

The Torah and Haftarah portions for Shavuot are Exodus 19:1-20:23; Numbers 28:26-31 and Ezekiel 1:1-28; 3:12; the Book of Ruth. We will begin by talking about the history surrounding Shavuot and then a short teaching. At the end there are some interesting Shavuot insights.

Shavuot (also known as Pentecost or The Feast of Weeks) is celebrated by doing no work and in ancient times as an agricultural feast by bringing the first part of your crops to Jerusalem. The harvest lasted seven weeks which began after Passover and lasted until Shavuot; so, Shavuot comes fifty days after Passover. We begin the count to the feast of Shavuot the day after the Shabbat (the day of rest) of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the first day of Passover) as mentioned in Leviticus 23 and then count 50 days. Some argue that the count should start after the 2nd Shabbat (day of rest), but the Bible says after the day of rest (Shabbat means rest), not after 2 days of rest. Nonetheless, people argue about when the count begins.

A modern application of Shavuot should include regular giving. Israel was to bring their giving to the Temple when they went there for the three main feasts. On the 3rd and 6th years they gave their tithe to the "Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow; see Deuteronomy 26:12. Giving is biblical.

Rather than giving all at once, it is a good idea to give as we get paid. Israel was supposed to give a little more than 10% per year because they also left the corners of their field unharvested and did not glean their crops. They were for the poor and stranger. It says about those who work the scriptures for us and teach us, 1 Timothy 5:18 NKJV says "**The laborer is worthy of his wages.**" Also, we are to give to those in need, Romans 12:10-13 NKJV says, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; **distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.**" Shavuot is a good time to remember to give; believers are commanded to give.

Also, Shavuot is a time for remembering the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. God gave man law again to provide a good and right way to live. Deuteronomy 4:6 NKJV says that God's commands in the Old Testament make us, "A wise and understanding people." It is also the day that we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit that was first given to believers in Yeshua on Shavuot. Yeshua said that the Holy Spirit is our helper (John 14:26); it is God's way of providing help to keep God's commandments and so we can be led by God through the Holy Spirit.

In antiquity Shavuot was apparently celebrated as a feast since the time of creation and the feast was renewed at the time of Noah as a sign that God would not flood the world again. Jubilees 6:16-18 says, "He set His bow in the cloud for a sign of the eternal covenant that there should not again be a flood on the earth to destroy it all the days of the earth. For this reason, it is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets, that they should celebrate the feast of weeks in this month once a year, to renew the covenant every year. And this whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation."¹ Quote is from pseudepigrapha online.

God created us to be His people, but man went His own way in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis Chapter 3). Most people now seek to fill their lives with something other than God; they seek the "garden" often in other ways than seeking the true God; that may be riches, peace, family, or fun, etc. While these things are not bad, mankind also needs a relationship with God. What we really need is that personal and "garden" relationship with God restored. God has been reaching out to mankind to bring us back to that original relationship ever since that day in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned and hid from God. God gave them a promise of a messiah in Genesis 3:15 so mankind could have victory over the devil (see Colossian 2:15). Also, God did not leave man without law and direction. There was always law that was established by God since the time of Adam.

Noah wrote down laws that resembled the laws given in the Torah. Jubilees 7:20 says: "Noah began to enjoin upon his sons' sons the ordinances and commandments, and all the judgments that he knew, and he exhorted his sons to observe righteousness, and to cover the shame of their flesh, and to bless their Creator, and honour father and mother, and love

¹ <http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/jubilees/6.htm>

their neighbor, and guard their souls from fornication and uncleanness and all iniquity.”² Also, Genesis 26:5 NKJV says, "Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." So those who teach an evolution of God's relationship with mankind or different covenants with different values are wrong. The laws at Mount Sinai were a re-giving of the laws that God originally gave at the time of Adam and passed down to Noah and the people of Israel. God had Moshe write them down and gave him the details of the law so we could have them in the future. God's people kept God's commandments and those who do not keep God's commandments are not true believers.

Laws are to help us to coexist, and the idea of order can even be seen in creation. God wants order, but He also wants a law that brings people into relationship with Him and with each other. Deuteronomy 11:1 NKJV says, "Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always." Leviticus 19:18-19 NKJV says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. You shall keep My statutes." We love God by keeping His commandments.

God's commandments also help us to be good to others. The giving of the law before Mount Sinai and at Mount Sinai was an act of God's favor (grace) towards man to help us live right. With the coming of the Messiah there appears to be additional laws that were given such as receiving the Holy Spirit and being led by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38-39). The some 1,050 laws given in the New Testament portion are mostly properly applied interpretations of the Old Testament law. Laws given by God and proper interpretations of the law are good for mankind. For example, if God said something was not good for us to eat back in Old Testament times, why would that change. Things that aren't considered food are still not good to eat. God says he does not change (see Malachi 3:6).

The law at Mount Sinai was able to restore God as King and make man servants of God again instead of servants of society and of an earthly king; or as in the case of Israel, God delivered them from the worship of Pharaoh and his false gods.

The Holy Spirit was given on Shavuot as our helper. Through Yeshua the Messiah we are set free from the power of sin, the sin of society, and those who would impose godless statutes on us so we could serve our God and King. We are in a new age that began with the coming of Yeshua where the Holy Spirit is given to help us and lead us. For those who believe on the Messiah Yeshua, we experience God on a personal level through the Holy Spirit and begin to experience some of the powers of the age to come it says in Hebrews 6:5. Therefore, we have entered a messianic age, yet not the future messianic age that is to come. It should be noted that biblical history tells us that man has always experienced the power of God since the time of Adam. God is still at work in this age.

The final age is not here yet, but believers in the Messiah now can anticipate a future hope because the Holy Spirit is at work helping us to follow God's commandments and helping us to walk with God. This is what Rabbi Yochanan (John) meant when he said in 1 John 5:10 NKJV, "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself." We need to believe in the promised Messiah Yeshua. Yochanan also said in 1 John 5:12-13 NKJV, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." We should note that faith requires works. James 2:24 NKJV says, "Man is justified by works, and not by faith only. What we believe, should reflect in how we act.

It is both comforting and encouraging to know that by believing on the Messiah and acting accordingly that we have eternal life. Someday, those who believe in Him **and follow His commandments** will live in a future age where God is again King over all. In order to be part of that, we need to take our faith seriously. Hebrews 10:28-29 NKJV says, " Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing." Those who live in sin will go to the lake of fire (see Revelation 21:8). We need to make God king of our lives and do things His way.

² See <http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/jubilees/7.htm>

It is a custom that dairy products are eaten on Shavuot or perhaps you have other fun rituals that you practice. Just as Israel entered the land of milk and honey after their sojourn, believers in the Messiah Yeshua will also enter the future kingdom after our sojourn in this present time as believers in Messiah. In the future kingdom we will experience the goodness and also the eternal blessings of God that were given both to us and for believers from all the ages.

Shaul clearly says that we are to observe Passover in 1 Corinthians 5:8 and so we should understand that we are to observe all of God's feasts and especially come together for the 3 main feasts; Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost), and Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles). God says they are His feasts - God's feasts. Leviticus 23:2 NKJV says, "The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, **these are My feasts.**" People observe all kinds of celebrations, what could be wrong with celebrating God's feasts? So, it should easily be understood we are to keep God's feasts. So, however you can, observe God's feasts with your family, or even if you have to by yourself. The three main feasts should be observed unless you are sick. Even then, you can do some sort of recognition for the feast.

Those who are especially sensitive to illness or cannot find anyone to observe the feasts are excused from meeting with others – a proper interpretation of the Torah allows for that. We understand the Torah teaches us to value life and protect life, so take care of yourself and get better if you are sick. So, don't forget to celebrate Shavuot however you can and celebrate what God has done and what God is going to do for those who believe.

A Teaching to Accompany Shavuot

Seek life, not darkness; we live in this world, but are not of the world.

Most of us have learned to apply ourselves so that we can support ourselves and be able to get by in life. We also need to apply ourselves spiritually; we need to seek a relationship with God. Taking care of ourselves is important both physically and spiritually. Shaul (Paul) says to set our minds on spiritual things, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth;" Colossians 3:2 NKJV.

Most people think only in terms of how they are doing physically and talk about what they are doing and what they have. Their entire focus on life is worldly. When we set our thoughts on spiritual things, we also take into account how well we are doing spiritually and think about following God's commandments. The end result of following God's commandments is a life filled with wisdom and understanding (Deuteronomy 4:5-6); and according to Yeshua, it is also a more abundant life that the Messiah gives us through the Holy Spirit (John 10:10).

Shaul said in Ephesians 3:20 NKJV, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." God's commandments and the Holy Spirit make for a life that is way better than what we could have imagined. I wouldn't be alive today if the Holy Spirit hadn't woken me up in the middle of the night when I had a fire in my house. God is real and spiritual things can be as important as life and death. One of the things that can get us off track is observing man-made doctrine.

Do not seek the made-up doctrines put on by mankind.

Man-made doctrine can be more like a show than anything to do with real life. There are ceremonies that God wants us to keep, but not all ceremony and ritual is a commandment from God. Ritual is part of life and can be enjoyable rewarding. I pray a lot every day; my extended prayer life could be considered ritual. I say prayers in Hebrew that I don't have to say, but they are meaningful and enjoyable to me. I wouldn't impose those as law on others.

Observing God's feasts are a commandment of God. Lighting candles, wearing a ceremonial hat (that means God is over me), having a Torah ceremony are okay to do, but making them into commandments is wrong. Ceremony can be fun and instructive, but making up lots of ritual and then saying they are commanded by God is wrong. Colossians 2:20-22 NKJV says, "Why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commandments and doctrines of men." There were a lot of man-made commandments being imposed in that time period so that it was difficult to follow God. Colossians Chapter 2 warns us about keeping man-made commandments and judging others by man-made commandments in Colossians 2:16.

It says don't live by man-made regulations. We need to be clear about the ritual we keep. Don't think that we absolutely need certain rituals that are not commanded by God. Some people get all upset about where the flowers are kept or did we light candles at the right time. I know how certain rituals are supposed to be done in Jewish practice. Is it that important which shoulder the Torah scroll is carried on? I will always carry it on my right shoulder, but should we get upset over man-made imposed ritual? I don't think so. The Bible doesn't say we have to have flowers at our meetings. Lighting candles is not a commandment of God. We light candles in our home to recognize entering into Shabbat, but a prayer or an announcement like "shabbat shalom" would suffice. I think it's a good idea to identify and recognize Shabbat and God's feasts. For God's feasts we dress up a little at home, but that is still not a commandment of God.

Remember, it's making unnecessary laws that is wrong and it makes keeping God's commandments difficult. My dad used to say it's too hard to be a Jew. That's not true when we drop all the unnecessary laws and consider ritual as just that, ritual and not God's commandments. 1 John 5:3 NKJV says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." God gave us His loving commandments and they are not a burden. Some of the rituals that people keep make life difficult and some have nothing to do with God. What does opening up an umbrella on Shabbat have to do with working on Shabbat? Where do they get this stuff? Turning on a light switch is not lighting a fire. A tiny spark is not a fire. Some things are ridiculous; be thoughtful.

Make sure you keep God's commandments and true applications of God's commands. Also, don't be critical of others ritual. If they understand it is ritual and not a commandment, it is not necessarily wrong! Watch out for ritual **law** though. Don't argue over ritual. The Talmud is a commentary and not God's word. It may have some good things in it, but commentary is just man-made thought. Idols are made by man and so are man-made commandments. Don't elevate man-made ideas or thought over God's law. Deuteronomy 4:2 NKJV commands us, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God." Keep God's commandments; they give us wisdom and understanding.

God's ways are practical and lasting. They have substance to them and apply well to our lives.

There is a lot more that can be said about man-made doctrine. Your synagogue or church could have man-made doctrine in it. Have you ever read the book of Proverbs? It has amazing practical information in it. I'll just share a couple things. Proverbs 1:7 NKJV says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." What have most of us been taught? We've been taught that reading, math, and science is the beginning of knowledge. I have nothing against learning. I graduated 2nd in my engineering class for my bachelor's degree. I used to work out calculations that took a half hour to work out with a calculator.

Why is the fear of God so important? Wouldn't you think that God is the most important thing to know about. The creator God knows how best we should live. The creator God determines what will ultimately happen in the future. This era we live in is a time of testing. We can either pass the test spiritually or fail. That determines how we will spend eternity. Eternity is a long, long time. We'd better have respect and awe for the God of the universe, or we will mess up our lives and our future. Some people look forward to buying a car or becoming successful in life. While it is good to have a successful career, it is a whole lot more important how we live and where we will end up in for eternity.

It says in Proverbs 1:19, "So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners." Did you know that countries used to go to war over taking other's land and resources or go to war over issues of pride? There are still power struggles going on today and people all over world are dying because of greed and pride. Wiki says that 85 million people died in World War 2 which was fought over greed and pride. Talking about taking away life; it's terrible. Just think if people kept just this one command, how much better we would all be. All the needless loss of life would stop. Some countries have great military power, but their people are poor. Why don't they invest in helping their people instead of fighting? These greedy murderers are destined for the lake of fire for eternity (see Revelation 21:8).

Proverbs 1:33 NKJV says, "But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil." Could you see how this verse applies. If you are doing what is right and good, you aren't investing your time and life in hurting others. Yeshua tells us to love one another. If we all treated each other well and cared about one another, we would have a much better world. People can be so anti-God; what could be wrong with being good to others? Think about it. What a wonderful world this could be if we would only have a God centered life and do what He tells us to

do.

Our lives should be inter-woven with God; it will be a blessing for us.

God should be woven into the fabric of our lives. All we do should reflect who we are and have become through God. The psalmist says in Psalms 138:8 CJB, "ADONAI will fulfill his purpose for me. Your grace, ADONAI, continues forever. Don't abandon the work of your hands!" God gave Israel grace, and He still gives His people grace. God is at work in our lives if we are following His commandments. It said His ways give us grace; He helps us supernaturally. Jeremiah 29:11 NKJV says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." Of course, this scripture is for Israel, but God is still at work for the believer. God is good and will bring good into our lives. God wants us to have a good future, and not just a bunch of stuff that is here today and gone tomorrow.

As believers in the Messiah Yeshua, we are a group of people who bring God's goodness and purposes into our lives and to other believers. Rabbi Shaul said in Ephesians 4:15-16 NKJV, "But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." We are to grow up spiritually and each believer can contribute to one another's spiritual growth and encouragement.

Thread count is the number of threads woven together per inch. So, 100 x 100 threads is a 200-thread count. A 200-thread count is considered high quality thread. Think about this in spiritual terms. The more of God that is inter-woven into our lives, the better quality of spiritual life we will have. I want a good spiritual life, who wouldn't want that. God, Jeremiah 10:12 NKJV says about God, "He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion." With almighty God in our lives, we will have a better life. He is the creator God and living His way is always best, and it can be amazing at times because God is an active and good God.

Here are Some Shavuot Insights

* The book of Jubilees chapter 6 says that before Israel's Mount Sinai experience, Shavuot was a perpetual celebration of God saving man from the flood. It also says there that Shavuot was celebrated since the time of creation.

* Zechariah served as a Cohen (priest) on the course of Aviyah. According to some, this course began on the seventh Shabbat after Pesach (Passover). All priests served on the holidays, so he would have begun his service after Shavuot. That is likely when the angel told him that he would have a son. His son, Yochanan the Immerser, would be the Elijah type person who came before Yeshua (Jesus). If you allow for the timing of conception, Yochanan the Elijah to come before Yeshua would have been born around Pesach (Passover).

Pesach is the time that we set a place for Elijah at the Pesach table, and we open our doors and sing a song asking Elijah to come with the Messiah, son of David (the song is Eliyahu Hanavi). Yeshua was then born 6 months after Yochanan. Some say on Rosh Hashanah also known as the Day of Shouting when the angels were shouting and the trumpets were blowing, others say on Sukkot. It had to be a major Jewish holiday because the inns were full, and Bethlehem is near Jerusalem (Luke 2:7).

* We know that Rome installed a high priest in Jerusalem; their high priest **was not the real high priest**. The real High Priest would have been selected from the real priests in the line of Aaron. That meant when Zechariah was picked to serve at the Temple, Zechariah was the real High Priest. He was chosen by "lot," (see Luke 1:8-9) so he was the real High Priest. It is very likely then that since an angel announced Yochanan the Immerser's birth (John the Baptist; Yeshua's cousin), that God Himself picked Yochanan the Immerser to be the next high priest.

Yeshua was not only in the line of David but was in the line of Aaron which also made Him a priest. It is likely then that after the death of the High Priest Yochanan the Immerser, Yeshua became the real High Priest. That's why it says in Hebrews 4:14-16 NKJV, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of

grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The High Priest made the sacrifice for sin once a year on Yom Kippur. The year Yeshua gave Himself for our sins, He was the High Priest and lamb of God who gave Himself for our sin.

How could something so amazing as all this and Zechariah being the High Priest be forgotten? We have to remember that the Roman Empire made up their own religion mixed with pagan practice. Their own historian, Tacitus, said that the Roman Empire killed Yeshua. They then blamed it on the Jews. They were trying to disassociate the Bible from its Jewish roots and even made celebrating God's feasts illegal (true believers would never have made God's feasts illegal). Believers in the Messiah lost all sense of its Jewish roots and how to follow God the way they were supposed to. The Jews were believers in the true God. Remember, Yeshua (Jesus) was Jewish and so were all the apostles and Paul.

All the early believers were Jewish, and we now have historic proof that mainstream Judaism and Messianic Judaism coexisted and **were never** at odds with each other. The church of the Roman empire killed and persecuted the true early believers in the Messiah in order to establish their false pagan religion. Messianic Jews never persecuted Jews; they were the ones being targeted for persecution. I have read that the Roman Empire and the religions that inherited their false doctrine killed around 1 million true believers in order to take over true Christianity.

Also, it is recorded that after Yeshua died and rose from the dead, Ya'akov (James), Yeshua's half-brother, served as High Priest for Yom Kippur a couple of times. So, not only was Yeshua the High Priest when he died and rose from the dead, but his brother became High Priest after Yeshua ascended to heaven! The High Priest is the only one allowed to do the ceremony for Yom Kippur (the day of atonement). Before the Temple was destroyed, we had a Messianic High Priest! Remember, Jews and Messianic Jews were never at odds. It was the pagan church of the Roman Empire that was at odds with the true believers.

* The Passover (Pesach) lamb foreshadows the Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) giving Himself to set us free from sin. Yochanan the immerser (John the Baptist) said about Yeshua in John 1:29 CJB, "Look! God's lamb! The one who is taking away the sin of the world!" Yochanan was referring to Isaiah 53:6-7 CJB, "We all, like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way; yet ADONAI laid on him the guilt of all of us. Though mistreated, he was submissive - he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to be slaughtered." Yeshua died for our sins. God said to Abraham in Genesis 22:8 CJB, "God will provide himself the lamb."

* The first day of unleavened bread reminds us of the first day of freedom for God's people as they fled idolatrous Egypt so they could serve God, and the unleavened bread reminds us to flee sin.

* The giving of the law at Mount Sinai in about 1447 BC to set God's people free to serve God foreshadows the future time that we are now in. The Holy Spirit was also given on Shavuot in about 30 AD to free us to serve God and free us from sin.

* The counting of the Omer before Shavuot reminds us of the anticipation of those who waited to be betrothed to God at Mount Sinai when God gave us His instructions (Torah). Also, the counting of the Omer before Shavuot reminds us of the anticipation of those who waited to be betrothed to the Messiah at Jerusalem when He gave us the Holy Spirit as our helper through Yeshua our Messiah. Will the counting of the Omer be a future time of anticipation for the rule and reign of our God?

* The counting of the Omer is a time of harvest. Perhaps, the counting of the Omer is symbolic of the harvest of true believers over the years. The 49 days of the counting of the Omer also correlates with the years in between Jubilees. The Jubilee (Yovel) year is on the 50th year when debts are forgiven, slaves are set free, and land is returned. The Jubilee is a picture of the future kingdom and rule and reign of God with his people.

* The Mount Sinai experience on Shavuot was like a wedding ceremony where Israel affirmed their commitment to God. The law was their Ketubah (marriage contract). Mount Sinai was their wedding canopy (Chuppah). The counting of the Omer before Shavuot was a countdown to the marriage of the bride, the believers both of Israel and the Messiah. Isaiah 54:5 NKJV says, "For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name." Also, the Rabbis said that

it rained, and the desert bloomed the year Israel received God's commands at Mount Sinai. Israel was surrounded by flowers when God spoke to them from the heavens.

* Just like the confession Israel made to God ("All the words which the Lord has said we will do." in Ex. 24:3), our confession of faith in Yeshua affirms our commitment to follow God's commandments and be led by the Holy Spirit (also like affirming a Ketubah – a marriage agreement).

* The gift of the Holy Spirit is the evidence of God's commitment to us. The Holy Spirit would be the evidence of our messianic Ketubah (marriage agreement). We are to be faithful to the end. Hebrews 3:14 NKJV says, "We have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

* The giving of the law was a blessing from God to help Israel. They made Him their God and King and they had a personal relationship with Him. We also have a personal relationship with our God and King through the Holy Spirit.

* Yeshua was born on Yom Teruah (Rosh Hashanah) when the angels were shouting, and the trumpets were blowing. He will likely return on Yom Teruah when the last trump is sounded. The day of atonement (Yom Kippur) foreshadows the future judgement to take place after Yeshua's return. The final wedding celebration is to occur after the return of Yeshua and the wedding feast will likely occur on The Feast (of Sukkot) in the future kingdom.