

# Jewish Observances & Holidays<sup>1</sup>

- **YOM TERUAH** [S] (**Tishri 1**) Day of the Blowing of the Shofar [Lev. 23:23-25]. Known traditionally as Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Beginning of the days of reflection and humbling leading up to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).
- **YOM KIPPUR** [S,F] (**Tishri 10**) Day of Atonement [Lev. 23:26-32]. The Scriptures command us on this day to "deny" ourselves. This traditionally means not only (if medically possible) refraining from eating and drinking, but also refraining from other "pleasures of the flesh." In Messianic Jewish tradition, we rejoice in the forgiveness for our sins through Messiah Yeshua, intercede in prayer for our families, for Israel, and the world, and meet in homes to discuss Biblical subjects.
- **SUKKOT** [S] (**Tishri 15**) Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) [Lev. 23:33-43]. Seven day harvest festival during which the Jewish people are told to live in "booths," or temporary shelters, for the seven days so that future generations will remember that G-d had the Israelites live in booths when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. Thought by many Messianic Jews to be when Yeshua was born into His earthly body, coming to "tabernacle among us."
- **SHMINI ATZERET** [S] (**Tishri 22**) "Eighth Day" of Sukkot [Lev. 23:39]. Traditional feast day during which prayers were said for the new crops, and, together with Simkhat Torah, helps to close the Tishri holy period.
- **SIMKHAT TORAH** (**Tishri 23**) Celebration of the end of the year-long cycle of Torah readings.
- **HANUKKAH** (Kislev 25) Festival of Lights. Celebration of the victory by a group of Jews led by Yehudah "Maccabee" ("the hammer") against the Hellenizing rule and the defiling of the Holy Temple by the Greek ruler Antiochus IV. Marks the rededication of the Temple. The New Covenant mentions that Yeshua went to the Temple on that day, calling it the "Feast of Dedication" (John 10:22-23).
- **TU B'SHEVAT** New Year for Trees. The traditional date on which, in Bible times, the maturity of the trees was determined for tithing purposes.
- **TAANIT ESTEYR** [F] (**Adar 13**) Fast of Esther. Commemorates the day of prayer and fasting done by Esther (Hadassah) before pleading with King Ahasverus to spare the Jewish people (see Purim).
- **PURIM** (**Adar 14**) Feast of Lots. Celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the evil plot of Haman to destroy them. The book of Esther (which tells the story) is read, and traditionally Purim plays are put on which dramatize it.
- **PESAKH/HAG HAMATZOT** (**Nisan 15**) [S] Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread [Lev. 23:5, Lev. 23:6-8, Ex 12:17-20]. Festival week of celebration for G-d's redemption of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. First and last days are sabbaths. Foods with yeast or other leaven are not eaten and are removed from our homes. The entire 7 days are traditionally called "Pesakh", meaning Passover. First seder is held the first night, second seder (usually only out of Israel) is held the second night. Seders are held after sundown to start each of the first two days of Pesakh. In some traditions, an informal Seder is held on the eighth day, the "Messiah's Seder."
- **BIKURIM** (\*\*) "Early Firstfruits" [Lev 23:10-14]. Day of dedicating the first of the harvest to G-d. Believed by Messianic Jews to be the day of the resurrection of Yeshua. Marks the beginning of the counting of the "omer" - the first of 50 days leading up to the holiday of Shavuot (Pentecost)
- **YOM HASHOAH** (**Nisan 27**) Holocaust Remembrance Day.
- **YOM HA'ATZMAUT** (**Iyar 5**) Israel Independence Day.
- **SHAVUOT** [S] (\*\*) Feast of Weeks ("Pentecost") [Lev 23:15-21, Acts 2]. Originally commemorated the end of the grain harvest and is the concluding feast of the Passover season. Held on the 50th day counted from "Early Firstfruits." Counting the days from Passover to Shavuot is called the counting of the omer. Commemorates Moses receiving the Torah from G-d on Mt. Sinai. For Messianic believers, additionally commemorates the day on which the Ruakh HaQodesh ("Holy Spirit") was given to the believers (Acts 2).
- **TISHA B'AV** [F] (**Av 9**) Saddest day in the Jewish calendar. Anniversary of the Divine decree (1312 BCE) that the Jewish people remain in the desert for 40 years; anniversary of the destruction (by Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar) of the First Temple, and by Romans (under Titus) of the Second Temple; capture by Romans of Beitar, last Jewish fortress to hold out in the Bar Kochba Rebellion; Jerusalem plowed up and turned into the non-Jewish city of Aelia Capitolina (C. 135 CE); in 1492, the last date by which all Jews who would not be baptized had to leave Spain (causing much loss of life in resettlement attempts); the beginning of World War I, which uprooted large Jewish populations and threw most Jewish communities into chaos (which brought in its wake the Russian Revolution which crushed European Jewry and the Cossack massacres of Jews throughout the Ukraine).

**NOTES:** Bikurim and Shavuot are not given specific calendar dates in Torah. Their dates are calculated, Shavuot being 50 days after Bikurim. In traditional synagogues, Bikurim, the start of the counting of the omer, is the second day of Passover, 16th of Nisan, putting the date of Shavuot on Sivan 6. Most Messianic synagogues reckon the day of Bikurim as the First-Day ("Sunday") during Hag Hamatzot. This is the method used by the Saducees. By this method the date of Shavuot can be up to 6 days different from the traditional. [S] Sabbath days. On these days G-d commands us not to work, and to hold a Sacred Assembly. [F] Days of fasting, either traditionally or by Scriptural decree. Fast days, if they occur on Shabbat ("Saturday") are postponed to Sunday except for the fast of Esther, which, if it occurs on Shabbat is held on the previous Thursday because of Purim. Yom Ha'atzmaut is held on the previous Thursday if it falls on Shabbat.

Remember that a Biblical day begins in the evening, at the beginning of sundown (the sun below the horizon), on the previous day (according to the Gregorian [common] calendar), and Sabbaths end approximately 25 hours later, at the completion of the next sundown.

<sup>1</sup> C:\My Documents\SCHOOLofLocalChurch\Lessons\22OurJewishRoots\Articles\JewishFeasts.doc