



A special holiday observed in Israel is called *Tu B'Shevat*. Its name literally means the 15th of *Shevat* or the 15th day of the month of *Shevat*, which occurs in mid-winter each year.

The holiday has its origins in the commandments of the Torah regarding tithing the produce of trees. According to Leviticus 27:30, “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to Adonai; it is holy to the Lord.” That practice went into effect when a tree reached its fourth year (Lev. 19:23-24). But it did not specify the exact day the counting of the year began for a tree.

The cutoff date for determining which year to assign a fruit tree became the subject of a debate between Hillel and Shammai, the two leading rabbis during the period of time a couple of decades before the birth of Yeshua (*Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 14b*). Hillel’s determination of that date being the 15th of *Shevat* became standardized, based on the reasoning that the heaviest winter rains in Israel have typically passed by that date, and the sap begins to rise in the trees, signaling a new fruit-bearing cycle.

In the Middle Ages, Jews began commemorating this date in a celebratory manner by holding a *Tu B'Shevat Seder*, modeled after the Passover Seder. It involves four cups of wine or juice with a range of colors from light to dark,

representing the change of seasons, and the consumption of biblical grains of wheat and barley and a variety of fruits that are:

- Hard on the outside (like almonds, walnuts and pomegranates).
- Soft on the outside and hard on the inside (like olives, dates, peaches and cherries).
- Soft on the inside and out (grapes, raisins, figs, strawberries, blueberries and apples).

In the late 19th century, Jewish pioneers returning to the land of Israel reimagined *Tu B'Shevat* as a day of national reforestation. It became known as the “New Year for Trees,” which has continued until modern times. So now, throughout the land of Israel on this day, a great number of trees are planted, many of them by school children in elaborate ceremonies.

In the late 20th century, the holiday expanded globally into a celebration of ecological awareness. It is now often called “Jewish Earth Day,” focusing on *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) by caring for the environment.

For Messianic believers, this day presents an opportunity to connect to the original meaning of the day in regard to dedicating the first tenth of all that we produce to the Lord. And it can provide a practical means of thanking God for His many provisions in our lives.