

Welcome to 10 Minute Topics

This week's topic is: Jewish Calendar

The Jewish calendar, like the Chinese calendar and Islamic calendar, is a lunisolar calendar. This means that the Jewish calendar is a combination of a solar calendar and a lunar calendar. The Jewish calendar attempts to have the year coincide with the solar calendar and its months coincide with the lunar calendar. Since the twelve months of the Jewish calendar are about eleven days short of a 365-day year, a leap month is added to the calendar on a 19-year cycle developed by Hillel II in the fourth century. The current cycle began in 5758 (1997-1998). An extra month is added on the third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth years during this cycle. (This is why one will see Adar I and Adar II on some calendars).

The year is calculated as the number of years since creation (5769 = September 2008 - September 2009). The year was calculated by adding up the ages of people in the Tanach back to the time of creation. However, this does not necessarily mean that the universe has existed for only 5769 years as we understand years. An ordinary Jewish calendar year has 353-355 days and a leap year has 383-385 days. Each month begins on Rosh Chodesh (new moon).

Before the Babylonian Exile, the months of the Jewish calendar were remembered by numbers and not names. The first month of the Jewish calendar is Nisan - however, it was referred to as "the first month". According to Maimonides (Talmud Yerushalmi-Rosh Hashannah 1:2), the names for the months came with the Jews when they returned to Israel from their Babylonian exile.

Hebrew Months

Hebrew Month		Secular Months	No. of Days	Associated Holidays
Nisan	נִיֶסָן	March-April	30	Chodesh Nisan, Pesach, Yom HaShoah
Iyar	אֵיָר	April-May	29	Yom HaZikaron, Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Lag B'Omer, Yom Yerushalayim
Sivan	סִיָן	May-June	30	Chodesh Sivan, Shavuot
Tammuz	תָמוּז	June-July	29	Chodesh Tammuz, Shiva Asar B'Tammuz
Av	אָב	July-August	30	Chodesh Av, Tish B'Av
Elul	אֱלוּל	August-September	29	
Tishri	תִּשְׁרִי	September-October	30	Rosh Hashanah, Tzom Gedaliah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hoshanah Rabbah, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah
Cheshvan	חֶשְׁוֹן	October-November	29 - 30	
Kislev	כֶּסֶלֶו	November-December	29 - 30	Chanukah
Tevet	טֵבֵת	December-January	29	Asarah B'Tevet
Shevat	שֶׁבֶט	January-February	30	Tu B'Shevat
Adar*	אָדָר	February-March	30	Fast of Esther, Purim
Adar II**	אָדָר ב'	February-March	29	Fast of Esther, Purim

* Adar I in a leap year

** Leap year only

Jewish Mysticism and the Months of the Year¹

Astrological Sign	Jewish Month	Hebrew Tribe	Hebrew Letter	
Aries	Nisan	Judah	Hey	ה
Taurus	Iyar	Issachar	Vav	ו
Gemini	Sivan	Zebulun	Zayin	ז
Cancer	Tammuz	Reuben	Chet	ח
Leo	Av	Simeon	Tet	ט
Virgo	Elul	Gad	Yud	י
Libra	Tishrei	Ephraim	Lamed	ל
Scorpio	Cheshvan	Manessah	Nun	נ
Saggitarius	Kislev	Benjamin	Samech	ס
Capricorn	Tevet	Dan	Ayin	ע
Aquarius	Shevat	Asher	Tsadi	צ
Pisces	Adar	Naphtali	Kof	ק

Hebrew Days of the Week

A day on the Jewish calendar begins at sunset. The exception to this is the ending of Shabbat when the next day begins when three stars are visible in the sky.

Hebrew Day		Secular Day
Yom Rishon	יום ראשון	Sunday
Yom Sheni	יום שני	Monday
Yom Shlishi	יום שלישי	Tuesday
Yom Revii	יום רביעי	Wednesday
Yom Chamishi	יום חמישי	Thursday
Yom Shishi	יום שישי	Friday
Yom Shabbat	יום שבת	Saturday

Jewish Mysticism and the Days of the Week²

Secular Day	Hebrew Day		Hebrew Letter	
Sunday	Yom Rishon	יום ראשון	Bet	ב
Monday	Yom Sheni	יום שני	Gimmel	ג
Tuesday	Yom Shlishi	יום שלישי	Dalet	ד
Wednesday	Yom Revii	יום רביעי	Kaf	כ
Thursday	Yom Chamishi	יום חמישי	Pey	פ
Friday	Yom Shishi	יום ששי	Resh	ר
Saturday	Yom Shabbat	יום שבת	Tav	ת

¹Ask Noah: Jewish Astrology? (<http://www.askmoses.com/article.html?h=424&o=60378>)

²Inner.Org: The Hebrew Letters of the Day (<http://www.inner.org/hebleter/letterof.htm>)