



Messenger Project Newsletter

The Messenger

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A NONPROFIT CORPORATION PROMOTING THE BIBLE THROUGH THE ARTS

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Messenger Notes

Lionel De Leon performed *If You Are The Son of God (Mt 4:1)* with Huntington Beach's **Community Bible Church** worship team on March 12th and *Follow Me (Mt 9:9, Mk 1:16)* on March 19th. The next scheduled song is *Early in the Morning (Lk 24:1)* on April 16th.

Our latest CD, *Messenger Project*, has a limited first run of 200 copies. Some copies will be used for promotional purposes and the rest will be offered at our website (for a ten dollar donation to help recoup production costs).

Making a Sepher Torah



A Sefer Torah is a specially handwritten copy of the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) that meets extremely strict standards of production. It is written entirely in Hebrew and contains 304,805 letters, which must be duplicated precisely by a trained sofer (scribe). The process takes about 1-½ years and 65 cows or goats are needed to make enough parchment for one scroll.

Parchment Preparation. The parchment of a Torah must derive from a kosher animal, usually a cow. The animal must have died from natural causes or for the purpose of providing food. The skin is meticulously prepared by the scribe, who soaks it in lime-water to remove hairs, stretches it over a wooden frame to dry and scrapes it with a sanding machine to prepare the surface for writing. When the skin dries, it is cut into rectangle sheets. All parchments must be treated with salt, flour and a residual of wasp enzyme and tree bark. A Torah may require more than 80 sheets. The Scribe

must declare that the parchments are being made "for the sake of Heaven." Scribes mark out lines and columns with a stylus, making a colorless mark in the skin. Each sheet must have at least three columns and there must be a 3" top margin, 4" bottom margin and 2" of space between margins. Torahs are written with 42 lines of text per column (248 columns total).

Quill. Quills are made from the feathers of kosher birds, usually geese. Scribes carefully and patiently carve a point at the end of the feather (1/3 width of the letters) and use many quills in the process of writing a Torah.

Ink. Scribes prepare ink by combining powdered gallnuts, copper sulfate crystals, gum Arabic and water. Only a small amount is prepared at a time to keep the ink fresh. Fresh ink is deep black, the only color acceptable for writing a Torah.

Writing Ceremony. The scribe visits the mikveh (ritual pool) and prays for sanctity in his heart before he begins writing the Torah. A scroll must contain no errors whatsoever. A scribe must pronounce each word aloud before writing it. Minor mistakes can be corrected by scraping off the letter. The quill is wiped clean and the whole body is washed before writing the name of God. Before God's name is written, the scribe must say "My intention is now to write the Holy Name" and he must inscribe it without interruption. Mistakes writing the name of God cannot be corrected. The uncorrectable sheet must be buried or placed in a genizah (a storage area for sacred text set for burial). When a parchment is completed, the scribe checks it three times with the help of someone who uses a tikkun (which means "correction" and is a specially prepared text). The scribe sews the parchments together using thread made from gut or leg sinews (tendons) of kosher animals (usually cows, sheep or oxen). The complete scroll is sewn onto wooden rollers called Eitzei Chayim (trees of life).

External Decorations. A completed Sefer Torah is often symbolically dressed like an Old Testament High Priest with an ornamental breastplate, protective fine fabric and a crown of beaten silver. This decoration marks the scroll as sacred and holy, the living word of God and

the core of God's communication with Israel.

Crown. The Crown is also called two rimonim (pomegranates). It fits over the wooden dowels called the Trees of Life and is decorated with small bells to let people know the Torah is approaching. Everyone faces the Torah out of respect. A crown (miter) and bells were also worn by the High Priest in Old Testament times.

Yad. The Yad is a pointer used to follow the words of the Torah because you are not supposed to touch the parchment with your hands.

Cover. The Cover is called the Parachet and is named after the cover in the desert tabernacle that separated the inner sanctum from the rest of the tabernacle. It is also called a mantle and is symbolic of the High Priest's tunic.

Reading the Torah. The Torah is chanted according to a music system called trop (a system of cantillation marks and their music). Although the notation is standardized, there are many different musical systems employed for chanting the Torah. A Torah reader must be at least 13 years old. Jews commemorate their 13th birthday by reading from the Torah.

The creation of a Sefer Torah is an act of worship. There is a tradition that if the Torah is dropped, the one responsible must fast for 40 days. The Jewish Talmud cites Rabbi Eleazar as saying "Great is Torah for, were it not for it, heaven and earth would not exist."

The intricate and sacred ceremony of creating a Sefer Torah demonstrates its reverence among Jews. We can be confident that the 304,805 letters of a Sefer Torah are the same that Moses originally inscribed from God. Minor variations among existing ancient manuscripts exist, but only with misspelling (and not the meaning) of a few words. This was likely caused by a laxity among certain Jewish sects (like Samaritan Jews) when they copied the text.

Every word in the Torah has wisdom and insight for those who understand them. King David prayed "Open my eyes that I may behold the wonders of your Torah" (Ps 119:18). Among these wonders are prophecy, revelation and mysteries of Jesus (who is hidden in the Torah).