Sukkot Chol Hamoed (חול המועד) (Tabernacles Intermediate Sabbath)

A Messianic Jewish Commentary

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Exodus 33:12-34:26; Ezekiel 38:18-39:16, Revelation 7:1-10

Shabbat Chol HaMoed (Intermediate Sabbath)

Decorations hanging from the s'chach (top or "ceiling") on the inside of a sukkah.

During each of the week-long festivals of Pesach (Passover) and Sukkot (Tabernacles), a special Torah portion specifically pertaining to the feast is read and studied rather than the regular parashah. This Shabbat that occurs during the "intermediate days" of Pesach and Sukkot is known simply as '*Shabbat Chol HaMoed'* .

The Hebrew expression, 'Chol HaMoed', literally means, "Weekday of the Festival"; and are the days sandwiched in between the first and last days of the holiday which the Word of God declares 'holy or sacred days' in which no work may be done. In these festivals that last a full week, there are these 'in-between' days which are still festive – and yet work is permitted.

These 'chol hamoed' days, as part of the Feast of Rejoicing, are the perfect opportunity for religiously observant Jews to go out and enjoy fun tiyulim (trips), travel, or recreational family outings since these things are not allowed on Shabbat or Holy Days. Live music and art festivals, street dances abound during the entire week.

What does this mean for the 'regular Israeli'? Incredibly long traffic jams on almost every highway; and overcrowding in almost every public place, event and attraction in the country!

Although not for the faint-of-heart, these conditions do not deter many from enjoying trips around the country and taking advantage of the beautiful Fall weather in the Land of Israel. Parks, pools, beaches, museums and zoos are full of people on 'chofesh' (freedom of the holiday) since (according to halachah – tradition) driving a car and using electricity is permitted during these days (except on Shabbat).

Some Orthodox Jews make a pilgrimage to Hebron to visit the Cave of the Patriarchs during Chol Hamoed Sukkot.

In addition to the designated Torah and haftorah (prophetic) readings, the entire Sefer Kohelet (The book of Ecclesiastes) is also traditionally read aloud in the synagogue on this day.

That I May Know You

In the Scripture portion for this Shabbat, Moses came to God with a simple request – that He would know Him more and find favor in His sight. **"Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight."** (Exodus 33:13)

Isn't this amazing – the man who heard God speak to him in a burning bush – who actually went up the mountain and spent forty days and nights in the very presence of the Almighty God – who is called a 'friend of God' asks to know Him more. Wow!

The apostle Paul expressed a similar sentiment – that to know the Messiah was worth the loss of everything else in his life: "*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Messiah Yeshua Adoni (my Lord), for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Messiah and be found in Him…that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings*…" (Philippians 3:8-10)

How could these great men of God ask only to know Him more? Weren't they already close enough in their relationship with Adonai? It seems to me that the closer we are to the Lord, the closer we want to be – and the farther we are from Him, the less we desire His presence.

In Your Presence

Moses also asked God for His presence to dwell with His people; and God agreed. "**Consider too, that this nation is Your people."And He said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.**" (Exodus 33:13b & 14)

Isn't this the one thing that we all so desperately need? We may seek for peace of mind, fulfillment, love, happiness and wealth; but in reality that which we are truly seeking for can only be found in the presence of the Almighty God, El Shaddai, El Elyon (God above all).

"**You will show me the path of life; In Your *presence* is fullness of joy;**
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." (Psalm 16:11)

Blessed Rest

"My Presence will go *with you,* and I will give you rest." (Exodus 33:14)

Not only do we find joy in God's presence but also blessed rest. In our harried lives, this is the one quality that many people find so elusive. Some people may take exotic vacations but still not find the true rest and peace they are seeking. Many people are weary and burdened by the cares and concerns of life.

Yeshua extends a wonderful promise that we can come to Him and find rest for our souls. He says, "*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30)

God With Us (Immanu – El)

Moses has enough sense to know that if God's presence doesn't go with them, then he doesn't even want to attempt the journey. "**Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here**." (Exodus 33:15)

This should be the case for us as well; we do not want to attempt any endeavor in which God's presence is not 'with us'. We can be so thankful that when God sent His Son to be born upon the earth as the Messiah, His name was called 'Imman-El', עמנואל**,** which in Hebrew means, '*With us – God'*.

"**Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin (young maiden) will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel**." (Isaiah 7:14)

God has promised in His Word that He will never leave us or forsake us; therefore we can trust that He is always with us – in every place, time and circumstance.

Distinguishing Marks

Why was it so important to Moses that God's presence went with them? It was because this would be the mark that would distinguish God's people from any other nation.

" **Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth**?" (Exodus 33:16)

Shepherds sometimes have a practice of placing a special mark upon their sheep, such as pink spray paint, so as their own sheep may be distinguished from all the other flocks of sheep.

Yeshua has told us what that distinguishing mark would be upon His own flock of sheep – <u>love</u>. It is by the love that we have for one another that we may be distinguished as Yeshua's disciples

from all other people who are upon the face of the earth. Is this true for us? Can people tell by observing our love for one another that we belong to Yeshua? Hmmm….

"**By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another**." (John 13:35)

Show Me Your Glory

And he (Moses) said, "**Please, show me Your glory."** (Exodus 33:18)

Moses asked God to show him His glory - a request to which God agreed, but only in part. God said, "**You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"** (Exodus 33:20)

Moses would be allowed only to see God's back, but not His face; for no one can see the full glory of the face of God and still live. It is through Yeshua that we can see the face of God, for Yeshua said that if we have seen Him, then we have seen the Father.

"Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Yeshua said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father '?" (John 14:8-9)

Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

In order for Moses to see God's glory, he needed to hide himself in the cleft of a rock and God covered Moses with His hand while He passed by in all of His glory. Can we even imagine how awesome it would have been to see the brilliance of God's glory as did Moses? After this supernatural encounter with the glory of God, Moses' face shone so brightly that it made the people afraid! Moses had to wear a veil over his face whenever he talked with the people.

Moses in the Cleft of the Rock www.theartisans.us

God instructed Moses to bring two more stone tablets up to Mount Sinai to replace the ones that were broken in the incident of the sin of the golden calf. On these stone tablets, God would again engrave the Ten Commandments (Luchot Habrit).

On Mt. Sinai, God revealed His glory to Moses by proclaiming His compassionate, loving, forgiving but perfectly just nature in what is referred to as His '*Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*.'

"Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "YHVH, YHVH, (יְהוָה יְהוָה) God of mercy and grace אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן (El Rachum v'chanun) slow to anger, and abounding in

lovingkindness and]truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." (Exodus 34:6-7)

El Kanah (Jealous God)

God confirmed His covenant with the people of Israel through Moses, and warned him not to make any kind of treaty with the inhabitants of the Land, nor to bow down to their gods in worship. God asked only for the wholehearted devotion of His people, whom He loves so very much. Like a faithful spouse, God is jealous for the love of His cherished Bride.

" For you shall bow down to no other god; for God, whose name is Jealous יְהוָה קַנָּא is a jealous God (El Kanah) אֵל קַנָּא" (Exodus 34:14)

All Israelite males were to appear before God at the three major festivals: Passover, Feast of Weeks (Shavuot), and Sukkot.

" **Three times in the year shall all thy males appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel**." (Exodus 34:23)

We may ask ourselves, "Why were these particular Scriptures chosen to be read on the intermediate Sabbath of Sukkot?" I wondered about this myself. A partial answer may be related to this last Scripture – that the Feast of Tabernacles/booths/Sukkot is one of the three pilgrimage festivals; but this is not the full reason.

I believe that these Scriptures have been chosen because in truth, Sukkot is all about knowing God – His goodness, mercy, lovingkindness, and justice. As we journey more and more with God, we experience His faithfulness to provide, to protect and to guide us through all the twists and turns of life – just as the Israelites did in their wanderings through the wilderness.

The sukkah (tabernacle) symbolizes God's covering over us – we are hidden in the cleft of the rock (so to speak) while God's glory is revealed to us in greater and greater revelations. As God 'tabernacles' with us by His Spirit – takes up residence in our hearts – we come to know the fullness of joy in His presence – a gift that no amount of money can buy!

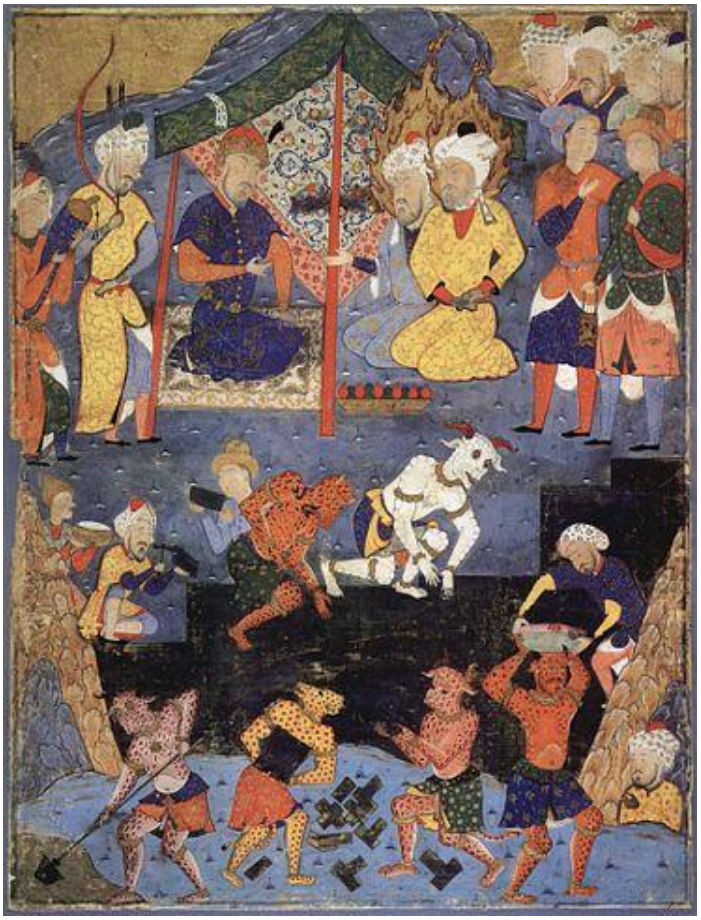
And why read these Scriptures exactly on 'Chol HaMoed' Shabbat during Sukkot? Because sometimes it is during those 'in between times' when we are neither 'here nor there' that we feel lost. When we are not where we used to be; but then again not where we are meant to be – when we have been trudging wearily through the wilderness and feel we will never reach our destination - this is when we most need this precious re-assurance of God's ever – faithful presence and love.

The War of God and Magog {Hebrew: גּוֹג וּמָגוֹג }

The haftarah (prophetic portion) for this Shabbat is about the war of Gog and Magog, which is predicted will take place before the final redemption in the End of Times. Why is this portion read during the festival of Sukkot?

It is believed that this war will happen during the month of Tishrei, the seventh month during which Sukkot so occurs.

The war of Gog and Magog, as described in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, is also very similar to the war described in the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah. These Scriptures, read on the first day of Sukkot, tell us that all the nations will be required to appear before the God of Israel during Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) after God destroys all the nations that come against Israel.



Dhul-Qarnayn with the help of some *jinn*, building the Iron Wall to keep the barbarian Gog and Magog from civilized peoples. (16th century Persian miniature).

Here again, God declares His 'jealousy' over Israel and vows to destroy the enemies of Israel through this war of Gog and Magog.

"And it will come to pass on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel, declares the Lord God, that My blazing indignation will flame in My nostrils. For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken; Surely there shall be a great noise on that day in the land of Israel." (Ezekiel 38:18-19).

The Hebrew prophet Ezekiel described an end-time Messianic scenario when formidable armies from the North, under the leadership of Gog, would challenge the restoration of Israel. This invasion of Israel, however, would end in the utter destruction of the forces of Gog, whose identity is somewhat obscure.

In the book of Ezekiel, Magog is the country of Gog; however in Rabbinic literature, Gog and Magog are partners in their sinister plans to destroy Israel. The 'war of Gog and Magog' is considered to be the terrible war of Armageddon which will proceed the Messianic age.

Armageddon

The word Armageddon comes from the Hebrew Har-Meggido (Mount Meggido) which is an elevation where they built ancient fortresses to guard Via Maris, the highway connecting ancient Egypt with Mesopotamia. Several ancient battles took place on Mt. Meggido; but today, Meggido is a modern town in the Kishon River area, about 25 miles (40 km) west-southwest of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee.

Ruins atop Tel Meggido

Armageddon is only mentioned once in the New Testament in Revelation 16:16. According to New Testament prophecies, the Messiah will return to earth and defeat the Antichrist (the "beast"), Satan the Devil, in the battle of *Armageddon*.

Satan will then be thrown into the "bottomless pit" for 1,000 years, a time period known as the Millennial Age, after which time Satan will then be released to gather Gog and Magog to surround the "holy ones" and the "beloved city" (Jerusalem).

God, who is in control of all the great forces of nature, will use an earthquake, giant hailstones, flooding, pestilence, blood, fire and brimstone to destroy the hordes of people who dare come against Israel.

"**And I will judge against him with pestilence and with blood, and rain bringing floods, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone will I rain down upon him and upon his hordes and upon the many peoples that are with him**." (Ezekiel 38:22)

And yet, it will be through this judgment that God's glory and greatness will be revealed to the Gentile nations and they come to know that He, YHVH יְהוָה is Adonai.

"**And I will reveal Myself in My greatness and in My holiness and will be recognized in the eyes of many nations (goyim), and they will know that I am the Lord**." (Ezekiel 38:23)

The Fire of God will descend from out of heaven to destroy Gog and Magog. After this, all those whose names are not found written in the 'Book of Life' are then thrown, along with the Devil, death, and hell, into the Lake of Fire (Gehenna) burning with brimstone.[1]

Rabbinic tradition holds that this war will be waged during Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles). It makes sense that if Yeshua (Jesus) will return on Yom Tru'ah, upon the blast of the shofar and with a great shout!, and if all will see and recognize him on Yom Kippur, and mourn for him; then it is on Sukkot that He will defeat all the enemies of Israel and set up His Messianic Kingdom and dwell (tabernacle) with His people.

"**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever.**" (Revelation 11:15)

When we hear about these terrible wars and the dreadful Day of the Lord that is to come, we don't need to fear, for the Word of God has promised that "**In the day of trouble, He will keep me safe in His sukkah."** (Psalm 27:5)

We may note several parallels between God's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians in Egypt long ago, and His future deliverance of Israel from Gog in future end-times. The exact same language is used in both: God saves and rescues Israel: "…*with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with fury (terror or judgments) poured out*." (Ezekiel 20:33)

This phrase, "***With a strong hand and an outstretched arm*** (חֲסְדּוֹ בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה כִּי לְעוֹלָם)" is a phrase that has special meaning in Jewish tradition to represent the use of God's power on behalf of His people. The 'arm of the Lord' also represents the 'salvation (Yeshuah) of the Lord.'

"I am the LORD. I will free you from your oppression and will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you **with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment**." (Exodus 6:6)

"You brought your people Israel out of Egypt with signs and wonders, **by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror. (Jeremiah 32:21**)

God used the judgments of the Ten Plagues to rescue Israel from Egypt. When enemy forces invade Israel in the end times, God will once again display His mighty power with a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, and with fury (terror/judgments).

"As I live, says the Lord GOD, surely **with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out,** will I rule over you" (Ezekiel 20:33)

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[1] Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10,14, 21:8

As long as God's people are standing with Israel, they will not need to fear these Divine Judgments. God set apart the land of Goshen, where the Israelites dwelt, and **made a distinction between His people and the Egyptians.**

"But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land. I will make **a distinction between my people and your people**. (Exodus 8:22-23)

Just as was the case in Egypt during the Ten Plagues, we can expect that in this future pouring out of God's wrath, He will keep His covenant people safe under the shelter of His Sukkah, even when judgments are being poured out upon the enemies of Israel.

Ezekiel, as depicted by Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel ceiling

In the end, however, God's purpose is always redemptive – His purpose is to make Himself known as the one true God among the nations of the earth: "**I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am YHVH**." (Ezekiel 38:23)

The deliverance of Israel, through a mighty demonstration of God's power, will bring about universal recognition of His sovereignty. "…and the nations shall know that I am YHVH, the Holy One in Israel." (Ezekiel 39:7)

More than that, however, it will restore Israel's faith in their God, and will also bring them to faith in His servant, Yeshua. When God saved Israel, and they saw all the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore, then the people "feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in His servant Moshe." (Exodus 14:30-31)

Likewise, in the war of Gog and Magog, God will save Israel and there will be so many dead that it will take seven months for Israel to bury them all and cleanse their land. (Ezekiel 39:12).

When Israel sees the hordes of Gog lying dead on the ground, the Lord YHVH will be glorified in their eyes and they will come to fear the Lord and believe in Him and in His servant Yeshua!

Shabbat Shalom!

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 now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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