

A History of Holidays

From A Messianic Jewish Perspective
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Overview

This study is intended to only be an over view and not much detail will be given to the Hebrew Holy Days. More information on Hebrew Holydays and holidays can be obtained [by clicking here](#).

Resources used: *World Book Encyclopedia* 1979, *The New Golden Bough* by James G. Frazer, *Ancient Deities* by Patricia Turner and Charles Russell Coulter, *Mythology* edited by C. Scott Littleton *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, *Encyclopedia Judaica*. These and other encyclopedias have noteworthy related information about the holidays we observe and can be found in local library reference departments.

Two Kinds of Holidays

The two basic kinds of holidays are; · Holidays, authored by men. · Holy Days, authored by G-d. Within these two categories we find other divisions most of which are culturally dependent. African Americans, Latinos, Orientals, Moslems, Indians, Native Americans and Jews, all have cultural/religious based holidays. For the focus of this discourse we will be looking primarily at "Christian" and "Hebrew" holidays.

Today's "Christian" holidays come essentially from historical events. The primary day of worship would naturally be listed first in this study, however because certain basic information must be obtained before full understanding can be grasped, I feel it necessary to place Sunday and the Sabbath last.

Ancient Calendars

To fully understand New Years Day requires a basic understanding of the calendar. The following information about calendar systems was obtained from, "World Book Encyclopedia" 1979 volume 3 "Calendar" except as noted.

Most ancient calendars compromised between the lunar and solar years, some having 12

months and others 13.

The Babylonians used a lunar calendar which was adjusted periodically to compensate for the lunar and solar differences by adding an extra month to their years at irregular intervals. When astrologers discovered that the calendar had run badly out of step, they decreed an "intercalary" month. This was done about three times in a cycle of eight years.

Egyptians were the first to adopt a solar calendar. Each month was thirty days having twelve months per year. At the end of the year the extra five days were added to the last month. This did not count for the quarter day ($365 \frac{1}{4}$ days per year) so even their calendar became out of sync over time. Their calendar was first developed around 4236 [BCE \(1\)](#).

The Romans borrowed their first calendar from the Greeks, having ten months in their calendar as is derived from the last six months being named numerically. Their names were

No.	Name	Modern Name
1.	Martius	March
2.	Aprilis	April
3.	Maius	May
4.	Junius	June
5.	Quintilis	July
6.	Sextilis	August
7.	Septembre	September
8.	Octobre	October
9.	Novembre	November
10.	Decembre	December

Sixty plus days every year were simply not included in the calendar.

Julian Calendar

The Julian (second Roman Calendar) originally began with Martius (March). Julius Caesar adjusted the calendar ignoring the lunar cycle in recalculating the calendar. He divided the year into twelve months having 30 or 31 days each except February (the last month) which had only 29. He ruled that the year 46 BCE would have 445 days to correct the calendar for accumulated errors. That year became known as "the year of confusion."

According to tradition, Augustus moved a day from February to August to make August as long as July. Traditionally, cultures add or remove days or months in the end of their calendar to adjust for solar to lunar variations in the calendar. This is why February was selected to be the short month.

Gregorian Calendar

This calendar was designed to correct the errors of the Julian calendar. Pope Gregory XIII corrected the calendar for the difference between solar and lunar by ordering 10 days dropped from October. The dropped days were from October 5, 1582. It became October

15. This procedure restored the next equinox to its proper date. To correct the Julian calendar's error regularly, the pope decreed that February would have an extra day in century years that could be divided by 400, such as 1600, 2000 but not in others, such as 1700, 1800, and 1900.

Hebrew Calendar

According to tradition, the Hebrew calendar has been in effect since creation, 3,760 BCE. The Hebrew calendar contains 12 months of alternately 29 or 30 days having a leap month (Veadar) added 7 times in 19 years to offset errors in the solar/lunar variant. (This is the most precise over time.) The names of the months are as follows;

Rel. No.	Civil No.	Modern Name	Gregorian Name (Roughly)
9.	1.	<i>Nisan or Abiv</i>	<i>March/April</i>
10.	2.	<i>Iyar</i>	<i>April/May</i>
11.	3.	<i>Sivan</i>	<i>May/June</i>
12.	4.	<i>Tammuz</i>	<i>June/July</i>
1.	5.	<i>Ab</i>	<i>July/August</i>
2.	6.	<i>Elul</i>	<i>August/September</i>
3.	7.	<i>Tishri</i>	<i>September/October</i>
4.	8.	<i>Heshvan</i>	<i>October/November</i>
5.	9.	<i>Kislev</i>	<i>November/December</i>
6.	10.	<i>Tebet</i>	<i>December/January</i>
7.	11.	<i>Shebat</i>	<i>January/February</i>
8.	12.	<i>Adar I</i>	<i>February/March</i>
X	13.	<i>Adar II (Leap Year)</i>	<i>February/March</i>

Originally, G-d instructed Moses which day and month were to be the beginning of the calendar. It starts in the spring and ends in the fall. Basically, the months after the seventh month were ignored because of the agricultural society. The calendar always began in the spring and ended in the fall. This way there was never a need for the calendar to be adjusted. Later men began to count the winter months causing a need for closer observance of times and the need to adjust the calendar.

Seven Day Week

The seven day week was created by [G-d \(3\)](#). While in Egypt, Israel was forced to keep an eight day week which caused them to lose which day was the Sabbath. After the exodus, G-d clearly revealed the Sabbath to them and re-established the seven day week .

Since the exodus, the Hebrew and Roman/Gregorian calendars have always had seven day weeks. The weekly calendar has never been adjusted. The first day of the week has always been the first day (Sunday) since the Exodus.

New Year Days

New Year's day is the first observance in the Gregorian calendar. It is based on the beginning of the year which starts at a most inconvenient time and date. Midnight is the time when most of us are in bed asleep. Dead of winter is no time to be out celebrating. Travel conditions are hazardous. Adding intoxication and sleepiness makes New Year celebration a very dangerous time to be out of the house.

Looking forward to the coming year is the focus and everyone is making "new years resolutions", often not having anything to do with G-d or faith.

New Year's Day Symbols

New Year's day symbols are limited to champagne bottles, party horns and noisemakers, and singing "Auld Lang Zyne."

Rosh Hashanah

The Jewish New Year begins at evening in the month starting the fall season, usually in September. In the Bible it is called *Shofarot* or [trumpets \(4\)](#). Temperatures are mild and the time of day is early evening. Observers spend the day in synagogue joyfully sounding trumpets and praying. The year has just ended, the fall harvest has been gathered and everyone is preparing for the end of year festival Sukkot (tabernacles).

Prayers of thanksgiving are offered to G-d for His great supply during the year. Our faith is the center of attention. During the prior month we focus on the past, resolving inter-community disputes and seeking forgiveness when needed. After the Hebrew new year we focus on our relationship with G-d asking His forgiveness for our transgressions.

For more information see Rosh Hashanah in our [Holy Days](#) document.

Saint Valentine's Day

Observed February 14th in memory of Saint Valentine a Catholic priest who was beheaded during persecution. Traditionally people exchange valentines cards. Often there are illusions to love between those exchanging cards. The origins of this day go back long before the "Christian" era. Cupid (see symbols) was always seen with bow and arrow. He is a fictitious character is derived from the great hunter [Nimrod \(5\)](#).

Saint Valentines Day Symbols

Hearts (representing love) and [Cupid \(6\)](#) with bow and arrows representing the love angel. According to legend Nimrod stole the hearts of women including Semiramis, his mother who became [his wife \(7\)](#).

Purim

The feast of [Purim \(8\)](#) is commanded in the Tanakh (Old Testament) . It is the remembrance of G-d's deliverance of the Jewish people from the plans of wicked Haman. Purim is a time of costumes and joy as the children drown out the name of Haman as the Magilla (the scroll of the book of Esther) is read. It is traditional to eat Hamentashen (cookies shaped in the form of Haman's hat). The celebration tends to get rather noisy. I am not aware of any pagan festivals coinciding with Purim.

Easter

The holiday called [Easter \(9\)](#) has come to be known as the Christian day of observance of the resurrection of Jesus. It is considered to be the "most important holy day of the Christian Religion." The day Easter is observed is difficult to calculate. At one time I thought it was the first Sunday after Passover. I found this not to be true. [Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 21 \(10\)](#). It cannot come before March 22 or after April 25. In 1997 its arrival would be on April 27 if it followed Passover. Consequently, Easter precedes Passover by almost four weeks this year arriving on March 30th.

The name "Easter" only appears once by error in the Bible, Acts 12:4 (KJV only). This is a mistranslation of the Greek word Pascha which is derived from the Hebrew Pesach. Elsewhere and in all other translations the word is rendered into English, Passover.

[Easter was originally a spring festival of sexuality and fertility \(11\)](#) known as Astorith or Ishtarti. The festival was called Ishtar and in modern days is known as Easter. There were also other near eastern cultures who worshipped the same goddess. The pronunciation of her name varies from culture to culture. Observance of Astorith's festival was marked with rabbits because of their rapid and vast reproductive characteristics. [Eggs \(12\)](#) are also important because it is from the fertilized egg that offspring is produced.

Just as in its ancient counterpart, Easter eggs have patterns painted in the shell using bright colors. The time of observance was early in the morning as the sun rose "from the dead" [\(13\)](#).

On [Shrove Tuesday \(14\)](#), children in Denmark and Norway trim birch branches with gay paper streamers. They "beat" adult members of the family with these "Lenten birches" until they receive "payments of hot cross buns."

Children in Finland perform this ritual on "Holy Saturday" and receive Easter eggs.

Easter Symbols

Traditional symbols are;

- Easter Sunday [Sunrise \(15\)](#) service
- Easter [Eggs \(16\)](#)
- Easter [bunnies \(17\)](#) (Christian connection unknown)
- [lamb \(18\)](#)
- [three crosses \(19\)](#) (*Remembering Jesus' execution with two thieves*)
- [hot cross buns \(20\)](#)
- new clothes (*remembering the new born state of believers*)
- Easter ham (*eluding to supposed cleansing of food*)

Passover

[Passover \(21\)](#) comes from the observance of Israel's exodus from Egypt. In it we remember the deliverance by G-d's outstretched hand and our journey to the promised land. The

exodus took place about 1450 BCE. For more information on Passover, see our document [Chag HaMatza](#).

Other pagan festivals fall during this time of year due to the proximity to spring.

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Shavuot

Fifty days after the "Ohmer" is waved before the L-rd, a special Holy day comes. The name is Shavuot meaning weeks.

The Greek name for this festival is Pentecost meaning fifty. There is disagreement between traditional Jews and some Messianic Jews as to when the Ohmer was waved. Messianic believers count the Ohmer from the [weekly Sabbath \(25\)](#) that falls within the feast of Matza (unleavened bread). Traditional Jews count it from the first day of Matza which is an [annual Sabbath \(26\)](#).

Shavuot is when G-d gave us the Torah [\(27\)](#).

No known pagan festivals occur during Shavuot.

Fourth of July

There are apparently no pagan origins to the fourth of July celebrations. It is celebrating the victory and independence from England.

Any pagan day occurring on the same day are purely coincidental.

Rosh HaShannah

See New Years and [Rosh HaShannah](#) above.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the most solemn day of Judaism and originates in the Torah. It is observed through fasting and prayer. In it we seek G-d's forgiveness for our sins and cast ourselves on His mercy.

As far as I know, there are no pagan festivals coinciding with Yom Kippur.

Sukkot

Sukkot is the feast of tabernacles or booths and originates in the Torah. It is observed by building a sukka in the back yard and eating and or sleeping under the sukka for seven days. It reminds us of the time our forefathers spent in the wilderness while leaving Egypt and going to the promised land. For more information on Sukkot, see our document on [Holy Days](#).

There are no pagan festivals coinciding with Sukkot.

Halloween (28)

Halloween is celebrated on October 31st. It developed from an ancient "New Year" festival and festivals of the dead.

In the CE 800's, the Catholic church established All Saints' day so that people could continue a festival they had celebrated before becoming Christians. The Mass that was said on this day was called Allhallowmas. The evening before became known as All Hallow e'en, or Halloween.

Trick or treating is the primary activity for most children. They dress in costumes and masks and go from door to door saying "trick or treat." The neighbors, to avoid having tricks played on them, give the children such treats as candy, fruit, and pennies.

The Celtic festival of Samhain is the source of the present-day Halloween celebration of over two thousand years ago. Celts lived in Great Britain and central and western Europe. Their new year began on November 1st. Samhain was observed in honor of the pagan god of death, after whom the feast was named. The Celts believed that Samhain allowed the souls of the dead to return to their earthly homes for this evening.

The Druids built a huge new year's bonfire of oak branches, which they considered sacred. They burned animals, crops and human beings as sacrifices. The families would then light their hearth fires from the new year's fire. During the celebration people wore costumes made of animal heads and skins. They told fortunes about the coming year by examining the remains of the animals that had been sacrificed.

The Romans conquered the Celts in CE 43 and ruled what is now Great Britain for about 400 years. Two Roman festivals were combined with the Celtic festival of Samhain. One of them called Feralia, was held in late October to honor the dead. The other festival honored Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. Apples probably became associated with Halloween because of this festival.

Regarding All Saints' Day, World Book Encyclopedia says that "the people made the old pagan customs part of this Christian holy day."

Halloween customs among the Celts in Ireland were to beg for food in a parade that honored Muck Olla, a pagan god. The leader of the parade wore a white robe and a mask made from the head of an animal.

In Scotland, People paraded through fields and villages carrying torches, They lit huge bonfires on hillsides to drive away witches and other evil spirits.

In Wales, every person marked a stone and put it into a bonfire. The people believed that if a person's stone was missing the next morning, he or she would die within the year.

The ancient Druids celebrated with bands of children roaming through the farming communities demanding treats. When the farmer cooperated and the children were satisfied with the bribe, they would light a carved lantern, usually from pumpkin or gourd and leave it at the property to keep evil spirits away. When the children were dissatisfied with the bribe, they would pronounce curses on the family and farm.

Halloween Symbols and Customs

Traditional Halloween symbols and customs are;

- Jack-O-Lanterns (*Carved pumpkins or gourds*)
- Ghosts, Goblins, Witches and Devils
- Costumes (*The more gruesome the better*)
- Dunking for Apples
- Hay Rides
- Bonn Fires
- Trick Or Treating
- Frightening People
- Haunted Houses

Thanksgiving Day

Thanksgiving Day apparently has no pagan origins. The pilgrims who came first to America offered a big feast to the Lord for His salvation. Turkey (a biblically approved meat) is served along with the bounty of the harvest of summer.

Any pagan holidays coinciding with Thanksgiving day are purely accidental.

Christmas (22)

One of the middle ages sources for Christmas is Saturnalia, a Roman festival honoring the Roman god Saturn, the lord of harvest. The festival began on December 17, and lasted for seven days. It was customary for all schools and businesses to close for Saturnalia.

On the second day of the festival, many families offered sacrifices of young pigs.

The last days of the festival were spent visiting and exchanging presents. Some of the gifts were little clay images called sigillaria, which means small images. These were placed under the idol to Saturn. There are many stories for the source of the Christmas tree.

In post flood days the celebration for tree worship was founded by Semiramis who purportedly found her son Nimrod in an evergreen tree while she was still a virgin . She started the custom of bringing a green tree into the home in observance of Nimrod's birthday. She carved up her husband who had died and sent his body parts all over her kingdom. Anyone who refused to observe Nimrod's birthday was threatened with the same fate.

Another version says that Semiramis turned into a tree which was worshipped as the mother of god.

God commanded His people to avoid such practices (Jeremiah 10:1-5 (KJV)).

The Yule log comes from worshipping Thor. It was said that the log had magical powers and was lit in the fireplace on the eve of the winter solstice. People would burn a huge log and keep parts of it for lighting the fire for the next years observance and to protect the house from fire and lightning.

The Messiah was not born in the winter during a pagan festival. The following information

was gleaned primarily from the "*Companion Bible*" by Zondervan, original copyright by *The Bullinger Publications Trust*.

- Luke 2:8 Shepherds keeping their flocks in the field at night. Could not do this in the winter time because of night time temperatures.
- Luke 1:26 Yeshua conceived 6 months after John the immerser was conceived.
- Zacharias received word of his son to be before Sivan 18. This was his time to serve. Luke 1:5 [course of Abia \(30\)](#)
- It took about three to four days to get home.
- John would have been conceived on or about 23rd of Sivan.
- 6 months later would be around the 15th of Nisson. Would place his birth about Tishiri 15 or the first day of Tabernacles.
- Yeshua started his ministry at age 30. His ministry was 3 ½ years. He was executed at Passover when He was 33 ½ years old. Count backwards from Passover ½ year. You come to the 15th day of the 7th month which is the 1st day of Sukkot.
- The 8th day of Sukkot (Shimini Atzeret) is also called Yom Brit Milah (day of circumcision). Yeshua was circumcised in the 8th day. Luke 2:21
- Important Messianic events are marked by G-d's festivals. Why would Yeshua's birth be any different?
 - Passover - Yeshua's sacrifice
 - First Fruit - Yeshua's resurrection
 - Pentecost - Falling of the Holy Spirit
 - Rosh haShannah (Trumpets) - His second coming foretold.

Sunday (31)

Sun worship was an ancient practice carried out by many people. The Romans named the first day of the week "Sunday" in honor of the Sun god. In order to assist in converting pagans to the "Christian" faith, the day was accepted as the primary day of worship.

[Constantine ordered the change \(32\)](#) from Saturday (Sabbath) to Sunday in the second century CE. He wasn't even a believer in this "cult". He was bent on destroying the Jews. He burned part of Rome and blamed it on the Jews. He then issued an edict that all who worship on Sabbath would be executed in the games at Rome. Because gentile "Christians" felt no obligation to keep the Sabbath or holy days, they soon ceased observing them because of Paul's teachings.

Sunday is called "[Little Easter](#)" (33) because in it the "resurrection of the Lord" is remembered every week. As was pointed out in the section on Easter, People rise early on Easter Sunday to arrive at an appointed place to watch the sun rise. They tell us this is to remember the resurrection of the Son of G-d.

Sabbath

When Israel came out of Egypt, G-d instructed Moses that no work was to be done on the seventh day of the week. Because Egypt had an eight day calendar, the L-rd had to show them which day was the Sabbath. He did this by sending "mannah" on every day but the

Sabbath. On the day before the Sabbath, double the mannah fell. On all other days if one picked more mannah than could be used, it turned to maggots and stank. On the Sabbath however, the mannah kept until it was all eaten. ([Exodus 16:11-30](#))

Sabbath begins and ends at sundown. We can see this even in the book of Genesis where the "evening and morning were the first day." ([Gen 1,2](#)) etc. etc.. Keeping the Sabbath marks us as being worshipers of the true G-d of creation ([34](#)).

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Footnotes

1. BCE; Before the Common or Christian Era.
2. Genesis 1,2
3. See "The Sabbath" also Exodus 20:8-11
4. Leviticus 23:24
5. Genesis 10:8,9
6. Cupid or Eros who purportedly produced the "winged ones", the son of Venus. Also Ninus or Ninus "the son"
7. Semiramis also called Rhea the great goddess mother of Ninus who was also her husband. Layard's "Nineveh and its Remains" Volume ii. page 480
8. Esther 9:28
9. Easter also called Ishtar and Astarte.
10. World Book Encyclopedia
13. In honor of Bel, Baal or Dios the sun god.
14. "World Book" Encyclopedia "Easter"
15. In honor of Nimrod who was Bel, Baal or Dios the sun god
16. Representing new life (was a fertility symbol in ancient cultures)
17. Christian meaning unknown (was a fertility symbol in ancient cultures)
18. Representing Jesus the lamb of G-d.
19. The earliest form of the cross was worship of Tammuz, another name for the sun god. The Egyptian "Ankh" or "Tau", symbol of eternal life is one of the earlier developments of this symbol of Tammuz.
20. The Cross is the symbol for sun worship (Tammuz note 19) and the round bun is the same symbol.
21. Exodus 12:1-14
22. World Book Encyclopedia, 1979 "Christmas"
25. Lev 23:16 This causes Shavuot to always fall on Sunday, the first day of the week.
26. I believe this is a reactionary move based on a looser interpretation of Lev 23:16
27. "The Jewish Holidays" by Strassfeld, page 69
28. World Book Encyclopedia, 1979 volume 9, "Halloween"
30. The Companion Bible Appendix 179 (Parallel Datings, Etc.)
31. "World Book" Encyclopedia 1979 volume 18, page 784 Mythology and Sun Worship
33. The New Golden Bough
34. Exodus 31:13,17