

THE MOSAIC OF TIME

BETH UVAL

DETERMINING THE CALENDAR

So long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease (Gen. 8:22).

Designed by Nirit Kreiman, drawn by Ma'ayan Singer, executed by Passover 2000 visitors and the Neot Kedumim staff. This project was made possible by the Ministry of Tourism through the Israel Government Tourist Corporation.

This 25-meter square calendar at Neot Kedumim – The Biblical Landscape Reserve, shows the relation between the natural cycles of the earth and the units of time determined by human beings. Since ancient times, people have been confronted with the discrepancy between the solar year (365 days) and the lunar year ($12 \times 29.5 = 354$ days). The Mosaic of Time shows how the Jewish calendar deals with this variance.

The revolving inner circle shows the 12 lunar months of the Hebrew calendar, with the plants, animals, and agricultural activities characteristic of each month (see above). In the center is the verse from Amos (9:13) describing abundant harvests that spill over into the following season: *The plowman shall meet the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed.* The outer circle shows the months of the solar-based Gregorian calendar. In each

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corner is the agricultural activity of each solar season: the spring grain harvest, the summer grape harvest, the fall conclusion of the fruit harvest, when the deciduous fruit trees lose their leaves, and the winter olive pressing.

Jewish tradition sees the calendar as a human responsibility, in partnership with the Divinely ordained cycles of nature: *Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times –the days and the years* (Gen. 1:14).

Visitors can "determine the calendar" by turning the large wheel that rotates the inner circle as follows: First turn the wheel so that the beginning of the lunar month of Nissan aligns with the spring equinox, March 21. Then rotate the circle of the months around the year, stopping at a point 11 days earlier than March 21. Do this twice more, each time stopping at a point 11 days earlier than the previous time, showing the 11-day discrepancy between the lunar calendar (the inner circle) and the solar calendar (the outer circle).

By the third year, there will be a month's discrepancy between the inner lunar circle and the outer solar circle. The month of Nissan will no longer align with *aviv*, the beginning of the grain harvest. At this point, the Jewish calendar adds another month (approximately every three years, seven times in 19 years). To show this, return the beginning of Nissan to its starting point of three years before, March 21.

There are important reasons for the Jewish calendar's synchronizing lunar and solar time. The Bible states that the holiday of Passover is to be celebrated *in the first month* (Ex. 12:18), the month of Nissan – determined by the moon – and in the month of *aviv* (Ex. 23:15, Deut. 16:1), the beginning of the barley harvest – determined by the sun. The *omer* offering of the first barley sheaves had to be brought on Passover (Lev. 23:10). The lunar and the solar have to come together. Otherwise, the holiday of the Exodus from Egypt would wander through the seasons and retain only its historical significance. And the holiday of the barley harvest would become an agricultural celebration only, divorced from the historical event. Linking the Exodus to the grain harvest expresses the important monotheistic belief that the God of history is the God of nature, that the harvest depends on the same God who brought the people out of Egypt. Without this link, the revolutionary concept of One Creator of history and nature would have faded from collective memory.

The Mosaic of Time is located in Neot Kedumim's Tribes of Israel area, in

the part devoted to the tribe of Issachar. According to I Chronicles 12:33, the people of Issachar *knew how to interpret the signs of the times, to determine how Israel should act*. According to rabbinic tradition, the people of Issachar knew in advance which years required the additional lunar month and could make advance calculations of the new moons.

Neot Kedumim senior guide Nili Hershgall has described the calendar in verse:

In Tishrei - we plow the fields and taste a ripe date.

In Heshvan - we find crocuses, sow wheat, and pray the rains won't be late.

In Kislev - we pick olives, ripe on the trees,
and light the lamps of the Maccabees.

In Tevet - the "lily of the valleys" awaits us –
which is, we suggest, the modest narcissus!

In Shvat - the almond blossoms are a lovely sight,
and the season's last rainbows bring us delight.

In Adar - baby lambs start to jump on their own
beside the Sharon tulip – *havatzelet hasharon*.

In Nissan - red buttercups and songbirds, sweet as a lute,

In Iyar - menorah-shaped moriah and olive branch, for *yom ha'atz-
ma'ut*.

In Sivan - we start reaping and threshing the wheat,

In Tamuz - the ripe figs become juicy and sweet.

In Av - the grapes ripen too on the vine,
the flowering white squill is summer-end's sign.

In Elul - the sun starts to ebb in its sizzle,
the fields are prickly with thorn and thistle.

(translated from Hebrew and adapted by Beth Uval)

As we read in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heavens:

a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted;

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*a time to kill, and a time to heal;...
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war, and a time of peace.*

The above article was adapted from a recent issue of *Neot Kedumim News*, the quarterly newsletter of Neot Kedumim -- The Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel. Located on 625 acres in central Israel's Modi'in region, Neot Kedumim is dedicated to exploring and demonstrating the ecological roots of the biblical heritage. Neot Kedumim welcomes individual and group tours (see visiting information below). Please contact Neot Kedumim for information on newsletter subscriptions (free of charge) and other Neot Kedumim publications.

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Visiting Information

Location

Midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 10 minutes from Ben-Gurion Airport, on Route 443 near the Ben-Shemen Forest in the Modi'in region.

Hours: Sunday - Thursday 8:30 to sunset. Friday and holiday eves 8:30 - 13:00.

Last admission two hours before closing. Closed Saturdays and Jewish holidays.

Tour Options

* Guided tours for groups (in Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew, or Russian) by advance reservation.

* Self-guiding 2 - 3 km. trails (wheelchair and stroller accessible) with a guidebook.

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