



DID I MISS A FEW YEARS?

A glance at any document on which is affixed the date according to the Jewish calendar will reveal a significant difference from the Gregorian Calendar in popular usage. For example, the *Jerusalem Post* International Edition for the week ending December 28, 1996 carries the date of Tevet 18, 5757.

The Jewish calendar contains twelve months of 29 or 30 days length. The religious year begins with the month Nisan in the spring and the civil year begins with the month Tishri in the fall.

The perplexing question is why 1996-97 on Gentile calendars is actually the year 5757 on Jewish calendars. The fact is that many of our Jewish friends would have as much difficulty answering this question as do their Gentile neighbors.

The answer to the question comes with understanding that the reckoning of time for the Jewish people begins with the creation of the universe by God; thus Genesis 1:1 took place in the year 1. The *Seder Olam* is a treatise on chronology attributed to a second century rabbi who used the various genealogies of the Old Testament,

along with the Biblical record of the longevity of various individuals, to calculate the date of creation—3761 B.C.

Therefore, if 3761 B.C. of the Gentile calendar is actually the year 1 of the Jewish calendar, then 1996 A.D. is actually the year 5757.

You may wish to review this information in anticipation of wishing your Jewish friends *l'shanah tovah* ("Happy New Year") when they welcome the year 5758 this fall.

Did You Know . . .

—That the Jewish population of the world is divided among two "families?"

THE ASHKENAZIM are those Jews whose ancestors settled in Northwestern Europe in the early Middle Ages, resulting in identification most closely with Western culture. This is the larger of the two "families."

THE SEPHARDIM trace their ancestry to medieval Spain and therefore represent the Eastern ("Oriental") culture of the Mediterranean world.

—That in Israel each of these two groups has its own Chief Rabbi?

ISRAEL LIVES!

Each spring the Jewish people celebrate a remarkable series of events in their history as recorded in the book of Esther. The ten chapters of this fifth century B.C. narrative by an unknown author tell of God's providential protection of His Ancient People from the arch-villain Haman. Using the Persian Queen Esther, who was actually a Jewish maiden, and her cousin Mordecai to foil Haman's plot, God thwarted the diabolical program of genocide.

This celebration, known as **Purim**, is more than an annual period of national reminiscing. It is a time to rejoice in the realization that God has kept His hand on Israel throughout her history and that repeated Haman-esque attempts to destroy the Jewish people have all been unsuccessful. In spite of them all, **Israel lives!**

Purim, though not one of the seven major holidays listed in Leviticus 23, is observed by many Jewish families as a festival of joy. Gentile believers do well to understand some of the features of this special day.

Date of Observance

14th day of Adar

(3/23/97, 3/12/98, 3/2/99, 3/21/00)

Origin of Name

Akkadian word, *pur* (meaning "dice"), referring to Haman's casting of lots to pick the best day on which to massacre the Jews (Esther 3:7).

Religious Observance

Reading of the Esther scroll at both Evening and Morning Services in the synagogue, during which congregation members stamp their feet and whirl noisemakers (**graggers**) every time the name of Haman is mentioned.

Family Observances

Purim Plays in which children dress as various characters and act out the book of Esther.

Gifts of Food exchanged among friends, neighbors, and relatives and cash presents (Purim-gelt) to children.

Traditional Foods like fried pastries known as "Haman's ears" (**ozne Haman**) and triangular buns filled with poppy seeds, dates, and prunes, known as **Hamantashen** ("Haman's pockets").



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