance around the lamps, carrying lighted torches and singing praises. On the steps leading to the court stood Levites, singing and playing instruments.

16th - 20th Tishri - The middle days of the feast were semi-holy days, in that the restriction on work was relaxed to the point that necessities could be purchased, and work could be done for the festival. The ritual of the first day was repeated on each of these days, except the bullocks sacrificed was reduced by one each day.

21st Tishri - The 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Festival of Willows (Hoshana Rabbah).

The final day of Judgment. A ritual of beating willow branches on the ground is practiced, which is thought to symbolize the casting away of sin. This day was also called Hoshanah Harabbah, or the Great Hosanna day. This day was distinguished by the fact that the priests would march around the altar seven times, instead of just once, and the people would take hold of the willows that formed the canopy over the altar and shake it so vigorously that all of the leaves would fall in a pile on the ground. People would also bring palm branches and beat them against the altar. When this was over the children would throw away their lulavs and eat their etrogs. On the afternoon of this day, the people would remove the furnishings from the Succoth. On the day after the festival, called Shemeni Atzeret, there would be a Sabbath.

25th Kislev – 2nd Tebet – The Feast of Dedication or Chanukah or Hannukka or the Feast of the Maccabees or The Feast of Lights (Josephus and Talmudic writings).

This day marks the miraculous victory of the Jews, led by the Maccabees, against Greek persecution and religious suppression. In the aftermath a miracle occurred: When the Maccabees came to rededicate the Temple, they found only one flask of oil to light the Menorah. This small flask lasted for eight days, and to commemorate the miracle, the Menorah is lit for the eight days of Hanukkah. Unlike the great feasts, it could be celebrated in synagogues.

10th Tebet - Asarah BeTevet Fast. This fast marks the beginning of the siege of the city of Jerusalem, which resulted in the destruction of the city and the Holy Temples.

13th Adar – Nicanor's Death – Maccabean General's Memorial

14th Adar – Esther's Fast – This day commemorates the fast Esther started before approaching King Haman.

15th Adar – Purim (meaning lots) or Mordecai's Day – This day commemorates the overthrow of the King's wicked advisor, Haman. Haman cast lots to secure a day of good omen in his plot to oppress the Jews, hence 'Purim'. During this celebration children dress in costume much like our Halloween, and partake in a festive reading of the Book of Esther. During the reading the audience cheers and boos the villains and heroes. They eat pastries called 'Haman ears' and end the day with a family feast.