

Rescue Mission Devotional
Evening of October 20, 2008
Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah—Jerusalem Time
By Kevin Swift

During the last three weeks Jews have been celebrating God's fall Festivals called the High Holy Days. In Leviticus 23, through the prophet Moses, God instructed the people of Israel to observe His appointed festivals each year, starting with Passover in the spring followed by several fall Festivals that occur one after the other, which are just about to conclude this year in the next 24 hours.

The world has changed drastically since we last sat around this table on September 15th. It is prophetic, in my view, that as the sun was setting in Jerusalem and Rosh HaShanah—the Feast of Trumpets began on September 29th, here in America the DOW began to suffer some of its most severe losses since the Great Depression. The ten days to follow between Rosh HaShanah and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)—September 30 to October 9, 2008, are known in Judaism as the "Days of Awe"—meaning, days of repentance and humility that lead up to that most solemn day in the Bible—the Day of Atonement. It is a time to turn towards God; then, five days later comes the Feast of Tabernacles, which is celebrated for seven days.

Our national economy is in chaos, and I believe God is showing us and our Jewish friends our need to trust in Him, and not the institutions of men. The last two Federal Chairmen, Alan Greenspan and currently, Ben Bernanke, are both Jews. Some of the individuals overseeing our largest banks are Jews. Many of our Jewish friends and our own family members have suffered losses in retirement plans. Alan Greenspan warned, "*This is a once-in-a-century crisis.*" Now an American economic crash is moving the world towards a global collapse. From Japan, to Europe, to Israel and even Russia, stock markets are in a decline and trillions of dollars have been lost. There are calls for globalization of the world's banks—a prerequisite of an international system of buying and selling foretold in Revelation 13.

In Leviticus 23:39, God establishes his Festivals, and instructs concerning the fall season, "*On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days... On the eighth day hold an assembly and do no regular work.*" Today, in Jerusalem, the seventh day of the Festival celebration has ended and the *eighth day* has begun—called Shemini Atzeret meaning, "the assembly of the *eighth (day)*."

Tonight, as we sit here together during the hours of the "*eighth day*," we are assembled as one to do God's work. So I want to take this opportunity to talk a little more about the "*eighth day*" which Jews are celebrating, and the *eighth* prophetic day that I believe is soon to come.

One element of this *eighth day* celebration is a synagogue event called Simchat Torah, which means "Rejoicing in the Torah,"—rejoicing in God's Word. It is a time of great celebration in the Jewish culture. The Biblical scrolls are taken from the Ark in the synagogue, and the congregation sings and dances seven times around the synagogue carrying the scrolls. It is particularly a festival celebration that *focuses on the children* of the assembly. Many congregations invite the children up front for a reading of the

Scriptures, then they march around the synagogue with flags and they kiss the scrolls in honor of the Word of God.

I'd like to share my own Simchat Torah story, if you will allow me—my personal “rejoicing in God’s Word.” The story will mean much more to me than it will to you, but is worth sharing because it is connected to this annual event and connected to my devotions tonight. When I was just 3 ½ years old, my S.S. teacher, Helen Exline, gave me my first Bible. My “rejoicing in God’s Word” story continues with an event eight years later at the age of 12. My father, a Baptist minister, left Iowa and moved his family to take a church in Abilene, Kansas. Little did I know that I no longer had my first Bible. I had not even missed it, and as the years passed and I purchased several other Bibles of various translations. It was a forgotten memory.

On January 29, 1991, my grandmother, a dear Godly woman—nearly 96 years old, died the day before my 35th birthday. We traveled to Iowa for her funeral. While there, an elderly woman with a familiar face walked up to me and introduced herself. I had not seen her for decades. She was from that small town church in Iowa--Mark Baptist Church, where my father had been a minister. She asked, “Do you remember having a little white Bible when you were a child?” I replied with a surprised “YES!” almost anticipating what she was about to do. She pulled my first white Bible from behind her back and presented it to me 23 years later, almost to the day. I had left it behind at her house after a Sunday lunch invitation, because of our upcoming move to Kansas. It was as though God had hidden it away for safekeeping until that moment. I had been told all my life that I was my grandmother’s favorite grandchild. I didn’t know why, but I held her heart somehow as a child. Now, at her funeral, my treasured possession came back to me—my heirloom Bible! I realized that if I had kept my Bible in our move to Kansas, it would have likely been discarded or lost forever like most all the other treasures of my childhood.

The date on the inside cover of my first Bible is October 25, 1959. Because of the closeness of this October date to my devotion tonight (October 20, 2008), I traced the Jewish Festivals back to October, 1959, and realized that my Sunday school teacher had given me my first Bible on *Simchat Torah*—the Festival which Jews are celebrating right now and in the hours ahead—49 years ago (Jewish Festivals fall on different dates from year to year, based on the lunar/solar calendar). I know this may seem like a coincident, but to me it is a blessing from the Lord in my personal walk with Him—my miracle.

Part of the week long Feast of Tabernacles celebration that Jews have been observing this last week, and leading up to tonight, involves two important elements—1) the building of the booth and 2) the waving of fruit and leafy branches in the Tabernacle. The booth is a temporary dwelling place constructed each year. Families are to leave the comfort of their homes and stay in these temporary outdoor 3-sided, open air booths. Leviticus 23:43 says, *Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to **live in booths** so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.*”

By this, God is reminding the Israelites that He took them from their permanent homes in Egypt (brick & mortar) and made them to live in tents for 40 years. At times they

suffered from the heat of the sun, from hunger, from thirst and shed many tears. Yet God revealed Himself to them and protected them in miraculous ways to bring them to the Promised Land, because He *Tabernacled* among them. For us, the booths would be like God asking us to leave our homes and live in tents for a week, to remind us that we cannot always depend upon the permanence of our homes, furniture and possessions. *Winds and waves can take them away; we too could one day find ourselves homeless.*

Leviticus 23:40 says, “*On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and **palm branches**, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.*” It was a holiday devoted to celebrating the fall harvest season and God’s provisions of rain and water.

The book of Revelation is rich in Biblical references and the symbolism of the Old Testament, particularly pointing to the Fall Festivals. Revelation 7 speaks about a future day when a great multitude will stand before God’s throne. Not just the Jews, but a “*great multitude of all nations*”—Jew and Gentile alike. To understand the paradoxical nature of this passage, we have to understand how contrary to Jewish belief and mindset this would have been when written by John on the Island of Patmos. No Gentile was allowed anywhere near the inner Temple area in his day. There were four courts surrounding the Temple in Jerusalem: First the court of the Priests, followed by the court of the Israelite men, surrounded by the court for Jewish women, and then the court of the Gentiles—that is the closest any Gentile could get to the Temple itself.

Revelation 7:9,10,13-17 (NASB Version): “*After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from ^(A)every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing ^(B)before the throne and ^(C)before the Lamb, clothed in ^(D)white robes, and ^(E)palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “^(E)Salvation to our God ^(G)who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb...*

Then one of the elders asked me, “These who are clothed in the ^(P)white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the ^(Q)Great Tribulation, and they have ^(R)washed their robes and made them ^(S)white in the ^(T)blood of the Lamb.

“For this reason, they are ^(U)before the throne of God; and they ^(V)serve Him day and night in His ^(W)temple; and ^(X)He who sits on the throne will spread His ^(Y)tabernacle over them. “^(Z)They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their ^(AA)shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the ^(AB)water of life; and ^(AC)God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

The reference to “*palm branches*” and the “*spreading of His Tabernacle over the great multitude*” connects this passage to the events in Jerusalem this last week that are ending tonight. I am led to the conclusion (along with many other Messianic Jews and students of prophecy) that the coming of our Lord will occur during the Fall Festivals. Just as Christ died during Passover at the Spring Festival season to fulfill the first set of Feasts, He will come again to fulfill the Fall Festivals. Zechariah 14 says, “*all the nations (Gentiles included)... will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles*”—also called the *Festival of the Nations* in

Judaism. So one day, all of us in this room, as Gentiles, will be celebrating this festival in God's kingdom.

Many of us believe that God has ordained a seven day cycle of time, followed by the all important "*eighth day*." As God created the world in six days and rested the seventh the first week of creation, so six days God will allow sin to reign, represented by six thousand years of sin history. But, on the seventh day there will be rest from sin. After the thousand year millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment, God will usher in the *eighth day... the day of new beginnings and eternal celebration*. A day that begins an eternity without sin or sinners! In that day, we will lift up the Word of God, written by Hebrew men inspired by the Holy Spirit, with rejoicing and singing in the spirit of *Simchat Torah*. We will celebrate our King and the eternal kingdom. Not surprisingly, Judaism also associates the *eighth day* with the Age to Come.

God's Festivals, called in the Scriptures the "appointed times," or *moedim* (meaning "rehearsals") hold historical significance, but also portend last-day events. In Daniel 8 the prophet sees a war vision, and in verse 19, the angel explains to Daniel the vision of war will occur at the end of time. He said, "*I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end*" (the Festival period of the end). This conflict involves the Persians, and we know that Persia is today's Iran (Persia changed its name to Iran in 1935). So, it is my view the Iranian conflict against Israel and her NATO and US allies is soon forthcoming, and will begin at or during the appointed times—such as a night like this one, or will quickly follow a Festival period of God's choosing.

We as Gentile saints have much to celebrate. We can hold up the Word of God and rejoice even more than our Jewish friends who do not know the LORD, for we know the Savior of the Book—Y'shua, Jesus, the Messiah. Even now, we are spiritually invited into the Temple and into the presence of God. One day, we will see Him face to face.

The work of the Rescue Mission represents in many ways that promise of the *eighth day* and the New Jerusalem. Our work involves spreading a tent of protection over men, women and children. We feed the hungry and supply water to thirsty souls. We give hope to the hurting ones whom would otherwise be out in the scorching heat, and give them shelter and the living water—Jesus Christ. We try, as best we can, to wipe the tears from their eyes. We give the downtrodden a glimpse of the *eighth day*! Our eternal hope!

Prayer

Lord, tonight we look forward to that day when we stand before your throne. It would be our privilege to serve You day and night in your Temple. You, with all your majesty and glory, will sit on the throne and will spread your canopy of protection over us. Never again will we hunger or thirst. The sun will not beat upon us. The Lamb will be at the center of the throne and will be our Shepherd; He will lead us to springs of living water that flow from the throne of God. And you will wipe away every tear from our eyes. The rescue mission will be complete!

What glimpse of glory we see, and we anticipate that day! We desperately want to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Lord tonight, give us Divine wisdom for the guidance of this ministry beyond our current abilities, for YOU see what lies ahead in clear view. We need the Spirit of the Living God to dwell in us, to lead us into all truth as You promised You would. May this ministry be protected from Satan's wrath that we might continue to provide for the men, women and children, who need protection from their personal storms, which they once never thought possible, but today are experiencing first hand. May they see the Savior in us; in our hearts, in our eyes, in our touch, and in our humble service.