

## Calendars Related to Easter and Passover

Most of us grew up “knowing” that THE calendar consisted of 12 months, 365 days except for a leap year every four years, Christmas always fell on 25 December, and Thanksgiving was the fourth Thursday in November, but that Easter wandered around during Spring. We always had to look at the calendar to determine when it fell.

Actually the calendar we rely on today is quite recent, and a creation of fallible man. Our calendars today are based on the rules laid down by Pope Gregory XIII. On October 4, 1582, nearly a century after Columbus discovered America, Gregory signed a papal bull promulgating the calendar that bears his name, the Gregorian calendar. The papal bull advanced the previous Julian calendar by 10 days. The calendar days October 5 - 14, 1582 simply vanished. The Gregorian calendar was adopted in Britain and America in 1752.

The Julian calendar, named after Julius Caesar, had been in place since 45 BCE. But the Julian calendar had an “error” in it. In the mid-1200’s, an English Friar named Roger Bacon observed that the date of Easter, in addition to its prescribed wandering, was drifting farther and farther into the spring season. Astronomers knew that the length of the solar year was closer to 365.242 days than to 365.250 days in the Julian calendar year. The small mismatch amounts to only 11 minutes per year but it had accumulated to 9 days. Bacon’s petitions to correct the drift went unheeded until the mid-1500s, when the drift was recognized by Pope Gregory XIII as a serious matter.

The Julian calendar was based on the Roman calendar, which changed its form several times between the foundation of Rome and the fall of the Roman Empire, and which is believed to have been a lunar calendar which may have been based on one of the Greek lunar calendars.

### **So when is Easter?**

The rule has been phrased since the Middle Ages that Easter is observed on the Sunday after the first full moon on or after the day of the vernal (spring) equinox. If March 21 is accepted as the spring equinox, Easter may fall anywhere from March 22 to April 25.

- Easter has not fallen on the earliest of the 35 possible dates, March 22, since 1818, and will not do so again until 2285. It does, however, fall on March 23 this year of 2008, but will not do so again until 2160.
- Easter last fell on the latest possible date, April 25, in 1943 and will next fall on that date in 2038. However, it will fall on April 24, just one day before this latest possible date, in 2011.

So within a 3-year period, Easter falls with one day of the earliest possible and the latest possible.

### **Why do Western and Eastern Christianities follow different dates?**

To further complicate the date of Easter, the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches use the Julian Calendar, rejecting Pope Gregory’s edict advancing the Julian calendar, while Western Christianity uses the Gregorian Calendar. Using the Julian calendar, Easter also always falls on a Sunday from March 22 to April 25 inclusive, but in the Gregorian calendar, due to the 13 day difference between the calendars between 1900 and 2099, those dates are from April 4 to May 8 inclusive.

Although never instituted by Scripture, the early church chose to commemorate the

Resurrection. Jesus' followers did not bother to record the exact date of his resurrection. Some Biblical scholars attribute this to an absolute faith in his imminent return to earth and mortal time, therefore, was not important. During the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine, the spread of Christianity though out the Empire made essential a systematic ordering of religious festivals and days. A pressing need was consistency of a date for celebrating Easter. This was one of eight major topics considered by priests and bishops at a meeting in 325 in Nicea, in present-day Turkey. The meeting reflected the deep animosity of Christians toward the Jews about their role in the death of Jesus. One particular canon guaranteed that Easter would never fall on the beginning of the Jewish Passover. However, there were divisions among the various churches represented and the Easter accord was tenuous. A long-term result remains the differences between dates celebrated by western and eastern Christianities.

### **When is Passover?**

Scripture tells us that Passover begins at dusk of Nisan 14 each year. In Exodus 12,

- 1 *ADONAI spoke to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt; he said,*
- 2 ***You are to begin your calendar with this month; it will be the first month of the year for you.***
- 3 *Speak to all the assembly of Isra'el and say, **'On the tenth day of this month,** each man is to take a lamb or kid for his family, one per household—*
- 4 *except that if the household is too small for a whole lamb or kid, then he and his next-door neighbor should share one, dividing it in proportion to the number of people eating it.*
- 5 *Your animal must be without defect, a male in its first year, and you may choose it from either the sheep or the goats.*
- 6 *'You are to keep it until **the fourteenth day of the month,** and then the entire assembly of the community of Isra'el will slaughter it at dusk.*
- 7 *They are to take some of the blood and smear it on the two sides and top of the door-frame at the entrance of the house in which they eat it.*
- 8 *That night, they are to eat the meat, roasted in the fire; they are to eat it with matzah and maror.*
- 9 *Don't eat it raw or boiled, but roasted in the fire, with its head, the lower parts of its legs and its inner organs.*
- 10 *Let nothing of it remain till morning; if any of it does remain, burn it up completely.*
- 11 *'Here is how you are to eat it: with your belt fastened, your shoes on your feet and your staff in your hand; and you are to eat it hurriedly. It is ADONAI's Pesach. (Passover)*
- 12 *For that night, I will pass through the land of Egypt and kill all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both men and animals; and I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt; I am ADONAI.*
- 13 *The blood will serve you as a sign marking the houses where you are; when I see the blood, I will pass over (Hebrew: pasach) you— when I strike the land of Egypt, the death blow will not strike you.*
- 14 *'This will be a day for you to remember and celebrate as a festival to ADONAI; from generation to generation you are to celebrate it by a perpetual regulation.*

That's simple, isn't it? Each year Passover is celebrated on 14th of Nisan, of the biblical year of course, not the civil year of Greece, Rome, Julius or Gregory.

## **Biblical Calendar**

Moses was instructed to begin the calendar at the New Moon following the Exodus. Deuteronomy 16:1 *Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night.*

The Biblical year begins with the first New Moon after the barley in Israel reaches the stage in its ripeness called *abib*. The period between one year and the next is either 12 or 13 lunar months. Because of this, it is important to check the state of the barley crops at the end of the 12th month. If the barley is *abib* at this time, then the following New Moon is *Chodesh Ha-Aviv* ("New Moon of the *Abib*"). If the barley is still immature, we must wait another month and then check the barley again at the end of the 13th month. Karaite Jews still today observe fields of barley in Israel to determine whether a second month of Adar must be added to the previous year so that the new year and the month of Nisan can begin after the barley is at the *aviv* stage.<sup>1</sup> Seldom, if ever, does the observed new year differ from that calculated by Hillel's 4<sup>th</sup> century methods.

In the Torah, months are almost always numbered, not named. One effect of numbering rather than the current naming of months is to recall that the calendar is based on the Exodus.

God's chosen people, the Hebrews, usually called Jews, chosen to teach the nations (of the world, Isaiah 49:6), have maintained a calendar based on Scripture throughout the world's adoption of Roman, Julian and Gregorian calendars. On the biblical, or so-called Jewish,

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1. The month of the *Abib* is the month which commences after the barley has reached the stage of *abib*. 2-3 weeks after the beginning of the month the barley has moved beyond the stage of *abib* and is ready to be brought as the "wave-sheaf offering." The "wave-sheaf offering" is a sacrifice brought from the first stalks cut in the harvest and is brought on the Sunday which falls out during Passover, as described in Leviticus 23:10-11:

*"When you come to the land which I give you, and harvest its harvest, you will bring the sheaf of the beginning of your harvest to the priest. And he will wave the sheaf before YHWH so you will be accepted; on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest will wave it."*

From this it is clear that the barley, which was *abib* at the beginning of the month, has become harvest-ready 15-21 days later (i.e. by the Sunday during Passover). Therefore, the month of the *Abib* can not begin unless the barley has reached a stage where it will be harvest-ready 2-3 weeks later.

We know from several passages that barley which is in the state of *abib* has not completely ripened, but has ripened enough so that its seeds can be eaten parched in fire. Parched barley was a commonly eaten food in ancient Israel and is mentioned in numerous passages (Leviticus 2:14, 23:14; Joshua 5:11; 1 Samuel 17:17, 25:18; 2 Samuel 17:28; Ruth 2:14).

While still early in its development, barley has not yet produced large enough and firm enough seeds to produce food through parching. This early in its development, when the "head" has just come out of the shaft, the seeds are not substantial enough to produce any food. At a later stage, the seeds have grown in size and have filled with liquid. At this point the seeds will shrivel up when parched and will only produce empty skins. Over time the liquid is replaced with dry material and when enough dry material has amassed the seeds will be able to yield "barley parched in fire."

calendar the date of scriptural holidays does not change from year to year. However, since the Jewish year is not the same length as the solar year on the Gregorian calendar, the date will appear to shift when viewed from the perspective of the Gregorian calendar.

Number	Canaanite Name	Scripture	Babylonian/ Aramaic Name	Tanakh Scripture	Modern Name
1	Abib or Aviv	Deuteronomy 16:1; Exodus 13:4	Nisan	Nehemiah 2:1; Esther 3:7	Nis(s)an
2	Ziv	1 Kings 6:1			Iyar
3			Sivan	Esther 8:9	Sivan
4					Tamuz
5					Av
6			Elul	Nehemiah 6:15	Elul
7	Eisanim or Ethaniam	1 Kings 8:2			Tishrei
8	Bul	1 Kings 6:38			Heshvan
9			Chislev	Zechariah 7:1	Kislev
10			Tebeth	Esther 2:16	Tevet
11			Shebat	Zechariah 1:7	Shvat
12			Adar	Ezra 6:15 & Esther	Adar

Exact biblical dates of God's festivals (" . . . my feasts . . ." Leviticus 22:2) are written in Scripture:

Passover	Nisan 15 (from evening of 14th)	"In the fourteenth day of the first month at even"	Leviticus 22:5
Unleavened bread	Nisan 15 - 22	"on the fifteenth day of the same month"	Leviticus 22:6
First Fruits	Nisan 16	"on the day after the Sabbath"	Leviticus 23:11
Weeks	Sivan 6	"fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath"	Leviticus 23:16
Trumpets	Tishri 1	"In the seventh month, on the first day of the month"	Leviticus 23:24
Atonement	Tishri 10	"the tenth day of this seventh month"	Leviticus 23:27

Passover	Nisan 15 (from evening of 14th)	“In the fourteenth day of the first month at even”	Leviticus 22:5
Tabernacles	Tishri 15 - 22	“fifteenth day of this seventh month”	Leviticus 23:34

## 2008

Easter is observed on the Sunday after the first full moon on or after the day of the vernal (spring) equinox. During this year of 2008 the first **full** moon "on or after" March 21 occurs on Friday, March 21. Therefore the first Sunday following is March 23, the date of Easter this year.

According to Scripture, Passover is observed beginning at dusk on 14 Nisan. The first new moon, and therefore the first day, of the Jewish year occurs on 1 Nisan, of course, which corresponds to April 6, 2008. Consequently 14 Nisan corresponds to April 19, when Passover begins at dusk.

While Passover usually precedes Easter by less than a week, this year of 2008 is an anomaly.

Gregorian Year	Western Easter	Erev Passover	Difference, days
2008	23 March	19 April	- 27
2009	12 April	8 April	4
2010	4 April	29 March	6
2011	24 April	18 April	6
2012	8 April	6 April	2
2013	31 March	25 March	6
2014	20 April	14 April	6
2015	5 April	3 April	2