

**An analysis of the interpretation and celebration  
of the three pilgrimage festivals in Messianic Jewry  
and their impact on Christian practice**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the contents of this thesis, unless otherwise specified, represent my own original work.

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## ABSTRACT

The Christian canon comprises of sixty six book. Of these the majority, thirty nine to be precise, stem from the Jewish religion. These books, comprising the Hebrew Bible direct or guide the adherents of Judaism till today. Christians consider the Hebrew Bible as the *Old Testament* in the light of a new revelation in Jesus Christ.

This thesis questions the last premise, firstly in the light that Messianic Jews or present day Jewish *Christians*, also still adhere to their heritage as stemming from the Old Testament. Secondly, it should be noted that due to missionary influence both the Old Testament (Hebrew) culture and African culture were discarded. In the light of so many correlations between the Old Testament values and culture and African values and culture I set out to trace whether there is more to the Old Testament than the deductions we, Africans, have inherited from the Western minds down the centuries, as we in the process could have tapped into their (unconscious?) anti-Jewish motivations.

As a start in this wide field, I focus on the three pilgrimage festivals, Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles, prescribed in the Old Testament. I go back in history, through the eyes of Messianic Jews, to learn about the celebrations and interpretations that surround these festivals. Once I have gained that insight I contrast it with the general Christian interpretations and celebrations and where there is room for implementation of Messianic Jewish insight I put these forward towards liturgical enrichment and worship enhancement in the Lutheran Church.

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## INTRODUCTION

"What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God."

"Theirs is the adoption of sons; theirs the divine glory; the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!"

(Rom. 3 : 1-2; 9: 3-5, NIV).

This quotation depicts an answer to a search in the primitive Church concerning the continuous relevancy of Old Testament values. With the passing centuries this search has expanded in the Christian Church into a debate, which still surfaces in one form or another, viz. the relevancy of the Old Testament for Christians.

I am driven to pursue this search for the relevancy of the Old Testament in the light of my personal experiences. I have been educated from the perspective of what has commonly been called Replacement Theology (Fieldsend 1993:15, Hegstad 1997: 112, Hahn 1998: 57). This theology boils down to the perception that the Jews with their rejection of Jesus the Christ had forfeited their position as the chosen race and this privileged position had now been taken up by the Church. This Church is guided by a new code found in the New Testament. The Old Testament prophecy foretold this transition whereby the Old Testament value system will be replaced and lapse into silence. Around these perceptions a theological package, stressing the supremacy of the New Testament, was formulated setting the pattern of interpretation for Christians.

I was shielded for years with this perception till it was shattered when I was confronted with a living Judaism in Israel and later with Messianic Judaism. Both these groups challenged Replacement Theology by *still* being obedient and faithful to the commands of God as put forward in the Old Testament and living what was supposed to be outdated and abrogated.

This "confrontation" especially with *Jewish* believers in Christ revealed another answer to the above

debate as to the relevancy of the Old Testament for *Christians* and brought about a quest as to whether there was more to the Old Testament than the pattern of interpretation we have been following for centuries? I had to ask difficult questions, the likes of could my educators, who were standing in a line of European (German) conditioning since the Reformation, be prejudiced in their approach to and transmission of Jewish values encountered in the Old Testament, and thus had developed their views based on these (unconscious) motivations? (It should be noted that Martin Luther was and is not held in high regard by Jews due to his views).<sup>1</sup> Another question was whether it is possible that our view concerning the supremacy of the New Testament over the Old Testament can be compared to (rebellious) adolescents who would (like to) relinquish everything their parents have taught them and made possible in their lives? Maybe this is extreme, but do we ever take a serious look at what motivates our attitudes to the guidelines and directions in the Old Testament?

Up to this point I have continuously used the idea of the relevancy of the *Old Testament*. If one considers the diversity of the content in this section of the canon, it would be clear that I am unable to concentrate on all these aspects. Due to this, I have narrowed my scope to focus on the relevancy of the *festivals* in the Old Testament, and then the *pilgrimage festivals* as such.

This thesis then is directed at a search as to whether we can gain more from the Old Testament festivals. This will be done especially in the light of views such as that of, for example, David Brickner who states that "God gave the Biblical festivals to teach the Jewish people about His character and to help us understand His plan of salvation. But *all* Christians who have been "grafted in" to the olive tree (Romans 11) *share our rich heritage and roots*" (italics mine) (1999: 1). Also Jo Taite who in *The Appointed Times of the Lord* goes beyond this stating that "God's plan for

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<sup>1</sup>In 1521 Luther wrote *Das Magnificat* in which he insists that the Jews should not be treated with in an unloving or unchristian manner. This was dealt with more fully in a booklet entitled *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew* wherein he showed both theological concern for the Jews and a true humanitarian spirit. In 1543 however, he wrote *Concerning the Jews and their lies* which reflects disappointment over the seemingly impossibility of converting the Jews through the gospel and his resentment against the religious propaganda of the Jews. The intemperate language led to the charge that Luther was not only anti- Semitic, but the father of modern anti-Semitism (Bodensieck 1965 : 1183).

salvation for mankind contained in the Lord's Festivals, form part of the "nourishing sap" that we have become partakers of with Israel, and we are all the poorer for ignoring and neglecting these appointed times of Yahweh.... Maybe the time has come for us to take back what the enemy has robbed us of and return to the Feasts of the Lord "(Taite nd: 41).

Another motivation for this search is the fact that the missionary zeal did not really take African values and culture into consideration when contextualizing the Bible. A wealth of similarities exists between the African culture and the Hebrew culture which were simply ignored. Aspects such as land issues, patriarchy, family values (the high regard for ancestry, blood ties), marriage, leadership and judicial issues, ritual, e.g. sacrifice, etc. Gerald West underscores this when he quotes Lemche's view that European readers give the Old Testament little chance to defend themselves, almost as little chance as they gave local traditions in the colonized countries ( 1999: 103). Today Old Testament African scholarship abounds with comparative work between the Old Testament and Africa, which is based on the assumption that there is some sort of correspondence between the African experience and the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> The perception is advocated that there is no conflict between biblical and traditional African religious beliefs. Various works by Mbiti, Bujo, Wambudta, etc. had shown the compatibility between Scripture and an African world-view (See Mbiti, 1986; Bujo, 1992; Wambudta 1981: 137-153).

Like these scholars I hold the view that today there is to be a 'transaction' between the Bible and Africa. For this thesis however, the approach needs to be different. In my search I approach the Bible as the 'subject', and despite various moves to the contrary a book of authority for Africa from which I seek guidance. Seeing that the Old Testament derives however from another language setting and culture and goes back way beyond our time frame, I seek an intermediary to open or gain access to the Old Testament milieu. Hereto I use Messianic Judaism to bridge the divide and to reveal (for this thesis) the background and celebrations of the festivals.

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<sup>2</sup> Semeia 73, 1994 deals with this assumption and many related aspects of the relation between Africa and the Bible.

My idea is not on the issue of normativity or the obligation of these precepts for Christians, or to put it differently to return to legalism which means an attempt to win God's favour or our own salvation by keeping the Law. The quest rather is along the line of the views of Gene Getz in the foreword to *Celebrate the Feasts* who contends that the Old Testament is a great and inexhaustible resource for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christians; one we tend to overlook because we believe that we live in the light of God's full revelation in the New Testament. He states that one of the most overlooked areas involves various feasts, celebrations and other family events outlined by God for Israel. Whilst his stress is on celebration in a family setting, my emphasis will be beyond this in searching whether the pilgrimage festivals can be adapted for Christian use in worship and liturgical enrichment.



In my methodology then, I will focus on what Messianic Jews are doing with the pilgrimage festivals. Their interpretation and celebration will be analysed and compared with the Gentile Christian practice to see whether I can learn from them to enrich our practice during the liturgical year. I will devote a chapter to each of the three pilgrimage festivals. In each chapter I will gather the prescriptions concerning the festival in the narrative accounts in the *Torah* or Pentateuch. I will then continue to give an overview of the celebrations concerning the festival down the centuries, firstly as recorded in the rest of the Hebrew Bible and then as they developed after the destruction of the Second Temple. In the latter, I will focus on the changing stipulations and guidelines as stemming from Rabbinic Literature from 70 CE till the formulation of the Babylonian Talmud. Over against these stipulations concerning the traditional Jewish celebrations, the Messianic Jewish practice of each festival will be portrayed. This will be done to analyse the Messianic Jews' adherence to their Jewish roots whilst looking how they incorporate Christian meaning to the festival. This Messianic Jewish practice will furthermore be put over against the general Christian tradition and celebration concerning the festival and the differences will lead to an evaluation whether Messianic Jewish insight and practice can be utilized in my denomination, for example in the worship and liturgical sphere.

Allow me at this stage to clarify some aspects of my methodological approach:

This thesis is about reinterpretation. Hereto various hermeneutic strategies were open to me to

pursue my quest. I will briefly relate two popular ones in the light of the African context and quest.

Firstly, more and more, an analysis of rituals is used to amplify the traditional historical methodologies to gain understanding and appreciation of the biblical text, by the exploration and application of social scientific (principally cultural-anthropological) theories, perspectives, and methods (McVann 1994: 10). The work of Victor Turner for example, is used extensively when he approaches rituals as rites comprising three phases: separation, liminality and reincorporation. Allow me to elaborate briefly on these stages with respect to the festivals. During every pilgrimage festival the males *separate* from their dwellings, go to the sanctuary and live there in a state of *liminality*. This comprises a position completely different from the usual patterns at home. At the sanctuary they are all equal, status-less and engage in rites (eating of leavened bread, living in booths) differently from the ordinary. After the allocated period they are *reincorporated* into society when they return home. In the light of these practices, rituals can be identified as a means of constructing, maintaining, and transforming the cosmos (Gorman 1994: 27). This strategy then, in the light of the rehabilitation of ritual and the emergence of ritual studies offer to biblical scholars another rich interpretative resource for approaching the Bible. I do not use this approach as I perceive it as an inflexible mold against which certain rituals are tested to proof or disproof a certain hypothesis (cf. the statement by Gorman earlier). Also this approach does not reveal to me all the minute insight to the origin and interpretations to the different elements of the festival which I need. These important aspects of background knowledge I need to contextualize for implementation in my denomination.

Secondly, an inculturation biblical hermeneutic was open to me to be utilized. This hermeneutic is defined by Justin Ukpong as an attempt to relate aspects in the Hebrew Bible's religious culture to African religious culture. This hermeneutic is an approach that consciously and explicitly seeks to interpret the biblical text from the socio-cultural perspectives of different nations. This includes both their religious and secular culture as well as their social and historical experiences. This hermeneutic supposes that the biblical text is plurivalent and can be validly understood differently according to different contexts and perspectives (1994:190).

My decision for not using this strategy comes from Ukpong himself when he stresses that we need

to be aware that much of the interaction was basically adaptation and much remains to be done at the deeper level of inculturation(1997: 231).

I have decided to use Messianic Judaism as a vehicle to achieve my goals of reinterpretation in the light that Messianic Jews are in a position to represent not only the past, but a present greatness of the Old Testament. They have access to the original biblical interpretation and celebration of each of the festivals and that is crucial for me as I need that original insight to the various elements when I wish to adapt the festivals in my context and thereby grow in faith through practising them. Another reason for utilizing Messianic Jews is that they still adhere to the basic Biblical precepts where the celebration and traditions are guided by Scripture or draw on the textual tradition stemming from them, in contrast to that of Rabbinic Judaism, i.e. legalistic developments concerning the festivals after the destruction of the Second Temple which became normative. This complements my search as I will primarily focus on the level of the text, rather than the socio-historical reconstruction which is rather difficult to make as the available information concerning the festivals before the exile is very speculative. Thus, rather than getting bogged down in a sea of speculation, I proceed quite rapidly to the Second Temple and beyond where ample sources provide insights to the festivals.

Another feature that the reader will note in this thesis is that I will only trace each festival from the prescriptions in the Pentateuch to the guidelines in the Babylonian Talmud. I had decided arbitrarily to draw the line here and limit the literature in the Judaica section up to this stage due to the following:

I am aware that there have been developments beyond the Talmud, including the likes of firstly, the works of the scholars in the *Geonim* era. They operated in the period following the Talmud between 500 and 1038 CE. During this period these scholars were the supreme religious authority and questions were directed to them from all over the Jewish world. The period came to an end with the death of Rabbi Shmuel ben Chofni, Gaon of Sura, and Rabbi Hai, Gaon of Pumbedisa. This was followed by the works of the *Rishonim*, early masters, who came to the fore with decline of the academies in Babylon and rise in influence of the Jewish communities in North Africa and Europe. Rashi, Maimonides, Nachmanides belonged to this period, and have left lasting legacies through their

commentaries and guidelines. The next period was that of the *Achoraim*, the later masters, operating from about 1492 CE onwards (Landesman 1995: 205ff).

To return to my explanation, I have not utilized information from these periods due to the perception that the Talmud is the beginning and end concerning religious guidance as it sets the stage for Jewish practice and life. All the other centuries were devoted to clarifying the Talmud in various interpretations and commentaries. Another Judaic concept is that the further we move from Sinai the more we digress from the Torah. Thus, unlike a general positive view in the progress of humankind, Judaism holds the view that we are actually digressing. In the light of these it will be notice that with a few exceptions I do not go beyond the Talmudic period.

The reader will also observe that I do not focus on the New Testament when tracing the festivals. This is due to my perception that the recordings concerning the festivals in the Gospels and Acts occur squarely in the Jewish traditions as shown in the recollections in the *Mishnah*. I thus underscore the views of Ferdinand Hahn that Jesus' mission and deeds ( and the festivals for that matter) can be understood only in the context of Judaism, for not until the end of the 1st century were the connections to Judaism loosened (1998: 56). To trace the festivals in the New Testament will thus only be a repetition of what is stated in the Judaic sections. Where there are differences however, these are highlighted in the section where I trace the festival and interpretation in Messianic Judaism.

I will now clarify the following concepts:

*Pilgrimage festivals* are the festivals elaborated upon in Ex 23:14ff, 34:18ff, Lev. 23:4ff, Num. 28:16ff. Deut. 16: 16. Here we read that three רגלים *regalim* (literally, 'feet')- that is three times a year, i.e. during Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles all males were to leave their abode and appear before the Lord. At first the Israelites made pilgrimages to a central sanctuary, but later this was directed to the Temple in Jerusalem. The festivals were firstly individually related to the three seasons of the agricultural year, but later they have been connected to the commemoration of a historical event of national importance, viz. the Exodus, Revelation at

Sinai and the wandering in the wilderness.

When I speak of *Messianic Jews*, I refer to a modern Jewish Christian movement who confess that they maintain their faith in Jesus as the *Messiah*, and their Jewish identity. Their origin can be traced to Joseph Rabinovitch, a Russian Jewish scholar and lawyer who fled to Israel. Being a keen Bible student he was interested in the historical biblical places and hereto was given a New Testament as it was perceived that it provides the best reliable record of the sites. On reading the New Testament Rabinovitch became convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. With this new insight he returned to Russia and started the Community of Messianic Jews, the Sons of the New Covenant. It should be noted that this movement and the subsequent growth to Austro-Hungary in the West and Siberia in the East, were free from any missionary influence (Fieldsend 1993: 23). Ultimately they would link up with English Missionary activity directed at Jews *per se*. The English Missionary activity would result in various conversions and with time the establishment of various churches which led to the Hebrew Christian Alliance in 1866 and the International Hebrew Christian Alliance in 1925. During World War II it seemed as if this movement had died due to the decimation of Jewish communities. In 1948 the State of Israel came into being focussing again on the Jews and their cause during the subsequent years. In the 1960's Jewish 'flower power' dropouts were reached by Christian missionaries who had managed to bring them to faith and the acceptance that Jesus is the *Messiah*. These converts were at first drawn into the Church and given full membership of the historic denominations. With time, however, a movement arose within the body of the Church where these Jewish Christians sought their own congregational autonomy and independence, although being still one in faith with their Gentile brothers and sisters. This search was due to the fact that firstly, they were unable to fully and freely practise their Jewish values which they still cherished, and secondly, they wanted to be free from the (anti-Semitic) Christian stigma when they try to convince their fellow Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

This is not a unified movement as can be expected due to the different denominational traditions from which these later converts stem, but the Jewish identity of the movement has been underscored. Today they provide an alternative to rabbinic Judaism and accept the view that Jesus is the only way to God for all people both Jew and pagan.

For this study I have focused extensively on the international group *Jews for Jesus*, with their South African headquarters in Johannesburg. I have also participated in Messianic Jewish congregations in the Cape Town area, but these congregations can also be found in the major cities in South Africa. Some are related to mainline denominations, but others are independent.

I shall use the word *Gentile Christians* at certain sections of the book, to bring across interpretations and ritual practised by those Christians other than Jewish Christians.

The reader will also note that from time to time I refer to “*my denomination*”. Here I refer to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA). ELCSA has its origin in the work of five Mission Societies, viz. the Berlin, the Norwegian, Hermannsburg, Rhenish, and the Swedish Mission Societies, who started their work all over Southern Africa from the early nineteenth century. These separate activities resulted in a multiplicity of churches although they all adhered to Lutheran dogma and principles. In 1966 this adherence led to the formulation of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA) and in 1975 the number of churches in the Federation further diminished with the merger of four regional churches into ELCSA. The German Lutheran Regional Churches opted not to join the merger. The merger was sealed with the adoption of the same constitution which secured that the liturgical and related practice would be of a uniform nature. To secure this further, theological education, which was co-ordinated since 1912, was streamlined even further with the establishment of one theological centre to facilitate the unity. Today only language divides the different congregations, the faith content, mode of worship and proclamation is exactly the same.

This thesis then comprises of three chapters, shaped around the three pilgrimage festivals. A chapter is devoted to each festival and the structure of each chapter is similar. Chapter one will deal with Passover, two with the Feast of Weeks, and the third with the Feast of Tabernacles. As indicated earlier I will set out to trace these festivals firstly in the Old Testament and then in Judaism. This is necessary to capture the continuity or discontinuity concerning the celebration and interpretation of the festival in Messianic Judaism and Christianity. The crux of the thesis is to compare the last two, and especially to utilize the positive traits practised in Messianic Judaism in my denomination.

In conclusion it should be noted that this thesis is thus an interdisciplinary study including aspects of

Biblical Studies, Studies in Judaism, Church History, and Liturgics or Worship. In each discipline I just scratch the surface, however I have tried to follow a logical sequence to bring the subject matter across in a clear and beneficial way.

# CHAPTER ONE

## PASSOVER

### 1. Introduction

In this chapter I will focus on the first of the three pilgrimage festivals, viz. Passover. Not only is it the first in the calendar of the Jewish festivals, generally, it is the greatest of Jewish festivals. It has been *the* holiday, the festival of redemption (Schauss 1970: 38). In reference to its celebration and commemoration, the command was given that all males should appear annually before the Lord, (at the place He will choose cf. Deut. 16:16) in gratitude and reverence towards God for the liberation from enslavement in Egypt (Ex. 23:15,17 ).

The aim of this chapter will be to investigate, *firstly* the celebration of the Passover feast in Messianic Judaism. Towards this I will raise the question in how far do they incorporate the interpretation of the original precepts given in the *Torah* concerning the institution of the Passover especially those stemming from Rabbinical Judaism with the destruction of the Second Temple. *Secondly*, although Messianic Jews exist to make the Messiahship of Jesus an unavoidable issue to the *Jewish* People, in how far/what can mainline *Christian* groups' gain from their celebration and interpretations in the light of the view that both sectors view Jesus as the Paschal lamb slain for our sins.

I will approach this chapter in the following manner. I will start by tracing the narrative accounts relating to Passover in the *Torah* or Pentateuch. I will then give an overview of the actual celebrations down the centuries, firstly as outlined in the rest of the Hebrew Bible and then as they developed after the destruction of the Second Temple in the light of stipulations and guidelines in Rabbinic Literature.

Over against this traditional Jewish celebration, the Messianic Jewish practice of Passover will be

portrayed to analyse their adherence to their Jewish roots whilst they incorporate Christian meaning to the festival. This analysis will be put over against the general Christian tradition concerning Passover which will lead to an evaluation as to whether Messianic Jewish insight and practice can be utilized in my denomination, for example in the worship and liturgical sphere.

## 2. Overview of Passover in the Torah

The institution of Passover or פסח (*Pesach*) stems from the gracious intervention of God on behalf of slaves when He “leaped or passed over”, (Heb. פסח *pasach*) the houses of the Israelites during the slaying of the firstborn in all the houses in Egypt. Cecil and Moishe Rosen are of the opinion that the verb “pass over” has a deeper meaning than the idea of stepping or leaping over something to avoid contact. They rather, linking it with the Egyptian word *pesh*, which means spreading the wings over, see the meaning of *pesach* to refer to *the sheltering and protection as is found under the outstretched wings of the Almighty* (1978: 22). (Cf. also Büchner 1997:14ff).

The account of the Passover is found in Ex 12:3-13, (NIV):

*Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be shall be year- old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire- head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it:*

*with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover. "On that same night I will pass through Egypt, and strike down every firstborn-both men and animals-and I will bring and judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.*

This is immediately followed by regulations concerning the celebration of the festival in the future with the accompanying feast of Unleavened Bread with the intention that the people might reflect regularly upon all that God had done for them.

*For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eat anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. (v.15)*

*"Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as He promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?', then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spare our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.'" (v.24-27, NIV).*

The experience of the Passover and the liberation from Egypt were to be treasured and guarded against attempts to cheapen and undermine the supreme intervention of God. Thus, in Exodus 12:43-51 regulations are given prohibiting non-Israelites from partaking in the future Passover. This prohibition, would secure its proper and lasting observance free from foreign influences and corruption. This was also dictated seeing that "many other people" (v.38) had escaped with the Israelites and had accompanied them with no experience of the actual Passover. For them to partake in this distinctive Israelite observance (and thus to become part of the Israelite nation in the future), circumcision had to be performed on all the males (v.48). This would indicate total allegiance to Israel and her values. The significance of circumcision as a condition to participate in the Passover celebration was emphasized by the fact that during the wilderness period Passover was suspended,

save one, till the entry into Canaan. On entry into Canaan, the first act before the Passover celebration was the circumcision of all the males born in the wilderness (Jos 5:5-9). Rosen interprets this shift and delay from the general procedure to circumcise eight days after birth, to be due to the danger of infection which could follow on circumcision whilst they wander in the wilderness. As this threat had passed on entry in Canaan circumcision was performed (Rosen 1978: 37).

In Exodus 23: 14-18 we get the oldest listing of the sacred feasts (De Vaux 1978: 470-74; Durham 1987: 333). Here we also get the first statement of requirement specifying that every male is to appear three times annually before the Sovereign Lord at the place set aside for worship of *Yahweh*. The name, Passover, is not directly mentioned, probably due to the agricultural point of reference here. Reference is however made to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, making the one day of Passover seem a mere introductory to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Cole sees in this reference that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is given justification in Israel as a memorial to the past historical event of the redemption from Egypt (1973: 179). Johnson also saw the association between Passover and Unleavened Bread as rather a later addition. Passover was a pastoral rite, celebrated by the family in the household whilst the Feast of Unleavened Bread which marks the beginning of barley harvest, was one of the three annual harvest festivals of the farming community, when males went on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary. The Feast of Unleavened Bread has, however been brought into association with Passover in order to give it more credibility vis-a-vis a mere Canaanite (original) practice. Johnson continues that this association between Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was facilitated by the coincidence of two features, viz. both were spring rites and in both unleavened bread was eaten (1990: 44).

In Exodus 34: 18-26 we get the same stipulation concerning the feasts, but with minor variations. Here it is implied that the Feast of Unleavened Bread started with the celebration of the commemoration of the Passover followed by seven days where unleavened bread was to be consumed. Towards this a trip to a sanctuary for all the adult males not disqualified by disease or infirmity was prescribed (v.17). Hyatt sees the utilization of the term “go up”(34:24) as a technical term referring to the Temple in Jerusalem whereto the pilgrimages were to be made. He thus presumes that this passage presupposes the centralization of the worship in Jerusalem (1971: 325).

Be it as it may , the pilgrims were also to bring gifts expressing their gratitude to God (v.15). In Exodus 34:24, a presumably futuristic aspect is brought into focus by the promise that God will drive out nations before them and enlarge their territory “and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord, your God.”

Whilst Passover is presupposed but not mentioned in the Exodus accounts of the pilgrimage festivals, this is not the case in Leviticus. In the Book of Leviticus, chapter 23 gives a comprehensive description of the sacred seasons in the Jewish Year. From verse 4 we read of the Lord’s appointed *seasons* which were holy convocations. This referred to an assembly “convoked” or called together for worship at the Sanctuary. The convocation was done by means of sounding two silver trumpets (Num.10: 1-10). Passover is mentioned first (23:5), but Porter states that Passover was not a sacred assembly and draws attention to the fact that neither are any sacrificial offerings mentioned in connection with it. This is unlike the rest of the recording which follows from the next day (23: 6ff) where the writer (priestly revisor?) made the first and seventh day into an assembly for worship. Food offerings are also to be presented each day (1976: 181ff).

An important day within the seven-day period of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the Wave Sheaf (*Omer*) Day (23: 9-12). On this day a symbolic sheaf of grain was cut and brought to God as the firstfruit of the harvest (Grabbe 1993:89). Porter states that this first sheaf represents in fact the whole harvest (1976:27).

From the book of Leviticus we now move to Numbers. In chapter 9: 1-14 we find the records of the celebration of Passover in the second year after the Exodus in the desert of Sinai. Here special permission is introduced to celebrate a supplementary Passover the next month in cases of ritual uncleanness or where the pilgrim is a great distance from the sanctuary during the time of the feast. Another section deriving from the priestly source is Numbers 28: 1- 29: 40 which is seen as a manual of offering for the Holy Year. A repetition of the commandments concerning the Passover is augmented with stipulations concerning the daily supplementary offerings for the duration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These comprise two bulls, one ram and seven lambs (28:19).

The Book of Deuteronomy repeats the precepts concerning the Passover celebrations, stressing its commemorative aspects: “Thou shalt well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh...” (Deut. 7: 8, also 16: 1-8). In Deuteronomy the two feasts are treated as parts of a single whole. In this recording (cf. 16: 2), the Passover victim can be either a bullock or a sheep, unlike the limitation of a lamb only in the other places. Another new dimension is added in chapter 16 and stressed six times (cf. v.2, 6,7,11,15,16) by emphasizing the gathering for Passover to be not at the Israelite’s own home, nor any local shrine, but only at the *central* sanctuary which the Lord will choose for the celebration. The prescription that no yeast was to be found in your possession (16: 4), will result in the ceremony called *bedikat chametz*, the searching for leaven, as we will see in the later sections.

These then were the theory and precepts concerning Passover and the related Feast of Unleavened Bread. I will now move to the recordings of the celebrations of Passover in the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

### **3. Passover in the Prophets and Writings.**

The isolated references in the Bible ( Jos. 5 : 10-11 ; 2 Kings 23: 21-23; 2 Chron. 8: 13; 30 : 1-27; 35 : 16-19; Ezra 6: 19-22; Ezek. 45: 21) have been taken to indicate that Israel was not so faithful in the annual recollection of the Exodus. Thus, some scholars are of the opinion that it took the special inspiration of leaders like Samuel, Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra to periodically awaken Israel from their unfaithfulness when they drifted into idolatry and thus forgot the commemoration of the Passover for long periods (Freyne 1980:82).

The first recording following the Pentateuch stems from Joshua 5: 10-12. The recording here speaks of an association of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which led Porter (1976: 182) to deduce that these two feasts were united much earlier in the pre-monarchical period. It should be noted that Unleavened Bread was only celebrated for one day showing a distinctive rite at Gilgal.

The apparent lapses for years on end from the previous record (as stated in the beginning) are questioned by others as the silence in the Bible does not necessarily mean that the festival was not

observed, for the Bible records only historical events relevant to its purpose (Klein 1973: 20). Also B.W. Anderson doubts whether the first mentioned can be correct in the light of the portrayal that from the time that Israel was organized as a Tribal Confederacy it was customary to make pilgrimages to the central sanctuary (cf. I Sam 1:3ff). Passover, dealing with the commemoration of Israel's sacred history, and more specifically, with the origins of the Israelite nation would have special significance and was observed from of old (1975: 558).

If the last-mentioned position is upheld, the reference in Deut. 16: 5 concerning the central sanctuary to which pilgrimages were to be made, culminated in its fulfilment in the establishment of Jerusalem as God's choice. The place where Passover was celebrated was closely related to the place of the Tabernacle. Thus the reference to Passover at Shiloh (I Sam. 1: 3ff), suggests that the Tabernacle was there throughout the time of the Judges. From thence, the Tabernacle was moved after the time of Eli to Nob, in the district of Benjamin (1 Sam. 21: 1-9) and from there in the time of David, it was first moved to Gibeon (I Kings 3:4) and ultimately it was brought to the Temple by Solomon (I Kings 8:4) (de Vaux 1968: 302ff).

The records concerning the celebration of Passover during the monarchy are scarce, but in the light of the potency and legitimization potential which derived from these Passover pilgrimages, it was assumed that the festival was utilized to the utmost by the Davidic monarchy and every effort was made during the monarchy to perpetuate it (Anderson 1975: 560). Thus, with the building of the Temple all the other sanctuaries were destroyed and Jerusalem proclaimed as the only site where the Passover could be kept.

The biblical accounts during the Divided Kingdom stress the power which was centred in the Passover festival. Thus, counter measures were instituted in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) to prevent pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Klein states that Hezekiah (726 BCE) tried to use the Passover celebrations at Jerusalem as a means of uniting all the Jewish people, as it had the potential of "a great political power". This is related in 2 Chron. 30 (1973: 20). These efforts of Hezekiah, were unsuccessful, but the tide swung after 722 BCE with the fall of the Northern Kingdom. It is recorded that Josiah (621 BCE) celebrated the Passover with special magnitude in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 35: 1-

17) and with all the Israelites, who had fled into Judah, participating.

After the exile Ezra and Nehemiah were able to enforce the law in a small close-knit community and thus we get more regular celebrations after the exile. From this time Judah would take up its prominent role again and every pilgrimage was directed to Jerusalem (Ezra 6: 19-22 ) (Cole 1973: 179).

With time the popularity or the observance of Passover would rise to record levels under the influence and direction of new leadership and direction. This will be dealt with in the next section.

#### **4. Passover in the Jewish Tradition**

Judaism proper was largely the product of the exile. Bultmann had considered the “religion of Israel” as the source for Judaism (Anderson 1975: 8 ). Under the influence of Pharisaism, a strict code relating to the observance of the Law stemming from the interpretations of Ezra would be promulgated which would be drawn on by the rabbis in their Academies with the destruction of the second Temple.

Every source during the Second Temple period underwrites a strict observance of Passover in such a way that figures concerning attendance ranged from between 600 000 and three million (Jos. Wars, 2:280; *Tosefta Pes. 4 :15*; *Talmud Pes. 64b*). *Pesachim 5: 5 & 5: 10* gives details as to how such a big crowd were handled and the elaborate ceremony that had accompanied the slaying of the Passover lambs.

The destruction of the Second Temple caused a crisis which was averted by the *Tannaim* (Teachers) of whom Rabbi Akiva and Judah the Prince were the most prominent. Although the Temple, the focal point of Jewish worship, was destroyed, these rabbis ensured that Jewish religious practice would continue. They stressed the idea that every man was to turn himself into a temple; prayers were to be offered up instead of sacrifices ( Klein 1973: 28).

They carefully searched the Scriptures and the traditions to create and codify the law into the *Mishnah* (Cohen 1975: xxiii). This happened sometime between 100 and 210 CE. and covered every aspect of Jewish religious life and presents a picture of the customs, traditions and observances of the majority of Jews at the time of Christ (Rosen 1978: 50). The name *Mishnah* derives from the root *shanah* 'to repeat' and indicates oral teaching, which is learnt by repetition. The noun is the opposite of *Mikra* 'the texts of Scripture for reading'. The *Mishnah* therefore signifies the codification of the oral traditions in a contradistinction to the written Torah of the Pentateuch (Cohen 1975: xxvi). It is arranged in six sections called Sedarim (Orders) of which each consists of *Massichtoth* (Tractates), which again is divided into chapters and paragraphs.

A further development was the compilation of a commentary on the *Mishnah*, the *Gemara*, and when this was combined with the *Mishnah* the result was the *Talmud*. Two came about, the Babylonian Talmud with 37 tractates of the *Gemara* and the Palestinian Talmud with 39 tractates.

For this thesis and chapter, the Mishnaic Order *Mo'ed* (Seasons) with Tractate *Pesachim* (lit. Passovers) is the most important as it dictates the observance for the Passover Festival. Also, each of the Talmuds contains a whole section on the Passover in the section *Pesachim*. To complete the Rabbinic literature for this study, the *Tosefta* (Supplement), a collection of laws in systematic arrangement, in many respects running parallel to the *Mishnah*, but containing additional matter (Cohen 1975 : xxx), needs to be considered. It came into existence by the end of the fourth century CE.

Under the scrutiny and guidance of the rabbis the Passover festival continued to be observed. As the festival changed with the removal of all the sacrificial elements, the rabbis stressed the rituals mentioned in the Torah concerning Passover night and the seven days of unleavened bread and then pass them on to the people for implementation and observance (Klein 1973:35). Here Rabban Gamliel played a crucial role when he stipulated that "He who does not stress these three rituals on Passover does not fulfill his obligations: the paschal lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs" (Talmud Pes. 116a). The festival would ultimately be compressed into *bedikat chametz*, the searching for yeast, and the home or *Seder* service, at which unleavened bread and bitter herbs were

eaten, and which commemorate and re-enact the historic events of the fourteenth of Nisan (Bloch 1978:130).

Concerning the searching of yeast derived from Exodus 12:15, the father of the house after the evening service on the day before Pesach, i.e the thirteenth day of Nisan, would according to the precepts go about by candle or lamp light (*Pesachim* 1:1; *Tosefta Pes.* 1 :1; *Talmud, Pes.*3a) with a goose feather and wooden spoon in search of *chametz or yeast*, after a prayer, expressing thanks for the command concerning the searching of yeast, has been recited. Strict regulations were laid down what comprised *chametz*, viz. the five species of grain: wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats, (*Pesachim* 2: 5) and how to do a search, e.g. cellars and store rooms (*Pesachim* 1: 1, *Tosefta, Pes.* 1:2-4). All yeast found is carefully bound in a cloth and kept to be burnt the next day during the sixth hour (11.00 a.m.) (*Pesachim* 1:3, 4). A special benediction is said in conclusion of the search concerning all *chametz* which might have been overlooked, by declaring it as “the dust of the earth” (Klein 1973: 37). During the burning of the yeast the next morning all utensils are *koshered*, purified by immersion in a cauldron of boiling water or heating them till they glow (Dosick 1995:164ff.). It was also customary on this day for all firstborns to fast in commemoration of the death of the Egyptian firstborns which the Israelites were protected from (Dosick 1995: 166).

The institution of the *Seder* service by the rabbis, derived from the command in Ex. 12: 25: “When you enter the land .. observe this ceremony.” The present day order, which I will explain below, had started centuries earlier with the incorporation of the singing of the *Hallel* (see below ), reserved for the Levites (*Tosefta, Pes.*, chap.4), during the home ceremony where the paschal lamb was eaten (*Pesachim* 86a, 95a). As time went on, each learned rabbi, and each succeeding generation of his disciples, added customs and traditions to embellish the Passover celebration. Nevertheless, the central theme always remained the same: the Almighty has brought freedom and new life to His people, Israel, through His supernatural power( Rosen 1978: 40).

As Passover was supposed to be an object lesson, additions were introduced after the recitation of the *Kiddush* , blessing over the cup of wine, especially the dipping of *yeraivot* (herbs, parsley or lettuce) into vinegar or red wine as a re-enactment of the dipping of the hyssop into blood to be

smear on the doorposts (Talmud Pes. 114b). *Matzah*, unleavened bread was also to be dipped into *charoset*, a mixture of ground nuts and fruit in wine, a reminder of the mortar with which they had to make bricks (Talmud Pes. 114a, 116a). The bitterness of the slavery was re-enacted by partaking of bitter herbs or *maror*, a combination of lettuce, endives, chervil, snakeroot and horseradish (*Pesachim* 2 :6).

These elements (unleavened bread, bitter herbs, etc.) have to stimulate the questions of the children so that the biblical command: “And when your children ask you, ‘what does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them....” (Ex.12 : 26) could be fulfilled (Talmud Pes. 116a). With time the questions were structured and a child would chant them. Originally, the questions were three, (cf. *Pesachim*, 10 :4), but later they became four, viz., why this night we only eat unleavened bread compared to the eating of leavened and unleavened bread at other times; why on other nights all types of herbs are eaten but tonight only bitter herbs; why on other nights the herbs are not dipped once yet tonight we dipped twice, and lastly why this night we recline (whilst eating), compared to other nights when we can sit or recline. The father would then respond according to the knowledge and understanding of the child (*Pesachim* 10 :4 ; *Talmud Pes. 116a*). There, however was a broad formula which the father was required to include in his account, viz. the early period of paganism, the subsequent period of slavery in Egypt and the ultimate redemption. According to Bloch these can be traced in Joshua’s Passover (cf. Jos. 24:2-14) as he was the first to adopt this formula of reviewing the lesson of the Exodus to the first post-Exodus generation (1978 : 132).

The *Seder* evolved further through the centuries, but it became crystallized around 300 AD (Lipis 1993:3) when a text was compiled to be read at the ceremony viz., the *Haggadah* (Talmud Pes. 115b). The name *Haggadah* stems from Ex.13: 8: “ You shall tell (וַתְּסַפֵּר) your son on that day: This is what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt,” and consisted largely of midrashic interpretations of biblical passages relating to the Exodus (Birbaum 1976:21).

Today there are dozens of variations of the Haggadah in publication (Lipis 1993:3) and yet the (modern) *Seder* “Order” is basically fixed in the following standard order in which fifteen terms are used to guide the procedures.

1. *Kiddush*: The blessing over and the drinking of the first of the four cups of wine.
2. *Urchatz*: The washing the hands by all the participants. No blessing is recited.
3. *Karpas*: The eating of the green vegetables dipped in salt water.
4. *Yachatz*: The breaking of the middle *matzah*, from the stack of three *matzot* on the *seder* table. One half is replaced whilst the other section called the *afikoman* is hidden.
5. *Maggid*: The recounting the Exodus story after the four questions are asked by the youngest child present. When the father relates about the ten plagues, a drop of wine is spilled for each plague to remember the suffering of the Egyptians. The recounting ends with the singing of *Dayenu*, which means “it would have been sufficient for us”, recalling God’s abundant blessings.
6. *Rachatz*: The washing the hands of the whole company. This is done with the proper blessing in preparation of the eating of the unleavened bread.
7. *Motzi Matzah*: The grace before the meal is recited thanking God for “bringing forth bread from the earth.”
8. *Matzah*: Pieces of the top and broken middle *matzah* are distributed and eaten.
9. *Maror*: The eating of the bitter herbs after it is combined with *charoset*, the fruit and nut mixture. This is a reminder of the bitterness experienced during the brick-making in Egypt.
10. *Maror Korech*: Combining the *matzah* and *maror*. Using the bottom *matzah* from the stack of three, a sandwich is made with the bitter herbs.
11. *Shulchan Orech*: The festive Passover meal is eaten.
12. *Tzaphun*: The *afikoman*, i.e. the section of the middle *matzah* that was hidden is retrieved and distributed.
13. *Barech*: The traditional blessing after the meal is recited.
14. *Hallel*: Psalms of praise to God are recited for the many miracles and blessings He had bestowed.
15. *Nirtzah*: The conclusion of the Seder. The concluding words recited are “Next year in Jerusalem” expressing the hope and prayer for the return of the nation to the Land of Israel (Dosick 1995 : 170ff.).

During the *Seder*, according to the dictum of Rabban Gamliel all recline at the table (Talmud Pes.99b) and at different stages of the *Seder* four cups of wine are taken (Pesachim 10 : 1) as according to the four verbs used in the Exodus account, viz. “I will bring forth”, “I will deliver”, “I

will redeem”, “I will take” (Ex.6: 6-7). Also the leader of the family or at a communal *Seder*, the communal rabbi will put on a white robe, called a *kitel*, a symbol of purity and rejoicing (Klein 1973:50). The table will always be adorned and a *Seder* plate containing three *matzot*, a shank bone, egg, *maror*, *karpas*, the *charoset* and a dish of salt water wherein the *karpas* will be dipped. The shank bone is a reminder to the *Pesach*, i.e. the Passover lamb, whilst the egg is a reminder of the *chagigah*, the festival offering which was eaten with the lamb if the company was too big. Klein saw the egg as being used as a symbol of mourning and also a symbol of the life cycle (1973 : 57).

Although only four cups are drunk, an extra cup is filled between the third and the fourth and left on the Table- known as Elijah’s cup. Elijah is seen as the harbinger of the coming of the Messiah who will relieve the Jews from all their suffering (Klein 1973: 64). The door of the house is thus opened in anticipation of the coming of Elijah. The ceremony closes with the hope and expression: “Next year in Jerusalem.”

The next day would start the commemoration of the related Feast of Unleavened Bread where for seven days no leaven will be consumed. Of supreme significance is the second day, the original day when the sheaf of barley was waved in the Temple. After the destruction of the Temple this day initiates the counting of the *Omer*, in Rabbinic Judaism. This is a countdown of fifty days to the next festival. Hereto the males would gather every day in the synagogue and prepare themselves for the commemoration of the Revelation on Sinai, as will be seen later.

This section then concentrated on the growth and stabilizing of the traditional Passover celebration (with the affixed Feast of Unleavened Bread). We will now proceed to see how Jewish believers in Jesus Christ have contextualized the above celebrations in the light of their new faith.

## **5. Passover in the Messianic Jewish Tradition**

The Messianic Jewish attitude towards Passover can be summarized as follows as found in the Jews for Jesus *Passover Haggadah*.

Passover is a night of rejoicing, a night of thanksgiving and a night to praise God. And today at Passover we really can praise God because the children of Israel really were redeemed out of the land of Egypt. And we can praise God because death really passed over the homes of the Israelites. But more importantly we can praise God because those of us who know Him are redeemed from an even greater bondage. Through Him, through our faith in the *Messiah Y'shua*, we too, each and every one of us can literally pass over from death unto life.

The above commemoration and celebration are concentrated in the *Seder*. The searching for yeast is practised by some, but mostly interpretative lessons are drawn from the ceremony as will be seen later. The *Seder* follows exactly the same order as in the traditional *Haggadah*. The setting is the same, the leader likewise dressed with the *kittel* or white robe, the food for the object lessons is the same and yet prophetic and Messianic references are interspersed at certain points to prove that Jesus is the Paschal lamb or to strengthen the claim that He is the Messiah. These run concurrent with the original aim of the Passover to instil pride of being part of the Jewish nation whose ancestors were redeemed from the Egyptian bondage.

The *Haggadah* is set in dialogue or responsive style between the leader and the family or leader and congregation when in a bigger setting where the *Seder* is celebrated collectively.

The celebration is preceded with the *lighting of the candles* which is the prerogative of the wife. Usually this is done before the Seder, but in this setting it is incorporated and done at the beginning and the ordinary blessing spoken by the wife is amplified to praise God, the King of the Universe who has sent his only Son, *Y'shua* the *Messiah*, the light of the world and the Paschal Lamb. She furthermore expresses the hope that the participants would remember that *Y'shua* (Jesus) is a light to lighten the nations and the glory of His people Israel.

The *Kiddush*, the sanctification and drinking of the first cup of wine start the celebration. The same blessing and background information as the traditional Jewish Passover are used, however Mitch Glaber links this action to Jesus' words in Luke 22: 15-18:

I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For me tells you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God. And when he had given thanks, He said, 'Take this and share it amongst yourselves, for I say to you, I will not drink of the vine from now until the Kingdom of God comes (NAV)(1998:2).

The washing of the hands, *urchatz*, follows and is linked in the Messianic Jewish depiction to the biblical account of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet as a sign of His notion of servant hood and example of humility ( John 13:3-5).

This is followed by the action called *karpas*, where parsley is dipped in salt water which represents the tears of life. The partakers are called upon to remember the tears which their ancestors shed in bondage as well as the nation's present need for salvation as they do not accept Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. The parsley is dipped and eaten in solemnity (Glaser 1998 : 2).

Next the leader performs *yachatz*, i.e. of the three pieces of unleavened bread the middle piece is divided into two. One section is put back whilst the other called the *afikoman* is hidden. This the children will need to retrieve later in the celebration. Jews for Jesus, a specific group of Messianic Jews, read special significance into this action and link it to the death and destruction of the second (middle?) person of the Trinity, Jesus their Messiah. The hiding and later the search and retrieval of the *afikomen* are linked to the burial of Jesus, the search for his body and the resurrection hope which stemmed from His appearance to His disciples and others (Wertheim 1998 :47).

*Maggid*, or the recounting the Exodus story, follows as in the general Jewish practise stemming from the four questions asked by the child. The leader recalls via the Joseph account how the Israelites came to Egypt and their bitter enslavement in the building of Pithom and Raamses. Then God's gracious intervention is recalled in the ten plagues and ultimately their freedom after the Passover

night. For each plague a drop of wine is spilled as a sign of compassion for the Egyptians despite their inflictions on the Israelites. This is to prevent hate-speech. This goes back to the biblical warning in Proverbs 24: 17-18 which says: “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, .....the Lord will see and be displeased.....” (Birbaum 1976 : 21, Klein 1973:76).

The recital is interrupted with the singing of *Dayenu* (“It would have been sufficient for us!”) recalling God’s abundant blessings where the various verses recall the redemption from Egypt, the giving of the manna, the Sabbath, the Torah, the Tabernacle, the promised land, the Messiah, etc. each would have been enough and yet God went beyond that. In accordance to the dictates of Rabbi Gamaliel the significance of the paschal lamb, the *matzah* and the *maror* are explained. During the explanation of the Paschal lamb Messianic references are mentioned where the lamb is linked to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is also stressed that the redemption was secured through blood in Egypt and likewise the participants were redeemed not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of a lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Messiah (I Pet. 1: 18-19)(Zimmerman 1981 :77ff).

The *rachatz* , washing the hands of the whole company, is followed by the *motzi matzah*, the eating of the unleavened bread after the grace is recited. This is followed by the dipping of *matzah* in *maror*, bitter herbs and eaten as a reminder that life without redemption is bitter.

*Maror Korech* is the part in the *Seder* where the hard labour during bondage is recalled. A sandwich is made of bitter herbs and *charoset*, a brown sweet mixture of fruit and nuts, representing the mortar which their ancestors had to make and work in Egypt. This is placed between *matzot* and eaten.

Now follows the *Shulchan Orech*, where the festive meal is eaten and concluded with the grace after meals. The children are then instructed to perform *tzaphun*, or to retrieve the *afikoman*, the piece of *matzah* that was hidden. On retrieval and after rewarding the child the bread is distributed. As earlier indicated, special emphasis is paid to the symbolic significance of the *afikoman*. What is held to be a means to keep the children awake and alert in the ordinary Jewish *Seder* tradition, is

interpreted as referring to the burial and resurrection of Jesus under these symbolism. Another interpretation is that this is the place at which Jesus instituted the first section of the Holy Communion, viz. “This is my body which is broken for you....” (Luke 22 :19). The distribution of the bread is followed by the third cup which is likewise interpreted and linked to Jesus’ words where He referred to it as His blood from which the disciples were to participate (Luke 22 : 20). Glaser states that these were shocking words to His disciples as Jesus did the unthinkable of pronouncing Himself to be the Passover lamb (1998 :3).

At this stage remembrance of Elijah, the prophet is introduced. The door is opened and a cup of wine is poured for Elijah who as in the Jewish tradition is seen as the forerunner of the Messiah. For Jews for Jesus, he had already come in the person of John, the Baptizer. The significance of continuing the pouring of the cup of Elijah is to commemorate him to be the forerunner and herald towards *Y’shua*’s *second* coming. The hope for a speedy coming is expressed, and yet, sadness is expressed that ordinary Jews focussed eagerly on an opened door instead of hearing the call of the Messiah: “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3 :20) (Glaser 1998: 6).

The *Hallel*, psalms of praise, (Psalms 113-118) is recited in a dialogue style between the leader and congregation.

The *Nirtzah*, conclusion, is ushered in with the fourth cup. The customary “Next year in Jerusalem” is augmented with a Messianic hope of a heavenly Jerusalem as recorded in Revelation: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven....” (21: 1-5). The benediction is pronounced after the expression of faith: “*Y’shua* died, *Y’shua* is risen, *Y’shua* is coming again.”

This concludes the interpretation of the Passover *Seder* as performed by Messianic Jews with its Christian meaning. I will now continue to show how Passover was celebrated in the Gentile Christian Church with special focus on the Lutheran tradition.

## 6. Passover in Gentile Christianity

According to Cheslyn Jones an important question we need to face concerning the Apostolic Age is that of liturgical continuities and discontinuities as the Church gradually defined itself over against Judaism. He cites a continuing relation between Christianity and Judaism which involved both attraction and repulsion (1992: 62). I will now elaborate on this.

Almost all the early Christians were Jewish. Likewise early Christian worship was performed against the background of the Jewish worship they were used to. This they had adapted and filled with Christian meaning. Persecutions, the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the missionary zeal of the Jewish Christians however, soon led to the spread of Christianity beyond the borders of Palestine and the Jewish fold. The incorporation of Gentiles into the Church created new challenges, especially a solution to the question whether it was necessary for Gentiles to observe the commandments as specified in the Torah. This was ultimately decided by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), who concluded that it was not necessary for Gentiles to keep the Law. They did however, give minor directives and precautions in particular prohibited to commit sexual immorality, idolatry and consume blood (v20). This decision meant that it was not normative for Gentile Christians to observe the pilgrimage festival of Passover. Thus they were not meant to go up to Jerusalem, slaughter a lamb, have the meal and the commemorations related to it, as was prescribed to the Jews.

Despite the above decision, the proclamation of the Gospel could only be done against the adaptation of the Jewish Christian roots and customs and thus Gentiles who were converted could only practice their faith against the redemptive history stemming from the primitive Church. This meant that, for example, that the time for the commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus by converts was bound with the time of the observance of the Jewish Passover. To facilitate the observance the first fifteen Jewish bishops in Jerusalem were circulating Paschal letters to notify Christians when the Passover would be according to the Jewish lunar calendar (Rosen 1978: 59).

With time the Gentile Christians gradually moved away from their Jewish counterparts. Firstly, they opted to follow a solar calendar and secondly, to stress the saving events of the cross and

resurrection centred in the Lord's Day, i.e. the Sunday. They thus commemorated the resurrection over against the Jewish observance of the commemoration of the Passover meal and liberation from slavery and sin. The Jewish Passover was thus transformed and called Pascha or Easter, as it is more familiarly called. The themes of freedom and the Exodus were retained to refer to the redemption from sin and spiritual slavery. This was celebrated during the unitive commemoration of the cross and resurrection.

Probably as a remnant of the Jewish practice, the Christian Passover started with a fast followed by an all-night vigil starting the Saturday night and culminating in the resurrection at dawn. Whilst during the first century the vigil focussed on the Eucharist, emanating from the Passover meal, by the second century baptism would be the main emphasis. New converts, who were instructed in the faith, were baptized at dawn after their declaration of faith and then partook of their first Eucharist (Davies 1972: 309). The candidates were baptized on this special day to stress the reception of the redemptive benefits secured in the cross and the resurrection. These included forgiveness of sin, salvation from death, the adoption as children of God, eternal life, etc. (Tally 1986: 13).

Not all the Gentile Christians subscribed to the dating as calculated according to the solar calendar. In fact the Quartodeciman controversy (from *die quarto decima* -the fourteenth day after the full moon that fell on or following the spring equinox) arose in the second century when the Church of Asia held on to the Jewish lunar calendar and celebrated the festival commemorating the cross and resurrection on the ancient day of 14 Nisan, the day when the paschal lambs were slaughtered. This was in accordance with the narratives in the Fourth Gospel which stated that Jesus' death coincided with the time when the lambs were slaughtered. In this Gospel this is linked with the special reference that none of His (Jesus's) bones were broken, as according to the prescriptions in the Torah. This tradition of the Asian church was supported by two bishops, Polycarp of Smyrna and Polycrates of Ephesus. Their views meant that the day of the Pascha could be on any day of the week and thus that the annual great commemoration of the resurrection would not necessarily coincide with the Lord's Day or the Sunday (Adam 1979: 58; Ferguson 1990 : 695ff). To summarize, I would use Tally who stresses that the interpretation of the celebration by the Quartodecimans was that they celebrated the entire work of redemption : the incarnation, the passion, the resurrection and

glorification, all focussed upon the Cross as locus of Christ's triumph (1986: 6). Over against this interpretation was the view of Rome and other local churches who celebrated the paschal mystery on the first Sunday after the fourteenth of Nisan. The chief supporters here were Pope Anicetus and Victor 1. Both groups appealed to apostolic tradition in defence of their practice.

The Council of Nicea in 325 addressed the problems of both the day and date and did away with this discrepancy when they decreed against the practice of the Quartodecimans. They decided that the Christian Pascha would be celebrated on the Sunday immediately following the full moon that fell on or after the spring equinox and that the equinox be reckoned as March 21.

Jones is of the opinion that this decision was due to anti-Jewish sentiments which resulted in a call to separate the dates for the resurrection and the Jewish Passover. This was done in the light of accusations of "Judaizing and Galatianism" deduced from the Epistles of Paul. This was the start of attempts by the Roman Church to replace the Jewish Christians' leadership and the normative interpretations stemming from them (1992: 62).

A further process of evolution developed when later in the century the Roman Church separated the Pascha into components and a threefold celebration emerged. Good Friday became reserved for the commemoration of the crucifixion or His death, the vigil on Saturday for His period when He was buried and the idea of Easter became limited to the theme of the resurrection. Ultimately this tradition would become the accepted standard through the ages with the addition that Holy Thursday would be connected with the death of Christ. A feet-washing ceremony came to be performed on this evening stressing and recollecting the servanthood of Christ.

For the centuries to come Rome would dictate a shift from the memorial of the death of Christ to the celebration of the resurrection and they formulated various rites towards the celebration of the feast. This also reflected a shift in the connotation of the Pascha from its original Jewish Christian association, and they thereby shifted the central focus from the commemorating of the day of the passion to the Sunday observance focussing on the day of the resurrection. Eventually the interpretation would be established that the Sunday of every week was commemorating the

resurrection and should be celebrated as such.

Fergusson states that paschal controversies resonated in the west till the eighth century due to computational difficulties to establish a uniform cycle of dates or Paschal tables. Differences concerning the calculation for the date for the celebration of Easter and the retention of the Jewish Christian focus on Passover, would be contributory factors creating a rift between the eastern and western churches ( 1990:696).

Another rift would come during the Reformation causing the parting of the way with the official Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran tradition recognizing the grave abuses in the over-elaboration of the medieval church, resolved to restore the observance of Easter to its earlier simplicity by the application of a scriptural and churchly principle. This meant that all customs contrary to the Scripture should be changed and only those upheld which were based on a Gospel fact (Reed 1959:36,37). Luther thus severed all ties with the ancient rites and texts which had the emphasis on fasting and the preparation of the faithful for the worthy keeping of Easter through discipline, penitence and abstinence. He scorned the idea that dispensation from fasting could be given on condition of making gifts to the church. This was in line with his attack on the general principle of indulgences (Reed 1959:42).

The Lutherans held to the celebration of the passion and resurrection as the heart of the liturgical year, however, the celebration of the resurrection came to dominate the commemoration of the Paschal festivities.

Luther furthermore tried to fix the date of Easter as according to the following quotation penned by Adam:

How much better it would have been if they had let Moses' law regarding Easter die altogether and had retained nothing of the old garment....They should instead have reckoned and noted the days of the passion , the burial and the resurrection by the course of the sun and set a fixed day for these, as they did with Christmas, New Year, .....and other festivals which they called fixed, not wobbling festivals (1978: 61).

Luther was never successful in achieving this. This was due to the fact that the date needed to be homogeneous, the outcome of a debate in which all the ecumenical bodies would participate. Given the circumstances of the day, unity was an impossibility.

From the above quotation however it is understandable why, unlike the other church denominations who incorporated the exodus and freedom motives in the liturgy, the references to the Exodus and the Passover meal were/are scant in the Lutheran tradition. Likewise, the celebration of the Eucharist was not held in such high regard on the resurrection day as in the other denominations.

These traditions and perceptions were also introduced in South Africa during the missionary endeavours and are maintained till the present day in my community. The celebration comprises of the following:

In preparation for the commemoration of the death and resurrection, taking the cue from Luther, it is stressed that Lent prepares for Easter and the seven weeks of Easter celebrates the rich mystery of life out of death, cross and resurrection, renewal by the Spirit of God. Lent should be the time for the contemplation of the Word of God, thereby removing superstition and work-righteousness and to develop a deeper devotion to Christ by studying the meaning of His victorious humility (Reed 1959: 43).

The Lenten celebration starts with Ash Wednesday. The service marks the beginning of a penitential discipline which climaxes in the absolution and peace on Maundy Thursday. Scriptural backing is evoked for this (cf. Gen. 3:19, 18: 37; Esther 4: 1; Jonah 3: 6; Job 2: 8, 42; 6; Matt. 11: 21; Luk. 10: 130) from the view that ashes suggest judgement and God's condemnation of sin, humility, repentance. The colour for the altar decorations is thus preferred to be black- the colour of ashes and desolation and suggesting the ashes to which all things must eventually return.

On Maundy Thursday, derived from the Latin, *mandatum* and refers to John 13: 34 : “ A new commandment I give unto you”, the feet-washing ceremony takes place. Absolution and peace are

proclaimed to the congregants as they move unto Good Friday and ultimately the longing for the resurrection.

The next day, Good Friday (originally, “God’s Friday”), the congregation participates in a Three-Hour Devotion focussing on the crucifixion with special references and meditation on the seven words of Jesus. Against the backdrop of the commemoration of Jesus giving up His spirit and being laid in the tomb, the congregants disperse in anticipation of the resurrection. No fasts or vigils are held on the Saturday (Pfatteicher 1979: 13).

Celebration of Easter has two phases. The first, the Easter vigil starts early on Sunday morning, at a cemetery or at the church. The vigil abounds in images to evoke responses from deep in the human psyche: darkness to light, death to life, chaos to order, slavery to freedom. The congregation watches for the rising dawn conquering forever the dark night of sin.

The second phase starts with a magnificent service later in the day showing why Easter has always been regarded as the crown of the whole year, the queen of Christian festivals. A Paschal candle inscribed with the Alpha and Omega symbols is light as the sign of the presence of Christ with his people shining in all his splendour. It lasts not a day, not a week but seven weeks in the Lutheran tradition. The use of the word “Alleluia” which was omitted during Lent returns during this service in the greeting “Christ is risen Alleluia!...” and echo at various stages during the liturgy which includes the baptism of the confirmants and the celebration of the Holy Communion. An antiphon for the first Sunday of Lent explains the omission of the “Alleluia” thus: Alleluia. Enclose and seal up the word, alleluia. Let it remain in the secret of your heart, alleluia, until the appointed time. You shall say it with great joy when the day comes. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia (Pfatteicher 1979: 307). This unleashing of the emotions in joy and song stems from a solid belief in the resurrection as expressed in the words of St. Paul: “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised from the dead. And if Christ has not been raised from the dead our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1 Cor. 15: 13,14).

In the light of the ritual indicated in the Lutheran tradition, I will now compare the Messianic Jewish

practice with the above and evaluate whether the Lutheran liturgy and worship patterns can be enhanced by Messianic Jewish views.

## **7. Evaluation**

The quest in this chapter had been to assess the Messianic Jewish practice to enhance the Lutheran worship and ritual. Hereto the following had been beneficial to me and worthy of consideration.

Firstly, in the (Messianic) Jewish heritage yeast is a sign of corruption. They emphasize the need to start afresh at least once a year through the symbolic searching and cleansing of the house of yeast and burning it the next morning. I am of the opinion that this exercise can also be psychologically beneficial to us. I would link this with our Ash Wednesday celebrations. In many denominations the service on Ash Wednesday derives its name from the application of ash in the sign of the cross on the forehead of believers. With this symbolic act they start a period of penitence during the Lenten season. It is possible to enhance this service with the searching of the (memory?) soul for yeast, i.e. sins and afflictions of the past and write them down. The idea here is that on many occasions congregants harbor guilt over past mishaps and that can cause a blockage in their relationship with God as it feels to the person that he or she is now excluded from the continuous love and grace of God. Due to this misinterpretation the person does not participate wholly in church activities anymore as it feels that it would be futile and hypocritical in the light of how they had disappointed God. It needs to be stressed by the worship leader (minister) that it is never the case and that repentance can break this deadlock. One way of doing this is to call on the congregants to write down their guilt feelings and surrender them to God. These are placed on the altar, kept during all of Lent and symbolically burnt during the service on Good Friday or Easter. The idea of contrition should be stressed and against this venture the congregants are sent away to prepare themselves during the Lenten season for the experience and participation in the joy of the celebration of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. Another possible way of doing this, is to urge the congregants on Maundy Thursday to search their lives and return with confessions on paper the next day and burn them during the Three Hour Service.

Seeing that the *Seder* is a new thing to my denomination I would advocate the following to inform the congregation about this practice: Firstly, the option of a (Messianic Jewish ) Passover meal in the form of a play is a possibility. As the Christian and Jewish traditions and the date of celebration varies, as already indicated, I would opt for such a play on Maundy Thursday as already the custom of the foot washing ceremony takes place on this day.

Thirteen representatives ( taking the role of Jesus plus 12 disciples ) from the various Church organizations plus a narrator could be used or a youth group for this dramatization. Even better however would be the utilization of the Confirmants for this drama as part of their curriculum and education. This will also secure a new group every year should the option be to do this on an annual basis. A further advantage of using young people is that they are more open to explore new ideas and the whole Lenten season can be dedicated towards this. New (Jewish) Passover songs can then be introduced and memorized towards this venture. It will have the added advantage of exposing the young to the richness of the religious diversity towards which respect needs to be shown and from whom insight can be gained. The role of the narrator will be crucial here to explain and elaborate on the elements as they follow the fifteen steps in the *Haggadah*.

Secondly, the notion of the family partaking in an annual recollection of the saving events is wonderful to me as family gatherings for *religious* settings have become very rare. Religious observance beyond the celebrations in the church building is virtually non-existence, not to mention the role of the father is supposed to play to facilitate religious growth. (I am fully aware of the existence of single parents, however, even in such conditions linking up with extended families should be a possibility). I would advocate as an alternative to the above, a type of *Seder* on Good Friday evening where the father would instill unto the children the significance of the crucifixion and the benefits stemming from the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

Another connotation deriving from Messianic Judaism is that the Passover celebration in the family is to instill pride and a sense of appreciation in the children of the origins of the Jewish nation they belong to. A Passover *Seder* for Christians could initiate a day of thanksgiving to God whereby as a *family* we give thanks to God and commemorate the victory over the evils of Apartheid. We hardly focus in Christianity on the pain and suffering of the Egyptian slavery; that Moses like many South

Africans had to flee for challenging the oppressive system, the killing of innocent children, the destruction of human dignity, exploitation of labour, etc. These the Israelites had to recall every year to prevent them from doing them to others less fortunate in their land. At our “Seder” gathering we can also pledge ourselves to uphold our new democracy and participate in nation building in the family and community where we stay. The ceremony will thus entail directives how to stimulate pride into the young for our new heritage.

Another sphere where the Messianic Jewish Passover practice can be used (indirectly?), is in a debate that ever so often surfaces. These are discussions concerning the distribution of Holy Communion elements to children not yet confirmed. Most denominations at one stage or another have had to find an equitable solution to this controversy. The latest Christian publication to focus on this issue is the *Kerkbode* (official mouth piece of the Dutch Reform Church) of July 2, 1999. I would like to use our insight into the (Messianic) Jewish Passover meal to broaden the foundation towards the Lutheran search on this subject.

Concerning this insight, it should be stressed that the Passover celebration has always been for children. “ And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever” (Ex. 12:24). Secondly, the object lessons have been to teach *children* of their heritage and to participate via symbolism in the bondage and freedom their ancestors had experienced. From their earliest years they were incorporated in the celebrations. Their curiosity was raised to the highest level concerning the strange actions during the *Seder* and then it was channelled in their expression of the four questions which would set the framework for the recounting of the Exodus experience. Under no circumstance were the children denied to partake in any food or drink, in fact they are not even spared from partaking in the distasteful horseradish in the *maror* or bitter herbs.

Children thus formed an integral part of the participants at the *Seder* or place of the original institution of the Holy Communion. We need to reflect again that Jesus’s command to commemorate His death and participate in His Body and Blood derives directly from the (all-inclusive) family Passover when He reinterpreted the elements of the *matzah* and wine.

Those still opposed to the inclusion of children would continue to argue that the above cannot bear on the Christian practice especially since even Jews still have a *Bar* -or *Bat mitzvah*, or confirmation ceremony to usher their children into the faith. Thus the children are not fully fledged participants and thus the present Christian system of preventing children from participating from the Table until they have declared their faith is sound. The debate will still resound amongst the (Systematic) theologians, however the Biblical narratives agree with Jesus's simple dictum: "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

With this evaluation I have indicated some possible appropriations of the Old Testament tradition of the Passover. Many other possibilities exist, however I have merely included the above to show some possible ones. We will now continue to focus on the next pilgrimage festival, viz., the Feast of Weeks.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FEAST OF WEEKS

#### 1. Introduction

I will now continue with the next pilgrimage festival, viz. שבועות or the Feast of Weeks.

This name can be misleading as it does not designate the duration or substance of the feast, in fact this is the shortest of the pilgrimage festivals - being a one-day celebration only. The name came about (in the absence of a Biblical proper name) due to the period which had lapsed since the previous feast. The Feast of Weeks (hereafter called *Shavuot*) occurred seven full weeks after Passover. Closely connected with the Hebrew name *Shavuot* is the name used by the Greek-speaking Jews viz. *Pentecost* (fiftieth) deduced from Lev. 23:16: "...count off fifty days..." in the Septuagint (LXX).

Unlike Passover (and *Sukkot* - to be discussed in the next chapter) this festival plays a minor role as it lacks elaborate ritual. There are no symbolic commandments to be performed on *Shavuot*, like the eating of the unleavened bread and bitter herbs on Passover or the dwelling in booths on *Sukkot*, and it made few special demands for its observance (Robinson 1995: 1). Another aspect of the festival that was baffling was the fact that the otherwise precise and detailed Torah did not even state the actual day of the month for its observance.

In the light of the previous, *Shavuot* is seen by many as an agricultural holiday which concluded the previous festival viz. Passover. This is derived from the precept that it should be celebrated "fifty days after Passover..." (Lev. 23:16).

This chapter will follow the same structure as the previous one. I will firstly trace the narrative

accounts of the festival in the Torah, followed by the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Rabbinic literature will next be searched for guidelines, accounts and traditions on the festival to investigate the developments, growth or changes to the festival in the course of time. All of these will be used as a mirror against which present day Messianic Jewish practice will be tested.

The next subsection will be a concise overview of how *Shavuot* was utilized and adapted in the Church through the ages. I will then evaluate the differences and especially see whether the interpretations and practice in Messianic Judaism can be of any use to enhance the ritual in my denomination.

## **2. Overview of Shavuot in the Torah**

Although I have thus far continuously been using the word *Shavuot* this overview will in fact reveal a variety of names for this festival. We find the first reference to the festival in Exodus 23 : 16, 19, where it is referred to as *Chag Ha-kazir* (Feast of the Harvest): “Celebrate the Feast of the Harvest with the first fruits of the crops you sow in your field.... Bring the best of the first fruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.” This act of consecration is elaborated upon in chapter 34, verse 22, 26 where the celebration is now called *Chag Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks), from which the popular name *Shavuot* derives. This implied that this festival was to be celebrated seven weeks after the wave offering was presented during Passover. This passage also specified that *wheat* was the specific harvested crop of which “the best were to be presented to the sanctuary” at this period. With this offering they were to put God first in their lives as He was the provider, the One who gives a bounteous harvest (McGee 1984 : 283).

In Leviticus 23: 15- 22, (NIV) we read:

“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine

flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of the firstfruits to the Lord. Present with this seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the Lord, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings - an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering. The priest is to wave the two lambs before the Lord as a wave offering, together with the bread of the first fruits. They are a sacred offering to the Lord for the priest. On the same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them to the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.

This account in the priestly code spells out what was to happen after the presentation of the *Omer* (sheaf or measure) during Passover. As the harvest progressed they were to perform *Sephirah*, i.e. keep a daily countdown for fifty days after which as a sign of God's abundant blessing and providence they were to bring two loaves of bread to the Temple. These represent the common food of the people and were to be waved only, not offered because they contained yeast (cf. "...you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering..." Lev.2 :11) and as they belonged to the priest. On the contrary, the lambs, bull, rams and goat were to be offered to the Lord (Porter 1976 : 184). The prohibition to reap the whole field (v22), at first appeared to be an afterthought, however this rule had secured that on this festival no-one not even the poor and alien were destitute or hungry as those privileged with a field and harvest were to share the bounty with those less fortunate and as a sign that God ultimately is the provider.

Another name for this festival appears in Numbers chapter 28. This chapter together with chapter 29 deals with a review of all the national sacrifices that were to be offered during the whole year. The sacrifices of the second pilgrimage festival are dealt with in verses 26 ff. by the priestly revisor, where the feast is designated *Yom ha-Bikkurim*, the Day of the Firstfruits. This was due to fact that the firstfruits were the essence of the offering to be brought to the sanctuary (Porter 1976 : 182).

In Deuteronomy 16: 9-12 we get a further repetition concerning *Shavuot*. Two explicit additions however shed some more light as to how the festival was to be performed. Firstly, the offering was to be “a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the Lord has given” (v10). Secondly, joy was to be the prevailing mood with the inclusion of everyone; free persons and slaves, farmers and Levites, citizens and aliens, landowners and the landless - all had to give thanks to God for the bounty. It was of the utmost importance that the disadvantaged are included lest the landowners forgot their heritage that they were slaves and landless in the past.

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11 describes how the firstfruits, which included wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates were to be presented to the sanctuary (Deut. 8: 8). The prayer (v. 5-10) was to be recited as an acknowledgement to the redemption and grace of God which had prevailed until the present harvest.

I will now continue to focus on the implementation of the festival, as recorded in the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

### **3. Overview of Shavuot in the Prophets and the Writings**

In the previous chapter I have already pointed out that during the Tribal Confederacy it was customary to make pilgrimages to the central sanctuary (I Sam. 1:3ff). This would have included *Shavuot* as it is characterized as a major festival (Robinson 1999: 2). Explicit reference to the festival came with the completion of the first Temple where it is stated that Solomon “kept the sacrifices commanded by Moses for Sabbaths, New Moons and the three annual feasts- the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles” ( 1 Kings 9 : 25 ; 2 Chron. 8 : 12,13). From the narratives therefore it seemed clear that the feast was implemented, however from a historical point of view this is not all that clear.

Another reference to *Shavuot* is found in 2 Kings 4:42 where we read of a man bringing the man of God (Elisha) twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. That these firstfruits were presented to the *prophet* and not the priest is explained as due

to the fact that “prophets and priests were associated at many shrines”(Rowley 1981:349).

A further reference linked to *Shavuot* is found in 2 Chron. 15: 8-15 which deals with King Asa’s assembly of Israel and Judah for covenant renewal in *the third month*. This was part of his cultic reforms according to the *Targum* to Chronicles and is linked to the celebration of *Shavuot* (Van Gemeren 1997, Vol 4 :22). This is based on the fifty-day interlude from Passover. As Passover is to be celebrated in the *first* month or Nisan, it follows naturally that *Shavuot* was celebrated in the third month.

In Ezekiel’s guidelines on offerings and holy days (45: 21-25), to be followed after the exile, *Shavuot* is notably missing from amongst the commands. Ezekiel gave details about Passover to be celebrated in the first month and *Sukkot* in the seventh month. The reason for this is not that obvious, but it is probable that these were directed to the princes (cf. 45: 17,22, 25) who were to contribute the sacrifices during these festivals. As *Shavuot* stressed the *people’s* contribution the festival is omitted. Wenham draws attention to the fact that Ezekiel echoes the priestly material in Leviticus and Numbers especially the idea of the ‘prince’ which is also found in Num. 1 : 16 ; 7 : 10 (1997 : 107).

I would like to conclude this section of the implementation of *Shavuot* by stressing the idea of the linkage ( or lack of it) of “the third month” to the festival. This linkage would be of major significance to the rabbis as will be seen in the next section.

#### **4. Shavuot in the Jewish tradition**

What happened during *Shavuot* after the exile and up to 70 CE has fortunately been secured in the *Mishnah* and later the *Talmud*. Remnants of what transpired during this festival can be obtained from some chapters of the Tractate *Bikkurim* (Firstfruits) in the Order *Zeraim* (Seeds). As a matter of interest it can be stated that here we find the *only* scant references related to *Shavuot* unlike the other two pilgrimage festivals which have extended tractates named after each of them in the Order *Moed* dealing with all the seasons. The tractates *Pesachim* and *Sukkot* deal literally with every aspect of the particular feast.

In tractate *Bikkurim* we are thus informed how before 70 CE, or the destruction of the Second Temple, the *bikkurim* or firstfruits of the seven chief products of the Holy Land, i.e., wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and date honey were brought to Jerusalem. We are told:

Some time before *Shavuot* the farmer would inspect his fruit and indicate his choice for the offering from the best and earliest of the crop by tying a string around it and says, 'Let these be *bikkurim*'. At the time of *Shavuot*, or soon after, he would join with the others of the district and together they would make a triumphal procession to Jerusalem. An ox with horns bedecked with gold and with an olive crown would lead the way. The flute was played before them and when they were close to Jerusalem they would send messengers in advance. On the way to Jerusalem they would say: 'I rejoice when they said to me, 'Let us go unto the house of the Lord'. In Jerusalem, where they would be joyously welcomed, they would say: 'Our feet are standing within thy gates, O Jerusalem'.

The governors, chiefs and treasurers of the temple then went out to meet them and the artisans would greet them: 'Brethren we are delighted to welcome you'.

At the approach to the court the Levites would sing the song: 'I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast raised me up, and hast not suffered mine enemies to rejoice over me'. Turtle doves were then offered as burnt offerings, but the *bikkurim* they presented to the priests.

Before the baskets were handed to the priests, they recite: 'I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the land which the Lord swore unto our fathers to give us'. The basket would then be deposited and waved by the priest while the worshiper continues with the words: 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labour. Then we cried to the Lord . . . and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt . . . He brought

us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey'. He would conclude with: 'And now behold, I have brought the firstfruit of the land, which Thou O Lord, hast given me'. At this juncture, the pilgrim would prostrate himself and depart (Bikkurim 3:1-8; Yerushalmi Bikkurim 65c).

It is noteworthy to see the utilization of the Psalms and Deuteronomy as a biblical basis for all the different stages of the pilgrimage. Thus, the Psalms of Ascent especially Psalm 122 is used to the full by the pilgrims, as is Psalm 30: 2 - the Levitical response when the pilgrims enter the Temple court. On the presentation of the "*bikkurim*", the pilgrims recite from Deut. 26 : 5ff.

As an aside, it should be noted that in the literature of this period another name for this festival was constantly used, due to the rabbinic interpretations on the festival viz. *Atzereth shel Pesach* or Concluding Festival to Passover (Pesikta 30: 163). This name was due to the fact that *Shavuot* had no major symbols or distinctive rites as earlier indicated, and its single festival feature was *the prohibition to work*. This in Hebrew is called "*atzur mimlacha*." As the root, עצר is the same for both words, (*atzur and atzereth*) it is deduced that the name was derived from this feature (Pearl 1973: 14). Kitov links the name *Atzereth* to the command that the day should be "a day of solemn assembly for everyone." In Hebrew the term *atzeret* may also mean "assembly" (1978:61). Be it as it may be, *Shavuot* was seen as the epilogue to what started fifty days before when the first harvest was consecrated.

The *bikkurim* (elaborated upon earlier) and related sacrifices came to an abrupt end with the destruction of the Temple, the focal point of the cultic expressions. The rabbis then had the overwhelming task to infuse the faith with new impetus and give urgent direction to a disheartened people. They set out to create a new contemporary motif for *Shavuot* by adapting customs and ceremonies to the new conditions. All practices dependent on a functioning Temple were abolished and prayers were formulated and given a place of centrality in the reconstruction of the festival (Schauss 1970:185).

They furthermore, linked the festival to a historic event of national importance, i.e., the theophany at

Sinai. This was based on the verse: “In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt, on the very day they came to the Desert of Sinai” (Ex.19: 1). Seeing that Passover was the first month, the rabbis deduced that the day when God revealed His presence on Mount Sinai and declared the Ten Commandments in the hearing of the people was on *Shavuot* seeing that this festival occurred fifty days after the first month. *Shavuot* was thus linked to commemorate the historic Divine Revelation.

This interpretation was sanctioned by the *Sanhedrin* at Usha in 140 CE and all means possible were used to inform the growing diaspora about it, as persecutions have forced the Jews from their homeland. With this adaptation and proclamation, the *Sanhedrin* tried to prevent a biblically mandated holiday from becoming increasingly ignored. The festival was thus given a universal motif of equal importance to the Jews in Palestine and the diaspora (Shauss 1970: 188). Due to the fact that the time for the celebration of the festival was announced via signals of fire from Jerusalem to the diaspora, they also added another day for celebrations in the diaspora in the event of interference with the signals heralding the start of the festival.

W. Dosick saw these moves as in keeping with the transformation of all the agricultural feasts into festivals related to the anniversary of significant historic events. This was a necessary step called for with the increase in urbanization and fewer people directly related to the land and agriculture ( 1995: 176, also Porter 1995: 120).

The rabbis made the festival, in the light of the above, the birthday of Israel, the anniversary of the day on which the Covenant had been concluded between God and His people. A new name for the festival emerged, viz. *Zeman Matan Toratenu*, the season of the giving of the *Torah* relating the remarkable events described in Ex. 19-20 (Encyclopedia Judaica 14: 1320). The term “season” was used in the light that the actual day of the Revelation at Sinai was not stated. Seeing that the narrative account states that Moses was on Sinai for forty day and nights, the rabbis taught that during this *extended* period or ‘season’ he had received instructions in the *Torah* from God (*Shabbat 86a*).

To bring all these new ideas together, the rabbis created various *midrashim* to stress Israel’s position vis-a vis the nations, who would not accept the Torah. These stories related why the Torah

was given in the wilderness, why on Mount Sinai, why during the month Sivan, etc. Israel's position vis-a-vis the immoral life style and position of the surrounding nations was also expounded. According to one of these teachings, all the seventy nations of the world heard the divine voice. The nations however, would not accept the Commandments when God offered it to them, as the Ten Commandments called on them to surrender their lifestyle. Finally it was offered to Israel who accepted it with the words: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey" (Ex. 24:7). Kitov is quick to stress that although it was taught that Israel alone of all the nations accepted the Torah, Israel was merely the instrument of the divine word and not the exclusive owner of it (Kitov 1978: 76ff).

The idea that the Israelites were the only willing nation to accept the Torah would inspire the Kabbalists in later years to institute a whole night Torah study session or *Tikkun leil Shavuot* to show Israel's willingness to dedicate themselves to the Torah. There is however another *midrash* which stated that God revealed Himself on Mount Sinai at noontime, but the Israelites were still asleep and Moses had to rouse them. This then is a way of atoning for the failure; to be awake and alert when God appears to us.

This custom of keeping awake all night was widely observed with a formal study compendium consisting of the first and last verse of each *sidra* (portion) in the Pentateuch, the opening verses of the rest of the biblical chapters and the beginning of each of the 63 tractates of the *Mishnah*. Some lectionaries also contain chapters of the mystical work the *Zohar* as well as poetic exhortations on the theme of the 613 commandments known as *Azharot*.

A lingering aspect from the agricultural phase was the rabbinic notion that *Shavuot* was the time for the judgement for the fruits of the trees (cf. Rosh Hashanah 1: 2). The idea was held that the world was judged four times a year. On Passover for grain, *Shavuot* for the fruits of the trees, on New Year all the inhabitants of the earth and finally on *Sukkot* for water. The idea is that God's verdict is shown by the plenteousness or poverty of the produce or commodity for humankind (Blackman 1990:382). Special prayers were said to secure a positive verdict on the trees' behalf. The faithfulness of the nation in bringing the firstfruits was also however linked to God's continuous faithfulness. The

prayers and intercession were visually stressed by decorating the place of worship with tree branches and boughs (Kitov 1978 : 64).

Another *Shavuot* custom was the eating of milk products, because the rabbis said that when the Israelites received the Law they were like newborn babies.

This section has dealt with how *Shavuot* was shaped over the years, and especially since the destruction of the Second Temple. We will now see how Messianic Jews shaped *Shavuot* in the light of their adherence to Jesus, the Messiah.

## **5. Shavuot in the Messianic Jewish tradition**

Dosick has lamented that no Jewish holiday is more ignored and less observed than *Shavuot* (1995:179) whilst Ellen Frankel calls *Shavuot* “a neglected stepchild” of the Jewish holidays.

Messianic Jews have been heirs to this dilemma, as they shared in the basic stock of celebrations of *Shavuot*, e.g. the offering of the two loaves and the *bikkurim*. They also recognized the rabbinic interpretations and need of moving the festival beyond the purely agricultural to a historical festival commemorating the giving of the Ten Commandments on Sinai (Wertheim 1998 :53).

The lack of ritual did influence the celebration of the festival and Messianic Jews made special efforts in at least the family circle to maintain it. They were aware that unlike the other two pilgrimage festivals *Shavuot* could pass by unobtrusively if no special efforts were made to save the celebrations.

It needs to be stressed at this point that not all Jewish parties had celebrated *Shavuot* at the same time. This was due to a dispute on the interpretation of the concept “the day after the Sabbath” (Lev.23: 11) from which fifty days were to be counted. Was this to be after the Sabbath proper, i.e. the seventh day closest to the beginning of the festival, i.e. the first day of the week or should the word “sabbath” be interpreted as the day when work was prohibited due to the “solemn assembly” and thus could be an ordinary weekday? These different interpretations had a direct influence on Messianic Jews. Should they follow the rabbinic view that the term ‘sabbath’ could refer to an

ordinary day and thus *Shavuot* can be on a weekday, or should they follow the Sadducean view (to which the Christian churches ascribe) and which means that *Shavuot* would always be on a Sunday? Here I see Messianic Jews as very flexible. They continue the (rabbinic) Jewish heritage by observing the general Jewish practice of commemorating the Revelation on Sinai, in a family setting. They bring this however in relation to Christ's vicarious suffering when He died for all who were disobedient to the Revelation and made atonement for them. The original stress of keeping every minute legal details was undone. This relief in fact is why Messianic Jews became missionary minded to convince their fellow Jews that there was a more fulfilled life 'under grace' if they studied the prophetic symbolism related to this festival, which shows that Jesus was the Messiah and had to die in our place. They furthermore, augment their celebrations on Pentecost Sunday by linking up with fellow Christians to observe the celebration and commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

During the feast, as was seen from the *Torah* regulation earlier, two loaves of bread were to be brought as an offering. It was however stated (compare the wording in the *Mishnah* on the deliverance of the *bikkurim* to the priest) that observing the "offering" of the two loaves of bread was only possible for those practising agriculture in Israel. For those living outside of Israel this observance was not possible and so they could only attend in a spirit of thankfulness and bring monetary gifts. Likewise Jews for Jesus, a Messianic Jewish group, have rather focussed on the symbolism of this act. Starting from the idea of the twelve loaves that were baked for the Table of Shewbread - each representing a tribe of Israel, they interpreted the two loaves as representing the whole population of the world: one loaf for the Hebrew people and the other for the Gentile people. The harvest represents the ingathering of the people. The interpretation is that the Messianic anticipation (Is. 42: 6,7) is fulfilled and that when Messiah comes for the second time, He will gather both Jews and Gentiles to Himself in a new covenant of peace (Rosen 1992: 2).

Concerning *bikkurim*, Messianic Jewish writers have advocated the enactment or practical performance of the *bikkurim* procedures (in a commemorative family setting) as stipulated in the *Mishnah*. The aim of this is to constantly recall our total dependence on God the provider and to show our gratitude to Him. The exception to the Mishnaic rules was that the firstfruits were either

deposited at a community food bank or distributed to needy people or the infirm instead of bringing them to Jerusalem or a sanctuary (Wertheim 1998: 56; Zimmerman 1981 :117,118). The family was thus urged to plant fruit trees or even vegetables and tie a red thread around the different fruits, designating them as *bikkurim* which would be reaped later. The sense of *bikkurim* was also stressed in the home and place of worship on *Shavuot* with decorations of green leafy branches, fruit and wild flowers (Wertheim 1998: 55).

The tradition of *Zeman Matan Toratenu*, the revelation on Sinai, is another aspect that had been contextualized and stressed in different ways by Messianic Jews. Whilst adhering to the rabbinical view of the Divine Revelation on *Shavuot*, this is connected with the need for *Y'shua* to become human and make atonement for all humankind. Their interpretation is that the Torah revealed on Sinai stressed complete obedience to all the laws in order to attain righteousness. This comprises to love God totally and to completely observe the whole *Torah*. You were not to sin or deviate in any way. The stress was to *never* falter, to be always in control. This would never be possible. No-one would ever be able to “ascend the mountain of the Lord ....to stand in His holy place” (Ps. 24:3). Rom. 3:22 made it clear that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Messianic Jews however claim for themselves the remedy to this condition. *Y'shua* died instead of all humankind and empowers all who accept His mediating death with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Zimmerman 1981: 105).

It should be noted at this stage, that the connection of *Shavuot* to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit goes beyond the general Jewish interpretation. Messianic Jews trace this gift of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit back to the promise made by Jeremiah that: “Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel....not according to the covenant....which they broke....I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (31:31-34). Paul echoes this when he writes: “You are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3). Righteousness now stems from and is upheld by *Y'shua*, however the indwelling Holy Spirit, seen as a gift, makes it possible to adhere to the guidelines of God.

This message is of supreme importance as Messianic Jews see this as the key to a fulfilled life. They are set free of legalism, i.e. the constant human efforts to satisfy God, with the resultant failure and condemnation which they dread. All efforts are made to alleviate the plight of their fellow Jews who still want to appease God via good works in attempting to obey all the commandments.

Messianic Jews also adhere to a *Tikkun leil Shavuot*, the all night study session. However, their observations differ from the all night study setting where Jewish males would gathering in a synagogue, to a family gathering to strengthen their internal ties. Likewise, the study programme moved beyond the Hebrew Bible to an informal “all night birthday celebration” which included New Testament sections relating to references to *Shavuot*. Thus Scripture references to fruit (in the light of the *Bikkurim*), salvation, the Holy Spirit, etc. are studied (Zimmerman 1981:108ff). The “all night birthday celebration” stems from the view that *Shavuot* was the birthday of the Church, and with it comes symbols to educate the children about the Holy Spirit. These include the use of candles, which are linked to the flames which descended on the disciples, and breath for the wind which was heard on Pentecost.

Another Messianic Jewish feature of *Shavuot* is how *Y'shua* (Jesus) is linked in a special way to the celebrations. As earlier indicated, *Shavuot* was seen as the epilogue to Passover. Messianic Jews read much into this. It is significant to them that the resurrection of *Y'shua* occurred fifty days before hand on the day when the *omer* of barley was waved in the Temple. This waving had always signified a portion of the whole harvest that was to follow and thus they underpin the apostle Paul's view that “Jesus was the firstfruit (to be raised) of those who had fallen asleep” (1Cor. 15:23). As *Shavuot* occurs fifty days later with further “blessings/ harvests”, i.e. the giving of the Ten Commandments and later the commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, this was understood as a further gift to enhance obedience to God and the maintenance of proper relationships with our fellow human beings. The last-mentioned they viewed as the original intent of the revelation on Sinai.

The most significant aspect of *Shavuot* in the Messianic Jewish tradition however, is the time of the commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jewish believers gathered in Jerusalem for their *Shavuot* celebration. It represents the birth of the Christian Church when three thousand Jewish

people became confirmed followers of *Y'shua*. The continuing outpouring of the Spirit is prayed for which brings about insight and understanding as to the position of *Y'shua*; that of the long awaited Messiah. They are sure that there is a way beyond legalism (whereby God should be pleased with meticulous observance of the Law), and that is what Messianic Jews hope for and proclaim to their fellow Jews. Rosen states that today Pentecost should speak to us of the sowing of the gospel seed and the harvest or ingathering of saved souls, redeemed people to become part of the Body of Christ. He continues that the test of Pentecost is to see whether we ascribe to the fact that the primary purpose of the Church is to proclaim the gospel. He is of the opinion that as God's people remain faithful to this task, the harvest will grow (1995:2). In a related article David Brickner stresses the need for missionaries (i.e. Jews for Jesus) with an apostolic lifestyle of availability, vulnerability and mobility. In practise it means that volunteers need to be ready and available to utilize any opportunity to spread the Gospel to fellow Jews, whether in house calls or hospital visitation. He stresses that this needs to be done even in the face of rejection or physical threats, anywhere around the globe where the need may arise (1999: 1).

In this section I have shown how Messianic Jews interpret the celebration of *Shavuot*, as it stems from the original biblical and later rabbinic Judaism. I have tried to focus on the continuity and discontinuity which have become evident. I will now focus on how the Gentile Church had approached and celebrated this festival.

## **6. Shavuot in Gentile Christianity**

The Greek rendering of *Shavuot*, i.e., Pentecost, became the most common utilized name in the Gentile Church for this festival. Of significance in this overview will be the difference in purpose for which this day and season were utilized.

Pentecost from the earliest establishment of the Gentile Church took on a special identity, viz. that of the birth of the Church or the new Israel with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as is recorded in Acts 2. This separate identity was firstly due to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, rendering the pilgrimage festival impossible. The cessation meant that the object lessons, the loaves and rituals

connected with *Shavuot* were discarded and so the possibility of the Gentile Church to reflect on them in a theological way and adapt them in one way or another. Secondly, the linkage of the Revelation at Sinai with *Shavuot*/ Pentecost was rather late in the second century when the Church had already established an identity (Tally 1986: 59).

Despite these, the Church's dating from Passover to the celebration of Pentecost ever since the first century, was irrefutably bound with one feature of *Shavuot*, i.e., the need for it to be commemorated fifty days after Passover. The differences as outlined earlier in the chapter concerning from which day to start the counting also had an influence on the celebration of Pentecost in the Church. The Roman Church celebrated Pentecost always on the eighth Sunday from the celebration of Easter, whilst the Quartodecimans celebrated it on any day of the week, as Easter could fall on any day from whence fifty days were counted.

A uniting feature amongst these different groups, besides the fact that they both utilize the fiftieth day, was that both groups approached the celebration as a time of joy and triumph. This was due to the perception that the resurrection was seen as the ushering in of the divine kingdom of God. Unlike the soberness and fasting of Lent, the differentiation is brought into play during and after Pentecost proper, by stating that during this period no kneeling in prayer or fasting was allowed. This was to show how highly the joyous mood of the season was regarded (Davies 1986: 61).

The celebration on Pentecost day proper was up to the fourth century celebrated as a unitive festival commemorating both the ascension of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Toward this the congregation in Jerusalem would gather on Mount Zion, the traditional site of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, at 9 a.m. (the same time and place as the original occurrence) for a service. During this service a Scripture reading would recall the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples. This was followed by a gathering just after midday at the sanctuary on the traditional site of the ascension, where portions from the Gospels and Acts were read related to the ascension of Jesus. A great candlelight procession came to the city in the darkness, and it was eventually about midnight when the people dispersed (Davies 1972: 310).

Toward the end of the fourth century the unitive commemoration was divided in the institution of the Ascension forty days after Easter, whilst Pentecost or Whitsunday was reserved for the celebration of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day. This would ultimately be the rule through all the succeeding ages (Tally 1986:62).

The Rabbinic linkage of Pentecost and the revelation at Sinai formulated centuries earlier came under the spotlight again, especially with Augustine and Leo the Great. They viewed this with profound significance. If the old covenant ratified in the Exodus was concluded with the Giving of the Law during Pentecost, then the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost can be seen as the conclusion to the establishment of the new covenant ushered in with the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They, furthermore, linked the “dividing tongues, as of fire” (Acts 2: 3) with the theophany to Moses and the people at Sinai which was likewise accompanied with fire and lightning (Davies 1972: 310). The interpretation was thus made that just as the giving of the Law at Sinai formed the constitution of the spiritual commonwealth of Israel, so the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples signalled the constitution of the spiritual community of faith in Christ.

As we move to the Reformation era, it should be noted that unlike the Lutheran position and interpretation on Easter, which led to the relinquishing of many Roman Catholic traditions connected with Easter, the same did not occur with the liturgical tradition and dogmatic views on Pentecost. Luther subscribed to the Roman Catholic idea that Pentecost was an archetype of what happened seven weeks after the resurrection in Jerusalem. He also agreed that Pentecost was the crown of the empowering phase of the Church which was ushered in with the reception of the spiritual benefits which stem from Christ’s victory over Satan and death. Likewise, the division of the celebration of Ascension and Pentecost was also retained in the Lutheran liturgy.

Centuries have hardly changed the perceptions attributed to Luther. These were faithfully transmitted as new churches were established around the globe. A special feature in my denomination today is the observance during the last ten days before Pentecost, i.e. from the celebration of Ascension Day. These days were endowed with a special significance. It was seen as a period of anticipation and each day is fully utilized for instruction of the believers. As Ascension day was seen as Christ’s victory

parade in heaven where He displayed Satan and all evil subdued in His train the idea was held that some of these blessings would also be bestowed on the heirs of Christ. Of supreme importance was the anticipation to be endowed with the Holy Spirit. Thus, we would reflect on the Holy Spirit or related topics under various thematic studies. These included the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. 12-14), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5: 22-23), etc. Also the Apostle's Creed is utilized, divided into ten sections and expounded each night during a worship ceremony. The emphasis on all these thematic studies was on preparation and sharing expectantly in God's blessings which come with Pentecost, the crown of the season. This was in line with the original view that the day of Pentecost is the culmination of the Easter celebrations: the risen Christ, having shown himself to the disciples and having ascended, sends the promised Holy Spirit to the expectant Church (Pffatteicher 1979: 26).

Pentecost proper is likewise celebrated with special zeal and joy. Confirmation ceremonies, especially adult confirmation, are given special significance on Pentecost as they symbolize the ongoing work of the Church. The Confirmants and general congregation are exhorted through the readings of the day and the sermon to recall and be open to the continuous outpouring of the Spirit on all believers (Reed 1959: 47). Red altar cloths and decorations, with the symbol of tongues of fire, displayed in the church building would enhance this message.

This briefly was how Pentecost developed during the centuries and how it is celebrated in my denomination. I will now move on and evaluate whether and how the Messianic Jewish practice can be used in my denomination.

## **7. Evaluation**

Taking the cue from Messianic Jews, I foresee the following ideas as useful for liturgical inspiration and enhancements.

Messianic Jews celebrated *Shavuot* as a pause from the daily rat race with its emphasis on human achievements and possibilities. Despite our capabilities and skills, Messianic Jews on this day call on

their members to step down from the centre stage and to acknowledge that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof” (Ps. 24). We are not our own creators, rather we are completely dependent on the benevolence of God in our daily existence. This I would like to see constantly instilled and impressed on our hearts.

Hereto the Sunday before Pentecost can be set aside to reflect on our dependance on God and to keep us humble. This will prevent feelings of devastation and despair when from time to time it takes the forces of nature to do that as they discredit all human endeavors to curtail these calamities. A special liturgy can be formulated and the sermon and related worship activities can focus on our dependance on God. This will ensure that the continuous technological advances and breakthroughs will be celebrated in their rightful context, i.e., of attributing all these insights to the mercy and revelation which stem from God.

*Shavuot* secondly, has also retained a harvest festival flavor although the agricultural aspect is no more the focal point. Messianic Judaism encourages families to uphold the *bikkurim* ideals by cultivating fruit trees or vegetable patches. This is done not necessarily from a perspective of providing for their daily sustenance, and yet I think the leadership in my denomination can utilize such an example to move beyond the mere spiritual proclamation of the Gospel and encourage our congregants, especially in the rural areas, likewise to establish peace or community gardens. These have the added advantage of providing self-employment and stimulate self help projects. Once these are on the way continuous facilitation could involve teaching the congregants their/ our complete dependance on God. The *bikkurim* ideals of returning to God a section of the bounty can be channeled to those less fortunate and thus compassion on others can be bestowed.

Another aspect related to this could be the adaptation of our harvest festivals. From time to time my denomination would celebrate this festival with the aim to give thanks to God and distribute the collected gifts to the needy. In general however the festival could be seen as a fund-raising drive to secure funds for the running of the church. I foresee the possibility to infuse this celebration with the ideas of the *bikkurim*, the bringing of first fruits as indicated in the *Mishnah*.

These ideas could be adapted and contextualized in the form of a play which can be performed by Sunday School children during the worship service. This could also be linked with the previous section where families are encouraged to become gardeners. Imagine the pride and possibilities for personal growth when the children select, care and reap their first fruits and bring them to the sanctuary in a spirit of thankfulness to God. I see in this the possibility to teach stewardship in a special way from an early age. The possibility of educating the young and the members will secure a right relationship to the Supreme Provider and Sustainer as well as the need to care for the earth and one another.

In the previous section, concerning the celebration of *Shavuot* in the Church, I have referred to the special significance of the ten days between Ascension day and Pentecost. I would like to bring this in connection with the link between *Shavuot* and the Ten Commandments to address our present moral crisis and social dilemma. As the possibility already exists in my denomination to utilize the ten days to Pentecost with a thematic study, I would opt to utilize the Ten Commandments during this period. This would create the opportunity to explore contemporary issues which are sometimes too sensitive to address. I would link each commandment with each day and utilize the following schematic structure. It should be noted that the Lutheran division of the Ten Commandments differs from others' in that the commandment on coveting is divided into two.

Thus, on day one in the light of the command to worship God solely, I would reflect on the unity of God versus the worship of the Trinity. Also how do we relate to adherents of other religions, especially those engaged in worship of what is perceived to be idols by us? The question needs to be raised whether all religions have equal access to God in the light of the perception that salvation can only be obtained in Christ.

Day two would focus on the prohibition to take the name of the Lord in vain. I would relate this to how we approach our vows and oaths, e.g., baptismal, confirmation and marriage vows, swearing of oaths and demeaning the majesty of God. Do we acknowledge God in them or are they vain expressions? The command also focuses on self-directed desires and we need to reflect on the consequences of "stealing" divine sovereignty and then use its authority to raise our "self" up in

awareness of others.

Day three will deal with honouring the sabbath. How did the change to the Lord's Day come about? How do we approach the problems related with a seven-day work week, sports on Sunday? If honoring God is linked to worship of God do we need to change our worship style at the close of the millennium to accommodate more people and facilitate in the process their adherence to the commandment?

On day four I would discuss family values, honoring parents and elders vs. child abuse, incest, etc. What are the consequences of a fatherless society as more and more single parenthood becomes a norm?

Day five would focus on murder vis-a-vis abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, etc. With guns and crime abounding how will we deal with inadvertent and righteous slaying in contrast to the wanton taking of life? Maybe time can be allocated to reflect on the objectives of Gun Free South Africa and reflect on the feasibility of their approach to crime and violence.

Day six would focus on faithfulness/faithlessness in marriage and the consequences of divorce. How do we approach society's present sexual values, premarital sex, homosexuality, prostitution, Aids, etc.? An issue that will reappear again in the future is polytheism and customary marriages which call for reflection.

On day seven I will reflect on issues relating to stealing, deprivation and exploitation of resources, corruption, etc. Globalization could be scrutinized from the vantage point of how to secure that monopolies and conglomerates do not exploit people or completely deprive them of livelihoods.

On day eight, the effects of jealousy, hatred, false testimonies and lies to or about another to magnify our image in the eyes of a third party. This can be extended to issues of media freedom vis-a-vis slander and character assassination. Also back stabbing and power struggles should be analyzed and prevented.

Day nine I would deal with coveting which stem from materialism and the Western influence on our value system. Coveting, i.e., acquisition of material that will enhance our appearance in the eye of another versus legitimate yearning to alleviate material burdens will be differentiated.

Day ten would continue the above and deal with extortion, exploitation, monopolies at the expense of the poor, etc.

My idea is at first just to stimulate discussion, create awareness and possible compassion. No conclusions need to be reached. Should these discussions at a later stage stimulate action and awareness programs with the resultant creation of specific support groups these would be an added bonus.

Lastly, Messianic Jews utilize Pentecost as a barometer to test the Church's position on witnessing and proclamation of the Good News. As the early disciples were imparted with gifts and power from on high, the goal was to use these to reach others and cause them to share in the believers' insight and experience. The idea was that Christ co-opted humans to create a chain reaction whereby salvation would reach the end of the earth. The above analysis of our witness' strategy, could also be annually made on Pentecost in my denomination to evaluate our relationship to the rest of the community and the world.

Hereto congregants could be called upon to share in the worship setting of their outreach experiences. Also, the leaders of the different organizations in the Church could be called upon to give an overview of their activities during the year in the light of the gift of the Spirit bestowed on them. Against this "report" which could include a vision for the future, the congregation could be called upon to commit themselves to pray for these activities in the groups. Those sharings in the congregation could be concluded with the laying on of hands, signifying the acceptance of the leaders, their acknowledgement by the congregation and encouraging them to persevere in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Another idea could be to call upon missionaries to visit the Church on this day and share with the congregation their experiences and call on them for support as the need would be.

With these possible appropriations of *Shavuot* I conclude chapter two. We now move to the last chapter and pilgrimage festival, viz., the feast of Tabernacles.

## Chapter Three

### The Feast of Tabernacles

#### 1. Introduction

The last of the three pilgrimage festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles (Heb. סוכות ; “booths or tabernacles”), is also the last of the feasts in the agricultural year. It ushered in a well-deserved rest from the hard labor and sincere rejoicing in what God has done in providing for His people. This name is derived from the command that the Israelites were to dwell in shelters or booths for seven days in commemoration of the wandering in the desert where their ancestors lived in booths (Lev.23: 42,43). Various other names were given to this festival, however the importance and the nature of the Feast of Tabernacles (hereafter called *Sukkot*) can be deduced from the designation, “the feast of the Lord,” connoting its preeminence in the cycle of the Jewish year. To rejoice at this festival was imperative and three times this prescription is given as will be seen later.

Whilst Passover was *considered* the greatest of festivals due to the supreme redemption, this feast is *designated* as such and especially in the rabbinic literature where it is referred to as *HaChag*, “the festival” without need for further elaboration or clarification to the reader.

The aim of this chapter will be the same as the previous two, viz., to determine how Messianic Judaism celebrates *Sukkot* in relation to the original precepts given in the *Torah* and guidelines stemming from Rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple. This celebration, will then be evaluated vis-a-vis the general Church practice connected to this feast to see whether positive aspects in Messianic Judaism can be incorporated to expand and enrich especially my denomination’s worship and ritual.

To achieve this, I will firstly, lay the foundation of this chapter with the prescriptions and guidelines

concerning *Sukkot* which we find in the *Torah*, which will be followed by the actual accounts of the celebrations in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Rabbinic literature will next be searched for guidelines, accounts and traditions on the festival to investigate the developments, growth or changes to the festival in the course of time, especially after the destruction of the Second Temple. All of these will be used as a mirror against which present day Messianic Jewish practice will be tested.

The next subsection will be a concise overview of how *Sukkot* was utilized or adapted in the Church through the ages. I will then evaluate the differences connected with Messianic Judaism and especially see whether the interpretations and practice in Messianic Judaism can be of any use to enhance the ritual in my denomination.

## **2. Overview of Sukkot in the Torah**

The first reference to *Sukkot* is found in Exodus 23. This chapter deals with accountability and justice to the poor. In verses 14-16 the pilgrimage festivals are mentioned which deal with accountability, thankfulness and acknowledgment of God after the various harvests. To implement this all the males were to appear before the Lord God. Verse 16b contains the first command toward the celebration and gathering of the feast which takes place “at the end of the year.” Here the feast is closely associated with the ingathering of the harvest and thus the name of the feast at this stage was, *Chag HaAsif* or the feast of ingathering. Cassuto states that this festival derived from the Canaanite celebrations dedicated to their gods. The Israelites were allowed to follow the Canaanite practice, but with a different observation and outlook whereby they would honour their God (1967:303).

In Leviticus more detail is given concerning the celebration of the festival which is here called *Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles:

The LORD said to Moses, Say to the Israelites: ‘ On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the Lord’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. For seven days present offerings made to

the Lord by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to the Lord by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no regular work. ““ These are the Lord’s appointed feasts, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to the Lord by fire- the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day. These offerings are in addition to those for the Lord’s Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to the LORD.) (23 : 33- 43 NIV).

These verses reveal to us that the period of rejoicing consists of two groups: firstly, the first seven days, Tabernacles or *Sukkot* proper; and secondly, the eighth day, *Azzeret* or the closing assembly. More information are also given in verses 39-43 directed to the celebration of the festival after the settlement in Canaan:

So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths 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. So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the LORD (NIV).

Porter states that this reflects two ancient customs, viz. a joyful procession with the fruit and branches of the trees and the situation/custom where the labourers would erect and live in booths in the vineyards and orchards *during* the harvest time. The compilers of the ‘holiness code’ however, went beyond the agricultural significance and used these as a reminder of God’s salvific acts during the wilderness period (23:43). He also notes that at first the branches were only utilized in the processions, but later they were used to construct the booths (cf. Neh. 8:15-16) (1976: 188).

The offerings referred to in Leviticus are described in detail in the book of Numbers, especially chapter 29: 12-38, a section of the manual for offering for the Holy Year. Here the joy prescribed (cf. Lev. 23: 40) and associated with the festival found expression in the prescription of an elaborate series of sacrifices. These signified the bounty of offerings to the Lord, the Giver of the harvest. Thus, it was prescribed that for seven days burnt offerings were to be brought which included thirteen bulls, two rams and fourteen lambs. A grain offering and a drink offering were to accompany the offering of the bulls. In addition a goat was to be offered as a sin offering. These were to be performed each of the seven days, with the number of bulls decreasing by one each day, till the seventh day when seven bulls were offered. Sturdy states that the daily decrease in the bulls to be sacrificed were symbolic to the decrease of the intensity of the joy as the feast goes on (1976: 207). Much significance had been derived from the number of bullocks, totaling seventy altogether, which were sacrificed. I will elaborate on this in the later sections.

More instructions were given in the next book, i.e., Deuteronomy chapter 16: 13-15, where we get specific information as to whom should participate in the celebrations “after the harvest of the threshing-floor and winepress” was completed. The stress was again on an all-inclusive celebration and the slaves, the Levites (who did not participate in the agricultural process), the stranger, orphan and widow were to be catered for. As in the previous books, it was stressed that the participants were to be “altogether joyful” in the blessings of the Lord and the work of their hands. Offerings were to be presented to the Lord as according to the ability of each pilgrim in accordance with his harvest (v.17). Here it is recorded that the festival was to last for seven days and the location of the feast is stipulated to be “at the place the Lord will choose” and this ultimately resulted in the centralization of Israelite worship in the Jerusalem temple, as will be seen in the next section. It is noteworthy that “the eighth day of solemn assembly” is not mentioned in this book. This is probably due to Deuteronomy’s focus of the elaboration on the three pilgrimage festivals *per se* (v.16), rather than to give a list of all the special and additional days (Johnstone 1990:333).

In Deuteronomy 31: 10ff., Moses commanded the Israelites that every seventh year, during *Sukkot*, the Torah, i.e., the law or instructions were to be read to all the assembled people. Young and old even the aliens were to listen and thus learn to fear the Lord which would lead to the observance of

the Torah (v12).

These then were the instructions concerning *Sukkot*. The implementation of these will be traced in the next section.

### **3. Overview of Sukkot in the Prophets and Writings.**

The first reference to the possible implementation of *Sukkot* is recorded in the book of Judges where it is stated that the Shechemites celebrated a feast of joy after the grape harvest (9: 27). In chapter 21 of the same book however, this is stated more explicitly. We are informed about a crisis of a lack of wives for the Benjamites and in an elaboration on the resolution of the crisis, verse 19 informs us that there was an annual festival of the Lord at Shiloh, the most noted sanctuary before the founding of the kingdom, from where these females were abducted. Schauss states that this annual feast was a reference to the celebration of *Sukkot* at Mount Ephraim (1970:172).

Years later as recorded in 1 Kings chapter 8 especially verses 2 and 65 we read about the “installation” of the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place in Jerusalem and the dedication of the Temple. We are informed that this took place on *Sukkot*. Solomon extended the prescription to be joyful by adding another week to the joyful celebrations. So highly was the festival regarded that it was designated “the festival” (1 Kings 12: 32; 2 Chron. 7:8). Solomon’s religious observance is also recorded in more detail in 2 Chronicles where we read that he kept all the Sabbath, New Moons, and the three annual feasts - the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (8: 12-13).

With Solomon’s death his kingdom split into two, Israel and Judah. The King of Israel, Jeroboam knowing the unifying potential of the pilgrimage festivals celebrated in Jerusalem, prevented the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom from traveling to Judah and instead set up two idols at Dan and Bethel to which pilgrimages were to be made. This is seen as the start of apostasy as he also instituted a new line of non-Levitical priests and instituted a new festival calendar. Of significance is the change of the time of observance for *Sukkot* from the biblical prescription in the seventh month to the eighth

month (I Kings 12:25-33) (Polley 1989: 83).

In Hosea 9:5 the prophet preaches in the Northern Kingdom and asks the question: “What will you do on the day of your appointed feasts, on the festival days of the Lord?” Stuart states that this refers to the contrast that will soon emerge to the rejoicing on the feast of *Sukkot*. There will be no more celebration and joy as they will be going into exile for their disobedience. Seeing that the Northern festival was a deviation from the prescriptions in the *Torah*, as it was celebrated in the eighth month, it became a suitable locus for attack upon the multiple covenant violations constituting Israel’s “prostitution” (1987: 144, Glaser 1987: 169).

The prophet Amos also visited the sanctuary at Beth-el during one of the *Sukkot* festivals and the revelry that he saw made such an unfavorable impression upon him that he condemned the sanctuary and the entire ritual of the festival. He deplored the fact that the people had allowed the cult to dominate their lives and had failed to care for the widows and orphans. In Amos 6: 7 he uses the word *mirzah* for this revelry and proclaims an oracle of woe (6: 4-7) directed against those who engage in wild orgies. Polley states that these include stretching out upon couches, eating lamb and calves, singing songs, drinking excessively and anointing themselves with costly oil. Amos also attacks sexual abuse (2:6-8) and the exploitations which were encouraged by the wives of the rich aristocrats, whom he calls the “cows of Bashan” (cf. 4:1)(1989: 89).

This idolatry and disobedience to the Most High were the beginning of the end for the Northern Kingdom which was overrun by Assyria in 722 BCE. In 586 BCE likewise Judah, the Southern Kingdom suffered the same fate. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed and the inhabitants taken away into exile by the Babylonians. The prophet Ezekiel, during the exile, encouraged the exiles after a vision of the rebuilding of the Temple. He issued directions how to rectify the mistakes of the past after the exile and in chapter 45, verse 25 he instructed the prince or king concerning his contribution towards the offerings during the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles in the future. Wenham (as indicated in the corresponding section on *Shavuot*) states that these instructions bear close resemblance to the recordings in Numbers (1997: 107).

Zechariah likewise encouraged the exiles urging them that the speedy restoration of Palestine's religious authority would follow through the rebuilding of the Temple. He was painfully aware that political independence was still beyond their reach. He thus voiced his aspiration in a baffling prophecy adding a futuristic element to *Sukkot*, when he recorded that in the end times all the survivors of the nations will gather annually at Jerusalem to worship God and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (14: 16, 18-19). This prophecy will have supreme importance to Messianic Jews and the Church as will be seen later.

The rebuilding of the Temple ultimately came true and we read of the celebration of *Sukkot* when the altar was rebuilt (Ezra 3: 4). Later, on hearing the reading from the Torah, the people fulfilled the commands by actually living in booths. This was on encouragement by Ezra and the leadership. They made shelters from branches of the olive tree, myrtles, palms and shade trees all over the Temple square (Neh.8: 14 -18).

We thus see that *Sukkot* was held in high regard and that all attempts were made to uphold its celebration. Before the exile it is not quite possible to deduce from the narratives what the celebrations actually consisted of. With time more elaborate celebrations would be instituted as we will see in the next section.

#### **4. Sukkot in the Jewish Tradition**

How *Sukkot* was celebrated before the destruction of the Second Temple (and regulations for its continuance thereafter) can be deduced from the sixth tractate of the order *Mo'ed* (Seasons) in the *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, and Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. This tractate, *Sukkah* (booth), in five chapters deals with the making of the *sukkah*, how to dwell in it, who is exempted from the observance of the festival, etc. Great detail is also given to the construction and rules concerning the bouquet of the four species of trees which are utilized during the celebrations. Sections of the ancient Temple celebrations during *Sukkot*, e.g., the water drawing ceremony and nightly celebrations are preserved in detail in the tractate. Let us firstly take a closer look at these ceremonies.

The *Mishnah* relates the following about the *Nissuch Ha-Mayim* or the water drawing ceremony which took place every day during *Sukkot*. It started with a procession of worshipers and flutists from the Temple Mount to the spring or pool of Siloam. Leading the procession was a priest carrying a large golden pitcher, in which he drew the water to be poured on the altar. As the flutists continued to play, a choir of Israelites chanted Psalm 118. After drawing the water the parade returned to the Temple and came to the Water gate which led to the inner court. A great crowd awaited the priest there and greeted him with joy. Priests carrying silver trumpets blew the ceremonial three calls whilst other priests chant the words of the Prophet Isaiah, “With joy shall we draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Suk.4: 9).

At the same time willows were brought by priests from Moza and placed alongside the altar. The priest with the pitcher then moved through the inner court and proceeded to the altar where the morning sacrifices had ended. He approached the altar where two silver basins were waiting, one for water and one for wine. Each of these containers had a narrow spout which was trained on the altar. The priest held the pitcher of water above the container and as he was about to pour the assembled people called out, asking him to raise his hand even higher to see that he was really pouring the water on the altar, and not on the ground. This was an act of prayer and an expression of dependence upon God to pour out His blessing of rain upon the earth.

After the libation the trumpeteers again blew the three calls and the ceremonial procession around the altar began. Each of the priests carried a willow branch. The Levites stood in choir formation and sang the Psalms of Praise. When they came to the words: “We beseech Thee, O Lord save now! We beseech Thee, O Lord make us now to prosper!” all the congregation gathered raised their palm branches and twirled them in the air, joining the Levites and reciting in a great chorus: “We beseech Thee, O Lord save now! We beseech Thee, O Lord make us now to prosper” (Suk.4: 5).

The whole ceremony was such a joyful occasion that it is written: “Anyone who has not seen this water ceremony has never seen rejoicing in his life” (Suk. 5 : 1).

The rest of the day was dedicated to the *Musaf* (additional) sacrifices and all the offerings stemming

from vows or freewill were offered. We are told that every priest in the country was present in Jerusalem during *Sukkot* to cater for all the pilgrims' needs. Much significance has been given to the number of bullocks (totaling seventy altogether) which were sacrificed over the seven-day period. This was seen as corresponding to the seventy nations who descended from Noah and his kin, who were the ancestors of the nations of the world. With this interpretation the rabbis understood that the Temple in Jerusalem was perceived as 'a house of prayer for all the peoples' and God desired to provide atonement for all humankind and secure their well-being and peace. These sacrifices were thus not superficial to the harvest festival, but a core component. A *midrash*, an exposition, on Psalm 109 verse 4: "In return for my love they hate me, and I am a man of prayer," underscores this view concerning the providence of atonement for all the nations. Here we read that notwithstanding Israel's love as manifested by their prayer and sacrifice of the seventy oxen during *Sukkot* as intercession on behalf of the seventy nations, the gentile nations hate them instead of being grateful (Goodman 1973: 43, Scherman 1989: 47).

The most interesting and joyous celebration of the festival was still to come, the fire observance with the torch dance, which took place in the Court of the Women. David Brickner interpreted celebrations recorded in *Sukkah* 5:1-4 thus:

At the end of the first day of the Feast, the Temple was gloriously illuminated. Four gigantic candelabras stood within the court of the women. Each of these golden candelabras was 50 cubits high (this is about 25 meters tall). Each had four branches and at the top of each was a large bowl filled with oil. The wicks were made from the worn garments of the priests. Four young priests would ascend the candelabras on ladders and ignite the oil. As the Temple was situated on a hill, it would lighten up the whole of Jerusalem. The light was to remind the people how God's *Shekinah*, glory had once filled His Temple.

He continues:

After the lighting ceremony, Levitical musicians played their harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets. There were singing and torch dances all through the night. The torch dances were performed by pious men and men of good deeds (i.e., men of the Sanhedrin and heads of the colleges) whilst the common people were only spectators to prevent

unseemingly behavior. The Levites would play and sing a Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) on each of the fifteen steps leading to the Women's Court. When the rooster crows the trumpets were sounded and the procession march to the Eastern gate. With their backs to the gate the priests recite: Our forebears stood on this spot with their back to God's house and with their faces to the east and worshiped the sun, but we turn to God and our eyes always turn to God. With this, the gates of the Temple are opened and the people disperse (Brickner 1999: 2).

Thus, the celebrations continued day after day with the grand finale on the seventh day. Whilst on the other days of *Sukkot* they march once around the altar, on the seventh day, which became to be known as the *Hoshana Rabba*, the "Great Hoshana," they marched seven times around the altar with great pomp and ceremony (Sukkah 45a).

With the destruction of the Temple, which resulted in the cessation of offering the sacrifices, the rabbis were especially concerned with the preservation and continuance of the two observances mentioned in Lev. 23: 39-43. These comprise of the commands that the people should dwell in booths for seven days and that the people were to take on the first day "the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook" to "rejoice before the Lord." Since the Bible does not prescribe detailed directions for the building of the booth or *sukkah*, much rabbinical legislation has been enacted on its building.

Concerning the construction of the *sukkah* it was to be considered that its height was not to exceed 20 cubits and not smaller than ten handbreaths (Suk. 1:1). With this, the rabbis wanted equally to condemn arrogance and subservience which shows itself in the building of the *sukkah*. It could not be constructed under a tree or inside a house, nor covered by a sheet (Suk. 1: 2), however, the trees can form the sides of the *sukkah* (2.4). The size was considered as a seven handbreaths square which was seen to be large enough to contain a man's head, most of his body, and his table (Suk. 2: 7). Any material could be used for the construction of the walls (Suk. 1: 5), at least two of which must be complete, whilst the third could be partial. The most important part of the *sukkah* was the roof and especially the covering thereof which was known as the *sekhakh*. The material for the *sekhakh*, roof,

must be cut from that which grew in the soil and which was not susceptible to ritual uncleanness ( Suk. 1: 4). An overhanging tree was given as an example unacceptable to be utilized as a roof ( Suk. 1:2). On completion of the roof covering it was imperative that the shaded area in the *sukkah* will exceed the unshaded (Sukkah 9b-10a). It was customary to decorate the *sukkah* with symbols of *Sukkot* and fruit -which was not to be eaten during the festival (Sukkah 28b, Suk. 10a-b).

During the seven days of the festival the *sukkah* was to be regarded as the principle abode, whilst the house was seen as merely a temporal dwelling (Suk. 2:9). With this prescription whereby the person surrounds himself with life's necessities in this temporary abode, he is reminded of his uncertain lease on life and of the need at all times to cast his eye heavenward. Food was to be eaten in the *sukkah* and the members were to sleep in it too. Exceptions were made when it rained.

The days spent in the *sukkah* should never be boring and thus the "invitation" of (heavenly ) guests, e.g., the patriarchs and Biblical personalities of importance were started. A biblical figure would visit each day and in the process opportunities were created to reflect on the examples of these holy men.

Next in importance were prescriptions in Lev. 23: 39-43 concerning the citron and the tall palm branch decked with sprigs of flowering myrtle and graceful willow. Rabbinic authorities named these the *arba'ah minim*, " the four species" where the "fruit of the goodly trees" is the citron (*etrog*); the "boughs of thick trees" are myrtle twigs (*hadasim*); the palm branch is the *lulav*; and the willows are *aravot*. This bouquet is collectively called the *lulav*. In acquiring these, expense was not to be considered. In its selection care was to be taken that they were to be flawless, i.e., none of the sections of the *lulav* or *etrog* was to be dry, broken or hanging down. The utilization of a stolen *lulav* was taboo (Suk.3: 1). It should belong wholly to the worshiper, however due to circumstances, it was possible for a group to possess it collectively.

Midrashic interpretations were made concerning the four species which were seen to represent four different types of persons each with his or her own virtues and shortcomings in learning and good deeds yet, when you combine them in one common effort and service to God, atonement is possible. Another interpretation was that the species are representatives of the human body, thus, the palm

branch, tall and strong provided the support like the human spine. The willow leaves shaped like lips, reminds us to utilize our words in glorification of God and to help others. The eye-shaped myrtle reminds us to look at what is right and good whilst the citron, which is heart shaped remind us that our hearts belong to God. As the species are combined likewise, humans are to unite all their organs in service of God (Scherman 1989: 58,59; Wertheim 1998:22).

During the seven days the *lulav* was ceremonially waved up and down as well as to all the four directions in the sanctuary to proclaim that God is everywhere and His the majesty and sovereignty are over all the universe. This is done with the *lulav* in the right hand and the *etrog* in the left hand. Towards the end of the service on the seventh day the *lulav* was ceremonially beaten with the resultant loss of leaves and discarded. This signified the separation or forgiveness of sin for which the worshiper had prayed during this period. The citrons likewise were given to the children to be eaten.

The eighth day was interpreted to be for intercession for the nation of Israel *per se* in the light of the interpretation that the sacrifices were offered on behalf of all the nations during the seven days. The intercessory prayers for rain now also come to a conclusion concentrating on Israel's needs.

Centuries after the destruction of the Temple a ninth day was added to *Sukkot*. This originally came about due to doubt whether the messengers from the Sanhedrin would reach Babylon in time to indicate when the feast was supposed to start. Due to this possibility another day was added to be sure that all the prescriptions could be fulfilled. This practice continued even when the calendar was fixed well in advance. The need however arose to give relevancy to this second day and to utilize it. Through this need, *Simchat Torah*, the rejoicing in the Torah came about. As it was customary to finish the cycle of Torah reading, which took place every Sabbath, during this time it was advocated that the worshipers celebrate in the supreme gift from God. On this day the scrolls are taken from the Ark and the congregants dance in a procession around the *bimah*, platform, from which the weekly portions were read. *Simchat Torah*, the added ninth day became in the course of time to be the merriest day of *Sukkot* (Shauss1970: 187).

I have now explained the popularity of the festival designation "HaChag," *the festival* in the *Mishnah*

and later rabbinic literature and what efforts the rabbis had introduced to safeguard this holiday. We will now proceed to see how Messianic Jews celebrate this festival.

## 5. Sukkot in the Messianic Jewish Tradition

The popularity of the festival as was elaborated in the previous section had by no means diminished in the minds and interpretations of Messianic Jewish circles. The actual celebration is approached and performed with the same vigour and yet differences can be deduced from the view of Efraim Goldstein when he writes: “It is my burden that more people in Israel can find the real meaning of *Sukkot* as the present celebrations cannot satisfy them and quench their spiritual thirst”(1999:3). The idea behind these words is that *Sukkot* had become a secular holiday on the one hand for Jewish people to take a break to a resort. On the other hand, in the orthodox circles where the festival is implemented the participants go through the motions as prescribed in the rituals, but after eight days no visible change or fulfillment can be observed in their lives.

Messianic Jews have tried to implement all of the guidelines of the rabbis. I will now focus on the guidelines connected to the *sukkah*, *lulav* and prayer for rain.

Much emphasis is laid on the actual building of the *sukkah* and the acquisition of a *lulav*. Each family is encouraged to construct a *sukkah* and to inhabit one or else a collective *sukkah* is to be constructed at the sanctuary. Messianic Jews stress that when you look through the *sukkah* branches at the stars in the sky you need to recall with joy that God is faithful and that He will provide for all our needs (Wertheim 1998 : 21). They utilize the time to reflect year after year on the temporal nature of this life and that we must ultimately rely on God to provide for us.

Whilst Messianic Jews continue the practice of inviting the “guests” to the *sukkah* and in the process transmit to the children the examples of the Biblical figures, they also focus with the aid of the fruit decorations on the need that God decorates our lives with the fruit of the Spirit, thus giving it a Christian angle. Thus each evening they would choose a “fruit of the Spirit” (cf. Gal. 5 : 22), reflect thereon and pray that *Yeshua* will establish it in their hearts and lives.

Likewise, in the selection of the branches for the *lulav* one must meticulously choose the best and least blemished as only the best should be considered to worship God (Zimmerman 1981 : 158 ; Glaser 1987:155). The waving of the *lulav*, i.e., the up and down movement and the waving in all four directions, by each of the congregants are also taken over from Judaism, however the congregants are urged that as they point the *lulav* in all these directions, likewise they need to strive (and acknowledge) that the *Messiah* is crowned king over all the earth and in every person's life. Beyond the usual interpretation it is significant that the waving of the *lulav* (interpreted as symbolizing the sovereignty of God and His majesty over all the universe) is connected with the prophecy in Isaiah (9:6). Here Isaiah speaks of the enlarging of the nation and the increase of joy—the joy of the harvest, because “...a child is born, to us a son is given....And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The fact that His *rule* was foretold to expand and cover the whole earth and will never cease was seen as already taking place ( Klett 1998 : 3). Another connotation with the waving of the *lulav* is that it is seen as the hope towards the fulfilment of the prophecy in Zech. 14: 9: “The Lord will be King over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His Name the only name.”

Concerning the ancient practice of prayer for rain this is augmented with a new emphasis that as the rain falls to nourish the crops, so may the *Ruach ha Kodesh* (Holy Spirit) fall upon those who have identified with Jesus in His death and resurrection.

I will now move beyond the connotations connected to the *lulav*, *sukkah* and prayer for rain and focus on various other Biblical references related to *Sukkot* and point to their implementation or the interpretations stemming from them which enhance Messianic Judaism.

Concerning the reference to the 70 sacrifices mentioned in Leviticus, made on behalf of the nations Messianic Jews stress the need for more service to the rest of the world to secure atonement and forgiveness for everyone in Jesus, the Savior. The interpretation is stressed that Israel is supposed to be missionary priests (Glaser 1987: 206) and thus at this period of *Sukkot*, missionary outreach is intensified to help shine the light of *Yeshua*. The homes of Jewish people who are willing to hear of

Jesus are visited, marches are held, Gospel tracts are distributed at street corners and campuses are visited. The printed media is also utilized with Gospel advertisements drawing attention to the essentials of *Sukkot* as linked to Jesus, the Messiah.

Messianic Jews implement the prescription to “give to the Lord according to the blessings He had given you”(Deut. 16: 17), by donating food to institutions set on assisting the poor. This is in line with Jesus’ proclamation in Matthew 25: 40, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” They thus approach this festival as a reminder of reliance upon God to provide for our physical as well as spiritual well-being and to share these with those less fortunate (Klett 1998: 2). It is significant that although sharing with the poor is not *the* emphasis for Messianic Jews this is absent in Judaism.

The prophecy of Zechariah 14: 16ff., concerning the ingathering of the Gentiles, is also given special importance and attention in this period. Special efforts are made or opportunities utilized to expose the festival to the Churches who are seen as rather ignorant about it. *Sukkot* is seen as the feast of Ingathering, the harvest of God in gathering together people of all nationalities who will worship Him. The view is held that when the Messiah comes all nations will worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They however could not wait until then to begin the work of salvation, as there are souls of every nation to be gathered now. Reconciliation and salvation can be obtained now by individuals who are willing to obey God and trust in His provision which He made in the Messiah Jesus (Rosen 1997: 3). Again this goes beyond Judaism which does not make any attempt to gather anyone beyond their religion into their fold.

Another aspect of the connotation of ingathering of all God’s children (stemming from Zechariah’s prophecy) is the linkage to Jesus’ words in John 14: 2,3 : “There are many homes up there where my Father lives, and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you...”(TLB). Messianic Jews anticipate that at the return of Christ a new era will be ushered in for all believers beyond this present earthly state. Everyone is called upon to anticipate the time when they will sit and feast with *Yeshua* in heaven (Zimmerman 1981 : 163).

Another biblical reference related to Sukkot is derived from Psalm 118, a section of the Hallel Psalms. Messianic Jews regret that although in Judaism the Hallel psalms, especially this one, is utilized, the general Jewish population does not understand the meaning of the section in Psalm 118 which says “The stone which the builders rejected has become the capstone” (v. 22). This is interpreted by Messianic Jews to refer to the rejection of Jesus, the Messiah (Klett 1998: 5). They deplore the fact that as the Pharisees were wise in their own eyes and professed to be proprietors of truth, and thus knew better than to accept Jesus, likewise today their fellow Jewish brothers and sisters reject the idea as nonsense that Jesus could be the *Messiah*. They maintain however, that real spiritual satisfaction is still available to those who believe as according to the age-old invitation: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer.29: 13).

*Sukkot* is linked *par excellence* with Jesus sayings (John 7 and 8 ) on the great day of the Festival, called the *Hoshana Rabba*. Jesus took the traditional elements of the celebration and applied them to His own life and mission. Using the significance of water during *Sukkot*, He called Himself the Living water for which those gathered, longed and prayed for, for the next year. He also said that He was the Light of the world and invited all to come to *Him* for illumination. This invitation was baffling as the crowds basked in the light of the gigantic *menorot*.

Concerning the living water, the act of drinking is seen to be referring to believing in Christ, whilst the water which Jesus promised is linked to the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7: 39). Messianic Jews see the same need for quenching evident today in the peoples’ lives. Glaser states, “We inhabit a spiritual desert, scorching the soul without the Holy One’s life-giving intervention on our behalf. We should thus long, pray and act that God’ presence in the form of the Holy Spirit, the Helper and Comforter could be present in the hearts of everyone ”(1987: 157).

Whilst *Sukkot* is celebrated every year in various circles, Messianic Jews long for the eschatological and eternal celebration of this feast. They long for the realization of the apostle John’s words: “Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they will be His people, ...” (Rev. 21: 3ff). They believe that ultimately, the whole earth will become the *sukkah* of God, and He will reign in the presence of His Son for all eternity (Glaser 1987: 213).

The ninth day in the Diaspora, eighth in Israel, i.e., *Simchat Torah* is likewise advocated with zeal in Messianic Judaism. They rejoice in the gift of God's Word, not only the Hebrew Bible but also the New Testament which together brings us the message of eternal life. Scripture study is encouraged as this was seen as God calling the person to a deeper friendship with Him. When they rejoice in the Torah, the aim should ultimately be to say from our hearts just like David: "Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long!" (Psalm 119 : 97) (Wertheim 1998: 25).

Like in the Jewish synagogues the scrolls and Bibles are carried around in the sanctuary and everyone joins in the parade with flags and apples with candles in them. Last mentioned stems from Prov.7: 2 : "Keep my commands, and you will live. Guard my teachings as the apple of your eye," and Ps.119: 105, " Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path."

*Simchat Torah* we have seen emphasizes the conclusion of the weekly readings from the *Torah*. With this reading, a weekly section from the Prophets and the Writings is also read. Messianic Jews regret that the rabbis have omitted an important option from the Prophet passages whilst drafting the schedule, viz. Isaiah 53. Whether this was deliberate or not, many Jews will never get the opportunity to reflect on this passage, connect it with the suffering of Jesus and recognize in Him the Messiah. This omission is rectified in Messianic congregations' own weekly readings and all efforts are made to encouraged other to include it in the worship planning (Wertheim1998: 27).

Messianic Jews call for a "*Sukkot* consciousness" every day as we constantly focus on the fact that here we have no enduring city, we are mere sojourners waiting the return of the *Messiah*. Thus the constant question should be, whether I am willing to submit to God's presence and protection, i.e., whether I am willing to be vulnerable or am I tempted to build a fortress of independence and security systems around myself? The fact is that our lives are as fragile as the little *sukkah*, and outside of God's protective wings we are so vulnerable.

This then concludes the section reflecting on the changes and amplified interpretations we find in Messianic Jewish spheres. What the Church had done with *Sukkot* is next.

## 6. Sukkot in Gentile Christianity

The absence of the celebration or observance of *Sukkot* in one way or another in the Church is conspicuous. How did this come about? Was it due to the destruction of the Temple? In the light of the previous chapters I find it hard to believe that the destruction of the Temple would have resulted in *Sukkot* being ceased to be observed. This is in the light that *all* the pilgrimage festivals were affected and yet Passover and Pentecost survived in the Church. Thus it is highly unlikely that *Sukkot* just lapsed like that.

The question is rather under-researched, but I will briefly explore the possible arguments:

Jones stresses that attempts have been made to see Epiphany as the Christianization of the Feast of Tabernacles. He cites works by A Schmemmann and E.G. Selwyn who saw similarities in the all-night vigil, the lighting of fires and the procession of lights, the water of life, the palm branches as allusions to a sacred marriage. He concluded that this theory is by no means proved (1978:414).

Reed actually states that the Christmas cycle corresponds to the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. He however, is not so clear as to how the switch came about. He states that the Christmas cycle contains three seasons: Advent (Preparation), Christmas (Nativity), and Epiphany (Manifestation). The Festival of our Lord's Nativity was observed on January 6 in the Eastern Church and December 25 in the Western Church. Last mentioned was also the day the pagans observed the birthday of the sun god (*Natalis solis invicti*) as at this time the sun, after sinking to the lowest point on the horizon, began to ascend and bring light and life to the world. The Christians transformed this day into a celebration of the birth of the Sun of Righteousness, who comes with healing in His wings (Reed 1959:38ff).

Fakes states that the big three feasts of the church year are Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. He sees however no direct linkage between *Sukkot* and Christmas, but states that dramatic changes came to the church in the fourth century as Christianity moved from a sect to a legally recognized faith and eventually the established religion of the Roman empire. Worship went public and pagan temples were now used to spread the Gospel. The festivals of Christmas and Epiphany were added to replace the

deeply rooted pagan celebration of the festival of the Sun ( 1994: 27).

The idea has been raised that it is possible that the early Christians could have celebrated the birth of Christ during *Sukkot*. However seeing that they were a marginal group, this practice was usurped by Rome and linked with the pagan practices. Caroline Lawrence finds it very strange that God who leaves no “loose ends” did not seem to link anything in the New Covenant (*and Church practice*) with *Sukkot* (1998: 2ff.). Concerning the other two pilgrimage festivals (as we had already seen) there are obvious links if one considers that Passover has direct links with the death and resurrection of Christ, whilst during the Feast of Weeks we recall the giving of the Law and more so the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She questioned whether God would leave *Sukkot*, the most important festival to the Jewish people, unattached.

Tracing the root of the word *sukkah*, to *sacach*, which means to weave together, Lawrence states that the word can be used in the sense of weaving a basket or constructing the *sukkah*, but also for the process of the human body being formed in the womb. Her hypothesis is that *Sukkot* and the birth of Christ have definite links. She cites the following examples: “Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me (*sacach*) together with bones and sinews?” ( Job 10: 10-11). “For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast knit me (*sacach*) in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...” (Ps. 139: 13-14). Using the principles of rabbinic deductions whereby she links the idea of a baby being knit in the womb and the building of the *sukkah*, she enquired whether it was not God’s perfect plan to have His Son born during *Sukkot*? Could the Eternal take on a temporary body and dwelling place to live amongst humans by being knitted together in a virgin’s womb? Lawrence made another observation that in Genesis 33: 17, the first occurrence of the word “*sukkot*” in the Bible, *succot* means animal shelter, and so asks whether it was coincidence that Jesus was born in a stable (animal shelter) according to the Gospels?

She is thus convinced that the birth of Christ should be linked with this festival. This view is also expressed by Jo Tait in a booklet *The Appointed times of the Lord* where we read “ that *Yeshua* was not born in December, but during the Feast of Tabernacles. The shelter in which He was born was not

a stable, but a *sukkah*, a tabernacle or booth. He who came during the feast to tabernacle, dwell with man, will bring His mission to a completion when He returns during the same Feast” (Taite nd: 38).

One can only speculate if the birth of Christ was ever celebrated on *Sukkot* in the early Church. I doubt whether this was the case as remnants of one sort or the other would have remained. On the other hand what prompted the Church to start to celebrate the birth of Christ? What were the motivating factors which were ultimately usurped by the pagan influences resulting in the celebration of the birth of Christ on 25<sup>th</sup> December? Was it the celebration of Christ’s birth during *Sukkot*? It seems that we are too far removed from the Early Church to give a decisive answer.

The only occasion when *Sukkot* might come under the spotlight in some form in my denomination (and probably all denominations for that matter) will be during sermon preparation on the indicated passages in John 7 and 8. Fortunately, the Mishnaic and Talmudic references concerning the celebration of *Sukkot* are common in all the popular commentaries giving preachers access to the background of the Feast of Tabernacles to these sayings /invitations of Jesus. I am thus of the opinion that *Sukkot* is not completely lost to the Church. This brings me to the place where I will focus on Messianic Jewish practice to trace the possibilities for utilizing *Sukkot* in a practical way in my denomination.

## **7. Evaluation**

*Sukkot* originally celebrates the recollection of the wilderness school (which lasted forty years) in which the Israelites participated, with the resultant insight that God was faithful, and supplied all the food, water and protection needed. Messianic Jews understand *Sukkot* within the theological framework of blessing, rejoicing, and kindness to the poor. They not only recollect a mere commemoration that God provides for the needs of Israel with each agricultural season, but also joy and gratitude for the commemoration and re-enactment of God’s salvific acts during the Exodus and years in the wilderness. They use the original precepts concerning *Sukkot*, but go beyond this to focus on the eschatological fulfilment of *Sukkot*. Hereto they strive to reach their fellow Jews with the “good news” in order for them to share and implement the richness of relating *Sukkot* to Christ.

I would advocate, firstly, the building of a *sukkah* in a collective setting in each congregation. This could be at the church or another central place. During the construction and afterwards the leader can explain the reasons for the flimsy state of the *sukkah* and the materials needed for its construction. The stress should be on the lessons and truths which it wants to bring across. The *sukkah* can serve as an admonishment to humans not to become overconfident because of affluence, rather one's survival is contingent upon the grace of the Almighty. As the congregations get used to the construction of the *sukkah*, each family could be encouraged to venture into building their own *sukkah* as a witness to their neighbours and share with them about the dangers of self-reliance void of acknowledging God.

Messianic Jews (as indicated earlier) understand *Sukkot* within the theological framework of blessing, rejoicing, and kindness to the poor. The values of *Sukkot* already are needed in the new South Africa where accusations of participation in the gravy train, corruption, disregard for the poor and oppressed are rife. The idea behind these is that they have forgotten their heritage in their affluence. We need to utilize the Sundays during *Sukkot*, where during the Church services we awaken via sermons or plays, thoughtfulness concerning our democracy and how it came about, rather than taking it for granted. We need to remember the long walk to freedom, express thankfulness for God's protection and pray for renewed guidance and the bestowal of His precious gifts.

My denomination (and all denominations, for that matter), has the added advantage of a South African national holiday, Heritage Day, in the *Sukkot* period. Whereas we, Christians, complain about the removal or abolition of Christian holy days here we have the advantage of christianizing one and spread a *Sukkot*-consciousness.

Messianic Jews utilize *Sukkot* to reach the "unreached." Does the Church still care about those beyond their fold who are desperately in need of salvation? Do we mobilize our manpower in creative ways to reach those caught up in "the striving after wind" to quote Ecclesiastics? *Sukkot* focuses on ingathering and we are called upon to venture into the harvest that is ripe and waiting. On the one hand this means challenging the value systems where power, finance and success are the goals in life. The leadership of the Church should equip themselves to be so pro-active and dynamic that they either can setup meetings e.g. business lunches whereto entrepreneurs can be invited and in these meetings

spread a *Sukkot*-consciousness. On the other hand *Sukkot* calls on my denomination to move beyond our “maintenance” ministry, where the acquisition of finance to survive on a parish level is the top priority, to a “mission” ministry where people beyond the fold and their needs take precedence. Here “mission” can be defined as the ‘converting/changing’ of the whole person in his/ her spiritual, socio-economic, or whatever need. Diaconate programs are called for urgently, to keep the Church relevant in the various communities.

Messianic Jews’ example of caring for the needy and living in flimsy, makeshift shelters can be used to conscientize our congregants concerning the plight of those who are living in “booths” as a permanent lifestyle. Millions of South Africans are living in the squatter camps without even the bare necessities of life. Compassion for the poor can be raised when our congregants are called upon to expose themselves to life’s challenges by substituting their homes for frail *sukkot*. We are called upon to care for one another (cf. Matt.25:31ff.), however unless we realize what others are going through we will not be in a position to show empathy and thus fulfill Christ’s call for diaconate work.

*Sukkot* also raises the question as to how supportive the Church is to the needs of the agricultural sector? Do we make intercession on a regular basis and with true feelings for the farmer and labour force? *Sukkot* provides the opportunity to really serve this vital sector of our society and to raise the levels of compassion for them amongst the congregants. Services can be dedicated to them where their needs are brought before God.

Usually in South Africa in certain regions at the end of the harvest or during harvesting festivals are held drawing visitors from beyond the region. Although these are mostly secular events, our local congregations in these regions can form part of these activities giving them a spiritual dimension and advocating thanksgiving to the One who really made it all possible. The successful gathering of the crop, health and strength, seasonal job opportunities must never be taken for granted - God must be acknowledged!

When we focus on *Simchat Torah*, the rejoicing in the Torah, is likewise of extreme importance to be investigated and considered in this day and age. How do we perceive and approach our Bibles? Do

we read them in a systematic way or are they gathering dust somewhere? Do we utilize it as a guide for daily living? Are we aware what Bible Houses are doing to ensure that each citizen can have a Bible in his/her own language? Do we rejoice at the possibilities of acquiring Bibles in South Africa? Too often it has become the reality that we are not willing or too shy to expose our adherence to Christ by carrying our Bible to church or to utilize them in public. I think it has become time again to rejoice in the Bible and the opportunities that we have.

I think it is of the utmost importance to follow the example of Messianic Jews to reflect year after year on the temporal nature of this life and that we ultimately have to rely on God to provide for us.

## CONCLUSION

As I come to the end of this thesis, I hope to bring all the sections together. To achieve this I will draw on the initial quest in order to convey my findings. I will then move to recommendations how the findings can be implemented. Lastly, it is my contention that every serious student of the Old Testament should try to find a way beyond the present impasse in Old Testament Theology and thus I would elaborate on this strategy as a way forward.

I have started this thesis against the backdrop of a quest concerning the benefits of Old Testament values for Gentile Christians. I have focused on the three pilgrimage festivals as they are directly related to a secondary quest which is to infuse or inspire our liturgy. Normativity was not the issue, i.e. not how do we implement the Israelite practice today, rather, the stress was on gaining insight from these festivals in order to utilize them.

The circumstances governing the composition and compilation of this thesis, or my quest towards the relevancy of the Old Testament, stems from an envy of teachers who could instill pride and hope in others as captured in this paragraph:

Thus we come to the end of the *shalosh regalim* (pilgrimage festivals) which had been described as threads of gold across the tapestry of Jewish life. They are green isles set amidst the cold, grey seas of everyday life. The joyous *Seder* table, the all-night vigil on *Shavuot*, the miracle of the booth under the stars, are graphic historical dramas that make the ancient experiences of our people living in us *today*. *To observe the festivals is to feed the fires of historic, religious and national consciousness and thus make possible a hopeful future for a glorious past* (italics mine) (Lehrman 1943: 87).

I see this quotation as coming from a person who could draw inspiration from his heritage and who makes a passionate plea to his readers not to neglect it. Can this pride and fervor, and the strengths that rang from these words come true for the practice of our faith? In the light of this, I thus set out to appropriate these festivals into the liturgical life of the Church. In order to do this I examined the

perspectives of Messianic Jews, who were already successfully doing just that in their context i.e. utilizing the pilgrimage festivals.

In assessing the worth of the celebration and interpretation of the feasts in Messianic Judaism, I have shown in the evaluations at the end of each chapter that in taking the cue from them, it is possible for us to utilize the feasts and so contextualize the Hebrew Bible. In my research it has become clear that two of the three pilgrimage festivals have survived in some form or another in Gentile Christianity, viz. Passover and Pentecost. The observance of *Sukkot* is more difficult to trace and one can safely say that from the fourth century it has never been utilized. From all three festivals, there are however additional gains we can obtain to enhance our faith and practice, as I have indicated in the evaluation in each chapter. Concerning Passover and the Feast of Weeks it is only necessary to step into the door that is already slightly open due to the remnant from the Early Church. With the Feast of Tabernacles however, creativity will be necessary.

In using Messianic Judaism as a vehicle to appropriate the pilgrimage festivals I came across the following challenges:

Firstly, I had to relinquish the idea that Messianic Judaism could be used as a time machine which one can utilize to return to past eras and gain *all* the insight and see *all* the Biblical practice one wants to understand. Neither can Messianic Judaism be approached as a 'museum', as (Messianic) Jews are centuries removed from the coming into being of the Hebrew Bible and in the subsequent centuries they have not been immune to socio-political dynamics that tried to destroy their heritage. These and related factors had impacted on the Jewish world and have caused them to adapt and change in order to survive. We need to be aware of this, do thorough studies and ask critical questions to fathom the present day practice.

Secondly, we need to be careful about the perception that Jewishness equals *scholarship* and *insight* in the Hebrew Bible and her values. Nothing could be further from the truth. Opportunities to pursue biblical or theological studies by Gentile Christians (not to mention specialized Christian scholarship) have resulted in more insight than Messianic Jews can offer. This is not so strange if we take the background of some of these Jewish converts to Christianity into consideration. Often they were secular or non-observant to their Jewish practice and ignorant of their roots. We thus need to be

selective in our utilization of Messianic Jewish practice and their resources to secure the best and correct retrieval of the past.

I also had to negotiate “suspicion” concerning the agenda of Messianic Jews, or rather those who with their affiliates are seen to have a (Zionist) political (hidden) agenda and are utilizing Messianic Judaism to achieve this goal. I can only pose the following questions to illustrate this. Is there a possibility that Messianic Judaism could be the “creation” of a Christian Western group or power with a strong financial backup who wish to “force” the eschatological fulfilment of Romans 11? Could Messianic Judaism be a legitimization ploy to invoke the favourable acceptance and support of the State of Israel in the Christian world as the “original branches” are starting to re-affix themselves to the olive tree or the Messiah and thus we need to support them? Why do the Evangelical Fundamentalists seem so obsessed with highlighting the “return of the Jewish branches” and support the spread of Messianic Judaism? I had no time to pursue these questions, however I hope these speculations are unfounded as they undermine all the good that otherwise could stem from Messianic Jews.

Lastly, the appropriateness in utilizing Messianic Jews for the establishment of African values was questioned. We are called upon to drink from our own wells and Mugambi has stressed that we Africans need to be faithful to our own culture and context (1995 : 3). This is seen to be not the case if we follow Messianic Jews who are carrying Northern or Western baggage with them when they approach the Bible. I agree with this assessment in general, however the strategy or the approach that I have utilized in this thesis did not call for the scrutinizing of the Messianic Jewish baggage to see whether they hamper or strengthen the African cause.

Despite this I still deem this study a worthwhile exercise. This thesis did give me an exposure of our heritage. Whether we deny it or not, the Hebrew Bible and its contents are irrefutably bound to our Christian perceptions and we need to probe them. This thesis also asks for the re-evaluation of our perspective on Judaism. It is a living religion contrary to what we think and teach. I am of the opinion that interfaith dialogue will increase in the future and we can only gain and grow if we listen to one another in a respectful manner. Lastly, new opportunities for the new millennium, especially in the liturgical sphere, can result as indeed the pilgrimage festivals do provide new ways of enriching our liturgy and practice.

It is my wish that this not be another academic exercise, rather that the conclusions will lead to a program of implementation in one way or another. As a start this will not be that easy, due to our point of departure and dogmatic exposure, whether in Confirmation class, sermons or advanced study from a Western (European) theological perspective. African critical scholarship should rectify this and ask whether there is more to the Old Testament than meets the eye.

In rectifying the above, I would start by suggesting that we teach the teachers of Christian values differently. Hereto I would start with the theological centres as the foundation for a future perspective is laid here. So the idea is to challenge the status quo by teaching the (future) pastors and teachers differently and in so doing to possibly break the mode of conditioning to which we had been exposed.

Next I would concentrate on refresher courses for pastors and teachers and utilize the Christian Education department in churches to bring the new possibilities, especially in the liturgical sphere, to the fore.

To the average (Gentile) Christian in the pew these chapters will be of no value. A possible way to reach or stimulate the grassroots with a new Biblical perspective and interpretation has come about due to land restoration in South Africa, which is taking place at a positive pace in South Africa. This means new beginnings for individuals, families, tribal groups and communities. As the land is restored to the peoples valuable governmental and non-governmental (NGO's) assistance, guidance and training on a physical level are given to the people to ensure success in the agricultural and related sectors. One sphere however, the field of (Christian) stewardship lags behind. The spiritual sphere is not deemed important to be concentrated upon and integrated in a holistic approach to farming or production. This lack of interest in the spiritual level results in a superficial acknowledgement of Christians' dependance on God and the need to acknowledge Him as the Sovereign Lord over everything. Labour and success are thus not linked to the grace of God. The Church should take the initiative in a non-aggressive way to guide people away from this pitfall. It is my view that the Biblical insight and values gained from the celebration of the pilgrimage festivals, which were closely related to agriculture, can be passed on via sermons, Christian education, discussions, etc. People could be brought together, the issues of concern raised and then the people could decide on how to get involved and implement gratefulness or express their dependance on God. Programmes should be owned and driven by the people.

To conclude, it is my opinion that if we take the cue from the Messianic Jews we can overcome (partially?) the impasse in Old Testament Theology. We need to be honest with ourselves that we do not have a monopoly on insight into the Old Testament, in fact we have been (are ?) completely dependant on Jewish scholars (ever since Paul and the Jewish Gospel writers) in terms of what has been handed down to us. We have adapted these to suit our needs without acknowledging the source of origin. Our adaptations and interpretations have resulted in the impasse. I am of the opinion that an open and honest search amidst the available scholarly works of Messianic Jews can offer insight which can secure progress in faith and growth.

I am not advocating an abandonment of other methods of interpretation, however new models of interpretation need to be constructed. Further work must be undertaken. It is time for Biblical Scholarship to take Messianic Judaism seriously as an element of the original communities that composed and passed on the biblical texts. David Stern in *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* stresses that the Jewishness of the Gospel is not only the key for understanding its content, but for establishing it (Graham Harvey 1995 :463).

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