

BeYom Ha'Shemini Atzeret (שְׁמִינִי עֲצֵרֶת)

בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי עֲצֵרֶת תִּהְיֶה לָּכֶם כָּל-מְלָאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ

'On the eighth day you are to have a festive assembly: you are not to do any kind of ordinary work' (Nu 29:35)

Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are singular among Jewish holy days in that they are one festival with two names. According to the Torah's commandment, there is only one day—the eight day from the beginning of Sukkot—but since, in the Diaspora, a day is added to festivals, Shemini Atzeret, like other festivals, became two days. In Eretz Yisrael, however, it is still one day—and what a day it is! In addition to the regular festival ritual, there is *Geshem*, the Prayer for Rain, and *Yizkor*—and the celebration that the Diaspora Jews know as *Simchat Torah*, with the delirious singing and dancing that are part of the *Seven Hakafot*, the circuits around the synagogue with the Torah Scrolls. In Israel, which observes a single day, all the observances are compressed into one day, and it is known as *Simchat Torah*.

The two most prominent reasons we are to have *simcha* (joyfulness) on this day is because: (1) it was ordained by the Torah; (2) the completion of the cycle of Torah reading is itself a cause of great joy.

“Seven days you are to keep the festival for יהוה your Elohim in the place יהוה your Elohim will choose, because יהוה your Elohim will bless you in all your crops and in all your work, so you are to be full of joy!” (Deut 16:15)

In Messianic Judaism, we have yet another reason: Messiah was born during the festival. Using the principle of Ecc. 3:14-15, we can also expect Messiah's return in the season of Sukkot.

During Second Temple times, two events which no longer take place highlighted the celebration. Water, drawn from a nearby source (e.g., the Pool of *Siloam*), was brought to the Temple and poured out by the altar as Isaiah 12:3 was repeated: *“Then you will joyfully draw water from the springs of salvation.”* In Hebrew, this is a familiar song *“וּשְׂאֲבַתֶּם מַיִם בְּשֵׁשׁוֹן מִמְעֵינֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה:”* *‘Ushavtem Mayim BeSason Mima-Ayenei HaYeshua.’* The torchlight parade, brilliantly illuminating the Temple at night, stood out as the other great event, possibly reflecting one of the verses from the Hallel, e.g., Psalm 118:27 *“יהוה is Elohim, and he gives us light. Join in the pilgrim festival with branches all the way to the horns of the altar.”*

Yeshua chose these two events to highlight His mission as Messiah. As the water was being poured by the altar, he announced: *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Scripture says that rivers of living water will flow from his inmost being”* (Jo. 7:37-39). As torches lit up the Temple, he shouted: *“I am the light of the world...light will flood the path of the one following me”* (Jo. 8:12).

Messianic significance also abounds in the celebration as traditionally observed since Temple days. For example, two verses from the *Hallel* (Psalms 113-118) which certainly stand out are: *“The stone which the builders refused has become the head stone of the corner.”* This beautifully pictures the time when *Yeshua* will reign as Messiah, the King over all the earth. The waving of the *lulav*, an oriental form of welcome, will be directed toward Him in that day. One of the *Hoshana Rabba* prayers certainly echoes this welcome to Messiah.

“A voice heralds, heralds and saith: Turn unto me and be saved, today if you hear my voice. Behold the man who sprang forth, Branch is his name...” (Jer. 23:5: *‘The days are coming,’ says יהוה, ‘when I will raise a righteous Branch for David. He will reign as king and succeed, he will do what is just and right in the land.’*”)

“But to his anointed, the Messiah he gives grace, Grant salvation to the eternal people, to David and to his seed forever...” (cf Isa. 9:6-7 “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty G-d, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of יהוה-Tzeva’ot will perform this.”)

This prayer eagerly anticipates the coming of the Messianic kingdom. Then, people will rejoice in the presence of the living Torah, *Yeshua*, the one that is called the Word of God (cf. John 1:11). That *Simchat Torah* will have no rivals in its joy and celebration. Zechariah describes this as a time when ALL NATIONS, not just Israel (and those grafted into Israel), will keep the Festival of *Sukkot* and live in *sukkah*-booths.

“Finally, everyone remaining from all the nations that came to attack Yerushalayim will go up every year to worship the king, יהוה-Tzeva’ot, and to keep the festival of Sukkot. If any of the families of the earth does not go up to Yerushalayim to worship the king, יהוה-Tzeva’ot, no rain will fall on them. If the family of Egypt doesn't go up, if they refuse to come, they will have no overflow <overflow from the Nile>; moreover, there will be the plague with which יהוה will strike the nations that don't go up to keep the festival of Sukkot. This will be Egypt's punishment and the punishment of all the nations that don't go up to keep the festival of Sukkot.” (Zech 14:16-19)

When *Kefa* (Peter) awoke from dozing and for a moment caught sight of the glory of *Yeshua* reflected at His Transfiguration, he immediately thought the Messiah had come to rule. In the spirit of Zechariah 14, he appropriately suggested that they begin celebrating *Sukkot*. His idea was good, but his timing was off. *Kefa* discovered later that he had had the privilege of looking into the future that Zechariah had predicted. So *Sukkot* pictures the coming reign of Messiah over the earth, the millennial reign of ultimate freedom.

As we celebrate *Sukkot* each year, we can anticipate that time when the *sukkah*-booths will no longer picture our present “sojourn under His wings.” Then they will remind us of the past, before the reign of *Yeshua HaMashiach* the King. In the meantime the *sukkah*-booths remind us to depend upon יהוה and not material goods.

“Therefore, I tell you, don't worry about your life—what you will eat or drink; or about your body—what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds flying about! They neither plant nor harvest, nor do they gather food into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they are? Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to his life? "And why be anxious about clothing? Think about the fields of wild irises, and how they grow. They neither work nor spin thread, yet I tell you that not even Shlomo in all his glory was clothed as beautifully as one of these. If this is how God clothes grass in the field - which is here today and gone tomorrow, thrown in an oven—won't he much more clothe you? What little trust you have! "So don't be anxious, asking, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or 'How will we be clothed?' For it is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:25-33)

Let us close with *Yeshua*'s account of His own return in Matthew 24:

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the talmidim came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that you are coming, and that the ‘olam hazeh is ending?” ⁴*Yeshua* replied: “Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you! ⁵For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁶You will hear the noise of wars nearby and the news of wars far off; see to it that you don't become frightened. Such things must happen, but the end

is yet to come. ⁷For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world; ⁸all this is but the beginning of the 'birth-pains'. ⁹At that time you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death, and all peoples will hate you because of me. ¹⁰At that time many will be trapped into betraying and hating each other, ¹¹many false prophets will appear and fool many people; ¹²and many people's love will grow cold because of increased distance from Torah. ¹³But whoever holds out till the end will be delivered. ¹⁴And this Good News about the Kingdom will be announced throughout the whole world as a witness to all the Goyim. It is then that the end will come. ¹⁵"So when you see **the abomination that causes devastation** spoken about through the prophet Dani'el standing **in the Holy Place**" (let the reader understand the allusion), ¹⁶"that will be the time for those in Y'hudah to escape to the hills. ¹⁷If someone is on the roof, he must not go down to gather his belongings from his house; ¹⁸if someone is in the field, he must not turn back to get his coat. ¹⁹What a terrible time it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰Pray that you will not have to escape in winter or on Shabbat. ²¹For there will be **trouble then worse than there has ever been from the beginning of the world until now and there will be nothing like it again!** ²²Indeed, if the length of this time had not been limited, no one would survive; but for the sake of those who have been chosen, its length will be limited. ²³"At that time, if someone says to you, 'Look! Here's the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' don't believe him; ²⁴for there will appear false Messiahs and false prophets performing great miracles—amazing things!—so as to fool even the chosen, if possible. ²⁵There! I have told you in advance! ²⁶So if people say to you, 'Listen! He's out in the desert!' don't go; or, 'Look! He's hidden away in a secret room!' don't believe it. ²⁷For when the Son of Man does come, it will be like lightning that flashes out of the east and fills the sky to the western horizon. ²⁸Wherever there's a dead body, that's where you find the vultures. ²⁹"But immediately following the trouble of those times, **the sun will grow dark, the moon will stop shining, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in heaven will be shaken.** ³⁰"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, **all the tribes of the Land will mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven** with tremendous power and glory. ³¹He will send out his angels **with a great shofar**; and they will gather together his chosen people from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ³²"Now let the fig tree teach you its lesson: when its branches begin to sprout and leaves appear, you know that summer is approaching. ³³In the same way, when you see all these things, you are to know that the time is near, right at the door. ³⁴Yes! I tell you that this people will certainly not pass away before all these things happen. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³⁶"But when that day and hour will come, no one knows—not the angels in heaven, not the Son, only the Father. ³⁷For the Son of Man's coming will be just as it was in the days of Noach. ³⁸Back then, before the Flood, people went on eating and drinking, taking wives and becoming wives, right up till the day Noach entered the ark; ³⁹and they didn't know what was happening until the Flood came and swept them all away. It will be just like that when the Son of Man comes. ⁴⁰Then there will be two men in a field—one will be taken and the other left behind. ⁴¹There will be two women grinding flour at the mill—one will be taken and the other left behind. ⁴²So stay alert, because you don't know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³But you do know this: had the owner of the house known when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you too must always be ready, for the Son of Man will come when you are not expecting him.