



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

Reel
187

Box
71

Folder
1045

The lunar and solar calendars in ancient Israel, 1964.

THE LUNAR AND SOLAR CALENDARS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

In writing of the many conflicting traditions which existed between Israel and Judah ("Moses and the Original Torah" - The Macmillan Co., 1961, Chapters 5 & 6), I stated: "It is clear that we are dealing here with two peoples, or with two groups of kindred tribes who, while sharing remote memories of a common ancestry and a cradle of common origin in Harran and the cult of a deity who was uniquely theirs, were in other ways quite distinct in their historic experiences."

Professor R. W. Livingstone, in writing of the Greek city states, makes a similar observation about them: "Though ultimately conscious of common Hellenic blood, these Greek states are vividly individual, divided against their neighbors. Primarily a man is a Spartan, an Athenian, a Theban, and so on. Secondly he belongs to one of the great rival groups, Ionians, Dorians, Aeolians. Thirdly, and that chiefly at the great festivals, at the national religious centre, the Oracle of Delphi, and in times of foreign invasion, he is a Greek." ("The Pageant of Greece" - Oxford, 1938 page 79).

Resemblances between the organization of the ancient Hebrew tribes and the early Delian and Delphic amphictyonies of Greece have also been noted by Professor Noth and others.

One of the sharp differences which existed between Israel and Judah concerned the calendar. This difference persisted down the ages, long after both states had been destroyed.

The ancient calendar of the Hebrews in Canaan was lunar. The year began in the autumn after the ingathering of the harvest -- (Ex. 34:22), or -- "at the end of the year", or "the going out of the year". The lunar was also the calendar of the Canaanites and the Babylonians. The calendar which was discovered at Gezer in Palestine, dating from approximately the tenth century, begins the year with the late harvest and follows through with the early and later planting, the hoeing up of flax, the harvest of barley and other harvests, the pruning of vines and finally, the gathering of summer fruit.

There were twelve months to the year and the year consisted of 354 days. The first month was called Abib -- (Ex. 13:4). The names of the second, seventh and eighth month are also given in the Bible -- Ziv, (I K. 6:1) -- Ethanim, (I K. 8:2) and Bul, (I K. 6:38). The first day of each month, which was marked by the appearance of the new moon (), was a holiday. Like the Sabbath, it was universally observed with cessation of labor and with special ceremonies, such as sacrifices and the blowing of trumpets. Three annual festivals connected with the three harvest periods were also celebrated. But their dates were not absolutely fixed in the calendar. They fluctuated within a designated period and were known as -- "appointed seasons". Note : (Perhaps from the term -- to "fluctuate", to "vacillate".)

Actually, no fixed dates are set in the older codes of the Pentateuch for these three annual festivals. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, according to the Book of the Covenant, is to be celebrated "at the appointed time in the month of Abib". . . . "You shall keep the Feast of Harvest of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year." (Ex. 23:15-16). Similarly in the Little Book of the Covenant, it is ordained that "The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. . . at the time appointed in the month Abib. . . You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end" (Ex. 34:18-22). So also Deuteronomy: "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to YHVH, your God. . . You shall count seven weeks. . . from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks. . . You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days when you make your ingathering from your threshing floor and your wine-press" (Deut. 16:1-13).

The day began and ended at sun-down. The week consisted of seven days, the seventh being the Sabbath Day -- -- a solemn day of rest when all work must cease.

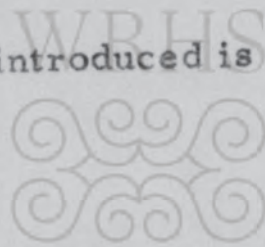
But the Pentateuch also has reference to another calendar, a solar one, one which began in the spring of the year. II Sam. 11:1 states

-- "And it came to pass, at the return of the year, i. e., at the commencement of the new year, when kings go forth to battle".

The months of the year were counted not from autumn but from spring. The chronology of the Book of Kings invariably follows a similar calendar. Jeremiah 36:22 also suggests that the year was reckoned from the spring: "It was in the ninth month, and the king was sitting in the winter house and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him."

The year consisted of 364 days and was divided into twelve parts, or months. Each month consisted of thirty days, an extra day being added every third month. The months had no special names but were numbered. The day began and ended at dawn.

Why were there two calendars? When and why was the second one introduced? That an innovation was introduced is sharply and dramatically indicated in Exodus 12:1-2:



"YHVH said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 'This month () shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you'."

The people are told that hereafter they must regard Abib as the first month of the year. Presumably this was a departure from what was the accepted usage up to then. This was a new ordinance deliberately announcing a new calendar, introducing a new time reckoning and a new era.

Many peoples throughout history adopted new calendars to mark some decisive event in their history, a political or social revolution, a momentous victory, or the birth of a great religious leader. Thus, the Romans dated their

calendar from the founding of their city. The Christian and Mahammedan religions both introduced new calendars. The French Revolution adopted a new republican calendar and gave new names to the twelve months of the year. All official national reckoning was thereafter made according to the new calendar. The new calendar did not always completely displace the old one -- any more say, than the calendar which was introduced following the American Revolution and which dated all official papers from the year of the Declaration of Independence, has displaced the civil (Christian) calendar which continues to be in use.

The change in the Hebrew calendar is associated in Ex. 12:1-2 with Moses and the Exodus. The Bnai Israel fled from Egypt in the spring. The event marked for them the beginning of their history as a free people. They instituted a night Holiday, Passover -- -- to commemorate that event for all future generations. For hundreds of years thereafter, the date of the Exodus marked for them the beginning of all their official chronology. Thus, when centuries later the Temple of Solomon was built in Jerusalem, the Chronicler records: "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the House of YHVH." (I K 6:1).

When, under Joshua, the Bnai Israel entered Canaan, they signalized the occasion by inaugurating an ~~official~~ new era. The Hebrews who had been living in Canaan right along and had never gone down to Egypt, and were not among those who were emancipated, undoubtedly had been reckoning their time the same way as the Canaanites did. They observed a lunar year. The conquering Bnai Israel announced that henceforth the first month of the year would be not in autumn but in the spring. Furthermore, the year would follow a solar calendar such as they and their ancestors had been accustomed to observe for generations in Egypt.

The Egyptians at first, during the protodynastic period, had employed a lunar calendar, but long before the Hebrews came to Egypt, a solar calendar had been introduced, possibly at the beginning of the third millenium, B.C. (See Richard A. Parker, "The Calendar of Ancient Egypt" - Univ. of Chicago Press, 1950, pg. 5lf.) The year consisted of twelve months of thirty days each. Later the calendar was corrected by the addition of five days at the end of the twelfth month -- making 365 days in all. The day was from sun-rise to sun-rise. The year began with the first signs of the annual inundation of the Nile in the spring of the year. The months had no names, but were numbered.

Note: The Israelite year consisted of 364 days. There was need, of course, to correct the difference between the 364-day year and the real solar year of 365 days. The difference in forty-nine years would amount to forty-nine

days. Accordingly, a special "year", consisting of forty-nine days -- a Jubilee Year -- was introduced. (See Solomon Zeitlin, "The Rise and Fall of the Judean State", 1962, pages 216-18). The Jubilee Year was a Northern institution and fell into disuse when the kingdom of Israel was destroyed.

The Rabbis declared that the Jubilee Year was observed only as long as all the twelve tribes lived in Palestine, i. e., (up to the destruction of Israel in 722 ('Arak. 32b).

The solar calendar which the Bnai Israel brought with them from Egypt became the officially accepted calendar for all the tribes when they were united under the monarchy. The New Year for the Court and the dating of all official state documents and decrees began in the spring. The Mishna preserves this fact when it declares: "There are four Rosh Hashanas: on the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings and the festivals (i. e. the sequence of the three festivals -- Passover, Shabuot, Succoth, which are to be observed in the first, third and seventh month.) (Rosh Hashanah I, 1)✓

But the older lunar calendar did not disappear. The new calendar never quite displaced the old, especially among the Judeans who did not share the Exodus experience of the Bnai Israel and had not, at any time, used a solar calendar. They continued to reckon the beginning of the year from the close of the harvest season in autumn and to fix their festivals on the basis of the lunar calendar.

When the Judeans were exiled to Babylonia, they found themselves among a people which also used the lunar calendar. Before long they adopted the Babylonian names of the months and while retaining the official sequence of the months which the Bnai Israel had introduced when they entered Palestine, they continued to regard the seventh month, now called Tishri, as the beginning of the year. Thus Ezekiel, receiving his visions in Babylonia and carefully dating each one of them, still retains the number sequence of the months, i. e., first, second, third, etc., but one month, the seventh, is not so designated, but is referred to as the month which begins the New Year -- (Ez. 40:1).

When the Judeans returned from captivity, they made the lunar calendar the official calendar of the people, fixing the dates of all the annual festivals accordingly and officially declaring the first of Tishri as , the beginning of the year. While the Pentateuch nowhere states that the first day of Tishri marked the beginning of the New Year -- that it actually was Rosh Hashanah -- the day is called --

"a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets -- a holy convocation" (Lev. 23:24) -- and while as late as Ezra and Nehemiah, the first of Tishri is still not designated as Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the year, but only as -- a "Holy Day" (Neh. 8:2), as indeed every new moon was so regarded, it is clear, however, that the very singling out of the

first day of the seventh month indicates that it marked the actual beginning of the year.

The Israelites and the Judeans celebrated their annual harvest festivals at different times due no doubt to their geographic locations. Harvest time in the north of Palestine is about a month later than in the south. The Harvest festivals were accordingly celebrated a month later. Jeroboam, the first King of Israel, after he had set up the two calves of gold in Bethel and Dan, went up to sacrifice at the altar in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month (Succoth) "Like unto the feast that is in Judah" (On the fifteenth day of the seventh month). According to the author of I K. 12:33, this was a date which Jeroboam "had devised of his own heart". (). But Jeroboam was undoubtedly following the agricultural custom of the North which always celebrated Succoth in the eighth month.

When the kingdom of Israel was destroyed, attempts were made by some of the kings of Judah to win back, at least to religious conformity, the Israelites who had not been deported. The Northerners were invited to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual festivals. But the calendar was clearly a stumbling block to the acceptance of such invitations. Thus, Hezekiah, according to the Chronicler (II Chr. 30) "sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh that they should come to the House of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the Lord, the God of Israel.

The King had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the Passover in the second month." The reason which is given for the postponement of the festival of Passover to the second month is that the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. The real reason was probably the desire to accommodate the Northerners who had been in the habit of celebrating Passover in the second month. Most of the Israelites "laughed the King's messenger to scorn and mocked them". Some accepted the invitation and did go to Jerusalem.

King Josiah also appears to have invited the people of Israel to join with the people of Judah in the celebration of the Passover, for the Chronicler reports the presence of Israelites at the celebration. But in the days of Josiah, more than half a century later, it was not longer deemed necessary to shift the date a month later in order to accommodate the Northerners. Passover was accordingly celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month (II Chr. 35:1).

The Israelites never really abandoned their own calendar, and never accepted the lunar calendar of Judea which, upon the return from the Babylonian exile, became the one authentic calendar of the restored community. There were, of course, many Israelites in the restored Judean community as there had been in Judea in the century preceding the exile (II Chr. 30:25). The calendar conflict persisted. The Northerners clung to the solar year.

The calendar controversy, of course, brought into question the exact days of all the holidays, for in a solar year of twelve months of thirty days and four intercalated days, the annual festivals would fall on the same day of the week from year to year. This would not be true in the case of a lunar year of 354 days -- twelve months of twenty-nine and a half days -- with a leap year of thirteen months every third or fourth year. Thus, what would be regarded as a sacred day by those who followed the official lunar calendar would be just another secular work-day for those who followed the solar calendar. The validity of the festival sacrifices which were brought in the Temple would quite naturally also be challenged by those who claimed that the sacrifices were brought on the wrong days.

The storm of controversy in post-exilic times is fully reflected in the Book of Jubilees (Chap. 72-82) and elsewhere. Professor Zeitlin's conclusion is that the Book of Jubilees "was written by a man, or a school of men, who opposed many of the pentateuchal laws and traditions" and that "it was written during the pre-Hellenistic period when it could be hoped that opposition to the Pentateuch would not be wholly futile" seems to be well established. (Solomon Zeitlin's "The Book of Jubilees", J. I. R. xxx pg. 31). The Book of Jubilees differs sharply on the matter of the calendar. In all likelihood, the author was an Israelite who clung to the Northern solar calendar -- a year of twelve months of thirty days each, with an additional day added at the end of every third month, making the year consist of 364 days or 52 weeks.

In the Book of Jubilees, Noah gives clear instructions to his descendants:

"And command thou the children of Israel that they observe the years according to this reckoning -- 364 days, and (these) will constitute a complete year, and they will not disturb its time from its days and from its feasts; for everything will fall out in them according to their testimony, and they will not leave out any day nor disturb any feasts. But if they do neglect and do not observe them according to his commandment, then they will disturb all their seasons, and the years will be dislodged from this (order), and they will disturb the seasons and the years will be dislodged and they will neglect their ordinances. And all the children of Israel will forget, and will not find the path of the years, and will forget the new moons, and seasons, and sabbaths, and they will go wrong as to all the order of the years. For I know and from henceforth will I declare it unto thee, and it is not of my own devising; for the Book (lies) written before me, and on the heavenly tablets the division of days is ordained, lest they forget the feasts of the Covenant and walk according to the feasts of the Gentiles after their error and after their ignorance. For there will be those who will assuredly make observations of the moon -- how (it) disturbs the seasons and comes in from year to year ten days too soon. For this reason the the years will come upon them when they will disturb (the order) and make an abominable (day) the Day of Testimony, and an unclean day a Feast Day and they will confound all the days, the holy with the unclean, and the unclean day with the holy; for they will go wrong as to the months and sabbaths and feasts

and jubilees. For this reason I ~~command~~ and testify to thee that thou mayst testify to them; for after thy death thy children will disturb (them), so that they will not make the year three hundred and sixty-four days only, and for this reason they will go wrong as to the new moons and seasons and sabbaths and festivals, and they will eat all kinds of blood with all kinds of flesh."

In the Book of Enoch (especially in chapter 72-82 -- the "astronomical" section) -- one finds the same insistence on the solar calendar as the only true one: "And the sun and the stars bring in all the years exactly, so that they do not advance or delay their positions by a single day unto eternity. But complete the years with perfect justice in 364 days (Chap. 82)".

It has been shown that the Qumran sectarians held the Book of Jubilees in high regard. They followed the solar calendar and reckoned the day from sunrise. "The basic difference in the calculation of the calendar caused the members of the sect to withdraw from the Temple and its cult. The withdrawal did not result from their opposition to the offering of sacrifices, in principle, as is often supposed, but from the fact that the dates in which the holidays were fixed in the Temple of Jerusalem were "those in which all Israel were in error" (Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Calendar Reckoning of the Sect from the Judean Desert". Scripta Hierosolymitana, IV (1958) pages 164, 177).

The Passover Letter which was found among the Eliphantine Papyri may also reflect the sharp divergency which existed in the fifth century B. C. E.,

with reference to the dates of observing the holidays. Instructions are sent to the Jewish military garrison in Elephantine to observe the Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan. "Let this be done as Darius the king commanded". (This is Darius II. The year of the letter is 419 B. C. E.)

Why should the authority of the Persian king be invoked in such a matter? Did not the Elephantine community know about Passover? Professor Cowley quite correctly asks: "Was this community which possessed a temple and offered sacrifice to Yahweh ignorant of the greatest of Jewish national festivals? Had they never celebrated it before?" (A. Cowley "Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B. C.", Oxford, 1923, pg. 61).

We are inclined to believe that the religious authorities in Judea sent these instructions, clearly stating that they were authorized by the Persian government, in order to insure that the Jewish garrison would observe Passover on the exact dates which was approved by them, and not on any other date. The Judean authorities wished to make their calendar standard for all Jews throughout the Persian Empire. It is likely that the original settlers of Elephantine came from Northern Israel, even before the Babylonian exile, and retained the solar calendar and the dates of the festivals based on that calendar.

The Samaritans, during the Second Commonwealth, who claimed direct descent from the ancient Israelites, clung to the Pentateuch, revered Moses, and, as patriotic "Northerners" claimed that the future Messiah would be a descendant of Joseph, and not of David, as the Judeans maintained, held fast

to a calendar which differed greatly from the one accepted by the rest of the Jews. The dates of their festivals differed. Only in the matter of the date of the counting of the Omer did they agree-- and that with the Sadducean calendar. They counted the Omer from the Sunday following the first Sabbath of Passover, so that the Feast of Pentecost always fell on a Sunday.

The Samaritan tradition maintains that their calendar was established by Phineas, according to the astronomical calculation of the meridian of Mount Gerizim (See Moses Gasten", "The Samaritans", London, 1925, pg. 66).

Because of their sharp opposition to the standard calendar of the Jews, the Samaritans were accused of lighting beacons on the hill-tops on wrong dates in order to bring about confusion, and make it impossible for the Jews outside of Palestine who relied on the official signals of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin to fix the time of the new moon, and thus to keep their festivals at the proper time. "Originally they used to light beacons (to convey the news of the new month to Jews outside Palestine). When the Cutheans (Samaritans) adopted evil courses, they made a rule that messengers should go forth. (Rosh Hashanah II, 1).

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

The Lunar and Solar Calendars in
Ancient Israel

from

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF SOLOMON B. FREEHOF



RODEF SHALOM CONGREGATION
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA · · 1964

THE LUNAR AND SOLAR CALENDARS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

by ABBA HILLEL SILVER

IN WRITING of the many conflicting traditions which existed between Israel and Judah,¹ I stated: "It is clear that we are dealing here with *two* peoples, or with two groups of kindred tribes who, while sharing remote memories of a common ancestry and a cradle of common origin in Haran and the cult of a deity who was uniquely theirs, were in other ways quite distinct in their historic experiences."

Professor R. W. Livingstone, in writing of the Greek city states, makes a similar observation about them: "Though ultimately conscious of common Hellenic blood, these Greek states are vividly individual, divided against their neighbors. Primarily a man is a Spartan, an Athenian, a Theban, and so on. Secondly he belongs to one of the great rival groups, Ionians, Dorians, Aeolians. Thirdly, and that chiefly at the great festivals, at the national religious centre, the Oracle of Delphi, and in times of foreign invasion, he is a Greek."²

Resemblances between the organization of the ancient Hebrew tribes and the early Delian and Delphic amphictyonies of Greece have also been noted by Professor Noth and others.

One of the sharp differences which existed between Israel and Judah concerned the calendar. This difference persisted down the ages, long after both states had been destroyed.

¹ *Moses and the Original Torah*, The Macmillan Co., 1961, Chap. 5 & 6.

² *The Pageant of Greece*, Oxford, 1938, p. 79.

The ancient calendar of the Hebrews in Canaan was lunar. The year began in the autumn after the ingathering of the harvest—תקופת השנה (Ex. 34:22), or בצאת השנה—"at the end of the year," or "the going out of the year." The lunar was also the calendar of the Canaanites and the Babylonians. The calendar which was discovered at Gezer in Palestine, dating from approximately the tenth century, begins the year with the late harvest and follows through with the early and later planting, the hoeing up of flax, the harvest of barley and other harvests, the pruning of vines and finally, the gathering of summer fruit.

There were twelve months to the year and the year consisted of 354 days. The first month was called Abib—אביב (Ex. 13:4). The names of the second, seventh and eighth month are also given in the Bible—Ziv, זיו (I K. 6:1)—Ethanin, אֶתְנָן (I K. 8:2) and Bul, בול (I K. 6:38). The first day of each month, which was marked by the appearance of the new moon (חדש), was a holiday. Like the Sabbath, it was universally observed with cessation of labor and with special ceremonies, such as sacrifices and the blowing of trumpets. Three annual festivals connected with the three harvest periods were also celebrated. But their dates were not absolutely fixed in the calendar. They fluctuated within a designated period and were known as מועדים—"appointed seasons."³

Actually, no fixed dates are set in the older codes of the Pentateuch for these three annual festivals. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, according to the Book of the Covenant, is to be celebrated "at the appointed time in the month of Abib." . . . "You shall keep the Feast of Harvest of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year." (Ex. 23:15-16). Similarly in the Little Book of the Covenant, it is ordained that "The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep . . . at the time appointed in the month Abib. . . . You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end" (Ex. 34:18-22). So also Deuteronomy: "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to YHVH, your God. . . . You shall count seven weeks . . . from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks. . . . You shall

³ Perhaps from the term מעד—to "fluctuate," to "vacillate."

keep the Feast of Booths seven days when you make your ingathering from your threshing floor and your wine-press' (Deut. 16:1-13).

The day began and ended at sun-down. The week consisted of seven days, the seventh being the Sabbath Day—יום השבת—a solemn day of rest when all work must cease.

But the Pentateuch also has reference to another calendar, a solar one, one which began in the spring of the year. II Sam. 11:1 states ויהי לתשובת השנה לעת צאת המלכים—"And it came to pass, at the return of the year, i.e., at the commencement of the new year, when kings go forth to battle." The months of the year were counted not from autumn but from spring. The chronology of the Book of Kings invariably follows a similar calendar. Jeremiah 36:22 also suggests that the year was reckoned from the spring: "It was in the *ninth* month, and the king was sitting in the *winter house* and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him."

The year consisted of 364 days and was divided into twelve parts, or months. Each month consisted of thirty days, an extra day being added every third month. The months had no special names but were numbered. The day began and ended at dawn.

Why were there two calendars? When and why was the second one introduced? That an innovation was introduced is sharply and dramatically indicated in Exodus 12:1-2: ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן בארץ מצרים לאמר: החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים ראשון הוא לכם: "YHVH said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 'This month (אביב) shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the *first month* of the year for you.'" The people are told that hereafter they must regard Abib as the first month of the year. Presumably this was a departure from what was the accepted usage up to then. This was a new ordinance deliberately announcing a new calendar, introducing a new time reckoning and a new era.

Many peoples throughout history adopted new calendars to mark some decisive event in their history, a political or social revolution, a momentous victory, or the birth of a great religious leader. Thus, the Romans dated their calendar from the founding of their city. The Christian and Mohammedan religions both introduced new calendars. The French Revolution adopted a new republican calendar and gave new names to the twelve months of the year. All

official national reckoning was thereafter made according to the new calendar. The new calendar did not always completely displace the old one—any more say, than the calendar which was introduced following the American Revolution and which dated all official papers from the year of the Declaration of Independence, has displaced the civil (Christian) calendar which continues to be in use.

The change in the Hebrew calendar is associated in Ex. 12:1–2 with Moses and the Exodus. The Bnai Israel fled from Egypt in the spring. The event marked for them the beginning of their history as a free people. They instituted a night Holiday, Passover—*ליל שימורים*—to commemorate that event for all future generations. For hundreds of years thereafter, the date of the Exodus marked for them the beginning of all their official chronology. Thus, when centuries later the Temple of Solomon was built in Jerusalem, the Chronicler records: "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the House of YHVH." (I K. 6:1).

When, under Joshua, the Bnai Israel entered Canaan, they signaled the occasion by inaugurating an official new era. The Hebrews who had been living in Canaan right along and had never gone down to Egypt, and were not among those who were emancipated, undoubtedly had been reckoning their time the same way as the Canaanites did. They observed a lunar year. The conquering Bnai Israel announced that henceforth the first month of the year would be *not* in autumn but in the spring. Furthermore, the year would follow a solar calendar such as they and their ancestors had been accustomed to observe for generations in Egypt.

The Egyptians at first, during the protodynastic period, had employed a lunar calendar, but long before the Hebrews came to Egypt, a solar calendar had been introduced, possibly at the beginning of the third millenium, B.C.⁴ The year consisted of twelve months of thirty days each. Later the calendar was corrected by the addition of five days at the end of the twelfth month—making 365 days in all. The day was from sun-rise to sun-rise. The year began with the first signs of the annual inundation of the Nile in the

⁴ Parker, Richard A., *The Calendar of Ancient Egypt*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1950, p. 51f.

spring of the year. The months had no names, but were numbered.^{5, 6}

The solar calendar which the Bnai Israel brought with them from Egypt became the officially accepted calendar for all the tribes when they were united under the monarchy. The New Year for the Court and the dating of all official state documents and decrees began in the spring. The Mishna preserves this fact when it declares: "There are four Rosh Hashanas: on the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings and the festivals (i.e., the sequence of the three festivals—Passover, Shabuot, Succoth, which are to be observed in the first, third and seventh month.) (Rosh Hashanah I, 1).

But the older lunar calendar did not disappear. The new calendar never quite displaced the old, especially among the Judeans who did not share the Exodus experience of the Bnai Israel and had not, at any time, used a solar calendar. They continued to reckon the beginning of the year from the close of the harvest season in autumn and to fix their festivals on the basis of the lunar calendar.

When the Judeans were exiled to Babylonia, they found themselves among a people which also used the lunar calendar. Before long they adopted the Babylonian names of the months and while retaining the official sequence of the months which the Bnai Israel had introduced when they entered Palestine, they continued to regard the seventh month, now called Tishri, as the beginning of the year. Thus Ezekiel, receiving his visions in Babylonia and carefully dating each one of them, still retains the number sequence of the months, i.e., first, second, third, etc., but one month, the *seventh*, is not so designated, but is referred to as the month which begins the New Year—(Ez. 40:1) בעשרים וחמש שנה לגלותנו בראש השנה בעשור לחדש.

When the Judeans returned from captivity, they made the lunar calendar the official calendar of the people, fixing the dates

⁵ The Israelite year consisted of 364 days. There was need, of course, to correct the difference between the 364-day year and the real solar year of 365 days. The difference in forty-nine years would amount to forty-nine days. Accordingly, a special "year," consisting of forty-nine days—a Jubilee Year—was introduced.

⁶ See Solomon Zeitlin, *The Rise and Fall of the Judean State*, 1962, pp. 216–18. The Jubilee Year was a Northern institution and fell into disuse when the kingdom of Israel was destroyed. The Rabbis declared that the Jubilee Year was observed only as long as all the twelve tribes lived in Palestine, i.e., up to the destruction of Israel in 722 ('Arak. 32b).

of all the annual festivals accordingly and officially declaring the first of Tishri as ראש השנה, the beginning of the year. While the Pentateuch nowhere states that the first day of Tishri marked the beginning of the New Year—that it actually was Rosh Hashanah—the day is called שבתון זכרון תרועה מקרא קדש—“a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets—a holy convocation” (Lev. 23:24)—and while as late as Ezra and Nehemiah, the first of Tishri is still not designated as *Rosh Hashanah*, the beginning of the year, but only as יום קדוש—a “Holy Day” (Neh. 8:2), as indeed every new moon was so regarded, it is clear, however, that the very singling out of the first day of the *seventh* month indicates that it marked the actual beginning of the year.

The Israelites and the Judeans celebrated their annual harvest festivals at different times due no doubt to their geographic locations. Harvest time in the north of Palestine is about a month later than in the south. The Harvest festivals were accordingly celebrated a month later. Jeroboam, the first King of Israel, after he had set up the two calves of gold in Bethel and Dan, went up to sacrifice at the altar in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the *eighth* month (Succoth) “Like unto the feast that is in Judah” (on the fifteenth day of the *seventh* month). According to the author of I K. 12:33, this was a date which Jeroboam “had devised of his own heart.” (בחדש אשר ברא מלבד) But Jeroboam was undoubtedly following the agricultural custom of the North which always celebrated Succoth in the *eighth* month.

When the kingdom of Israel was destroyed, attempts were made by some of the kings of Judah to win back, at least to religious conformity, the Israelites who had not been deported. The Northerners were invited to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual festivals. But the calendar was clearly a stumbling block to the acceptance of such invitations. Thus, Hezekiah, according to the Chronicler (II Chr. 30) “sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh that they should come to the House of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the Lord, the God of Israel. The King had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the Passover in the *second* month.” The reason which is given for the postponement of the festival of Passover to the second month is that the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number,

neither had the people gathered themselves together in Jerusalem. The real reason was probably the desire to accommodate the Northerners who had been in the habit of celebrating Passover in the second month. Most of the Israelites "laughed the King's messenger to scorn and mocked them." Some accepted the invitation and did go to Jerusalem.

King Josiah also appears to have invited the people of Israel to join with the people of Judah in the celebration of the Passover, for the Chronicler reports the presence of Israelites at the celebration. But in the days of Josiah, more than half a century later, it was no longer deemed necessary to shift the date a month later in order to accommodate the Northerners. Passover was accordingly celebrated on the fourteenth day of the *first* month (II Chr. 35:1).

The Israelites never really abandoned their own calendar, and never accepted the lunar calendar of Judea which, upon the return from the Babylonian exile, became the one authentic calendar of the restored community. There were, of course, many Israelites in the restored Judean community as there had been in Judea in the century preceding the exile (II Chr. 30:25). The calendar conflict persisted. The Northerners clung to the solar year.

The calendar controversy, of course, brought into question the exact days of all the holidays, for in a solar year of twelve months of thirty days and four intercalated days, the annual festivals would fall on the same day of the week from year to year. This would not be true in the case of a lunar year of 354 days—twelve months of twenty-nine and a half days—with a leap year of thirteen months every third or fourth year. Thus, what would be regarded as a sacred day by those who followed the official lunar calendar would be just another secular workday for those who followed the solar calendar. The validity of the festival sacrifices which were brought in the Temple would quite naturally also be challenged by those who claimed that the sacrifices were brought on the wrong days.

The storm of controversy in post-exilic times is fully reflected in the Book of Jubilees (Chap. 72–82) and elsewhere. Professor Zeitlin's conclusions that the Book of Jubilees "was written by a man, or a school of men, who opposed many of the pentateuchal laws and traditions" and that "it was written during the pre-Hellenistic period when it could be hoped that opposition to the Pentateuch would not be wholly futile" seems to be well estab-

lished.⁷ The Book of Jubilees differs sharply on the matter of the calendar. In all likelihood, the author was an Israelite who clung to the Northern solar calendar—a year of twelve months of thirty days each, with an additional day added at the end of every third month, making the year consist of 364 days or 52 weeks.

In the Book of Jubilees, Noah gives clear instructions to his descendants: "And command thou the children of Israel that they observe the years according to this reckoning—364 days, and (these) will constitute a complete year, and they will not disturb its time from its days and from its feasts; for everything will fall out in them according to their testimony, and they will not leave out any day nor disturb any feasts. But if they do neglect and do not observe them according to this commandment, then they will disturb all their seasons, and the years will be dislodged from this (order), [and they will disturb the seasons and the years will be dislodged] and they will neglect their ordinances. And all the children of Israel will forget, and will not find the path of the years, and will forget the new moons, and seasons, and sabbaths, and they will go wrong as to all the order of the years. For I know and from henceforth will I declare it unto thee, and it is not of my own devising; for the Book (lies) written before me, and on the heavenly tablets the division of days is ordained, lest they forget the feasts of the Covenant and walk according to the feasts of the Gentiles after their error and after their ignorance. For there will be those who will assuredly make observations of the moon—how (it) disturbs the seasons and comes in from year to year ten days too soon. For this reason the years will come upon them when they will disturb (the order) and make an abominable (day) the Day of Testimony, and an unclean day a Feast Day and they will confound all the days, the holy with the unclean, and the unclean day with the holy; for they will go wrong as to the months and sabbaths and feasts and jubilees. For this reason I command and testify to thee that thou mayst testify to them; for after thy death thy children will disturb (them), so that they will not make the year three hundred and sixty-four days only, and for this reason they will go wrong as to the new moons and seasons and sabbaths and festivals, and they will eat all kinds of blood with all kinds of flesh."

In the Book of Enoch (especially in chapters 72–82—the "astro-

⁷ *The Book of Jubilees*, J.I.R. p. 31.

nomical" section)—one finds the same insistence on the solar calendar as the only true one: "And the sun and the stars bring in all the years exactly, so that they do not advance or delay their positions by a single day unto eternity. But complete the years with perfect justice in 364 days (Chap. 82)."

It has been shown that the Qumran sectarians held the Book of Jubilees in high regard. They followed the solar calendar and reckoned the day from sunrise. "The basic difference in the calculation of the calendar caused the members of the sect to withdraw from the Temple and its cult. The withdrawal did not result from their opposition to the offering of sacrifices, in principle, as is often supposed, but from the fact that the dates in which the holidays were fixed in the Temple of Jerusalem were "those in which all Israel were in error." ⁸

The Passover Letter which was found among the Eliphantine Papyri may also reflect the sharp divergency which existed in the fifth century B.C.E., with reference to the dates of observing the holidays. Instructions are sent to the Jewish military garrison in Eliphantine to observe the Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan. "Let this be done as Darius the king commanded." ⁹

Why should the authority of the Persian king be invoked in such a matter? Did not the Eliphantine community know about Passover? Professor Cowley quite correctly asks: "Was this community which possessed a temple and offered sacrifices to Yahu ignorant of the greatest of Jewish national festivals? Had they never celebrated it before?" ¹⁰

We are inclined to believe that the religious authorities in Judea sent these instructions, clearly stating that they were authorized by the Persian government, in order to insure that the Jewish garrison would observe Passover on the exact date which was approved by them, and not on any other date. The Judean authorities wished to make their calendar standard for all Jews throughout the Persian Empire. It is likely that the original settlers of Eliphantine came from Northern Israel, even before the Babylonian exile, and retained the solar calendar and the dates of the festivals based on that calendar.

⁸ Talmon, Shemaryahu, "The Calendar Reckoning of the Sect from the Judean Desert," *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, IV, 1958, pp. 164, 177.

⁹ This is Darius II. The year of the letter is 419 B.C.E.

¹⁰ Cowley, A., *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford, 1923, p. 61.

The Samaritans, during the Second Commonwealth, who claimed direct descent from the ancient Israelites, clung to the Pentateuch, revered Moses, and, as patriotic "Northerners" claimed that the future Messiah would be a descendant of Joseph, and not of David, as the Judeans maintained, held fast to a calendar which differed greatly from the one accepted by the rest of the Jews. The dates of their festivals differed. Only in the matter of the date of the counting of the Omer did they agree—and that with the Sadducean calendar. They counted the Omer from the Sunday following the first Sabbath of Passover, so that the Feast of Pentecost always fell on a Sunday.

The Samaritan tradition maintains that their calendar was established by Phineas, according to the astronomical calculation of the meridian of Mount Gerizim.¹¹

Because of their sharp opposition to the standard calendar of the Jews, the Samaritans were accused of lighting beacons on the hill-tops on wrong dates in order to bring about confusion, and make it impossible for the Jews outside of Palestine who relied on the official signals of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin to fix the time of the new moon, and thus to keep their festivals at the proper time. "Originally, they used to light beacons (to convey the news of the new month to Jews outside Palestine). When the Cutheans (Samaritans) adopted evil courses, they made a rule that messengers should go forth."

¹¹ See Moses Gasten, *The Samaritans*, London, 1925, p. 66.