



BRIDGES FOR PEACE
YOUR ISRAEL CONNECTION®



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Bridges for Peace Israel Teaching Letter



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In the seventeen years I have lived in Israel, I have been blessed to learn many things which have given me fresh insight on the Scriptures. Some say that my husband and I, and the staff of Bridges for Peace, have given our lives to the Lord's call to Israel. That is true, but what is also true is that Israel has given us new life as well. Christians who visit Israel invariably remark about how their Bible reading has come to life after a trip to Israel. In this *Israel Teaching Letter*, I want to share a few things that I have learned.

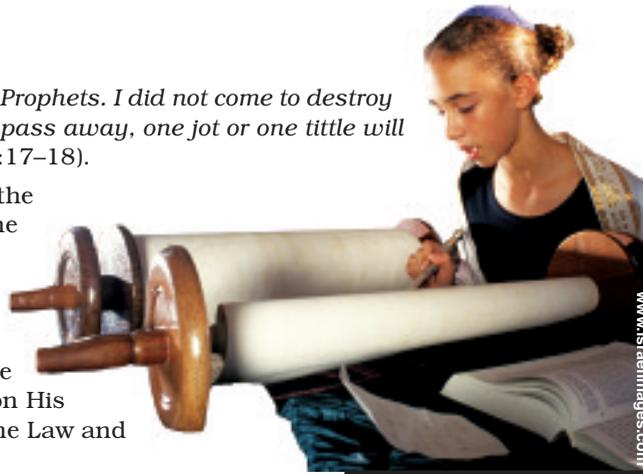
Jot and Tittle

“Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17–18).

The phrase “jot and tittle” refers to specific parts of the Hebrew alphabet. The jot refers to the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the yod (י). Tittle is an English word meaning a very small particle, iota, or jot. It refers to small strokes, which differentiate Hebrew letters one from another. For instance, the only difference between the dalet (ד, d sound) and the resh (ר, r sound) is a tiny little stroke at the top of the letter. So, Yeshua (Jesus) was putting an exclamation point on His statement to let the hearers know how important and valid the Law and Prophets were to Him.

The Jewish people have great reverence for the Scriptures. In fact, a *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) scroll is still handwritten on leather parchment by scribes who are meticulous in their workmanship. It takes about a year to complete a *Torah* scroll and costs around US \$50,000. Great care is taken to ensure that every letter is perfect and that the copy has no mistakes. Our Bible has come down to us through the ages unchanged because of the care taken by generations of Jewish scribes.

In Jerusalem, you can visit the Shrine of the Book museum and see the Dead Sea Scrolls. A 2,000-year-old scroll of the book of Isaiah is on display. Scholars tell us that it is virtually unchanged from the modern day Hebrew language book of Isaiah.



Note the tittle shown on the right end of the dalet.



Calendars

The biblical calendar is not the same as the one we use today. In fact, in modern day Israel, two calendars are used simultaneously: the Gregorian calendar, the one we are familiar with, and the Hebrew calendar, which is the biblical calendar. When you pick up a newspaper in Israel, you will see two dates on the cover.

The Hebrew calendar is a lunar calendar and is based on the movements of the moon. Each month has 30 days. Every few years, an additional 30-day month is added to ensure that holidays happen at roughly the same time of year. When you read in the Bible that something occurred in the first month, it does not mean January. It means the Hebrew month of Nisan, which falls somewhere in March or April (Exodus 12:2; Leviticus 23:5). Passover starts on the 15th day of Nisan. All biblical feasts are figured according to the Hebrew calendar, which is why they are never on the same dates from year to year according to the Gregorian calendar.

When Tom and I became residents of Israel, we had to fill out forms, and one of the questions was what our birthdays were on the Hebrew calendar. When we finally figured it out, it was funny for us. Our birthdays are close together. In fact, Tom is one year minus eight days older than me. For eight days a year, we are the “same” age. According to the Hebrew calendar, he is one year plus three days older than me.

In Israel, day-to-day life is figured according to the Gregorian calendar, but biblical, national, and secular holidays are commemorated on the Hebrew date. Many significant events like weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries are honored on the Hebrew date.

The Jewish people are currently living in the year 5767. Of course, they have to operate in a larger world, and so they also use 2006 like we do. They do not use BC and AD after years, but rather use BCE (before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era).

In Jewish thought, the day begins at sundown and ends at sundown. This is because in Genesis it says, *“And the evening and the morning was the first day” (1:5).*

The Jewish calendar compared to the Gregorian calendar:

1	Nisan	March-April
2	Iyar	April-May
3	Sivan	May-June
4	Tammuz	June-July
5	Av	July-Aug
6	Elul	Aug-Sept
7	Tishri	Sept-Oct
8	Cheshvan	Oct-Nov
9	Kislev	Nov-Dec
10	Tevet	Dec-Jan
11	Shevat	Jan-Feb
12	Adar	Feb-March

The Jewish people are currently living in the year **5767**, but they also use **2006** like we do.



Bless GOD, not the Food

The blessings over the bread and wine are wonderful examples of blessing God every day. The blessings are as follows:

"Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine."

"Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."

When I was growing up, we always prayed before meals, and we often blessed the food. One phrase I remember was "bless this food to our bodies." My Jewish friends are a little surprised by this kind of prayer. They assume the food is good because God made it and gave it to us as a gift. The prayers above are prayers of thanksgiving and honor to God who gave us the good gifts of food and wine.

When Yeshua fed the five thousand, it says He blessed. *"Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes"* (Matthew 14:19). Reading that before living in Israel, I thought Yeshua blessed the food. Instead, Yeshua undoubtedly blessed God, who gave the food, as is the Hebraic custom.

No "J" in the Hebrew Alphabet

When I began studying Hebrew, I was amazed to find out that there is no "j" sound in Hebrew. Why, I wondered, did my English Bible have all those names that start with "J"? When I began to look up some of those names, I found out that they all start with the Hebrew letter "yod" (י), which is a "y" sound. I later found out that the English language had changed. Previously, the English letter "j" had a "y" sound. When the Bible was translated into English, the names were pronounced with a "y" sound. Later, English changed, and the "j" sound developed. Since no one went back and changed the Bible translations, we continue to this day to pronounce these names with a "j" sound. A few examples: In Hebrew, Joel is pronounced Yoel; Joshua is pronounced Yehoshua; and Jeremiah is Yirmiyahu.

Biblical Names Have Meanings

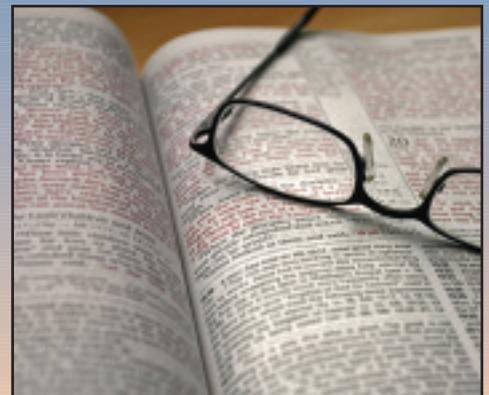
After learning some Hebrew, I found that the names in the Bible were more meaningful. Suddenly, I was seeing words, not just names. Melchizedek is an interesting example (Genesis 14:18). It is actually two Hebrew words, *melchi* and *tzdek*. *Melchi* means "my king," and *tzdek* means "righteous." So, whenever someone called him by name, they were saying "my righteous king." The name *Yeshua* is the Hebrew word "salvation." Isaiah's two sons' names formed a sermon when said together. His first son's name was *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*, which means "swift is the booty, speedy is the prey" (Isaiah 8:3-4). The second son's name is *Shear-Jashub*, which means "a remnant shall return." Every time Isaiah's wife called the boys to dinner, she was proclaiming to the entire neighborhood that there was going to be war and captivity, but a remnant would return.

The Newer Testament Is Written in Shorthand

Often as 21st-century Christians, we don't fully understand the Newer Testament, because we are reading through our own cultural eyeglasses. We live more than 2,000 years after the events of the Newer Testament and 2,500 to 4,000 years after the events of the Older Testament. Most of us live great distances from the Land of Israel. We speak a different language than the writers of the Bible.

To compound the problem, the Newer Testament is written in a kind of shorthand. What do I mean? Things that were readily understood by the readers of the day are not explained. So, for instance, Passover is never explained, just referred to. Paul says, *"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of of*

We don't fully understand the Newer Testament, because we are reading through our own cultural eyeglasses.





malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Corinthians 5:6–8). Unless you know about the feast of Passover, you would not catch all the inferences in this passage. During Passover, all leavening is to be removed from the house and only unleavened foods are to be eaten for the entire eight-day holiday. Leaven is understood to symbolize sin. The readers in Paul’s day understood this, but we don’t necessarily have the same clarity.

At the time Paul wrote this letter, it would have seemed silly to explain Passover, because everyone knew what it was all about, including which Scriptures were read, the songs sung, the foods eaten, and the story of the event from Exodus. To explain these concepts would be like writing a letter to a friend today and making reference to Christmas. You wouldn’t say something like, “You know, Christmas is that holiday when we commemorate the birth of Jesus. We sing carols, decorate our houses, make gingerbread houses, give gifts and put lights on our house.” If you did, your friend would wonder what was wrong with you, because, in our culture, we automatically picture all those things when we hear the word “Christmas.”

There are other concepts that are not really dealt with in the Newer Testament. For example, singing in worship is only mentioned in one Scripture. *“Do not be drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father”* (Ephesians 5:18–20, NASB). Does that mean that by the time of the Newer Testament, God was no longer interested in being praised and worshipped? I don’t believe so. It merely was unnecessary to write about, since there was already a wonderful book of 150 psalms.

Fasting Jewish Style

There are many fast days throughout the Jewish year. *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) and *Tisha b’Av* (the 9th of the Hebrew month Av, the date on which both Temples were destroyed) are the two most prominent. Fast days start at sundown and continue to sundown on the following day. On these days, they fast from more than food—no liquids are ingested. They abstain from many things that bring pleasure. Showers are not taken. This is because the Scripture says that you should “afflict your souls” (Leviticus 23:27).

I can tell you this from experience—it is much easier to fast from food than to fast from liquids.

The number 18 is thought to be a good number, because the letters which total 18 form the word “chai” (חַי), which means “life.”

Hebrew Letters Used as Numbers

Every Hebrew letter has a numerical equivalent. The chapters and verses of the Hebrew Bible are not identified by traditional numbers, but rather by Hebrew letters that have numerical value (example: וט=26). Because of this, some numbers have become significant. For example, the number 18 is thought to be a good number, because the letters that total 18 form the word *chai* (חַי), which means “life.”

1	א
2	ב
3	ג
4	ד
5	ה
6	ו
7	ז
8	ח
9	ט
10	י
20	כ
30	ל
40	מ
50	נ
60	ס
70	ע
80	פ
90	צ
100	ק
200	ר
300	ש
400	ת

In closing, I want to encourage you to dig a little deeper into the culture of the Bible, word studies in Hebrew and Greek, and, if at all possible, visit Israel and see how your Bible will speak to you in fresh new ways.

By Rebecca J. Brimmer
International President and CEO

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Scriptures taken from the New King James version, unless otherwise noted.

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding “yes!” It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. *“For out of Zion shall go forth the law, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 2:3).

