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Keep the Feast of Shavu'ot

**Exodus 23:16, 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-21;
Numbers 28:26-31; Deuteronomy 16:9-12**

Keep the feast of Shavu'ot DIG: If the universal, invisible Church started in Jerusalem with Jews, why is it that today it seems that Messianic believers are largely excluded from mainstream Christianity? What was the purpose of the Shavu'ot celebration? Why do you think ADONAI wanted different social classes, age groups, and ethnic groups to celebrate together? What was the emotional tone of the feast? Why? Why were the children included? What is the Messianic significance of Shavu'ot? How is Shavu'ot fulfilled?

REFLECT: Where do you "fit in," to the Body of Messiah? What are your spiritual gifts? What ministry are you involved with? How much are you tithing? How many people have you won to Yeshua? How many people have you disciplined? Who are you mentoring? These are all marks of a believer. If you were arrested and charged with being a believer, would there be enough evidence to convict? Or are you a closet believer, hiding your light under a bushel?

The Feast of Shavu'ot was fulfilled by the birth of the Church.



Today, **the** same **feast** is known as **Pentecost** or **Weeks**, which comes from the

Greek word “fifty” because **the feast** is **fifty days** after Passover, beginning on **the Feast of Unleavened bread**. The Torah has other names for **Shavu'ot: Yom ha-Birkurim**, or **the Day of First Fruits**, as it appears in **Numbers 28:26**, and **Hag ha-Katzir**, or **the Feast of the Harvest**, as it appears in **Exodus 23:16**. **Then you are to count from the morrow after the Shabbat, from the day that you brought the omer as a wave offering of barley, seven complete Shabbatot. Until the morrow after the seventh Shabbat, you are to count fifty days, and then present a grain offering to ADONAI (Leviticus 23:15-16)**. Because **Shavu'ot** marks the last of the first cycle of festivals, it became known as the “The Closing Feast.” It celebrated the latter firstfruits of the wheat harvest, whereas **the Feast of Rasheet (First Fruits)** celebrated the early firstfruits of the barley harvest. Although its origins are to be found in an ancient grain harvest **feast, according to rabbinic tradition, this is the day on which the Torah was given, so most of the customs of the holiday relate to Torah teaching, its acceptance, and Torah study. It is customary to view Shavu'ot as the day on which the people of Isra'el were married to ADONAI - and the Torah as the “Ketuvah,” or marriage agreement, which establishes their relationship to YHVH.**

Shavu'ot is designated as a time of thanksgiving for the spring harvest which increases the hopefulness for the abundant fall harvest, celebrated by the Sukkot (Booths). Giving thanks for the present provision leads to faith for future addition. What a wonderful **God** we have! **He** provides all our needs through **His** riches in glory in **Messiah (Philippians 4:19)**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being so awesome! We are not worthy of such great love! **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalms 103:11-12)**. We give thanks for **Your** love by loving **You** back with our time, our money, our thoughts and with all of our hearts. **You** are worthy and wonderful beyond comprehension. Praise **You** for accepting our love and when we make the choice to follow **You** as our **Lord** and **Savior (Romans 10:9-10)**, **You** make us **Your children (John 1:12)**. **You** are so wonderful! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

The Biblical Practice: This was a one-day festival and one of **the** three pilgrimage **feasts**. On this occasion two wheat loaves were to be placed on a single sheet and waved before **ADONAI**. It was waved, but not actually offered on the bronze altar

(Leviticus 2:12). The loaves were to have leaven in them. This was unusual because this was **the** only **feast** where leaven was permitted as an offering. Leaven, when it is used in the Bible symbolically, is always a symbol of sin. The reason **God** permitted leaven to be used on this occasion was because those that this offering represented were sinners.

Seven weeks you are to count for yourself - from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain you will begin to count seven weeks. Then you will keep the Feast of Shavu’ot to ADONAI your God with a measure of a freewill offering from your hand, which you are to give according to how ADONAI your God blesses you. So, you will rejoice before ADONAI your God in the place ADONAI your God chooses to make His Name dwell - you, your son and daughter, slave and maid, Levite and outsider, orphan and widow in your midst. You will remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you are to take care and do these statutes (Deuteronomy 16:9-12).

The Jewish Observance: Traditional **Jewish** observance of **Shavu’ot** is multifaceted and has evolved somewhat from biblical times. As recorded in the Torah, during the Second Temple period **Shavu’ot** consisted of being a harvest festival for farmers. Various firstfruits were brought as an offering: barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and honey. The farmers would parade to the Temple with these firstfruits and then offer them up in a special ceremony. People would follow them blowing flutes and other musical instruments. It was quite an elaborate observance as the farmers brought their firstfruits to the Temple.

Part of the wheat offering was baked into two loaves of leavened bread, a striking contrast to the matzah offered a few weeks before. These two loaves were brought to the Temple on a single sheet, and waved in every direction before the bronze altar twice. This act was a public statement of **God’s** provision for all **His** people.

The first time was before the slaughter of two sheep. The second time after the slaughter of the two sheep and they were waved with the breast and thigh of the sheep. Then the two loaves were eaten by the priests. One loaf was eaten by the high priest and the second loaf was divided among the other priests. It was eaten either on the very same day that it was waved or that night sometime before midnight. **The rabbis asked the question, “Why was it necessary to have two loaves?” The answer they came up with is because Shavu’ot is the season for the fruit of the tree and therefore the Holy One, blessed be He,**

said, “Bring Me two loaves on **Shavu'ot** so that the fruit of your trees may be blessed.” That was the rabbinic reason for the two loaves.

Since the destruction of the Temple below in 70 AD, the modern **Jewish** observance of **Shavu'ot** has changed. It is still a time to remember **God's** faithfulness; however, an additional fascination has evolved. **Since the Israelites came to Mount Sinai in the third month after Passover (Exodus 19:1), the rabbis teach that Shavu'ot was the day that Moses received the Torah or the Oral Law** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click [Ei - The Oral Law](#)**). Therefore, the modern observance includes celebrating the giving of the Torah. Messianic congregations, however, do not include the celebrating of **the Oral Law**.



There were eight other observances that started during the Second Temple period and have carried over to today.

1. There was no fasting. If **Shavu'ot** occurred on the Sabbath, the slaughter of the sacrifices were deferred until the following day, so it was not to be a day of fasting.

2. There was a tradition of three days of consecration (see my commentary on **Exodus Df - Go to the People and Consecrate Them**) that **the Israelites** underwent before receiving the Torah. Because of **Jewish** tradition, today many **Jews** observe three days of consecration in order to make themselves worthy of celebrating the **Shavu'ot**. Another special custom, *Tikun Leil Shavu'ot* (preparing for the arrival of **Shavu'ot**), developed from **the Jewish** people's love for the Torah. Traditional **Jews** stay up the first night of this holy day studying the Torah. Many synagogues customarily hold confirmation services for teenagers during this season to recognize their culminating childhood studies of the Torah.
3. Certain scriptures are read especially on **Shavu'ot**. From the Torah of Moses, **Exodus 19:1** through **20:17** (the giving of the Torah); **Numbers 28:26-31** and **Deuteronomy 5:19-30, 9:9-19, 10:1-5, 10**, is read on the first day. **Deuteronomy 15:19** through **16:17** is read on the second day along with the prophets **Ezeki'el 1:1-28** (the prophet's vision of **God's** Sh'khinah glory) and **Habakkuk 2:20** through **3:19** are read.
4. The book of **Ruth** is also read because **her** story takes place at harvest time as **Shavu'ot** does. Moreover, **Ruth** was a convert to the Torah and the Torah was given on **Shavu'ot**. **The rabbis teach that just as Ruth suffered deprivation when she accepted the Torah, so we suffer deprivation when we accept the Torah. Furthermore, according to Jewish tradition, King David, who was a descendant of Ruth** (see my commentary on **Ruth Bd - Coda: The Genealogy of David**), **was born and died on Shavu'ot**.
5. There are two special liturgies that are used during the synagogue service. The first is the singing of *the Akdamut*, which is an Aramaic hymn (composed about 1030 AD) that is a reference to the Ten Commandments and has as its theme **God's** love for **Isra'el** and **Isra'el's** faithfulness to the Torah of Moses. It is sung on the first day of **Shavu'ot**. The second is *the Tikkun Leil Shavu'ot*, which means *the service on the night of Shavu'ot*. This is an anthology of the first and last verses of every book in the TaNaKh and also the entire book of **Ruth**. **The main emphasis of this second song is the indivisibility of the Torah and the Oral Law** (see above) **according to rabbinic teaching**.
6. There is a special emphasis on eating milk products on **Shavu'ot** in order to remember that the Promised Land that **Ha'Shem** gave to **Isra'el** was supposed to be **a land flowing with milk and honey**. **Also, according to Jewish tradition, on that day of the giving of the Torah, only dairy products were eaten**. So,

cheese is eaten because it is a product of the land reminding **the Jews** that it is a **land of milk and honey**. Cheese blintzes’, a special form of **Jewish** crepes filled with cheese, are also served to remind **the Jews** of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments (see my commentary on [Exodus Dj - The Ten Commandments](#)) brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses.

7. A second kind of special food is Challah, which is egg bread that has a yellow color because of the heavy use of the yoke of the eggs. Often two loaves of Challah are used to represent the two loaves that were once offered in the Temple compound. This bread is eaten every Friday night on **the Jewish** Shabbat, but on the Sabbath the bread is braided. However, on **Shavu’ot** the bread is not fixed in the braided form, it is fixed with a design of a ladder. **The reason is that the rabbis teach that the Challah for the Feast of Shavu’ot should be different from the Challah that is used for the Sabbath. Furthermore, the rabbis teach that the ladder is used to remind the Jews that Moses used a ladder to climb up to heaven to receive the Torah.**

8. A third type of food is *kreplach*, which is a form of **Jewish** ravioli but without the tomato sauce and it is fixed in a triangle rather than a square. It has three sides to represent the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to represent the three divisions of the TaNaKh: the Torah (Ta), the “Neviim,” or the Prophets (Na), and the Ketuvim (Kh), or the Sacred Writings.

The Messianic Significance: The Festival of **Shavu’ot** was fulfilled by the birth of the Church (see my commentary on [Acts Ai - The Ruach ha-Kodesh Comes at Shavu’ot](#)). There were three thousand **Jewish** believers who were saved on that day, but the Gentiles were not saved until later (see my commentary on [Acts Bg - Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius](#)). Therefore, in a very special way, those **Jewish** believers were the firstfruits in fulfillment of **Shavu’ot**. **James**, in his book specifically written to **Jewish** believers ([James 1:1](#)), said: **God chose to give us (spiritual) birth through (the preaching of the gospel) the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:18)**. With all the spiritual meaning behind the holy day of **Shavu’ot**, believers in **Yeshua** can find great blessing in celebrating it. Much of the traditional **Jewish** observance can be followed. Yet, as believers add a Messianic perspective to this **feast**, it becomes even more meaningful.

The practical celebration of **Shavu’ot** begins when the Feast of Firstfruits ends. On the day before the start of **Shavu’ot**, a number of preparations should be made for

the observance. The dinner table is set with the best linens and dishes. You may want to decorate the house with greenery or fresh flowers, as a reminder of the harvest aspect of the day. As the sun is setting on *Erev Shavu’ot* (evening of Shavu’ot), the family and friends gather around the festive table. The *yom tov* (holiday) candles are lit by the woman of the house. After the traditional blessings and prayer, blessings are first chanted over the cup of wine or kosher grape juice (kiddush): *Barukh attah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, borei peri ha-gafen* (Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine). Then the challah bread is blessed and shared by all: *Barukh attah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, hamotzi lechem min haaretz* (Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth). On the first night of the holy day we add: *Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, she-he-khiyany v’kiya-manu v’higi-yanu lazman hazeh* (Bless are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, who has given us life, sustained us and brought us into this season).

Next, the holiday dinner is served, which should include dairy dishes to help commemorate the milk, that is the Word of **God**, which becomes a special joy to believers in **Yeshua** because **His Ruach ha-Kodesh** enables us to follow **His** instructions. Many Messianic congregations hold *Erev Shavu’ot* services and morning services the next day. Corporate worship and fellowship are consistent with the intent of **Shavu’ot**. After the evening service, some ambitious believers might want to have their own *Tikun Leil Shavu’ot* (preparing for the arrival of **Shavu’ot**). As we learned earlier, this is the tradition of staying up late to study Torah. A Messianic group of believers might focus on the five books of Moses and the blessings of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. Whatever customs are incorporated, the holy day of **Shavu’ot** can be a true blessing for those who have **the Spirit of God** within them.

The Feast of Shavu’ot was fulfilled by the birth of the Church. This was a mystery to the righteous of the TaNaKh (**Ephesians 5:32**). And as a picture of the Church, being made of both **Jews** and Gentiles, it was the only time that **leaven** could be offered in one of the feasts (**Leviticus 23:17**). The preaching of the gospel began at **Shavu’ot**, something the whole **nation of Isra’el** was being prepared for, but, unfortunately, only a remnant obeyed, beginning with the twelve apostles