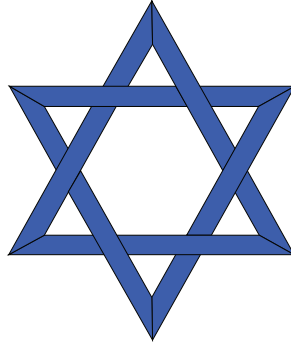

A "JEWISH JEWELS" Teaching

THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

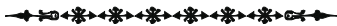


“...these are My feasts.”
Leviticus 23:2

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About the Authors

Neil and Jamie Lash have been involved with Messianic Judaism since 1976, the year in which the God of Israel supernaturally spoke to Neil at a 6:00 A.M. prayer meeting. As Neil relates the encounter, he suddenly began to experience the most intense grief that he had ever experienced from the “kishkes,” (the inner depths of his being).^{*} Not understanding where this grief was coming from, Neil asked God to explain to him what he was experiencing. God’s answer: “This is how I feel about the lost sheep of the House of Israel.” Neil’s reply: “What do you want **me** to do about it?” God’s commission: “I want you to start a Messianic synagogue.”

The rest is history, not **our** story but **His** story—the story of Yeshua Ha Mashiach (Jesus, the Messiah) who is revealing Himself to His own people in these last days. It is the story of the God of Israel who is providing a vehicle whereby Jewish people can retain their Jewishness once they receive Ben Elohim, the Son of God, the promised Messiah.

This booklet is a brief overview of the Feasts of the Lord (also known as the Jewish Holidays) as celebrated by Neil and Jamie and Messianic Jews worldwide. While we also celebrate Purim and Hanukkah, these are found outside of the Leviticus 23 cycle in the Torah and are not dealt with in this booklet.

^{*}Several years later Neil realized that he had experienced part of the grief that caused Yeshua to weep over Jerusalem: “*Now as He (Yeshua) drew near, He saw the city and wept over it...*” (Luke 19:41).



The Feasts of the Lord

“*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts”*” (Leviticus 23:1-2).

The feasts spoken of in these two verses from the third book of the Torah are part of God’s sacred, prophetic calendar. While they are often called the “Jewish holidays,” they have a much more universal applicability, since God identifies the feasts as HIS feasts. We like to say, referring to the feasts, that God is throwing a party, and everyone is invited. It is up to us to decide if we want to attend. We love what one of our *Jewish Jewels* partners said referring to God’s feasts: “They are helpful in keeping love alive.” Nice thought.

The word for feasts in Hebrew is *moadim* (moe-ah-DEEM). The singular, feast, is *moed* (moe-ED). The literal meaning of *moadim* is “appointed times.” The God of the Bible has set aside specific, appointed times to meet with His children - encounters with God, holy days, more than holidays. In Temple times, all Jewish males were required to go up to Jerusalem yearly to worship the Lord at three of these feasts: Passover (Pesach), Weeks (Shavuot), and Tabernacles (Sukkot).

There are a total of seven feasts in the Levitical cycle. When studied closely, they present an ongoing picture of the first and second coming of the Messiah Yeshua. They portray His life, death, and resurrection as well as His return to earth to rule and reign. The feasts are visual aids given to us by a Master Teacher. They are types and shadows of the Redeemer of mankind. We read in the *Brit Hadasha* that the law has a “*shadow of the good things to come*” (Hebrews 10:1). This is the case with the feasts in Leviticus 23. They are a shadow of a coming King. Once the King appears, His shadow shows another dimension of Him and testifies of His reality. “*So that no one would judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ (Messiah)*” (Colossians 2:16-17). Enjoy the “shadows.” They magnify the Lord and add an extra dimension to our understanding of Him.

Yeshua said to His *talmidim* (disciples), “*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me*” (John 5:39). And again, “*For if you believed Moses; you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me*” (John 5:46). Moses wrote about Yeshua when he wrote about the feasts. Each of the seven *moadim* testify of the Messiah in some way. They show that He came to fulfill the law and its teachings, bringing it to full expression, showing its true meaning. (Matt. 5:17)



Shabbat: the Weekly Feast

Although there are seven (the biblical number of perfection) yearly feasts in the Levitical cycle, there is one weekly feast that is mentioned before the others: *Shabbat* (the Sabbath). The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “*Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings*” (Leviticus 23:3). The word *Shabbat* (shah-BAHT) in Hebrew literally means “rest.” The days of the week in Hebrew all have numbers, e.g. Day One (*Yom Rishon*), Day Two (*Yom Sheini*). Only one day has a name instead of a number. That day is *Shabbat*. It is the day on which God Himself rested after finishing creation. “*Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished: And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it...*” (Genesis 2:1-3).

God gave the Shabbat to His People Israel as a wedding gift at Mount Sinai. Before that time, people worked seven days a week without rest. The Messiah Yeshua emphasized the gift nature of *Shabbat* when the Pharisees criticized His disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath: “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:27-28).

The Lord always meant for *Shabbat* to be a blessing, a time of rest and refreshing, a weekly *moed* with Him. The early Jewish believers in Yeshua worshipped the Lord on *Shabbat*. Gradually, as the body of believers began to include more Gentiles, believers gathered on the “Lord’s Day,” the day of Yeshua’s resurrection. God, however, never changed the Sabbath, which begins at sundown Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday. We, as Messianic Jews, worship on Friday nights and Saturdays, but we agree with what Rabbi Saul (Paul) says in Romans 14:5-6, “*One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it...*”

Yeshua is the believer’s perfect rest, our perfect Shabbat. We can rest because our sins are forgiven, and we have been reconciled with our Father in heaven, with whom we now have peace. We can rest in His love and find rest for our souls in our Savior (Matthew 11:28).



Pesach: the Feast of Deliverance

God’s sacred calendar was initiated at the first Passover (*Pesach*—PAY-sock). The Lord gave His people a new calendar at the Exodus: “*This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you*” (Exodus 12:2). The Israelites were to reckon time from when God delivered them from Egyptian bondage. Their new, sacred, holy calendar, was based on His saving grace. “*On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD’S Passover*” (Leviticus 23:5). The first month of the year would have the first feast of the year: Passover.

This first of the seven feasts set the tone for all the others. The lives of God’s people were spared by applying the blood of sacrificial lambs to the lintels and doorposts of their homes (Exodus 12:7). Their act of obedience, through faith, saved them. Moses instructed them as follows: “*Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the Passover*” (Exodus 12:21 KJV). “Passover” and the “lamb” are synonymous. No lamb, no passover. Yet today, the lamb (represented by a lamb shank bone) may occasionally be replaced by a chicken bone at traditional Passover seders. At the very least, the lamb is considered relatively minor in importance. But not in the Torah!

The Passover shows us that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob deals with His people on the basis of covenant. “*So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them*” (Exodus 2:24-25). God’s action in delivering His people from Egyptian bondage was based on covenant love. The God of Israel was unique among the gods of all other nations, being the only One who initiated covenants with His people. A covenant (*b’rit* in Hebrew, pronounced b’REET) was a treaty, a sacred bond, a legally binding agreement, a solemn promise made by God, always sealed in blood. Passover was the result of the eternal, unconditional covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants.

The Passover lambs, as well as the millions of lambs that Israel was to sacrifice as burnt offerings as commanded in Torah (Leviticus 5:6), were shadows of a greater reality to come—a Lamb who would deliver God’s people once for all time. This Lamb, who would suffer and die as the final sacrifice for the sins of Israel and the world, was prophesied over 700 years before the birth of Yeshua (Jesus). The Jewish prophet Isaiah, in chapter 53 of his book, wrote of this Lamb, “*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter...*” (Isaiah 53:7).

Yeshua was that prophesied lamb. When He began His ministry in Israel, Yochanan (John) pointed at Him and said, “*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). At His final Passover seder with His disciples (*talmidim*, tahl-mee-DEEM in Hebrew), Yeshua identified Himself as the final sacrifice for sin when He took the cup of redemption (the cup after supper) and proclaimed, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which he shed for you*” (Luke 22:20). While celebrating the redemption from Egyptian bondage, the Messiah was declaring a much greater redemption—deliverance from the bondage of sin (spiritual Egypt)—made possible by the sacrifice of God’s Passover Lamb. When we apply His blood to the lintel and doorposts of our heart, death passes over us, and we enter into new life.

Yeshua fulfilled the Passover by dying as the Lamb of God exactly on the date of this first feast of the Lord. In doing this, He established a pattern for the other six feasts. We will see that all four of the spring/summer feasts have been fulfilled by Yeshua exactly on schedule, corresponding with Messiah’s first coming. The final three feasts will surely be fulfilled in like manner at His second coming.



Unleavened Bread: the Feast of Sanctification

The second feast of the Lord is closely connected to Passover and actually inseparable from *Pesach*. It is called *Chag HaMatzot* (khag ha-maht-ZOHT), the Feast of Unleavened Bread. “*So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on the same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses*” (Exodus 12:17-19).

Leaven (*chametz*, kha-METZ in Hebrew) is a type of sin in the Holy Scriptures. Unleavened bread is *matzah* (maht-ZAH). While leaven has the underlying meaning of “sour,” *matzah* has the underlying meaning of “sweet.” It is sin that makes man sour; redemption makes us sweet. Blood atonement, through the Passover lambs, set the Israelites free from the bitterness of physical slavery. Yeshua’s blood sets us free from tyranny to self. It also sanctifies us and sets us apart as God’s holy people.

At the first Passover, the Israelites were commanded to have three major elements: the lamb, the *matzah*, and bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8). After the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., there could be no more Passover lambs sacrificed. Over time, the unleavened bread became the most important element in the Passover celebration. Since the Lord repeats a few times in the Torah that whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day will be cut off from Israel, the command is taken seriously. Every year at Passover, Jews around the world acknowledge a fact of the Exodus, “*So the people took dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders*” (Exodus 12:34). No leaven left Egypt.

The symbolic meaning of leaven and unleavened bread is rarely spoken of in traditional Jewish seders. There is great significance, however, to Messianic Jews. For us, God’s Passover Lamb dealt a final blow to our leaven (sin) at the Tree of Sacrifice. Through Yeshua, our Messiah, we become unleavened. Rabbi Saul (Paul) alludes to this: “*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Yeshua fulfilled the Feast of Unleavened Bread, exactly on time. He was the sinless sacrifice, totally unleavened, the Unleavened Bread of Life, that was in the grave (hidden away) during this feast. A ceremony during the Passover seder hints at this. It is called *yachatz* (yah-KHATZ), breaking of the *matzah*. This ceremony involves the breaking of the middle of three pieces of *matzah* which are together in a *matzah tosh* or pocket. Dr. Ron Wolfson, a traditional Jew, makes an interesting

comment on *yachatz* in his book, *The Art of Jewish Living, the Passover Seder*: “The dominant themes of *yachatz* are brokenness and hiding. The matzah is broken and part of it hidden away for the *afikoman*, the last piece of matzah eaten at the Seder and, as we will later learn, as symbol of the, now-lost, Paschal sacrifice. In fact, this step of the Seder where the *afikoman* is found and redeemed is called *tzafun* (tza-FOON), literally ‘hidden.’ This is a ‘hiding’ which foreshadows the future. In the future, something now in hiding will make complete that which is now incomplete. This is a foreshadowing of the Messiah, establishing that we not only celebrate the Passover of the past, but the Passover of the future.”

WOW. Dr. Wolfson is so close to the truth! The “Hidden One” is Yeshua, the Messiah, the Eternal Passover Lamb, who identified the *afikoman* with Himself. He said to His *talmidim*, “*Take, eat; this is My body*” (Matthew 26:26). The Messiah clearly meant: “I am your unleavened Passover sacrifice.” His broken body would one day make Jews and non-Jews complete.



Firstfruits: the Feast of New Life

A very important, albeit not well known, feast follows *Chag HaMatzot*. It is the Feast of Firstfruits, which occurs the day after *Shabbat*, on the first day of the week following Passover. In Hebrew it is *Yom HaBikkurim* (Yohm Ha-Bih-koo-REEM). It is a “day” (*yom*) of firstfruits.

Yom HaBikkurim was the feast when the Children of Israel brought a sheaf of the firstfruits of their barley harvest to the priest on the day after the Sabbath of Passover. “*He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf*” (Leviticus 23:11).

Yeshua the Messiah fulfilled the Feast of Firstfruits in a powerful way by being accepted on our behalf as our atonement for sin. On the day after the Sabbath of Passover, the first day of the week, Yeshua rose from the dead (Matthew 28:1-6). His resurrection is directly connected to firstfruits by the Rabbi Saul (Apostle Paul), “*But now Christ (Messiah) is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Other verses in the New Covenant also connect First Fruits and the resurrection: “*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him*” (2 Timothy 2:11). “*Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures*” (James 1:18).

Firstfruits begins a fifty-day period of counting the *omer* (OH-mehr), which leads to the next feast of the Lord. “*And you shall count for yourselves on the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed...then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD*” (Leviticus 23:15-16).



Shavuot: the Feast of the Law and the Spirit

We move on God’s sacred calendar from Passover in the spring to Shavuot in the summer. This feast of the Lord is known by many names. *Shavuot* (Sha-voo-OAT) is the Hebrew word for “weeks,” referring to the seven weeks from Passover to this feast. Therefore, Feast of Weeks is one of the names for Shavuot. Another is Pentecost, referring to the fifty days following firstfruits.

Shavuot is one of the three Pilgrim Feasts (Sha-LOWSH Reh-gah-LEEM) that all Israelite males were required to observe in Jerusalem. Passover and Tabernacles are the other two (Deuteronomy 16:16). The new grain offering that God’s people were commanded to offer at *Shavuot* was very interesting: two loaves of fine flour, baked with leaven (Leviticus 23:17). These loaves have prophetic significance as do many aspects of Shavuot. New Covenant parallels abound, especially in timing.

Shavuot is considered by traditional rabbis to be the time when the Israelites were given the Law at Mount Sinai on the sixth day of Sivan, fifty days after the Passover, in the third month since leaving Egypt (Exodus 19:1, 10-11). Thus, this feast has yet another name: *Hag Matan Torateinu* (Hag-Mah-TAHN TOE-rah-TEY-new), the Festival of the Giving of the

Torah. It is also seen as the completion of Passover, *Atzeret shel Pesach* (Aht-ZER-et shell PEH-sock), since the Israelites were not truly free until they had received God's instructions for living: His Torah. The God of Israel set His people free from physical bondage at the Exodus. He set them free from the spiritual bondage of idolatry and immorality at Shavuot, giving them rules to live by.

It is God-incidental that on the Feast of Shavuot, the Lord chose to send His Spirit to Yeshua's *talmidim*, waiting in an upper room in Jerusalem. *"When the day of Shavuot had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And tongues like fire spreading out appeared to them and settled on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) and began to speak in other tongues as the Ruach (Spirit) enabled them to speak out"* (Acts 2:1-4 TLV). God sent His Holy Spirit at the precise time that He had given His Law. This showed His people that through Yeshua, the Law would be engraved on the heart, not just on tablets of stone, as prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Shavuot also marks the beginning of the summer (wheat) harvest. This aspect of Shavuot was fulfilled with a great harvest of souls on the day that Yeshua sent His Spirit to indwell His followers. We read in the *Brit Hadasha* that three thousand souls were saved at the giving of the Spirit, *"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"* (Acts 2:41). In contrast, at the giving of the Law fifteen hundred years earlier, three thousand souls perished, due to the idolatry at Mount Sinai, *"And about three thousand men of the people fell that day"* (Exodus 32:28).

What about the two leavened loaves that were waved by the priest on Shavuot? They foreshadowed two groups of people, both sinners by nature, whom the Lord would one day sanctify by sending His Spirit to indwell them. Both loaves (Jews and non-Jews) would be ONE in the hands of the Priest (Yeshua). The scroll of Ruth, traditionally read at Shavuot due to its harvest theme, is a prophetic picture of Gentiles coming under the wings of the God of Israel.

Shavuot, as the conclusion of Passover, also has meaning for believers in Messiah. Just as the Israelites were not truly free until they received the Law at Shavuot, showing them how to live, believers are not truly free until they embrace not only redemption through the blood of God's Lamb, but His Word as their standard of living. Freedom without rules is anarchy.

Yeshua fulfilled the Feast of Shavuot by sending His Spirit, His *Ruach* (ROO-akh), to indwell His followers. He fulfilled His promise: *"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away! For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you"* (John 16:7). The giving of the Spirit sets us free from bondage to sin (Romans 8:1-4). *"And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness"* (Romans 6:18).

There are other parallels between the Giving of the Law and the Giving of the Spirit. A few of them follow: Thunder and lightning accompanied the giving of the Law (Exodus 20:18). Tongues of fire accompanied the giving of the Spirit (Acts 2:2-3). God gave the Law on Mount Sinai. God gave the Spirit on Mount Zion. Shavuot is considered the birthday of Judaism. Pentecost is considered the birthday of the Church. The Ten Commandments, given on Shavuot, are considered by traditional Jews to be the 120 most important words in the Bible, since they constitute the basic moral code for all mankind: 120 life-changing Hebrew words. There were 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem when God sent His life-changing Spirit. (The number 120 is considered the biblical number that signifies the end of all flesh and the beginning of life in the Spirit. See Genesis 6:3.)

There is much more richness to be found in Shavuot, worthy of personal study. If you seek, you will find great treasures.



Yom Teruah: the Feast of Repentance and Return

The feasts thus far have been a prophetic picture of Messiah's death, burial, resurrection, and giving of His Spirit. All of these are connected with Yeshua's first coming as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, *Mashiach Ben Yosef* (the suffering Messiah). He is coming again, this time as *Mashiach Ben David* (the ruling King). One Messiah. Two comings.

Since Yeshua fulfilled all the spring/summer feasts, we can expect Him to fulfill all of the fall feasts, beginning with the

first one, *Yom Teruah* (Yohm Tehr-OO-ah), the Day of Blowing (of the shofar). There is a special kind of prelude to this feast - an entire month of repentance, of preparing one's heart to turn from sin to God, as the shofar sounds daily in the synagogue. This month of repentance is called Elul (eh-LOOL).

Elul is an acronym for *Ani L'dodi V'dodi Li*, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (Song of Songs 6:3). During this month, preceding the seventh or holiest month of the Hebrew calendar, Jews throughout the world believe they have special access to the King who loves His people Israel. Psalm 27 is read daily, as Jewish people seek the face of the Lord.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, saying; "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation"' (Leviticus 23:23-24). This feast occurs in the seventh month (Tishri) of the biblical calendar which began at Passover. During the Babylonian captivity, the rabbis adopted another calendar (a civil one), and the Feast of Trumpets became known as Rosh Hashanah, the Head of the Year. Thus, a new secular calendar began, with Rosh Hashanah beginning the first month. That is why people greet one another with "Happy New Year."

The shofar plays a major role on *Yom Teruah*. On this day, the shofar is sounded 100 times. This special sound is considered to be a "prayer without words" by traditional Jews, a cry of the heart, the sound of repentance, and a sound that confuses and confounds *hasatan*, the adversary of God's people. The faith of Abraham is focused on in traditional synagogues, as they read the *Akedah* (ah-kay-DAH), the Binding of Isaac, found in Genesis chapter 22. The shofar or ram's horn reminds God's people of the ram caught in the thicket that was sacrificed instead of Abraham's son, Isaac. [For more information about the shofar, you may download our booklet on the Shofar.]

Yom Teruah also has two other names: *Yom HaZikaron* (Yohm Ha-Zee-kah-RONE), the Day of Remembrance, and *Yom HaDin* (Yohm ha-DIN), the Day of Judgment. God as King is Faithful to remember His covenant promises to His people, and God as Judge is Righteous and Just. The Kingship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has special emphasis on *Yom Teruah*. It is traditionally proclaimed: "To an earthly king, a man goes full and returns empty. To God, he goes empty and returns full."

This feast of the Lord is primarily a joyful one: apples are dipped in honey, people are wished a sweet new year, greetings abound concerning one's name being written for a good new year in the Book of Life. Reconciliation and forgiveness are strongly encouraged, since one must make things right with others before we are right with God. Traditional Jews have little knowledge about the "Book of Life." They hope that, based on their repentance and good deeds, God has written their name in His book for a good year. We were thrilled, after receiving our Messiah, to find out that there is a Book in which our name can be written for all time. This book has a name: "The Lamb's Book of Life" (Revelation 21:27). Our names are written in this Book when we receive Yeshua as our Messiah by faith, through grace, not because of our good works, but rather God's mercy.

Yom Teruah, the Feast of Trumpets, will be fulfilled when the Messiah Yeshua comes again, preceded by the sound of the shofar. This is the glorious hope of Messianic believers: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

This is not only a sign of God's faithfulness (*Yom HaZikaron*), but God's righteous judgment (*Yom HaDin*), when the entire world will be judged (Revelation 20:12).



Yom Kippur: the Feast of Redemption

There are ten days between *Yom Teruah* and *Yom Kippur* (Yohm Key-POOR), the Day of Atonement, called the Days of Awe, *Yamim Noraim* (ya-MEEM No-rah-EEM). These are ten days of solemn introspection and self-evaluation in which God's people allow Him to search their hearts and reveal where repentance, reconciliation, and restoration are necessary, both horizontally and vertically - with God and with others. The hope of a sweet new year permeates the Days of Awe, as

worshippers greet one another with the words, *“L’shanah tovah tikateivu,”* “May your name be inscribed [in the Book of Life] for a good year.” It is believed that one’s future is sealed on *Yom Kippur*, the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar.

The theme of holiness is central to *Yom Kippur*. Not only does “The Day” (as it is known in the Talmud) occur in the seventh or holiest month of the year, *Yom Kippur* is the single most important day of the Jewish year. It is perhaps the only day in which sin receives a major focus. Long lists of sins, both intentional and unintentional, are recited in synagogues throughout the world.

When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, the sacrificial system provided yearly atonement for the nation of Israel. Sin was covered, but not removed, hidden but not done away with. The removal of sin was finally accomplished through the death of our Messiah on the tree of sacrifice. *“But this Man [Yeshua], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God”* (Hebrews 10:12).

God makes it clear in His Word that atonement of sin is only possible through a blood sacrifice. *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul”* (Leviticus 17:11). Once the Temple was destroyed, in 70 A.D., blood sacrifices were no longer possible. The traditional rabbis and sages in Babylon decided that fasting along with prayer [*t’fee-LAH*], repentance [*t’shoe-VAH*], and charity [*tz-dah-KAH*] could replace the sacrifices, based on the scriptural admonition concerning *Yom Kippur*, *“Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls”* (Leviticus 23:27,32). *“Afflict your souls”* was understood to mean “fasting,” based on Isaiah 58:3. Fasting included mourning over sin while restraining earthly appetites. Prayer became one of the substitutes for the sacrificial offering based on Hosea 14:2, *“Take words with you, And return to the Lord. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.”*

God’s ways still remain higher than our ways. His way for atonement includes a blood sacrifice and a High Priest. *“For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord”* (Leviticus 16:30). The *Cohen Gadol* (Co-HEN Gah-DOLE), the High Priest, was the mediator for the nation of Israel, taking blood once a year into the Holy of Holies, *Kadosh HaKodashim* (Kah-DOSH Ha-Ko-dah-SHEEM). He was merely a shadow of the perfect High Priest to come. *“For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the peoples’, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself”* (Hebrews 7:26-27). Yeshua is our High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant in His blood. The late Moishe Rosen made an astute comment on the change in the Jewish religion from Temple times, *“Scriptural Judaism emphasized atonement, but through the years this emphasis shifted as Judaism has gone from being a redemptive religion, concerned with how to be saved from sin, to a moral religion concerned with how people should live.”*

During Temple times, part of the duties of the High Priest on *Yom Kippur* involved two male goats. Lots were cast to determine which goat would be *“for the Lord”* and which would be for *“azazel”* or the scapegoat. The High Priest tied a piece of crimson-dyed wool (based on Isaiah 1:18) between the horns of the scapegoat, and tied a similar piece of wool around the neck of the goat which was to be sacrificed. *“But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness”* (Leviticus 16:10). The live goat illustrated that the sins of Israel had been removed. God’s wrath was appeased by the slaughtered goat.

According to Jewish tradition, the piece of crimson wool on the scapegoat turned white each year, signifying that God had accepted the sacrifice, and atonement had been made for the sins of the nation of Israel. The Mishnah states that forty years before the destruction of the Temple (approximately 30 A.D.), the red wool stopped turning white. We verified this on one of our trips to Jerusalem when we spoke with someone at the Temple Institute. She attributed this to Israel’s apostasy, but we know that the timing coincides with the one great atoning sacrifice of the Messiah of Israel, who like the *azazel*, has removed our transgressions from us. He paid the price of our sins approximately forty years before the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. It would seem as if *Yom Kippur* has already been fulfilled, since we have our High Priest, our *“azazel,”* and our blood atonement, but there is more to be fulfilled. According to the Bible, there will be a National Day of Atonement for Israel. The Messiah is coming to establish His throne, *“And the LORD shall be King over all the earth”* (Zechariah 14:9). The Prophet Zechariah spoke of that coming day when all Israel will accept the atonement provided by the Messiah. *“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn”* (Zechariah 12:10).

Until that day, we, as Messianic Jews, fast on *Yom Kippur*, not for our own atonement but for the salvation of our Jewish people. We thank God, that through our Messiah Yeshua, we have a precious promise: “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). We have “at-one-ment” with God because the final Yom Kippur sacrifice has been made.



Sukkot: the Feast of Rejoicing

The final of the fall feasts, *Sukkot* (Sue-COAT), is also one of the three Pilgrim Feasts which included journeying to the Temple in Jerusalem. *Sukkot* has many names: *Hag HaSukkot* (The Feast of Booths/ The Feasts of Tabernacles), *HaHag* (The Feast), *Hag HaAsif* (Feast of Ingathering or Harvest), and *Z'man Simchateinu* (The Time of Our Rejoicing). *Hag* (Khag) is Hebrew for “feast” and comes from a root meaning “to dance or be joyous.” *Sukkot* is indeed a very joyous celebration, lasting for eight days. Of all the *hagim* (hah-GEEM), it is the one most characterized by dancing before the Lord.

The Lord instructed Moses concerning this *moed*: “*The fifteenth day of the seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) for seven days to the LORD*” (Leviticus 23:34). And again, “*Also on the fifteenth day of this seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall dwell in booths for seven days...that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God*” (Leviticus 23:39-40, 42-43).

Our God always brings us from darkness to light. The High Holy Days are an example of this pattern. We go from repentance (*Yom Teruah*) to redemption (*Yom Kippur*) to rejoicing (*Sukkot*). From sin to salvation. From sorrow to joy. From estrangement to reconciliation. Our final destination is God’s tabernacle - His *sukkah*. While traditional Jewish people celebrate God’s faithfulness to His People in their wilderness wanderings on the way to the Promised Land, we as Messianic Jews also celebrate God’s Presence dwelling WITHIN us.

Sukkot is known as *Z'man Simchateinu* (zeh-MAHN Sim-kha-TAY-new), the Time of our Rejoicing, because we have a God who covers and protects us. We are safer and more secure in a flimsy booth with God than in an Egyptian palace without Him! Psalm 27:5 says it well, “*For in a time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion (Hebrew: sukka). In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me.*” Security in God leads to joy. There is actually a triple commandment in the Torah to rejoice during *Sukkot* (Leviticus 23:40, Deuteronomy 16:14 and Deuteronomy 16:15). As Messianic Jews, we have many causes to rejoice: God dwells with us now and forever, our sins are forgiven, we have access to the Presence of our King every day, and our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

There is a biblical command to wave palm branches, *lulavim* (loo-lah-VEEM), at *Sukkot*, along with a lemon-like fruit, *etrog* (EH-trog), myrtle, *hadas* (HA-das), and willow, *aravah* (ah-rah-VAH). These four species together are called a *lulav* (LOO-lahv). In Temple times, the lulav was waived as worshipers made a circuit around the temple altar saying prayers for redemption. For seven days they prayed, “*Hoshiana*” (English Hosanna, “Save now”).

Now picture Yeshua, the Messiah, riding a donkey into Jerusalem. The crowd is waving *lulavim* before Him. They are welcoming their long-expected Messiah and King, the One they had prayed for each *Sukkot*, saying, “*Hoshiana.*” (*This is what Palm Sunday in the church is all about!*)

Our Messiah made some of His most astounding proclamations during this final feast. In the midst of the Illumination of the Temple, which included great menorahs, Yeshua declared that He was the Light of the World (John 8:12). During the Water Drawing Ceremony, long considered a symbolic representation of a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Yeshua declared that He was the Source of Living Water (John 7:37-39). This happened on *Hoshana Rabba*, the Day of the Great Hosanna, the final day of *Sukkot*. “*On the last day, that great day of the feast, Yeshua stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive*” (John 7:37-39).

It is very possible that “*the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us*” at *Sukkot* (John 1:14). No one knows the exact date of Yeshua’s birth, but we do know that it was not in December. We personally celebrate the incarnation, a crucial doctrine of our Messianic faith, during *Sukkot*. We believe that the Eternal Son of God took on a human body (an earthly *sukkah*) to identify with sinful man and become our atonement. He was placed in a humble feeding trough for animals—manger in English, *sukkah* in Hebrew (Genesis 33:17). *Sukkot* would be a time when there was “*no room at the inn*” and shepherds would be out in the fields. The coming of the Messiah was certainly joy to the world!

Sukkot is so rich and many-faceted, that it deserves an entire book! We must mention, in closing, that *Sukkot* is an “inclusive feast,” which always included Gentiles. During Temple times, seventy bullocks were offered up as an atonement for the seventy nations of the world (the Gentiles)! During Yeshua’s future earthly reign, all nations will be required to go up to Jerusalem to worship the King and to celebrate *Sukkot* (Zechariah 14:16-17).

Finally, *Sukkot* is an “eternal feast,” an everlasting ordinance (Leviticus 23:41). When Yeshua returns, He will reign over the earth for 1,000 years from Jerusalem. God’s eternal *sukkah* will be like a wedding canopy over His beloved bride, “*For over all the glory there will be a covering* (in Hebrew, *huppah*). *And there will be a tabernacle* (in Hebrew, *sukkah*) *for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and a shelter from the storm and rain*” (Isaiah 4:6).

Sukkot will have a glorious fulfillment at Yeshua’s return. [For more about our future bridal *sukkah* (*huppah*), download our Jewish Wedding booklet.]



A Final Word

The Feasts of the Lord of Leviticus 23 speak to us of a God who is Faithful to fulfill His Word, in His time, and in His way. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob always keeps His promises. He sent the Messiah, the Perfect Passover Lamb, to die for our sin. We needed Him! As Messianic Jews, living in temporary *sukkahs* (bodies), we now have eternity in our hearts. The Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) indwells us, guiding us, comforting us, and bringing us joy - the JOY promised by Yeshua, the Messiah, before His death on the tree of sacrifice. (See John 15:11.) Yeshua is not only the fulfillment of the feasts, He is the fulfillment of the deepest desires of our heart!

There is a verse from the book of Proverbs that applies to believers in Messiah, “*All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast* (Proverbs 15:15).” That is what we have in Yeshua: A CONTINUAL SPIRITUAL FEAST. We have an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father through His Son, the Messiah of Israel and the world.

This continual feast and this joy can be yours, as you pray a prayer from your heart, like the one suggested below.

“God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, the One who made atonement for my sin. I come to you with a repentant heart, asking for your forgiveness. Cleanse me; make me new. Write Your Torah on my heart, so that I might serve You by the power of your Ruach with joy. Amen.”

As soon as you pray to receive Yeshua as your Messiah, thank God for your new life in Him and claim the following promise from the *B’rit Hadasha*: “*Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*” (John 16:24)

Before now, you had no right to ask for anything in the name of Yeshua. Now you do! You are a child of God, heir to all the promises of Scripture. Ask big! God is a Giver. He wants you to learn to receive from Him. Ask in faith. Faith is what pleases Him most. Ask wisely. What is the desire of your heart? Express that desire to God. Prayer is simply talking with your Heavenly Abba (Father in Heaven). He will speak to you through His Word, the Holy Scriptures. God loves you! He gave His only Son for you. It is His good pleasure to give you “the kingdom”—righteousness, peace and joy in the *Ruach HaKodesh*.

Expect a heart that has a continual FEAST!

Shalom b’shem Yeshua, (Peace in the Name of Yeshua),