Hoshana Rabah, Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

The Last Days of Sukkot

By Hannah Nesher www.voiceforisrael.net

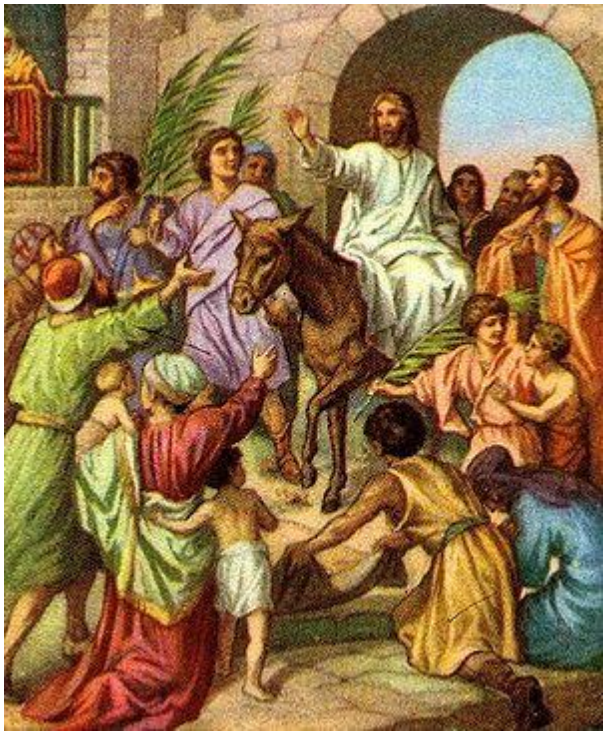
Hoshana Rabah { הוֹשַׁעְנָא רַבָּא } Great Deliverance

Readings: Numbers 26-34, John 7:1-2, 37-42

As we approach the end of Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) Jewish people in Israel and around the world celebrate with three concluding festive days. The seventh day is called **Hoshana Rabah** (Great Salvation) when the people cry out "*Hoshana Adonai*" - "Save us Lord!"

Centuries ago, a great multitude of Jewish people had come to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover; and when they heard that Yeshua was coming, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out,

***"Hosha - Na**!" (Save us!). "**Baruch Haba B'shem Adonai**" (Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord)! **Melech Yisrael** (King of Israel)!"* (John 12:12-13)



Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey is depicted on an early 1900s Bible card illustration

The cries of God's people are not in vain, for God promises that all who call upon His name will be saved. "**And everyone who calls on the name of יהוה will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as Adonai has said, among the survivors whom Adonai calls**." **(**Joel 2:32**)** This promise is repeated in the New Covenant. [1]

Why are the people crying out, "*Hoshana*! (*Save us*!)" on this day? Jewish tradition maintains that although judgment is sealed on Yom Kippur, it is not 'delivered' until the end of Sukkot on Hoshana Rabah, giving a little more time to possibly alter God's verdict for the coming year.

Seven Hoshanot

While during Sukkot, the Jewish people walk in a daily circuit around the synagogue holding the four species of branches and fruit, on the last day (Hoshana Rabah) seven circuits - called hoshanot - are observed. This custom originates from the days of the Holy Temple.[2]

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[1] Romans 10:13

[2] As recorded in the Mishnah: "It was customary to make one procession around the altar on each day of Sukkot, and seven on the seventh day" (Sukkah 4:5).

What do these circuits represent? They are to demonstrate our joy and thanksgiving for a blessed and fruitful year. Why seven circuits on the last day? Seven is a number in the Bible that symbolizes perfection, wholeness or completion (as in the 7th day Sabbath when all of creation was complete and perfect).

It is believed that encircling something or someone seven times breaks down the walls of separation, just as when the Israelites encircled the walls of Jericho seven times, "the wall fell down flat." (Joshua 6:20)

Sephardic Jews observe Hoshana Rabah illustration by Bernard Picart

For this reason a Jewish bride will traditionally encircle her bridegroom seven times before approaching the altar. [3] This is believed to tear down any walls of separation between them and give her entrance into the depths of her beloved's heart.

It is a beautiful Jewish custom. In similar manner, when the Jewish people circle around the synagogue seven times, holding the palm or willow branches and etrog (citroen), we demonstrate to the Lord our desire as His bride to tear down any walls of separation between us and our Heavenly Father.

The seven circuits also represent the Scripture: "*Erhatz benikayon kappay, va'asovevah et mizbahakha Hashem"* - "I wash my hands in purity and circle around Your altar, O Lord" (Psalms 26:6). Each 'hoshana' honors one of the Jewish patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David. Also included on Hoshana Rabah are verses expressing hope for the soon coming of the Messiah.

[3] You can see this custom observed in my daughter's wedding video with Emanuel in the DVD "A Messianic Jewish Wedding in Jerusalem available through the website: www.voiceforisrael.net

SHMINI ATZERET (שְׁמִינִי עֲצֶרֶת) – "Eighth [day of] Assembly"

Deuteronomy 14:22 – 16:17, 1 Kings 8:54-9:1, Matthew 17:1-9

"For seven days present food offerings to the Lord, and **on the eighth day** hold a sacred assembly and present a food offering to the Lord. It is the closing special assembly; do no regular work." *(Leviticus 23:36; Numbers 29:35)*

If the number seven is so meaningful – representing 'wholeness, completion and perfection' – why do we need an 'eighth day'? The eighth day of Sukkot is also special. The Hebrew word for 'eighth' is 'shmini' שְׁמִינִי. It is a significant number which represents covenant. It is on the 8th day that every Jewish male child is brought into covenant (brit) with the God of Israel through the ceremony of circumcision (Brit Millah).

Brit Milah (circumcision ceremony) for Avi (2002)

What does this mean to us and how does this relate to Shmini Atzeret? Although seven is the number of completion and perfection, God gives us an additional day to celebrate that goes even beyond seven! This tells us of the amazing wonders that God will reveal to those who love Him. But, as the *Tanakh* says, **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard and no one's heart has imagined all the things that God has prepared for those who love him."** (1 Corinthians 2:9)

To be a 'Hebrew' is called an 'Ivri' עברי. It comes from the root word that means 'to cross over'. All of us who are in the Messiah, whether Jewish by birth or not, have 'crossed over' from the Kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light (of His Son); therefore we are all in essence 'Ivrim' עברים (Hebrews).

There is another related meaning that comes from this root word. 'm'ever' מעבר means 'beyond'. These blessings that we receive through the New Covenant are far above and beyond even anything we could ask, or think, or even imagine! Wow! "**Now to the One being able to do exceedingly above and beyond all things that we ask or think, according to the power working in us**." (Ephesians 3:20)

How is it that we could possibly receive such an awesome blessing from Adonai? It is not because of any righteousness or goodness in ourselves; but only through covenant (brit) – the New Covenant we have in Yeshua the Messiah.

Seven is the number of completion – resting in the finished work of the Lord. Once we come to this place of resting in Him through faith, we can enter fully into this New Covenant – knowing He has done it all on our behalf. We can cease from striving for perfection in ourselves and simply receive His perfection – in us. Eight is the number of new beginnings. The full week of seven has been completed and we begin again. It is a number of the great hope we have through covenant with the Almighty God.

Showers of Blessings

Israelis hold umbrellas to protect themselves from the rain as they walk on Jaffa Street, downtown Jerusalem, October 31, 2014. (Miriam Alster/Flash90) Times of Israel

Rabbinic Tradition teaches that on the eight day of assembly, **Shemini Atzeret,** God judges the world for water, deciding on the amount of rainfall for the coming year, therefore the Jewish people recite special prayers for rain on this day.

God's covenant with Israel also promises 'rain in its season' as long as the people of Israel walk in obedience. "***I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing***." (Ezekiel 34:26)

I will never forget when I came to Israel for the Brit Milah ceremony of my second grandson, Yoah, born in Feb 2009. Israel had been experiencing a terrible drought at that time; but immediately after Yoah was brought into covenant with the Almighty God, it began to rain…and rain…and rain! It poured for the rest of the week and beyond.

Hannah & her daughter Courtney at Yoah's Brit Millah

Even when I went up to Haifa it poured such abundant rain that the streets began to flood. People said they had never seen anything like it! A pastor from America had come to the congregation and prophesied the rain to be a sign of God's favor and blessings that He is about to pour out upon His people in Israel. Halleluyah!

Hope of the Messiah

Water is a recurring theme throughout the festival of Sukkot; but why is there such an emphasis on water? Besides the obvious need for rain to water the earth, the rains also symbolize showers of blessing and specifically, the hope of the coming Messiah.

"**He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace…He shall have dominion also from seas to sea**." (Psalm 72:6-8)

Rain is desperately needed in Israel! Water is such a precious resource here. After a long, hot, dry summer in Israel, the people must have felt their critical need of water; and yet they did not withhold the water, but poured it out on the altar before the Lord. This sacrificial act demonstrated their faith in God to provide the rains they would need in the upcoming year.

Nahal Paran, Negev Desert

Poured Out Like Water

Likewise, when we feel at the end of our resources, if we will give sacrificially to the Lord, He will pour back into our lives, providing for our needs. When we are feeling lack in any area of our lives, this is the worst possible time to withhold; it is a time to give in faith that God is our provider. I heard someone once say, "*If you have a need, give a seed*."

The Bible says, "*Give and it shall be given unto you*…."; but this principle extends far beyond the area of finances into every aspect of our lives. Whatever we give out will be poured out upon ourselves. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38)

If we want to experience more love, we need to give more love to others. If we need encouragement – we can go out and find someone else to encourage. And if we need a financial blessing, probably the best thing we can do is go give some money away.

Yeshua understood these spiritual principles and acted upon them. He knew that when we pour ourselves out, God will pour back - in abundance! Yeshua was" **poured out like water**", as described in the Messianic prophecy: **"I am poured out like water,** and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me." (Psalms 22, verse 14)

However, it was after He **poured out His soul even unto death** on a cross, that God poured out **the 'rain of the Holy Spirit'** upon the earth.

On this final day of the Feast, a special ceremony is performed called **Simchat Beit Hashoeva** (Rejoicing of the House of Drawing of Water), originating from a Second Temple period custom in which the Cohen (priest) would draw water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it out upon the altar. In this ancient water ceremony, the Jewish people would follow the Cohen in a joyous processional of singing, dancing and rejoicing, reciting hallel (praise) Psalms (Tehillim) and chanting the Scripture: **"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation (Yeshuah)."** (Isaiah 12:3)

Lower pool, Breikhat Hashiloah

Yeshua, the word used in this verse is also the Hebrew name for Jesus the Messiah. It means '**God is salvation' or God saves**. The pool of Siloam, a rock cut pool, fed by the waters of the Gihon Spring, is located on the southern slope of the City of David, outside the walls of the Old City. This pool is the very site where Yeshua sent a man who had been blind from birth as part of the act of healing him. "**Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam"[4]. So the man went and washed, and came home seeing**." (John 9:7)

On the last day of the Feast (Shmini Atzeret), Yeshua stood up and invited everyone who was thirsty to come to Him and drink of the Living Waters. Can we picture this? At the same moment that the Cohanim (Jewish priests) were pouring out the waters upon the altar of the Holy Temple, Yeshua stood up and proclaimed Himself to be the source of Living Water!

On the last and greatest day of the festival (of Sukkot), Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "**Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of Living Water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.**" (John 7:37-38)

The *Water of Life Discourse* by Angelika Kauffmann

When Yeshua encountered a Samaritan woman at the well, someone who (on her fifth intimate relationship) was obviously thirsting for true love, He spoke to her of this living water that would alone quench her thirst. In this discourse, Yeshua clearly declared Himself the Messiah. Yeshua said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' (John 4:13-14)

[4] this word in Hebrew means "Sent"

All who are Thirsty

In this hot, dry country of Israel it is easy to become dehydrated if we don't drink enough water. Sometimes we may be thirsty without even realizing it. If we don't purposefully drink enough water, this can even lead to dangerous physical collapse. We can live for quite a while without food but life quickly dies without water.

So too do we need to drink deeply from the wells of living water that Yeshua provides through relationship and fellowship with Him. The vultures of hell circle overhead, watching for their next meal. They are just waiting for someone to collapse from spiritual sunstroke and dehydration. But we can drink of the Living Waters of salvation – before it's too late!

Yeshua said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Fountain in Independence Park, Jerusalem

If we will accept Yeshua's invitation to come to Him when we are weary or full of sorrow and drink from the Spirit, then we can prevent a spiritual collapse. None of us are camels; we humans cannot travel for long distances without drinking water. We can only walk from oasis to oasis in this wilderness.

We may not necessarily feel thirsty, but we need to come daily and drink deeply from the fountain of living waters to quench our thirsty soul.

"**Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.**" (Isaiah 55:1)

Simchat Torah **(שמחת תורה)** 'Rejoicing with the Torah'

Deuteronomy 33 – 34, Genesis 1:1-2:3, Numbers 29:35 – 30:1, Joshua 1:1 – 18, Matthew 5:17 - 48

Following the eighth day[5], the fall feasts are concluded with Simchat Torah – meaning 'Joy of the Torah'. This day also completes the weekly Torah readings (parashot) with Deuteronomy 34; but then immediately a portion from Genesis 1 is read, reminding us that our study of the Torah never ends. As soon as we conclude, we begin again.

[5] In Israel, Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah are combined into one day; but outside of Israel in the Diaspora two separate days are observed.

Dancing with the Torah

Jewish people love the Torah and have diligently preserved the Word of God for centuries.

"Oh, how I love Your Torah; It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies…Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." *(Psalm 119:97-98, 105)*

Simchat Torah gives joyful expression to the Jewish people's love of Torah. What is Torah? This Hebrew word, Torah תורה, is often translated in most English Bibles as '*law*'; however this is a rather poor translation. It reminds me of the laws to wear our seatbelts or keep to the speed limit. Torah is so much more than just a compilation of do's and don't's.

The word 'torah' comes from the roots '*yarah*' ירה, which means to '*shoot, aim, or point to'*, and '*morah'* מורה, meaning 'teacher'.

Therefore, the Torah is God's instructions to His people. These instructions teach us how to live on this earth and point us to eternal life through Yeshua. The Torah, in its strictest sense, includes the five books of Moses: Genesis (B'reisheet), Exodus (Shmot), Leviticus (Vaykira), Numbers (Bamidbar), and Deuteronomy (D'varim).

However, Yeshua and Paul both quoted from other books of the Bible, including the Psalms and the Prophets, and called them Torah (law).

"Yeshua answered them, '**Is it not written in your Law (Torah), I said, 'You are gods'**"? (John 10:34) In this passage, Yeshua is quoting Psalm 82:6.

"**In the Law (Torah) it is written: 'With men of other tongue and other lips I will speak to this people'** " (1Corinthians 14:21) This quote Paul refers to as law is from the book of the Prophet Isaiah 28:11.

Another word for Torah often used by Jewish people is the Tanakh תנך. The Tanakh is a Hebrew name for all the books of the Old Testament. This word is actually an acronym: T-N-K {Hebrew letters tav, nun, kaf} - an abbreviation for: Torah, Neviim (prophets) and Ktuvim (Writings – Psalms, proverbs, etc).

Observant Orthodox Jews consider another whole compilation of writings as 'Torah'. These are called the 'oral law' and include the Talmud, Mishnah, and Gemorrah, comprised of rabbinical interpretations of scriptures.

Many consider the oral law of equal weight and authority as the written Torah and spend the majority of their time and study in these books, sometimes to the exclusion of the written word itself. However, most followers of Yeshua do not accept the Talmud as 'law' and rely upon the written scriptures that comprise both the Tanakh and the Brit Hadashah (New Testament).

So why do we have a special day just to rejoice in the Torah of God? It is because the Word of God is a tree of life for us; and if we would just take hold of it, we would see that all its paths are pleasantness and will lead us to peace (shalom).

The Kotel in Jerusaelm as people gather on Simchat Torah

The Torah contains all the wisdom and instruction we need to live healthy, happy, successful, prosperous lives. The Haftorah (prophetic portion of Scripture) for Simchat Torah includes the 1st chapter of the book of Joshua (verses 1-18).

Sterling silver Torah case

The Lord said to Joshua, "***Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do.***

Study this Book of Instruction (Torah) continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. (Joshua 1:7-8) NLT

God initially chose to reveal His Torah to the nation of Israel; and He gave them the mission to spread its light and teachings to every nation of the earth. Yeshua is the living word that became flesh and dwelt amongst us. While Yeshua fulfilled and did away with the old sacrificial system, He makes it clear that He never came to abolish the Torah, or God's moral guidelines for mankind to live in righteousness.

Did Yeshua Abolish the Torah?

Yeshua made His position about the Torah clear, in saying, "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law (Torah) of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.

So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 5:17-19 N.L.T)

Simchat Torah in Mea Shearim, Jerusalem

On this day of Simchat Torah, all the ornately decorated scrolls are taken out of the 'ark' in which they are kept and preserved so carefully all year long. Jewish people all around the world parade around and around the synagogues, in circles called 'hakafot', holding their precious Torah, accompanied by jubilant singing and dancing.

Young and old, male and female, may all partake of the honor of dancing, singing, and rejoicing with the Torah on this special day. The barrier (machitzah) that separates the men from the women is, for this one day, removed, and all may rejoice as One People.

Simchat Torah in Tel Aviv

We also hope and pray for a day when the machitzah (dividing wall), which has already been pulled down by the ultimate sacrifice of Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah) will be removed forever; and we will all rejoice in the Torah as One (Echad) in His hand. Halleluyah!

CHAG SAMEACH (JOYFUL FESTIVAL!)

Sisu v'simchu (Rejoice & be glad) b'Simchat Torah

About the Author:

Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She made aliyah (immigrated to Israel), and is now teaching about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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"For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2:3)

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