



## TODAY I AM A MAN

One of the most important rites of passage for a Jewish boy, and his family, is his **Bar Mitzvah**, meaning "Son of the Commandment." This event is held immediately after the thirteenth birthday and signifies his arrival at adulthood in regard to the requirements and privileges of the Jewish religion, including the right to "lay on" (wear) the **phylacteries** (boxes and leather thongs wrapped around the hand and forehead) for prayers, the right to read from the Torah during synagogue services, and the right to be included in the minimum number of men required for a prayer group (**minyan**).

Since approximately 1400 A.D., a boy's Bar Mitzvah has included a special ceremony in the synagogue...

During which—

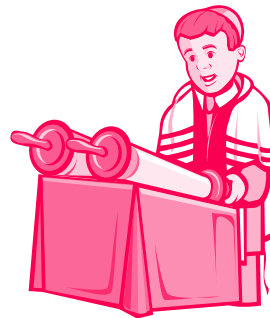
- He is called to the **bimah** (rostrum) to recite the blessing over the Torah and to read a portion of it and the Prophets.
- He presents a speech on the **Talmud** (Rabbinical commentary on the Scriptures), which speech is normally written by the teacher who has prepared him for his Bar Mitzvah.
- He may be given a challenge by the officiating Rabbi, along with the offering of a special prayer for him.

After which—

- An elaborate celebration dinner is usually held.
- He receives gifts from friends, neighbors, and relatives, including monetary presents, often amounting to very large sums.
- In Eastern Mediterranean Jewish communities (Sephardic) and in Israel, he is pelted with candies thrown by the women and girls of the synagogue following the reading of the Torah.

In connection with which—

- Many Jewish families from Israel, the U.S., and other parts of the world arrange for the Bar Mitzvah ceremony to be held at the Western Wall in Jerusalem or in the ancient synagogue of Masada near the Dead Sea.
- Synagogues have an opportunity to urge unaffiliated Jewish families to become members, so that their sons will receive the necessary instruction in preparation for the Bar Mitzvah ceremony.



Since the 1920's, young women in the United States have been included in this observance of maturation through a **Bat Mitzvah** ("Daughter of the Commandment") at the age of twelve. In all branches of Judaism but the Ultra-Orthodox, some type of Bat Mitzvah ceremony is held during a regular synagogue service.

*One of the most difficult issues faced by Jewish believers in Christ is how to handle the matter of their children's Bar Mitzvahs and Bat Mitzvahs. It is an extremely important time in the life of a young man or young woman and alienation from the mainstream Jewish community and the synagogue, through belief in Messiah, may mean exclusion from this joyful observance, one of many sacrifices Jewish Christians may be called upon to make.*

## **O DAY OF REST AND GLADNESS**

So special is the Sabbath to religious Jews that they not only have a ceremony in the home welcoming its arrival shortly before sundown on Friday, but they also have a ceremony signifying its conclusion shortly after sundown on Saturday. It is the **Havdalah** (pronounced *hahv-duh-l'ah*) which means "separation" and is so called because it marks the separation between the holy and joyful Sabbath and the rest of the week.

The Havdalah consists of the reciting of four prayers:

- The prayer over the wine as traditionally it is poured out until it overflows the cup. Since wine is symbolic of gladness and joy, this

action represents the hope and the prayer that the joy of the Sabbath just concluded will spill over into the new week.

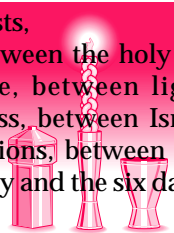
- The prayer over the spices kept in ornate and elaborate boxes which are passed around the table as each family member sniffs their fragrance, in hope that they will lift the spirits of those who are saddened by the passing of the Holy Day.

- The prayer over the lighting of the Havdalah candles which are very distinctive in design and appearance. They consist of at least two, and often more, wicks and wax strands braided together into one candle. This feature derives from the blessing included in this prayer, "Blessed art Thou. . .who created the lights (more than one, ed.) of fire."

Lighting the candle wicks signifies that the family will once again be able to kindle a flame in the household, an action forbidden on the Sabbath.

- The Havdalah blessing itself which includes reference to a series of contrasts,

*“. . .between the holy and the profane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six days of labor."*



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