

Shavuot/Pentecost

Introduction

- Why are we here?
 - Festival of Shavuot/Pentecost
 - What important event happened on Shavuot? God gave the Torah, His instructions, to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai.
 - Tikkun Leil Shavuot = "Correction for the night of Shavuot"
 - There is a tradition that the people at Sinai slept when Moses was receiving the Torah from God on Mount Sinai, and he had to run. So we stay up, we push aside sleep, and instead study the Torah.
- Read the story of the Giving of the Torah.
 - **Read Exodus 19:16-20:21**
 - **Read Deuteronomy 4:9-10**
 - This is one of the most important events in Biblical History. What are some others?
 - Covenant with Abraham
 - Redemption from Egypt
 - Building of the Tabernacle
 - Covenant with David
 - Building of the Temple
 - Destruction of Jerusalem
 - Return to Jerusalem
 - Birth of Messiah
 - Resurrection of Messiah
- **Abraham Joshua Heschel, from God in Search of Man**

We have never been the same since the day on which the voice of God overwhelmed us at Sinai. It is forever impossible for us to retreat into an age that predates the Sinaitic event. Something unprecedented happened. God revealed his name to us, and we are named after him. "And all the nations shall see that the Lord's name is proclaimed over you" (Deuteronomy 28:10). There are two Hebrew names for Jew: Yehudi, the first three letters of which are the first three letters of the Ineffable name, and Israel, the end of which, el, means God in Hebrew. If other religions may be characterized as a relation between man and God, Judaism must be described as a relation between man with Torah and God. The Jew is never alone in the face of God; the Torah is always with him. A Jew without the Torah is obsolete. The Torah is not the wisdom but the destiny of Israel, not our literature but our essence.

God's Appointed Times

- Let's take a step back and talk about God's appointed times
- **Read Leviticus 23:1-2 -- Moadim**
- These are times that Hashem has appointed as holy days, days set aside for worshiping Him and designed to show us what He is doing in the grand scheme of history.
- The *Moadim* form a year-long cycle, and are designed to teach us about the nature of God, how He works in the world, and what His plan is for humanity.
- These holidays were given to the Jewish people, the children of Israel, and are integral to their covenant relationship with God. Each *moed* is connected to an important time in the history and life of Israel, and is an annual reminder of how important that covenant relationship is to God.

- For those of us who believe in the Messiah, the *moadim* take on even more meaning, because each one of these holy days is also connected to an important event in the redemptive and restorative plan of God. We will talk about these deeper meanings as we go.
- The *moadim* bring the spiritual into the physical, they help us bridge the gap between those two worlds. We are physical beings, and the systems and the cycles of the holidays help us connect with God and understand Him better.
- There are some common patterns that you'll see in the *moadim*.
 - The first day of the festivals (and last day of Pesach and Sukkot) are days with many of the standard Sabbath regulations.
 - מְלָאכָה עֲבֹדָה *melechet avodah* = normally translated "laborious work"
 - However, the main difference between these holidays and the weekly Sabbath is that God removed the prohibition on cooking on these days.
 - Additional (*mussaf*) offerings are added to the normal daily offerings on each day of the holiday.
 - **Read Deuteronomy 16:16–17** – Three of these holidays (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) are pilgrimage festivals: days on which the men of Israel are obligated to appear before God in the Tabernacle/Temple.

The Omer Offering

- **Read Leviticus 23:9–14**
- This holiday is sometimes called the Festival of Firstfruits because the Omer offering is the first fruits of the barley harvest.
- The Omer is offered on Nissan 16, the day after the first day of Passover. (Side note: There was a difference of opinion between the Saducees and the Pharisees in the time of Jesus about the timing of this offering, but we can talk about that when we talk about the Gospels.)
- On this day, the people bring the first harvest of their grain (typically barley ripens first) to offer it to HaShem. It was prohibited to eat any of the new harvest until after this offering was given.
- The priest waved the grain sheaves before the Lord in front of the altar, then processed sheaves of barley, separating out the grain and grinding it into flour. It had to total 2 omers (about 7 lbs) of flour. Then that was mixed with oil and burned on the altar, along with 1 liter of wine.
- Hashem's Restoration Plan:
 - Messiah rose from the dead on the 16th of Nissan, the day when the Omer offering of first fruits was brought before HaShem.
 - Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:20–23, "But the fact is, Christ has been raised from the dead, **the first fruits of those who are asleep**. For since by a man death came, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming..."

Counting the Omer

- **Read Leviticus 23:15–16**
- Hashem says to count out the days between Passover and the next holiday Shavuot, beginning with the day when the Omer offering was brought.
- We are to count 7 weeks of 7 days each, a total of 49 days.
- During this time, it is traditional to focus on preparing our hearts for the giving of the Torah, just like the children of Israel prepared for the giving of the Torah when they approached Mount Sinai.
- In the *siddur* (prayer book) the count for each day is connected with two of the *sefirot*, the emanations or expressions of HaShem, elements of His character that we focus on each day.

Shavuot

- **Read Leviticus 23:121**

- **Read Deuteronomy 16:9–12**
- This festival is called the festival of Weeks (*Shavuot*). The English name Pentecost derives from the Greek word *pentecoste*, which means "fiftieth day."
- This day is a Sabbath rest day, with food preparation being allowed. It is also one of the three pilgrimage festivals.
- The festival memorializes the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, which happened 50 days after the original Passover in Egypt.
- This holiday is also called the Feast of First Fruits (*bikkurim*) because it is on this day that the first fruits of the Wheat harvest were brought to the Tabernacle/Temple.
 - To understand the First Fruits offerings and the joy of these celebrations, let's **read Deuteronomy 26:1–15**
 - Also, we can read a passage out of the **Mishnah (Bikkurim 3:1-8)**. This passage vividly describes a pilgrimage of Israelites bringing their *bikkurim* (first fruits) to the Temple. They converged on Jerusalem from all over the land of Israel.
- This festival is also connected with the story of Ruth, because right after God gives the instructions about how to celebrate Shavuot and offer the first fruits of your wheat harvest, in Leviticus 23:22 God commands the Israelites not to harvest the corners of their fields, which is a key element in the story of Ruth. Also tradition tells us that King David, who descended from Ruth, was born and also died on Shavuot.
- Two Loaves
 - Leviticus 23:16–17 – You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread as a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the LORD.
 - In the previous verses we read about the Omer offering given at the beginning of the Omer cycle. In that case, the priest mixes one batch of barley flour into dough with oil, waves it before the LORD with frankincense, touches it to the four corners of the altar, then bakes the dough into a single loaf of bread so that it can be eaten.
 - Why **two** loaves at Shavuot? On a basic level, it represents a double portion of blessing in the wheat harvest
 - Why were these loaves allowed to be leavened?
 - Leviticus 2:11-13 – ‘No grain offering, which you bring to the LORD, shall be made with leaven, for you shall not offer up in smoke any leaven or any honey as an offering by fire to the LORD. As an offering of first fruits you shall bring them to the LORD, but they shall not ascend as a soothing aroma on the altar. Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God will not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.
 - So, no other grain offering is allowed to be leavened, but in this case, Leviticus 23:17 explicitly says “baked with leaven”
 - The simplest explanation is that this holiday is connected to Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, through the counting of the omer, and it represents a completion of the Passover season.
 - Leaven = *seor* = the sourdough starter
 - The process had to be re-started 40 days before, and the culturing process takes some time.
 - Daniel Lancaster: “Think of it this way: When the children of Israel left Egypt, they were leaving behind the culture of slavery, idolatry, and immorality that had defined their identity in Egypt. For forty-nine days, they traveled through the wilderness. On the fiftieth day, they received a new culture to replace the one they had left behind: the Torah

Giving of the Spirit

- **Read Jeremiah 31:31-40**
 - Jeremiah prophesied after the destruction of the first temple about a new covenant that God says he will make with the Jewish People.

- What does he say will happen with this new covenant he makes with Israel?
 - put My law within them
 - write it on their heart
 - relationship: I will be their God, and they shall be My people
 - they will all know Me
 - I will forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember
 - The Jewish people will never cease to be God's covenant people
 - He will never reject His people
 - the city will be rebuilt for the LORD
- **Read Ezekiel 36:24–30**
- **Read Acts 2:1-4**
- Set the stage. Where were they?
 - The text here literally says they were together "in the it" or colloquially "in the place". Verse 41 says: So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.
 - Where in the city of Jerusalem would there have been room to 3,000 people to not only hear Peter speaking but also get baptized? The Temple! Look at what verse 46 says: "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple."
- What time was it?
 - Acts 2:15 – Peter says it is only the “third hour of the day”
 - This would have been after the morning prayer service and while the morning sacrifices were still going.
- What was their disposition?
 - Exodus 19:2 says, “and there Israel camped in front of the mountain.” The Hebrew text uses the singular form of the word “camped,” and the Jewish sages derived from this that there people came to Mount Sinai in perfect unity, and encamped there as if they were one man.
 - Acts 2:1 alludes to this same unity: “they were all together in one place”
- Connections to Shavuot
 - The giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai was a special time, accompanied by signs and wonders.
 - Exodus 20:18 tells us
 - וְכָל־הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת־הַלְפָּידִם
 - And all the people saw the voices and the torches...
 - Most English translations try to make that easier to read by saying something like:
 - And all the people were watching *and hearing* the thunder and the lightning flashes, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it all*, they trembled and stood at a distance. (NASB)
 - But the ancient sages understood the text literally, that the people of Israel *saw* the voices, and saw torches of fire.
 - The sages also say that "the voices" means that the words that HaShem spoke from Mount Sinai divided into the 70 languages of the 70 nations of the earth.
 - b. Shabbat 88b -- The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught with regard to the verse: “Behold, is My word not like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that shatters a rock?” (Jeremiah 23:29). Just as this hammer breaks a stone into several fragments, so too, each and every utterance that emerged from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, [at Sinai] divided into seventy languages.
 - Exodus Rabbah 5:9 -- And it is stated (Exodus 20:15), "And all the people saw the voices" - it is not written, "voice," here, but rather, "voices." Rabbi Yochanan said, "The voice would go out and divide into seventy voices for the seventy tongues, so that all the nations would hear."
- Do you see the connections between what the sages say happened at the giving of the Torah on Shavuot and the giving of the Holy Spirit on Shavuot?

- Just as the people of Israel "saw the voices and the torches," the disciples saw and heard the wind and the flames, and the Word of HaShem went out in all of the 70 languages of the world.
- To the Apostles, these connections were confirmations of their faith in the Messiah.
- Di made another connection in our Through the Bible class between the 3,000 people who died not long after Shavuot and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai because of the sin of the golden calf, and the 3,000 people who came into the Kingdom as a result of the giving of the Spirit on Shavuot 1400 years later.
- Why did God send us His Spirit?
 - John 14:25–26 – “These things I have spoken to you while remaining with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.”
- What was the after-effect of the giving of the Spirit?
 - **Read Acts 2:42–47**
 - Theologian Scot McKnight sums it up: “Here we find a society marked by:
 - Restoration with God in prayer and miracles
 - Connection to Jesus through the apostolic teaching and leadership
 - Elimination of injustices and impoverishment and hunger by caring for one another
 - Engaging the culture around them with the gospel.
 - Serving instead of seeking power.”

Ruth

Torah commentators offer two major theses to explain the custom:

- that Ruth was the model of Torah acceptance, and
- that without her Jewish history could not continue.

Ruth wanted to attach herself to God to cleave to Him, to connect herself to the source of all life and being. The only way to do this was to attach herself to a person who was already attached in this way to God. Thus she followed Naomi the person, rather than the abstract truth. We read her story on Shavuot to teach us that this is the type of Torah acceptance we are seeking. We are not after God's laws. We are seeking to attach ourselves to God Himself. When we attach ourselves with Him, He then inspires us to follow his laws.

Mishnah, Bikkurim 3:1-8

How does one set aside *bikkurim*? A man goes down into his field, he sees a fig that ripened, or a cluster of grapes that ripened, or a pomegranate that ripened, he ties a reed-rope around it and says: “Let these be *bikkurim*.” Rabbi Shimon says: even so, he must again designate them as *bikkurim* after they have been plucked from the soil.

How were the *bikkurim* taken up [to Jerusalem]? All [the inhabitants of] the cities of the *ma'amad* [the representatives] would assemble in the city of the *ma'amad*, and they would spend the night in the open street and they would not entering any of the houses. Early in the morning the officer would say: “Let us arise and go up to Zion, into the house of the Lord our God” (Jeremiah 31:5).

Those who lived near [Jerusalem] would bring fresh figs and grapes, while those who lived far away would bring dried figs and raisins. An ox would go in front of them, his horns bedecked with gold and with an olive-crown on its head. The flute would play before them until they would draw close to Jerusalem. When they drew close to Jerusalem they would send messengers in advance, and they would adorn their *bikkurim*. The governors and chiefs and treasurers [of the Temple] would go out to greet them, and according to the rank of the entrants they would go forth. All the skilled artisans of Jerusalem would stand up before them and greet them saying, “Our brothers, men of such and such a place, we welcome you in peace.”

The flute would play before them, until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount even King Agrippas would take the basket and place it on his shoulder and walk as far as the Temple Court. When he got to the Temple Court, the Levites would sing the song: “I will extol You, O Lord, for You have raised me up, and You have not let my enemies rejoice over me” (Psalms 30:2).

The birds [tied to] the basket were [offered] as whole burnt-offerings, and those which they held in their hands they gave to the priests.

While the basket was still on his shoulder he recites from: “I acknowledge this day before the LORD your God that I have entered the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to assign us” (Deuteronomy 26:3) until he completes the passage. Rabbi Judah said: until [he reaches] “My father was a fugitive Aramean” (v.. When he reaches, “My father was a fugitive Aramean”, he takes the basket off his shoulder and holds it by its edges, and the priest places his hand beneath it and waves it. He then recites from “My father was a fugitive Aramean” until he completes the entire passage. He then deposits the basket by the side of the altar, bow and depart.

Originally all who knew how to recite would recite while those who did not know how to recite, others would read it for them [and they would repeat the words]. But when they refrained from bringing, they decreed that they should read the words to both those who could and those who could not [recite so that they could repeat after them].

The rich would bring their *bikkurim* in baskets overlaid with silver or gold, while the poor used wicker-baskets of peeled willow-branches, and the baskets and the *bikkurim* were given to the priest.