

Sh'mini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

An Introduction

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I want to give you a short overview of today's service in which we will first comply with Scripture to assemble on *Sh'mini Atzeret*, the eighth day of *Sukkot*, and half-way through the service we will begin our celebration of *Simchat Torah* – a day early – but because *Simchat Torah* is not commanded in Scripture, we are taking the liberty. In order to do both of these on the same day, we will do a very unusual thing, and that is we will have two *Torah* services – the first, an abbreviated service in recognition of *Sh'mini Atzeret*; then we will blow the *shofar* to signify a transition to our second *Torah* service in celebration of *Simchat Torah*. If you think it is strange – well, it is!

Sh'mini Atzeret is commanded in Leviticus 23:33-36:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. 'On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. 'For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it.’”

Sh'mini Atzeret is also mentioned in 2 Chronicles 7:8-10, where the Temple's altar was dedicated for seven days of the feast, and a sacred assembly was observed on the eighth day.

Very prominently, John 7:37-43 speaks of “the last great day of the feast:”

“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; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Yeshua was not yet glorified. Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Mashiach." But some said, "Will the Mashiach come out of Galilee? "Has not the Scripture said that the Mashiach comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a division among the people because of Him.”

And as I mentioned last week, that is where the division among the Jewish people regarding Yeshua's identity began.

Now *Simchat Torah* was not celebrated in its current form and on its current day until relatively recently. It literally means “the celebration of the *Torah*,” and it marks the end of one cycle of *Torah* reading, and the beginning of the next. In recognition of this, we dance both of our *Sifrei Torah* (our *Torah* scrolls) around the room seven times and then we read the end of Deuteronomy from one of them, and the first part of Genesis from the other. Synagogues

situated in residential communities sometimes even dance the *Torah* scrolls into the streets but, in our neighborhood, it would not be very practical, nor would it be understood.

So, with this short explanation, let us continue with our observance of *Sh'mini Atzeret*. Let the *Torah* team come forward.