Understanding the Postponement Rules

Determining the Beginning of the Month

The months of the Hebrew Calendar are set by the lunar cycle, which begins with a sliver-thin crescent that has an illumination percentage a few points above zero. It is formed at the point of conjunction when the moon appears to be enveloped in total darkness. At this point, however, a very narrow arc of light is exposed along one edge. This narrow arc of light is the new moon.

Too faint to be visible, the new moon is portrayed on calendars as a black circle. However, its existence as a formed crescent has been scientifically demonstrated.[1]

[1] Although the new moon is typically depicted as a black circle its actual phase is a very thin crescent, because the moon does not pass directly in front of the sun (except during a solar eclipse). On July 8, 2013, French astrophotographer Thierry Legault successfully photographed the new moon, although the crescent itself was not visible to the unaided eye. (Wikipedia, s.v. "New Moon")

Because the new moon cannot be sighted until it has been waxing for one to three days, it must be determined by calculation. This is the reason for the mathematics of the Hebrew Calendar.

To calculate the time that the new moon will occur, the calendar uses a formula based on the average lunar cycle. The calculated date is called the molad (the Hebrew word *molad*, or *moled*, means "renewal"). The term "molad" clearly identifies the new moon with the renewal of the lunar cycle at the time of the conjunction.

Correctly identifying the new moon as the crescent that is formed at the beginning of the lunar cycle is essential for the observance of God's holy days at their appointed times. Counting from the first day of the lunar cycle ensures that the moon will be full on the fifteenth day of the month as ordained by God in Leviticus 23 and Psalm 81:1-3.

Since the full moon occurs midway through the lunar cycle, in an average cycle it will fall at 14.765 days—about five and a half hours before sunset beginning the 15th day. In a cycle that is shorter than average, it may fall from six to twelve hours before the 15th begins. In an average cycle the full moon occurs at 22 minutes past noon on the 14th, but in a shorter cycle it occurs on the morning of the 14th. In either case, it is at or near 100% illumination when it rises on the eve of the 15th.

The calculations of the Hebrew Calendar are designed to provide the best possible illumination for the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread on Nisan 15 and the Feast of Tabernacles on Tishri 15. Relying on the visible crescent to set the beginning of the month will in most years delay the observance of these festivals until the 16th day of the lunar cycle, after the peak period of illumination has passed.

Although the Hebrew Calendar consistently provides the best illumination for Nisan 15 and Tishri 15, it is not possible to achieve 100% illumination in every year due to variations in the length of the lunar cycle. The average length of 29.53 days includes cycles that range from 6 hours shorter to 7 hours longer. In some years the peak period of illumination does not coincide perfectly with the 15th day. Despite these variations, the Hebrew Calendar has maintained an average of more than 99% illumination for thousands of years.

Calculating the Molad of Tishri

Although each month in the Hebrew Calendar begins with a molad, the focus of the Hebrew Calendar is the calculation of the Molad of Tishri. Calculating the Molad of Tishri is the first step in determining the date of Tishri 1, which sets the holy days for the entire year. The fact that in every year there are exactly

177 days from Nisan 1 to Tishri 1 makes it possible to count backward to the beginning of the holy day season. In years when additional days are needed to keep the calendar synchronized with the movement of the sun and the moon, these days are added before Nisan 1 so that the holy days never shift from their appointed times.

The Hebrew Calendar, designed by God Himself, has a proven method for synchronizing the lunar year with the seasons of the solar year. It accomplishes this by the process of intercalation, producing leap years as needed to keep pace with the longer solar year. Because the lunar year is 11 days shorter than the solar year, a 13th month is added in a fixed cycle of 7 out of 19 years to prevent the holy days from drifting out of their seasons. Adding a 13th month does not affect the weekly cycle of days, which remains unchanged from sunset to sunset, serving as a primary consideration in the declaration of Tishri 1.

Adjusting the Calculation of the Molad to the Correct Day of the Week

The calculation of the Molad of Tishri, which is based on the average lunar cycle, does not always fit the actual movement of the moon. The mathematical formula that is used for calculation allows the Molad to fall on the morning or afternoon of any day in the week, but the movement of the moon prevents the renewal of the lunar cycle from taking place on certain week days. There is a forward progression in the week from one year to the next that limits the first day of Tishri to specific days and specific times of day.

In 39 years out of 100, the calculation of the Molad will arrive at the correct day for the first day of Tishri. In the 61 years when the day calculated for Tishri 1 is not accurate, the date must be adjusted. The Postponement Rules are the mathematical principles that God established to make this adjustment.

The Postponement Rules take effect when the date calculated for the declaration of Tishri 1 does not fit the actual time of the new moon. In such years, the calculated date is adjusted by the application of one or more of the Postponement Rules to keep the calendar precisely on target for the holy day that begins the

month of Tishri and sets all other months in the year. (The mathematical basis of the Postponement Rules is explained in the article "The Hebrew Calendar Made Simple" by Dwight Blevins. This article is freely available upon request.)

God in His wisdom placed the sun and moon in their positions expressly for the purpose of establishing His appointed times. Foreseeing every circumstance that would arise with the passing of time, He made provision for all irregularities to be corrected when He gave instructions to Moses for calculating His feast days. This revelation was committed to His people for all time and is preserved in the Calculated Hebrew Calendar.

RULE ONE

When the Molad of Tishri or advancement occurs on a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday, the declaration of Tishri 1 is advanced one day to a Monday, Thursday or Saturday (Sabbath) respectively.

RULE TWO

When the Molad of Tishri occurs at noon (18 hours 0 parts) or later, the declaration of Tishri 1 is advanced to the next day.

RULE THREE

When the Molad of Tishri of a common year falls on Tuesday, at or after 9 hours and 204 parts, the declaration of Tishri 1 is advanced to Wednesday. The application of Rule One advances the declaration one more day to Thursday.

RULE FOUR

When the Molad of Tishri of a common year immediately following an intercalary year occurs on a Monday, at or after 15 hours and 589 parts, the declaration of Tishri 1 is advanced to Tuesday.

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