

Shavuot (Pentecost) God's Appointed Times

We will take a break from our series on the **Messianic Jews** and return to God's Appointed Times ~ Shavuot (Pentecost). In 2018, Shavuot will be observed by Jewish Believers beginning at sundown on Saturday, May 19th. Christians will be celebrating Pentecost on Sunday, May 20th. Essentially, Jews and Christians will be celebrating on the same day, albeit for slightly different reasons.

Scriptural Basis

¹⁵"From the day after the day of rest — that is, from the day you bring the sheaf for waving — you are to count seven full weeks, ¹⁶until the day after the seventh week; you are to count fifty days; and then you are to present a new grain offering to Adonai. ¹⁷You must bring bread from your homes for waving — two loaves made with one gallon of fine flour, baked with leaven — as firstfruits for Adonai. ¹⁸Along with the bread, present seven lambs without defect one year old, one young bull and two rams; these will be a burnt offering for Adonai, with their grain and drink offerings, an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for Adonai. ¹⁹Offer one male goat as a sin offering and two male lambs one year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. ²⁰The cohen will wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before Adonai, with the two lambs; these will be holy for Adonai for the cohen. ²¹On the same day, you are to call a holy convocation; do not do any kind of ordinary work; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations, no matter where you live." (Vayikra [Leviticus] 23:15-21)

Basic Description

Shavu'ot was one of three festivals (Pesach/Matzah & Sukkot being the other two) appointed by **Adonai** where all Jewish males were to go up to Jerusalem. Shavu'ot means "weeks." It comes exactly fifty days after Pesach. In Greek, we have come to know it as Pentecost. Pentecost means "fifty." It was an agricultural festival to celebrate the latter fruits of the spring harvest. Recall that Yom HaBikkurim (First Fruits) immediately following Pesach celebrated the barley harvest and, as Believers, we recognize it as the resurrection of **Yeshua** – the first fruit from the dead. Shavu'ot celebrates the thanksgiving for the wheat harvest symbolized by the two loaves of challah.

Observance

The two loaves of challah were brought into the Temple and with great ceremony, waved in every direction before **Adonai**. In addition, blood sacrifices were offered to cover the sin of the people. Since sacrifices can no longer be made with the destruction of the Second Temple, the modern Jewish observance of Shavu'ot has changed. Rabbis calculated that Moshe received the Torah at Mount Sinai on Shavu'ot. Hence, the rabbinic name for Shavu'ot is Zman Matan Torateynu (the Time of the Giving of the Torah).

The custom of decorating the synagogue in greenery, flowers and baskets of fruit to symbolize the harvest aspect of Shavu'ot; the practice of marking the holiday with a meal featuring dairy products in recognition of Scripture being described as the pure milk of the Word (I Peter 2:2); and the inclusion of the Megillah (scroll) of Ruth in the service are all the primary reminders of Shavu'ot's agricultural prominence.

But Ruth's story sounds another theme, one more relevant to the celebration of Shavu'ot by modern Jewish people and Messianic Believers. When her husband dies, Ruth - a gentile - elects to stay with Naomi, her mother-in-law, telling her "**your people will be my people, and your God will be my God**" (Ruth 1:16) binding herself willingly to the people Isra'el. Ruth's story is one of commitment to the Jewish people freely made and to the covenant with God that is the core of the Jewish religion and experience. Like Ruth, the gentile woman who was in the lineage of **Yeshua**, we have voluntarily said to our fellow Messianic Jewish believers your people will be my people, your God will be my God.

Shavu'ot celebrates the most important moment in the Mosaic covenant - the giving of the Torah to Moshe and its acceptance by Isra'el at Sinai. Shavu'ot has come to be dedicated to the idea of **Torah** study and Jewish

education. Traditional Jews stay up all night on the first night of this festival studying the **Torah**. In keeping with the theme of Jewish education, Shavu'ot has traditionally been the time when many Jewish schools mark graduation.

Messianic significance abounds in this festival. From God's perspective the time of great harvest when large numbers of Jewish believers and later Gentiles came into a personal relationship with Him was initiated at Shavu'ot immediately after **Yeshua's** resurrection (Acts 2:40-43). The two leavened loaves of Shavu'ot may therefore symbolize Jew and Gentile presented to God and now part of His family. God set us free from slavery to sin by placing His Spirit in us to enable us to live as He intended (Romans 8:1-4). Hence God visibly placed His Ruach HaKodesh in **Yeshua's** followers on that important Shavu'ot centuries ago (Acts 2:4).

The coming of the Ruach HaKodesh served as the completion of Pesach, the completion of our atonement, in the sense that through the Ruach, God gives us the power we need to overcome our tendency to do evil.

The theme of Shavu'ot can be best summed up by the word *revival*. Isra'el was called to praise God for the first fruits of the ground, knowing that these early fruits assured the latter harvest. This also applies to the spiritual Kingdom of God. The first fruit of believers at Shavu'ot virtually guarantees a revival in the latter-day spiritual harvest for Messiah. Now we can understand why God included Shavu'ot in the three required festivals for every Jewish male. He had gathered Jewish men from throughout the region to hear the Good News of Yeshua in their own language. They would take that message back home with them to tell their families and friends. As Pesach speaks of redemption, Shavu'ot speaks of revival. The message of Shavu'ot is one of great hope and joy. It was a message heard and accepted by 3,000 Jewish people on that special Shavu'ot (Acts 2:41). Note that 3,000 Jewish people died because of their rebellion of worshipping the Golden Calf at the giving of the Torah.

When Is the Biblical Feast of Shavuot?

Many people desire to know the actual Biblical date for Shavu'ot. It is the only feast that God did not say fell on a specific date in the Hebrew calendar. Rather He gave a formula for calculating the day. Though the traditional Jewish community will celebrate Shavu'ot according to that traditional calculation, there is a difference of opinion on the matter. In the first century the Pharisees and Sadducees differed on the date that Shavuot was to be celebrated. The question arose over which Sabbath does Firstfruits (see Vayikra 23:9-14) take place after: the day after Pesach, which is generally considered a Sabbath or the regular seventh day Sabbath, i.e. Saturday during the week of Pesach?

The Pharisees claimed the correct day was the day after the first day of Matzah, the sixteenth of Nisan. The Sadducees taught that the correct day was Sunday, the day after the weekly Sabbath. Since the writings of the Pharisees survived and developed into traditional Judaism, their opinion is accepted in modern Judaism.

But who is biblically correct? Remember, the Scriptures state, "**you are to count seven full Sabbaths until the day after the seventh week; you are to count fifty days.**" (Leviticus 23:15-16).

For it to be the day after the seventh Shabbat, the initial Sabbath would have to be the weekly Sabbath. So, it would appear the Sadducees were right. Consequently, I believe that the Sadducees got this one correct. Amazingly, the year that **Yeshua** died, the sixteenth of Nisan fell on the Sunday, which is the day after the Sabbath for the Sadducees as well. God worked it out that neither group would have a reason not to recognize **Yeshua** as the Firstfruits of the Resurrection.

In my next post, we will return to our series on the **Messianic Jews** as we continue to our series on **Yeshua: The Better Covenant**.