

Shemini Atzeret - Looks Forward to Yeshua's Return

'On the eighth day there shall be for you an assembly. You are to do no regular work' (Nu 29:35)

The Hebrew word *shemini* means *eighth*, and the Hebrew word *atzeret* means public assembly. Thus *Shemini Atzeret* means we are to have a public convocations or assembly. This holy day is singular among Jewish holy days in that it is one festival with two names – *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*. 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, *Sukkot* 8 like other festivals, became two days. In the land of Israel, however, it is still one day – and what a day it is! In addition to the regular festival ritual, there is the Prayer for Rain (*Geshem*), 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 Circuits (Hakafot)*, the circling 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 mostly as *Simchat Torah*.

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

“¹⁵Seven days you will feast to Adonai your God in the place He chooses, because Adonai your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hand, and you will be completely filled with joy” (Deut. 16:15).

In Messianic Judaism, we have yet another reason: Messiah was born during the festival of *Sukkot*. If we use the principle of Eccl. 3:14-15 and Heb. 13:8, we can also expect Messiah's return in the season of *Sukkot*.

During Second Temple times, two events that no longer take place today 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: “*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*” In Hebrew, this is part of the familiar song *Mayim, Mayim*: ‘*Ushavtem Mayim BeSason Mima-Ayenei HaYeshua.*’ There was a torchlight parade, brilliantly illuminating the Temple at night, which stood out as the other great event, possibly reflecting one of the verses from the *Hallel*: “*Adonai is God, and He has given us light. Join the festival with branches, up to the horns of the altar*” (*Psalms 118:27*).

Yeshua chose these two events to highlight His mission as Messiah. As everyone chanted the *Mayim, Mayim* Scripture when the water from *Siloam* was being poured out by the altar, he announced: “³⁷*On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Yeshua stood up and cried out loudly, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture says, ‘out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-39).* As torches lit up the Temple, he exclaimed: “*...I am the light of the world. The one who follows Me will no longer walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*” (*John 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*) that certainly stand out are: “*The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone*” (*Psalms 118:22*). This beautifully pictures the time when *Yeshua* will reign as Messiah, the King over all the earth. The waving of the *lulav*, which is 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 man hath sprung forth, and the Branch His Name is-yea David himself, 'tis King David, rejoice! – M^eVaOser V^eOmer...” (“Behold, days are coming”—it is a declaration of Adonai— “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He will reign as king wisely”)(Jer. 23:5).

“The name of the wicked shall God extinguish-He grants His anointed celestial grace – M^eVaOser V^eOmer. Then make of our seed an eternal people, preserving for ever King David's race – M^eVaOser V^eOmer” (Isaiah 9:5-6: “For to us a child is born, a son will be given to us, and the government will be upon His shoulder. His Name

will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God My Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.⁶ Of the increase of His government and shalom there will be no end— on the throne of David and over His kingdom—to establish it and uphold it through justice and righteousness from now until forevermore. The zeal of Adonai-Tzva'ot will accomplish 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 (John 1:11). When that *Simchat Torah* comes it 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 *sukkot*.

“¹⁶ Then all the survivors from all the nations that attacked Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, Adonai-Tzva'ot, and to celebrate Sukkot. ¹⁷ Furthermore, if any of the nations on earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, Adonai-Tzva'ot, they will have no rain. ¹⁸ If the Egyptians do not go up and celebrate, they will have no rain. Instead, there will be the plague that Adonai will inflict on the nations that do not go up to celebrate Sukkot. ¹⁹ This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate Sukkot” (Zechariah 14:16-19).

When 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* will no longer picture our present “sojourn under His wings.” Then they will remind us of the past, before the reign of Messiah *Yeshua* the King of Kings. In the meantime the *sukkah* remind us to depend upon *Adonai* and not material goods.

“²⁵ “So I say to you, do not 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? ²⁶ “Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your Father in heaven feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰ Now if in this way God clothes the grass—which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow—will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For the pagans eagerly pursue all these things; yet your Father in heaven knows that you need all these. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:25-33).

Let us close with *Yeshua*’s words about His own return in Matthew 24:

²³ “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here’s the Messiah,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and show great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ “So if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. Or, ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For just as lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ For wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ “But immediately after the trouble of those days, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.’ ³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the land will mourn, and they will see ‘the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ He will send out His angels with a great shofar, and they will gather together His chosen from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”