

What is a Holy Convocation?

Introduction

The phrase “holy convocation” is one used to describe all of the annual holy days in the Torah in addition to the weekly Sabbath. The meaning and importance of this phrase is often overlooked and underemphasized. Does it refer to a full gathering of the assembly of יְהוָה? Does Yeshua’s teaching of “[where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst](#)” (Matthew 18:20) apply to or meet the requirements of a holy convocation? The purpose of this study is to see exactly what the scriptures say about this phrase, how it is used, and what it refers to.

Definition of Terms

To properly understand the intent of the holy convocations of the weekly Sabbath and annual holy days we need to define the terms in question. In the Hebrew the phrase is מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ, *miqra qodesh*. The phrase is in the Hebrew construct form, which basically equates to the possessive tense in English. Through defining the terms below we will see that it means “a gathering of holiness” or a “holy gathering.”

- *Miqra* -

מִקְרָא *miqra* is the “convocations” portion of the phrase “holy convocations.” The definition as found in various Hebrew lexicons is as follows.

“Something *called* out, that is, a public *meeting* (the act, the persons, or the place).”¹

“A convocation, convoking, reading.”²

“(1) a calling together, convocation: a. an assembly called together, a sacred convocation called together; b. a place of holy convocation. (2) recitation, reading.”³

¹ Strong, James. “Entry for מִקְרָא.” The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1923.

² The Lockman Foundation. “Entry for מִקְרָא .” New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance. La Habra, CA: Zondervan, 2004.

The Hebrew root of *miqra* is **קָרָא** *qara*, which means “to call, call out, recite, read, cry out, or proclaim.”⁴ Based on the root and the definitions given above a *miqra* should be understood as a public gathering that is assembled by a calling of some sort. We find examples of these callings in the scriptures.

Numbers 10:2 (LITV) – “Make two trumpets of silver for yourself. You shall make them of hammered work, and they shall be to you for the calling of the congregation, and for causing the camps to pull up *stakes*.”

The word “calling” in the verse above is the Hebrew **מִקְרָא**. The purpose of these trumpets was to call the entire assembly of the children of Israel together for certain actions. In this case the actions were for the calling of the congregation for the appointed meeting times and for the moving of the army camps.

We can find another usage of this word in the prophecies of Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:13 (LITV) – “Do not add to bringing vain sacrifice; *its* incense is an abomination to Me. I cannot endure the new moon and sabbath, the going to meeting, and the evil assembly.”

In this verse the word “meeting” is the Hebrew **מִקְרָא**. Though its usage in this verse in context relates to **יהוה**'s disgust in Israel's corrupted celebration of the Sabbath and high days one fact remains; **יהוה** is condemning the way that they gathered together as an assembly in His name.

Isaiah 4:5 (LITV) – “Then **יהוה** will create a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, over all the site of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies; for on all the glory *will be* a canopy.”

In this verse the word “assemblies” is the Hebrew **מִקְרָא**. This is yet another verse that shows us that the word *miqra* refers to the entire assembly of the children of **יהוה**. Here **יהוה** says that He will cover all of Mount Zion with His glory. The dwelling place of the resurrected saints of the Most High, which is what the context of this verse is referring to, will be in New Jerusalem on Mount Zion. All of the resurrected saints will be there, not just a small portion of them.

³ Gesenius, Wilhelm. “Entry for **מִקְרָא**.” Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures. London, UK: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, exact publication date unknown.

⁴ Gesenius, Wilhelm. “Entry for **קָרָא**.” Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures. London, UK: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, exact publication date unknown.

Outside of these three passages the word *miqra* is found 20 more times. One of those occurrences refers to the reading of the Torah in [Nehemiah 8:8](#), but the remaining 19 occurrences all specifically related to the set apart days of **יהוה**, His holy convocations.

- *Qodesh* -

The Hebrew word for “holy” in “holy convocations” is **קֹדֶשׁ** *qodesh*. *Qodesh* is defined as follows.

“A sacred place or thing; rarely abstractly sanctity.”⁵

“From an unused word; apartness, sacredness.”⁶

“Apartness, holiness, sacredness, separateness.”⁷

The proper understanding of this verse is that whatever is called *qodesh* is set apart for special purposes. It is not normal. The various sacrifices to **יהוה** were considered **קֹדֶשׁ קֹדָשִׁים** *qodesh qodashim*, “most holy,” for example. These sacrifices were set apart to **יהוה**, holy only for use as sacrifices to Him. *Qodesh* is also used to describe the ground that Moses was standing on when **יהוה** appeared to him in the burning bush ([Exodus 3:5](#)). That ground was special, unique, and set apart. The Almighty Creator of the heavens and the earth was present there at that moment. What we need to take away from the word *qodesh* as it relates to our gathering together on the weekly Sabbaths and annual holy days is that the gatherings are to be set apart, not normal.

- *Miqra Qodesh* -

These are very special occasions in which **יהוה** calls us together as an assembly. These always were and always will be national, not personal gatherings. The entire nation of Israel gathers together on these days just as history proves their ancestors did as well. If we have joined ourselves to Israel through Yeshua or Messiah to be a part of the New Covenant we are to partake in these “holy convocations” as **יהוה** intended them to be. Using all of the information above we should understand that a *miqra qodesh*, a holy convocation, is a public and sacred gathering of the assembly of **יהוה**.

⁵ Strong, James. “Entry for **קֹדֶשׁ**.” [The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible](#). New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1923.

⁶ The Lockman Foundation. “Entry for **קֹדֶשׁ**.” [New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance](#). La Habra, CA: Zondervan, 2004.

⁷ Brown, Francis & Driver, S. R. & Briggs, Charles A. “Entry for **קֹדֶשׁ**.” [Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1906.

The Holy Convocations

As mentioned above the phrase “holy convocations” is used some 19 times in the scriptures referring specifically to the weekly Sabbath and annual holy days. Here are just a few of the passages from the scriptures that describe them.

Leviticus 23:2-3 (LITV) – “Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, ‘The appointed feasts of **יהוה** which you shall proclaim, holy gatherings, shall be these: These *are* My appointed seasons: {3} Work is to be done six days, and in the seventh day *shall be* a sabbath of rest, a holy gathering; you shall do no work; it *is* a sabbath to **יהוה** in all your dwellings.’”

These verses show us two very important things. First, **יהוה** categorizes all of His high days throughout the year as holy convocations (or gatherings). Though some days permit certain work to be done, such as the work necessary to prepare food on the high days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, all high days, including the weekly Sabbath, are considered holy convocations. It is important to note that these instructions were given to all of the sons of Israel, not just certain individuals. This means that the proclaiming and celebration of these holy convocations was to be done by the entire assembly together.

Leviticus 23:27 (LITV) – “Also, on the tenth of this seventh month shall be a day of atonement; there shall be a holy gathering, and you shall humble your souls and shall bring a fire offering to **יהוה**.”

This verse refers to the annual high day of Yom HaKippurim, the Day of the Atonements. This day, too, is a day intended to be one in which a holy convocation is proclaimed. This day was and is seen as the holiest day of the scriptural festal year by the Israelites. All of the children of Israel would gather outside the gates of the tent of meeting or the temple while the high priest performed his annual service to atone for their sins.

This was the most fearful and yet the most joyous day of the year to the Israelites. They would watch as the goat of removal (azazel) was led off into the wilderness bearing their sins to a desolate land. This day was a national holy day where the entire assembly of **יהוה** was expected to attend and participate, if at all possible (i.e. exceptions were made for severe illnesses and ritual uncleanness).

Numbers 29:12 (LITV) – “And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, you shall have a holy gathering; you shall do no work of service; and you shall celebrate a feast to **יהוה** seven days.”

This verse speaks of the first day of the annual Feast of Tabernacles. This day, along with the eighth and “Great” day of the feast, was to be celebrated with a holy convocation. The entire assembly of **יהוה** would gather together for joyous celebration, sacrifices, and services.

Solemn Assembly

Some believe that the holy days of **יהוה**, whether speaking of the weekly Sabbath or the annual high days, are days that are meant for personal reflection, meditation, or devotion as opposed to communal gatherings. But the reality is that there is no scriptural or historical precedent to substantiate that belief. The weekly Sabbaths and annual high days were always celebrated by a gathering together of the saints of the Most High. There is, in fact, an alternate term used to describe these holy convocations that emphasizes this point even more.

Numbers 29:35 (LITV) – “On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall do no laborious work.”

This verse refers to the eighth “Great” day of the Feast of Tabernacles as a “solemn assembly.” In Hebrew this phrase is actually only one word **עֲצָרָה** *atsarah*, which means “an assembly of people, a gathering together.”⁸ It is used in [Joel 1:14](#) to refer to the gathering together of the children of Israel and the elders to fast and cry out to **יהוה**. It is used in [2 Kings 10:20](#) to refer to an assembly of people gathered to worship Baal.

Another important occurrence of this word can be found in [2 Chronicles 7:9](#) where we see the children of Israel making an assembly on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This instance is especially important because it illustrates the fact that the entire assembly of **יהוה** was gathered together as a whole, not as individuals or families (see verse 3 which says that all the children of Israel were watching). The word *atsarah* itself is derived from a verb that is very telling to the true meaning of the word. We read the following definition of the root **עָצַר** *atsar* from Gesenius’ Lexicon.

“**עָצַר** (1) TO SHUT

(2) to hold back, to detain

(3) to restrain by rule, to rule

(1) to be shut up

(2) to be restrained, hindered

(3) to be gathered together (from the idea of restraining, compelling, see

עֲצָרָה), especially to a festival (**עֲצָרָה**).”⁹

The last definition, the one that the noun *atsarah* itself derives from, clarifies the exact intent of the word “assembly” as it relates to the high days. We are compelled by **יהוה** to gather together as an assembly on those days.

⁸ Gesenius, Wilhelm. “Entry for **עֲצָרָה**.” [Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures](#). London, UK: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, exact publication date unknown.

⁹ Gesenius, Wilhelm. “Entry for **עָצַר**.” [Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures](#). London, UK: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, exact publication date unknown.

It was not יהוה's intent to give us the freedom to observe all aspects of these days in any way we see fit. Just like in all things that He does, יהוה has set order in his feasts. He has given us freedom in many things, such as what food we are to eat, what scriptures we can read, etc. But one thing is extremely clear when the entire whole of the scriptures is examined. He wants us to gather together as His assembly on His holy days.

Where Two or Three are Gathered

Yeshua, in [Matthew 18](#), was teaching many things to his followers. One such thing was how to ask for things from the Father in Yeshua's name (verses 19-20). Verse 20 reads as follows.

Matthew 18:20 (LITV) – “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst.”

Many people desire to use this verse as a reason to celebrate the feast either by themselves or only with their family. Unfortunately to use this verse for that reason is to misuse it. Yeshua was not speaking of the high days of יהוה in any way, shape, or form here. He was teaching his followers how to supplicate to the Father in his name.

The weekly Sabbath and the annual holy days are not Yeshua's, they are יהוה's. When we are commanded to have a holy convocation we are to do so as an assembly, not as individuals or families. Where two or three are gathered together in Yeshua's name he is most definitely there, but we should not take Yeshua's instruction here as him giving us permission to celebrate the weekly Sabbaths or annual holy days by ourselves. To do so would be to remove every other scripture above from its true Hebrew meaning and context, in addition to dismissing every available historical fact that the high days were celebrated by the assemblies as a whole, not by individuals or families.

As in all things we should strive to follow the example set by our master and Messiah, Yeshua. We have no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Yeshua would have even considered observing the high days by himself or with only his family. On the contrary, every ancient historical witness we have available to us, including the contemporaries of Yeshua like Philo and Josephus, declare without question that the high days and their holy convocations were celebrated by the gathering together of the entire assembly of יהוה.

Conclusion

The information above is not intended to give a full historical examination of the ways in which the ancient Israelites celebrated the weekly Sabbaths and annual holy days. It is intended to

examine the scriptures and words that pertain specifically to the holy convocations commanded in scripture. What we can safely and confidently conclude from the textual evidence we have is that a “holy convocation,” a *miqra qodesh*, is intended to be a set apart gathering of the people of יהוה, an assembling together by the compelling call of the word and command of יהוה.

These convocations are not intended to be solely times of personal reflection and meditation. Though personal reflection and meditation should be part of all of יהוה’s high days and Sabbaths there are other requirements and obligations given to us by יהוה for His high days and Sabbaths specifically. There are three annual feasts, which include five annual high days together, two other annual high days, and one day per week that יהוה claims are His, not ours.¹⁰ That’s exactly 70 days out of 365, or only 19% of all the days of the year that יהוה has claimed for Himself. The rest of the days of the year He has given us free reign and freedom over, but on those 70 days He commands us in no uncertain terms to assemble together as a people and not remain alone as individuals or families.

Let us be diligent to search out the scriptures for what יהוה wants us to do on His days and not put our own personal thoughts and desires first. Let us examine ourselves to see if the actions we take or don’t take on His days are in alignment with what He has commanded us in His word and what we have handed down to us through history. Let us compare our actions to those of Yeshua to see if we are in alignment with him, following in our master’s footsteps and after his example. If he was a part of the whole assembly of יהוה gathered together on the Sabbaths and holy days we should be as well. After all, he taught us, “A slave is not greater than his master, nor a messenger greater than the *one* sending him.” (John 13:16) יהוה commands us to convocate and have an assembly, a set apart gathering of believers, on His days. Let us be diligent to obey the voice of our Elohim.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (LITV) – “And let us consider one another, to incitement of love and of good works, {25} not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as *is the* custom of some, but exhorting, and by so much more as you see the Day drawing near.”

HalleluYah!

¹⁰ See [Leviticus 23:2](#) where יהוה says, “These are My appointed times...”