

# HEBREW MONTHS

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Passover (and the Feast of Unleavened Bread) is found in the first biblical month of *Aviv*, which today is called *Nisan* in Judaism, since the Babylonian captivity in 587 BC:

Exodus 12:2-4: “This month shall be the *beginning* of months for you. It is to be the *first month of the year* for you. Speak to all the Congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the 10th of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household.’”

Exodus 13:4: ‘On this day in the month of *Aviv*, you are about to go forth.’

Exodus 23:15: ‘You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For 7 days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month *Aviv*, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.’

Exodus 34:18: ‘You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For 7 days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of *Aviv*, for in the month of *Aviv* you came out of Egypt.’

Leviticus 2:14: ‘Also if you bring a grain offering of first fruits to Yahveh you shall bring fresh heads (*Aviv*) of grain roasted in the fire, grits of new growth, for the grain offering of your early ripened things.

Deuteronomy 16:1: ‘Observe the month of *Aviv* and celebrate the Passover to Yahveh your God, for in the month of *Aviv* Yahveh your God brought you out of Egypt *by night*.’

## *The Names of the Biblical Months*

There are only four months in the Bible that have biblical names. Other ways of referring to the months are by numbering them (e.g. the third month).

1. 1st month *Aviv* .....הָאָבִיב ...Ex. 13:4; 23:15, etc.<sup>1</sup> .....Babylonian name: *Nisannu*
  - a. Passover month
2. 2nd month *Ziv* .....זִיב ...1st Kings 6:1, 37 .....Babylonian name: *Ayaru*
  - a. In the 480th year after Israel was set free from Egyptian slavery, in the month of *Ziv*, Solomon began to build the Temple.
  - b. In his 4th year, in the month of *Ziv*, Solomon began to lay the foundation for the Temple.
3. 7th month *Aetanim* הָאֵתָנִים ...1st Kgs. 8:2 .....Babylonian name: *Tash’retu*
  - a. “All the men of Israel assembled with King Solomon at the Feast (Tabernacles; cf. Jn. 7:2, 8,

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<sup>1</sup> The word *aviv* occurs eight times in Scripture, six times in the expression *chodesh ha’aviv* (the month of *Aviv*: Ex. 13:4; 23:15; 34:18 twice; Dt. 16:1 twice). The other two times are in Ex. 9:31 and Lev. 2:14 where the word is just *aviv*.

10-11, 14, 37) in the month of Ethanim, which is the 7th month.”

4. 8th month *Bul* .....בּוּל ...1st Kings 6:38 .....Babylonian name: *Arakh'shama*

a. “And in the 11th year, in the month of Bul, which is the 8th month, the House (Temple) was finished in all its details and according to all its plans. So he was 7 years in building it.”

The last three are seen with the beginning of the building, the completion and the dedication of the Temple of Solomon.

1. The 1st month of *Aviv* means, ‘green ears of corn...month of green ears.’<sup>2</sup>
2. The 2nd month of *Ziv* means, ‘beauty, especially of flowers’ and its root means, ‘to shine, be bright, beautiful.’<sup>3</sup>
3. The 7th month of *Aetanim* means, ‘firm, strong, mighty...perennial...constancy, of streams.’<sup>4</sup>
4. The 8th month of *Bul* means, ‘produce, increase’<sup>5</sup> (of the Earth).

*Unger's Bible Dictionary* states:

‘Before the exile the individual months were usually designated by numbers (the twelfth month occurs in 2nd Kings 25:27; Jeremiah 52:31; Ezekiel 29:1)...yet we find also the following names: Ear month (Hebrew: *hodesh ha-aviv*; Exodus 13:4; 23:15; Deut. 16:1), corresponding to the later Nisan’ (*hodesh ha-aviv* means ‘the month of the *aviv*,’ i.e. ‘green ears’ of barley).

‘Bloom month (*hodesh ziv*; 1st Kings 6:1, 37), the second month’.

‘Rain month (*ya'ray'ach bul*; 6:38), the eighth month.’<sup>6</sup>

‘Freshet<sup>7</sup> month (*yerah ha'aetanim*; 8:2), the seventh month,’

‘all of which seem to be mere appellatives. Occasionally, the months were newly numbered after the post-exilian period.’<sup>8</sup>

The names for the Jewish months since the Babylonian captivity, and their Babylonian counterparts:

1. *Nisan* .....*Nisannu* .....30 days<sup>9</sup>
2. *Iyyar* .....*Ayaru* (‘Bud’) .....29 days

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 2. This definition of ‘green ears’ is now being contested.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>6</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL, U.S.A: Moody Press, 25th printing, 1976), p. 1098. ‘*Yarah*’ is Unger’s way of transliterating the Hebrew word for moon (*yaray'ach*).

<sup>7</sup> J. M. Sinclair, general consultant, Diana Treffry, editorial director, *Collins English Dictionary*, Fourth Edition (Glasgow, Scotland: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), p. 613. Freshet, ‘the sudden overflowing of a river caused by heavy rain or melting snow’ or, ‘a stream of fresh water emptying into the sea.’ I have no idea why Unger’s uses that designation.

<sup>8</sup> Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 1098.

<sup>9</sup> Nisan appears in Nehemiah 2:1; Esther 3:7; Sivan appears in Esther 8:9; and Adar appears in Esther 3:7, 13; 6:15; 8:12; 9:1, 15, 17, 19, 21.

3. *Sivan* .....*Simanu* .....30 days
4. *Tammuz* .....*Du'uzu* (Name of a god) ...29 days
5. *Av* .....*Abu*.....30 days
6. *Elul* .....*Ululu* ('Purification') .....29 days
7. *Tishri* .....*Tash'retu* ('Beginning') .....30 days
8. *Marheshvan*<sup>10</sup> .....*Arakh'shama* .....29 or 30 days
9. *Kislev* .....*Kis'limu* .....29 or 30 days
10. *Tevet* .....*Tabetu* ('Flooding') .....29 days
11. *Shevat* .....*Shabatu* ('Beating') .....30 days
12. *Adar* .....*Addaru* .....29 days (30 in leap year)<sup>11</sup>

It's interesting that the Jewish month of *Elul* has as its Babylonian meaning 'purification.' This is the month that the Jewish people begin 'to prepare' for the Day of Atonement by blowing the shofar in the morning prayer service. Yahveh doesn't mention anything about this preparation, which means it's a tradition of man, which in this case, isn't bad.

The name of the 7th month, before Judah was taken into captivity, was *Aetanim*. In captivity they adopted Babylonian names for all their months. That's why today, the first month in Judaism is called *Nisan*, but in the days of Moses and King David it was called *Aviv* (Exodus 13:4; 23:15, etc.). *Nisan* came from the Babylonian *Nisanu*. Tishri, the current 7th month in Judaism, came from the Babylonian month *Tash'retu*, meaning 'beginning.' Babylon is most likely where the Rabbis came up with their understanding that Creation 'began' in the 7th biblical month.

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<sup>10</sup> Commonly known as *Heshvan* today.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Wigoder, editor in chief, *The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York-Oxford: Facts on File, 7th Edition, 1990), p. 187.

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