



Shalom in the Sar Shalom!

## The Biblical Jewish Calendar

Throughout their history, the Jewish people have usually lived with two calendars — their own and that of the dominant culture in which they lived. The Jewish calendar, permanently fixed in the 10th century, begins counting, according to tradition, with the creation of the world. This year's calendar is the 5766 - 5767 year calendar. Many traditional Jews anticipate the beginning of the Messianic Age in approximately the year 6000. According to this reasoning, God has given men six days, or six thousand years, to rule the earth. The year 6000 would be the start of the seventh day, the completion of the earth life span and the beginning of a one-thousand year long Sabbath. We may be a lot closer to the seventh day than we imagine! In the meantime, we can observe and celebrate the Feasts of the Lord as determined by the Jewish lunar calendar. Passover and Sukkot begin at the full moon; Rosh Hashanah, at the new moon. Hanukkah lasts from the waning moon, through the new moon, to the growing moon. The new moon, a minor festival in its own right (Rosh Hodesh), determines the celebration dates of that month's festivals. This sheds light on Isaiah 66:23: *"And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, says the LORD."* Consider also Psalm 104:19: *"He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knows its going down."*

## Your 5766 - 5767 Calendar

The new Jewish calendar begins in the month of September, so now is the time to get yours. We have ordered the calendars from a traditional Jewish company. They are lovely with big colorful photos of Judaica items, however, the explanations of the items are short, really kernels of thought. We decided to make the seeds bloom, and give you an expanded teaching on some of the items to enrich you spiritually as we enter a new year (beginning the evening of October 3 this year).

Following are some of the items on the calendar and our expanded explanations. We have also included some of the items for sale, so that you can use them in celebrating God's feasts in your home.

### October: Etrog Box

**From the calendar:** The etrog, a lemon-like fruit from Israel, gives the holiday of Sukkot a special fragrance. Carried to the festivities and displayed in ornate boxes such as this one, the etrog or "fruit of the goodly tree" symbolizes a world of abundance and peace for all people.

**From us:** In Leviticus 23:39-43 we read God's instructions to His people concerning the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot. Included in the four spices that they were commanded to take for themselves on the first day of the feast was *"the fruit of beautiful trees;"* (verse 40) in Hebrew *p'ri etz hadar*. Tradition has identified this fruit as the etrog, the citron, a citrus fruit.

Great care is taken by observant Jews in the selection of the etrog. Then, equal care is given to its protection, especially to the pittam, the fragile stem of the etrog. For this reason, special boxes, often ornately decorated, are fashioned to hold etrogim.

The etrog in Jewish thought is compared to the heart, and symbolizes the Jew who has both faith and good works. The etrog tree also bears fruit all year long. The etrog, in ancient times, was a messianic symbol because of its association with the holiday of Sukkot and its messianic themes.

The etrog reminds us as Messianic Jews of the truth of James 2:17: *"Thus also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* It also symbolizes our calling as believers to bring forth fruit (John 15:16) as we await the soon return of the Messiah Yeshua.

Please remember to pray for us from October 16 to October 27, during the Feast of Sukkot, as we go up to Eretz Yisrael on a Mercy Mission. May our fruit and works be pleasing to our God and may they result in much lasting fruit for His Kingdom.

### **November: Torah Breastplate**

**From the calendar:** The art of the gifted silversmith adorns the gift of divine law. Breastplates such as this hang on the front of a Torah scroll and reflect the desire to beautify the teachings of the Holy One. Bells, flowers and intricate designs convey our delight with the law.

**From us:** The *Torah*, the Five Books of Moses, also known as the Pentateuch, has been revered by Jewish people for thousands of years as the source of all knowledge, the Word of God. The word *torah* comes from the Hebrew word "to teach," and literally means "instruction" rather than "law" as is commonly thought.

The Torah is considered a "Tree of Life" in Jewish thought, the expression of the divine will, the source of all wisdom and love. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the synagogue and the rabbis replaced the daily Temple sacrifices as the center of spiritual life. The rabbis ruled that Torah study now atoned for Israel's sins (even though this contradicts the Torah itself! See Leviticus 17:11).

It was at this point that the Torah scroll inherited the vestments of the High Priest. The outer covering called the mantle replaced the high priest's ephod, while the binder replaced the girdle of the ephod. The High Priest's mitre was replaced by the Torah's crown. The breastplate of the High Priest became the Torah breastplate. It does not always contain the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, however, it is sometimes decorated with twelve semiprecious stones. Torah breastplates are often adorned with various Jewish symbols and floral motifs such as the Lion of Judah and the Tree of Life.

### **December: Chanukah Menorah**

**From the calendar:** Chanukah is the festival of religious freedom. We light eight lamps, beginning with one on the first night, to recall the great miracle that the light of truth can dispel

the darkness of ignorance. Each night a candle is added to rekindle our dedication to the spirit of freedom that burns in everyone.

**From us:** There are two main types of menorahs in Judaism: the 7-branched menorah and the 9-branched menorah. The 7-branched menorah or candelabra is symbolic of the one that once stood in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, and later in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This classic symbol of Judaism is also the symbol of the State of Israel. A large 7-branched menorah can be found today outside the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) in Jerusalem.

The Chanukah Menorah, on the other hand, has 9 branches. It was not part of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and came into existence during the time of the Maccabees, around 165 B.C. The Chanukah menorah is also called a *chanukkiyah*. Eight of the branches, originally contained olive oil but now generally hold candles, representing the miracle of the oil that lasted eight days. This occurred when Judah Maccabee and his followers went to rededicate the Temple that had been desecrated and defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes and his troops. A one-day supply of holy oil for the Temple (7-branched) Menorah was found which miraculously lasted eight days until new oil could be consecrated. Thus was born the *chanukkiyah* with eight branches and one extra, the servant candle, *shammash*, which is used to light the other candles.

Originally, Hanukkah menorahs hung on the left side of the front door, opposite the mezuzah, so that Jews could **publicly** affirm the Hanukkah miracle. Later, for safety reasons, the chanukkiyahs were moved inside the home but still were displayed so that those in the street could see the lights.

For Messianic Jews, the shammash candle of the chanukkiyah has special significance, since Yeshua, the Divine Servant, is also the Light of the World. He is the One who imparts His Light, and His Life to us!

## January: Sephardic Torah

**From the calendar:** The Torah Scroll of the law containing the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy is Judaism's holiest object. We cherish it for we are taught that "Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace."

**From us:** There are two types of containers for the Torah scroll, the Ashkenazi-style and the Sephardic style. Both contain the same parchment scroll wound around two carved wooden rollers called the *atzei hayyim* (trees of life) or *ammudim* (pillars), a term derived from the twin pillars of the Temple (Jakhim and Boaz[1Kings 7:21]). The parchment itself is made from the skin of a biblically clean animal and is unornamented. The words themselves are considered too beautiful to need ornamentation. The only exceptions are little crowns (*tagin*) that embellish certain letters of the Torah.

While the Ashkenazi Torah is wrapped in a richly embroidered cloth mantle, the Sephardic Torah is enclosed in a cylindrical or octagonal case called a *tik*. The *tik* originated in 10th century Iraq and is usually ornately decorated. It is divided into two pieces which are hinged in the back, allowing the pieces to swing open for reading. The scroll is not removed from the tik as is the case with the Ashkenazi scroll. Rather, it remains upright when the scroll is read.

## February: Kipah Connection

**From the calendar:** A beautifully embroidered kipah or yarmulka to cover our heads is symbolic

of our respect for the Holy One and our acceptance of tradition. Styles such as these, handmade in Israel, can be found throughout the world.

**From us:** The Hebrew word *kippah*, comes from *kaf*, meaning "palm," which indicates the approximate shape of the typical head covering worn by observant Jewish men today. The plural of *kippah* is *kippot*. The Yiddish word for *kippah* is "yarmulka".

The practice of wearing a *kippah* is rabbinic rather than biblical. While the sages of ancient Israel declared it optional to cover one's head for prayer, the rabbis of Babylon advocated always covering one's head as a sign of *yirat shamayim* (fear of heaven). This viewpoint, along with the Talmudic concept of the covered head being a sign of awe before the Divine Presence, has resulted in the common practice of wearing *kippot* at Jewish religious ceremonies.

In recent times, some Jewish women have chosen to wear a *kippah* to symbolize their religious equality as well as their reverence for God. We consider the wearing of a *kippah* optional for the Messianic Jew.

God bless you for standing with us this summer as we get the 22 Alef-Bet programs ready to release. We needed \$66,000 to produce them. To date we have \$65,500! Now we have to pay for airtime. Trusting God to provide!

Love,

Neil and Jamie