



Heart's Desire

Information and Ideas To Equip Believers for a Loving and Sensitive Witness to Our Jewish Friends

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Romans 10:1)

WHY IS THAT MAN HOLDING A LEMON AND SHAKING THAT BUNCH OF STICKS?

First, that's no lemon; it's a citron (a second cousin to the lemon), or *etrog* in Hebrew. And that's not an ordinary bunch of sticks; it's actually a carefully selected combination of branches from three different trees: the date palm (*lulav* in Hebrew), the willow tree, and the myrtle tree. The branches are stacked next to each other and bound together with thin strips of palm leaves.

Admittedly, it's a strange "contraption," but it shows up in the autumn of every year, as it has for the last three thousand years, when Jewish people celebrate the eight-day holiday of Sukkot, also called the Feast of Tabernacles (see HD 2:1, 6:1). Its design is based on the commandment in Leviticus 23:40:

And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees (citron), branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees (myrtle) and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. (ESV)

This listing of four different types of trees accounts for the title, "the four species," in

referring to this unusual practice. (Not to be confused with "the seven species," about which an article in a future issue of *Heart's Desire* will be written.)

On each of the days of Sukkot, the "Lulav and Etrog" (as the "contraption" is commonly called) are taken to the synagogue and waved in six different directions—forward, right, backward, left, up, and down—while a prayer, taken from Psalm 118:25, is recited:

Save now (Hebrew, Hosanna), I beseech thee, O Lord! O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity! (KJV)

While the Biblical commandment regarding the practice is very clear, the meaning behind the commandment is not, and subject to varying interpretations. One of the more common views is that the four species represent four types of Jews, with the quality of taste signifying learning, or knowledge, and the quality of fragrance signifying good deeds (Hebrew, *mitzvoth*).

- ff The **etrog** (citron) has both taste and fragrance, so it symbolizes Jews who demonstrate both knowledge and good deeds.
- ff The **lulav** (date palm) has taste, but no fragrance, so it symbolizes Jews who are learned, but lack good deeds.
- ff The **myrtle** has fragrance, but no taste, so it symbolizes Jews who manifest good deeds, but lack learning.
- ff The **willow** has neither taste, nor fragrance, and thus represents Jews without knowledge and devoid of good deeds.

And yet, they are all bound together (as the three branches are bound together by the strip of palm-frond) as part of the nation of Israel, visible as a "special people" to the nations of the world (in all directions, as the "bunch of sticks" is shaken in all directions).

THERE'S A STRANGER IN MY SUKKAH!

During the eight-day holiday of Sukkot (September 22–29, 2010), Jewish families eat their meals outside their homes in a temporary structure called a *sukkah*, with branches forming the roof to provide shade and shelter, while still allowing a clear view of the sky. This is in obedience to God's command in Leviticus 23:42–43:

Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (KJV)

So, every year Jewish people are reminded that their ancestors lived for forty years in temporary housing on their way from Egypt to their permanent home in Canaan. Maybe they

sang: "This world is not my home; I'm just a-passing through!"

There is a well known and widely accepted Jewish tradition which says that during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) seven patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David—visit the *sukkah* of worthy Jews. As a way of demonstrating their worthiness to receive such "special" visitors, the Jewish family must warmly welcome any strangers (Aramaic, *ushpizin*, pronounced oosh-puh-**zeen**, meaning "guests") to share a meal with them in their *sukkah*.

It is very likely that the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews had this tradition in mind when he, referencing Genesis 18:1ff., wrote these words:

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews 13:1–2, KJV)

YOU'RE IN FOR A REAL TREAT (AND AN EDUCATION) when you view the film, *Ushpizin*, released in 2005. That it is a cooperative project of both secular and ultra-Orthodox Israelis makes it unique among cinematic pieces. Filmed on location in the ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem neighborhood of Mea Shearim, *Ushpizin* presents an authentic glimpse of Sukkot customs, while also presenting a slice-of-life view of Hasidic Judaism in the context of an intriguing and inspiring story line. The dialogue is in Hebrew, but the English subtitling is so adeptly done that one hardly notices the language barrier.

One important hint to the viewer: Key to understanding the whole storyline is the fact that the "choicest" *etrog* (citron), as classified by the rabbis, can sell for an exorbitant price.



Ushpizin, on DVD, is available on loan, free of charge, from our office.

And I heard a great voice
out of heaven saying,
Behold, the tabernacle
of God is with men,
and he will dwell with
them, and they shall be
his people, and God
himself shall be with them,
and be their God.

(Revelation 21:3)

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