



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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## TWO FOR ONE

Years ago, when I was growing up, there were three holidays in February. Although we didn't get out of school for it, there was Valentine's Day on the fourteenth. Then there were two holidays in honor of presidents. On the twelfth was Lincoln's Birthday and on the twenty-second was Washington's Birthday. Both of those were celebrated as separate days, honoring two of the greatest Presidents of the United States. Sometime since then the government decided to honor all presidents on one day, regardless whether it was a bad president like Ulysses Grant or a great one like Lincoln or Washington. Because we were already celebrating presidents in February, they chose the third Monday of that month for the new holiday. In essence they combined two holidays into one.

If the representatives of the United States government were inclined to look for a precedent for such an action, and if they were inclined to look in the Bible for that precedent, they could find it in Leviticus 23. When God appointed his feasts for the Jewish people he prescribed two feasts to coincide with each other.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. (Lev 23:33-36)

Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and

the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. (Lev 23:39-41)

Many of the Jewish people today don't even realize what God did here. They don't feel cheated out of a holiday because they don't realize God combined two of them on the same days. Most people consider that they are celebrating *Succoth*, the Feast of Booths, when in synagogue they wave the "four species," the celebration of the Feast of Ingathering. (September 21-27, 2002)

Why did God do this? I don't know. Some would suggest that there was originally a harvest festival at that time, and that God added the Feast of Booths at the same time to celebrate the wandering in the wilderness. If so, then why didn't God just say that the harvest festival (which they wouldn't have celebrated during the exodus) was now a celebration of a different event? Did God, like the United States government, just want to reduce the number of days off for his people? If so, then why add other holidays later?

Having raised the question of why God designates two holidays on the same dates, I am not going to give possible answers. To some this will just be a quaint fact to be filed away. Others may choose to try to figure out an answer for themselves. Whichever type you are, you now have my permission to do with it what you will.

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# THE LAST SHOFAR

As most of my regular readers know, I have a great interest in “God’s appointed seasons,” those times God set aside to meet with the Jews that we call holidays. Most of these holidays have some correspondence to times and teachings in the life of Christ or of the early church. Jesus was born either at the time of *Pesach* (Passover) or of *Succoth* (the Feast of Booths), most likely the latter. The Messiah died at *pesach*. The Lord’s Supper is based on the Passover *seder*. *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) is a picture of the atonement brought about through the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah. *Purim* also pictures God’s salvation through unexpected means at an unexpected time. *Hoshana Rabbah*, the Great Hosanna that comes at the end of *Succoth*, was reenacted six months from its normal time in the “triumphal entry” of Jesus into Jerusalem (see “A Celebration Out of Time”, Minutes With Messiah, October 2000). Even Hanukkah was the setting where Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:22-38)

## The Feast of Trumpets

Almost every feast and holy day is related to the Messiah. For a long time, though, I failed to associate one holiday with Jesus. That was the Feast of Trumpets, which falls on *Rosh Hashanah* (September 7<sup>th</sup> in 2002).

The passage legislating this feast says, “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the

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first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.” (Lev 23:23-25) That is it. No explanation for the blowing of the *shofar*; no details other than it is a day for no constructive work. While the day is now called the “head of the year,” or the Jewish New Year, in the calendar of feasts it is the first day of the seventh month—nothing apparently special. To the Jewish people, this holiday, and the *shofar* blasts thereon, is seen as a call to repentance before *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. It is on this

day that God decides a person’s judgement for the coming year. Provided no repentance intervenes, that judgement is sealed on *Yom Kippur*.

Until I visited a particular Messianic Jewish web site recently, I had never associated this passage with some important ones in the New Testament. Jesus, himself, associated his coming with the blowing of the *shofar*. “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a *shofar*, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt 24:30-31)

Paul expands on this idea in his discussion of the body we shall have at the resurrection. “Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the *shofar* shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (1 Cor 15:51-53)

Modern iconography shows Gabriel coming and playing Al Hirt or Miles Davis for the resurrection. Well, if not those great trumpet players, at least the medieval herald with the long trumpet. Instead, the picture Paul gives is of the piercing sound of the ram’s horn trumpet as blown on *Rosh Hashanah*. Nobody could mistake it for Harry James. But nobody could miss hearing it, either. That “last *shofar*” will be heard by all.

## No man knows the day and hour

The position of some Messianic Jews in regard to the return of the Messiah, as evidenced by some of the web sites I visited, is that Jesus will return specifically on *Rosh Hashanah* to set up an earthly kingdom of peace and brotherhood. They don’t know which year he will come, but they claim that they know the specific holiday.

Jesus said, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” (Matt 24:36) He specifically points out that no man can know *the day* or the hour of his coming. If this is so, how do some claim that they know he will come on *Rosh Hashanah*?

Those whom I read on this point out that *Rosh Hashanah* is celebrated on both the first and second

days of the seventh month. Therefore, while they know he will come during the holiday of the Feast of Trumpets they don't know which of the two days it will be. Thus, nobody knows the day (which of the two) or the hour (which of forty-eight) that the Messiah will come again.

That sounds like a good argument, except for one detail. It is true that the Jews celebrate the holiday on two successive days. This tradition dates back to the days following the destruction of Jerusalem when the Jewish people were scattered over the face of the known world. The sanhedrin in Jerusalem would have to wait for two witnesses to say they had seen the new moon before they could categorically identify the date of the holiday. Because communications from Jerusalem were not instantaneous, those scattered around the world began to celebrate on the two days that would be sure to include the new moon. Even after the development of accurate calendars that gave the specific date, and even hour, of the new moon, and even after the later development of modern worldwide communications, this practice has continued. But the fact remains that the specific day of the holiday is known, although they continue to celebrate for two days.

The argument that Jesus was saying he would come on one of two days, but that nobody knows which one is hardly valid. To Jesus and his hearers, there was only one day of the Feast of *Shofars*. Even if he were looking forward to a day when most would celebrate it on two days, his hearers would not understand this. The great rabbi Paul, when he wrote about the "last *shofar*," if he were saying it would come on the holiday, would certainly have considered it to be one day. Beyond that, logically "no man knows the day or hour" implies simply that no man knows when the event will be, not that nobody knows which of two days. This is borne out by the rest of Jesus' discourse in Matthew 24.

### **Be prepared (the Boy Scout Motto)**

While I don't agree with this conclusion, that Jesus will come on *Rosh Hashanah*, it seems clear that Paul considered the holiday to be at least symbolic of his coming. Jesus clearly associated the symbolism of the blowing of the *shofar* with his return. Rather than saying that they now knew when he would return, he goes on to say:

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the

Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall

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come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt 24:42-51)

It would be very tempting to live as one wanted, and then when the Days of Awe, the days from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Yom Kippur*, arrived to sincerely show repentance and be assured of the atonement at the end of that time. Some might question, rightly or wrongly, that repentance, however. If one had sinned early in the year, he might be tempted to think that gave him license to sin however he wants until the approach of the Days of Awe. I know the rabbis would argue that this is not the intent of *Rosh Hashanah*. Nevertheless, it is human nature.

Jesus says, however, that such a person is evil. One who expects to "sow his wild oats" and then make a deathbed confession is likely to die unexpectedly. One who says he can wait until the approach of *Rosh Hashanah* to straighten up his life, believing that to be the day Jesus will reappear, may be surprised when the end of the world comes in spring rather than fall. Jesus says that not knowing "the day and hour" (verse 36) is the same as "a day when he is not looking for him" (verse 50).

Although the Feast of the Trumpets is associated with the final coming of Christ and with the resurrection, Jesus says not to expect it on that day. We should all be ready every day to hear the *shofar*. For those who are constantly prepared, the trumpet will herald a feast indeed.

# THE JOY OF GOD'S WORD

There is a holiday on the Jewish calendar called *Simchas Torah* (the Joy of Torah). It falls just after the day after *Succoth* (September 29 in 2002), on or after the holiday of *Shemini Atzeres*. *Simchas Torah* is not one of the holidays prescribed in the Law, but is of rabbinic origin. There is a lesson, however, that we can learn from it.

For every week of the year the rabbis have assigned a reading from the Torah, the five books of Moses. The cycle of readings ends, and begins again, on *Simchas Torah*. On that day everyone in the congregation is given the opportunity to read part of the passage, unlike most holidays and Sabbaths in which only seven men are called to the reading. On that day the Torah scrolls are brought out and paraded around the sanctuary of the synagogue while the congregation sings and rejoices. The point of the holiday is rejoicing in the word of God.

Many Christians I know (and, to be honest, many Jews) do not read the entire Bible or even five books of the Bible through in a year. Some, if they didn't listen during the sermon, might not get the equivalent of a good chapter. One reason for this lack of interest in reading the Bible may be found in the holiday of *Simchas Torah*.

Americans, especially, have gotten used to being entertained. We want to be happy, but we want that happiness to come from something external. There are situation comedies on television to suit almost any taste in humor. Even our television commercials tell us that happiness is the right mutual fund/mouthwash/beer/

chewing gum. But joy comes from something internal. Perhaps many don't read the Bible because they have no joy in it.

That may sound contradictory. Am I not talking about joy in reading the Bible? Is that not something external? Yes, and no. Yes, the Bible, as a book that can be read, is something external. However, the word of God is something we must make internal in order to get joy from it.

Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is the word of God (Eph 6:17). That Holy Spirit is to dwell in us (Col 3:16). If the Holy Spirit is purely external to us—if we read the Bible, but don't let it into our souls—then there can be no joy in Torah.

When was the last time someone came up to you and said, "Rejoice with me. I just finished reading the Bible!" When was the last time you said that to somebody? Some of us go through the Bible quickly; others may take over a year. But what would be wrong with inviting someone to share your joy when you finish, and start again? When our children read it through for the first time, why not throw a party? That would show how enthusiastic we are about the word of God. If a congregation has set a goal of reading the Bible through in a year, celebrating with those who met that goal would only enhance the joy.

Of course I am not saying this is something that we should require of others. I have no right to legislate church holidays. On the other hand, if we truly rejoice in the word of God, why not share our joy with others? Who knows what influence that might have? It might even make us want to study God's word more often.

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