



Calendars and Assumptions

The Secular Calendar and the Torah...

Should followers of the Messiah celebrate the civil New Year? Of course we should abstain from the revelry of the world and its carnivals, but should we otherwise regard January 1st as a divinely appointed time to reflect over our lives and to make resolutions to change? What is the significance of this date and why was it selected to represent a “new year”? What does the month of “January” mean? Indeed, what relationship, if any, is there between the world’s calendar systems and the calendar system outlined in the Scriptures?



Pope Gregory XIII

UGO BUONCOMPAGNI

OFTEN WE DON'T REALIZE what is *not* being said because of what *is* being said. In other words, hidden or unspoken assumptions are *always* at work in communication, though we rarely take the time to seriously examine these assumptions for ourselves. Advertisers, politicians, and others who wish to control your thinking implicitly understand this and therefore regularly employ various techniques to *distract* you from examining *their* assumptions. They understand that the louder (or more frequently or more threateningly) something is said, the less likely you will question its truth status or engage in reasonable thinking of your own.... In other words, “truth” for such pragmatists is little more than *persuasion*. Get the crowd to believe you and you’ve got the “truth.”

Take, for example, the idea that we should all rush about purchasing Christmas presents to give on December 25th, and that shortly thereafter we should celebrate a transitional day that marks the end of one year and the beginning of the next. In most countries of the world, New Year’s Day is usually celebrated on January 1st, though this date comes from the arbitrary decree of the consuls of ancient (and pagan) Rome -- not from anything taught in the Hebrew Scriptures. Some Christian churches plan their own New Year’s celebrations, offering a service to make resolutions and to offer up special prayers. (Because it falls eight days after December 25th, some Roman-influenced churches observe this date as the “Feast of Christ’s Circumcision.”) Many mainline churches plan “midnight” communion services so that the sacraments could be taken just before the start of the “new year.” Now while all this might be encouraging and helpful on some level, it needs to be stressed that the civil New Year that the world celebrates is not a Biblical holiday at all, and in fact is opposed to the Biblical Calendar that was revealed in the Torah and Scriptures.



The study of the various calendar systems used in the world is highly convoluted and intricate. Consider, for example, the ancient calendars of the Egyptians, the Sumerians (i.e., Babylonians), and the Aztecs. Or consider the Druid legends and Stonehenge.... Indeed, there are numerous calendar systems that have been developed throughout human history -- some based on the appearance of the moon (lunar calendars), some based on the sun (solar calendars), and still others based on various astrological signs and omens (the Aztecs followed the movements of the planet Venus, and the Romans counted backwards from fixed points of the moon's cycle and considered months of 29 days to be unlucky).



The Torah designates the month of *Nisan* (Scripturally called *aviv*, or “spring”) as the first month of the year (Exod. 12:2). Originally, then, the Hebrew calendar was lunar and observational. When the new moon was sighted, a new month begun. Since the Torah also identified Sukkot as “the end of the (harvest) year” (Exod. 23:16), the sages of the Mishnah later identified the fall month of Tishri (i.e., the “seventh month”) as the start of a new year.... During the Babylonian exile (6th century BC), Babylonian names for the months (i.e., Tammuz) were adopted. This might harken back to the earlier Sumerian Calendar of Abraham's day...

By the time the Mishnah was compiled (200 AD), the sages had identified four new-year dates for every lunar-solar year (the modern Jewish calendar was apparently ratified by Hillel the Elder in the 3rd century AD):

1. **Nisan 1** (i.e., *Rosh Chodashim*) marks the start of the month of the Exodus from Egypt and the beginning of Jewish national history. As such, it represents the start of the Biblical year for counting the festivals (Exod. 12:2). Note that the month of Nisan is also called *Aviv* since it marks the official start of spring.
2. **Elul 1** marks the start of the year from the point of view of tithing cattle for Temple sacrifices. Since the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the rabbis decreed that this date should mark the time of *selichot*, or preparation for repentance before Rosh Hashanah. Elul 1 marks the start of the last month of summer.



3. **Tishri 1** was originally associated with the agricultural “Feast of Ingathering” at the “end of the year” (Exod. 23:16, 34:22), though after the destruction of the Second Temple, the sages decided it would mark the start of the civil year in the fall. Tishri 1 was therefore called *Rosh Hashanah* (“the head of the year”) which begins a ten-day “trial” of humanity climaxing on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).
4. **Shevat 15** (i.e., *Tu B’Shevat*) originally marked the date for calculating the tithes of the harvest (*ma’aserot*) that farmers would pledge to the priests of Israel. This was the start of the year from the point of view of tithing of fruit trees. Today Tu B’Shevat represents a national Arbor Day in Israel, with tree planting ceremonies in Israel. Unlike the other three “new years,” Tu B’Shevat begins in the middle of the month, during a full moon in winter.

In practical terms, however, there are two “New Years” in Jewish tradition. The first occurs two weeks before Passover (Nisan 1) and the second occurs ten days before Yom Kippur (the other two “new years” are not regularly observed, except by the ultra-orthodox). The first New Year is Biblical and is called Rosh Chodashim (see Exod. 12:2). This is the month of the redemption of the Jewish people -- and it is also the month Yeshua was sacrificed upon the cross at Moriah for our sins. Oddly enough for most Christians, “New Years Day” should be really celebrated in the spring....

All of this is in striking contrast, however, with the most widely used calendar in the world today -- the “Gregorian Calendar” -- named after Pope Gregory XIII who reigned over the Catholic Church in the 1500’s.

The Gregorian calendar, considered to be a revision to the Julian calendar (which was itself a revision of the pagan Roman/Greek calendars) retains most of the names of the days of the week and months of the year from pagan Rome (and therefore, ancient Greece). The ancient Greeks named the days of the week after the sun, the moon and the five known planets (Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn) which themselves were associated with the gods Ares, Hermes, Zeus, Aphrodite, and Cronus, respectively:

- **Sunday.** Latin: *dies solis* - “Sun Day.” Sunday celebrates the sun god, Ra, Helios, Apollo, Ogmios, Mithrias, or the sun goddess, Phoebe. In the year 321 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine ruled that the first day of the week, ‘the venerable day of the sun’, should be a day of rest. The name was later changed to *dies Dominica*, “Lord’s Day” in ecclesiastical tradition.
- **Monday.** Latin: *lunae dies* - “Moon Day.” Monday was named in honor of the Assyrian goddess, Selene, Luna and Mani. In old English, *mon(an)daeg* meant “day of the moon.”



- **Tuesday.** Latin: *dies Martis* - “Day of Mars.” In Greek mythology *Ares* was the god of war (renamed “Mars” by the Romans). In English, “Tuesday” comes from *Tiu* (Twia), the English/Germanic god of war and the sky (identified with the Nordic god called Tyr).
- **Wednesday.** Latin: *dies Mercurii* - “Day of Mercury.” In Greek mythology Hermes was the god of trade and commerce (renamed “Mercury” by the Romans). In English, the name “Wednesday” derives from the Scandinavian god Odin, the chief god of Norse mythology. *Woden* is the chief Anglo-Saxon/Teutonic god, the leader of the Wild Hunt.
- **Thursday.** Latin: *dies Iovis* - “Day of Jupiter.” In Greek mythology Zeus was the god of the sky (renamed “Jupiter” by the Romans). The English word “Thursday” comes from the Middle English *Thorsday*, referring to “Thor” (the Nordic counterpart to Jupiter).
- **Friday.** Latin: *dies Veneris* - “Day of Venus.” In Greek mythology Aphrodite was the goddess of love/fertility (renamed “Venus” by the Romans). The name “Friday” comes from *Freya* (Fria), the name of the Norse god Odin’s wife and Teutonic goddess of love, beauty, and fertility.
- **Saturday.** Latin: *dies Saturni* - “Day of Saturn.” In Greek mythology Cronus was the god of the harvest (renamed “Saturn” by the Romans) who ruled until dethroned by his son Zeus.

Likewise the names of the months (“moons”) have pagan-Roman connections. The month of “January,” for instance, is named on behalf of *Janus*, the two-faced Roman “god of doorways” who had one face looking forward and one backward (“Janus faced”). March is named after Mars, the god of war; April for the fertility goddess Aphrodite, July is named on behalf of Julius Caesar, August for Augustus Caesar, and so on.... Of course, the Gregorian calendar of the Roman church tradition assimilated the pagan pantheon into its own liturgical calendar, as the Latin names of the days and months reveal.

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי דָרֶךְ הַגּוֹיִם אַל-תִּלְמְדוּ
כִּי-חֻקֹּת הָעַמִּים הֵבֵל הוּא

Thus says the LORD: “Learn not the way of the nations...
for the customs of the peoples are vanity (Jer. 10:2-3)



It frankly baffles me that certain Christian theologians and preachers can be so meticulous about certain doctrines (such as justification by faith alone, the definition of the “church,” the “inerrancy” of Scripture, the exact formula for baptism, etc.) and yet be seemingly oblivious to the fact that the modern, institutionalized Church inherits much of its substance and practice from pagan Rome... True, the Jews themselves adopted pagan names of the months from ancient Babylonia, but the Torah (as opposed to Jewish tradition) calls months (and days) by their ordinal number (the “first” month, the “second” month, etc.), and explicitly mentions that the New Year begins in spring (*aviv*). So, while I’d like to wish you all a “Happy New Year,” I’d like to wait until Nisan 1! Meanwhile, I hope and pray that you draw close to our Lord Yeshua, regardless of the time or day!

Μὴ ἀγαπάτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.
ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ.

Do not love the world or the things in the world.
If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

ADDENDUM: I am *not* suggesting that we should reject the secular calendar in preference to the Biblical calendar, at least for everyday, practical matters in this world. Conventionally we all use the words “Monday,” “Tuesday,” “January,” “February,” and so on without regard for the pagan associations of these names, and since we live in a secular culture, we are constrained to use the same terms as the culture around us, especially regarding times, dates, etc. Nevertheless I think it’s *worthwhile* contrasting the Biblical view of the calendar with that of the pagan world around us, *especially* since this reveals the disparity between the “Greek” and “Hebrew” mindsets so clearly. Our Jewish Lord and Messiah told us that we were “in but not of” the world, after all (John 17:5).

Moreover I am concerned that the predominantly Gentile Church has unthinkingly adopted many assumptions of the pagan world and has thereby become gravely out of touch with the divine calendar and the prophetic purpose of the festivals of the LORD. Perhaps this is a result of the almost intractable problem of “Covenant Theology” or its ideological twin, “Dispensationalism,” two interpretative methods that are used by various church theologians as they read the Scriptures. Churches that teach “Covenant Theology” advocate a form of “Replacement Theology,” claiming that Israel should *really* be identified with the Gentile “church.” On the other hand, churches that teach “Dispensationalism” consider the “Old Testament” to be worthy of instruction but *really* applicable only to the Jewish people (the Pauline epistles and perhaps the Gospel of John, on the other hand, are intended for the predominantly Gentile church). I believe that both approaches misread the Scriptures. (For more on this subject, see the Hebrew4Christians web site).