

shall come increase from God which, when seen and properly understood, makes men bow in worship before it, and repeat the old words: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give the praise."



The Jewish Sacred Year and Calendar.

BY THE REV. G. H. BOX, M.A.

ONE of the most interesting links that connect the modern Jews with their great historic past is their sacred year and calendar. This has been maintained intact (though with developments) from Biblical times. It is a subject, therefore, that claims the intelligent consideration of all who are interested in the study of Holy Scripture, both in its Old and New Testament divisions. The calendar system, which is implied in the New Testament, may be studied in the life, as it were, in the social organization and worship of the modern Jews. No apology is, therefore, needed for introducing a short study of the main relevant facts in this place.

I. THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE JEWISH CALENDAR.

The elements of the calendar are, of course, the day, the month, and the year. The day is reckoned from evening to evening, and begins when (on a clear night) three stars are visible, which is supposed to be twenty-five minutes after sunset. This is technically known as the "coming forth of the stars." It should be noted that this division of the day is guaranteed by the first chapter of the Bible. In the enumeration of the days of creation evening comes first: "And it was evening and it was morning one day" (Gen. i. 5), etc. Accordingly, the day is divided into evening, morning, and afternoon, for each of which an appropriate service of prayer is provided—viz., evening prayer (*Ma-ārīb*), morning prayer (*Shahārīth*), and afternoon prayer (*Minhā*). The week is, of course, identical with

our own, consisting of seven days, Saturday being the seventh. But the Jews have no special names for the days of the week, except for the seventh, which is called the "Sabbath," or "Day of the Sabbath" (*i.e.*, "Day of Rest"). The only distinctive Jewish mode of distinguishing them is by numbers (first, second, third day of the week, etc.), a method of reckoning which is familiar to us through the New Testament (*cf.*, *e.g.*, St. John xx. 19). It is worth noting, however, that in post-Biblical Hebrew the sixth day (Friday) is termed "Eve of the Sabbath" (*'ereb shabbāth*), or "the coming in of the Sabbath" (*ma'ālē shabbāth*). It is interesting also to notice that the Hebrew word for "eve" (*'ereb*), or, rather, its Aramaic equivalent (*'ārābtā*), came to be the technical designation of Friday; and in exactly the same way the Greek equivalent, *παρασκευή* (= "preparation," *viz.*, for the Sabbath), came to be the regular name for Friday, and is still so among the Greeks. According to St. John (xix. 14), it was on preparation-day that the crucifixion took place; and, according to unbroken Christian tradition, that day has been fixed as Friday, or, as we call it, "Good Friday." The evening following the Sabbath is known as "the going out of the Sabbath"; and similarly the day preceding a festival and the evening following it are called "eve of the festival" and "the departure of the festival."

The Jewish month is lunar, beginning with the new moon. The moment at which it commences is technically termed its *molad*, or "birth," which is noted in every Jewish calendar for each month. Its length strictly should be 29 days 12 hours 44 minutes and $3\frac{1}{2}$ seconds. But for practical purposes this is adjusted by making the months 29 and 30 days in length alternately. Since, however, twelve such months only make a total of $354\frac{1}{3}$ days, while the solar year contains $365\frac{1}{4}$ days, a further adjustment was rendered necessary to prevent the seasons getting wrong. The difficulty was met by adding an extra month—the second Adar—to certain years, which are called "leap years." In a cycle of nineteen years ("the Metonic cycle") the difference, as compared with the corresponding solar

years, would amount to seven months. Hence, in every such cycle it is necessary to have seven leap years—viz., the third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth.

The fixing of the *molad* of the month, and the determination of the length of any given year, are now made exactly by astronomical calculations, and published through the Jewish ecclesiastical authorities. But formerly the proclamation of the new moon and the making of a “pregnant” year (*i.e.*, the addition of the thirteenth month) was the prerogative of the Sanhedrin and the patriarch, and was regarded by them as “the highest mark of their sovereignty in Israel.”¹ When the day of the new moon had been fixed by observation, the Sanhedrin proclaimed its decision, and this was conveyed by signals and messengers to Jewish congregations within reach.

There were, however, congregations in distant parts which could not be reached in this way in time. As the incidence of the festivals depended on the dates of the months, this created a difficulty which was solved by the congregations outside of Palestine observing two days as holy days instead of one.² Thus the New Year (*Rôsh ha-shānā*) is kept two days (Tisri, 1 and 2) instead of one. The one exception was the Day of Atonement (Tisri, 10), which had no additional day, “because the people were unable to abstain from food two whole days.”³ This observance of an additional day is really only a pious custom (*minhag*), which has ceased to have any meaning now that the calendar is accurately fixed beforehand by astronomical calculation. But the custom having become practically universal, it is held in orthodox Jewish circles that it can only be abolished by a properly constituted Sanhedrin, whose authority shall be recognized by the whole Jewish people. “Reformers, however,” we are told, “keep only one day, and this example is being largely followed.”⁴

¹ Dembitz.

² The possible variation for the beginning of a new month was limited to two days. The new moon might in some cases be seen a few hours earlier in one place than in another.

³ *Jewish Year Book*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Before the Babylonian Exile the months had Jewish names, of which only four have survived—viz., the months numbered 1, 2, 7, and 8 in the table below (1, Abib=Nisan; 2, Ziv=Iyar; 7, Ethānīm=Tisri; and 8, Bul=Cheshvan).

In the Bible they are usually indicated by numbers (first, second month, etc.); but after the Exile the Babylonian names were introduced, and are still in use among the Jews. These are :

<i>Name of Month.</i>	<i>Corresponds roughly to</i>	<i>Duration.</i>
1. Nisan	= April - - -	30 days.
2. Iyar	= May - - -	29 "
3. Sivan	= June - - -	30 "
4. Tammaz	= July - - -	29 "
5. Ab	= August - - -	30 "
6. Elul	= September - - -	29 "
7. Tisri	= October - - -	30 "
8. Cheshvan	= November - - -	29 or 30 days.
9. Kislev	= December - - -	30 or 29 "
10. Tebeth	= January - - -	29 days.
11. Shebat	= February - - -	30 "
12. Adar	= March - - -	29 (in leap year 30) days.
And in leap year :		
13. Adar Sheni	(= Second Adar) - - -	29 days.

Thus, an ordinary year cannot be less than 353 or more than 355 days; and a "leap year" cannot be less than 383 or more than 385 days.

It will be noticed that the order of the months just enumerated makes Nisan the first month—*i.e.*, makes the year begin with spring. Now, this is the beginning of the sacred year according to the Pentateuch, and on this arrangement of the year the cycle of sacred festivals is based. But there is another reckoning of the year which in post-Exilic times we find existing side by side with the above. According to this, the year begins with Tisri (*i.e.*, the seventh month of the Pentateuch reckoning). This marked the beginning of the secular or civil year, and is the year of the modern Jews.

Professor Schürer (a very high authority on these matters)

thinks that beginning the year with Tisri was the more ancient practice. There is some support for this view in a statement of Josephus, who says the beginning of the year with Nisan, as ordained by Moses, holds good with reference only to sacred things; whereas, on the other hand, "for buying and selling, and other business," the year commences with Tisri, according to the more ancient pre-Mosaic ordinance.¹ The two systems, as they formerly existed side by side, may be compared to our own ecclesiastical and secular year, the former beginning with Advent, the latter with January. But since the destruction of the Temple the Mosaic sacred year has largely ceased to have any practical importance, and what was formerly the secular year only has been accepted as the basis of its sacred year by the Synagogue.

The Jewish new year, then (*Rosh ha-shānā*),² begins with the first of Tisri. Thus, the present Jewish year (5667, according to the era of Creation) began on Tisri 1 last = September 30, 1906, and ends Elul 29 = September 19, 1907. The arrangement of the Jewish year is determined by certain rules, the most important of which are that the Day of Atonement must not fall either immediately before or immediately after the Sabbath (on account of the inconvenience involved in preparing for the Sabbath and the fast). If, therefore, in accordance with this rule, Tisri 10 (*i.e.*, the Day of Atonement) cannot occur on a Friday or a Sunday, Tisri 1 cannot occur on a Wednesday or a Friday. Further, in order to prevent the old national holiday, *Hosha'na Rabbā* (falls on Tisri 21) from occurring upon the Sabbath, Tisri 1 cannot fall upon a Sunday—that is to say, it cannot occur on Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday.

Another complication is brought about by the *molad*. The Jewish day formally begins six hours before midnight. If, therefore, the *molad*, or new moon, "occurs after midday, but before two o'clock, it cannot become visible till the next day, which has, therefore, to be reckoned as the day of the new moon."

¹ Schürer, *H. J. P. (E. T.)*, i. 38.

² One of the names for this festival is "Feast of Trumpets."

Thus, "if, by calculation, the *molad* should strike Saturday afternoon, the first of Tisri must be put off to Sunday, and, this being disallowed, further on to Monday."¹ The adjustment so necessitated is made at the end of the months Cheshvan and Kislef for the preceding year.

The first of every Jewish month (*Rosh Hodesh* = "Head of the Month") is kept as a half-holiday. It is identical with the "new moon" of the Bible. When the preceding month has thirty days the thirtieth day is kept as *Rosh Hodesh* as well. Thus, Iyar has two days of *Rosh Hodesh*—viz., Nisan 30 and Iyar 1—while Nisan itself has only one (Nisan 1).

2. THE DATES OF THE FESTIVALS AND FASTS.

We have, first of all, (a) "*The Solemn Days*"—viz., New Year and Day of Atonement.

1. New Year (*Rosh ha-shāna*): First day = Tisri 1; second day = Tisri 2.

2. Day of Atonement (*Yôm Kippûr*) = Tisri 10.

The first ten days of the New Year (Tisri 1-10) form a penitential period something like our Advent, and are known as "the ten days of penitence."

(b) *The Three Festivals*—viz., Feast of Tabernacles, Passover, and Feast of Weeks.

1. Feast of Tabernacles (*Succôth*): First day = Tisri 15; second day = Tisri 16; third to seventh days, middle days of the festival (half-holidays); seventh day = *Hosha'nā Rabbā*, Tisri 21; eighth day = *Shēmīnī 'Atseret* (Eighth Day Festival), Tisri 22; ninth day = *Simhath Tôrā* (Rejoicing of the Law), Tisri 23—total, nine days.

2. Passover (Pēsah = Greek *πασχα*): First day = Nisan 15; second day = Nisan 16; seventh day = Nisan 21; eighth day = Nisan 22.²

¹ *Jewish Year Book*.

² Note that the commencing and concluding days, which are full holy-days, are doubled here, as elsewhere, in accordance with the rule explained above. The Biblical first day now becomes two (Nisan 15 and 16), and the Biblical seventh day likewise two (Nisan 21 and 22).

3. Feast of Weeks (*Shābū'ōth*=weeks): First day=Sivan 6; second day=Sivan 7.

The "Feast of Weeks" is so called because it marks the completion of a week of weeks (*i.e.*, seven weeks, or forty-nine days), from the second day of Passover, when the "omer" of new corn was offered. The days of this interval are counted as they proceed, and this is known as the "counting of the omer." The fact that the fiftieth day marks the incidence of the festival is the explanation of its Greek name Pentecost (= "Fiftieth," *sc.* day). It corresponds, of course, to our Whitsuntide.

(c) *The Historical Feasts*.—Besides the above, there are two feasts commemorating events in the later history of the Jewish people—viz., *Hanukkā*, or *Dedication*, which is celebrated in memory of the rededication of the Temple, after a period of defilement, by Judas Maccabæus in 164 B.C. (*cf.* 1st Maccabees); and *Purim*, commemorating events related in the Book of Esther.

1. *Hanukkā*¹ lasts eight days: First day=Kisley 25; eighth day=Tebeth 2. (It often falls about Christmas-time.)

2. *Purim* (= ? *Lots*): Lasts one day—viz., Adar 14. It is the carnival of modern Jewry.

(a) *The Four Fasts* (commemorating events connected with the fall of Jerusalem)—viz.:

1. Tebeth 10 commemorates the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem.

2. Tammuz 17 commemorates the breach made in the wall.

3. Ab 9, the destruction of the first and second Temple (traditionally supposed to have taken place on the same day of the month). This is known as the "Black Fast," in contradistinction from the "White Fast," the Day of Atonement.

4. Tisri 3, the Fast of Gedaliah (the Jewish Viceroy left by Nebuchadnezzar after the destruction of Jerusalem, who was murdered: *cf.* Jer. xli.).

¹ *Hanukkā*=Dedication, τὰ ἑγκαίνια of St. John x. 22, Vulg. encænium. It was called also "The Feast of Light."

All these fasts begin at daybreak, except that of Ab 9, which, like the Day of Atonement, begins the previous evening, and lasts twenty-four hours. (All four fasts are alluded to in Zech. viii. 19.)

(e) *Other Minor Fasts* are :

1. Fast of Esther=Adar 13 (before Purim).
2. Fast of the Firstborn=Nisan 14 (before Passover).

NOTE.—It should be added that Passover must always be celebrated on the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Hence the canon of the Council of Nicæa, fixing Easter on the Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox. And so our own Prayer Book, which sets forth that “Easter Day . . . is always the first Sunday after the full moon, which happens upon or next after the twenty-first day of March” (*i.e.*, the spring equinox).

3. THE JEWISH ERA.

A word must be said in conclusion about the Jewish era. In the Books of Maccabees all dates are fixed by the Seleucid era (begins 312 B.C.). This continued in use till about the tenth century A.D., and was commonly employed for dating documents for legal purposes. Hence it is known as the “era of contracts.” Curiously enough, it survives among the Jews of Yemen (South Arabia) to this day. But since the tenth century the great mass of Jews have used the era of Creation (A.M.=anno mundi), which they fix as beginning 3760 B.C., disagreeing with Ussher’s reckoning, which dates it 4004 B.C. Thus the present year (1907), according to this notation, is $3760 + 1907 = 5667$. In printed Hebrew books, etc., this is shortened to 667 simply.¹ The Christian era is usually indicated in Jewish circles by the letters C.E.—*i.e.*, “common era.”²

¹ In Hebrew letters 667 appears as תרסז; ת=400, ר=200, ז=60, and ך=7.

² A full and detailed calendar is printed each year in the *Jewish Year Book* (Greenberg and Co., London).