



The Hebrew Months

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THE HEBREW MONTHS.

THE calendar used by the Jews after captivity was that of the land of their captivity, but the month names belonging to this calendar are only mentioned in the later books: Ezra i, 7, viii, 19; Neh. i, 1, vi, 15; Esther ii, 16, iii, 7, viii, 9, ix, 26; Zechariah i, 7, viii, 19. Here we find the months—

10. Tebeth....	....	December January.
11. Sebat ....	....	January February.
12. Adar ....	....	February March.
1. Nisan ....	....	March April.
2. — ....	....	April May (Ijar ?).
3. Sivan ....	....	May June.
4. — ....	....	June July (Tammuz ?).
5. — ....	....	July August (Ab ?).
6. Elul ....	....	August September.
7. — ....	....	September October (Tisri ?).
8. — ....	....	October November (Marchesvan ?).
9. Chisleu ....	....	November December.

In the cases marked in brackets the month is only mentioned in these books by its number.

In the book of Kings, however, we find the names of three months (1 Kings vi, 1, 38, viii, 2)—

“in the month Zif, which is the second month.”

“in the month Bul, which is the eighth month.”

“in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.”

These are the old Hebrew month names which do not occur in the Aramaic calendar, and which already, when the Book of Kings was penned, seem to have required a note to explain when they occurred in the year.

When we turn back to the Pentateuch we find notices of the first month (Exodus xii, 2, xiii, 4, xxiii, 15, xxxiv, 18; Deut. xvi, 1). Hence we learn that up to the time of the Captivity—

Abib	=	Nisan	the first month.
Zif	=	Sebat	„ second „
Ethanim	=	Tisri	„ seventh „
Bul	=	Marchesvan	„ eighth „

But we have no other means of knowing what were the names of the other eight Hebrew months before the Aramaic calendar came into use.

It is usual to suppose that the Aramaic names of the other months

were used by the early Hebrews. This idea arose at a time when the month names had not been recovered in cuneiform records, but were only known from the Bible, and from later Jewish literature. There is not, as far as I can find, a shadow of foundation for this view.

The Assyrian calendar compares with that used after the Captivity, as follows :—

Jewish.	Assyrian.
Nisan.	Nisannu ("beginning").
Ijar.	Airu. ("light").
Sivan.	Sivanu ("bricks").
Tammuz.	Dumzu ("sun").
Ab.	Abu.
Elul.	Ululu.
Tisri.	Tasritu ("beginning").
Marchesvan.	Arah Samna ("8th month").
Chisleu.	Kisilivu ("giant").
Tebeth.	Tebituv ("rain").
Sebat.	Sabatu ("storm").
Adar.	Addaru ("dark").

These names occur also in the calendars of Palmyra, of Heliopolis, and of the old Sabæans in South Arabia (with certain exceptions), and are said to have been Babylonian in origin; but none of these calendars include the names Abib, Zif, Ethanim, Bul.

When, however, we turn to the Phœnician monuments we find the following notices of months.

On the coffin of Eshmunazar we read: "In the month Bul, in the fourteenth year . . ."

On a Phœnician text from Larnaca: "In the new moon of Ethanim."

It is clear from these cases that in all probability the Phœnicians and the Hebrews, before the Captivity, used the same calendar, and that this calendar differed from that of the Babylonians. The Phœnicians continued to use this calendar in Persian times, and apparently after the Jews adopted the Assyrian calendar.

As regards the meanings of the names, we are informed by Gesenius that Abib means "green ear of corn," being the month of corn ripening, but the meaning of Zif seems doubtful, as also Ethanim. Bul he renders "showers," which is equivalent to the Aramaic Tebeth, "rain," the later name of the tenth month. October November is the month of "showers" still in Palestine, and November December of "rain."

The reason why special importance attaches to these month names is that they serve to show, to a certain extent, the age of the books in which they occur. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Zechariah are late books belonging to the period of Persian rule. Here it is natural to find the Aramaic calendar, but if we found this calendar used in the Pentateuch it would be a critical argument in favour of late date. On the contrary,

we find in both Exodus and Deuteronomy not only the old name Abib, but in Kings the old names used with an explanation, as if already archaic terms requiring some explanation—the Book of Kings being later than the Pentateuch.

Whether the Phœnician calendar was throughout the same as the old Hebrew, whether any names of months were common to the Babylonian and Phœnician systems, and whether every month had a name in the earlier calendar, are questions which, as far as my information goes, remain still unanswered. The “third month” is mentioned in Exodus only by its number (xix, 1); Ezekiel (i, 1) speaks only of the “fourth month” (*cf.* 2 Kings xxv, 3); the “fifth month” (2 Kings xxv, 8; Ezek. xx, 1), the “sixth month” (Ezek. viii, 1), the “twelfth month” (2 Kings xxv, 27), are only mentioned by their numbers before the Captivity.

We possess the names of four other Phœnician months on inscriptions as follows.¹ On a text from Larnaca, in Cyprus, we read **זבחשמש ירח**, “the month of sacrifices of the sun.” On another Larnaca text we find **ירח מרפא**, which was known at Carthage as **מרפאם**, showing that the Carthaginian calendar was probably the same as that of Cyprus. This word means “healing,” “refreshing,” “tranquil.” There was a Phœnician God called Baal Merafe. On one of the Dali inscriptions we find **ירח כרר**, the month of “going in a circle,” or “dancing.”

We have, therefore, apparently names for eight out of the twelve Phœnician months, though in three cases we do not know which month of the year is intended. The eighth is Faaloth, mentioned on the text from Larnaca, which notices Ethanin, and supposed by Renan to be the sixth month. **פעלת** means “work,” “preparation,” and if the sixth month be really intended, the reference would no doubt be to the ploughing, which began in September. The sacrifices of the sun may be supposed to have occurred at the time of the summer solstice, and the dances of the ancients frequently took place at the autumnal equinox, or at the winter solstice. The month of “refreshing” or “healing” may have been a cool month, perhaps February March, which would well bear such a designation in Palestine.

Distinguishing these three months by a query, we obtain the following calendar for Phœnicia from the monuments. It is to be observed that these months are lunar. The word for month is **ירח**, “moon,” and so also at Sidon, on the mutilated inscription of Bodashtoreth, the same word occurs.

PHœNICIAN CALENDAR.

1. (Abib ?), “green ears.” Vernal equinox.
2. (Zif ?).
- 3.
4. (?) Zebakh Shamash, “sun sacrifice.” Solstice.

¹ See Renan, “Corpus of Semitic Inscriptions,” I.

- 5.
6. Faalot, "work."
7. Ethanim. Autumnal equinox.
8. Bul, "showers."
- 9.
10. (?) Carar, "dance." Solstice.
- 11.
12. (?) Merpa, "refreshment."

It seems more than probable that this Phœnician calendar may have been that of the Hebrews in the days of Solomon.

In the remarks made by critics like Wellhausen on the calendar, I find no reference to this monumental evidence. He regards the fixation of feasts by phases of the moon as a later alteration. But the Hebrews and the Phœnicians had no word for month save "moon," and only saved their calendar from becoming vague, like that of the Moslems, by the interpolation of an additional month. There is no evidence at all that they ever used a true solar year such as the Egyptians possessed. The latter had 12 months of 30 days, and five epagomenæ, or odd days. Even in the days of Ptolemy Euergetes (Decree of Canopus), no allowance is made for the difference of the solar and sidereal year since the rising of Sirius is said to advance one day in four years, although Dr. Birch believed the fixed year to be as old as the days of Rameses II. There is, however, I believe, no known evidence of the use of a true solar, or of a sidereal year, by Semitic people.

C. R. CONDER.

NOTES BY MAJOR CONDER.

I.

MEJARKON.

"THE yellow water," Josh. xix, 46, in the territory of Dan, near Rakkon (Tell-er-Rakkeit), I have proposed to identify with the 'Aujeh river, on account of its turbid waters which wash down sand. I find the following note in Pausanias iv, xxxv.

"The country of the Hebrews, too, not far from the city Ioppa, affords a yellow water which is perfectly similar to the colour of blood. This water is near the sea; and they report that Perseus, when he slew the whale to which the daughter of Cepheus was exposed, washed himself from the blood in this fountain."

This applies clearly to the 'Aujeh river, near Jaffa, where the story of Perseus was localised.

C. R. C.
