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Hag Shavu'ot (Weeks)

Leviticus 23: 17-22

Hag Shavu'ot DIG: What is the purpose of this feast? How would this festival help to maintain a correct relationship with God? What insights do you glean from this festival? Why is leavened bread used in this feast? What do the Jews associate this festival with?

REFLECT: Three thousand Jews who were saved on the first Shavu'ot. Do you know when you were saved? How do you feel when you realize that Yeshua was the first fruit of the more to come? Who do you know that you could introduce Yeshua to, so that they can be saved?

Hag Shavu'ot was fulfilled by the birth of the Church.



During the centuries, the first **“First Fruits”** (in other words **Ea - Resheet**) became less important to **Isra'el**, especially as **the Jewish people** were denied access to the Land and the Temple. But the second **“First Fruits”** is called **Shavu'ot** because the text in **Leviticus** instructs us to count off **seven weeks** (literally **seven Sabbaths**); thus, it is named **Weeks**, since **it** occurs **seven weeks** after the offering of **the first fruits** of the **barley** harvest on **Resheet**.⁴⁴⁵ Greek-speaking **Jews** and many Christians called this day **Pentecost** (which means “fiftieth”), because it occurs **fifty days** after **the seventh week (23:16)**. The count actually began on **Resheet**, and once **it** reached **the fiftieth day, the**

Feast of Weeks would be observed.

Because **Shavu’ot** marks the last of the first cycle of **festivals**, it became known as the “The Closing **Festival**,” and was considered a **Sabbath day**. It celebrated the latter **first fruits** of the wheat harvest, whereas **the Festival of First Fruits** celebrated the early **first fruits** of **the barley** harvest. Although its origins are to be found in an ancient grain harvest **festival**, **Shavu’ot** has long been identified with the giving of the Torah on **Mount Sinai**. **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 festival of Booths** (see [Eg - Sukkot](#)). 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)**.

Hag means *pilgrimage*, and whenever this term is used to characterize a **festival**, it refers to an actual pilgrimage, either to a nearby or to a faraway site. The duty to undertake a pilgrimage is known in a number of other religions, most notably in Islam, where the Arabic term *hajaton*, is similar to the Hebrew *hag*, and designates a **holy** pilgrimage (see a video presentation of **Hag Shavu’ot** by clicking [here](#)).

This means that any **festival** called **hag** could not be fully celebrated at one’s home, but required one’s presence at the Temple in Jerusalem. In earlier times, before the Temple was built, the pilgrimage might have brought a family to a nearby altar, but subsequently **Deuteronomy 12** ordained that all sacrificial offerings were to be brought to one, central Tabernacle/Temple, which necessitated a much longer pilgrimage for most **Israelites** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ct - The Place to Worship ADONAI**).⁴⁴⁶ Three times a year, every able-bodied **Jewish** man (families were also welcomed if they could make the trip) was to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the **three** pilgrimage **feasts** of **Hag ha’Matzot**, **Hag Shavu’ot**, and **Hag Sukkot** (see the commentary on **Exodus Eh - Three Times a Year Celebrate a Festival to Me**). Consequently, **Shavu’ot** was the Tower of Babel reversed.

The Biblical Practice: This was a one-day **festival**. On this occasion two wheat loaves were to be placed on a single sheet and waved before **God**. 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.

Normally, offerings brought to **the LORD** required **unleavened bread (Lev 2:4-5 and 7:12; Num 6:15)** because **leaven** pictures sin, and **God** cannot tolerate sin. However, **on Shavu'ot**, Moshe wrote: **You must bring bread from your homes for waving - two loaves made with one gallon of fine flower, baked with leaven - as first fruits** (of the fall wheat harvest) **for ADONAI (23:17)**. This was the one time of the year when **leavened bread** was brought to **Ha'Shem**, though none of it was burned on the bronze altar. **The bread** was **leavened** by placing in the dough a lump of **leaven** from **bread** of the preceding **barley** harvest, thus reemphasizing the close connection between **the barley** and **wheat** harvests, and **the festivals** associated with **them**.⁴⁴⁷

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 first fruits 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 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 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, fascinating thing 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 [Ei](#) - The Oral Law**). Therefore, modern observance includes celebrating the giving of the Torah. Messianic congregations, however, do not include the celebration of **the Oral Law**.

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

1. There was no fasting. If **the Feast of Weeks** 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 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 traditionally read because **her** story takes place at harvest time as **Shavu’ot** does (see the commentary on **Ruth [Ah](#) - The Book of Ruth and Shavu’ot**). 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 **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 **the Feast of Weeks**. The second is *the Tikun 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 Words (see **Deuteronomy Bk - The Ten Words**) 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.⁴⁴⁸

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 Jews** who were saved on that day, but the Gentiles were not saved until later (see **Acts Bg – Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius**). Therefore, in a very special way, those **Jewish** believers were **the first fruits** 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 first fruits 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 First Fruits** 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**). 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.⁴⁴⁹

The Feast of Passover was fulfilled by the death of Messiah, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled by the sinlessness of His sacrifice, the Feast of First Fruits was fulfilled by the resurrection of Messiah life, and Shavu’ot was fulfilled by the birth of the Church.

A Practical Guide for Believers in Messiah: With all the spiritual meaning behind **the holy day of Shavu’ot**, believers in **Yeshua** can find great blessing in celebrating. Much of the traditional **Jewish** observance can be followed. Yet, as believers add Messianic perspective to this feast, it becomes more meaningful.

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On the first night of **the holy day** we add: *Barukh atah Adonai Elohenu melekh ha-olam, she-he-khiyanu v’kiya-manu v’higi-yanu lazman hazeh*. Blessed are **You, LORD our God**, King of the universe, who has given us life, sustained us and brought us to this season.

The blessings over the wine, grape juice and challah are chanted to traditional melodies. Next, the holiday dinner is served, which should include dairy dishes to help commemorate the milk, that is **the Word of God. God’s Word** becomes a special joy to believers in **Yeshua** because **His Holy Spirit** enables believers to follow **His** instructions.

Many Messianic congregations hold *Erev Shavuot* 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 night 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 Ruach Ha’Kodesh** within them.⁴⁵⁰

*Dear Heavenly Father, Praise **You** for **Your** wisdom in planning festivals so we can remember how wonderful **You** are and how everything **You** do is done in perfect sequence and timing.*

*Praise **You** for **Your** giving of **the Ruach ha’Kodesh** within me to always be there to help and guide me (**Hebrews 13:5c**). **Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him (John 14:23)**. Though life is often hard now, we love to worship and praise you, knowing that our trials will soon be over and eternity will be filled with peace and joy and life in heaven praising you forever! **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18)** In the Name of the One who sits at **Your** right hand. Amen*