

Abib Search for the Year 2003

by Brian Convery, May 31, 2003

Once again members of the Church of God teamed up with Karaite Jews this year to conduct a search for Abib barley across the land of Israel. Most of the participants arrived in Jerusalem February 26th just after what is being called the heaviest snowfall in more than 50 years. It is difficult to explain the situation that existed in the high country around and in Jerusalem as anything short of chaos. But, at the same time there was excitement and jubilation with many in Israel. Most of the traffic jams going into the city were caused by people just stopping in the road and jumping out with entire families to play in the snow and get pictures to remember it by. The first several days were very trying at times with gridlock throughout the region. Imagine a foot or more of heavy wet snow, which took 3 days to melt off the roads and no one with snow tires. So much for fun in the sun! Church of God members from last years search once again returned for this important event. They are Gerald Kirby and Michael Story from the Northwest Church of God in England, Richard Dolan from the Worldwide Church of God, and Brian Convery from the Church of God at large. They were joined by two new members this year. Angie Andrews who hales from Michigan and is a member of the Church of God at large and Ruthanne Koch from eastern Colorado who has been observing the Sabbath and Festivals of God for a year and a half with her family and who is unattached as to a Church.

Angie handled all the GPS activities and functions such as recording field locations and samples taken. Ruthanne put her years of crop inspection experience to work in examining the barley as to its stages in growth as well as putting on an excellent seminar as to the entire maturing process of Barley. She and her husband own and operate an agricultural services business in Colorado.

The search this year was special from the sense that the potential for adding a 13th lunar month to the calendar was presenting itself. Most feast keepers either do not know much about, or anything about, the inner workings of their respective calendars which they or their organizations use to set the dates of the feasts. The traditional Rabbinical Calendar which is used by the vast majority of the brethren is subject to a 19 year sun cycle. It is also referred to by different groups as the Sacred Calendar and Hebrew Calendar. A 19 year cycle in this calendar governs the years of intercalation. That is, 7 years in each 19 year cycle an additional month is added to the standard 12 lunar month year. This is done to bring the lunar year in sink with the growing season for the lunar month is approximately 11 days short of a solar year. This leaves a little over a month gap every 3 years. If this was not adjusted one would be keeping Passover throughout the various seasons and not in its truly appointed time. So, 7 fixed times in a 19 year cycle the year is intercalated.

Many Church of God brethren who keep the Biblical standard of observing the New Moon hold the same standard as to the intercalation of months. Instead of accepting the 19 year cycle of preset intercalated months throughout the centuries under the Rabbinical calendar they travel to Israel to inspect the barley fields for themselves each year.

The month of Abib or the first month of the year (Ex. 12:2; 13:4) is the name given to a particular stage in the development of the barley crop. This was done because the barley must be mature enough by the middle of the first month so that it can be used for the Wave Sheaf offering on the Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:10-11) and thus start the seven weeks of harvest unto Pentecost (Duet.16:9). Most brethren have some knowledge of these events and there meaning to the plan of Salvation.

As a result of this years search it was very clear that 99% of the wild barley crop was 3-5 weeks away from being Abib by the minimum standards which can be used for a grain offering (Lev. 2:14). That means that a 13th lunar month was added (Adair II). This places all the various calendars used by the brethren in the same month this year as to keeping the festivals (to the best of our knowledge). By the observed calendar however the new year will start on April 4th for the New Moon will not be able to be seen, **in Jerusalem**, until after sunset on April 3rd. Those who follow the Rabbinical Calendar rules will be keeping April 3rd itself as the start of the month of Abib. This is actually not the new year for the Rabbinical Calendar for it designates the start of the 7th month as the new year and counts backwards from there to determine the first month. Many readers may be wondering why this exists for many families keep different calendars within a particular household as well as in a group. Simply explained, the Rabbinical Calendar has what is called a postponement this fall. It takes place at the Feast of Trumpets. That is the only festival that starts on the same day as the New Moon or the first day of the month. This year that day falls on a Sunday. Rabbinical rules will not allow that to happen for that would make the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles fall on a weekly Sabbath. This cannot happen for the Rabbis have a tradition of taking down their booths on the last day and if it falls on a Sabbath they cannot do so. Thus they move the date of Trumpets backwards one day and keep it on the last day of the 6th month. What this does now is it moves the start of the first month back one day. To determine the first day of the first month they count backwards 177days. Then they count 14 days to determine their Passover. If the postponement rule was not invoked it would be keeping the very same day as those who depend on the rules of observation. This places all the festival dates one day apart this year except for Pentecost which will be kept by most brethren on June 8th. I say most for the Rabbinical Calendar rules actually state that Pentecost should be kept on Sivan 6 (3rd month). Most organizations do not follow this rule however. In conducting the search this year many regions of Israel were inspected. They included the Jordan Valley, Judean Hills, Galilee, Beth Shean Valley, and the historic lands of Israel under the control of the Jordanian Government. Information gained will assist in the efforts in the years to come.

Gerald Kirby and Michael Storey have remained in Israel until the end of March. They have been filming a documentary about the Abib search and its historical roots in the land of Israel. Many important sites and textual sources have been incorporated into the film as well as interviews. Once the film is ready for distribution, brethren will be notified by postings on the internet as well as in publications such as the Journal.

As well, they will be putting out a very informative booklet on the Abib and its relationship to the setting of the Moedim (appointed times of meeting) of God, which we in the Church call Feasts.

Because of the rainy conditions in Israel this past month the searchers were able to see the remarkable display of Darnel (Rye grass) or Tares of the New Testament growing amongst the barley. You will be able to see how one cannot distinguish between the two until the plants are mature enough for the heads to come out of the stocks (boots).

The team were also able to film an interview with Dr. Roy Hoffman, chair of the science department, at Hebrew University. Dr. Hoffman is heading up the task of compiling all the necessary criteria for Rabbinical Judaism to use in an observation based Calendar. This is not a light moment in the Churches of God. Dr. Hoffman is doing this as an overall effort with many others to reestablish the Court of the Sanhedrin in Israel. As many of the readers may know this is the body of Rabbis who amongst their many duties declare the start of months and years. This was practiced after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD until the middle of the fourth century when they found it necessary to use calculations to do so, due to Roman pressure to dissolve the Court. The calendar rules continued to evolve until the eleventh century when they were codified into the present configuration used today. Interviews with the Chief Rabbis were also being set at the time of departure for Michael and Gerald to conduct and film. What all this means is that if the Court of the Sanhedrin is convened one of the first functions they plan to undertake is to disregard the current Calculated Calendar and replace it with an observed Calendar. This will undoubtedly cause a lot of turmoil within the Church unless all are prepared for it.

Inquires about the progress on the film, booklets, status of Sanhedrin events, etc. can be send to Brian Convery at: bjclmc@aol.com A new website for brethren to obtain information on these happenings as well as the knowledge which has been acquired on searching for Abib barley and many other companion subjects will soon be set up.

The Abib searchers hope all the brethren throughout the Church of God have a peaceful festival season regardless which calendar one may be keeping. Prove all things and be ready to serve one another in love.