

Religious Calendars

Time, often called the fourth dimension, is an important part of our life. In fact, we measure life in terms of time. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years are the time periods that define our lives. We compartmentalize time into appointments, tasks and vacation periods. We separate and schedule eating, sleeping, reading and other activities and set aside days or other periods of time to memorialize important markers of time like birthdays and anniversaries. Many of us keep all of this scheduling in PDAs, appointment books or personal calendars. We live and organize our lives through time. Some of us are good times managers and others are not. But we all have to use our time as we manage our lives. We cannot escape time.

Two major time systems operate in our lives. These are civil time (or cultural time) and religious time. When a religion dominates a culture or a culture dominates a religion, these two systems may merge into a comprehensive time system. But often we manage these time systems separately.

In the United States, the time system begins the day at midnight, begins the work week on Monday, uses a variable system for months (28-31 days) and begins each New Year on January 1st. Holidays are set apart and often are celebrated by taking off the day from work even if the day is not celebrated as an expression of its meaning. This is because the time is seen as secular rather than religious. This is different than the religious system of time found in the Bible. The Bible begins the day at sundown, begins the week with Sunday, marks off months every twenty eight days (a lunar system) and begins the religious year in Spring (the Month of Nisan).

Judaism and Christianity find the origin of their calendars in this Biblical calendar and time system. But through the centuries, both Judaism and Christianity have adapted that system with the Western Cultural one (used in the USA) and added to that system new Holy Days and observances.

The Jewish Religious Calendar

The Jewish Religious calendar is closest to the original Biblical one. It combine the Biblical calendar with the cultural one so that both the Religious months and the modern months are overlapped and special Holy Days are marked for observance. As found in the Torah (Lev. 23), the Holy Days are marked out. These include:

The Sabbath: The last day of the week as described in Genesis is the Sabbath which is a memorial to God as Creator and Redeemer. The Torah requires that Jews observe the Sabbath in all their generations. This observance begins Friday night at Sundown and continues until Saturday at Sundown. Originally this was a home observance, but the Sabbath became the primary time of Synagogue (congregational) meeting and prayer during the Babylonian captivity and remains so to the present.

Rosh Hodesh: (Beginning Renewal) The First of the Month is observed by lighting candles in the home but is a relatively minor holy day. Its purpose is to set off each month so time is remembered. In Temple times, the shofar (ram's horn) and Silver Trumpets were sounded on the first day of each month at sundown.

Pesah (Passover): The Torah declares the first month (Nisan) to be the beginning of the year. Modern Judaism, based on the tradition of the Oral Law written down in the Mishnah has four new years days. This "religious" one is usually overshadowed by the "civil" one that is observed as Rosh Hashanah (Head of the Year) during the fall. Passover includes a combination of home and synagogue services that commemorate the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt as narrated in the Book of Exodus. The Passover Seder is an elaborate dinner ritual that retells the Exodus story using symbolic food. The Seven Days of Unleavened Bread follow where no leaven can be eaten and matzah replaces normal breads.

Counting of the Omer: A period of seven Sabbaths plus one additional day is the period called the "Counting of the Omer". This counting of the days and Sabbaths from Passover to Shavuot (Pentecost) was based on a floating start (Always Sunday rather than a date) during the Temple period. The celebration of First Fruits required gathering Sheafs on Saturday evening that are waved before the Lord in the Temple on Sunday and begins the count. Seven Sabbaths (49 days and one additional day would always make Shavuot always land on a Sunday. But after the Temple was destroyed the Pharisee tradition fixed the starting date of the counting to the day after the Passover celebration which is Nisan 16. That means the fifty days can end on any day of the week, rather than only on Sunday.

Shavuot: Three themes are associated with the celebration of Shavuot. These are Harvest, Conversion, and the Giving of the Torah. The harvest theme is the oldest and is related to the notion of First Fruits. The traditional observance includes a reading of the Book of Ruth which focuses on the conversion of Ruth to the Jewish God, Land and people. Finally, this is the traditional date of Moses bringing the Ten Commandments from God to the people from Sinai establishing the Mosaic Covenant.

High Holy Days: The seventh month of the Biblical Calendar is Tishri. As the seventh month it holds great significance. The first day of the month is called Yom Teruah (Day of Blowing) and requires that Jews hear the blowing of the shofar (ram's horn). In the Temple periods, this was echoed by the blowing of two silver trumpets. So this day is sometimes called "Trumpets". It is also one of the four New Year days for Judaism (the civil new year) and is commonly called Rosh ha-Shanah (Head of the Year). The shofar is sounded with three themes – Repentance, Remembrance and The Sound of the Shofar. Every Jew is required to hear the sounding which begins the 10 days of awe or repentance which involves repentance and restoration of relationships in anticipation of the Day of Atonement (forgiveness and judgment) which is the tenth day of the Seventh Month. The Day of Atonement is the most sacred day of the Jewish year and involves fasting (affliction of the soul) and prayers and a liturgy related to the ministry of the High

Priest as commanded in the Book of Leviticus for the atonement of God's people. It is also a time for reading the Book of Jonah and consider the judgment and mercy of God.

Sukkoth: On the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishri) is the celebration of an eight day period of Sukkoth (booths). During this period, Jews are required to live in small booths as a reminder of the period after the exodus when they lived with God in the wilderness. During that period, God also dwelt among them in a tent or Tabernacle. As a result, this celebration is sometimes called "tabernacles" or "booths". This celebration also looks forward to the Messianic age when the nations shall come to Jerusalem and God will be King over all the nations.

Other Holy Days: In addition to the Holy Days required by the Torah, additional Holy Days are included in the Jewish religious calendar. Among them are Purim, observed in early spring, which celebrates the survival of the Jews from extinction by the plan of Haman. Instead, Haman is killed on the vary gallows that he intended to kill Mortica the Jew, who refused to bow before him. This story is the subject of the Book of Esther which is read on Purim. Another observed Holy Day is Hanukkah, found in the books of the Maccabees and observed in winter. This celebration is a copy of Sukkoth and is related to the rededication of the Temple by the Maccabees. According to the story, the Menorah in the Temple stayed lighted for eight days even though only one day's worth of oil was available. This miracle is commemorated by the lighting of a Hanukkah menorah in Jewish homes and synagogues. Other holy days include holocaust remembrance day (Nisan 27) and Tisha be-Av (The 9th of Av) which laments the destruction of the first and second Temples. Additional holidays can be discovered by examining a book on observance or Jewish calendar.

The Jewish Religious Year: Together the Biblical and Jewish Holy Days reinforce the major themes on the Torah and the Exodus as well as significant points in the history of Israel. Together they establish this religious year.

Pessah - Unleavened Bread First Fruits	Nisan 14 (Spring) Nisan 15 Nisan 16	The Passover First Day of the week of Unleavened Bread The start of the Counting of the Omer
Holocaust Remembrance	Nisan 27	Murder of Six Million Jews in Europe
Shavout	50 days after Nisan 16	Harvest, Conversion, Ten Commandments
Tisha Be-Av	August	Destruction of the Temple
Rosh ha Shanah Yom Kippur Sukkoth	Trishri 1 (Fall) Tishri 10 Tishri 15 – 22	Civil New Year and Day of Blowing Day of Atonement Dwelling with God
Hanukkah	Kieslev 25	Dedication and Lights for eight days

Purim Adar 14 (Spring) Story of Esther

The Christian Religious Calendars

While in general, the Jewish traditions have held to a single calendar with minor or subtle difference between orthodox, conservative and reform observance times, though the celebrations and liturgy do have some variance, this is not true for the Christian Churches. Four great divisions within the Christian tradition have affected the Holy Days and the Christian Year among Christians. In addition, historic battles over the time of the resurrection and the setting of Easter have brought about differences in the timing and type of liturgy used by these four divisions of the church. As a result, we will have to speak more generally about this and address those Holy Days that are the most universal. The most significant problem with the Christian Calendar is that the Eastern Church and Western Church fix Easter (Resurrection Sunday) using different calendars and systems. The Eastern Church is closer to the Jewish calendar so that Passover and Easter are maintained in relationship to one another.

The Church Year found among Christians are general represented in their liturgical and worship materials. For Eastern Orthodox this is found in the Liturgikon. Roman Catholics use the Roman Missal, Protestants some form of the Book of Common Prayer and for the Free Church Tradition, denominational and non-denominational hymnals represent the basic church year and Holy Days. Each of these traditions for a generalized Church year based on three primary Holy Days – Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. The Church year as it developed began to place celebrations and observances on and around these Holy Days and focused on the Life and Ministry of Jesus. The result was the following general structure.

Advent: The period of Advent (Coming) begins four weeks prior to Christmas and is celebrated each Sunday. Thus usually involves readings from the Gospels regarding the prophecies of the coming Messiah, and the birth of John the Baptist and move toward the story of the birth of Jesus. This period is marked off by lighting candles on an Advent Wreath which may have four candles (one for each Sunday) and often a fifth one (The Christ Candle (Used for Christmas Eve). This celebration is traditional in homes and churches. In most liturgies, the second coming of Christ is included in the Advent expressions and celebrations.

Christmas: The celebration of Christmas (The Incarnation and Birth of Jesus) is celebrated by Western Christians on December 25th and by Eastern Christians on January 6th. This usually involves Christmas hymns, Gospel Readings regarding the birth of Jesus and often a candle lighting service or midnight Mass.

Epiphany: Epiphany (appearing) is counted from the Sunday following Christmas and is specifically associated with January 6th. This period lasts several Sundays and has as its

focus the early life of Jesus. It includes readings of the dedication of Jesus at the Temple, the arrival of the Wise men or Magi, and the Baptism of Jesus by John.

Three Kings Day: On January 6th many in the Western church celebrate Three Kings day. This celebration of epiphany involves a home celebration of the arrival of the Magi or Kings to see the new born King. The Sunday after January 6th (sometimes later in the month) is the memorial of the slaughter of the innocents by King Herod, which followed the arrival of the magi. Many Churches use this day to consider the present concerns regarding abortion in America.

Ash Wednesday: The period of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. On this day, Christians come to Church to begin a period of fasting, self denial and repentance for the Lent period leading up to the Passion Week culminating on Easter. Ashes that are burned from the previous year's palms used on Palm Sunday are placed on those who take a vow to give something up during the Lenten period.

Lent: The Theme of Atonement found in the High Holy Days in Judaism is represented in the period of Lent and Holy Week in Christianity. The 40 days of Lent are similar to the repentance period prior to the Day of Atonement. Various fasts or vows of self-denial are part of the Lenten celebration.

Holy Week: Holy Week is so closely tied to Passover (Pesah) in Judaism that it is impossible to truly understand Holy Week without understanding Passover. In fact, the Biblical, Jewish and Christian Calendars are synchronized by the celebration of Passover and Holy Week.

The early Christians did not actually have a separate Holy Week. They simply added meaning related to the Death, Burial and resurrection of Jesus to the existing celebration of Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits. This can be seen in Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he tells the church to keep the feast (Unleavened Bread) because Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us and His resurrection establishes Him as the First Fruits. After the Temple was destroyed, the growing separation between the Judaism and the emerging Gentile (Greek and Roman Churches) started a move toward separating the timing and celebrations of the Holy Days. Even the Eastern and Western Church have different times and approaches to Easter based on calendar and other considerations. But among Roman Catholics, Protestants and Free Church traditions, Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday and includes Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

Palm Sunday: Palm Sunday commemorates the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem when the people proclaimed Him as the Messiah, Son of David. Palms are used to decorate church sanctuaries and many congregations reenact the procession of the entry to Jerusalem by readings, hymns and passion plays.

Maundy Thursday: For historical and political reasons, as well as Biblical interpretation, the events of the Passion Week are placed on Thursday through Sunday. Thursday night commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus. Churches often have a

communion service or reenactment of the Last Supper. More recently, churches have reintroduced Passover Seders based on the belief that the Last Supper was a Passover Seder held by Jesus and His disciples.

Good Friday: Good Friday is the traditional memorial to the crucifixion of Jesus. Though scholars debate the day of the crucifixion (Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday), Good Friday is the most common observance. Services are scheduled for the afternoon or evening and usually are based on the crucifixion narratives in the Gospels or the Seven Last Words (sayings) of Christ on the Cross. Among Catholics, a procession of the Stations of the Cross may be included.

Holy Saturday: Saturday commemorates the Burial of Jesus and includes fasting and prayers in many liturgies. Services are rare (The Eucharist is forbidden) except for the Saturday Night Vigil which is focused on the Resurrection. This Great Vigil involves a liturgy that includes the lighting of the Pascal (Passover Candle) which burns during the period from Easter to Pentecost and represents the risen Christ. A Candlelight service and in Catholic tradition, baptism and confirmation of catechumens are common elements of the celebration.

Easter Sunday: The reason that the celebration of the empty tomb is called Easter is problematic. The term may be an unfortunate mixture of paganism and faith used in the separation of Christianity from Judaism. Many Christians are uncomfortable with the term Easter and prefer “Resurrection Sunday” or “First Fruits”. But the heart of the celebration is the empty tomb and victory over death by the resurrection of Jesus. Sunrise services, musical plays and concerts and special programs are used to mark this most important day of the Church Calendar.

The Sundays of Easter: For many Christians, every Sunday is Easter (Resurrection) Sunday. This is why worship is held on Sunday for most Christians. The early believers observed the Biblical Sabbath during the time from before the destruction of the Temple until at least the middle of the second century. As Judaism and Christianity moved apart, both a misunderstanding of certain Biblical texts and the difference in how to determine the beginning of the day (Sundown or Sunrise) started a shift toward Sunday worship and a justification for it on the basis of the Day of the Resurrection. This New Day or Christian Sabbath became known as “The Lord’s Day”. As the term Easter became attached to the One Special Resurrection Sunday, the Sundays between Easter and Pentecost became the Easter Season in the Church Calendar. These Sundays count the 1st through the fiftieth Day of Easter which approximates the time of the counting of the Omer in Judaism.

Ascension Thursday: The New Testament Book of Acts places the ascension of Jesus after forty days of showing himself alive. The fortieth day after Easter is Ascension Thursday and the services and prayers reflect the theme of the Book of Hebrews which declares that Jesus, as our Great High Priest, entered into heaven with His own blood and made atonement and then sat down at the right hand of God the Father until the time of

His second coming. This celebration combines the Gospel accounts of the Death burial, resurrection and ascension with the theology of the Torah based Day of Atonement.

Pentecost: The Christian celebration of Pentecost is a parallel, if not fulfillment, of Shavuot in Judaism. The actual Holy Days do not fall at the same time because the counting of the Omer follows tradition of the Pharisees that begins on the 16th of Nisan and the Christian follows the Sadducee tradition that counts from the day after the weekly Sabbath (always Sunday) that was the tradition of the Temple during the ministry of Jesus.

Pentecost to Advent: The Sunday after Pentecost is Trinity Sunday and precedes a series of Sundays dedicated to various Saints. In some sense, it is the end of major Holy Days until Advent begins anew. There are some exceptions. All Soul's Day or all Saints Day on November 1st is a kind of Christian Memorial day when the Saints and deceased beloved family members are remembered. Beyond this one day, Holy Day observance varies from tradition to tradition.

American Christian Holy Days: In the United States, several holidays have entered the Church calendar and are observed in various manners. Foremost among them is Thanksgiving. Both a family and congregational observation, American Christians set aside this time to be thankful to God for family and country based on the events of the early Christians pilgrims who settled in America. Other national holidays are sometimes observed with special services or emphasis. New Year's Eve services, Mother's Day and Fathers Day may be observed or underscored and often the Sunday nearest to July 4th is observed. Nationalistic hymns are found in most hymnals and are included in such services. In recent times, for very odd reasons, Free Church traditions, which do not usually include All Saints Day, have challenged the more popular Halloween with alternative Harvest festivals. This is usually explained as a way to avoid the pagan origins of Halloween. The truth is Halloween is not pagan in origin. It is a pre-Holy Day relaxation of stress for All Saints day that parallels Fat Tuesday which provides the same for Ash Wednesday. It would be easier to observe the Holy Day and ignore the secular and non-Christian development of these two wild times. Or observe them culturally within Christian values.

A Judeo-Christian Approach

The Messianic Judaism Movement and a renewed interest in the Jewish roots of Christianity have begun to influence many congregations in a renewal of observance in family and congregational observation of Holy Days. Messianic Jewish congregations must find a way to observe the Biblical and Jewish Holy days while explaining them in the context of belief in Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah. Churches re-discovering the Jewish roots of Christianity and Judeo-Christian Congregations must find a way to fit both sets of Holy Days together without damaging either tradition. This requires a new religious calendar for those influenced by both traditions. The DiscipleCenter of Anaheim Hills is a Judeo-Christian congregation which seeks to benefit from both traditions but

understands that a simple mixing of the two may do damage to both. As a result, a tentative religious calendar is being developed for worship that attempts to do justice to the meaning found in the Torah and New Testament documents. This is consistent with the belief that the intent of the New Testament writers was to include Gentiles into the promises made to Abraham and the blessing of the Messianic promise as understood in Jesus (Yeshua).

The overlap between the Holy Day systems in Judaism and Christianity are best understood when the two are connected in the Pesah / Holy Week celebrations and meanings. As a result, we often follow the Eastern Church rather than the Western one. The result would be as follows:

Sabbath / Lord's Day: The Biblical Sabbath finds its origin in the creation account of Genesis. It is given to Israel to keep as a testimonial of God as Creator and Redeemer. The Sabbath is critical to Judaism and important to Christianity. The initial Sabbath observance was tied primarily to household and family. After the Babylonian captivity, and the origin of the synagogue meeting, the Sabbath took on the focus of weekly worship and this was normative during the life and ministry of Jesus. Most Christians, over the centuries have dropped the Sabbath, some maintain the Sabbath and these groups argue about the meaning of the Sabbath. Our congregation observes the Sabbath in our homes to identify with the God of Creation and the Israel of God (Jewish people) to whom we are connected by the Messiah. We observe this as families and households with a modified ceremony on Friday night and by abstaining from subsistence work on Saturday until sundown. We gather as a congregation on Sunday for our weekly worship to identify with our Christian brethren who worship on the Lord's Day.

Thanksgiving: As a part of our history as American Christians we observe the Thanksgiving Holyday with a special service the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving and then Home celebrations with our families on Thanksgiving Day.

Advent: We observe Advent in our homes and congregational services on the Sundays preceding Christmas. On Christmas Eve, we observe a celebration of the incarnation by candlelight. During this same period we hold a special **Hanukkah** service which explains the Temple Menorah, Courtyard Menorahs, and Hanukkah Menorah and celebrates God's preservation of Israel.

Epiphany: The Sundays of Epiphany and January 6th are observed with readings in our worship services related to the themes of Epiphany.

Purim: Our congregation is encouraged to read the Book of Esther on Purim and attend Purim services at local synagogues to enjoy the message of the Holy Day.

Lent: We meet on Ash Wednesday and those who wish to make a vow are marked with Ashes. The Lenten period may have special readings calls to repentance in the worship services.

Pesach: The families of the congregation observe Passover with home Seders to identify with Israel and God's covenant in the Torah. Those who wish observe the seven days of unleavened bread do so by avoiding leaven and eating matzos. First Fruits is marked by a service that we connect to Holy Week.

Holy Week: The celebration of Holy Week involves several services that focus on the background of Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits and ties them into the Christian understanding of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This includes a **Palm Sunday** service that recounts the series of events during Holy Week. The Last Supper is celebrated with a **Last Supper Seder** that expresses both Passover and Last Supper meaning. The Crucifixion is commemorated with a Darkness Service which remembers the Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross. On Saturday Evening the **First Fruits** celebration from the Temple Period is symbolized with the Gathering of the Sheaves and the Lighting of the Vigil Candle as a symbol of the resurrection. On **Sunday Morning**, the Empty Tomb is celebrated and the Sheafs of the First Fruits are waved before the Lord.

Counting of the Days and Omer: Our congregation counts the Omer, using the Sadducee tradition which parallels the Churches count of the days toward Pentecost. Each Sabbath is counted and represented by lighting a candle on the Menorah in the Worship service on the Day after each Sabbath until we reach the 50th day.

Holocaust Remembrance Day: Yom ha Shoah is included in our religious year because as Judeo-Christians we are committed to the preservation of the Jewish people, their welfare and safety. We seek, not their assimilation, but their fullness in the promises made to Abraham, the Covenant of Moses and the New Covenant of Jeremiah.

Ascension: Ascension is celebrated by readings and ritual which remembers that ascension and expresses the entrance of Jesus into Heaven as Our Great High Priest. On the Sunday following Ascension, the service focuses on the High Priest ministry of Jesus as expressed in the Book of Hebrews.

Pentecost: The Celebration of Pentecost is a combination of Shavuot and the events of Pentecost following the ascension of Jesus. The Service involves a memorial of the waving of the Leavened Loaves as it was practiced at the Temple. It also includes symbolism and liturgy regarding the Giving of the Torah at Sinai and the Giving of the Holy Spirit and tongues of Fire as explained in the Book of Acts. The service also includes readings from the Book of Ruth.

Destruction of the Temple: The fast of the destruction of the Temple (Tish be-Av) is included as this event had implications for both religious Jews and Christians. This is a day for us to also lament the separation of Christianity from Judaism and the loss of our richer understanding of the scriptures because of the false Christian notion of "replacement theology". We Pray for Israel, the Peace of Jerusalem and the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel.

High Holy Days: Although the Church has interfaced the general themes of atonement, judgment and resurrection to Holy Week and Ascension, there is much in the High Holy Days that make them worthy of continuing. Our services on **Yom Terauh (Rosh ha Shanah)** involves the traditional “Blowing of the Shofar” and includes the anticipation of the Last Trump, when the Messiah will return and raise the dead. On **Yom Kippur** we have a service that recalls the ministry of the High Priest in the Tabernacle and Temple based on Leviticus 16 and its parallel with Jesus as the High Priest of the New Covenant who will return from Heaven as Judge of the whole earth.

Sukkoth: The celebration of Sukkoth draws on events practiced at the Temple during the ministry of Jesus. These include the Water Ceremony and the Light Ceremony that look back to the wilderness experience of Israel and which Jesus references to Himself. We also build a Sukkah as a memorial of the command for Israel to dwell in booths for these Holy Days and we celebrate the “Kingdom to Come” when the Messiah will rule and the Torah will go forth from the Mountain and House of the God of Jacob in Jerusalem.

All Saints Day: This Holy Day is a reminder that God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Jesus taught that those who know God are not dead and that in the resurrection, they will be with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This communion of saints joins all believers on earth and in heaven in one great congregation. We live in the hope that soon, this faith will become sight and all the promises of God will be manifest.

The web site of the DiscipleCenter has a complete listing of dates and services for the current year.