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Simchat Torah - שמחת תורה

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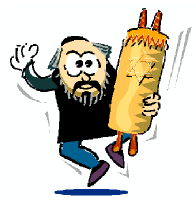
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In this [study](study.html) I would like to examine the [holiday](festival.html) Simchat Torah (Ashkenazim pronounce this as Simchas Torah). To do this, I will need to take an extensive look at [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) because these [two](two.html) holidays occur on the same day. While Simchat Torah is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah, it is a part of our [tradition](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\orallaw.html). Thus we [know](daat.html) that these later [generations](toldot.html) are being [taught](teacher.html) something wonderfull through this mystical [holiday](festival.html).



Simchat Torah is normally translated as "Rejoicing in the Torah”. Simchat Torah celebrates the completion of the reading of the Torah by the [community](community.html). Those [communities](community.html) which follow the [Annual](annual.html) [cycle](cycles.html) complete the reading of the Torah in [one](one.html) year. Those who follow the [Shmita](shmita.html) or [triennial](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html) will complete the Torah once in [three](three.html) and a half years or twice in a [Sabbatical](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html) of [seven](seven.html) years. Simchat Torah focuses on the Torah, the [Five](five.html) Books of Moses. This completion of the Torah readings is a [time](time.html) of great celebration, with processions, singing, and dancing.

[Tishri 22](feasts.html), the day after the [seventh](seven.html) day of [Succoth](succoth.html), is the [holiday](festival.html) of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html). In [Israel](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\city.html), [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) is also the [holiday](festival.html) of Simchat Torah. Outside of Israel, where extra days of holidays are held, only the second day of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) is Simchat Torah:

[Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) and Simchat Torah are on [Tishri](feasts.html) 22 in [Eretz Israel](city.html).

[Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) is [Tishri](feasts.html) 22 and 23, while Simchat Torah is [Tishri](feasts.html) 23, outside Israel.

[**Shemini Atzeret**](shemini.html) **/ Simchat Torah is** [**one**](one.html) **day** [**holiday**](festival.html)**, the 8th day of cessation, assembly, or gathering, occurs right after the** [**seven**](seven.html) **days of** [**Succoth**](succoth.html)**.**

Simchat Torah is characterized by joyful dancing with the Torah. The final portion of the Book of Devarim (Deuteronomy) is read in the [synagogue](synagog.html) followed by the beginning of the Book of Bereshit (Genesis). In this manner, the [cycle](cycles.html) of Torah readings by the [community](community.html) continues without ending.

[**The Torah Portion**](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\festivals.html)for [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) for the [first](one.html) day in the diaspora is:

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 14:22 - 16:17

Bamidbar ([Numbers](nchart.html)) 29:35 - 30:1

**Haftorah**: 1 Melakim (Kings) 8:54-66

[**The Torah Portion**](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\festivals.html) for Simchat Torah and [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) in [Eretz Israel](city.html) and the second day of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) in the diaspora is:

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 33:1-34:12 **(**[Vezot Habracha](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\annual.html)**)**

Bereshit (Genesis) 1:1-2:3

**Maftir:** Bamidbar ([Numbers](nchart.html)) 29:35-30:1

**Haftarah**: Joshua 1:1-1:18

This **"Reading of the Torah"** refers to the fact that Moshe instituted the public reading of the Torah on each [Shabbat](sabbath.html), at the [time](time.html) of the [exodus from Egypt](thebirth.html). The completion of this reading of the Torah was later celebrated as Simchat Torah.

The [Hakhel.](hakhel.html) (gathering) was the [time](time.html) when the populace [gathered](gather.html), once in [seven](seven.html) years, for a public reading of the [Law](law.html). This reading came at the [time](time.html) that the whole [community](community.html) had already spent [seven](seven.html) years reading through the Torah twice, on successive Shabbatot of the [seven](seven.html) years, until they arrived at Simchat Torah in a [Shmita](shmita.html), or [Sabbatical](shmita.html) year. They began the Torah reading [cycle](cycles.html) in [Tishri](feasts.html), [seven](seven.html) years earlier. The [first](one.html) [cycle](cycles.html) ended in [Nisan](feasts.html) and the second [cycle](cycles.html) culminates on the exact same day that this inspiring [journey](stages.html) had began. Now, on this fatefull day, the whole [community](community.html) will listen as the Torah is read by the King in the [Temple](temple.html). What a magnificent day!

In many [communities](community.html) it is customary to read the Torah on the *evening* of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) [or on Simchat Torah outside the [land of Israel](city.html)], this is the **ONLY** [time](time.html) of the year when the Torah is read at night.

The practice of reading the final portion of the Torah, *Devarim (Deuteronomy) 33-34*, on this day was set by the [Mishna](orallaw.html). From this practice, there gradually grew a tradition of a special, joyous celebration to mark that completion. The basis for such a celebration is found in the [Midrash](orallaw.html), which described Solomon as having made a special feast after he was granted wisdom:

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah - Ecclesiastes I:1*** *‘Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings' (melakim)--read the phrase as 'He shall stand before* [*angels*](angels.html)*’ (mal'akim). R. Simon said in the* [*name*](name.html) *of R. Simeon b. Halafta: It may be likened to a councillor who became great in the royal palace. The king said to him, ‘Ask what you will and I shall give it you.’ The councillor thought to himself, ' If I ask for silver and gold, or precious pearls, or garments, he will give them to me; but I will ask for his daughter [in* [*marriage*](mashal.html)*] and then everything will be given to me included with his daughter.’ Similarly, In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a* [*dream*](dreams.html) *by night; and God said: Ask what I shall give thee (I Kings III, 5). Solomon thought to himself, ' If I ask for silver and gold and pearls, He will give them to me; but I shall ask for wisdom and then everything will be included.’ That is what is written, Give Thy servant therefore an understanding* [*heart*](body.html) *(ib. 9). The Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, said to him: ‘Thou hast asked for wisdom and didst not ask riches, honour, and the life of thine enemies for thyself; therefore wisdom and* [*knowledge*](knowledge.html) *will be granted thee and thereby riches and possessions also will I give thee’ (cf. ib. 11 ff.). Immediately, Solomon awoke, and, behold it was a* [*dream*](dreams.html) *(ib. 15). R.* [*Isaac*](isaac.html) *said: A* [*dream*](dreams.html) *stands upon its foundation. [Solomon became so wise that] when a bird chirped he* [*knew*](daat.html) *for what it chirped, and when an* [*ass*](chamor.html) *brayed he* [*knew*](daat.html) *for what it brayed. At once, He came to* [*Jerasalem*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\city.html)*, and stood before the* [*ark*](ark.html) *of the* [*covenant*](covenant.html) *of the Lord, and offered up burnt-offerings, and offered peace-offerings, and made a feast to all his servants (ib.). (R.* [*Isaac*](isaac.html) *said: we learn from this that a feast should be held after completing [the* [*study*](study.html) *of] the Torah.) Forthwith the Holy Spirit alighted upon him and he composed the following* [*three*](three.html) *Books: Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. Hence it is written, THE WORDS OF KOHELETH, THE SON OF DAVID.*

There are [two](two.html) commonly heard misconceptions about [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) (Simchat Torah):

(1) That the Simcha, the joy of the [Holiday](festival.html), is the **result of the** **Siyum**[[1]](#footnote-1)**,** the ending of the [Torah reading cycle](cycles.html).

(2) That we read the last parsha of the Torah, [Vezot Habrachah](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\annual.html), **because** we finish the reading [annual cycle](cycles.html).

Nothing could be further from the truth than these [two](two.html) misconceptions. [First](one.html), the excessive joy on [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) is a [Torah commandment](cmds613.html), [one of the 613](one.html), where as the ending of the reading of the Torah in a [cycle of one year](one.html) is a relatively **late** Rabbinical custom. Hence the Simcha, the joy,of the [holiday](festival.html) is a part of the [laws](law.html) of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html),rather than a result of the Siyum*.* And secondly, the reading of Vezot Habrachah on [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) is an ancient custom dictated by the [**Mishna**](orallaw.html)and has nothing to do with the [Annual](annual.html) reading [cycle](cycles.html). In fact, we may clearly say the opposite, that **they instituted the ending of the** [**cycle**](cycles.html)on [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html), **because we read on this day the last parsha of the Torah.** So why did the [Mishna](orallaw.html) elect the Vezot Habrachahreading for [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html)*?*

# The Reasons for the Readings[[2]](#footnote-2)

[Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) is an open, yet concealed, [feast](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\festival.html). Chazal, our sages, apparently aware of the dilemma, and being fearful that the meaning of the [holiday](festival.html) would be forgotten or overlooked, especially in the diaspora, instituted the requirement to read the main story of the [holiday](festival.html), the story of King Solomon building the Holy [Temple](temple.html), not less than [three](three.html) times throughout [Succoth](succoth.html) and [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html). Yet the story remains concealed from our [heart](body.html) and mind. We read it, [time](time.html) and again during the [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) [holiday](festival.html), year after year, totally unimpressed. We read it in the Haftarah of the second day of [Succoth](succoth.html), on the [first](one.html) day of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html), and on the second day of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) [the reading from Joshua is wrong, say the Tosfot in Megilah].Yet, the [halachic](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\walking.html) literature of the last [two](two.html) thousand years almost ignores it.

Moreover, as if to engrave the story in our mind even more so that we will not forget it, we read in the Torah from Vezot Habrachah*,* the last chapters of the Torah, *in the memory* of the story of King Solomon . Why, indeed, do we read that section in [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html)? Everyone assumes that it is because we end the Torah reading [cycle](cycles.html) on [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html), but the [Mishna](orallaw.html) in Megilah already says that we read it not for the Siyum but for the [Holiday](festival.html) itself. And at the [time](time.html) of the [Mishna](orallaw.html) there was no Simchat Torahand they used to finish the [cycle](cycles.html) [once every three and a half years](three.html). So why does the [Mishna](orallaw.html) elect the reading from Vezot Habrachah?Explains Rashi: Since the Haftarah says, "And on the [eighth](eight.html) day he sent the people away and they blessed the King" (1 Melakim [Kings] 1:8). And Abudarham concurs: The people blessed the king, and the king, in turn, blessed the people. And it became a custom throughout the [first](one.html) [Temple](temple.html) [time](time.html) that on [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) the people came to visit the King from the house of David, and the King in turn blessed the people. Since Moshe was not only a prophet but also a King, it is appropriate to read on this day his blessings too. **Hence, not only do we read repeatedly the Haftarah from Melakim about the story of King Solomon, but we also read because of it, from the Torah itself, the blessing of the King who is Moshe.** Moreover: We encounter the story of Solomon even when we [study](study.html) the [Halachot](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\walking.html) of the [holiday](festival.html). According to the [Talmud](orallaw.html), the essence of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) may be summarized in the acronym of the [six](six.html) [letters](letters.html) כשו פזר (PZR-KShV), which also mean: ‘Pazer’ - disperse, ‘Keshev’- Listen. Hence we have [two](two.html) opposing messages in the same acronym. [One](one.html) part PZR will disperse your mind away, so to [speak](mashal.html), whereas the second part - KShV - will lead you to the real meaning of the [Holiday](festival.html).

On Simchat Torah we read Vezot Habracha to complete the Book of Devarim (Deuteronomy) and thus the whole Torah. This Torah portion begins with the blessing of Moshe, right before he dies, for the [Jewish people](gen-jew.html) and each [tribe](tribes.html). Then Moshe ascends Mt. Nebo where [HaShem](hashem.html) shows him all of the land the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people are about to [inherit](inherit.html). He dies, is buried in an unknown spot, and the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people [mourn](mourning.html) for [thirty](thirty.html) days. The Torah then concludes with the words, "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom the Almighty had [known](daat.html) [face](body.html) to [face](body.html)..." At the end of each Book of the Torah the congregation calls out in unison, "Chazak, chazak, v'nizchazeik" which means "Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!" This is the eternal battle [cry](mashal.html) of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people. We then read the Book of Bereshit (Genesis), symbolizing that the Torah truly has no beginning or end; it is eternal and through our learning and fulfilling the Torah, the [Jewish people is eternal](gen-jew.html)!

# How do we celebrate?

On [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html), which corresponds to Simchat Torah, we remove the [Torah scrolls](letters.html) from the [ark](ark.html) and make [seven](seven.html) circles around the bimah (the raised platform where the Torah is read in the [synagogue](synagog.html)). The congregation dances before the Torah with intense joy. Some have the tradition of placing a lighted candle in the [ark](ark.html) while the scrolls are removed so that the [ark](ark.html) will not be without light.

Hallel ([Psalms](psalms1.html) 113-118) is recited after the Shacharit [Amidah](amida.html) (The morning [prayer](prayer.html)) on Shimini Atzeret.

The Torah reading at Shacharit, the morning service, is the last sidra in the Torah, Devarim (Deuteronomy) 33:1 - 34:12. It is customary that every [male](male+female.html) congregant is called up to the Torah for reading, on this day. Therefore, this portion is read through a [number](nchart.html) of times. The reading is concluded with calling up [three](three.html) people for aliyot, which is unique to this day. After this reading, another person is called to read the [first](one.html) portion of Bereshit (Genesis). The person given this honor is called the Chazzan Bereshit, the bridegroom of Genesis.

There is a special aliyah called "All the Children". This is the only [time](time.html) in the year when children are given an aliyah. A [tallit](tzitzith.html) is spread like a canopy over their heads and they say the blessing along with an adult who accompanies them. After the second blessing, the congregation recites:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 48:16*** *"The* [*angel*](angels.html) *who has* [*redeemed*](redemption.html) *me from all evil, bless the youths; and let my* [*name*](name.html) *be named on them, and the* [*name*](name.html) *of my* [*fathers*](fathers.html)[*Abraham*](avraham.html) *and* [*Isaac*](isaac.html)*; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth".*

It is customary for the Chazzan Torah, the most distinguished congregant who reads the conclusion of the Torah, to invite the entire congregation to a festive Kiddush to celebrate Simchat Torah.

On Simchat Torah it is customary to [hand](fourteen.html) out flags to be reminiscent of the [tribal flags](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\month.html) under which the [Israelites marched in the desert](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\tribes.html).

On Simchat Torah it is customary to put an apple on top of the flagstaff, or an apple with a hole carved out for a lighted candle, to evoke images of the Torah as light.

In some synagogues it is customary to allow some good-natured fooling around during mussaf (the additional [prayers](prayer.html) said after shacharit on [Shabbat](sabbath.html) and [festivals](festivals.html)), particularly by the children, who tie the [tzitzith](tzitzith.html) together or throw water on the Chazzan when he recites, "who brings forth wind and brings down [rain](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\rains.html)".

On Simchat Torah, taking hold of the Torah, and touching it, are privileges that are given to the whole congregation, in fulfillment of:

***Mishlei (Proverbs) 3:13-18*** *Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, For she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you* [*desire*](needs.html) *can compare with her. Long life is in her right* [*hand*](mashal.html)*; in her left* [*hand*](mashal.html) *are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace.* ***She is a*** [***tree of life***](eternal.html) ***to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.***

It is worth noting that the imagery, the rejoicing, and the [prayers](prayer.html) all picture the culmination and consummation of a [wedding](wedding.html) feast.

# The Development

While the tradition of added merriment on this last day of the [holiday](festival.html) in honor of completing the Torah began during the [ninth](nine.html) and tenth centuries of the common era, at the [time](time.html) of the Geonim, the [name](name.html) Simchat Torah came into use even later. **The custom of reading of the last portion of the Torah was set by the** [**Talmud**](orallaw.html)**, but that of reading of the** [**first**](one.html) **chapter of Bereshit (Genesis) was not introduced on Simchat Torah until sometime after the 12th century.** The reasons given for this additional reading were:

1) To indicate that "just as we were privileged to witness its completion, so shall we be privileged to witness its beginning" and

2) To prevent Satan from accusing [Israel](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\gen-jew.html) that they were happy to finish the Torah (in the sense of getting it over with) and did not care to continue to read it.

Initially it was the custom for the same person who completed Devarim (Deuteronomy) to read the Bereshit (Genesis) portion from memory without using a [scroll](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\letters.html), on account of the general rule that "[two](two.html) scrolls are not taken out for [one](one.html) reader." Eventually the practice developed of calling [two](two.html) different persons, [one](one.html) for the reading of the last portion of Devarim (Deuteronomy) and [one](one.html) for the [first](one.html) portion of Bereshit (Genesis), and [two](two.html) different scrolls began to be used.

The celebration of Simchat Torah in concert with [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) grew gradually during the middle ages. Until the Middle Ages there was more than [one](one.html) Torah reading [cycle](cycles.html)[[3]](#footnote-3). Another widespread reading [cycle](cycles.html) was the [triennial or septennial cycle](shmita.html) in which the Torah was read through in [three](three.html) and a half years. After the adoption of a single reading [cycle](cycles.html), [the annual cycle](cycles.html), the obvious [desire](needs.html) to celebrate the concluding and the beginning of the Torah reading developed.

The ritual custom most closely identified with Simchat Torah is that of the hakkafot. Hakkafot is the term used to designate ceremonial processional circuits, whether in the [synagogue](synagog.html) or elsewhere. On Simchat Torah, all the [Torah scroll](letters.html)s are removed from the [Ark](ark.html), and carried around the central platform in [seven](seven.html) hakkafot. This takes place during the evening service and also before the readings from the [two](two.html) [Torah scroll](letters.html)s (described above) during the morning service (shacharit). Hasidic practice in the Diaspora is to conduct hakkafot also at the evening service of the [first](one.html) day of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html), as in Israel.

# Origins

Although the custom of hakkafot on Simchat Torah is of rather late origin, dating from about the last [third](three.html) of the 16th century (in the [city](city.html) of Safed), the practice of hakkafot goes back much further. Processional circuits are [first](one.html) mentioned in the Tanach, in the book of Joshua, as a build-up to the downfall of the walls of [Jericho](stages.html). There were [seven](seven.html) circuits around [Jericho](stages.html); once a day (starting on [Passover](passover.html)) for [six](six.html) days, and [seven](seven.html) times on the [seventh](seven.html) day.

The lulav (and aravot too) were carried around the [Temple](temple.html) altar during the [seven](seven.html) days of [Succoth](succoth.html); once a day during the [first](one.html) [six](six.html) days, and [seven](seven.html) times on the [seventh](seven.html) day (see above). From there developed the custom of hakkafot around the [synagogue](synagog.html) with the lulav and the etrog. At traditional [Jewish](gen-jew.html) [wedding](wedding.html) ceremonies the custom of hakkafot is still to be seen in the circling by the bride around the bridegroom at the very start of the ceremony, usually [seven](seven.html) circuits. [Three](three.html) such circuits (Persian custom) can be said to symbolize the [three](three.html)-part passage from the Prophets, which describes [Israel's](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\gen-jew.html) relationship to [HaShem](hashem.html) in terms of an idyllic [betrothal](betroth.html) and [marriage](mashal.html):

*I will* [*betroth*](betroth.html) *you unto me forever; I will* [*betroth*](betroth.html) *you unto me in righteousness and judgment, in loving-kindness and mercy; I will* [*betroth*](betroth.html) *you unto me in faithfulness and you shall* [*know*](daat.html) *the Lord.* (See also weekday morning [prayer](prayer.html) for putting on [tefillin](tefillin.html)).

# Song and Circuit Dancing

In addition to the prescribed passages, it is commonplace for the congregation to join in the singing of many additional songs, generally verses from the Tanach or the [prayer](prayer.html) book that have been put to music. It is also the practice in the more traditional congregations for the worshippers to join a circle and dance in between each circuit.

Every other [time](time.html) of the year we have the opportunity to honor the Torah by studying it. On Simchat Torah, however, the [Torah scroll](letters.html) remains covered! It is not available for intellectual [study](study.html), only for being rejoiced through our dancing. And while we each attain our own unique personal level in Torah-[study](study.html), when it comes to circling around the Torah together, we are all equal--[two](two.html) [feet](heel.html) each! Distinctions based on level of intellect or even committment are irrelevant. We just dance. Then the Torah is "happy," G-d is happy, and we have a good [time](time.html) too. Afterwards, we should find that the dancing itself arouses us to increase our Torah [study](study.html) efforts throughout the [new](teruah.html) year.

Those holding [Torah scrolls](letters.html) also join the dancing. In the yeshivot, the schools of higher [Jewish](gen-jew.html) learning, and in those congregations where traditional youth predominates, the singing and dancing that accompany the hakkafot can last for many hours. It is sometimes even carried outdoors. The whirling [bodies](body.html) and the stomping [feet](heel.html), perhaps a performance of acrobatic feats by someone inside the dancing circle, all accompanied by continuous song, provide a scene of ecstatic joy. Small children are generally given decorative flags or miniature scrolls and they too follow the [Torah scroll](letters.html)s in the processions.

# In [Eretz Israel](city.html)

In [Jerusalem](city.html), it is now customary on Simchat Torah morning for some congregations to join together in a mass dancing procession through the [city](city.html) to the Western Wall. Led by [scrolls of the Torah](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\letters.html) carried under the [canopies](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\tzitzith.html), literally thousands of people, young and old, [eight](eight.html) and [ten](ten.html) abreast, dance and sing their way to the Western Wall in a procession that stretches for as far as the eye can see. The original custom of holding the hakkafot at the conclusion of Simchat Torah inspired the custom in Israel of carrying the Simchat Torah celebration also into the night after the [holiday](festival.html). Public gatherings with bands and music featuring hakkafot and singing and dancing are then held. In [one](one.html) public square of [Jerusalem](city.html), it is customary for the Chief Rabbis and high government officials to participate. At that celebration there is featured the varied practices of the different [Jewish](gen-jew.html) [communities](community.html): Hasidic, Yemenite, Bukharan, native Israeli, etc. A different group is responsible for each of the hakkafot, doing it in their respective traditional dress and with their traditional melodies.

# Dates

Simchat Torah, which coincides with [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html), is observed on:

**2013**:   Sundown September 25-27

**2014**:   Sundown October 15-17

**2015**:   Sundown October 4-6

**2016**:   Sundown October 23-25

**2017**:   Sundown October 11-13

Simchat Torah is only the [first](one.html) day in the [land of Israel](city.html). Outside the [land of Israel](city.html) it is celebrated only on the second day.

# Atzeret:

The [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) [festival](festival.html) is related to the [festival](festival.html) of the giving of the Torah, meaning the [festival](festival.html) of [Shavuot](shavuot.html), which the [Talmud](orallaw.html) always refers to as **atzeret**. We find the [name](name.html) atzeret also applied by the torah to the [Seventh day of Passover](seventh.html) (Devarim 16:6), although that day is an integral part of the [festival](festival.html). Thus, the term appears in [connection](connection.html) with all [three](three.html) pilgrimage holidays.

[Shavuot](shavuot.html), the [time](time.html) of the giving of the Torah, is the last [festival](festival.html) of the year (From [Tishri](feasts.html) to [Tishri](feasts.html)). Simchat Torah is the last Biblical [festival](festival.html) of the months (From [Nisan](feasts.html) to [Nisan](feasts.html)).

[Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) / Simchat Torah represents [two](two.html) climaxes in the [Jewish calendar](gen-jew.html). It comes at the end of the [holiday](festival.html) season, which begins in the month of [Elul](elul.html) and continues through [Rosh HaShanah](teruah.html), [Yom HaKippurim](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\kippur.html), and [Succoth](succoth.html). And it also marks the end of the harvest season, which began with [Passover](passover.html) in the spring.

# Rain:

In the Musaf [prayer](prayer.html) of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) we begin saying "He causes the wind to blow and the [rain](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\rains.html) to descend." This can be connected to the [coming](coming.html) of [Mashiach](mashiach.html): The phrase "he causes the wind (*ruach*) to blow" uses the same word as the verse "The spirit (*ruach*) of G-d hovered on the surface of the waters," and our Sages say "This is the spirit of King [Mashiach](mashiach.html)."

"He causes the rain (geshem) to descend" means that the [coming](coming.html) of [Mashiach](mashiach.html) actually occurs, in [physicality](physical.html) (*gashmiut* - related to *geshem*). Not only "the spirit of [Mashiach](mashiach.html)," but a soul in a [body](body.html), i.e. [Mashiach](mashiach.html) in the simple, literal sense in this [physical](physical.html) [world](worlds.html).

Moreover, "*geshem*" has the numerical value of 343, and this is connected to the prophecy that in the Messianic [future](future.html) "the light of the [sun](hachama.html) will be [seven](seven.html)-fold as the light of the [seven](seven.html) days." *Rashi* paraphrases this as "[seven](seven.html) sevens as the light of the [seven](seven.html) days, i.e. [forty](forty.html)-[nine](nine.html) sevens, equaling [three](three.html) hundred [forty](forty.html)-[three](three.html)." *(Likutei Sichos)*

\* \* \*

Nehemiah 8:2,13-14,18

# [Hakhel](hakhel.html) (Gathering)

[Hakhel](hakhel.html) is the culmination of the [Shmita](shmita.html), or [Sabbatical](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html). This [seven](seven.html) year [cycle](cycles.html) profoundly affected Israel and the [Jews](gen-jew.html) living there. For example, failure to follow the Torah in it’s requirements for the [Shmita](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html) resulted in the captivity in [Babylon](bavel.html). Aditionally the Torah requires that at the end of the [Shmita](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html), in the beginning of the “[eighth](eight.html)” year, that the King read the entire Torah to every man, woman, and child in the land. This gathering ([Hakhel](hakhel.html)) of all the people of the land must have been an [awesome](awesome.html) sight!

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 31:9-13*** *And Moses wrote this* [*law*](law.html)*, and delivered it unto the* [*priests*](priests.html) *the sons of Levi, which bare the* [*ark*](ark.html) *of the* [*covenant*](covenant.html) *of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, and unto all the elders of Israel. 10 And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every* [*seven*](seven.html) *years, in the solemnity of the* [*year of release*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\shmita.html)*, in the* [*feast of tabernacles*](succoth.html)*, 11 When all Israel is come to appear before* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this* [*law*](law.html) *before* [*all Israel*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\gen-jew.html) *in their* [*hearing*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\mashal.html)*. 12* [*Gather*](gather.html) *the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and* [*fear*](fear.html)[*HaShem*](hashem.html) *your God, and observe to do all the words of this* [*law*](law.html)*: 13 And that their children, which have not* [*known*](daat.html) *any thing, may hear, and learn to* [*fear*](fear.html)[*HaShem*](hashem.html) *your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over* [*Jordan*](stages.html) *to possess it.*

[Hakhel](hakhel.html) also stresses the importance of welcoming the [Ger](aliens.html) Tzadek, the righteous "[Jews](gen-jew.html) by Choice" who have embraced the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) faith and [community](community.html). All [Jews](gen-jew.html) are welcomed and nobody is asked to prove his [Jewish](gen-jew.html) credentials or lineage. Some authorities[[4]](#footnote-4) say that even [gentiles](gen-jew.html) residing in Israel would be welcomed at the [Hakhel](hakhel.html) ceremony.

The purpose of [Hakhel](hakhel.html), in the words of the Torah, is: "In order that you may hear and in order that you may learn to [fear](fear.html) [HaShem](hashem.html) your God." This, too, is cited as the purpose of [Matan Torah](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\shavuot.html) at Mt. [Sinai](stages.html)[[5]](#footnote-5), where the entire [nation](nations.html) congregated to hear the words of [HaShem](hashem.html).

In the [Yovel](yovel.html), [Jubilee](yovel.html), year, this assumed greater significance, as all slaves were freed on [Yom HaKippurim](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\kippur.html) and were, thus, able to participate in the communal acceptance of the Torah that took place on [Hakhel](hakhel.html). Thus, the Sefirat HaYovel, the counting of the [Yovel](yovel.html) year, was in fact a countdown to the [freedom](freedom.html) from slavery and embracing of the Torah. By way of comparison, it follows that [Sefirat HaOmer](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\omer.html) expresses the same idea.

What is the significance of the [Hakhel](hakhel.html)?

This [commandment](cmds613.html) has in large measure fallen into disuse during the past [two](two.html) milennia because it is intimately linked to the [Temple](temple.html) and the King of Israel, *with the King responsible to actually read the Torah publicly*:

[***Talmud***](orallaw.html) ***Bavli*** [***Sotah***](hair.html) ***41a*** [*MISHNA*](orallaw.html)*. WHAT WAS THE PROCEDURE IN* [*CONNECTION*](connection.html) *WITH THE PORTION READ BY THE KING? AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE* [*FIRST*](one.html) *DAY OF THE* [*FESTIVAL [OF TABERNACLES]*](succoth.html) *IN THE* [*EIGHTH*](eight.html)*, I.E., THE END OF THE* [*SEVENTH*](seven.html)*, THEY ERECT A WOODEN DAIS IN THE* [*TEMPLE*](temple.html) *COURT, UPON WHICH HE SITS; AS IT IS SAID, AT THE* [*END OF EVERY SEVEN YEARS*](seven.html)*, IN THE SET* [*TIME*](time.html) *etc. THE* [*SYNAGOGUE*](synagog.html)*-ATTENDANT TAKES A* [*TORAH-SCROLL*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\letters.html) *AND* [*HANDS*](fourteen.html) *IT TO THE* [*SYNAGOGUE*](synagog.html) *PRESIDENT, AND THE* [*SYNAGOGUE*](synagog.html)*-PRESIDENT* [*HANDS*](fourteen.html) *IT TO THE [*[*HIGH PRIEST*](priests.html)*'S] DEPUTY. HE* [*HANDS*](fourteen.html) *IT TO THE* [*HIGH PRIEST*](priests.html) *WHO* [*HANDS*](fourteen.html) *IT TO THE KING. THE KING STANDS AND RECEIVES IT, BUT READS* [*SITTING*](mashal.html)*. KING AGRIPPA STOOD AND RECEIVED IT AND READ* [*STANDING*](mashal.html)*, FOR WHICH ACT THE SAGES PRAISED HIM. WHEN HE REACHED, THOU MAYEST NOT PUT A FOREIGNER OVER THEE, HIS* [*EYES*](body.html) *RAN WITH* [*TEARS*](mashal.html)*. THEY SAID TO HIM, ‘*[*FEAR*](fear.html) *NOT, AGRIPPA, THOU ART OUR BROTHER, THOU ART OUR BROTHER!’ [THE KING] READS FROM THE BEGINNING OF DEUTERONOMY UP TO THE* [*SHEMA*](shema.html)*’, THE* [*SHEMA*](shema.html)*’, AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IF YE HEARKEN, THOU SHALT SURELY* [*TITHE*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\priests.html)*, WHEN THOU HAST MADE AN END OF TITHING, THE PORTION OF THE KING, AND THE BLESSINGS AND CURSES, UNTIL HE FINISHES ALL THE SECTION. THE KING PRONOUNCES THE SAME BENEDICTIONS AS THE* [*HIGH PRIEST*](priests.html)*, EXCEPT THAT HE SUBSTITUTES* [*ONE*](one.html) *FOR THE* [*FESTIVALS*](festivals.html) *INSTEAD OF* [*ONE*](one.html) *FOR THE PARDON OF* [*SIN*](sin.html)*.*

The awakening of [awe](fear.html) in the [nation](nations.html) by having the King read in the [Temple](temple.html), fosters [Jewish](gen-jew.html) unity. Thus, during [Temple](temple.html) times, [Hakhel](hakhel.html) was an opportunity to re-[experience](experience.html) the [revelation of the Torah at Sinai](stages.html). And just as at [Sinai](stages.html), the unity of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people led them to bring together all levels and all types of [Jews](gen-jew.html).

According to the Kli Yakar, the purpose of [Hakhel](hakhel.html) is to foster unity.

The Biblical text does not specify the exact day of [Hakhel](hakhel.html). Maimonides, as well as most authorities, rules that it took place on the night following the [first](one.html) day of the [Succoth](succoth.html) [festival](festival.html)[[6]](#footnote-6).

The [Mishna](orallaw.html)[[7]](#footnote-7) explains that this ceremony should take place “On the day after the [first](one.html) day of the [festival](festival.html) of [Succoth](succoth.html), on the year after the [seventh](seven.html) year (that is the [Shmita year](shmita.html))”. The king was to read the Torah to the whole nation[[8]](#footnote-8)1.

Rashi[[9]](#footnote-9) writes that it was on the night following the last day ([Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html)) of the [festival](festival.html), which parallels Simchat Torah of the Diaspora.

It is interesting to note that the [Jerusalem Talmud](orallaw.html)[[10]](#footnote-10) in bringing the same [Mishna](orallaw.html) has a different version. Instead of stating that the ceremony of the [Hakhel](hakhel.html) should be on the second day of the [festival](festival.html) of [Succoth](succoth.html), it writes that the [Hakhel](hakhel.html) was on “the day after the end of [Succoth](succoth.html)”.

We have already seen that the [Babylonian](bavel.html) and [Jerusalem](city.html) [Talmuds](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\orallaw.html) disagreed on the exact timing of the [Hakhel](hakhel.html). The Bavli ([Babylonian Talmud](orallaw.html)) said that it was after [Succoth](succoth.html) whereas the Yerushalmi ([Jerusalem](city.html) [Talmud](orallaw.html)) placed it at the beginning of [Succoth](succoth.html).

The argument stems from an understanding of how to achieve unity. The [Jerusalem](city.html) [Talmud](orallaw.html) suggests that unity is an integral part of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people. When the people [gather](gather.html) to celebrate [Succoth](succoth.html) they are already capable of bonding together to serve [HaShem](hashem.html). Therefore it is appropriate that the [Hakhel](hakhel.html) should be at the beginning of [Succoth](succoth.html).

However, the Bavli holds that in order to achieve unity the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people have to spend a week together. They have to [study](study.html) each other and worship together. Only then can they achieve true unity. Therefore the [Hakhel](hakhel.html) was held at the end of [Succoth](succoth.html).

[Succoth](succoth.html) and Simchat Torah are times of unity, true unity. Therefore, they are also times of joy, [true joy](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\succoth.html). The focal point of this joy is the Torah, and the unity that we seek and celebrate comes from the Torah. As we have learned elsewhere, [Torah = Mashiach](mashiach.html).

There is a [Gemara](orallaw.html) that discusses the [Hakhel](hakhel.html) and raises a [number](nchart.html) of important points connected with this ceremony.

***Chagigah 3a-3b*** *“Once Rabbi Yochanan ben Beroka and Rabbi Elazar ben Chisma went to visit Rabbi Yehoshua in Peki’in. He asked them ‘What* [*new*](new.html) *things were said today in the* [*study*](study.html) *hall?’ They replied ‘We are your students and drink from your waters.’ ‘Even though, there is no* [*study*](study.html) *hall with no* [*new*](new.html) *ideas. Who gave the discourse this week?’ ‘Elazar ben Azaria.’ ‘What did he* [*teach*](teacher.html) *about today?’ They said to him ‘*[*Hakhel*](hakhel.html)*.’ ‘What did he* [*teach*](teacher.html)*?’ ‘“*[*Gather*](gather.html) *together the men, women and children” (Devarim 31:12), if the men come to learn, the women to hear, why do the children come? In order to give reward to those that bring them.’ He said to them ‘You had such a gem [of an idea] and you did not want to reveal it to me?’*

*‘He continued [the verse states] ‘You have declared God today [to be your God]’ (Devarim 26:17), and [in the next verse it says] ‘God has declared you [to be His chosen* [*nation*](nations.html)*]’ (ibid. 18). God said to* [*Israel*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\gen-jew.html) *‘You made Me* [*one*](one.html) *entity in the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, I will make you* [*one*](one.html) *entity in the* [*world*](worlds.html)*. You made Me* [*one*](one.html) *entity in the* [*world*](worlds.html) *as it says ‘Listen Israel, the Lord is our God, God is* [*one*](one.html)*’ (Devarim 6:4), and I will make you* [*one*](one.html) *entity in the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, as it says ‘Who is like you, Israel,* [*one*](one.html)[*nation*](nations.html) *in the land’ (Divrei HaYamim I 17:21)’.*

*‘He continued and said ‘The words of the sages are like spurs, and like nails driven in are those who collect; they all come from* [*one*](one.html) *shepherd’ (Kohelet 12:11). Why are words of Torah compared to spurs? In the same way that spurs direct the animal to give life to the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, so do words of Torah direct those who learn from the ways of death to the ways of life.*

*‘Those who collect’; these are Torah scholars who* [*gather*](gather.html) *together and learn Torah. Some say that [a particular item] is impure while others say that it is pure, some say that [a particular action] is forbidden, while others say that it is permitted, some say that [a* [*food*](food.html) *item] is not* [*kosher*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\food.html)*, while others say that it is kosher. Lest a person should ask ‘How can I learn Torah in such a situation?’ The verse clearly states ‘they all come from* [*one*](one.html) *shepherd’.* [*One*](one.html) *God gave them, from the* [*mouth*](body.html) *of the Lord of all actions. Thus you should open your* [*ears*](body.html) *like a funnel and acquire an understanding* [*heart*](body.html) *to hear the words of those who say it is impure, the words of those who say it is pure, the words of those who forbid and the words of those who permit, the words of those who disqualify and the words of those who say it is kosher’”.*

Most startling of all is the Maimonidean explanation of the [commandment](cmds613.html): "And the converts who are not conversant must prepare their hearts to understand and their [ears](body.html) to comprehend, with [fear](fear.html) and [awe](fear.html) and joy within their trembling, as on [the day in which the Torah was given at Sinai](stages.html). This [commandment](cmds613.html) was established by the Torah in order to strengthen the true religion and to enable us to see ourselves as if we were now being commanded and we were [hearing](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\mashal.html) it from the [mouth](body.html) of the [Great One](one.html). And the King is the messenger who imparts the words of [HaShem](hashem.html)[[11]](#footnote-11)". Clearly, Maimonides sees [Hakhel](hakhel.html) as being a re-[creation](bara.html) of the Revelation at [Sinai](stages.html) at the conclusion of each [seven year period](seven.html), and a re-affirmation of the [covenant](covenant.html) on the part of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) [nation](nations.html). This ceremony likewise establishes the King of Israel as representing the King of all Kings. Our ruler is seen as a Hakham-King whose major task is to communicate the Divine word[[12]](#footnote-12).

[Hakhel](hakhel.html), according to the Rambam, is not aimed at transmitting intellectual content, rather it a re-[creation](bara.html) of the [Matan Torah experience](experience.html), a renewal of the [Sinai covenant](stages.html).

*If you will analyze the mystical dimension of the* [*commandment*](cmds613.html) *of* [*Hakhel*](hakhel.html)*, you will find that just as the* [*Shmita*](shmita.html) *year itself is an allusion to the* [*seventh*](seven.html)[*millennium*](millenium.html) *during which our universe will revert to chaos, so the* [*commandment*](cmds613.html) *of* [*Hakhel*](hakhel.html)*, which commences after completion of the* [*seventh*](seven.html) *year alludes to the word "la'asot" in Genesis 2:4 which follows the report of the conclusion of the* [*seven days of creation*](seven.html) *after the Torah had introduced the concept of the* [*Sabbath*](sabbath.html)*.* Rebbeinu Bachya

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 33:1-5*** *And this is the blessing wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the* [*children of Israel*](file:///D:\Word\SUCCOTH\gen-jew.html) *before his death. 2 And he said:* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *came from* [*Sinai*](stages.html)*, and rose from Seir unto them; He shined forth from mount Paran, and He came from the myriads holy, at His right* [*hand*](mashal.html) *was a fiery* [*law*](law.html) *unto them. 3 Yea, He loveth the peoples, all His holy ones—they are in Thy* [*hand*](fourteen.html)*; and they sit down at Thy* [*feet*](heel.html)*, receiving of Thy words. 4 Moses commanded us a* [*law*](law.html)*, an* [*inheritance*](inherit.html) *of the congregation of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*. 5 And there was a king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were* [*gathered*](gather.html)*, all the* [*tribes of Israel*](tribes.html) *together.*

**Torah tzivah lanu Moshe,**

**morasha kehilat** [**Yaakov**](israelja.html)**!**

**"Moshe** [**taught**](teacher.html) **us the Torah; these teachings are an** [**inheritance**](inherit.html) **for the children of** [**Yaaqov**](jacob.html)**!"**

***Devarim 16:15*** *"You shall rejoice on your* [*festival*](festival.html) *and be exceedingly happy".*

The next [Hakhel](hakhel.html) will be in [Tishri](feasts.html) 5776.

# Second Thoughts

Now that I have had a chance to meditate on the aspects of this [study](study.html), I have come to understand another very interesting concept that King Shlomo [spoke](mashal.html) about many years ago:

***Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 1:9*** *That which hath been is that which shall be, and that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and there is nothing* [*new*](new.html) *under the* [*sun*](hachama.html)*.*

The essence of Simchat Torah is the rejoicing we have with Torah and [HaShem](hashem.html). This is the picture that [HaShem](hashem.html) established in the beginning:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 2:15*** *And* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *God took the man, and put him into the* [*garden of Eden*](eden.html) *to dress it and to keep it.*

Thus it seems that not only is Simchat Torah a re-enactment of [Sinai](stages.html), and a re-enactment of the [Temple](temple.html), it is also a re-enactment, a returning to [Gan Eden](eden.html). Just as [HaShem](hashem.html) walked with [Adam](adam.html) in the garden, so also in the end, the second [Adam](adam.html) will [walk](walking.html) with [HaShem](hashem.html) in the garden. May it happen speedily in our day, Amen v’Amen!

**Simchat Torah** [**events**](feasts.html)**:**

[**Tishri**](feasts.html) **22nd**

[**Shemini Atzeret**](shemini.html) / **Simchat Torah (**[**Eretz Israel**](city.html)**)**, The [Eighth](eight.html) day, [Sabbath](sabbath.html). ***Leviticus 23:34***, [***Numbers***](nchart.html) ***29:33***

Solomon dismisses the people at the end of the [Temple](temple.html) dedication ceremony ***1 Kings 8:66***

[Yeshua](yeshua.html) is [circumcised](circumcz.html). [***Luke***](luke.html) ***2:21***

[Yeshua](yeshua.html) begins His ministry. ([Yeshua](yeshua.html) is 30 years old - [Luke](luke.html) 3:23). [***Luke***](luke.html) ***3:23***

[Yeshua](yeshua.html) is transfigured before Peter, John, and James. Peter [wants](needs.html) to build 3 [succoth](succoth.html). [***Luke***](luke.html) ***9:28-36***

Adulteress brought to [Yeshua](yeshua.html). He says, "let him who is without [sin](sin.html) cast the [first](one.html) stone". ***John 7:27 - 8:11***

[Yeshua](yeshua.html) spends the night on the [Mount of Olives](east.html). ***John 7:37-53***

(Diaspora)**Torah** section is *Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17*, [*Numbers*](nchart.html) *29:35-30:1*. **Haftorah** is *1 Kings 8:54-66*.

(Israel) **Torah** section is *Deu. 33:1 - 34:26*, *Genesis 1:1 - 2:3*, *Num. 29:35 - 30:1*. **Haftorah** is *Joshua 1:1-18*.

[**Tishri**](feasts.html) **23rd**

**Shimini Atzeret** / **Simchat Torah (Diaspora)**, The [Eighth](eight.html) day, [Sabbath](sabbath.html). ***Leviticus 23:34***, [***Numbers***](nchart.html) ***29:33***

Rebecca’s nurse, Deborah, dies. *Book of Jubilees*

Moses waged war on Og. *Tanhuma, Hukkat 24*

Solomon sends the people home, with joyful and glad hearts. ***II Chronicles 7:10***

[Yeshua](yeshua.html) rebukes a [demon](demons.html) in a boy and heals him. [***Luke***](luke.html) ***9:37-45***

The disciples debate "who will be the greatest in the Kingdom of [Heaven](heaven.html)." [***Luke***](luke.html) ***9:44-48***

(Diaspora) **Torah** section is *Deu. 33:1 - 34:26*, *Gen. 1:1 - 2:3*, *Num. 29:35 - 30:1*. **Haftorah** is *Joshua 1:1-18*.

\* \* \*

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1. Completion of a text, or of a course of study; a graduation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This explanation is excerpted and edited *from Sod Siach Shmini Azeret* [www.mjol.com](http://www.mjol.com), by Dr Zvi Aviner [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The Jewish Holidays*, A Guide and Commentary, by Michael Strassfeld, page 150 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibn Ezra's commentary to Devarim 31:10-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. see, e.g., Shemot 20:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Laws of Chagigah 3:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Sotah 7:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 1 See my “Sparks of Light” page 194 for an explanation of the significance of the king reading the Torah [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. B.T. Megillah 5a [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Yerushalmi, Sotah 7:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rambam, Hilkhot Hagigah, Chapter 3, Law 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)