

The Feasts of Israel

Lesson Seven- The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost

Holidays are almost universally celebrated on specific calendar dates. For example, New Year's Day is always January 1, and America's Independence Day is always July 4. Likewise, one does not usually count the number of days between holidays. However, just the opposite is true for the Jewish feast of Shavuot, Israel's fourth holy day. No date is actually associated with it in the Bible. Yet, ask any observant Jew concerning Shavuot and he will answer that it is always celebrated fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits.

The Biblical Observance

Names are very important in the ancient Jewish world. They usually reflected the significant character, history, or meaning of that to which they were attached. Three separate names were used by the Hebrew Scriptures for the feast of Shavuot which in the Hebrew means, **Weeks**. Each name emphasized a different facet of its observance. The most common Hebrew designation was Hag Hashavuot meaning, "**The Feast of Weeks**." Shavuot was called the Feast of Weeks because seven weeks were counted from the Feast of Firstfruits until the observing of this feast.

The primary meaning of the feast was reflected in the Hebrew name, Yom Habikkurim, or the "**Day of Firstfruits**." since Shavuot was the day on which the firstfruit offerings of the summer wheat crop were brought to the Temple.

Exodus 34:22 - And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end.

Deut. 16:10 - And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God, according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee:

2 Chron. 8:13 - Even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles.

Numbers 28:26 - Also in the day of the firstfruits, when ye bring a new meat offering unto the Lord, after your weeks be out, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work:

Thus, Shavuot marked the **BEGINNING** of the **SUMMER WHEAT HARVEST** even as Israel's earlier First of Firstfruits marked the beginning of the **SPRING BARLEY HARVEST**.

The third designation, Hag Hakatzir, of "**The Feast of Harvests**," reflected the fact this festival was the official beginning of the summer harvest season. In addition to the biblical designations, the Talmud and Josephus referred to this festival as Atzeret, meaning "CONCLUSION." They viewed Shavuot as the conclusion of the Passover season and of the seven-week spring harvest since there are no other major Jewish holy days until the autumn. In the Greek language, Shavuot was known as **Pentecost** meaning **fiftieth** since it was celebrated on the 50th day from the Feast of Firstfruits.

Thus the Feast of Pentecost had four main names:

1. **The Feast Of Weeks**
2. **The Feast of Harvest**
3. **Pentecost**
4. **The Day of Firstfruits**

The Time of Shavuot and its Record in Scripture

Shavuot is observed in the late spring, usually late May or early June. On the modern Hebrew calendar, Shavuot falls on the sixth day of the month of Sivan. As noted earlier, the celebration of Shavuot was never tied to an actual calendar date in the Bible. It was instead defined as a calculation of 50 days (the day after seven weeks had passed) from the Feast of Firstfruits: "And you shall count...fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath" <Lev. 23:15-16> Because of the commandment to count, the time period from Firstfruits to Shavuot is known as Sefirah (Heb. "counting"). The measure of barley which was brought to the Temple as a firstfruit offering on the Feast of Firstfruits was known as the omer (Heb. "measure, sheaf"). Since this counting of days was to begin with the offering of the omer, this 55 day period is also known as THE OMER.

Three scripture passages outline the biblical observance for Shavuot. Temple offerings were described in Leviticus 23:15-21 and Numbers 28:26-31. The requirements for individual worshipers were outlined in Deuteronomy 16:9-12 where they were instructed to offer a freewill offering, to rejoice before the Lord, and to remember that the Lord had freed them from Egyptian bondage.

The Importance of Shavuot

In Bible days, Shavuot was a particularly important Jewish feast. Seven divinely appointed feasts were given to Israel. We have studied four so far. Of these seven, THREE were decreed by the Lord as "SOLEMN FEASTS" during which all Israelite men were obligated to present themselves before the Lord in the Temple. Shavuot was the SECOND in this exclusive triad of solemn feasts, the other being UNLEAVENED BREAD and TABERNACLES.

Like the Sabbath and many of the other feast days, Shavuot was a holy CONVOCAATION or rest day (Lev. 23:21; Num: 28:26). Therefore, no work was permitted.

The Service of Shavuot

According to the Bible, it was forbidden to eat of the new new barley crop until the barley firstfruits (omer) were offered on the Feast of Firstfruits. The same principle was applied to the wheat crop. Therefore, the numerous meal offerings and showbread for the sanctuary were not made from the new wheat crop until AFTER the wheat firstfruits were presented on Shavuot.

The Temple services for Shavuot followed much the same pattern as that of the Feast of Firstfruits since both holy days were celebrated with first-fruit offerings. However, the offering for Shavuot was unique. It consisted of two long, flat, LEAVENED loaves of wheat bread as commanded by the Lord:

Leviticus 23:17 - Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord.

The loaves were not burned because the Lord had forbidden leaven on the altar: "You shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire." Instead, these loaves and two lambs as a peace offering formed the WAVE OFFERING for Shavuot. The priest waved them before the altar forwards and backwards, then up and down. Afterward, they were set aside for "the priest." (Lev. 23:20) and formed the festive meal eaten by priests later that day in the Temple. Thus, the term FEAST of Pentecost.

The Modern Observance and Meaning:

Pentecost has its roots in Mt. Sinai. Rabbinical Judaism suggests that Pentecost was the day that the Torah (Mosaic Law) was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This was not done arbitrarily. Although the Bible never associated Pentecost with Sinai this theme was chosen because the giving of the Law had

also occurred in the third month (Exodus 19:1). There is great spiritual significance with this event. Thus, the idea of the giving of the Law and the birthday of Judaism quickly caught on and became the dominant motif of the modern Pentecostal festival. So Shavuot became known as Zeman Mattan Toratenu, or "**the Time of the Giving of our Law.**" (See our chart: **Old Testament Pentecost/New Testament Pentecost** for comparison of what happened at Sinai and what happened in the Temple 50 days after Jesus went to glory)

The Synagogue

It is customary to decorate synagogues with greenery and beautiful floral arrangements for Shavuot. Some synagogues hang an embroidered green curtain over the ark (where the scrolls are stored). Some synagogues braid a crown of branches and flowers for the Torah scrolls. Others weave a canopy of flowers over the reading area. The reason for these decorations is Shavuot emphasis as a harvest festival. According to tradition, these are also a reminder that Mt. Sinai was at one time covered with green trees and grass.

The ancient scripture readings for Shavuot (Ezek. 1:1-28; 3:12; Hab. 2:20-3:19) date back to the days of the Temple. They describe the brightness of God's glory. In Ezekiel's vision he witnessed WIND, FIRE and VOICES:

Ezekiel 1:4 - And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Ezekiel 3:12 - Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place.

Habakkuk saw the Lord revealed at the Messiah's coming in **FIRE and BRIGHT LIGHT:**

Habakkuk 3:3-5 - God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. [4] And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. [5] Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.

After Shavuot was refocused to the giving of the LAW (Exodus 19-20 was included the Shavuot Scripture readings. These chapters describe God's revelation on Mt. Sinai and the Ten Commandments. When the Ten Commandments were read in the synagogue service, it was customary to stand.

It is also a Shavuot custom to read the Book of Ruth in the synagogue. Several reasons are usually given. Most important, the story of Ruth took place during the spring barley harvest, and Shavuot is the celebration of the conclusion

of the barley harvest and the beginning of the summer wheat harvest. Secondly, Ruth the Moabitess willingly embraced the God of Israel and His Law (Torah). Therefore her story is read on this holiday which today focuses on the giving of the Law. In this regard, many synagogues also hold Shavuot confirmation services for their teenage youth to recognize their childhood studies and confirm their commitment to live according to the Mosaic Law.

The Food of Pentecost

One of the most popular traditions is the eating of dairy foods. The rabbis have suggested that this widespread practice is a reminder of the Lord since the WORDS of the Scriptures are like milk and honey to the soul.

Among the most delicious and tempting of these dairy dishes are cheesecakes, cheese blintzes, and cheese kreplach. The blintzes are made of cheese rolled in pancakes and fried in a skillet. The kreplach are dough pockets which are stuffed with cheese for Shavuot. These kreplach are similar to ravioli noodles, only triangular in shape. The three corners of the dumpling are said to recall the statement of the ancient rabbis; "Blessed by the Merciful One who gave the threefold law - LAW, PROPHETS, WRITINGS to a people made of three classes - PRIESTS, LEVITES AND ISRAELITES, through a third-born child (MOSES was born after Miriam and Aaron) in the third month Sivan) <Shabbat 88a>

It is also customary to bake two loaves of challah bread on Shavuot. These represent the two loaves of bread offered in the Temple and the two tablets of the Law received on Mt. Sinai. A seven-rung ladder design is traditionally formed on the top of the loaves symbolizing the ascent of Moses to receive the Ten Commandments.

Stay Up All Night

It is customary today for observant Jews to stay up the entire night of Shavuot studying and discussing Torah. Traditionally, they study the opening and closing verses of each Sabbath reading, the opening and closing verses of each book of the Bible, and the entire Book of Ruth. Throughout the night there are periodic breaks for coffee and cheesecake.

As dawn approaches in Israel, thousands of observant Jews can be seen winding their way from the orthodox quarters of Jerusalem toward the site of the ancient Temple. These multitudes pour onto the Western Wall plaza to recite the ancient Amidah prayer together. The Amidah or "standing" prayer with its 19 blessings date back more than 2,000 years. It forms the central prayer of all prayer services (morning, afternoon, evening, Sabbath, and holidays)

"On the Day of Pentecost".....THE FULFILLMENT

The year was around A.D. 30. It was a hot morning late in the month of May when the day of Shavuot came that year. The fiery topaz of a Judean sun was already high above the horizon, several hours along on its daily trek. A thin blanket of low-lying morning clouds had long since disappeared in the presence of its heat, leaving only a clear blue sky above Jerusalem.

In the stillness of the mid-morning air, the Temple Shacharit (morning) service could be heard as it concluded - the blast of silver trumpets, the thunder of worshipers praying in unison, the solitary voice of the reading chanting from Ezekiel and Habakkuk. Throngs of Jewish worshipers crowded the Temple courts. Since Shavuot was a pilgrim holiday, many were conspicuously visiting from other countries throughout the Middle East, Northern Africa, Europe, and Asia.

SUDDENLY, from high overhead, the roar of a violent thunderstorm was heard. But how could this be? There were no clouds and there was no breeze. It was the wrong time of the year for a storm. The worshipers stood confused, searching the cloudless sky to find the source of the disturbance. The sound began to change as if it were descending toward the west. Several hundred men in the outer court rushed out the southwest gate, past the Temple guards, and onto the towering steps leading down to the city below. From that lofty vantage point, the momentary flashes of what seemed like swirling bits of fire from one of the nearby houses below caught their attention. The men paused while shouting and pointing toward the house. What could this wind and fire mean? Could this be what they had just heard read from Ezekiel and Habakkuk? Could it be that the Shekinah glory was returning to Israel after some 600 years?

The crowd pushed onward, determined to know the matter. In a few moments they had reached the house and were pounding on the door. Had not 12 men from inside pushed their way to the street, the door surely would have been broken down.

The 12 immediately began to address a barrage of excited queries from the crowd. But to the astonishment of the crowd, the 12 answered in the various native languages of those within the crowd. This caused an uproar of discussion. These 12 were obviously Galilean by their style of dress, but who had ever heard of an educated Galilean? Education was centered in Jerusalem, not Capernaum. How were these uneducated Galileans able to speak not only the languages, but to speak them with the very accents as if there were their mother tongue?? Many pressed for answers while others began to mock and accuse the men of drunkenness. Word of the wind and fire had spread quickly to the teeming

crowds who were now leaving the Temple service. The streets were filling fast, and communication was becoming impossible.

One of the 12 named PETER, apparently was the spokesman, shouted for the crowd to follow him to the nearby plaza outside the southern entrance to the Temple. The site was a favorite place for the rabbis to teach their students before entering the Temple complex. With its surrounding plaza and low, 200-foot-wide steps leading up to the southern gate, the location was one of the best in the Temple area for addressing large crowds.

The 12 ascended to the landing of the white limestone steps, their backs to the magnificent three-tiered Royal Portico which towered 120 feet above them. By the time Peter lifted his hand to quiet the crowd, a sea of humanity was assembled on the plaza below. The locals recognized these Galileans as followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the One who had been crucified almost two months earlier at Passover.

The crowd fell silent and fixed their gaze upon Peter, FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST, speak,

Acts 2:14-19. - But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: [15] For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. [16] But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; [17] And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: [18] And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: [19] And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke:

He was right. They themselves had witnessed the signs of wind and fire and heard these 12 miraculously sharing the Scriptures in their own native dialects. Surely this was the hand of God. Peter went on to quote JOEL, the Hebrew prophet concerning the coming day of God's wrath and warn that only those who "call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This crowd of devoutly religious men remained silent. Only the distant bleating of sheep from somewhere in the Temple could be heard. There seemed to be an electricity in the air, an anticipation, even a hunger in the crowd for Peter to continue his words.

Peter turned his words to Jesus of Nazareth, and for the next quarter hour he slowly, forcefully, and with a simple eloquence reasoned the prophecies of King David and Israel's prophets concerning the promised Messiah. As he shared prophecy, it became obvious that the Scriptures had clearly and convincingly foretold Messiah's death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven. How could one believe otherwise??

The crowd of orthodox men was visibly moved and beginning to mill about. Peter's words burned within their hearts. Some had tears streaming down their cheeks. Some were slowly striking their chests with clenched hands as a sign of anguish and repentance. Others could bear it no longer and began to shout, "What should we do?" With strong emotion in his voice, Peter urged them, "REPENT!" Motioning southward toward nearby Pool of Siloam, he continued, "Then be immersed in the name of Jesus the Messiah because your sins are forgiven, and you will receive the HOLY GHOST, for THIS PROMISE is for YOU and YOUR CHILDREN and THOSE WHO ARE AFAR OFF."

Throughout the morning, scattered crowds could be seen in the plaza questioning, discussing, reasoning with some of the 12. Yet, what was truly overwhelming was to see the throngs of MEN streaming to and from the mikvehs (baptismal pools). In all, some 3,000 trusted in the Lord that morning. The above is based on true eyewitness account and is recorded in Acts chapter 2. On that Shavuot morning, God initiated a NEW COVENANT with ISRAEL as He foretold in Jeremiah 31:31:

Jeremiah 31:31 - Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

On that morning He poured out His Holy Spirit as he also foretold:

Isaiah 59:20-21 - And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. [21] As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.

Even as this promise was for them, it is also FOR YOU. Call upon the name of the Lord and you shall be saved and be filled with the Holy Spirit. That's the FEAST OF PENTECOST! **We're Living in the DAY OF PENTECOST today WAITING on the FEAST OF TRUMPETS which is in type the Rapture of the Church. THIS IS THE HARVEST GENERATION!!!! Now is the time to look unto the fields white with harvest.**

In Summary:

- Pentecost means 50, and was and is always celebrated 50 days AFTER Passover. The Holy Spirit fell 50 days after Jesus died on Passover.
- Pentecost is the fulfillment of the NEW COVENANT. It occurred on the day the Lord gave Moses the OLD COVENANT, LAW, or the

Torah, upon Mt. Sinai. The Holy Spirit brings GRACE. Law cannot redeem

- **It was one of three solemn feasts where all Israel's males were to appear before the Lord. The service included readings from Ezekiel and Habakkuk which spoke of WIND, FIRE and VOICES. Dairy products, especially cheesecake, were eaten to symbolize the word of God being sweet as honey to the soul. Another feature of this festival was many would stay up all night reading, discussing and praying. The same thing known today in scripture as a WATCH.**
- **It was the celebration of the WAVE OFFERING - Two loaves of bread with LEAVEN were waved before the altar (brazen altar) as symbolic of the JEW AND GENTILE being waved before the fires of the cross to purge out the leaven of the ONE NEW MAN - the CHURCH which is composed of both.**
- **Pentecost speaks of harvest. This is the harvest generation - We are living in the time God is gathering a final harvest before judgment. Every outpouring of the Holy Spirit in scripture has always been followed by great judgment. The outpouring on Pentecost was the early rain. We are living in the "latter rain" as spoken of in Joel and in James in the New Testament. It was the final feast in the SPRING before the FALL feast of TRUMPETS. One of the terms used for Pentecost meant "CONCLUSION."**
- **The day of Pentecost speaks of the Shekineh Glory of God returning to Israel, not within a building made by hands but within the hearts of all those who would believe in Messiah Jesus. John the Baptist promised "He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire."**