

A Guide to the Jewish Holidays

Rosh Hashanah

Yom Kippur

	Starts at Sundown	All Day	Ends at Sundown	Starts at Sundown	Ends at Sundown
2013	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Fri	Sat
	Sept 4	Sept 5	Sept 6	Sept 13	Sept 14
2014	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Fri	Sat
	Sept 24	Sept 25	Sept 26	Oct 3	Oct 4
2015	Sun	Mon	Tues	Tues	Wed
	Sept 13	Sept 14	Sept 15	Sept 22	Sept 23
2016	Sun	Mon	Tues	Tues	Wed
	Oct 2	Oct 3	Oct 4	Oct 11	Oct 12
2017	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Fri	Sat
	Sept 20	Sept 21	Sept 22	Sept 29	Sept 30
2018	Sun	Mon	Tues	Tues	Wed
	Sept 9	Sept 10	Sept 11	Sept 18	Sept 19
2019	Sun	Mon	Tues	Tues	Wed
	Sept 29	Sept 30	Oct 1	Oct 8	Oct 9
2020	Fri	Sat	Sun	Sun	Mon
	Sept 18	Sept 19	Sept 20	Sept 27	Sept 28
2021	Mon	Tues	Wed	Wed	Thurs
	Sept 6	Sept 7	Sept 8	Sept 15	Sept 16
2022	Sun	Mon	Tues	Tues	Wed
	Sept 25	Sept 26	Sept 27	Oct 4	Oct 5
2023	Fri	Sat	Sun	Sun	Mon
	Sept 15	Sept 16	Sept 17	Sept 24	Sept 25

A Guide to the Jewish Holidays

- Holiday dates vary because the Jewish calendar is lunar, not solar
- Some Jewish people add an extra day to some holidays because of ancient tradition and some don't
- Jews hope non-Jews know a little about Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Chanukah

If you want a general understanding of what your Jewish friends' and colleagues' holidays are, or if you just want to avoid conflicts when schedules involve Jewish employees, co-workers, colleagues or students, then this brochure is for you.

Why Do Jewish Holidays Keep Changing Dates?

Congregant 1: When is Chanukah this year?

Congregant 2: Same as always, 25th of Kislev.

-- Overheard at Congregation Children of Israel,
Athens, Georgia

Jewish holidays actually occur on the same day every year: the same day on the Jewish calendar! The Jewish calendar has a different number of days than the secular calendar because the Jewish calendar is tied to the moon's cycles instead of the sun's. The Jewish calendar loses about 11 days relative to the solar calendar every year, but makes up for it by adding a month every two or three years. As a result, the holidays don't always fall on the same day, but they always fall within the same month or two. The Chinese calendar (which is also lunar) works the same way, which is why Chinese New Year occurs on different days but is always in late January or early February. The Muslim calendar is lunar but does not add months, which is why Ramadan circles the calendar.

When Does a Jewish Holiday Start and End?

Attorney 1: Thursday is Rosh Hashanah, but I'm available for trial on Friday.

Attorney 2: Thursday and Friday are Rosh Hashanah for me.

Attorney 3: I have to leave early on Wednesday for Rosh Hashanah.

Judge: Is this holiday one day, two or three?

Attorney 1: One day.

Attorney 2: Two days.

Attorney 3: Two days.

-- Inspired by a true story

How long is a Jewish holiday? It depends on who you ask!

In ancient times the calendar was set according to physical observations of the phases of the moon, the blossoming of trees and other nature signs. As there could be some uncertainty about these signs, an extra day was added to some holidays in outlying districts. In modern times, some branches of Judaism have abandoned this custom, returning the holidays to the length specified in the Bible. Other branches continue the ancient tradition of adding a day to certain holidays. Thus for some Jews, a holiday might be observed on a Thursday but not on Friday, while others might observe both Thursday and Friday.

Adding to the confusion is the fact that a Jewish "day" starts and ends at sunset. Therefore, holidays start at sunset the evening before the day listed on your secular calendar. For example, if your calendar says that Passover starts on April 24, families will be getting together for Passover dinner on the night of April 23. A few secular calendars now mark the preceding day as "Erev Passover," which basically means Passover Eve. If your calendar says "Erev" or "Eve" before a holiday name, it means the holiday starts at sundown on that day and continues into the next day.

Commonly Observed Jewish Holidays

The holidays discussed below are not necessarily all of the most important Jewish holidays, but they are the holidays that are most commonly observed by American Jews.

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, the day when the year number on the Jewish calendar increases. It occurs between Labor Day and Columbus Day. It lasts for one or two days, depending on individual custom.

Many Jewish people who do not go to synagogue any other time of year will go to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah is a happy, festive holiday, but somewhat more solemn than American New Year. Like American New Year, it is a time to look back at the past year and make resolutions for the following year. It is also a wake-up call, a time to begin mental preparations for the upcoming Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

Most American Jews would like non-Jews to be aware of Rosh Hashanah. It is listed on most calendars you buy in the store, but remember: the holiday starts at sunset the night before the day shown on your calendar! Many Jewish people attend services on the evening when the holiday starts as well as during the next day or two. Therefore, it is difficult for them if you schedule important events, meetings or tests on the evening before the first day, the first day, and often the second day. Students may not have time to complete work or study for tests that happen right when they return to school. Even those who do not go to synagogue may observe the day in some way. If you celebrate Christmas or Easter, imagine how you would feel if someone scheduled such activities on Christmas Eve, Christmas or Easter, even if you didn't attend church, and you will understand how Jewish people feel about these scheduling conflicts.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the Jewish Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and repentance to reconcile ourselves for the mistakes we have made in the last year. It occurs on the ninth day after the first day of Rosh Hashanah (Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first day of the Jewish month; Yom Kippur occurs on the 10th), so it is usually in late September or early October, sometimes falling on Columbus Day.

Remember that this holiday starts the evening before the day it appears on most secular calendars. Some secular calendars will mark the preceding day as Kol Nidre, which is the name of the first evening service of the holiday. The way this holiday is observed is with a fast starting at sunset and continuing to the following sunset. During that time, many Jews attend services in the evening and the following day.

Most (but not all) Jewish people take time off from work or school on this day, even ones who are not religious at other times. Many will also want to leave work early the afternoon before, so they have time for a large, slow meal before the fast. Like Rosh Hashanah, most American Jews would like non-Jews to be aware of this day. Almost all will expect some kind of accommodation for missing work, school, or appointments during this holiday and hope administrators will avoid scheduling important meetings, activities, and onetime events on these days.



Chanukah *a.k.a Hanukkah, Chanukkah, or Hanukah*

Chanukah is the festival of lights, commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after a successful revolt against the Seleucid Greeks. As part of the rededication, the victorious Jews needed to light the Temple's menorah (candelabrum), but they had only enough oil to last one day and it would take eight days to prepare more oil. Miraculously, the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days. The miracle of the oil is commemorated with this eight-day candlelighting holiday.

Chanukah begins between Thanksgiving and Christmas. About half of the time it overlaps with Christmas, but there are many years when Chanukah ends before Christmas. In 2002, for example, Chanukah began on Thanksgiving and ended in the first week of December, but that is unusual.

Almost all Jewish people light candles with their families for at least some nights of the holiday, so people like to be at home during this holiday. Although almost nobody takes off from work or school for Chanukah, many may not want to work nights or travel during the holiday so they can light candles with family. Accommodations should be made for this. For schools, there is generally no problem scheduling homework or tests during these eight nights; however, being sensitive to individual family customs is appreciated. Some families' tradition is to have an extended family dinner together on one of the nights, reducing available time for homework or studies.

Because Chanukah usually falls during December, it may be tempting to think of it as the Jewish equivalent of Christmas. Like Christmas, it is often enjoyed as a special family time. However, in the religious hierarchy, unlike Christmas, Chanukah is not very religiously significant. It is important to understand that this holiday season can be challenging for those who don't celebrate Christmas, especially for children and their families. This often manifests in the need to assert our Jewish identity, distinctiveness, and existence in the face of overwhelming pressure to conform to a non-Jewish norm. Pressuring Jewish people to conform to that norm or to participate in Christmas events if they don't want to, can create hard feelings and resentment.

Passover

This holiday commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. If you've seen Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*, then you know the story of Passover, more or less. Passover is celebrated for seven or eight days (depending on individual custom) starting on the night of a full moon in April. Passover usually overlaps with Easter, though occasionally Passover occurs a month after Easter.

Most American Jews observe Passover to some extent, even if only to go to a relative's or friend's house for a ritual dinner (called a seder) on the first and/or second night of the holiday. Many American Jews avoid bread and grain products to one extent or another throughout this holiday, in memory of the fact that our ancestors left Egypt in a hurry and didn't have time to wait for their bread to rise. Be sensitive when scheduling events involving food and travel during this holiday, because the seders are very special family events and because it may be hard for observant Jews to find suitable food away from home.

Most American Jews will work through Passover, although many may want to take time off the day before Passover to prepare for the seder. To put this in perspective: imagine if you had to work during the day of Thanksgiving, then prepare for Thanksgiving dinner after getting home from work. Strictly observant Jews do not work, go to school or carry out any business on the first two and last two days of Passover. The first and second nights of Passover are generally the most important. Most Jews will participate in a seder on one or both nights. This often involves preparing special foods for a large gathering and/or traveling to another location for the gathering. The seder is a home service that generally lasts quite late. Therefore, on these two nights, it is difficult for students to do homework or prepare for tests that would be due or occur on the following days.

Remember that Passover, like all Jewish holidays, begins the evening before the date that it appears on your calendar. If your calendar says that Passover starts on April 24, then Passover really begins with the family dinner (seder) on the night of April 23.

Other Jewish Holidays

Sukkot: This festival commemorates the Biblical period of wandering in the desert by building a temporary shelter (called a sukkah) in the yard and eating meals in it. Some spend considerable time in the sukkah, even sleeping there. Sukkot begins on the fifth day after Yom Kippur, in late September or October, and lasts for 7 days. From the perspective of the Bible and Jewish law, this holiday is every bit as important as Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, but most American Jews don't see it that way. About 10% of Jews do not work on the first and last one or two days of this holiday and will not want to travel during this holiday, because they want to be able to have meals in the sukkah.

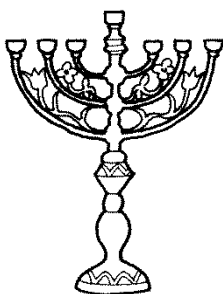
Shemini Atzeret / Simchat Torah: These two holidays fall immediately after Sukkot. Shemini Atzeret is sort of an extra day tacked onto the end of Sukkot; Simchat Torah celebrates the completion of the annual cycle of Bible readings in Sabbath services. Only about 10% of Jewish people will take both of these days off from work. Some branches of Judaism celebrate these two holidays on the same day, which is the first day after Sukkot.

Tu B'Shevat: This Jewish Arbor Day is used for calculating the age of trees for certain religious purposes. It occurs in late January or early February. There are no restrictions on this holiday that would require accommodation.

Purim: This is a partying holiday which celebrates the rescue of the Jews from an official bent on genocide (Hamen from the story of Esther in the Hebrew Bible). The celebration resembles a Jewish Mardi Gras, with stories and costumes. Purim occurs in late February or March, a month before Passover, and lasts for one day. Although work is technically not forbidden on this holiday, a small number of Jewish people prefer not to work on it because of rabbinical dictum that no good will come from work done on this day.

Shavuot: This holiday commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. It occurs between Memorial Day and Independence Day, and lasts for one or two days depending on individual custom. Like Sukkot, this holiday is religiously as important as Passover, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but only about 10 % of American Jews take off from work or school on this holiday.

Tisha B'Av: This holiday commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and other tragedies. It occurs in late July or August. About 10% of Jews observe this holiday by fasting. Although work is not forbidden on Tisha B'Av, some prefer not to work on this day because it is difficult to fast while working with others who are not fasting.



This material comes with minor editing from the following website created by Tracey R. Rich: www.jewfaq.org/holidayg.htm. Please see this website for further detail regarding Jewish traditions.

A good website for looking up the secular calendar dates for the Jewish holidays through 9999 is www.hebcal.com.

Chanukah

Passover

	Starts at Sundown	Ends at Sundown		1 st Seder	2 nd Seder	Ends at Sundown
2013	Wed	Thurs	2014	Mon	Tues	Tues
	Nov 27	Dec 5		Apr 14	Apr 15	Apr 22
2014	Tues	Wed	2015	Fri	Sat	Sat
	Dec 16	Dec 24		Apr 3	Apr 4	Apr 11
2015	Sun	Mon	2016	Fri	Sat	Sat
	Dec 6	Dec 14		Apr 22	Apr 23	Apr 30
2016	Sat	Sun	2017	Mon	Tues	Tues
	Dec 24	January 1		Apr 10	Apr 11	Apr 18
2017	Tues	Wed	2018	Fri	Sat	Sat
	Dec 12	Dec 20		Mar 30	Mar 31	Apr 7
2018	Sun	Mon	2019	Fri	Sat	Sat
	Dec 2	Dec 10		Apr 19	Apr 20	Apr 27
2019	Sun	Mon	2020	Wed	Thurs	Thurs
	Dec 22	Dec 30		Apr 8	Apr 9	Apr 16
2020	Thurs	Friday	2021	Sat	Sun	Sun
	Dec 10	Dec 18		Mar 27	Mar 28	Apr 4
2021	Sun	Mon	2022	Fri	Sat	Sat
	Nov 28	Dec 6		Apr 15	Apr 16	Apr 23
2022	Sun	Mon	2023	Wed	Thur	Thur
	Dec 18	Dec 26		Apr 5	Apr 6	Apr 13
2023	Thurs	Fri	2024	Mon	Tues	Tues
	Dec 7	Dec 15		Apr 22	Apr 23	Apr 30

It is always challenging to schedule events coordinating the needs of schools, organizations, and different cultures within a community. Two years of research within our congregation, with members from more than six towns, showed that many congregants experience conflicts between secular responsibilities and Jewish religious practices. Some of this is due to public confusion with the Jewish calendar and how the holidays are observed. Though no ill will may be intended, personal stories underscored how misunderstandings and tension can arise as a result of these scheduling glitches. Unfortunately, many of the conversations that do take place happen after a point of conflict. This too easily results in blame, anger and defensiveness.

In order to avoid these kinds of situations, Temple Shir Tikvah has created this informational brochure about the Jewish holidays. It is not meant to be a complete and exhaustive education of the Jewish holidays, nor is it meant to supersede any direction you might get from your local Jewish leaders. Rather, it is meant to help schools, communities, and organizations be mindful, respectful and informed when scheduling important events. Therefore, the brochure focuses on the Jewish holidays that most often cause conflicts and confusion. We hope the detachable 10-year calendar inside the front and back cover is also helpful to you.

Downloadable copies of this brochure are available at
<http://www.shir-tikvah.org/JewishHolidayGuide.pdf>



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