

Shavuot (Weeks/ Pentecost)

שבועות



The Seven Agricultural Species of the Land of Israel

Shavuot, (Festival of Weeks), one of the three pilgrimage festivals, commemorates the day traditionally believed to be when God gave the Torah to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. It is also an agricultural festival, more well known in the Land of Israel than in the Diaspora, which marks the end of the ‘counting of the Omer’.

After the appointed festivals of Pesach (Passover) and Bikkurim (First Fruits), we now come into a period of time called Counting the Omer. From the day after the Sabbath, we count seven weeks (Shavuot). **“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks (Shavuot).**

Since the number seven represents completion, perfection and wholeness, such as when God rested on the seventh day, seven weeks of seven days symbolizes the pinnacle of that perfect peace we will find only when Yeshua the Messiah returns and establishes His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and justice on this earth.

On the fiftieth day, a new grain offering is presented to the Lord and a sacred assembly is held to celebrate the Feast of Shavuot. **Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD.” (Leviticus 23:15-16)**

The name of the festival is derived from the Hebrew word Shavuah, meaning week (Shavuot being the plural form – weeks).

Most in the Christian Church are more familiar with its Greek name of Pentecost – from the word pente, which means fifty, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the Jews waiting in the upper room.

Here the disciples and women waited and prayed:
*"And when they were come in, they went up **into an upper room**, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."* (Acts 1:13-14)

It is believed to have been this upper room where Yeshua held his 'last supper' of Passover with his disciples and where His followers waited for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them, as they had been instructed.

"And when the day of SHAVUOT was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." (Acts 2:1-2)



Photo: The Cenacle on Mount Zion, claimed to be the location of the Last Supper and Pentecost. Bargil Pixner claims the original Church of the Apostles is located under the current structure.

SHAVUOT – A TIME OF GIVING

Seven weeks after the start of the harvest, at Shavuot, the ancient people of Israel were commanded to bring a free will offering to the Lord in proportion with how much God had blessed their harvest.

“Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot) to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you.” (Deuteronomy 16:9)

Although the people were intended to rejoice over the goodness of God to their own families, the Word of God always exhorts us to remember the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows.

“And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name —you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your

towns, and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows living among you.” (Deuteronomy 16:10-11)

The blessings God has blessed us with are not for us to hoard or use only for our own families, but to share with others who are in need. It was for this reason that God commanded the people not to harvest the entire field but to leave the corners of their fields for the poor.

“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 for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 23:22)

Therefore, the traditional Scripture reading for Shavuot is the Book of Ruth.

A Jewish tradition is to stay up all night studying the book of Ruth together on the eve of Shavuot.

Some Christians are unfamiliar with this brief book from the Old Testament, but rather than dismissing it, we may find the story of Ruth rich in prophetic meaning for the Church.

Ruth came back to Israel with her Jewish mother in law, Naomi, and vowed to her, “Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Ruth means faithful friend, while Naomi’s other daughter in law, Orpah, kissed her goodbye and left her. Orpah, in contrast, means ‘back of the neck’.

These two Gentile women, related to Naomi through marriage may represent the two types of the Gentile, Christian Church and their relationship to Israel. One sticks with her to the end; but the other walks away in her time of greatest need.



Ruth in Boaz's Field

Ruth gleanes in the fields of Boaz, her kinsmen redeemer, who represents Yeshua, our Redeemer. When Ruth asks why he has taken special notice of her, a foreigner, Boaz replied,

“It has been fully reported to me the kindness you have shown to your mother in law...” (Ruth 2:10)

Our Kinsmen-Redeemer, Yeshua, also takes notice of the kindness you show to the Jewish people, like Naomi, who have lost everyone and everything in exile and have come back to the Land. Thank you for being a faithful friend like Ruth to the people of Israel.

“May a full reward be given you by the God of Israel under whose wings you have taken refuge” (Ruth 2:12)

Shavuot is a time of giving. It is one of the three pilgrim festivals where the people of Israel were to come to bring an offering to the Lord. No one was to appear empty handed.

“Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot) and the Festival of Tabernacles. No one should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.”
(Deuteronomy 16:16-17)

For this reason, Messianic Believers in Israel traditionally hold nation-wide Shavuot picnics where Believers from all over the country come to worship the Lord together and celebrate the goodness of God, thanking Him for how much He has blessed us and our families.



Annual Shavuot Picnic for Messianic Believers

Often, worship bands play music all day long; and in some congregations, people are invited to bring their offering to the Lord in the form of a song, a dance, or any other expression of gratitude.

God never asks us to do anything, however, that He has not already done. God is a generous giver. One of the most well known Scripture from the gospels, John 3:16, says that **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have eternal life.**

Shavuot – Giving of the Torah

Traditionally, Shavuot is the time of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. If Pesach was the birth of the nation of Israel, then Shavuot is its Bar Mitzvah – the coming of age ceremony by which a Jewish son or daughter of Israel accepts, as part of their own personal faith, the Mitzvot (commandments) of God as written in the Torah.



Seven weeks after their miraculous exodus from Egypt, Israel received the Torah at Mt. Sinai, which meant not only accepting the privilege but also the responsibility as living as God's set apart people. The Torah became the agreed upon standard of behavior or code of conduct for both the native born Israelite and the stranger who came to join them.

“One law (torah achat) and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.” (Numbers 15:16)

The Torah is God's written instructions to His people. The entirety of Psalm 119 extols the beauty, blessing and liberty contained in living according to God's word in the Torah.

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Torah of the Lord....so I shall keep Your Torah continually, forever and ever, and I will walk at liberty...I delight in Your Torah...Great peace have those who love Your Torah and nothing causes them to stumble.” (Psalm 119)

When we meditate upon and observe to keep the ways of Torah, we will enjoy prosperity and good success. (Joshua 1:8)

The Torah, however, is so much more than a list of rules. Mount Sinai was not simply a place to receive the law, but rather the sealing of a Covenant between God and His people, as a Bridegroom with His beloved Bride.

Many aspects of the experience on Mount Sinai resembled a Jewish wedding ceremony:

The cloud covering represented the Jewish wedding canopy – the chuppah

The shofar call announced the arrival of the Bridegroom

The Ketubah – the Marriage contract outlining privileges and responsibilities of each party

The vows – “I do!”

The wedding ring (sign of betrothal) – Sabbath

The wedding gift – the land of Israel

Now that God has given us the Torah, He has entrusted us with a sacred mission – to spread the light of Torah to all the nations.

Yeshua’s final words to us were to go and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them all God has commanded us in the Torah.



A Ketubah

“Go and make disciples of all nations, immersing them in the mikvah in the name of the Father (Av) and Son (Ben) and Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh), teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you.....” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Keeping Torah is not how we may be saved; it is how we live because we are saved.

Love is the whole point of the Torah. The message of Shavuot is that we are significant; we have been chosen, appointed, and anointed to promote God’s purposes in this world.

We have each been given a holy calling to bring more love, peace, kindness, and justice to this world – to be a shining light in the midst of a dark and perverse generation.

When we understand and come to realize that we have actually been selected by God to reveal God’s beauty and wonderful attributes to the world, then we have discovered the secret to a truly meaningful and fulfilling life.

Shavuot in the New Testament

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:4,8)

We simply cannot be a light and witness for the Lord without the power of the Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh).

What happens to the Torah under New Covenant? It becomes written in our mind and our heart. (Jeremiah 31:31-34) However, it is not enough simply to know God's word in the Torah; we need the Spirit of God to lead and guide us into all truth and give us the ability to keep God's word. Knowledge alone, without the Spirit, causes only pride and legalism.

Paul said that if we could be made righteous by the Torah, then Yeshua died in vain. "I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the Torah could make us right with God, then there was no need for Messiah to die." (Galatians 2:21)

Yeshua's disciples were instructed to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, without which they would not be able to fulfill their destiny. This power of the Holy Spirit came on Shavuot with rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire and they began to speak in other tongues (languages).

"When the day of Shavuot came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:2-4)

Although Shavuot is considered by many as the 'birth of the Church', the people who experienced the Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh) at this time were God-fearing Jews from many nations: **"Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven."** (Acts 2:5)

One of the most amazing lessons from Shavuot in the New Testament shows how the law, used wrongly, can bring death, but with the Spirit, it brings life. After receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai, three thousand souls perished because of the sin of the golden calf (Exodus 32:28)

However, on the same day of Shavuot, when the Ruach Hakodesh came, this same number of souls were saved! **Over three thousand souls were added to the community of Believers at Shavuot.** (Acts 2:41) The Spirit of God reversed the destruction caused by the sin of man!

The first thing they did after receiving the Spirit of God was to form a **Messianic kibbutz** (communal lifestyle) where they shared all things in common. (Acts 2:44, 4:32) No one lived for their own selfish desires anymore but shared all they had with anyone in need.

May we each experience the Holy Spirit in a fresh, new and powerful way this year on Shavuot, transforming our hearts, and making us more generous givers – as created in the image of God.

Give and it Shall be Given....

"Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38)

This scripture does not simply refer to material giving, but also and perhaps primarily, about giving mercy, grace, patience, forgiveness and love to others. Then it will come back running over and abundant into our lives. This is the context in which Yeshua gave us these Scriptures.

“Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”
(Luke 36:37)

God loves a cheerful giver. If we give generously then we will receive generously. But this works in a negative way as well as the positive. If we are generous in dishing out criticism, judgment and condemnation, then we will also reap this rotten harvest in our lives. We have been given a choice.

In ancient, Biblical times, there were two types of harvesters in the fields: those hired workers who harvested the main crops in the center of the fields and the poor who gleaned in the corners. The primary harvesters would fill their baskets, carry them over to the barn or wagon, dump them and go back for another load.

They didn’t really care how full their baskets were, as they were paid by the hour, and therefore only needed to look like they were keeping busy. With the poor, however, it was a different story. Most had likely walked quite a long distance to arrive at the field and would have an equally long ways to carry back the grain they had gleaned from the field.

Whatever amount of food they could stuff into their baskets would be the amount of food available to feed their families. It could be a matter of life and death if they could sufficiently fill their baskets. Therefore they first made sure to put in a good measure (filled to the brim); then they would press it down to make room for more. After adding more to the basket, it would then be shaken together and then heaped up until it spilled over the sides.

This is the meaning of **“good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over...”**

Anyone listening to Yeshua’s words in ancient Israel would have understood the meaning of these words.¹ He was saying that whatever we give, we’re going to get a whole lot more of the same in return. We always receive back more than we give.

Personally, I like to give away food. I love to feed the animals that I know are hungry or neglected. And I always seem to be given food. People hand me large sacks of pita bread over the fence – so much that I can’t use it all. So I give it away. So I receive even more...and on and on it goes.

Recently, I was waiting and waiting for a large sum of money to come in for a scholarship for my son who wanted to go to university in Israel; but as yet we had received no word and the time was drawing short. I felt the Lord speak to me about giving and blessing – not to receive a reward, but simply out of obedience and gratitude.

¹ The Blessed Life, Robert Morris

I had always given my tithe to our local kehilla (congregation) but the Lord was challenging me to give a free will offering above and beyond my tithe. At Shavuot we are commanded to give a free will offering. I could probably list a page full of personal needs and family needs that I could have used the money for, but the Lord told me to give it away instead.

I knew of a brother in our congregation who was working but really not making ends meet. Sometimes he had not even one shekel to his name. And besides this he had hopes and dreams of one day getting out of poverty and establishing himself in a business, for which he needed some equipment. I felt the Lord telling me to give a substantial offering to him in cash, which I did.

The next day – the very next day! – we got word that my son had been awarded a scholarship of several thousand dollars – far and above and beyond the amount I had given, even though for me it was a lot.

I hope these stories will also stir up the gift of giving in your heart. We all have something that we can give. There is a homeless Israeli young man that has been coming to our kehilla and recently gave his heart to the Lord. He has some mental disabilities and believes he is an Elvis impersonator.

I happened to have an Elvis coffee mug lying around that someone had given me at a gas station as a gift, so I wrapped it in bubble wrap and paper and gave it to him at the service. Oh, my goodness, you would have thought I gave him pure gold! He wrapped and unwrapped it carefully and lovingly throughout the service, showing it to anyone who would look. When I saw him raising his hands to praise the Lord, I was filled with a supernatural love and joy.

Truly it is more blessed to give than to receive.

May your Shavuot be filled to overflowing with the Spirit of the Living God, His power, His love, His mercy and forgiveness. And may we extend that same grace, out of gratitude for all He has blessed us with, to those around us.

Shalom from the land of Israel and chag Sameach (happy holidays).

I also want to give to you – so here is a free You Tube video we recorded some years ago on the Ruth message (click on Shavuot).

<http://www.youtube.com/user/VoiceforIsrael1998/videos?view=1>

Love in Yeshua,
Hannah
www.voiceforisrael.net

VOICE for
Israel



