

## Shavu'ot • Feast of Weeks • Pentecost

### Is Shavu'ot relevant?

With some research, we should be able to discover the meaning of Pentecost. Some of this may sound new, but as we stop and study each scripture reference, we can actually discover truth that may have previously escaped our notice.

What does Pentecost mean? It's a Greek word meaning 'fiftieth'. Fiftieth what? How and why does this seemingly important word just pop up in the book of Acts? Was this a stand-alone event without any historical precedent? Does it have a numerical reference point?

Why does 'Pentecost sun-day' have such significance in the western Christian denominations? Why is there an emphasis on hyper-spirituality so that 'speaking in tongues' seems to be a mark of Christian maturity? Why Azusa Street, Angelus Temple, Vineyard, Kansas City and the charismatic movement?

Using a pure mathematical approach, we know that 'fiftieth' must logically have a beginning integer, a 'first'. The Hebrew scriptures [a.k.a. OT] will provide the answers since it is neither located nor explained in the NT.

### Luke's letters to Theophilus

Luke sets the stage by writing his second letter for Theophilus, calling it Acts. Although Theophilus sounds like a Greek name, this man was cohen [priest] from about 37-41 CE. This evidence is supported by archaeological findings, also by *Antiquities XVII* written by the historian Josephus Flavius.

It is noteworthy that Luke, as a disciple of Yeshua, creates a written record of events for the cohen, Theophilus. It is apparent that Theophilus, like Nicodemus, Yosef of Arimatea, and others, was a respected member of the religious community, and follower of Yeshua. As was the custom, these letters were carried to other congregations to help them learn Torah and to warn them away from destructive teachings which were prevalent and developing, as they are today.

Luke, as an observant Jew, is well-versed in Jewish traditions and it's also remarkable that he is instructing a cohen. 'Acts of the Emissaries of Yeshua the Messiah' was likely written around 62 CE, roughly three decades after our Lord's crucifixion, burial, resurrection, 40-day 'living witness' and ascension. This second letter would have come to Theophilus about two decades after he had retired from Temple service.

So let's understand the context of this historical encapsulation of Acts, as well as the plural noun; acts. 'Acts' is shorthand for 'actions' which describes deeds that are performed by witnesses. Luke first reminds Theophilus of his earlier letter [book of Luke] then moves quickly to the Lord's conversation with His disciples. Yeshua declined to answer a political question but declared this; 'you will receive power when the Ruach ha Kodesh [Holy Spirit] comes upon you; you will be my witnesses...' [Acts 1:8]

### Divine & human witnesses

What is the purpose of a witness? It is to testify about someone else, either by words or actions. Luke, along with other Gospel writers, is functioning as a true witness. This is the purpose for which we receive the Holy Spirit, enabling us to live righteously before our Creator, bearing His image, becoming a witness to His Lordship. Luke acted as a witness through his letters and actions.

God calls sun and moon as witnesses. Although we see their primary functions as light-emitter and light-reflector, they are proofs to all mankind of certain promises, as found in Jeremiah 31:34-36 and 33:19-22. I left out a key verse which we can review shortly. These prophecies will be fulfilled when Yeshua comes to earth, sets His feet on the Mount of Olives and sets up His yeshiva at Yerushalayim, to inaugurate His thousand-year reign. [Zechariah 14:4 and Isaiah 2:2-4]

We must also realize that human witnesses, since they are mortal and fallible, are at a lower lever from divine witnesses. Obviously, Yeshua is the lone exception to this, because He faithfully made known to the world precisely what His Father gave Him to say and do.

The only reliable witnesses who can speak for God are the ones who are already obeying Him. Throughout history, the Holy Spirit revealed God's will to men, then they spoke and wrote His message as reliable prophets for their contemporaries. When a righteous person qualifies as a reliable witness, they are dependent on divine inspiration to provide them with three things:

- power [courage + knowledge] to witness
- the right message
- proofs to their audience

### **The significance of language**

Because God gives us language to communicate with each other, language is important. Names are important. Yeshua is more commonly known by His Greek nickname Jesus. I have no idea what Jesus means, except that it is a transliteration of Yeshua.

Yeshua is our Lord's given name – the name that His mother Miryam was commanded to give Him. Yeshua means 'He saves' and can also be rendered 'Salvation'. When we get the original Hebrew, it opens our understanding of the message to Miryam.

This common word 'church' is probably the most well-known but unfortunate linguistic anomaly, since it appears in the KJV as the de facto translation, derived from the LXX. The word 'church' is not a reliable witness, quite literally. King James, in his editorial mandate for the 1611 project, declared that the word 'church' would be substituted in place of *edah* [Hebrew = witnessing body] and *ekklesia* [Greek = witnessing body]. To this day, the ambiguity of the word is preserved, and in normal conversation if one mentions their 'church', it is unclear if they are referring to an assembly of people or a building.

Obviously, we want a true witness, especially from the holy scriptures. As a side note, King James also changed the name of Yeshua's little brother. His actual name, as he would have been known in his hometown, was Ya'akov ben Yosef of Natzalet. Who knew? Ya'akov became the leader of the Messianic believers in Yerushalayim after the death of Yeshua. What is his transliterated name? Check the book immediately after Messianic Jews [Hebrews] for the answer. The King wanted to insert his own name in scripture and found a way to do it.

The significance of language as a true witness is paramount – when we weed out mistranslations, we can capture truths presented by biblical authors. Therefore, it is imperative that we diligently study to know what the source scriptures actually say in the proper context. As Yeshua declared to two of His disciples [Luke 24:27], '...starting with Moshe and the Prophets, He explained to them the things that can be found throughout the TaNaKh concerning Himself.'

Circling back around to Shavu'ot, Acts 2:1 gives us the exact clue we need – 'The festival of Shavu'ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place.' [CJB]

In this verse, most bible versions only use the word Pentecost, so let's use the simple context of Pentecost/fiftieth as our starting point. The words 'fiftieth' or 'Pentecost' by themselves are irrelevant, until we know how they relate to the 'first'. This is not a mystery, actually Shavu'ot has been observed for 3.3 millennia, since its inception. When did it begin?

### **Moedim [appointed times]**

Shavu'ot started 49+1 days after Pesach in the year 2448 [1312 BCE]. In Leviticus 23 we read about the eternal righteous laws by which the Lord has ordered the inhabitants of earth, and by which He will judge them in the last days. There are 8 moedim [appointed times] listed; 1 solar-based and 7 lunar-based. Among these are Pesach [Passover] and Shavu'ot [Feast of Weeks].

Knowing these appointed times brings reality into focus which has escaped the church for three millennia - the word 'fiftieth' refers to the fiftieth day after Pesach [Passover]. So now, the word fiftieth takes on special meaning, when it is properly connected to the appointed time which directly preceded it.

This connection is made by a day-by-day tally for 50 days, called 'Counting the Omer'. During these 50 days, the priesthood was responsible to take one gallon [one omer] of fine flour, bake two loaves and present them to the Lord. This was a daily offering of gratitude for an abundant harvest.

Pesach was initiated on the eve of the Exodus - the slaying of the lamb provided protection [passing over] from the destroying angel. Pesach always occurs on Nisan 15 and has been observed for the last 3,334 years. This year it fell on April 17, 2022.

As we read God's continuing instructions in Leviticus 23:16, on **Nisan 16** we begin Counting the Omer. We count the Omer for 7 weeks + one day, that is 50 days. At the end of the fiftieth day is the festival of Shavu'ot. By doing this according to God's calendar, we find Pesach at the beginning, connected to Shavu'ot at the conclusion. It works like this:

Pesach, SMTWTFS, SMTWTFS, SMTWTFS, SMTWTFS, SMTWTFS, SMTWTFS, SMTWTFS, Shavu'ot

It is noteworthy that the offerings made during the moedim are perpetual. For these appointed times, the sin and guilt offerings, although required by Torah, could never solve the sin problem. These offerings anticipated the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God, Who is Yeshua.

The definition of sin has not changed. Torah still defines what sin is - it is this Law by which the Judge will render rewards and punishment for all people at the end of time. Paul addresses this in Romans 7:7 – as a Jewish Roman citizen who was a Torah expert and knew the Greek culture, Paul declares, in all his wisdom, 'without Torah I would not have known what sin was.'

### **A new nation - Israel**

In the year 2448 [1312 BCE] Moshe led the Hebrews in their Exodus from Egypt. They were B'nai Israel; a family - but they were not yet a nation. On the night before the Israelites [and those foreigners gathered with them] left Egypt, they sacrificed their lambs. They prepared the Pesach [Passover] meal and applied the lambs' blood on the doorframes of their houses in the

shape of **ן** het. [Psalm 119:57-64]

For the next 7 days, Israel ate unleavened bread. They traveled for 7 weeks [49 days] and arrived in the region of Horeb at Mount Sinai. On the fiftieth day after their exodus, they gathered at Mount Sinai, where Moshe was given the Ten Devarim [Ten Words].

These freed slaves were tribes of Israel – not the nation of Israel. They had been ‘saved by grace’, but were still wanderers in the desert. The only despot they knew was the Pharaoh-god; the only political structure they knew was recently demolished, and the prevailing social structure was pagan.

To espouse Israel to Himself as His bride, God had to enter into a covenant to them. It was entirely up to them to accept or reject this covenant which was given on Mount Sinai. He was calling them out as His chosen inheritance, to be holy and righteous by the laws He was about to give them.

Salvation by grace [Passover] was only the **first step**; that just got them out of Egypt and into the middle of the desert of Horeb. They were survivors saved by grace, without moral direction.

The **final step**, to become God’s children, was to accept His covenant.

It's important to note that the Ten Devarim [Hebrew = Ten Words] were spoken directly to Israel and the foreigners gathered with them at Mount Sinai. The Ten Words in their proper linguistic sense, can be rendered the Ten Utterances. Ten Commands are more common, albeit slightly incorrect.

The Ten Devarim came **directly from God** to the whole nation of Israel.

The following commands came to the nation of Israel by God, **through Moshe**.

These commonly-accepted 613 commands which comprise Torah law are called mitzvot. Every mitzvah found in the Law has its origin in the Ten Devarim.

Again, a linguistic understanding of Hebrew is very important to understand the relationship between the **giver of the Devarim** and the **recipients of the mitzvot**.

The ‘im’ on the end of Devar indicates masculine plural. These were given by God, as the Groom. The ‘ot’ at the end of mitzvot, and at the end of Shavu’ot indicates feminine plural. These mitzvot are received by the commonwealth of Israel and those of us grafted in as Gentile believers, as the ‘bride of Christ’. Consider this in the context of a Husband-to-be, as He presents covenant vows to His bride-to-be.

Rabbi Paul explains this ‘grafting into the olive tree’ concept in Romans 11:24.

For 40 years Moshe continued to record God’s instructions for the new nation of Israel and those gathered with them. They were given instructions for moedim; the first mention of these 7 appointed times are listed in Leviticus 23.

Shavu’ot was observed as one of the prescribed yearly festivals through Israel’s turbulent history. We don’t have much mention of it until about 1,345 years later, when it is mentioned specifically in the Acts narrative.

## **Messianic Renaissance**

The moedim in Leviticus 23 are God's appointed times for the earth and its inhabitants. These are perpetual. These are **Laws of the Future**. We will return to these when Yeshua begins His thousand-year reign on earth. Yeshua will teach Torah to the nations which will replace all other manmade laws. God already built His kingdom before we got here and thankfully, He doesn't need our help. Any human efforts to construct alternatives become subject to the inevitable process of entropy.

Because of this truth, it is essential that we honor God's laws as truth; they are not mere allegory but are real, practical laws for redeemed humans living in harmony with Him. When we are saved by the blood of Yeshua, we come into His covenant and are obligated to engage in mature obedience to the laws He gave us. This is the purpose of the Holy Spirit: He instructs us by informing our spirit of His will. These 'good works' that Paul wrote about in Ephesians 2:10 do not precede our salvation, but naturally follow it. These are the laws that King David lauds in Psalm 119 as eternal and righteous.

Scripture teaches that the kingdom of Heaven is already within us, as believers. A king has a kingdom, in which His subjects revere Him as ruler and lawgiver. We are the part of God's creation who are able to bear His image. We as believers are doing this presently and will do this in the future, here on earth.

Alas, common rapture theology teaches us that we are going to leave earth and go somewhere ...but what does scripture teach?

When Yeshua comes, we will 'meet Him in the air'. After we meet Him in the air, what's next? Yeshua will set His feet on the Mount of Olives, which is across the Kidron Valley, directly east of the Temple Mount. He already came as the Suffering Servant; the Lamb of God. Next He comes as the Lion of Y'hudah; the conquering King.

What happens next? Yeshua is staying on planet earth with us. He will begin to teach His law from Mount Zion. He will set up His yeshiva in Yerushalayim. His eternal, righteous law is the standard by which He will restore to order everything that is currently in disorder.

As believers saved by Yeshua, we are grafted into the natural olive tree of Israel - we are grafted in by covenant. This covenant is not new; it is what He declared to the nation of Israel and the foreigners gathered with them at Mount Sinai. Now, anticipating the reign of Yeshua on earth, we can prepare for His rule, as He restores the earth to shalom. [Zechariah 14, Isaiah 2]

It is a stretch to consider the demise of technology and the renewal of all things, but as we read scripture, we begin to grasp truths that will come into reality when Yeshua becomes Lord of all the earth.

Fortunately for us, after the fall of Adam and Eve, mankind does not live forever in a state of separation from God. We've been subjected to the curse of sin, but through the blood of our Messiah, we can be redeemed from that curse. Since we all experience physical death, we now have the opportunity for resurrection to eternal life with our Father. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live 'holy as He is holy'. [Leviticus 11:45, 19:2]

This brings us back to the moedim - these are the celebrative events that will be season-markers for us during the 1,000-year reign of Yeshua. We actually get to study these now and participate in them as we await His coming.

## **Redemption and Revelation**

When the Holy Spirit was given at Shavu'ot, it was an important beginning of the words of Yeshua Who told His disciples to 'wait for it'. It was the power for '...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' [Matthew 28:20] This infilling of the Holy Spirit was a prophetic pattern for all humanity – all believers are candidates for the Holy Spirit empowering them to good works. God's laws bring life – they are a result of His mercy after we have been redeemed by Him.

Pesach is **redemption** - Shavu'ot is **revelation** of the covenant.

Yeshua's crucifixion was the event of **redemption** – Pentecost was the event of **revelation**.

The Holy Spirit gives us power to obey God's laws.

It works like this; God redeemed His people Israel from oppressive Egyptian slavery by a combination of miracles. It is interesting that the Jews left Egypt under their own power; no miracles necessary for this event. They packed up their belongings and walked out, which was not a miracle, but obedience.

The clans of Israel were residents of Egypt for '430 years to the day' [Exodus 12:40-41]. They left as a unique group of ethnic people; 12 tribes of Israel. They had experienced **redemption** from slavery, all 10 plagues, were saved through the sea, but were not yet a nation.

50 days later they received their **revelation** of God's covenant at Mount Sinai.

50 days after the Lamb of God had been sacrificed, He provided a dramatic **revelation** which fulfilled His earlier promise. What was this promise?

### **Shavu'ot 33 CE...wait for it...**

God spoke to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah in one of the most well-known of many biblical prophecies about the coming Holy Spirit,

"Here, the days are coming [says Adonai] when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Y'hudah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt;

because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them. [says Adonai]

For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days [says Adonai]  
I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts;  
I will be their God, and they will be my people."

[Jeremiah 31:30-32]

The 10 Devarim and the balance of Torah [Law], Nevi'im [Prophets] and Ketuvim [Writings] can be described as **Laws of the Future**.

The importance of the Holy Spirit's power for believers should be enthusiastically declared to all of us. When Luke records the Shavu'ot event, he mentions the visitors from 14 different

linguistic regions, hearing the disciples speaking in their native language. This is significant in itself; residents of the Galil accurately communicating with languages they did not know.

However, the miracle of the sound of a violent wind, or the miracle of tongues, should not eclipse what the believers were saying. The consensus of the spectators was, 'How is it that we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great things God has done?' [Acts 2:11]

The miracles functioned as the dinner bell. When these visiting Jews from the diaspora and the local Gentiles heard the witnesses, they were prompted to action. When Peter began his own witness of the Hebrew scriptures, He quoted Joel 3:1-5 [some versions have 2:28-32], Psalm 16:8-11 and 110:1.

Although the gift of 'tongues' is seen as having 'arrived' in Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Apostolic circles, Paul gives very clear teaching about order in public meetings, specifically how the Holy-Spirit enabled believers are to conduct themselves with proper decorum. The work of a prophet is to be a true witness; he is to 'bring forth'. What does he bring forth? He is to bring forth the word of God, not his presumptions or dreams. He must witness to what God said.

There is an interesting blip on the radar of history, about the year 1996 [1764 BCE]. In Genesis 11, we read of the cursed line of Ham which produced Nimrod. [a.k.a Ashur] As probably the earth's first dictator, the Bavel project is generally attributed to Nimrod and his followers.

Instead of following God's mandate to 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.' [Genesis 1:28], the Bavel coalition decided to 'unify' by staying in one locality to make a name and a tower for themselves. Sound like Aelia Capitolina? Germania? Dubai? Neom? God orchestrated a miraculous, demographic reset and created **confusion** via their languages, [Bavel = Confusion] after which they scattered over the earth.

It is interesting that at Shavu'ot 33 CE, 1,797 years after the Bavel fiasco, God brought **understanding** via languages. Indeed, hearing their own unique languages brought momentary confusion [Acts 2:6] to the crowd. The Holy Spirit then brought understanding to the foreigners by means of obedient witnesses, but the folks had to obey Yeshua's instructions;

'You are witnesses of these things. Now I am sending forth upon you what my Father promised, so **stay here in the city** until you have been equipped with power from above.' [Luke 14:48]

### **In conclusion**

The gifts of the Holy Spirit lead to the fruits of the Holy Spirit. As Rabbi Paul instructs us in 1 Corinthians chapter 14; what the assembly gets to hear from a speaker is more important than what the speaker gets to say to the assembly. This is social protocol, common sense, and orderly which is pleasing to the Lord. This the essence of a true witness.

Since Shavu'ot is a harvest-related festival, it is tradition to read the book of Ruth. This book is a harvest-time story of love between Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer and Ruth, the Gentile outsider. Boaz and Ruth become the great-grandparents of King David, who began to turn the hearts of Israel back to Yahweh. The theme of redemption is evident throughout the story and is a foreshadow of Yeshua our Redeemer.