

## Holy Convocation

Holy convocation, first introduced in Exodus 12:16 when God stipulates the celebration of various feasts, became the basis of weekly meeting / assembly of the Old Testament church. What is this and how might its origination help the New Testament churches of today?

And on the first day you shall have a holy assembly (**miqrā'**), and another holy assembly (**miqrā'**) on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except for what must be eaten by every person—that alone may be prepared by you. (Ex 12:16)

The English translation of “convocation” arises from the Hebrew term “miqrā’,” and it is always associated as a “holy convocation.”

A holy convocation is a public assembly / meeting set apart for God, which God designated for regular intervals. The Hebrew “miqrā’” includes a meaning with the sense of purpose specifically reading (God’s word) and rehearsal (repetition and practice). As God’s personal possession and nation of priests (Ex 19:5-6), holy convocation can be seen as the means to train the priesthood – genuine Believers of the God of the Hebrews.

In His instruction to the newly freed nation of Israel, God specified three times for holy convocation:

### 1. Sabbath

The Sabbath was part of the Ten Commandments.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Ex 20:8-11)

It was a part of the Mosaic covenant with the sons of Israel so that they would acknowledge the Lord’s act of setting them apart for Himself and recognize His creation of heaven and earth in six days and resting on the seventh.

Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Now as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You must keep My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a permanent covenant.’ It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.” (Ex 31:12-17)

The Sabbath was the appointed time for holy convocation.

For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings. (Lev 23:3)

2. High Sabbath – High Sabbath is not a distinction made in the Bible; however, it was a designation that the Jews made to indicate a Sabbath associated with a feast / celebration / memorial (John 19:31).

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Holy convocation took place to memorialize the reality and work of God and learn and teach His word on the Sabbaths of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6-8), the Feast of Weeks / Harvest (Lev 23:15-21), Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-32), and the Feast of Ingathering (Lev 23:33-44).

### 3. The day before High Sabbath

Holy convocation was stipulated on the Lord's Passover (Lev 23:4-5), which occurred the day before the first Sabbath of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. In this instance, a holy convocation was stipulated on two consecutive days.

An example of holy convocation is seen as part of the Feast of Ingathering / Booths (Neh 8:9-18) with an emphasis on the reading / exegetical understanding of the Torah.

And all the people gathered as one person at the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, and **they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses** which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And **he read from it before the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, from early morning until midday**, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; **and all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law**. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left. Then Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and **when he opened it, all the people stood up**. Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" with the raising of their hands; then they kneeled down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and **the Levites explained the Law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.** (Neh 8:1-8)

It was through obedience to the Mosaic covenant that the sons of Israel were set apart for God (Ex 19:5-6) and validated the holiness of a convocation. Disobedience invalidated a convocation as holy, which God rejected and found unacceptable. The prophet Isaiah declares a judgment upon the nation of Israel equating them to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13:13; 18:20; Deut 32:32-33) and rejects their "holy convocation."

Hear the word of the Lord,  
You rulers of Sodom;  
Listen to the instruction of our God,  
You people of Gomorrah!  
"What are your many sacrifices to Me?"  
Says the Lord.  
"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams  
And the fat of fattened cattle;  
And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats.  
When you come to appear before Me,  
Who requires of you this trampling of My courtyards?  
Do not go on bringing your worthless offerings,  
Incense is an abomination to Me.  
New moon and Sabbath, **the proclamation of an assembly—  
I cannot endure wrongdoing and the festive assembly.**

I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts,  
They have become a burden to Me;  
I am tired of bearing them.  
So when you spread out your hands in prayer,  
I will hide My eyes from you;  
Yes, even though you offer many prayers,  
I will not be listening.  
Your hands are covered with blood.” (Isa 1:10-15)

The rejection of the nation of Israel’s convocation is rooted in their disobedience / infidelity to their covenant commitment and the failure to know God’s word in listening and obeying:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.  
Since you have rejected knowledge,  
I also will reject you from being My priest.  
Since you have forgotten the Law of your God,  
I also will forget your children. (Hos 4:6)

In supreme vindication of the holiness of His great name (Ezek 36:22-25), God uses His Son Jesus Christ to establish the New Covenant church based on agape love, a love that sanctifies and sets one apart for God (Matt 22:36-40; John 13:34-35).

#### Agape love God

In making all Believers one by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13), the Holy Spirit serves a unifying function in bringing Believers together (2 Cor 13:14; Philip 2:1-2) for the singular purpose of serving God (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 2:19-22).

The Old Covenant purpose of holy convocation is preserved. As God’s personal possession and nation of priests (1 Pet 2:9-10), Believers continue to learn and practice God’s word by meeting in the New Testament “miqrā’.”

#### Agape love neighbor / Believers

As an added dimension of agape love (1 Cor 13:4-7), God gifts and appoints Believers to serve others in the pursuit of holiness in the church (1 Cor 12:4-7, 27-28).

Because the Holy Spirit sanctifies by assuring the Believer of the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:6-7; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11), it is through Jesus Christ that serving God is caring about the salvation of others whether it is salvation from the penalty of sin or salvation from the power of sin.

Holy convocation is seen as the place where Believers can serve each other in agape love. The Bible never portrays church as a place for one’s entertainment or personal social benefit.