

Celebrating Shavuot

Most Christians know the story of Pentecost in Acts chapter two: the mighty wind, the tongues of fire, Holy Spirit and the speaking in every language. Very few are aware of the Torah-background behind this event.

- The Torah commanded the Jews to count the days of the Omar, (which is the first fruit of the barley harvest).
- On the day after the Sabbath during the week of the Passover celebration, which was the day on which the first fruits of the barley were harvested and offered up in the Temple—this was the day on which they were commanded to begin a countdown to the next festival.
- They were told to count forty-nine days, (7 weeks) and upon their completion, the fiftieth day is the appointed time of the Festival of Shavuot.
- Both the English and Hebrew names for the festival reflect this counting.
- The English name is Pentecost and means ‘50th day’.
- The Hebrew name is Shavuot and means ‘weeks’.
- It is so named because of the seven full weeks of counting.
- The counting is a chain that links the Passover festival to the Pentecost festival.
- In a sense, Shavuot concludes the festival season that began at Pesach.

Shavuot is a harvest festival. Just as Pesach celebrates the ripening of the barley crop, in a similar way, Shavuot celebrates the ripening of the wheat crop.

- At Shavuot, the first fruits of the wheat harvest were brought to the temple and baked into two loaves of leavened bread.
- The interim 49 days of counting are called ‘the counting of the omar’ because day one begins the harvest of a single barley sheaf (omar) and day 49 concludes the harvest of the wheat sheaves.
- In addition to wheat, the pilgrims celebrating Shavuot brought with them the first fruits of all their crops and offered them before the altar.

The oral traditions of the Jews describe a pilgrimage of Israelites bringing their first fruits to the Temple:

- The worshippers converged on Jerusalem from all over the land of Israel.
- In their hands they carried baskets of the first fruits of their produce.
- The wealthy among them carried baskets overlaid with silver and gold while the poor carried wicker baskets made from peeled willow branches.
- Those who lived near Jerusalem brought fresh figs and grapes while those who lived far off brought dried figs and raisins.
- Turtle doves, destined for the altar, were tied to the baskets.
- A sacrificial ox with its horns bedecked with gold and its head crowned with olive leaves led the procession to the Temple.
- This is why we bring our best offering to Yehovah on this day.
- This is why we decorate with greenery and flowers.
- Walking in front of the ox, a flute player played the melodies of the psalms while the pilgrims sang along—this is where we get our dancing.
- Passover brought our redemption and Pentecost consummated our marriage by Holy Spirit dwelling in us.
- This day is a day of great celebration—music, singing, dancing, shouting, and feasting!

We can imagine the disciples and followers of Jesus of Acts chapter 2 joining into this First Fruits procession.

- The Shavuot festival already carried particular significance for them because it was exactly fifty days after Messiah had resurrected.
- He was the First Fruits of the Resurrection.
- In fact, the disciples and followers of Jesus were themselves the First Fruits of Messiah's ministry.
- On Shavuot, 3000 more were added to their number and the great harvest of souls began!

On the first Pentecost, signs and wonders accompanied the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

- There was smoke, fire, and cloud on the mountain.

- The mountain trembled, and the blast of a shofar sounded louder and louder.
- The voice of God was audibly heard by the entire nation.
- According to Jewish oral tradition, the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was accompanied by additional wonders, two of which are significant to our reading of Acts chapter 2.

Jewish oral tradition speaks of flames of fire which came to each individual at Sinai:

- On the occasion of the giving of the Torah, the children of Israel not only heard Yehovah's voice, but actually saw the sound waves as they emerged from His mouth.
- They visualized them as a fiery substance.
- Each commandment that left Yehovah's mouth traveled around the entire camp and then came back to every Jew individually.
- The second miracle that Jewish oral tradition preserves is the voice of Yehovah speaking in every language known to man.
- It says: And all the people witnessed the thunderings (Exodus 20:15).
- Note that it does not say 'the thunder', but 'the thunderings'; wherefore Rabbi Johanan said that God's voice, as it was uttered, split up into seventy voices, in seventy languages, so that all the nations should understand.
- Oral tradition also speaks of the supernatural nature of the stones that the Ten Commandments were written on.
- The tablets of stone were made of blue sapphire as a symbol of the heavens and God's throne.
- The words were written by the finger of God.
- The Hebrew letters were said to be bored fully through the stone, which was a miracle, since the inner part of some of the Hebrew letters "floated" in place.
- Moreover, even though the letters were fully bored through the stone, both sides appeared normally—that is the back of the tablet looked exactly like the front.
- It was said that the tablets carried their own weight, enabling Moses to carry them down the mountain.

Whether or not these oral traditions preserve actual historical memories of the Mount Sinai experience is not important.

- What is important to remember is that the disciples and followers of Jesus were all aware of these oral traditions.
- They knew the stories of the giving of the Torah at Shavuot.
- They knew the story of words of fire resting on each individual at Shavuot.
- They knew the story of God's voice speaking to all mankind in every language at Shavuot.
- They knew the story of the super-natural nature of the tablets.
- Therefore, the miracles and signs and wonders they experienced in Acts chapter 2, carried deep significance and prophetic fulfillment.
- The tongues of fire and the speaking in every tongue were both direct allusions to the Mount Sinai experience and to the receiving of Torah.
- God was underscoring a connection between Holy Spirit and His Holy Torah.
- The early disciples understood their new life was super-natural.

Shavuot draws a line of connection between Exodus 19 and Acts 2.

- The festival unites the giving of the Torah at Sinai with the giving of the Spirit in Jerusalem.
- The two events are forever inseparably linked.
- Jeremiah the prophet foresaw this when God declared through him, "Behold, I will make a new covenant...I will put My Torah within them and on their heart I will write it, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
- Ezekiel the prophet also foretold by the Spirit of God: "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."

According to these prophets, Holy Spirit was given in order to place Torah within the believer's heart.

- If that is true, then the Spirit within us and the Torah of God (Word of God) must agree.
- The purpose for the presence of Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is to enable us to walk in the ways of God.
- The stated purpose of the first Shavuot was to have the full expression of God, dwelling within human hearts, so that He might be our God and we might be His people.

- It was the purpose of the Shavuot recorded in Acts chapter 2, and it remains the same purpose for which we participate in Shavuot celebrations annually to this day.
- The image of God back in the earth once again!
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Shavuot Lesson

Call to come to the Festival—Shofar blowing

Pilgrimage to the Temple—Praise, Worship & Dancing

At the Temple—renewal of commitment with communion & giving of offerings

Feasting