

Jewish Holy Day Descriptions

The Jewish year, which generally begins in September, is based on a lunar calendar. The lunar calendar is 11 days shorter than the solar (Gregorian) calendar, therefore the Jewish holidays move either backwards about 11 days or forward about 28 days as we continue to regulate the dates with the seasons.

Another point of importance is to understand that the Jewish holidays have various levels of importance, based mainly on their description in the Jewish Bible (Torah). Each level has different requirements for observance, i.e., what activities are or are not allowed on the specific days.

We hope that this brief description will be helpful to you in your understanding of the Jewish calendar and holidays.

Thank you.

Please note: all Jewish holidays begin at sunset on the evening before, and last through the day(s) until just after sunset when the holiday ends.

The **Sabbath**, beginning on Friday evenings, concluding on Saturday evenings.

HIGH HOLIDAYS:

Rosh HaShanah is the beginning of the Jewish year. It is the first of the High Holy Days and marks the start of the 10-day period of penitence and spiritual renewal. Usually in September.

Yom Kippur is the 10th day penitence. This is the MOST HOLY DAY in the Jewish year, occurring 10 days after Rosh HaShanah. The day is marked by fasting and prayers people atone, asking for forgiveness from both G-d and fellow humans. It is also referred to as the Sabbath of Sabbaths.

MAJOR HOLIDAYS:

There are three Major Holidays, known collectively as “Shalosh Regalim,” the 3 Pilgrimage Holidays. These holidays (**Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot**) are most closely associated with early agricultural practices, but also have historical significance.

Sukkot is the 8-day Jewish festival of harvest and thanksgiving. It is generally associated with celebrations held in a temporary booth known as a *sukkah*. **Shemini Atzeret** is the eighth and final day of Sukkot, on high special memorial prayers are said. **Sukkot** occurs a week after Yom Kippur.

Simchat Torah, the day after Shemini Atzeret, celebrates the conclusion of the public reading of the Five Books of Moses (Torah) and its beginning anew, thus affirming that the study of G-d’s word is an unending process.

Pesach (Passover) celebrates the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian bondage. During this eight-day festival, *matzah* (unleavened bread) is eaten. The Seder is a ritual meal that occurs on the evenings of the first two days of Passover. This is a springtime holidays, usually occurring between late March and mid-April.

Shavuot celebrates the covenant established at Mount Sinai between G-d and the Jewish people, and the revelation of the Ten Commandments. This holiday occurs seven weeks after the beginning of Passover.

MINOR HOLIDAYS:

Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in (approximately) 164 B.C. It is also known as the Festival of Lights. It is observed for eight days, with a candle-lighting ceremony each night. This joyous holiday occurs sometime between late November and late December.

Purim is one of the most joyous and fun-filled holidays on the Jewish Calendar. It commemorates a time when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination. It typically happens in March.