

Where does it say we need Barley to start the New Year?

At this time of year, the debate always comes along about when does the New Year begin. So, once again, I want to explain this. It has nothing to do with the Equinox. Nothing.

Biblical Leap Years

The Biblical year begins with the first New Moon after the barley in Israel reaches the stage in its ripeness called “Abib/Aviv.” The period of time between the beginning of one year and the next is either 12 or 13 lunar months. Because of this, it is important to check the state of the Barley crops at the end of the 12th month. If the barley is “Abib” at this time, then the following New Moon is “Hodesh Ha-Aviv” or, the “New Moon of the Abib.” If the barley is still immature, we must wait another month and then check the barley again at the end of the 13th month.

By convention, a 12-month year is referred to as a “regular year” while a 13th month year is referred to as a Leap Year. This should not be confused with Leap Years as they occur in the Gregorian (Christian) Calendar, which involve the “intercalation” (addition) of a single day (Feb. 29). In contrast, the Biblical Leap Year involves the “intercalation” of an entire lunar month (a “thirteenth month” which is called “Adar Bet”). It can only be determined whether a year is a Leap Year a few days before the end of the 12th Month.

Where is “Abib” mentioned in the Hebrew Bible?

The story of the Exodus relates to us “this day you are going out, in the the month of the Abib.” (Ex 13:4).

To commemorate that we left Egypt in the month of the Abib, we are instructed to bring the Passover sacrifice and to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Hag Ha Matzot) at this time of year.

In Dt 16:1 we are commanded:

“Keep the month of the Abib and make the Passover (sacrifice) to YHWH your God at night, because in the month of the Abib YHWH your God took you out of Egypt”.

Similarly, we are commanded in Ex 23:15 that:

“You will keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread; seven days you will eat unleavened bread, as I have commanded you, at the time of the month of the Abib, because in it you went out of Egypt.”

The same is commanded in Ex. ch. 34 vs. 18:

“You will keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread; seven days you will eat unleavened bread, as have I commanded you, at the time of the month of the Abib, because in the month of the Abib you went out of Egypt.”

So what does “Abib” mean?

Abib indicates a stage in the development of the barley crops. This is clear from Ex 9:31,32 which describes the devastation caused by the plague of hail:

“And the flax and the barley were smitten, because the barley was Abib and the flax was Giv’ol. And the wheat and the spelt were not smitten because they were dark (Afilot).”

The above passage relates that the barley crops were destroyed by the hail while the wheat and spelt were not damaged. To understand the reason for this we must look at how grain develops. When grains are early in their development they are flexible and have a dark green color. As they become ripe they take on a light yellowish hue and become more brittle. The reason that the barley was destroyed and the wheat was not is that the barley had reached the stage in its development i.e. “ripeness” called “Abib” and as a result had become brittle enough to be damaged by the hail. In contrast, the wheat and spelt were still early enough in their development, at a stage when they were flexible and not susceptible to being damaged by hail. The description of the wheat and spelt as “dark” (Afilot) indicates that they were still in the stage when they were deep green and had not yet begun to lighten into the light yellowish hue which characterizes ripe grains. In contrast, the barley had reached the stage of Abib at which time it was no longer “dark” and at this point it probably had begun to develop golden streaks.

Parched Abib

We know from several passages that barley which is in the state of Abib has not completely ripened but has ripened enough so that its seeds can be eaten if parched in fire. Parched barley was a commonly eaten food in ancient Israel and is mentioned in numerous passages in the Hebrew Bible as either “Abib” or “parched (Kalui) in fire”

(Lev 2:14) or, in the abbreviated form, “parched (Kalui/ Kali)” (Lev 23,14; Jos 5,11; 1Sam 17,17; 1Sam 25,18; 2Sam 17,28; Ruth 2,14).

While still early in its development, barley has not yet produced large enough and firm enough seeds to produce food through parching. This early in its development, when the “head” has just come out of the shaft, the seeds are not substantial enough to produce any food. At a later stage, the seeds have grown in size and have filled with liquid. At this point the seeds will shrivel up when parched and will only produce empty skins. Over time the liquid is replaced with dry material and when enough dry material has amassed, the seeds will be able to yield “barley parched in fire”.

Abib and the Harvest

The month of the Abib is the month which commences after the barley has reached the stage of Abib. Approximately 2-3 weeks after the beginning of the month the barley has moved beyond the stage of Abib and is ready to be brought as the “wave-sheaf offering” (Hanafat HaOmer). The “wave-sheaf offering” is a sacrifice brought from the first stalks cut in the harvest and is brought on the Sunday which falls during the week of Unleavened Bread (Hag HaMatzot). This is described in Lev 23:10-11:

“When you come to the land which I give you, and harvest its harvest, you will bring the sheaf of the beginning of your harvest to the priest. And he will wave the sheaf before YHWH so you will be accepted; on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest will wave it.”

From this it is clear that the barley, which was Abib at the beginning of the month, has become harvest-ready 15-21 days later (i.e by the Sunday during Unleavened Bread). Therefore, the month of the Abib cannot begin unless the barley has reached a stage where it will be harvest-ready 2-3 weeks later.

That the barley must be harvest-ready 2-3 weeks into the month of the Abib is also clear from Dt 16:9 which states:

“From when the sickle commences on the standing grain you will begin to count seven weeks.”

From Lev 23:15 we know that the seven weeks between Passover (Hag Hamatzot) and Pentecost (Shavuot) begin on the day when the wave-sheaf offering is brought (i.e. the Sunday which falls during Unleavened Bread):

“And you shall count from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day you bring the sheaf of waving; they will be seven complete Sabbaths.”

Therefore, the “sickle commences on the standing grain” on the Sunday during Unleavened Bread, i.e. 2-3 weeks after the beginning of the month of the Abib. If the barley is not developed enough so that it will be ready for the sickle 2-3 weeks later, then the month of the Abib cannot begin and we must wait till the following month.

It should be noted that not all the barley ripens in the Land of Israel at the same time. The wave-sheaf offering is a national sacrifice brought from the first fields to become harvest- ready. However, the first-fruit offerings brought by individual farmers can vary in ripeness anywhere from “Abib parched in fire” to fully ripe grain which may be brought “crushed” or “coarsely ground”. This is what is meant in Lev 2:14:

“And when you bring a first-fruit offering to YHWH; you shall bring your first-fruit offering as Abib parched in fire or crushed Carmel” (Carmel is grain which has hardened beyond Abib to the point where it can be “crushed” or “coarsely ground”).

All of the above passages have been translated directly from the Hebrew and it is worth noting that the King James translators seem to have not understood the various Hebrew agricultural terms very well. In Lev 2:14 they translated “Carmel” as “full ears” and “Abib” as “green ears” whereas in Lev 23:14 they translated “Carmel” as “green ears!”

To summarize, barley which is in the state of Abib has 3 characteristics:

1. It is brittle enough to be destroyed by hail and has begun to lighten in color (it is not “dark”).
2. The seeds have produced enough dry material so it can be eaten parched.
3. It has developed enough so that it will be harvest-ready 2-3 weeks later.

So where do we find evidence of this in the New Testament and did Yehshua follow the Aviv Barley to begin the year?

The sacred calendar is aligned with the seasons and the harvests of the crops necessary for the various Feasts. Barley was the first crop to be reaped in the lands of the Bible and the first month was reconciled with the barley at the stage of it being “green in the ear,” ready to be reaped for the offering of Firstfruits. Unleavened bread made from barley was eaten during this week.

There are three “Hags” (Feasts) in which we are commanded to Jerusalem; Unleavened Bread, Shavuot and Sukkot. Each one shows you the plan of Salvation. Always keep this in mind as you keep each of these Feasts.

The Wave Offering

There was a ritual connected with the Feast of Weeks or “Pentecost season” as some call it today, that the priests of Israel were to perform in the Temple or the Tabernacle of the Lord. It is recorded for us in Lev.23:9-14.

“Say to the people of Israel, when you come into the land which I give you and REAP its harvest, you shall bring the SHEAF OF THE FIRSTFRUITS OF YOUR HARVEST to the priest; and he shall WAVE the sheaf BEFORE the Lord, that you may find acceptance; ON THE MORROW AFTER THE SABBATH the priest shall wave it.....And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day.....”

This ceremony has to do with the FIRSTFRUITS. It was a WAVING of the FIRST of the Firstfruits by the priest before the Lord. It was to be fulfilled before any of the NEW harvest could be gathered in to be used for bread, or eaten in any way.

Author Samuele Bacchiocchi has correctly observed that:

“The countdown to Pentecost began with the offering of the first barley sheaf (known as the Omer).....the purpose of the wave-sheaf offering was to consecrate and inaugurate the Spring grain harvest which lasted about seven weeks until Pentecost.....the cutting of the first barley sheaf entailed a lively ceremony. The sheaf was cut in the evening, put into baskets, and held until the next day, when it was brought to the temple...to be ceremonially waved by the priest. The Talmud states that a priest would meet a group of pilgrims on the edge of the city and from there lead them to the Temple mount singing and praising God. Together with a priest they proclaimed: ‘A wandering Aramaean was my father; and he went down into Egypt.....and the Lord brought us out of Egypt.....into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me’ (Deut.26:5, 8, 9, 10).

When they arrived at the Temple, the priest would take the sheaves, lift some in the air and wave them in every direction to acknowledge God’s sovereignty over the whole earth. Before the offering of the sheaves, no reaping of the harvest for personal use could be done (Lev.23:14). A portion of the wave-sheaf was placed on the altar and the rest was eaten by the priest. A male lamb was sacrificed as a burnt offering (Lev.23:12)”

(God’s Festivals, pages 170,171).

Let us back up a little to the time when these first sheaves were to be cut. This particular happening is interesting in its ceremony and also shows the time as to when it was done by the teaching of the Pharisees. The Sadducees disagreed with the Pharisees as to the DAY this cutting and waving of the sheaf was to be performed. The Pharisees taught the sheaf was cut the evening of the 15th of the first month, at the very beginning of the first Sabbath of the feast of Unleavened Bread. The Sadducees taught it was to be cut and presented to the Lord on the first day of the week DURING the feast of Unleavened Bread, a Sunday wave sheaf day.

Because among the religious sects of Judah the common people were in the main, followers of the Pharisees, it was their teaching of the cutting and waving of the sheaf that got center stage and the largest spot light.

Actually and technically, it was the Sadducees that held the correct understanding as to WHAT DAY the first sheaf of the spring harvest was to be waved before the Lord. the barley was cut after the weekly Sabbath and prepared that night and presented as the wave offering at 9 AM that 1st day of the week, Sunday.

In this typology study I want to focus on the RITES of the cutting for a moment.

This “reaping” of the Omer Barley offering was a special ceremony performed BY a select group of individuals, who performed the “cutting” and “bringing” of the Omer “on behalf of” all the people of God. This SPECIAL offering was NOT brought by each and every man in Israel.

Reading from THE TEMPLE AND ITS MINISTRY AND SERVICES, by Dr.Alfred Edersheim, page 258, we find exactly how this Barley Omer Offering was first “cut- reaped” and how it was then “brought” to the priest in the Temple.

Quote: ” Already, on the 14th of Nisan, the spot where the FIRST SHEAF was to be REAPED had been MARKED OUT by delegates from THE SANHEDRIN, by tying together in bundles, while still standing, the BARLEY THAT WAS TO BE CUT DOWN. Though, for obvious

reasons, it was customary to choose for this purpose the sheltered Ashes-valley across Kidron, there was no restriction on that point, provided the barley had grown in an ordinary field – of course in Palestine itself – and not in garden or orchard land, and that the soil had not been manured nor yet artificially watered. When the time for CUTTING THE SHEAF (Omer) had arrived, that is on the evening of the 15th of Nisan (even though it were a Sabbath), just as the SUN WENT DOWN, THREE MEN, each with a SICKLE AND BASKET, formally set to work.

But in order clearly to bring out all that was distinctive in the ceremony, they first asked of the bystanders THREE times each of these questions: ‘Has the sun gone down?’ ‘With this sickle?’ ‘Into this basket?’ ‘On this Sabbath (or first Passover day)?’ and lastly, ‘Shall I reap?’

Having each time been answered in the affirmative, they CUT DOWN THE BARLEY to the amount of ONE EPFAH, or TEN OMERS, or THREE SEAHs, which is equal to about THREE PECKS AND THREE PINTS of our English measure.

The ears were BROUGHT INTO THE COURT OF THE TEMPLE, and thrashed out with canes or stalks, so as not to injure the corn (barley grain); then ‘parched’ on a pan perforated with holes, so that each grain might be touched with by the fire, and finally exposed to the wind. The corn (barley grain) thus prepared was ground in a barely-mill, which left the hulls whole.

According to some, the flour was always successively passed through thirteen sieves, each closer than the other. The statement of a rival authority, however, seems more rational – that it was only done till the flour was sufficiently fine, which was ascertained by one of the ‘Gizbarim’ (treasurers) plunging his hands into it, the sifting process being continued as long as any of the flour adhered to the hands.

Though ONE EPFAH, or TEN OMERS, of BARLEY was CUT DOWN, only ONE omer of flour, or about 5.1 pints of our measure, was OFFERED in the Temple.....”

In corroboration of these facts, the SONCINO TALMUD, a special limited anniversary edition of the Babylonian Talmud in English, published by The Soncino Press, tells about these procedures followed by these three men from the Beth Din (House of Judgment-Sanhedrin), to REAP this same Omer Barley Offering, which say:

“MISHNAH. What was the procedure? The messengers of the Beth Din used to go out on the day before the Festival and tie the unreaped corn in bunches to make it easier to reap. All the inhabitants of the towns near by assembled there. AS SOON AS

IT BECAME DARK he called out ‘Has the sun set?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ ‘Has the sun set?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ ‘With this sickle?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ ‘With this sickle?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ ‘Into this basket?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ ‘Into this basket?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ On the Sabbath he called out further, ‘On this Sabbath?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ ‘On this Sabbath?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ ‘Shall I reap?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ ‘Shall I reap?’ And they answered ‘Yes.’ He repeated every matter three times, and they answered, ‘Yes’ – ‘Yes’ – ‘Yes.’ ”

Again, let me remind you that what you have read above was the PHARISEE teaching and practice of the CUTTING and PREPARING the FIRST SHEAF for offering in the Temple by the priest.

They did it after the sun set on the beginning of the 15th of the first month, the annual Sabbath of the beginning of the feast of Unleavened Bread, and it was waved by the priest in the Temple on the day after this annual Sabbath, or the 16th of the first month.

This was the common practice of the Pharisees, and as the largest segment of the “religious” population belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, this practice was carried out and performed by the Temple administration, who in the main were Sadducees. Yet the Sadducees themselves in “theology” teaching DID NOT AGREE with this interpretation of WHEN this first barley sheaf should be cut and waved before the Lord in the Temple.

They said the waving of the FIRST SHEAF of the FIRST HARVEST, before the Lord in the Temple should be on the MORROW after the weekly Sabbath, which came during the feast of Unleavened Bread.

We have seen in past studies on the typology of this Pentecost feast, and especially concerning the typology of the WAVE SHEAF, or FIRST FRUIT cutting of the barley grain, that this FIRST SHEAF of grain REPRESENTED the FIRST of the FIRST- FRUITS of the SPIRITUAL HARVEST RESURRECTION to the heavenly Father, which was typical and was fulfilled by CHRIST JESUS, as the first of the firstfruits – see again 1 Cor.15:20-23; James 1:18.

The FIRST SHEAF of the FIRST harvest to the Lord, was offered or WAVED BEFORE THE LORD, on a certain morning of a certain day, which was also connected to the feast of Unleavened Bread. As this sheaf REPRESENTED the Messiah Christ, being waved or accepted by the Father in heaven, as the FIRST of the FIRST harvest of souls for His family, can we find anywhere in the Gospels where this typology was fulfilled by Jesus and heaven?

YES INDEED WE CAN!!

In John chapter twenty and verse 17, we read that on the day that Jesus appeared to Mary (verses 11-16) and was about to touch Him, He told NOT TO DO SO, for He was not yet ASCENDED UNTO THE FATHER!

Jesus was not talking about His permanent ascension to the Father for two thousand years or so, until His return to earth, BECAUSE later that SAME DAY, He appeared to his disciples and they DID touch Him – see Matthew 28:8-10.

These two accounts in the Gospels make it very clear that Jesus DID, for a short while, ascend to the Father in heaven and return. He allowed no one to touch Him until He had presented Himself to the Father, and then after that on His return to earth that SAME DAY, He allowed Himself to be touched.

WHAT DAY did all this take place? A reading of the last chapters of the Gospels show quite plainly and without contradiction, that this ascending of Jesus to present Himself as the FIRST OF THE FIRSTFRUIT HARVEST, THE WAVE SHEAF OF THE FIRST HARVEST TO THE HEAVENLY FATHER, WAS ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK FOLLOWING THE WEEKLY SABBATH, DURING THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD!

The WAVE SHEAF DID NOT REPRESENT THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST!
IT REPRESENTED THE CHRIST ALREADY RISEN, BEING WAVED OR ACCEPTED BY THE FATHER IN THE TEMPLE OF HEAVEN, AS THE FIRST OF

THE FIRST FRUITS, THE FIRST OF THE SPIRITUAL HARVEST TO BE MADE IMMORTAL FROM FLESH AND BLOOD. THE REST OF THIS HARVEST OF SOULS TO BE ALSO SO MADE IMMORTAL WHEN JESUS COMES AGAIN (1 Cor.15:23; 1 Thes.4:13-18).

THIS TOOK PLACE ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, AFTER THE WEEKLY SABBATH, DURING THE UNLEAVENED BREAD FEAST.

IN THIS PARTICULAR CASE THE SADDUCEES HAD THE CORRECT DAY AS TO WHEN THE WAVE SHEAF WAS TO BE OFFERED TO GOD IN THE TEMPLE! TYPOLOGY AND PROPHECY WAS FULFILLED. THAT WHICH HAD BEEN FORETOLD IN SYMBOLISM AND TYPE HAD COME TO PASS EXACTLY AS THE TYPOLOGY HAD PICTURED, ON THE EXACT DAY IT HAD BEEN PRACTICED AND PERFORMED FROM THE BEGINNING UNDER MOSES AND IN THE WILDERNESS TABERNACLE.

THIS SHOULD STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH BRETHERN. ALL THAT GOD HAS PROMISED AND FORETOLD IN PROPHECY AND TYPOLOGY, EITHER HAS ALREADY COME TO PASS, OR YET WILL COME TO PASS. WE CAN COUNT ON IT, WE CAN LOOK TO IT AS UNTO A LIGHT THAT SHINES IN A DARK PLACE, UNTIL THE DAY DAWN, AND THE DAY STAR ARISE IN YOUR HEARTS (2 Pet.1:19).

SO IT IS WRITTEN, SO IT WILL COME TO PASS!

I hope you, too, can see the awesome picture this day now gives us!

It is on the Wave Sheaf Day that Yehshua went to heaven at 9 AM, at the time of the morning sacrifices. Otherwise known as “Sunday” morning. Yehshua is represented by the Barley in the Wave Offering. The wave offering was done on that 1st day of the week which begins the counting of the Omer to the 50th day of Pentecost.

Do you grasp the importance of this event?

New International Version (©1984)

This is why it says:

| “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”

New Living Translation (©2007)?That is why the Scriptures say,

| “When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people.”

English Standard Version (©2001)?Therefore it says,

| “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

New American Standard Bible (©1995)?Therefore it says,

| “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”

Holman Christian Standard Bible (©2009)?For it says:

| When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave gifts to people.

International Standard Version (©2012)?That is why God says,

| “When he went up to the highest place, he led captives into captivity and gave gifts to people.”

David wrote about this event back in Psalms:

| Psalm 68:18 When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious—that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.

| Proverbs 30:4 Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!

Yehshua led a host of captives from the grave when He went to heaven that Sunday morning at 9 AM- at the time of the morning offerings. That is the very same moment when the Wave Offering is made. Never before had any man gone to heaven until this time. This is such a huge event I am beside myself.... why others do not or cannot see just how big a deal this was I do not understand.

Now in all of this there is something to keep in mind. Before Yehshua went up to Heaven on this Wave Sheaf Day, NO ONE, NOT ONE PERSON, HAD EVER GONE TO HEAVEN.

| Joh 3:13 And no one has ascended up to Heaven except He who came down from Heaven, the Son of Man who is in Heaven.

This is the reason we wait to see if the barley is going to be Aviv or not. Because we need to have barley to make the wave offering found in Lev 23.

| Lev 23:10 Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, When you have come into the land which I give to you, and shall reap the harvest of it, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 And he shall wave the sheaf before Jehovah to be received for you. On the next day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

The wave offering represents the first resurrection of the Saints who had lived and died since the creation of Adam up until that time in history. This is HUGE to understand because we now wait for the next Wave offering of Pentecost to come to fruition. The Feast of Pentecost is the wave offering of two leavened loaves.

Lev 23:15 And you shall count to you from the next day after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete. 16 To the next day after the seventh sabbath you shall number fifty days. And you shall offer a new food offering to Jehovah. 17 You shall bring out of your homes two wave loaves of two-tenth parts. They shall be of fine flour. They shall be baked with leaven, firstfruits to Jehovah. 18 And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bull, and two rams. They shall be *for* a burnt offering to Jehovah, with their food offering, and their drink offerings, a fire offering of sweet savor to Jehovah. 19 Then you shall sacrifice one he-goat for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings. 20 And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits, a wave offering before Jehovah, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to Jehovah for the priest.

All of those who have lived and died since that day when Yehshua took those with Him to Heaven in 31 C.E. will now be raised in what I believe will be the last year of the tribulation in 2033 C.E. This is all the Apostles and all those Saints who have lived and died over the past 2000 years.

The wave offering is huge in understanding and our future. This is why we wait for the barley to be ripe and then for the wheat to be ripe for Pentecost/Shavuot.

Triennial Torah Cycle

We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

22/02/2014 Gen 26 1 Sam 6-8 Ps 55-56 Mark 3-4:23

Isaac and the Philistines (Genesis 26)

As in the days of Abraham, the land of Canaan experienced another drought and famine—and, having the example of his father before him, Isaac journeyed south with the probable intent of going into Egypt where food would be more likely available, that country being sustained by the annual inundation of the Nile. His journey took him to the southern Philistine city of Gerar, whose king bore the hereditary title Abimelech (meaning “Father King” or “My Father Is King”). That several kings bore the title of Abimelech is amply proven by archaeological discoveries.

Verse 2 records that God told Isaac, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you.” This implies that God generally directed Isaac’s movements, for if God had merely wanted Isaac to remain in Canaan, He would have simply said, “Live in the land,” omitting “of which I shall tell you.” The latter phrase implies continued guidance. This is interesting because we are told that Abraham, although going into Canaan, went “not

knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8), and that God had said, “Get out of your country to a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1), implying that although Abraham knew he was heading toward Canaan, he did not know whether he would remain there or if God would lead him elsewhere. Isaac’s movement toward Egypt was stopped by God’s directly intervening to guide his movements within Canaan. For the moment, God gave no further direction than to remain in the land of Canaan (verse 3).

Notice also that in both Genesis 12 and 26 we have the repeated pattern of God commanding his servant (Abraham or Isaac, respectively) to go to a land that He would show him, followed immediately by a giving or reaffirming of what has come to be called the Abrahamic Covenant. Genesis contains several examples of this kind of couplet—as you read through the book, you should keep your eyes open for them. One of the couplets is Abraham and Isaac’s denial of their wives, in each case to a king titled Abimelech (Abraham also did so to Pharaoh, Genesis 12). These couplets have led some to suggest that the book of Genesis was stitched together from several different and contradictory traditions—in this case, one tradition having Abraham denying his wife, and another tradition having Isaac denying his wife. The truth is that there are no contradicting traditions. Abraham and Isaac both did the same things, the son imitating the father, perhaps for the same reasons.

Though the incidents with Abraham occurred before Isaac was born, Isaac probably heard about them, perhaps viewing such an approach as acceptable. In Isaac’s case, however, he did not have his father’s excuse that his wife actually *was* his sister. So this was blatantly a lie (although it could perhaps be argued that a close relative could be called a sister). In any case, this was clearly wrong and illustrates the fact that a bad example can go a long way. Still, despite Isaac’s problems, he was a man who, like all of us, was growing in faith. Indeed, his is a tremendous example of perseverance. God greatly blessed him (26:12-14). But enemies tried to thwart him, filling in wells that his father’s servants had dug. Isaac’s answer: dig *new* wells. When the same enemies then quarreled with him over a new well, he dug another well, and then another, and then another. Country singer Paul Overstreet actually wrote a song inspired by all of this called “Dig Another Well.” It talks about the devil thwarting our efforts—stopping up our wells—and then says, “When I go out for my morning drink, and get a dipper full of dirt, my heart does sink, but I think of old Ike and I have to grin—God blessed me once and He can do it again.” And the song’s advice to those facing such circumstances: “Just pick up your shovel, and dig another well.”

The Ark in Philistia (1 Samuel 5:1-7:1)

The plague many of the Philistines suffer and die from produces “tumors,” the Hebrew word for which “literally means ‘swellings’ and may refer to any kind of tumor, swelling, or boil” (*Nelson*, note on 5:6). When the ark is sent back, the people include an “offering” consisting of five golden sculptures of these “tumors.” But they also for some unstated reason include five golden rats. It would appear that rats had some sort of involvement with whatever the plague was. It is interesting to note that bubonic plague, the black death of the Middle Ages, is characterized by the formation of buboes, i.e. inflammatory swellings of the lymph glands,

especially in the groin area—and that the plague was spread by the fleas of rodents, particularly rats. This, then, may have been what the Philistines were suffering from. When the Philistines decide the ark is most likely the cause of their problems, and agree to send it back, they devise a test to try to determine for sure whether the God of Israel is behind all of this. They find two cows that have never pulled a cart and that have recently given birth, and they take their calves from them. If the cows are willing to be harnessed to a cart for the first time and cooperate together to pull it without balking, without any guidance, and in the correct direction away from their own calves, then, the Philistines reason, God would have to be involved. The lords of the Philistines follow the cart in astonishment as the cows pull the ark directly back to the land of Israel.

For some reason, the ark is never returned to the tabernacle. It remains in the house of Abinadab for 70 years or more until David brings it to Jerusalem when he pitches a new tent for it (1 Chronicles 15:1; 16:1). Meanwhile, the tabernacle and altar of burnt offering somehow find their way to Gibeon (16:37-40).

Israel Asks for a King (1 Samuel 7:2-8:22)

After some 20 years, the Israelites begin to seek God again, and relief from the Philistines. Samuel gathers them together at Mizpah, about two miles north of his home in Ramah. Here Samuel leads them in pouring out water to God, evidently symbolic of pouring out one's heart in repentance (compare Lamentations 2:19; Psalm 62:8). The gathering incites the Philistines to attack, but the Israelites are in a particularly God-oriented frame of mind following Samuel's preaching, and God grants them a great victory.

But as Samuel gets older, Israel's faith begins to waver again. Samuel's sons are not righteous. (It is interesting to note, however, that Samuel's grandson, Joel's son Heman, becomes one of the chief musicians in David's time, see 1 Chronicles 6:32-33; 15:16-19). The people (or at least the elders, verse 4) worry about what will happen to them when Samuel dies, and decide that what they really need is a human king like those ruling and leading the nations around them. God had anticipated this years earlier (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20). But He has Samuel describe to them the problems inherent in having a human king, which they either don't believe or think they can endure.

The problem is that Israel *already had a King*—ever since the time of Moses and the Exodus, around 1445 B.C., when Israel became a true nation. The King at that time and for the next nearly 400 years was the Rock of Israel, the Eternal God Himself—in fact, the preincarnate Word, Yeshua Christ (compare Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Corinthians 10:4; John 1:1-3, 14; 17:5). Though ruling through His chosen “judges”—from Moses and Joshua all the way to Samuel—God in the person of Christ sat on the throne of Israel (compare Judges 8:22-23). Indeed, Samuel later tells the Israelites that the period of the judges was the time “when the Lord your God was your King” (1 Samuel 12:12). And it is the reason that when the Israelites told Samuel around 1050 bc that they wanted a human king like the nations around them, the Lord told him, “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). So God then gives them a physical monarch.

It is interesting to note, as we will see in the next few chapters, that unlike other ancient rulers, the king of Israel was not to be an absolute despot. God will have Samuel anoint Saul “commander” (9:16; 10:1) or “captain” (KJV) over His people. This Hebrew term *nagiyd* used here could be rendered in English as viceroy or governor-general—the stand-in for the *real* monarch. In fact, the very act of anointing a ruler in the ancient world implied a vassal relationship. It is later explained that Israel’s king “sat on the throne of the Lord,” reigning as king *for* Him (1 Chronicles 29:23; 2 Chronicles 9:6-8).

Also quite different than in other realms was the fact that the king was not also priest over the national religion. Furthermore, in other countries, kings made law and were thus above it. But in Israel, God’s prophet will explain “the rights and duties of the kingship” (1 Samuel 10:25, NRSV). The ruler was *subject* to the law (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Essentially, the Almighty set up a constitutional limited monarchy—in which He would send a prophet as His representative to the king to give him his “report card.”

Psalm 55

Psalm 55 is the last *maskil* of David in a sequence of four. As before, the word *Neginoth* in the superscription, perhaps part of a postscript to Psalm 54, is probably correctly translated in the NKJV as “stringed instruments.”

David cries out to God in this song about many enemies acting against him, though his focus is on one in particular. The psalm addresses the pain of being betrayed by a friend—one David knew well who even worshiped God at the tabernacle alongside him (verses 12-14). Besides being painful on its own, a betraying friend is an enemy with vital knowledge—an adversary particularly adept at causing harm and inflicting pain. David addresses both elements here when he says, “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him” (verse 12, NIV).

The friend having “broken his covenant” (verse 20) could mean an informal one of friendship or a formal oath of loyalty to David as king—perhaps part of an oath of office. The man’s loyalty and slick speech, David says, were a pretense—all part of a calculated plan to stab him in the back (verse 21).

David doesn’t name the friend, but many believe the person meant here was his counselor and prime minister Ahithophel, who betrayed him in joining and essentially directing Absalom’s rebellion (see 2 Samuel 15-17). Further, many see a connection between Psalm 55 and Psalm 41:9: “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” However, Psalm 41 also concerns an illness that befell David—and there is no record of him being ill when Absalom rebelled (though, as pointed out previously, it is not hard to imagine that his deep depression could have made him physically sick). It could be that Psalm 41 and Psalm 55 concern two different friends at different times—or that both concern the same friend but not Ahithophel. In any case, these two psalms are certainly linked by theme if not by occasion. That being so, we should recall that Psalm 41:9 is quoted in the New Testament as a prophecy of the betrayal of Yeshua by Judas Iscariot. The betrayal in Psalm 55 would seem to prefigure this as well, as many have recognized.

The NKJV translates David's prayer in verse 15 as: "Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell"-that is, not just the one treacherous friend but others who were set against him also. In no way does this refer to people descending into a burning hellfire and remaining conscious. Rather, the word translated "hell" here simply means, as the NIV renders it, "grave." In using the word "alive," David could conceivably be calling for what happened to Korah and the other rebels against Moses in the wilderness when the earth opened up and swallowed them-whereupon they were instantly killed. Yet it seems likely that he simply means for their deaths to come while they are in full vigor and not after they have lain on their sickbeds in old age. David later expresses his belief that this will happen when he says near the end of the psalm, "Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days" (verse 23).

How are we to understand David's call for death on his enemies, as it may seem very unrighteous in light of Yeshua's instruction to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors? One book explains regarding such imprecations (callings for curse or judgment on others) in the psalms: "These invocations are not mere outbursts of a vengeful spirit; they are, instead, prayers addressed to God. These earnest pleadings to God ask that he step in and right some matters so grossly distorted that if his help does not come, all hope for justice is lost.

"These hard sayings are legitimate expressions of the longings of Old Testament saints for the vindication that only God's righteousness can bring. They are not statements of personal vendetta, but utterances of zeal for the kingdom of God and his glory. The attacks that provoked these prayers were not just from personal enemies; rather, they were rightly seen as attacks against God and especially his representatives in the promised line of the Messiah. Thus, David and his office bore the brunt of most of these attacks, and this was tantamount to an attack on God and his kingdom!

"It is frightening to realize that a righteous person may, from time to time, be in the presence of evil and have little or no reaction to it. But in these psalms we have the reverse of the situation. These prayers express a fierce abhorrence of sin and a desire to see God's name and cause triumph. Therefore, those whom the saints opposed in these prayers were the fearful embodiments of wickedness.

"Since David was the author of far more imprecatory psalms than anyone else, let it also be noted that David exhibited just the opposite of a vindictive or vengeful spirit in his own life. He was personally assaulted time and time again by people like Shimei, Doeg, Saul and his own son Absalom. Never once did he attempt to effect his own vindication or lift his hand to exercise what many may have regarded as his royal prerogative....

"Finally, these imprecations only repeat in prayer what God had already stated elsewhere would be the fate of those who were impenitent and who were persistently opposing God and his kingdom. In almost every instance, each expression used in one of these prayers of malediction may be found in plain prose statements of what will happen to those sinners who persist in opposing God" (Walter Kaiser Jr., Peter Davids, F.F. Bruce and Manfred Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 1996, comments on Psalm 137:8-9).

David, we should also remember, was a prophet expressing God's judgment. Furthermore, here in Psalm 55 he even seems to make allowance for repentance when he says that it is such

people's *lack* of repentance that is the basis for their punishment: "God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them [i.e., the evil they say and do] and afflict them...men who never change their ways and have no fear of God" (verse 19, NIV).

Conversely, David has confidence that God will sustain His faithful people. He tells the righteous to "cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you" (verse 22). The apostle Peter later says the same in 1 Peter 5:6-7: "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

Psalm 56

Psalm 56 is the first of five Davidic psalms in a row bearing the title *mikhtam* (56-60). As explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 16 (another *mikhtam*), the meaning of this word is uncertain. It may mean a writing or inscription-and could perhaps denote something first written as a poem (though we know from the examples here that these were set to music, at least at some point, and some express a desire to play instruments or sing). As noted previously, these *mikhtams* are all written in the face of great danger.

We earlier read Psalm 56 in conjunction with the account of David fleeing from Saul into Philistine territory and being taken into custody by the Philistines at Gath-the event mentioned in the superscription (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 1 Samuel 21:1-12; Psalm 56). This was immediately before David feigned madness to escape from the Philistines, after which he composed Psalm 34 in thanks to God.

David complains that his enemies are many and that they hound him all day (56:2). Having been on the run from Saul, it is likely that David was thinking a great deal about him and his forces and not just the Philistines-though they were certainly included.

David talks through his fears in prayer: "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.... In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?" (verses 3-4; compare the same basic refrain in verses 4 and 10-11; see also 118:6). It was fear of Saul that had driven David from Israel and into Philistine territory. So he was clearly learning some lessons here.

David then once more describes the actions of his enemies (Psalm 56:5-7) before again expressing trust in God to help him. *The Nelson Study Bible* says that "alternating passages of pain and faith are a characteristic of the lament psalms...[and] the poet typically complains about lies, the misuse of language, and deceit" (notes on Psalm 56:3-4 and verse 5).

Thinking about his life on the run and all his suffering, David knows that God is aware and keeps track of it (verse 8). David realizes God is *for* him-on his side (verse 9; compare Romans 8:31). God has been faithful to him in saving and helping him (Psalm 56:13)-and David will be faithful to God (verse 12).

Mark 3-4:23

Mark chapter 3 opens with once again an incident of Yeshua knowing the hard hearts of the Scribes and Pharisees and a confrontation concerning man made rules of the Sabbath. Yeshua heals a man with a withered hand. The Scribes and Pharisees plot with the Herodians on how to destroy Him. Yeshua again withdraws but masses of people continued to follow Him because of the great healings He was doing. The unclean spirits proclaimed Him to be "the Son of Elohim."

Verses 14 thru 19 we get a list of the twelve disciples and learn that He sent them out with great authority to heal and cast out demons. There was a huge commotion over Yeshua and all He was doing such that even His relatives tried to reign Him in. The Scribes and Pharisees accused Yeshua of casting out demons by Satan and Yeshua warns them of blaspheming against the Set apart Spirit, for which there is no forgiveness.

In chapter 4 we read of the giving of the parable of the seed and the sower. The four types of ground or soil upon which the seed may fall and the outcome. He spoke to them in parables so that those who were not to see or hear were unable. He then proceeds to explain the parable to His taught ones only.