

The Value and Mystery of the Jewish Calendar

Source Sheet by Adam Berman

Exodus 12:1-2

(1) God said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: (2) This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you.

Rashbam on Exodus 12:2:3

Following the opinion of R. Eliezer that the world was created in the Hebrew month of Tishre, one would explain the true plain meaning of the text as follows:

"This month shall mark *for you* [the beginning of months]." Even though this month [Nissan] is not the first month for the other nations, *for you* it will be the beginning of the months, for you to enumerate [for example] "the sixth month" or "the seventh month" or "the eighth month" or "the ninth month" or "the twelfth month, that is the month of Adar" (Est. 3:7). You should count from Nissan to remember that in Nissan you left Egypt. And when it says in the Torah "in the seventh month," it means if one counts months from the month of the exodus.

Bekhor Shor, Exodus 12:2

For your freedom, and so you shall make it the first in your count of months so that you count from your freedom, and thus you will remember the time of your freedom and remember the goodness that I have done with you, and you shall be cautious in regards to fearing Me, loving Me, and serving Me.

Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1

(1) **They are four** days in the year that serve as the **New Year**, each for a different purpose: **On the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings**; it is from this date that the years of a king's rule are counted. **And** the first of Nisan is also the New Year **for** the order of **the Festivals**, as it determines which is considered the first Festival of the year and which the last. **On the first of Elul is the New Year for animal tithes**; all the animals born prior to that date belong to the previous tithe year and are tithed as a single unit, whereas those born after that date belong to the next tithe year. ... **On the first of Tishrei is the New Year for counting years**, as will be explained in the Gemara; **for** calculating **Sabbatical Years and Jubilee Years**, i.e., from the first of Tishrei there is a biblical prohibition to work the land during these years; **for planting**, for determining the years of *orla*, the three-year period from when a tree has been planted during which time its fruit is forbidden; **and for tithing vegetables**, as vegetables picked prior to that date cannot be tithed together with vegetables picked after that date. **On the first of Shevat is the New Year for the tree**; the fruit of a tree that was formed prior to that date belong to the previous tithe year and cannot be tithed together with fruit that was formed after that date; this ruling is **in accordance with the statement of Beit Shammai**. But **Beit Hillel say**: The New Year for trees is **on the fifteenth of Shevat**.

Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:8-9

(8) **Rabban Gamliel had forms of the moon on a tablet on the wall of his attic, which he would show to the laymen. And he would say to them: Did you see a form like this or like this?** There was **an incident in which two witnesses came to testify, and they said: We saw the waning moon in the morning in the east, and that same day we saw the new moon in the evening in the west. Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri said: They are false witnesses,** as it is impossible to see the new moon so soon after the last sighting of the waning moon. **When they arrived in Yavne, Rabban Gamliel accepted them. And there was another incident in which two witnesses came and said: We saw the new moon at its anticipated time,** however, **on the following night, it was not seen. And nevertheless Rabban Gamliel accepted their testimony and established the New Moon on the thirtieth day. Rabbi Dosa ben Horkinas disagreed and said: They are false witnesses; how can witnesses testify that a woman gave birth and the next day her belly is between her teeth,** i.e., she is obviously still pregnant? **Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: I see the logic of your statement;** the New Moon must be established a day later.

(9) Upon hearing that Rabbi Yehoshua had challenged his ruling, **Rabban Gamliel sent a message to him: I decree against you that you must appear before me with your staff and with your money on the day on which Yom Kippur occurs according to your calculation;** according to my calculation, that day is the eleventh of Tishrei, the day after Yom Kippur. **Rabbi Akiva went and found Rabbi Yehoshua distressed. Rabbi Akiva said to Rabbi Yehoshua: I can learn from a verse that everything that Rabban Gamliel did in sanctifying the month is done,** i.e., it is valid. **As it is stated: “These are the appointed seasons of the Lord, sacred convocations, which you shall proclaim in their season” (Leviticus 23:4).** This verse indicates that **whether** you have proclaimed them **at their proper time** or **whether** you have declared them **not at their proper time, I have only these Festivals** as established by the representatives of the Jewish people. Rabbi Yehoshua then **came to Rabbi Dosa ben Horkinas, who said to him: If we come to debate and question the rulings of the court of Rabban Gamliel, we must debate and question the rulings of every court that has stood from the days of Moses until now...** When Rabbi Yehoshua heard that even Rabbi Dosa ben Horkinas maintained that they must submit to Rabban Gamliel’s decision, **he took his staff and his money in his hand, and went to Yavne to Rabban Gamliel on the day on which Yom Kippur occurred according to his own calculation.** Upon seeing him, **Rabban Gamliel stood up and kissed him on his head. He said to him: Come in peace, my teacher and my student. You are my teacher in wisdom,** as Rabbi Yehoshua was wiser than anyone else in his generation, **and you are my student, as you accepted my statement,** despite your disagreement.

Math puzzle:

In the 19-year cycle, leap years occur in years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19. When are the earliest and latest holidays?