

CALCULATING THE SHEMITA YEAR

By Don Esposito

There has been some confusion on how to calculate the Shemita year and I believe where the confusion stems from is that some don't understand that there are actually 2 coinciding calendars working throughout the biblical year. You have the cyclical calendar that runs from Aviv to Aviv, and then you have the agricultural calendar that runs from Tishrei to Tishrei. Both calendars revolve though around the equinoxes, but one starts near the Vernal equinox and one starts near the autumn equinox.

The agricultural calendar begins Tishrie 1, and this is confirmed by the Gezer calendar that was used by King David and Solomon and is the very foundation that the biblical calendar is based on. The Gezer calendar was found in Tel Gezer and has a detailed account of the whole agricultural growing season in Israel. It has several words for grass depending on whether it is grass from the early rain or whether it is grass from the barley harvest etc.

It also has different words for harvesting as in Hebrew there is a different Hebrew word for each fruit harvested. The Gezer calendar shows the whole agricultural cycle of Israel and clearly starts on Tishrei one, and that is why the Jews call Tishrei 1 "**Rosh Ha Shenah**", or "**the beginning of the year**", because it is the beginning of the agricultural cycle.

Lev 25:8-10 confirms the Shemita and Jubilee begin in Tishrie, **NOT** Aviv.

Lev 25:8 And you shall number to yourself seven Sabbaths of years, seven years times seven, and all the days of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be to you forty nine years.

Lev 25:9 **And you shall let a ram's horn resound, a signal in the seventh month, in the tenth of the month; in the day of atonement, let a ram's horn pass throughout all your land;**

Lev 25:10 and you shall make the fiftieth year holy, one year. And you shall proclaim liberty in the land to those living in it; He shall be a jubilee to you. And you shall return every man to his possession; yea, you shall turn back each to his family.

The Jubilee starts on the 10th day of the seventh month called Tishrei, as where the Sabbatical Shemita year starts on Tishrei 1. The reason the Jubilee starts on the 10th day is that in a Jubilee year you would have back to back Sabbath land rests, so in the second year land rest of the Jubilee you would have a 10 day period between the two Shemitas to harvest anything that had grown of itself the year before and prepare a harvest to bring up to Jerusalem for Sukkot, according to scripture.

The Israelites are told to take of the harvest fruits and appear before Yahweh at Sukkot with those fruits which are part of the preparation for the Sukkah.

Lev 23:39 Also, in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather the increase of the land, you shall keep the feast of YAHWEH seven days; on the first day a Holy Day Sabbath, and on the eighth day a Holy Day Sabbath.

Lev 23:40 **And you shall take to yourselves on the first day the fruit of majestic trees**, palm branches, and boughs of oak trees, and willows of the valley, and shall rejoice before YAHWEH your Elohim seven days.

Also see Deut 14:

Deu 14:22 Tithing you shall tithe all the increase of your seed that the field yields year by year.

Deu 14:23 And you shall eat before YAHWEH your Elohim in the place which He shall choose to cause His name to dwell there (Jerusalem), **the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil**, and the first-lings of your herd and of your flock; that you may learn to fear YAHWEH your Elohim all your days.

The Israelites are commanded to take the fruit of the 7 species and hang them in the Sukkahs and also bring the firstfruit offerings of the agricultural harvest as the firstfruit tithe to Yahweh. They actually tie strings around the first pomegranates etc to even know which fruit came up first. Some believe that the Shemita begins from Aviv to Aviv, but if this was so how could the Israelites harvest and take up the yearly fruits for Sukkot as they would not be able to harvest any fruits in Tishrei (September/October) if they started the Sabbatical year in Aviv (March/April). They would have to violate and break the above scriptures on bringing the harvest fruits to Jerusalem at feast time if the Shemita started in Aviv, which Yahweh would never command.

Starting the Shemita in Tishrei (the 7th month) according to the agricultural calendar makes total sense, as Yahweh affirms that He is in charge of the harvest and will bring it in the appropriate time (early or late) if Israel is obedient. Doesn't His word say He can make it rain on one place and not on another? (Amos 4:7) And since it runs from Tishrie 1 to Tishrei 1 of the next year there would always be a harvest to bring the commanded fruits to Jerusalem for Sukkot.

In Israel, this year, up to Tishrei one, about 70% of the harvest is already in this year and the rest will be used for the poor and all other people for gleaning during the Shemita.

Lev 23:22 And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely reap the corner of your field, nor shall you gather the gleaning of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor, and for the alien: I am YAHWEH your Elohim.

Lev 23:23 And YAHWEH spoke to Moses, saying,

Lev 23:24 Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first of the month, a Holy Day Sabbath shall be to you, a memorial acclamation of the resounding of trumpets, a holy gathering.

Lev 23:25 You shall do no laborious work and you shall bring a fire offering to YAHWEH.

It is interesting that right after Yahweh states about not reaping your harvest from the trees more than one time for leaving enough to glean for the poor, the next verse speaks of Tishrei one and trumpets. In normal years about 5% are left for gleaning after a farmer reaped his tree and in a Shemita it is 30 to 40%.

And Shemita or not there is never a full harvest lost as would be if one was incorrectly keeping the Shemita from Aviv to Aviv. As if you start your Shemita year in Aviv you will not be able to harvest your grain (which most is harvested after Aviv 1) and in the fall you will not be able to harvest anything as it would be in the middle of your Shemita cycle if you started the Shemita in Aviv (April).

Then, you would not be able to plant your grain after Sukkot for the next Aviv and in doing so you are losing your full second harvest. The Shemita is not meant as a burden, but as another avenue to put trust in Yahweh.

Just as the Israelites relied daily on Yahweh for the manna in the wilderness, in the Shemita year they would have to daily rely on him for their food, but it is reliance not wasting of good food that Yahweh is trying to show in a Sabbatical or Shemita year.

Every year Shemita or not people only harvest until the Feast of Trumpets (give or take a few days) and then, they prepare to go to Jerusalem for bringing their harvest to Sukkot. They harvest the remaining when they return and in a Shemita year they don't harvest but pick the fruits for food for several months daily as needed. In order to understand the Shemita year, you must understand there are 2 calendar cycles, the cyclical and the agricultural.

You can compare this with Yahweh's day running sunset to sunset. So when we fast on Yom Kippur you really don't miss your big dinner meal, you simply eat your dinner early the first day before the fast, and then, the next day you eat your dinner later after sunset when the fast is over. and of course you don't eat any of the smaller meals in between sunset to sunset.

The Shemita year is similar. You have an early harvest before the Shemita begins, and then you have a later fall harvest the following year after the Shemita is over, and you don't do any of the smaller harvesting in between the Shemita year, but you never miss any full harvest as Yahweh will provide the early and later harvest and rains for your obedience to obeying Him.

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Lev 25:9 And you shall let a ram's horn resound, **a signal in the seventh month, in the tenth of the month**; in the day of atonement, let a ram's horn pass throughout all your land;

Lev 25:10 **and you shall make the fiftieth year holy, one year.** And you shall proclaim liberty in the land to those living in it; He shall be a jubilee to you. And you shall return every man to his possession; yea, you shall turn back each to his family.

Lev 25:14 And if you sell anything to your neighbor, or buy from the hand of your neighbor, you shall not each man oppress his brother.

Lev 25:15 By the number of years after the jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor; by the number of the years of increase he shall sell to you;

Lev 25:16 **according to the many years you shall increase its price; and by the fewness of the years you shall diminish its price, for he is selling to you the number of crops.**

The above scripture proves the 2 calendar system as in the Jubilee 50 year cycle you are not selling land **but 'agricultural cycles from Tishrei to Tishrei.'**

This is further proved in the following scriptures:

Exo 34:21 You may work six days, and on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.

Exo 34:22 And you shall observe a Feast of Weeks for yourself, the first-fruits of the harvest of wheat; also the Feast of Ingathering **after the turn of the year.**

Exo 23:16 Also the Feast of Harvest, the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. **Also the Feast of Ingathering, at the going out of the year,** at your gathering your work from the field.

Many translations put at "**the end of the year**" for Ex 23:16, so how could Tishrie being the 7th month be the end of the year? Because it is speaking of the end of the agricultural year, not the calendar year that runs from Aviv to Aviv.

As we learned from the Gezer calendar that the agricultural year started in Tishrei 1 and ran from equinox to equinox as that was the growing season cycle revolved around the equinoxes and that is why even the cyclical year starting in Aviv could not start before the vernal equinox.

Some have suggested that if the harvesting in a Shemita or Sabbatical year ends on Tishrei one, that much of the fruit on the trees will be wasted, but this is just not the case. Also realize that depending on where you are in Israel due to temperature changes, the harvest can vary up to several months, even in normal years, so in no year is everything harvested all at once.

They have olive presses here from the days of Yahshua (I have seen them), and they have regular presses for normal years of commercial pressing of Olive Oil and they also have next to them hand presses to be used in a shemita year for daily grinding of oil. Yahweh's ways are perfect and nothing is lost. Also, remember in biblical days olives were not pickled but used for oil and the paste left over for maybe paste.

According to the Gezar calendar Tishrie one is the beginning of the agricultural year and has been in Israel since before the days of Yahshua. That is why it is called Rosh Ha' Shenah, or the beginning of the year, but the agricultural year, not the cyclical one.

The Shemita command is a land rest and all the earth belongs to Yahweh (Ps 24:1), not just Israel and should be kept by believers all over the earth. (Please read my article on the Shemita year online

www.yhwh.com), so it would be a violation of scripture to purchase any food that was either planted or harvested in a Shemita year.

It would be like if you found out that your local supermarkets food was stolen, would you buy food that was stolen and violated Yahweh's word? In the same way how can you buy food from someone who you know has violated the word of Yahweh by planting or harvesting that food in the Sabbatical year.

I know in Diaspora it is not always easy, but Yahweh didn't want our Diaspora to be easy but hard and for His people to cry out to Him in repentance for Him to lift the curse and bring His people Home to Israel.

Lev 26:33 And I will scatter you among nations, and shall draw out the sword after you, and your land shall become a waste, and your cities shall be a desolation.

Lev 26:34 **Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths**, all the days of the desolation. And you shall be in the land of your enemies; then the land shall enjoy rest, and shall enjoy its Sabbaths.

Lev 26:35 **It shall rest all the days of the desolation, that which it has not rested in your Sabbaths while you lived on it.**

Lev 26:36 And those who are left of you, I shall also bring a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a driven leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as one flees from the sword; and they shall fall when no one pursues.

Lev 26:40 And if they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, in their trespass with which they have trespassed against Me; and, also, that they have walked contrary to Me,

Lev 26:41 **that I also have walked contrary to them, and I have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are then humbled, and they are pleased to pay for their iniquity;**

Lev 26:42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and I shall also remember My covenant with Abraham, **and I shall remember the land.**

Lev 26:43 For the land shall be forsaken by them, and shall satisfy for its Sabbaths, in the desolation without them. And they shall satisfy for their iniquity, because, even because, they have kicked against My judgments, and their soul has loathed My statutes.

Actually, in today's society it is much easier than as in ancient times as we do have can food that are caned months if not even a year before that can be purchased as well as frozen foods, and dry foods. People can purchase whole grain now that was harvested in last year's harvest and use it for the whole Shemita.

Remember, the point of the Shemita is reliance on Yahweh, something we all need to learn more and not simply having us abstain from certain foods. But just as during the Days of Unleaven when we have to think about every meal whether there is leaven in it or not, during the Shemita we need daily to think about reliance on Yahweh for all and what we are doing is not violating His word and thanking Him for the great bounty He gives daily.

It would be wrong to buy fresh fruits and grains from a supermarket since they are violating Yahweh's word by planting and harvesting the food during the Shemita and making it unsanctified by doing so.

You can also refer to the article wrote on the Shemita and also the recent Q and A that I did that is in the video section at www.coyhwh.com. I pray this article and the Torah studies on line will be a blessing and help you to understand the subject better, as also the message I will give on this subject at Sukkot.