

# Names of the Months and of the Days of the Week<sup>1</sup>

From the practice of the Jews before the Babylonian Captivity, it seems probable that at first the months were simply numbered, not named. This is a clear and rational procedure and is found in the early Scriptures. so the Society of Friends felt called upon to use the Scriptural names of the days of the week and of the months instead of those names which are in common use and which are, for the most part, derived from the names of pagan gods. Other Christians besides Friends have felt similarly on this subject. Richard Baxter, the English nonconformist of the Seventeenth Century said: "It were to be wished that the custom were changed of using the names of weekdays which idolators honored their idols with-as Saturday. Monday. and the rest. So for the months."

Friends did not object to the names "September." "October." "November." and "December." but objected to their use since the months they name are no longer the seventh. eighth. ninth and tenth months. January was named for Janus. an old Roman god. February was named from the *Februa* the expiatory ceremonies which the Romans held in honor of their dead in this month. March was named for the Roman god Mars. Who, at the time of the naming of the month. was primarily a god of agriculture, the symbol of springtime and youth. It was only after the artificial identification of Roman gods with Greek gods that Mars became the god of war. the counterpart of Ares. April is derived from the same root as the Latin *aperire*, which means "to open". Thus April is the month of opening buds and flowers.

May is of uncertain origin. perhaps from the Roman goddess Maia. or from *maiores* (the older). June may have been named for the Roman goddess Juno. or from *iuniores* (the younger). July, originally *Quinctilis*, was renamed for Julius Caesar, who was born in that month. August. originally *Sextilis*, was chosen by the Roman emperor Augustus to be renamed in his honor because of the many fortunate events in his life that had occurred in that month.

The practice of naming the days of the week is derived from Egyptian astronomy. It did not become firmly established in our civilization until the time of Theodosius. at the end of the Fourth Century A.D. Curiously enough. it was the Roman custom of lettering the successive days of a *nundinum* (a period of eight days, in addition to the current day) which gave rise to the modern custom in some Christian groups whereby the dominical letter is determined. The days of the week are lettered from A to G, just as the Romans lettered the days of a *nundinum* from A to H.

According to the Egyptian astronomers the sun and moon were planets and the order of the planets in terms of their distance from the earth was as follows: **Saturn**, **Jupiter**, **Mars**, **sun**, **Venus**, **Mercury**, **moon**. One hour of each day beginning with the first, was consecrated to each of these "planets". The whole day was consecrated to the planet to which belonged the first hour. If the first day be consecrated to the sun, to which belongs the first hour, then the first hour of the next day will belong to the moon and the day will be the moon's day (**Monday**) and so on until after the cycle has been completed, the first hour of the eighth day will belong to the sun again. and it will again be the sun's day (**Sunday**)

Our names of the days of the Week are derived from AngloSaxon names and these in turn are named for the Saxon gods Who approximate to the Roman gods for whom the days were named. The Roman names have survived, to an extent. in Spanish. French. Italian and other languages derived from or greatly influenced by Latin

The day of **Mars** was called the day of Tiw, the god of star. (**Tuesday**)

The day of **Mercury** was called the day of Woden. chief of the gods. Whose attributes corresponded more nearly to those of the Roman Mercury than to those of Jupiter, chief of the Roman gods. (**Wednesday**).

The day of **Jupiter**. who was believed to hurl thunderbolts. was called the day of Thor, the god of thunder. (**Thursday**).

The day of **Venus** was called the day of Frigg. queen of the gods, who was sometimes confused or identified with Freyia the goddess of love (**Friday**)

The Seventh day was still called the day of **Saturn**, the sower of seed. (**Saturday**)

No doubt most Christians unthinkingly use these names of which we have just spoken, or else they use them merely in conformity to the general custom. Although general custom can. in the long run. determine the correctness of language and vocabulary, it cannot pass upon right and wrong. And so, some Christians still feel that the use of these names for months and days, derived as they are from non-Christian sources. is

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<sup>1</sup> C:\My Documents\SCHOOLofLocalChurch\Lessons\33PaganHolidays\Articles\Months4.doc

inconsistent with the tenets of the Christian faith. The original Roman calendar had 10 months with 304 days in a year that began with the month of March.

**JANUARY** in Roman mythology, JANUS, the god of doors and gateways and beginnings (which the Romans believed brought good endings). A pretty good name to start the year!

**FEBRUARY** From FEBRUA, the Feast of Purification, celebrated in ancient Rome. It was not originally included in the Roman calendar which began with March.

**MARCH** From MARS . In Roman mythology, the god of war, one of the most important gods. Mars was regarded as the father of the Roman people.

**APRIL** From APRILIS, perhaps from the Greek Aphrodite or a pagan underworld goddess.

**MAY** Named after Maia, the Roman goddess of the spring.

**JUNE** In Roman mythology, Juno, queen of the gods and wife and sister of the god Jupiter. She was the protector of women and was worshipped under several names. One of them was Hera.

**JULY** From JULIUS CAESAR, born in Rome on July 12 or 13 in 100 BC. He was the Roman general and statesman who laid the foundations of the Roman imperial system. In 44 BC he changed the name of the month Quintillis to Julius, after himself. The following year he decided (based on the advice of an astronomer) to use a purely solar calendar with 365 days. This calendar is known as the Julian calendar in his name.

**AUGUST** From AUGUSTUS CAESAR, born in 63 BC and died in 14 AD. He was the emperor of Rome from 27 BC until his death. He restored unity and orderly government to the empire after nearly a 100 years of civil wars. The month Sextillis was renamed Augustus after him in 45 BC.

**SEPTEMBER** From the Latin word SEPTEM meaning 7.

**OCTOBER** From the Latin word OCTO meaning 8.

NOVEMBER From the Latin word NOVEM meaning 9.

**DECEMBER** From the the Latin word DECEM meaning 10.

### **Where the names of the months originated**

All names of the 12 months of the year are of Latin origin. Some came from the ancient Roman calendar which used March 1 as the first day of the year. However, a well-known general who in time became emperor of Rome named Julius Caesar set January 1 as the first day instead of March 1.

**January**, the first month of the year, consisted of 31 days. Its name was derived from Janus, the Roman god of gates and doors. Hence, of all beginnings. Every January 1st the Romans offered sacrifices to Janus asking blessings for the New Year.

**February**, the second month, came from a Roman celebration called Februs. It was a festival of purification or cleaning. It once had 30 days until Julius Caesar took one day off to add to the month which was later named after him. As stated by tradition, the emperor Augustus took one day off it and transferred it to August. February is the only month with 28 days. A 29th day is added to it during leap years.

**March** was the first month of the Roman year and formerly called Martius. Until Julius Caesar revised the calendar and made January 1 as the beginning of the year. **March** became the third month. It was named after Mars, the Roman god of war.

**Aprilus** was the name the Romans gave for **April**. It was derived from a perire which means "to open". It is the season when the buds begin to open and the Anglo-Saxons called it Eostre (Easter) month.

Most people said **May** was named afer Maia, the Roman goddess of spring and growth. Yet some authorities said it is short for majores, Latin for older men.

**June** once had 29 days until Julius Caesar added a 30th one. Some believed it was named after Juno, goddess of marriage. Others theorized it originated from juniores, Latin for young men.

**July** was called Quintilis or fifth month by the Romans. Julius Caesar was born in this month. After his death, the month was named Julius, to honor him.

**August** was named after emperor Augustus. It once had 30 days when Augustus lengthened it to 31 days.

**September** comes from the Latin septem which means seven. It has 30 days.

**October** originated from the Latin octo, which means eight.

**Novem** is the Latin word for nine. This explains November being the ninth month. It once consisted of 29 days until Julius Caesar gave it 31 days.

**December** has 31 days. Since it was the tenth month in the Roman calendar, it came from the Latin decem which means ten.