

CHAPTER 10

Shemini Atzeret and *Simchat Torah*

Immediately following the last day of *Sukkot*, *Hoshana Rabbah*, is *Shemini Atzeret* (the eighth day of assembly). *Shemini Atzeret* along with *Simchat Torah* are celebrated together on Tishrei 22 and 23. As it is written, "On the eighth day you shall hold a solemn gathering (*Atzeret*); you shall not work at your occupations" (Numbers [*Bamidbar*] 29:35). The rabbis interpreted this verse to mean that G-d asks all who made a pilgrimage for *Sukkot* to tarry (*atzeret*, which comes from the Hebrew root word meaning "to hold back") with Him one additional day. From this, the rabbis concluded that *Shemini Atzeret* is an independent festival.

To understand *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*, we must review a few things. First, the seven days of Passover (*Pesach*) are followed by a 49-day period of counting the omer, which climaxes with the fiftieth day of Pentecost (*Shavuot*). Thus, the liberation of Passover (*Pesach*) is linked with the revelation and giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, known as *Shavuot* (Pentecost). If we look at the festival cycle, *Shemini Atzeret* is analogous to *Shavuot*, which is understood to be the conclusion or *atzeret* to Passover (*Pesach*). Just like *Shavuot*, a one-day festival, is the conclusion to *Pesach*, a seven-day festival, so *Shemini Atzeret*, a one-day festival, is the conclusion to *Sukkot*, a seven-day festival.

Therefore, we see that *Shemini Atzeret* is the eighth day -- that is the day after "seven." Seven, being a perfect number in the Bible, signifies a complete unit of time as each week ends with the seventh day called the *Shabbat* (Sabbath). Thus, the eighth day is the day after time. It is the end of both kinds of time. It is thus not just the promise of redemption, but the actual moment of it. G-d said, "Remain with Me (*atzeret*) an extra day," a time beyond time.

Simchat Torah: Rejoicing in the Torah

At last comes the most joyous day of all, the day of *Simchat Torah*, rejoicing in the Torah. *Simchat Torah* is celebrated on the twenty-third of Tishrei, or the day following *Shemini Atzeret*. Once again, it should be noted that the Hebrew word *Torah* means "teaching [or instruction]," for it teaches us our

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way of life, the kind of life G-d wants us to lead. The *Torah* is the foundation for understanding the entire Bible.

The Cyclical Reading of the Torah

Until the early Middle Ages, there was more than one cycle with regard to the reading of the Torah. In fact, the most widespread cycle was the triennial one, in which the reading of the Torah took three years and ended before Passover (*Pesach*).

In modern times, the annual reading cycle became predominant. Therefore, *Simchat Torah* became the end of the reading cycle and thus its own festival day. As just stated, the Torah reading cycle is concluded on *Simchat Torah*. However, at this time, it is immediately started again from the beginning. This shows that there is no end to the Torah, and that it must be read and studied constantly, over and over again. The Torah, like G-d Himself who gave it, is everlasting (Matthew [*Mattityahu*] 5:17-18).

Simchat Torah celebrates a Torah of joy, a Torah without restrictions or a sense of burden.

Yeshua and Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

Tishrei 22, *Shemini Atzeret*, and Tishrei 23, *Simchat Torah*, in ancient times were considered one long day and celebrated on Tishrei 22. *Simchat Torah* is a celebration of rejoicing in the Torah.

As it is written in John (*Yochanan*) 7:37, "In the last day, that great day of the feast [of *Sukkot*]...." This day would be known as *Hoshana Rabbah*, or Tishrei 21. In John (*Yochanan*) 8:1-2, it is written, "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came unto Him; and He sat down, and taught them." This is the next day after *Hoshana Rabbah*, the day attached to *Sukkot* called *Shemini Atzeret*. Once again, in ancient times that day was also called *Simchat Torah*, the rejoicing in the Torah. So, in John (*Yochanan*) 8:5, we see *Yeshua*, the author of the Torah, is questioned about the Torah on the day referred to as "the rejoicing in the Torah."

The Spiritual Understanding of *Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah*

In Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 31:9-13, at the Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles), you are to read the Torah. The seventh year is called the year of release (Deuteronomy [*Devarim*] 31:10); all debts are to be forgiven at this time (Exodus [*Shemot*] 21:2; Leviticus [*Vayikra*] 25:1-4; Deuteronomy [*Devarim*] 15:1-12; Jeremiah [*Yermiyahu*] 34:8-22). The seven years are a picture of the 7,000-year plan of G-d (Psalm [*Tehillim*] 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8). The seventh year is the year of release and is a picture of the

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seventh day or the Messianic age, the Millennium, or the *Athid Lavo*. *Yeshua* referred to this in both Isaiah (*Yeshayahu*) 61:1-3 and Luke 4:16-21. The phrase, "liberty to the captives" in Isaiah (*Yeshayahu*) 61:1, speaks of the year of release. *Yeshua* is saying, in essence, "I am that release. Trust in Me and you will be free."

In the days of *Yeshua*, there was a seven-year cycle of reading the Torah. In years one through three, the people would read from the Torah, the prophets and the writings. In years three through six, they would start over. In year seven, they would read from them all. While reading, the priest would stand on a podium (*bema*) and give the understanding and teaching (Nehemiah 8:1-12). This was done during the Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) (Nehemiah 8:2,13-14,18).

In the future, we will experience the real *Simchat Torah* during the time G-d judges the believers in the Messiah according to the lives they lived on this earth. At that time, when we hear the truth of the Bible and understand G-d's Word, we will cry when we see how we have failed to keep and follow the Bible and G-d's truths. But G-d will say, "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the L-rd is your strength" (see Nehemiah [*Nechemiah*] 8:9-10). At this time, we will not be going through the rehearsal (*miqra*) of the festival, but we will be experiencing the "season of our joy," the time of the Messianic kingdom on earth. The reading, teaching, and understanding of the Torah will be at its height during the Messianic age, the Millennium. In Isaiah (*Yeshayahu*) 2:1-5 and Micah (*Michah*) 4:1-5, *Yeshua*, the Messiah, the author and teacher of the Torah, will teach all the peoples of the earth the ways of the Torah.

Rain and Dew: (*Geshem* and *Tal*: A Prayer for Rain)

On the festival of *Shemini Atzeret*, the *Musaf*, the additional service on this day, begins with a special prayer for rain (*geshem*). The reason for these special prayers is understandable enough (if you have lived in the land of Israel). The winter months in the Holy Land are the rain season, and the entire life of the country depends on rain. If the rains come down in their due season and in sufficient quantity, the rich soil will produce abundant crops and fruits; if not, the country is doomed to famine and starvation. During the summer months, there is no rain; it's the dry season. During these rainless months, the earth would have been completely parched, the top soil would have turned into dust and been blown away by the wind, and the land would have turned into barren desert -- were it not for the dew that settles on the cool soil during the hours of the night, drenching the ground with the soft moisture which we know as dew and which sparkles in the early rays of the sun like pearls. Thus, the rain in the winter and the dew in the summer are vitally needed to sustain life.

Spiritual Application (Halacha). Because this chapter concludes the festivals, we will review the spiritual significance of the festivals to the individual believer in the Messiah and how they relate to his life. Therefore, at this time, we can conclude with the spiritual significance of the fall festivals, especially *Sukkot*, *Shemini Atzeret*, and *Simchat Torah*.

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G-d designed the agricultural and weather seasons in Israel to parallel the life of every believer in *Yeshua* who seeks to love Him and serve Him with all his heart. With this in mind, let us examine how this is true.

Every time a person receives *Yeshua* the Messiah as his own Savior, he spiritually experiences Passover (*Pesach*). He is to flee Egypt (*Mitzrayim*; the world's evil system and ways); trust (*emunah*) in the Messiah, the Lamb of G-d; and allow *Yeshua* to be the doorpost of his heart. As believers, we are then to seek to live holy lives before G-d and experience Unleavened Bread (*Hag HaMatzah*). Just as *Yeshua* rose from the dead, we are to consider our former ways dead to us and experience the newness of life in the Messiah. Once we do this, we can be immersed (baptized) in the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) and have the power of G-d (the anointing) in our lives. Spiritually, we have experienced the spring harvest of Israel in our lives. When we accept *Yeshua* into our hearts and lives, He begins to teach us the Bible and show us how much He loves us, and we begin to grow in the knowledge of Him.

At that time, G-d will begin to take us on a spiritual journey through the wilderness of life. Spiritually, we will begin to experience the dry summer season of Israel. Many things in our lives will not go the way we expect them to or how we trust G-d for them to go. In the process of experiencing life's bitter disappointments and struggles, if we keep our eyes upon G-d, He will take us from Passover (*Pesach*) to *Shavuot* (Pentecost). There He will reveal His ways and His Word, the Bible, in a deeper and more progressive way. By keeping our eyes on the Messiah through life's struggles, G-d will not only reveal His Word, the Bible, to us in a greater way, but He also will refine our faith like fine flour, just as was done to the wheat during the days of counting the *omer* between Passover (*Pesach*) and *Shavuot* (Pentecost). Meanwhile, if we put our entire trust (*emunah*) in *Yeshua* while on our spiritual journey in the wilderness of life as G-d refines our faith and reveals Himself to us in a greater way, then our spiritual journey will not end in the wilderness of life (Hallelujah!). Instead G-d will take us forward to spiritually experience the fall festivals and our spiritual promised land.

It is when we spiritually experience the fall festivals -- especially the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* -- and enter into our spiritual promised land that G-d will anoint our lives for Him in an awesome way, as we live and serve Him, and we will then experience the greatest joy in our entire lives. Joy unspeakable! But we will experience not only joy, but also dancing, praise, victory, peace, and the power of G-d in our lives. Spiritually, we will be experiencing the fall harvest of Israel. The rain in the Bible speaks of two things: the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) and an in-depth understanding of *Yeshua* and His Word, the Bible, in our lives. Both the anointing of the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) and great knowledge of spiritual truths will be present in our lives in order that we may accomplish the purpose G-d has for every one of our lives. Therefore, we have the anointing of G-d upon our lives so we may help to do our part to build up the Body of Messiah to full maturity and to establish the Kingdom of G-d on earth until we come to that day when we will rule and reign with the Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords on earth during the Messianic age, the Millennium, and for all eternity.

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Messianic Fulfillment and Understanding

When G-d created man and put him in the Garden of Eden (*Gan Eden*), the Garden of Eden was like paradise, Heaven, or the world to come, known in Hebrew as the *olam haba*. However, man sinned and as a result, both man and the earth was diminished in comparison to the original glory and beauty in which it was created. As a result, G-d laid out a 7,000-year plan to restore both man and the earth back to the glory and majesty of the Garden of Eden (*Gan Eden*). The Messiah was to play a central role in this redemption.

In Hosea 6:3 and Joel 2:23, the Scriptures tell us that the coming of the Messiah *Yeshua* will be like the rain. As previously discussed, in Israel there are the spring rains that are in the form of dew and showers, and the fall rains that make up the great rainy season. In His wisdom, G-d gave the weather season in Israel to teach about the coming of the Messiah. Just as there are mainly spring rains and fall rains in Israel, G-d designed for two comings of the Messiah. During the first coming of the Messiah, the Messiah would fulfill the role of *Messiah ben Joseph*, the suffering Messiah. During His second coming, the Messiah would fulfill the role of *Messiah ben David*, the King Messiah. Those who would receive the Messiah in the season of His first coming would, spiritually, be like the spring rains in Israel and G-d would pour out His Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) upon all people at this time. However, the greatest number of people who would accept the Messiah would be during the season of the fall rains in Israel, which speaks of the Messiah's second coming. The greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) would be at this time as well.

This great outpouring of the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) and the knowledge of the Messiah on earth, will reach their greatest height during the Messianic age, the Millennium, and continuing into eternity. This is what the fall rains in Israel are spiritually all about and are why G-d instructed the people to pray for rain during the festival season of *Sukkot* including *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*. After all, *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) and *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* were given to us by G-d to instruct us what life would be like during the Messianic age and all eternity when the knowledge of the Messiah and the Spirit of G-d will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, as prophesied in the Book of Zechariah. For *Yeshua* the Messiah is both the Former and Latter Rain and the Teacher of Righteousness (Hosea [*Hoshea*] 6:3; Joel [*Yoel*] 2:23; Psalm [*Tehillim*] 72:6; 84:5-6; John [*Yochanan*] 3:2; Isaiah [*Yeshayahu*] 55:10-12). How glorious it will be to live with the Messiah during those days! This is the essence of the festivals of the L-rd!

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