

# The Islamic Calendar



The science of astronomy was highly regarded in Islam; Muslims also improved the development of the astrolabe (used for measuring the positions of heavenly bodies).

In this edition of the “30 Days Muslim Prayer Focus” we have included the moon in its various phases near the titles in each of the daily prayer articles. This is because our month of prayer takes place at the same time as the Muslim month of fasting called Ramadan. This month is determined by the Muslim lunar calendar (corresponding to the lunar cycle from one crescent moon to the next). The Muslim calendar year is 354 days long and “lags behind” each year by 11 days compared to the Western “Gregorian” Calendar. The Ramadan month will therefore shift each year until eventually (after 33 years) it will have cycled through a whole (Gregorian) year.

Western urban dwellers hardly relate to the possibility of using the moon as a calendar reference, yet for many peoples around the world the lunar cycle is still the prevailing way of following and calculating time.

In the Bible it is written that God said, “*Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years*” (Gen 1:16). The Jewish calendar was specifically based on the lunar cycle. The names of the days of the week in the Arab or Muslim calendar have obvious origins from Jewish and Christian influence in Arabia.

The following is the list of the days of the week used specifically by Arabs and in Islamic nations in general.

- yum al-ahad* (first day) — Sunday
- yum al-ithnayna* (second day) — Monday
- yum ath-thalatha'* (third day) — Tuesday
- yum al-arba`a'* (fourth day) — Wednesday
- yum al-khamis* (fifth day) — Thursday
- yum al-jum`a* (gathering day) — Friday
- yum as-sabt* (Sabbath day) — Saturday

The first day of the week is Sunday, which is called *yum* (day) *al-ahad* (the first). There is also a Sabbath day in the Muslim week (the seventh day), which certainly has Jewish roots, although its original significance has been lost. The present Muslim day of rest is *yum al-jum`a* (day of assembly), which corresponds to the Muslim day of mosque-centered worship (Friday). A Muslim day, like a Jewish day, starts at sunset on the evening before the next day; this follows the biblical idea found in Genesis, “*And there was evening and there was morning, one day.*”

The Muslim numbering for years starts with Mohammed’s fleeing Mecca to live in Medina in AD622—an event called the *Hegira* or *Hijira* (flight). 2005 corresponds to the lunar Muslim year of 1426 AH (*anno hijira*) since the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

Although the moon symbol is strongly associated with Islam, it was not until the rise of the Ottoman Empire that this association began (crescent moon, and sometimes a pointed star). The moon has never been an object of worship for Muslims, though it was an object of worship among Arabs before the rise of Islam.

