

THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTHS

In Exodus 12:2 God gives the following instruction to Moses and Aaron regarding the month Abib: “This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.” It is mainly based on the rescue events that occurred when God delivered the Israelites out of the land of slavery and sent them on their way to the land of promise. As a result God made this decree: “Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night.” (Deut 16:1).

At the heart of the events of this month of Abib is decidedly the celebration of the Pesach, during which the people of God were “exempted” (*Strong's*) by the blood of the sacrificial Lamb, they were “passed over”, and were presented with the opportunity to move out of the land of slavery (Ex 12). The New Year, which commences about two weeks before this epoch-making event, does not enjoy the focus and importance that is usually ascribed to New Year in the Western tradition.

Thus the two weeks before Passover become, strictly speaking, a time of humbling oneself and preparation for the coming feast. We can read the parallel of this in the actual events of Jesus' life.

It is perhaps especially due to the emphasis of the new year that the Jews, over the years, made Rosh Hashanah their “Jewish New Year” – but it is, in fact, not scriptural to call this very important feast (which occurs on the first and second day of the month of Tishri, the seventh month) the Jewish New Year. Read Lev 23:24-25 for an explanation of these holy feast days. Besides: If we consider all the *Moedim* (feasts), it makes spiritual sense from a “preparatory” salvation perspective that the year begins in the time before Pesach and ends after Sukkoth.

1 Abib is not acknowledged as a *Mo'ed* (feast day) except that it occurs on the new moon, *Rosh Chodesh*, which, along with all the other new moons, makes it a remarkable day with a remarkable meaning.

In early Biblical times the months did not have names; they were indicated by numbers. The month in which Passover is celebrated was not just the month of deliverance, but also the month of the founding of the Jewish nation. It was called the FIRST month. It was only after the Jews were in exile in Babylon that they named the months with Babylonian names.

We often do not understand the world view and reality of the Middle Eastern culture in which the Jews functioned. One important aspect of the Hebrew way of thinking about time is that it is not linear but cyclical. Cyclical does not mean to walk in circles (alas, as the Israelites did in the desert due to disobedience!) but rather to move in terms of cycles. The concept “year” in Hebrew literally means repetition. God's decree regarding 1 Abib means, most especially, that we must realise that we have again been given the opportunity to be at the beginning of the repetition of a cycle, “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1)! Thus Psalm 23's famous verse “He leads me in the paths of righteousness” is actually, in the original Hebrew, “He leads me in the cycles of righteousness, FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE”!

The feasts (including the cycles of every new year) are all there to help us to walk with the Messiah, Jesus, the Anointed One, the Way (John 14:6); as we recognise Him more and more we are “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18)!