

Shavuot - Feast of Weeks or Pentecost



The fourth feast mentioned in Leviticus 23 is Shavuot, Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks. It is celebrated fifty days after the Sabbath that follows Passover. **Leviticus 23:15-21** *"From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD. Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the LORD, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings--an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering. The priest is to wave the two lambs before the LORD as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. They are a sacred offering to the LORD for the priest. On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. (NIV)* Shavuot, like the Feast of First Fruits, does not fall on the same date every year. However, it always celebrated on a Sunday, exactly seven weeks after the Feast of First Fruits.

According to Jewish tradition, Shavuot is the celebration of two important events:

1. Thanksgiving for the spring harvest.
2. The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Because the counting of the seven weeks is linked to the Sabbath within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, there is a strong connection between Passover and Shavuot. Passover physically freed the Jews from bondage, but the giving of the Torah on Shavuot redeemed them spiritually with the light of God's Word. The Torah teaches the people of the world how to relate to God and to mankind.

The counting of the forty-nine days from the Sabbath that follows Passover to the Sabbath before Shavuot - or Pentecost - is called the "Counting of the Omer." An omer is a unit of measure. On the Sunday following Passover, in



the days of the Temple, an omer of barley was cut down and brought to the Temple as an offering (Feast of First Fruits). According to Hebrew tradition, the counting is done in the prescribed manner. After the evening prayers, a blessing is recited, “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to count omer.” Then the counter simply says, “Today is ___ days of the omer.” Following the counting of the omer (stating the number of days it has been since the Sabbath that follows Passover) it is customary to recite Psalm 67. This psalm contains forty-nine Hebrew words, corresponding to the days of the omer.



During the 49 days of the Omer count, the wheat crop ripens in Israel. By the end of the Omer count, the crop is ready for harvest and the First Fruits of the wheat crop are brought to the Temple on Shavuot.

Traditionally, the period of the Omer count is to be a time of spiritual introspection as the counters prepare themselves for Shavuot. Because it begins during the Passover season and ends on Shavuot, it denotes remembrance of the journey from Egypt to Sinai.

How Shavuot Is Celebrated

Jewish customs for celebrating Shavuot:

1. It is to be treated as a Sabbath. **Leviticus 23:21** “*On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work.*” (NIV)
2. The Ten Commandments are read in synagogues to reaffirm the covenant with G-d and His Torah.
3. The Book of Ruth is read. Opinions differ regarding its specific significance.
 - a. It is a story about harvest so it is fitting to read on Shavuot.
 - b. Ruth was a sincere convert who embraced Judaism with all her heart. On Shavuot all Jews were converts having accepted the Torah and all of its precepts.
 - c. Shavuot is the traditional birthday and *yahrtzeit* (day of passing) of King David, and the book of Ruth records his ancestry. Ruth and her husband Boaz were King David's great-grandparents.



4. On Shavuot it is customary to adorn the home and synagogue with fruits, flowers and greenery, commemorating the Temple era in which the first fruits of harvest were offered on Shavuot. Jewish Sages also teach that although Mount Sinai was situated in a desert, the mountain bloomed and sprouted flowers when the Torah was given.
5. On Shavuot it is customary to eat dairy foods. A number of reasons explain this custom:
 - a. With the giving of the Torah, the Jews therefore became obligated to observe the kosher laws. Since the Torah was given on Shabbat no cattle could be slaughtered nor could utensils be koshered; thus on that day they ate dairy.
 - b. The Torah is also symbolically likened to milk. The Hebrew word for milk is *chalav*. When the numerical value of each of the letters in the word *chalav* are added together - 8; 30; 2 - the total is forty. Forty is the number of days Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Torah.

According to Deuteronomy 16, Shavuot is the second of three Feasts the Lord commanded the children of Israel to come to Jerusalem in order to celebrate. **Deuteronomy 16:16-17** *“Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.”* (NIV)

Spiritual Significance For Christians

In **Acts 1:4-5**, Jesus told His disciples *“Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”* (NLT) Jesus did not begin His earthly ministry until the Holy Spirit filled Him. **Matthew 3:16-17** *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* (NIV)



On Shavuot (Pentecost) God sent the Holy Spirit, thereby fulfilling his promise. **Acts 2:1-4** *“On the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection, the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.”* (NLT) Immediately the

ministry of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ began. Peter stood up and preached. **Acts 2:37-42** *“Peter's words convicted them deeply, and they said to him and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you and to your children, and even to the Gentiles--all who have been called by the Lord our God.’ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, ‘Save yourselves from this generation that has gone astray!’ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church--about three thousand in all. They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.”* (NLT) God fulfilled Shavuot by sending the Holy Spirit. **It is the birthday of the His church.**

When God gave the Holy Spirit to the Church, He brought into spiritual fulfillment the two Jewish traditions for Shavuot:

1. The Holy Spirit brings in the harvest of souls to the kingdom. Salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit.
2. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher, imparting us the truth of God’s Holy Torah.

The reading of the Book of Ruth has great significance to Christians. Ruth was a Gentile who embraced the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; her love for Naomi transcended human love. Naomi taught Ruth about the God of Israel. When Naomi urged Ruth not to go with her back to Israel, Ruth replied, *“Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.”* **Ruth 1:16-17** (NIV) We are thereby reminded of our debt to the Jewish people, for showing us the One True God, for faithfully preserving His Word, and for bringing us Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the world. Therefore, we are honor-bound to respond to the Jewish people and the nation of Israel in the steadfast manner of Ruth - with unconditional love, blessing and kindness.

1. Ruth loved Naomi unconditionally. Even when Naomi was succumbing to despair, Ruth refused to forsake her. We are to show the same unconditional love for Israel.
2. Ruth blessed Naomi physically by helping her return to Israel, her homeland, and gleaning in the fields so she and Naomi would have food to eat. **Ruth 2:17-18** *“So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.”* (NIV) We as Christians should do



exactly what Ruth did, help Jews return to their homeland and then once they are there help them financially to stay there. Shavuot would be a great time to give an offering to Israel.

3. Ruth showed kindness to Naomi. She made certain Naomi was neither abandoned nor forsaken. Even when she married Boaz, she continued to show Naomi kindness. **Ruth 4:13-15** *“So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: ‘Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.’”* (NIV) Boaz represents to us a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though we have been blessed to receive Him as our kinsman redeemer, we must never neglect to honor or show kindness to the Jewish people.

Shavuot – an observance of celebration and thanksgiving – offers a wonderful opportunity for Christians to extend blessings to the Jews and the nation of Israel by showing an act of kindness. Here are ministries you could contribute to that are helping bless the Jewish people:



Bridges for Peace – www.bridgesforpeace.com



International Fellowship of Christians and Jews - www.ifcj.org



International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem – www.icej.org



Faith Bible Chapel, Ariel Adoption Project –
303-424-2121- Contact Paula Romer

Shavuot is the last of the spring feasts. In their order, Jesus fulfilled each of the spring feasts on their exact day (appointed time).

1. Jesus was crucified on Passover, becoming our sacrificial Passover Lamb.
2. Jesus fulfilled the Feast of Unleavened Bread, representing the embodiment of the sinless Lamb of God.
3. Jesus rose from the dead during the Feast of First Fruits.
4. Jesus fulfilled His promise, sending the Holy Spirit on Shavuot (Pentecost).