

## Lesson 1 – Introduction

### Feasts and Festivals of Israel

Feasts and festivals were a common component of ancient religious practice. They were celebrations of divine provision or protection. Each major Israelite feast recognized a specific aspect of God’s saving work. Since sharing a table signified peace or fellowship, feasts as religious observances demonstrated a peaceful relationship between God and Israel. The most significant texts regarding the feasts of Israel are **Exodus 23:10-19**, **Exodus 34:18-26**, **Leviticus 23**, **Numbers 28 and 29**, and **Deuteronomy 16**.

### Prescribed Feasts

Feast	Date	References
Passover	Nisan 14	Ex 12:1–14; 23:15; Lev 23:5; Num 28:16; Mt 26:17–20
Unleavened Bread*	Nisan 15–21	Ex 12:15–20; 34:18; Lev 23:6–8; Num 28:17–25
Firstfruits	Nisan 16, Sivan 6	Lev 23:9–14; Num 28:26
Pentecost (Harvest, Weeks)*	Sivan 6	Ex 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23:15–22; Num 28:26–31; Deu 16:9–12; Acts 2:1
Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)	Tishri 1	Lev 23:23–25; Num 29:1–6
Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	Tishri 10	Lev 16:2–34; Lev 23:26–32; Num 29:7–11; Heb 9:7
Tabernacles (Ingathering, Booths, Sukkot)*	Tishri 15–22	Ex 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23:33–43; Num 29:12–39; Deu 16:13–17; Neh 8:13–18; John 7:2
Dedication (Lights, Hanukkah)†	Chislev 25 (for 8 days)	John 10:22
Purim†	Adar 14–15	Esth 9:18–32

\* The three festivals for which all adult Israelite males had to go to Jerusalem (Ex 23:17; 34:23)

† Festivals that are not prescribed in Leviticus

## The Jewish Calendar

A lunar calendar was commonly used throughout the ancient Near East. This “lunisolar” calendar was integral to Israelite culture and is reflected in the writings of the Old Testament.

The New Year usually occurred in the spring, at the beginning of the growing season, with the month of Nisan (March/April). The Passover occurred in the first month, so its commemoration was linked to the observance of the beginning of the year (Ex 12:2). The Feast of Trumpets, which occurred during the seventh month, or Tishri (September/October; see Lev 23:23–25), was called Rosh Hashanah or the “head of the year”; it marked the end of the agricultural year (Ex 34:22).

The beginning of the month was determined by the first visible crescent of the new moon. The lunar month was 29 to 30 days long, and 12 lunar months added up to a 354-day lunar year. A solar year is just over 365 days. This means that the lunar year would fall short by 11 days each year and quickly become out of sync with the seasons. To correct for this “seasonal shift,” an extra lunar month needed to be added every 2.7 years.

Both the Old Testament and New Testament use lunar months for the dates of events, but sometimes different names appear for the months in the Bible. The Babylonian names appear most commonly, which seem to have been adopted after the exile (post 538 BC). Canaanite names appear for four of the months in pre-exile texts (see Ex 13:4; 1 Kgs 6:1; 6:38; 8:2).

## Calendar

Month	Biblical Name	Modern	References
1	Nisan/Abib*	Mar—Apr	Ex 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Deu 16:1; Neh 2:1; Esth 3:7
2	Iyyar/Ziv*	Apr—May	1 Kgs 6:1, 37
3	Sivan	May—Jun	Esth 8:9
4	Tammuz	Jun—Jul	none
5	Ab	Jul—Aug	none
6	Elul	Aug—Sep	Neh 6:15
7	Tishri/Ethanim*	Sep—Oct	1 Kgs 8:2
8	Heshvan/Bul*	Oct—Nov	1 Kgs 6:38
9	Kislev	Nov—Dec	Neh 1:1; Zech 7:1
10	Tebeth	Dec—Jan	Esth 2:16
11	Shebat	Jan—Feb	Zech 1:7
12	Adar	Feb—Mar	Ezra 6:15; Esth 3:7, 13; 8:12; 9:1, 15, 17, 19, 21
13	Second Adar†	Mar—Apr	none

\* Those with two names include the Babylonian name first and Canaanite name second.

† Since the lunar calendar is 11 days shorter than the solar calendar, an extra month was added between Adar and Nisan seven times in each 19-year cycle.

## Feasts and Festivals of Israel

**Exodus 23:10–19** The laws in this section relate to sacred time—times that are set apart for sacred purposes. The first two verses prohibit Israelites from working the land during the seventh year or Sabbatical Year (vv. 10–11; compare Lev 25:1–7). The observance of the Sabbatical year to allow the land to rest may relate to the law that a Hebrew slave should be released after six years (Exod 21:2; compare Deut 15:12). Deuteronomy 15:1–10 also establishes a general release of debt to happen every seven years. Exodus 23:12 then reiterates the importance of observing the Sabbath day (compare 20:8–11; 34:21; 35:2). Verses 14–17 presents the agricultural festivals in Israel’s sacred calendar (compare 34:18–24). These festivals—which also appear in Deut 16:1–17—are referenced by the Hebrew word *chag*, indicating a pilgrimage. The holy and festival days of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and Passover are not included here, since they are not linked to the agricultural cycle. A more complete sacred calendar is found in Lev 23. The sacrifices associated with the events in the sacred calendar are listed in Num 28–29.<sup>1</sup>

### Exodus 23:10–19 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, <sup>11</sup> but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.

<sup>12</sup> “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed.

<sup>13</sup> “Pay attention to all that I have said to you, and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips.

<sup>14</sup> “Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. <sup>15</sup> You shall keep the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. <sup>16</sup> You shall keep the **Feast of Harvest**, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the **Feast of Ingathering** at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. <sup>17</sup> Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God.

<sup>18</sup> “You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning.

<sup>19</sup> “The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Ex 23:10–19). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

### Exodus 34:18–26 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup> “You shall keep the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. <sup>19</sup> All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. <sup>20</sup> The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed.

<sup>21</sup> “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. <sup>22</sup> You shall observe the **Feast of Weeks**, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the **Feast of Ingathering** at the year’s end. <sup>23</sup> Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. <sup>24</sup> For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.

<sup>25</sup> “You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover remain until the morning. <sup>26</sup> The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

**Leviticus 23:1–44** Chapter 23 lists the holy seasons and celebrations of ancient Israel and their required sacrifices for the entire sacred year. The Pentateuch preserves three calendar traditions for Israel: Exodus 23:12–19 focuses on the Sabbath and the three annual pilgrimage festivals: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of the Harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering; Deuteronomy 16:1–17 mentions Passover, the late spring Feast of Weeks, and the autumn Festival of Booths (“Tabernacles”); Numbers 28–29 includes all of the festivals and the Sabbath, and notes celebrations related to the new moon. More details of how to perform these sacrifices are given in other parts of Leviticus.<sup>2</sup>

### Leviticus 23:1–44 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.

#### The Sabbath

<sup>3</sup> “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a **Sabbath** of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places.

#### The Passover

<sup>4</sup> “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. <sup>5</sup> In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is **the LORD’s Passover**. <sup>6</sup> And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. <sup>7</sup> On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. <sup>8</sup> But you shall

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<sup>2</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Le 23:1–44). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.”

### **The Feast of Firstfruits**

<sup>9</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>10</sup> “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, <sup>11</sup> and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. <sup>12</sup> And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. <sup>13</sup> And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. <sup>14</sup> And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

### **The Feast of Weeks**

<sup>15</sup> “You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. <sup>16</sup> You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. <sup>17</sup> You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD. <sup>18</sup> And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. <sup>19</sup> And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. <sup>20</sup> And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. <sup>21</sup> And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

<sup>22</sup> “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.”

### **Feast of Trumpets**

<sup>23</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>24</sup> “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with **blast of trumpets**, a holy convocation. <sup>25</sup> You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the LORD.”

### **Day of Atonement**

<sup>26</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>27</sup> “Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the **Day of Atonement**. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. <sup>28</sup> And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. <sup>29</sup> For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people. <sup>30</sup> And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. <sup>31</sup> You shall

not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.  
<sup>32</sup> It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath.”

### Feast of Booths

<sup>33</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>34</sup> “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the **Feast of Booths** to the LORD. <sup>35</sup> On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. <sup>36</sup> For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work.

<sup>37</sup> “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day, <sup>38</sup> besides the LORD’s Sabbaths and besides your gifts and besides all your vow offerings and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD.

<sup>39</sup> “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. <sup>40</sup> And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. <sup>41</sup> You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. <sup>42</sup> You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, <sup>43</sup> that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

<sup>44</sup> Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the LORD.

**28:1–29:40** Chapters 28–29 detail the religious calendar the Israelites will follow in the promised land. Once in the land, the people—via the priesthood, sacrifices, and correct calendar—must be rightly related to God. Leviticus 23 outlines a full calendar. Numbers 28–29 adjusted or supplemented that calendar in several places in order to match later conditions, when Israel actually occupied the land (compare 15:1–12). Verses 1–8 lists the daily offerings of the tabernacle, as they are the core of the sacrificial system. The schedule of holidays begins in v. 9. All of the regular offerings are explained in detail in Lev 1–7.<sup>3</sup>

### Numbers 28:1–31 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Command the people of Israel and say to them, ‘My offering, my food for my food offerings, my pleasing aroma, you shall be careful to offer to me at its appointed time.’ <sup>3</sup> And you shall say to them, This is the food offering that you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs a year old without blemish, day by day, as a regular offering. <sup>4</sup> The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; <sup>5</sup> also a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with a quarter of a hin of beaten oil. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Nu 28:1–29:40). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

It is a regular burnt offering, which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. <sup>7</sup> Its drink offering shall be a quarter of a hin for each lamb. In the Holy Place you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD. <sup>8</sup> The other lamb you shall offer at twilight. Like the grain offering of the morning, and like its drink offering, you shall offer it as a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> “On the Sabbath day, two male lambs a year old without blemish, and two tenths of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, and its drink offering: <sup>10</sup> this is the burnt offering of every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.

<sup>11</sup> “At the beginnings of your months, you shall offer a burnt offering to the LORD: two bulls from the herd, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; <sup>12</sup> also three tenths of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull, and two tenths of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; <sup>13</sup> and a tenth of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering for every lamb; for a burnt offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. <sup>14</sup> Their drink offerings shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, a third of a hin for a ram, and a quarter of a hin for a lamb. This is the burnt offering of each month throughout the months of the year. <sup>15</sup> Also one male goat for a sin offering to the LORD; it shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.

<sup>16</sup> “On the fourteenth day of the first month is the LORD’s Passover, <sup>17</sup> and on the fifteenth day of this month is a feast. Seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. <sup>18</sup> On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, <sup>19</sup> but offer a food offering, a burnt offering to the LORD: two bulls from the herd, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old; see that they are without blemish; <sup>20</sup> also their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil; three tenths of an ephah shall you offer for a bull, and two tenths for a ram; <sup>21</sup> a tenth shall you offer for each of the seven lambs; <sup>22</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you. <sup>23</sup> You shall offer these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a regular burnt offering. <sup>24</sup> In the same way you shall offer daily, for seven days, the food of a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. It shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. <sup>25</sup> And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work.

<sup>26</sup> “On the day of the firstfruits, when you offer a grain offering of new grain to the LORD at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, <sup>27</sup> but offer a burnt offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD: two bulls from the herd, one ram, seven male lambs a year old; <sup>28</sup> also their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, three tenths of an ephah for each bull, two tenths for one ram, <sup>29</sup> a tenth for each of the seven lambs; <sup>30</sup> with one male goat, to make atonement for you. <sup>31</sup> Besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, you shall offer them and their drink offering. See that they are without blemish.

### Numbers 29:1–40 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> “On the first day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a day for you to blow the trumpets, <sup>2</sup> and you shall offer a burnt offering, for a pleasing aroma to the LORD: one bull from the herd, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; <sup>3</sup> also their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, three tenths of an ephah for the bull, two tenths for the ram, <sup>4</sup> and one tenth for each of the seven lambs; <sup>5</sup> with one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you; <sup>6</sup> besides the burnt offering of the new

moon, and its grain offering, and the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offering, according to the rule for them, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD.

<sup>7</sup> “On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation and afflict yourselves. You shall do no work, <sup>8</sup> but you shall offer a burnt offering to the LORD, a pleasing aroma: one bull from the herd, one ram, seven male lambs a year old: see that they are without blemish. <sup>9</sup> And their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil, three tenths of an ephah for the bull, two tenths for the one ram, <sup>10</sup> a tenth for each of the seven lambs: <sup>11</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering, besides the sin offering of atonement, and the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

<sup>12</sup> “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall keep a feast to the LORD seven days. <sup>13</sup> And you shall offer a burnt offering, a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD, thirteen bulls from the herd, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old; they shall be without blemish; <sup>14</sup> and their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, three tenths of an ephah for each of the thirteen bulls, two tenths for each of the two rams, <sup>15</sup> and a tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; <sup>16</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering.

<sup>17</sup> “On the second day twelve bulls from the herd, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>18</sup> with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities; <sup>19</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

<sup>20</sup> “On the third day eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>21</sup> with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities; <sup>22</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering.

<sup>23</sup> “On the fourth day ten bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>24</sup> with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities; <sup>25</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering.

<sup>26</sup> “On the fifth day nine bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>27</sup> with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities; <sup>28</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering; besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering.

<sup>29</sup> “On the sixth day eight bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>30</sup> with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities; <sup>31</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering; besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offerings.

<sup>32</sup> “On the seventh day seven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>33</sup> with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities; <sup>34</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering; besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.

<sup>35</sup> “On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly. You shall not do any ordinary work, <sup>36</sup> but you shall offer a burnt offering, a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>37</sup> and the grain offering and the



drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities;<sup>38</sup> also one male goat for a sin offering; besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering.

<sup>39</sup> “These you shall offer to the LORD at your appointed feasts, in addition to your vow offerings and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your grain offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings.”

<sup>40</sup> So Moses told the people of Israel everything just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

**Deuteronomy 16:1–17** This passage describes the festivals of Passover, Weeks, and Booths (also called Tabernacles). Each of these three festivals commemorates an event from Israel’s history. Passover commemorated the exodus event where Israel left Egypt (Exod 12:14). The Feast of Weeks came to be associated with the giving of the law at Sinai (approximately 7 weeks into the Israelite’s journey; Exod 19:1–3), and the Festival of Tabernacles (Booths) memorialized Israel’s period of wandering in the wilderness (Lev 23:42–43).

Israel’s sacred calendar is detailed several other times in OT law (Exod 23:10–17; 34:18–24; Lev 23; Num 28–29). Deuteronomy emphasizes that the seven-day pilgrimage festivals required travel to the central sanctuary. The other accounts in OT law assume the feasts will be celebrated at the tabernacle (Exod 23:14–17) because Israel lived together as one camp prior to the settlement of Canaan. However, Passover was originally celebrated in the home (see Exod 12), and Deuteronomy relocates the celebration to the central sanctuary (Deut 16:5–6).<sup>4</sup>

### Deuteronomy 16:1–17 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> “Observe the month of Abib and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night. <sup>2</sup> And you shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the LORD your God, from the flock or the herd, at the place that the LORD will choose, to make his name dwell there. <sup>3</sup> You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. <sup>4</sup> No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall any of the flesh that you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain all night until morning. <sup>5</sup> You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, <sup>6</sup> but at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt. <sup>7</sup> And you shall cook it and eat it at the place that the LORD your God will choose. And in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents. <sup>8</sup> For six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God. You shall do no work on it.

<sup>9</sup> “You shall count seven weeks. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. <sup>10</sup> Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God

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<sup>4</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Dt 16:1–17). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

blesses you. <sup>11</sup> And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there. <sup>12</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. <sup>14</sup> You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns. <sup>15</sup> For seven days you shall keep the feast to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.

<sup>16</sup> “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. <sup>17</sup> Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you.

## Israelite Festivals

Feast	Date	References
Passover	Nisan 14	Ex 12:1–14; 23:15; Lev 23:5; Num 28:16; Mt 26:17–20
Unleavened Bread*	Nisan 15–21	Ex 12:15–20; 34:18; Lev 23:6–8; Num 28:17–25
Firstfruits	Nisan 16, Sivan 6	Lev 23:9–14; Num 28:26
Pentecost (Harvest, Weeks)*	Sivan 6	Ex 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23:15–22; Num 28:26–31; Deu 16:9–12; Acts 2:1
Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)	Tishri 1	Lev 23:23–25; Num 29:1–6
Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	Tishri 10	Lev 16:2–34; Lev 23:26–32; Num 29:7–11; Heb 9:7
Tabernacles (Ingathering, Booths, Sukkot)*	Tishri 15–22	Ex 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23:33–43; Num 29:12–39; Deu 16:13–17; Neh 8:13–18; John 7:2
Dedication (Lights, Hanukkah)†	Chislev 25 (for 8 days)	John 10:22
Purim†	Adar 14–15	Esth 9:18–32

\* The three festivals for which all adult Israelite males had to go to Jerusalem (Ex 23:17; 34:23)

† Festivals that are not prescribed in Leviticus<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

## Feasts and Festivals of Israel (חַג, chag; מוֹעֵד, mo'ed; ἑορτή, heortē)

Feasts and festivals were a common component of ancient religious practice. They were celebrations of divine provision or protection. Each major Israelite feast recognized a specific aspect of God's saving work. Since sharing a table signified peace or fellowship, feasts as religious observances demonstrated a peaceful relationship between God and Israel. The most significant texts regarding the feasts of Israel are Lev 23, describing the festivals, Num 28–29, emphasizing the offerings, and Deu 16, emphasizing pilgrimages. In addition to national festivals, Israelites celebrated other occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and agricultural or personal events. These occasions, while more private, were not secular, as each event had a divine blessing.

### Sabbath

Sabbaths were the most frequently observed festivals in Israel. They occurred weekly, monthly, every seven years, and every fifty years. Sabbath celebrations were included in the list of Israel's appointed feasts (Lev 23:1–44). The Sabbath Year was more festive than the weekly Sabbath celebration (Lev 25:1–7). The Year of Jubilee, celebrated every 50 years, was an occasion to free slaves and cancel debts (Lev 25:8–55). Each new moon constituted a minor festival—it included feasting, rest from work, and extra sacrifices. While the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee may never have actually been practiced, the new moon celebrations continued throughout Israel's history (see 1 Sam 20:24–27; 1 Chr 23:31; 2 Chr 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Ezra 3:5; Psa 81:3; Isa 1:13–14; Hos 2:11).

### The Levitical Feasts

The most well-known feasts of Israel are those described in Lev 23. The three pilgrimage feasts—the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles—demanded that every male Israelite travel to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

#### *Paschal Feasts*

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are closely related and ran consecutively (Lev 23:4–8). The Feast of Weeks followed seven weeks later, and connected the remembrance of the exodus (at Passover) with the bounty of the conquest.

**Passover.** The Passover was established in Ex 12 prior to the Sinai covenant. It is technically non-Levitical, but Levitical statutes expanded regulations for the Passover.

Of all the feasts of Israel, the Passover is the clearest example of God's election and grace. The Passover celebrates God's divine grace and deliverance of the faithful during the time of the exodus, the story of which is recounted during the feast. By "passing over" the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, God allowed the firstborn of Israel to live (Ex 12:21–31). Kline suggests that the emphasis of Passover is not on the passing of God over the Israelites but on His "covering" the Israelites through the blood on the doorpost. This interpretation makes the Passover an atonement feast like the Day of Atonement, and may be contradicted by passages such as Ex 12:12–13 (Kline, "Feast of Cover-Over," 498–500).

Passover was originally celebrated on the 14th day of Abib (which in postexilic times was called Nisan). Initially celebrated within households, the establishment of the temple

demanded a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Deu 16:5–7). Passover excluded foreigners and hired help, but circumcised resident aliens could participate (Ex 12:45–49). The feast was austere, and demanded a specific menu and procedure:

- The lamb from the sacrifice was the main course. It was to be roasted by fire and completely consumed (Ex 12:7–10). The lamb was to be treated carefully, and could not have any broken bones (Num 9:12).
- Bitter herbs were served, signifying the bitterness of the Israelites' struggles in Egypt.
- Only unleavened bread could be used. Initially, this was caused by the inability to wait for the bread to rise (Ex 12:39). Later, the absence of leaven represented purity from sin.
- Participants in the Passover feast were to be fully dressed for travel, anticipating God's deliverance (Ex 12:11).

The Passover meal was later expanded to include:

- Spring greens dipped into a cup of salt water, representing the passage through the Red Sea (salt water) and entrance into the land (spring greens).
- Roasted eggs to symbolize a peace offering for the temple.
- Charoset, which is made from chopped fruit and nuts. This was intended to be visually similar to the mortar the Hebrew slaves used to build bricks for the Egyptians.

The Passover traditionally also included wine. After the destruction of the temple, a roasted lamb's shank was presented on a plate rather than lamb meat. Called the *zeroa*, this is not eaten; it is a reminder that the temple—where the sacrifice would have been performed—was gone (Zimmerman, *Celebrating Biblical Feasts*, 66).

**Feast of Unleavened Bread.** The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week-long remembrance that consecrated the coming season. It may be considered an extension of the Passover feast rather than an independent holiday. The biblical texts intertwine the two feasts, with the Passover celebrated on the first day of the feast—the 14th of Abib—and the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated on the following day (Ex 13:3–10; Lev 23:4–8). The Feast of Unleavened Bread continued for seven days and required daily offerings. The feast demanded a rejection of leavened bread from the Israelites' meals, households, and storage places (Deu 16:4). It concluded with a convocation and rest from laborious activity (Lev 23:8).

While the Feast of Unleavened Bread was not a pilgrimage feast, it was often celebrated in Jerusalem, since Passover's pilgrimage would have already occurred. This feast likely included the waving of the firstfruits, signaling the dedication of the coming growing season (Ex 34:26; Lev 23:10–14).

**Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).** The Feast of Weeks, alternatively called the Feast of Harvest or Pentecost, celebrated the grain harvest and the renewal of the covenant. It is named for the seven weeks separating it from the Passover celebration. The Feast of Weeks celebrated the entrance into the promised land and its bounty (Lev 23:10).

The Feast of Weeks was marked by the offering of the firstfruits of the grain harvest. In contrast to the Passover feast, this grain offering explicitly included leaven (Lev 23:17). Meat offerings of bulls, a ram, and seven lambs were also required (Num 28:27). Deuteronomy

indicates that the Feast of Weeks was to be celebrated at the temple once it had been established (Deu 16:11). This makes the Feast of Weeks one of the pilgrimage feasts. The date of the feast is “from the day after the Sabbath” (Lev 23:15); it generally falls around the sixth of Sivan.

The *Book of Jubilees* indicates that the Feast of Weeks included a covenant-renewal ceremony. Thus, the festival may have (at one time) been called the Feast of Oaths (שְׁבֻעוֹת, *shevu'oth*) rather than the Feast of Weeks (שָׁבוּעוֹת, *shavu'oth*). The ceremony reflects the renewal of the covenant prior to the entry into the land (Deuteronomy) and after the conquest of the land (Josh 24). In addition to covenant renewal, the Feast of Weeks included the reading of the book of Ruth. This reflects the harvest that provided for Ruth and Naomi, and Ruth’s acceptance into the community of God.

### *Fall Feasts*

Three feasts occurred in the month of Tishri:

1. The Feast of Trumpets called for repentance.
2. The Day of Atonement sought redemption.
3. The Feast of Tabernacles, a pilgrimage feast, remembered the fulfillment of the redemption from Egypt (Glaser, *Fall Feasts of Israel*, 16).

**Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah).** The Feast of Trumpets signaled a call for repentance. Leviticus says that it should be announced with the blast of trumpets and be treated as a holy convocation. A food offering was included in the celebrations alongside the prohibition against work (Lev 23:23–25). The meat offerings of the feast were the same as those of the Feast of Weeks, but with only one bull (Num 29:2).

The Feast of Trumpets marked the beginning of a new agricultural year. It was unusual in that the trumpet, likely the *shofar*, would announce the feast and assemble the people. This feast dedicated the new agricultural year to God for His provision. Psalm 81 may allude to the Feast of Trumpets (Psa 81:3) in the context of the deliverance from Egypt. The psalm ends with a call for repentance, reminding the people to call upon the Lord as those in Egypt did (Psa 81:11–16).

**Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).** The Day of Atonement was the most holy of the feasts—the one time each year when the high priest could approach the mercy seat to make atonement for the nation’s sins. It occurred on the tenth day of Tishri, and was treated as a Sabbath (Lev 16:29). The Day of Atonement, described in detail in Lev 16, contained precise procedures and sacrifices:

- The high priest had to be properly bathed and attired for the ceremony (Lev 16:4).
- A bull was offered as a sin offering for the high priest and his household. Since the high priest made intercession for the nation, this purification was particularly important. Purification for the high priest is repeated four times: Lev 16:6, 11, 17, and 24.
- Two goats were placed at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. One was sacrificed as a sin offering and one would be the scapegoat sent to Azazel (Lev 16:7–10). A sin offering for the people was offered at least three times: Lev 16:10, 17, 24.

- After the offering of the bull, a censer of fire and incense was presented in the most holy place. The blood of the bull was then sprinkled upon the mercy seat of the Ark (Lev 16:12–14).
- The goat for the sin offering was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat to make atonement for the most holy place (Lev 16:15–16). The blood from both the bull and the goat was then spread on the horns of the altar seven times (Lev 16:18–19).
- The high priest touched the scapegoat and confessed national sins over the animal. It was then set loose into the wilderness (Lev 16:21–22).
- The high priest changed to normal priestly robes, bathed, and then offered burnt offerings for both himself and the people. The fat of the sin offering was burnt. The remains of the sin offerings were removed from the camp and burned (Lev 16:27–28).
- The individual(s) who led the scapegoat to the wilderness washed their clothes and bathed before returning to camp (Lev 16:26).

There were 15 sacrifices total (three sin offerings and 12 burnt offerings) and the scapegoat.

The peoples' impurity demanded the purification of the tabernacle and the altar. Sin and purification were the focus of the day's events (Rooker, *Leviticus*, 211–13). The Day of Atonement was the only fast day commanded in the Mosaic Law.

**Feast of Tabernacles.** The Feast of Tabernacles commemorates the period of the wilderness wanderings directly following the exodus from Egypt. It lasted seven days, beginning on the 15th of Tishri. It is also called the Feast of Ingathering, since it gathered the people together after the harvesting season and was the final pilgrim feast of Israel.

The feast opened and closed with convocations of the people. There were daily sacrifices. The final day of the feast may have had the same rules against working as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (MacRae, "Meaning and Evolution of the Feast of Tabernacles," 258). The remembrance of the wilderness wandering was considered an occasion of joy, connected to God's saving work on Israel's behalf. A large number of sacrifices were offered during the week's celebration (Num 29:12–38).

### **Feasts of the Exilic and Intertestamental Periods**

Besides the Mosaic feasts, the most well-known Israelite feasts are introduced in the books of Esther and the Maccabees. The earlier feasts relate to the exodus directly or through their association with the Sinai covenant. The later feasts are each associated with a distinct saving act.

#### *Purim*

Purim—the Feast of Lots—was an exilic-era feast celebrating the Jewish deliverance from Haman's plan to massacre them. Gerleman has suggested that Purim is an exilic equivalent to the Passover. While this is not commonly accepted, Purim did celebrate salvation (Schellekens, "Accession Days and Holidays," 117).

Purim was characterized by celebration, not sacrifice. The feast occurred on the 14th and 15th day of the month of Adar (February—March). It was a feast of excess, with the 13th of Adar was a day of fasting. The book of Esther was read in commemoration of Purim—typically on the night before.

### *Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah)*

The Feast of Dedication—also called the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah—commemorated the cleansing of the temple during the Maccabean Revolt. It had been defiled by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but the Maccabees restored it in 164 bc. The name “Festival of Lights” comes from a legend: when the altar was rededicated, there was only oil enough for one day. The temple menorah miraculously remained lit for eight days. For this reason, Hanukkah was celebrated for eight days beginning on the 25th of Kislev (1 Macc 4:52–59). Its festivities were similar to those for the Feast of Tabernacles (2 Macc 10:6).

### *Nicanor*

The defeat of the general Nicanor was celebrated on the 13th of Adar (1 Macc 7:49). Since this was the day before Purim, it was a day of fasting. Nicanor’s death was remembered on Purim.

### **Feasts in the New Testament**

Several Israelite feasts are mentioned in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels as they narrate the course of Jesus’ ministry. The proper observance of the Sabbath, especially, figures prominently in Jesus’ conflicts with the Pharisees (see, e.g., Mt 12:1–14; Mark 2:23–3:6; Luke 6:1–11; 13:10–17). Christ visited Jerusalem during the Passover (Luke 2:41; John 2:13, 23) and the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22), and was ultimately crucified at the Passover (Mt 26:2, 17; Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1, 7; John 19:14). The Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples on Pentecost (Acts 2). The Christian community usually reinterpreted these feasts as signs of Christ’s saving works. The Bible ends with the anticipation of one final feast: the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

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## Israelite Calendar

Month	Biblical Name	Modern	References
1	Nisan/Abib*	Mar—Apr	Ex 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Deu 16:1; Neh 2:1; Esth 3:7
2	Iyyar/Ziv*	Apr—May	1 Kgs 6:1, 37
3	Sivan	May—Jun	Esth 8:9
4	Tammuz	Jun—Jul	none
5	Ab	Jul—Aug	none
6	Elul	Aug—Sep	Neh 6:15
7	Tishri/Ethanim*	Sep—Oct	1 Kgs 8:2
8	Heshvan/Bul*	Oct—Nov	1 Kgs 6:38
9	Kislev	Nov—Dec	Neh 1:1; Zech 7:1
10	Tebeth	Dec—Jan	Esth 2:16
11	Shebat	Jan—Feb	Zech 1:7
12	Adar	Feb—Mar	Ezra 6:15; Esth 3:7, 13; 8:12; 9:1, 15, 17, 19, 21
13	Second Adar†	Mar—Apr	none

\* Those with two names include the Babylonian name first and Canaanite name second.

† Since the lunar calendar is 11 days shorter than the solar calendar, an extra month was added between Adar and Nisan seven times in each 19-year cycle.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

## Calendars in Old Testament Times

The calendar was important in the ancient world for regulating agricultural, religious, and legal activities. A version of the lunar calendar was commonly used throughout the ancient Near East. This “lunisolar” calendar was integral to Israelite culture and is reflected in the writings of the OT.

The New Year usually occurred in the spring, at the beginning of the growing season, with the month of Nisan (March/April). The Passover occurred in the first month, so its commemoration was linked to the observance of the beginning of the year (Ex 12:2). The Feast of Trumpets, which occurred during the seventh month, or Tishri (September/October; see Lev 23:23–25), was called Rosh Hashanah or the “head of the year”; it marked the end of the agricultural year (compare Ex 34:22).

The beginning of the month was reckoned by the first visible crescent of the new moon. The lunar month was 29 to 30 days long, and 12 lunar months added up to a 354-day lunar year. Because of variations on when the new moon might first become visible in different places, the rabbinic work the Mishnah established that the observance of the new moon in the Palestine region would be the official start of the month.

Both the OT and NT use lunar months for the dates of events, but sometimes different names appear for the months in the Bible. The Babylonian names appear most commonly, which seem to have been adopted after the exile (post 538 BC). Canaanite names appear for four of the months in pre-exilic contexts (see Ex 13:4; 1 Kgs 6:1; 6:38; 8:2).

Jewish literature from the Second Temple period indicates that a wide variety of sectarian groups followed both the traditional lunisolar calendar and a 364-day solar calendar. The usage of the solar calendar is attested to primarily in the book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The use of both led to Sabbath and holiday observances on different days. The lunar cycle and the solar cycle were annually out of sync by about 11 days, so the lunisolar calendar was corrected periodically to realign the lunar months with the seasons. The most common method of reconciling the calendars was adding an extra month when necessary (called “intercalation”) which kept the months and seasons aligned. Intercalation was most often made by royal decree in Mesopotamia until around 500 BC. During the Persian period, a mathematical formula was developed for intercalation based on the correspondence between 19 solar years and 235 lunar months. Seven months were intercalated for every 19-year period.

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<sup>8</sup> Mangum, D. (2012, 2016). [Calendars in Old Testament Times](#). In *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

## Calendar

The biblical text gives only sporadic evidence for the functional Israelite calendar during Old and New Testament periods. Despite the lack of comprehensive evidence, it appears that Israel utilized a lunisolar calendar which was, in part, dependent on the agricultural cycle.

### Agricultural Cycle

Early Israelite texts show evidence that Israelites understood the year in an agricultural context. The climate in the Levant is split between two seasons:

1. wet—occurring between October and March;
2. dry—occurring between April and September.

These two primary divisions are further broken down into the harvest (April—June) and planting (November—December). Several passages identify harvest (קציר, *qtsyr*) as pertaining to a specific time of the year:

- In Gen 30:14, the temporal period when Reuben finds mandrakes is identified as “the days of the harvest.”
- In Josh 3:15, the temporal period when the Jordan overflows its banks is “all the days of the harvest.”
- In Judg 15:1, Samson visits his wife “at the time of the harvest.”
- In Ruth 1:22, Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem at the “beginning of the barley harvest.”
- In 2 Sam 21:9, the Gibeonites are avenged “at harvest time.”
- In Num 13:20, the time of the grape harvest (July) is used as a temporal identifier.

Each of these references demonstrates that “the harvest” was understood as a temporal marker. Additionally, Gen 8:22 separates the year into “seedtime and harvest,” using agricultural markers to divide the year into two segments. Additional support for an agricultural understanding to the year is found in the 10th century BC Gezer Calendar.

### Day

The Bible uses the word “day” (יום, *ywm*) as a temporal marker for a solar day and the period of daylight. In the Old Testament, a day is subdivided into various segments, including:

- midnight;
- dawn;
- morning;
- noon;
- twilight;
- evening;
- night.

Matthew 20:1–16 and John 11:9 indicates that the day was divided into 12 hours. Passages such as Ex 14:24 and Mark 13:35 divide the night into different watches (see also Judg 7:19; 1 Sam 11:11; Lam 2:19; Mt 14:25).

The Bible presents conflicting evidence for the time when the day began for Israel. Four traditional options exist for the beginning of a day, including:

1. sunset;
2. midnight;
3. sunrise;
4. midday.

Midnight and midday find little support in the text; however, support for a day beginning at evening and morning are found in every segment of literature including the Pentateuch, historical books, Wisdom literature, and the Prophets. The evidence for each beginning of the day may be classified into three categories (Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology*, 3):

1. direct statements, in which the day begins or ends at a specified point (evening or morning);
2. statements of relative order, in which morning follows evening on the same day or evening follows morning on the same day;
3. relative expressions, including “the same day,” “tomorrow,” “yesterday,” “today,” and “the next day,” in which the relative position of the beginning of the day may be ascertained.

Based upon these criteria, the biblical text provides evidence that the day may have begun at either sunset or sunrise.

Evidence that the day began at sunset is found throughout the Old Testament:

- Exodus 12:18 relates that the festival of Unleavened Bread begins at sundown on the 14th of Nisan and concludes at sundown on the 21st of Nisan.
- Leviticus 23:32 chronicles that the Day of Atonement lasts from evening to evening.
- The Sabbath begins and ends at sunset.

However, Beckwith finds evidence for the Sabbath beginning at evening in the Prophets and in later texts. According to Beckwith, “the Old Testament seems to give a hint of it (evening beginning of the Sabbath) in Neh 13:19, and the New Testament gives clear indications of it in the references to the time of Jesus’ burial in Luke 23:54 and John 19:31, 42. Intertestamental evidence is supplied by 2 Macc 8:25ff and Damascus, CD, 10:14ff, and Josephus evidence from the first two centuries AD is to be found in Josephus (*Jewish War* 4:9:12, or 4:582; *Antiquities* 16:6:2, or 16:163; *Life* 32, or 159–61) and in the tractate Sabbath of the Mishnah” (Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology*, 4). The Mishnah confirms that the first day of the month may have begun in the evening with the spotting of the new moon (Rosh Hashanah 3:1).

Several texts provide the relative order of evening before morning, or night before day on the same day (Esth 4:16, Psa 91:5, Isa 27:3; 34:10; Jer 14:17). For example:

- Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 recount the creation of the world with the phrase “and there was evening and there was morning, day x.” This example places evening before morning—all on the same day.
- Daniel 8:14 reads that a continual offering will be made for 2,300 “evenings *and* mornings” until the restoration of the holy place.

- Psalm 55:18 identifies that the psalmist will call upon Yahweh in the following order: “evening, morning, and at noon.”
- Deuteronomy 1:33 places the fire of God at night before the cloud of God during the day.
- First Samuel 25:16 places night before day when discussing the protection of shepherds.
- First Kings 8:29 describes that Yahweh’s eyes are open “night and day.”

In Leviticus, ceremonial uncleanness ends at evening/sunset, implying that the day begins in the evening (Lev 11:24–25, 27–28, 31–32, 39–40; 14:46; 15:5–8, 10–11, 16–19, 21–23, 27; 22:6). Anyone becoming unclean will remain unclean, located outside the camp, until evening—perhaps implying the beginning of a new day. Examples outside Leviticus include Num 19 and Deu 23:11, which echo the end of uncleanness at sunset.

However, evidence also exists that the Israelite day began in the morning at sunrise; in fact, more passages depict day before night and sunrise before sunset than the alternative (e.g., Gen 1:14, 16, 18; 8:22; 41:40; Num 14:14; 2 Sam 21:10; 1 Kgs 8:59; 1 Chr 9:33; Neh 1:6; 4:9; 9:12; Pss 22:2; 42:3, 8; 55:10; 74:16; 78:14; 88:1; 136:7–9; Isa 28:19; 38:12; 60:11; 62:6; Jer 9:1; 16:13; 31:35; 33:20, 25; 36:30; Lam 2:18). These examples range from the Pentateuch, historical books, Wisdom literature, and the prophets leading to a possible conclusion that the day began with the sunrise.

Additional relative evidence exists with the combination of relative time references including “the next day,” “tomorrow,” and “the same day” in combination with specific night, day, morning, and evening, which point to a sunrise beginning of the day.

- In Gen 19:34, Lot’s daughters say that “the next day the older daughter said to the younger, ‘Last night I lay with my father.’ ” In this text, the combination of relative and absolute time references points to the day beginning in the morning.
- Lev 7:15 specifies that, on the day an offering is to be eaten, it should not be held over until morning (i.e., a new day).
- Lev 22:30 also specifies an offering “must be eaten that same day; leave none of it till morning.”
- Judg 19:9 demonstrates an intent for the day to begin in the morning with the reading “the day is coming to an end; spend the night here that your heart may be merry. Then tomorrow you may arise early for your journey so that you may go home.”

Additional references which combine relative and absolute time references to support a sunrise beginning of the day include 1 Sam 19:11; 28:8, 19. A final example supporting a dawn beginning of the day is found in Josephus regarding the Passover and festival of Unleavened Bread. Josephus points to the possibility that the day begins in the morning, even though the ritual accounts from evening to evening.

The conflicting evidence has resulted in two primary conclusions:

1. Wagenaar and Talmon argue that the day began at dawn in Israel’s early history (following the Egyptian day) and later reflected an evening beginning.
2. Milgrom argues that the Israelite day began in the morning, and references to the evening highlight special extraordinary occurrences.

## Month

The Israelite month (יָרֵחַ, *yrch*) was tied to the lunar cycle, lasting either 29 or 30 days. The month began with the appearance of the new moon just after sundown. The phases of the moon shifted approximately every seven days:

- the first half moon occurred about the seventh;
- the full moon occurred on the 15th;
- the waning half moon occurred on the 21st or 22nd.

These dates generally correspond to the beginning and/or ending of Israelite festivals, which may have also been originally tied to the lunar cycle. Month names are sometimes counted by number, and other times by name; they are most frequently identified by number. Wagenaar argues the majority position that these references are from priestly or historic texts dating to the late pre-exilic or exilic periods. Examples include references from Lev 23; Num 28; Ex 12:18–19; 1–2 Kings (with four exceptions); 1–2 Chronicles; Ezra (with one exception); Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Daniel; Haggai; and Zechariah. Examples of four Canaanite month names are found in the biblical text including:

- Abib—first month (Ex 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Deu 16:1);
- Ziv—second month (1 Kgs 6:1, 37);
- Ethanim—seventh month (1 Kgs 8:2);
- Bul—eighth month (1 Kgs 6:8).

Several Mesopotamian months are also identified, including:

- Nisan—month one (Neh 2:1; Esth 3:7);
- Sivan—month three (Esth 8:9);
- Elul—month six (Neh 6:15);
- Chislev—month nine (Neh 1:1; Zech 7:1);
- Tebeth—month 10 (Esth 2:16);
- Shebat—month 11 (Zech 1:7);
- Adar—month 12 (Ezra 6:15; Esth 3:7, 13; 8:12; 9:1, 15, 17, 19, 21).

## Lunisolar Calendar

A calendar that follows the cycles of the moon would express 12 lunar months in 354 days, while the solar year is just over 365 days. This means that the lunar year would fall short by 11 days each year into the solar cycle and quickly become out of sync with the seasons. To correct for this “seasonal shift,” an extra lunar month needed to be added every 2.7 years. This meant adding an extra lunar month at intervals of every two or three years (called intercalations). The practice of adding extra months was adopted in Mesopotamia as early as the third and second millennia BC.

The intercalations in Mesopotamia (and presumably Israel) were normally located after the 12th month of the year; however, months were often added after the sixth month and are occasionally attested at other times. It seems that, until the first millennium, these months were usually added at the end of the year when it was apparent the seasons were out of line with the calendar. Britton notes that “we find instances of intercalations at intervals of two and

three years from the third millennium on, suggesting that it was known from early times that three years was too long an interval between intercalations to maintain a calendar in phase with the seasonal year. On the other hand we also find instances of successive intercalary years and no evidence of any systematic practice” (Britton, “Calendars,” 119). During the second and third millennia, evidence points to a shared knowledge that the lunar calendar needed augmentation to stay aligned with the seasons, but no clearly defined cycle was adopted to maintain the two cycles together.

### Year

The Israelite year (שנה, *shnh*) was comprised of 12 months (with a possible intercalary month) and tied to the solar year (1 Kgs 4:7; 1 Chr 27:1–15). Bruce, relying upon Herodotus, *Histories* 2.5, argues that the earliest Hebrew year may have followed the Egyptian calendar, with 12 months of 30 days, plus five additional days—totaling 365 days. Once in Canaan, Israel may have adopted a Mesopotamian styled calendar beginning in the spring (Ex 12:2; 13:3–4; 23:15; Deu 16:1, 6). There is also evidence from the Gezer Calendar and biblical passages supporting a fall beginning for the year (Ex 34:18–24; 23:10–17; Deu 16:1–17).

The conflicting evidence for the beginning of the year can be explained in different ways:

- The spring beginning year may have been for ritual purposes, as there is some evidence for a civil calendar beginning in the fall (Clines, “The Evidence for an Autumn New Year,” 22–40).
- The early Israelite calendar may have begun in the fall in pre-exilic times, shifting to a spring beginning during the exile.
- Thiele argues that the kingdom of Judah used a fall-beginning calendar, while the kingdom of Israel followed a spring-beginning calendar.

Milgrom finds that the Israelite calendar contains similarities to the second-millennium Mesopotamian calendar (introduced by Samsu-iluna around 1750 BC), which divided the year into two segments:

- the first month, beginning around the vernal equinox (during the summer);
- the seventh month, beginning around the autumnal equinox (during the cold season).

Milgrom interprets Ex 34:22 (תְּקִיפַת הַשָּׁנָה, *tequphath hashshanah*) and 2 Sam 11:1 (לְתִשְׁבֻּת הַשָּׁנָה, *lithshuvath hashshanah*) as preserving an Israelite knowledge of the equinox division of the lunar year into two parts—beginning months one and seven. Milgrom also argues that “the priestly calendar clearly reflects this bipartite division of the year by its concentration of festivals in the first and seventh months that largely parallel one another. For example, both these two months contain a seven-day festival beginning on the fifteenth day of the month to which an additional day was added: the *pesaḡ* before the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:5–8) and the eighth day after the seven-day festival of Booths (Lev 23:36). This symmetry is accentuated in the Septuagint of Ezek 45:20: ‘You shall do the same (as the first day of the first month) in the seventh month’ ” (Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1965).

### Ancient Near Eastern Calendars

The Near Eastern calendars of the third and second millennia were based on a lunisolar calendar. The beginning of the month, in every location except Egypt, was determined by the appearance of the moon. Verderame finds that the *Enuma Anu Enlil* celestial omen series is dependent upon the appearance of the new moon crescent, and identifies “the first visibility of the moon” as the first day of the month (Verderame, “*Enuma Anu Enlil*,” 447–57). The Old Babylonian Epic text *Enuma Elish* also identifies the moon and its phases as the markers for the month (5:12–22): “[Marduk] made Nannaru [the moon] appear, entrusted (to him) the night. He assigned to him the crown jewel of nighttime to mark the day (of the month): Every month, without ceasing, he exalted him with a crown. At the beginning of the month, waxing over the land, you shine with horns to mark six days, on the seventh day, the disk as [ha]lf. At the 15th day, you shall be in opposition, at the midpoint of each [month]. When the sun f[ac]es you from the horizon of heaven, wane at the same pace and form a reverse. At the day of di[sappeara]nce, approach the sun’s course, On the [...] of the thirtieth day, you shall be in conjunction with the sun a second time” (Foster, “Epic of Creation,” 399).

This text describes the month in terms of lunar phases: The beginning of the month is depicted as the first lunar crescent, then moving through the seventh day (half moon) and waxing to full on the 15th. The second half of the month receives less focus, only noting the moon waning until it disappears to begin a new month. The text mentions a 30 day month which should be taken as the idealized month. The month was assumed to be 30 days in length unless the new moon was spotted on the 31st day. This spotting of the new crescent moon would shift the date to the first of the next month.

Steele notes this difference between the practical and ideal calendar as it occurs in administrative text: “The 30-day ‘ideal’ month, however, has its origins in early administrative practices in which the year containing twelve or sometimes thirteen months each of which may be 29 or 30 days long was replaced by an accounting year of 12 30-day months to simplify calculation of interest, work obligations and so forth” (Steele, “The Length of the Month in Mesopotamian Calendars,” 133). Britton joins Steele in arguing that the administrative calendar was an accounting convention, and not really a calendar acting as a “conceptual bridge between the civil and schematic calendars ... The procedure slightly overestimated the amounts which would have been actually provided, but greatly simplified the administrative management of large scale projects” (Britton, “Calendars, Intercalations and Year-Lengths in Mesopotamian Astronomy,” 117).

Sallaberger agrees, stating that “a moon month ... could be expected ... to alternate months between 29 or 30 days. On the other hand, in original Ur III texts regarding workers, rations, textiles, or calculations, a standardized 30 day month is used. This 30 day standard month serves obviously only for calculations in the administrative area and gives no information about the generally utilized ‘middle class’ calendar” (Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit*, 11).

The calendar year usually began in the spring with the harvest season. This conclusion is supported by:

1. the meaning of month names identified as the 12th and first months of the year corresponding to activities in the spring;



2. the presence of intercalary months usually occurring in the month just before spring; and
3. textual evidence from rental and labor contracts that depict the first month of the year as beginning with the contracts in the spring.

The year was divided into two, six month religious units:

1. the first beginning in the spring—harvest;
2. the second beginning in the autumn—seeding.

The same time periods are marked by the appearance of the equinoxes—the vernal equinox occurring usually in month one (spring) and the autumnal equinox usually occurring in month seven (fall). This raises the possibility that this six-month religious cycle was based upon the ebb and flow of the amount of daylight and night over the land.

An understanding of the *akītu* festival's importance with Ur lies in the patron god of the city. Nanna, the moon god, was the chief god at Ur. As the sun (Utu) and moon (Nanna) vied for control of the celestial heavens, so did the duration of each celestial body's presence over the earth. At the spring equinox, the sun and moon held equal time over the earth. After the vernal (spring) equinox, the sun experienced greater duration at the expense of the moon. Therefore, the vernal equinox—celebrated in the first month at the *akītu* festival—marked the transition of dominance to the sun. In the seventh month, at the autumnal equinox, the sun and moon were again equal. The *akītu* festival in the seventh month was more important at Ur because the moon (the patron god of Ur) would now hold dominance over the sun for the next six months until harvest.

This interplay between Utu and Nanna and the two agriculturally based *akītu* festivals in the same months as the equinoxes, points to the possibility of a connection between the vernal and autumnal equinoxes and the six month religious cycle (Cohen, *Cultic*, 400). While the correlation between the months and the equinoxes is evident at Ur, the expression of a connection with the equinoxes is experienced throughout the region. In the first and seventh month in Lagaš (Barley and Malt Festival and the Festival of Baba) and the Tummal Temple New Year's festivals at Nippur are examples of this expression in regional cultures.

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