

A Short Explanation of Shavuot

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Beginning with Leviticus 23:4 we read:

These are the designated times of ADONAI, the holy convocations you are to proclaim at their designated times. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between sundown and complete darkness, comes Pesach for ADONAI. On the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of matzah; for seven days you are to eat matzah. (Leviticus 23:4-6)

And continuing with verse 10:

Tell the people of Isra'el, 'After you enter the land I am giving you and harvest its ripe crops, you are to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the cohen. He is to wave the sheaf before ADONAI, so that you will be accepted; the cohen is to wave it on the day after the Shabbat. On the day that you wave the sheaf, you are to offer a male lamb without defect, in its first year, as a burnt offering for ADONAI. (Leviticus 23:10-12)

So, we have Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a Promised Land, and a harvest (upon coming into the land), the firstfruits of which belong to God. The Israelites were to commemorate that harvest by waiving a sheaf of barley, and sacrificing an unblemished male lamb. We commonly refer to the day as *Yom HaBikkurim* (or "Day of Firstfruits"), and we are instructed to commemorate the day year after year:

You are not to eat bread, dried grain or fresh grain until the day you bring the offering for your God; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations, no matter where you live. (Leviticus 23:14)

Now, beginning with Leviticus 23:15, we are commanded to count 50 days and 7 Sabbaths toward the next designated time, the "Feast of Weeks" (or *Shavuot*), that is also referred to in Scripture as a "day of firstfruits."

From the day after the day of rest- that is, from the day you bring the sheaf for waving- you are to count seven full weeks, until the day after the seventh week; you are to count fifty days; and then you are to present a new grain offering to ADONAI. You must bring bread from your homes for waving- two loaves made with one gallon of fine flour, baked with leaven- as firstfruits for ADONAI. (Leviticus 23:15-17)

The first *Yom HaBikkurim* is the Spring barley harvest, and the second *Yom HaBikkurim* (*Shavuot*) is the wheat harvest. This process of counting days and weeks is called "Counting the Omer" (An "omer" is a measure of barley).

So, we have a second day of firstfruits, and Scripture says that on this day (in addition to the agricultural and other offerings), the Israelites were once again to sacrifice lambs – this time not one lamb, but seven:

Leviticus 23:18 “*And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD.*”

And here is a piece of information that is not in Scripture, but is in the orally transmitted tradition known as the *Talmud*. It seems that shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jewish leaders of their day came to believe that *Shavuot* was the anniversary of the *Torah* that was given at Mount Sinai. We do not consider the *Talmud* authoritative as we do Scripture, but we know that not all the events of history are recorded in Scripture. So, let’s suppose, for a moment, that God actually gave this information about *Shavuot* to the Jewish leaders, and let’s see where it takes us.

1. We have Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
2. We have a prophecy of coming into a promised land and a first harvest.
3. We have a Day of Firstfruits (*Yom HaBikkurim*) when a sheaf of barley is waived, and an unblemished lamb is offered to the Lord.
4. We are instructed to count 50 days and 7 weeks from *Yom HaBikkurim* to a second day of firstfruits called *Shavuot*, when two loaves of bread are waived, and not one, but seven unblemished lambs are offered to the Lord.
5. We have the additional fact that early Jewish leaders came to regard *Shavuot* as the anniversary of when God gave the *Torah* to Israel on Mount Sinai.

Now we take a long jump in time to the year of Yeshua’s death, when we see the beginnings of the New Covenant, and the unfolding of what we have just recounted. Yeshua celebrated the Passover that was to be His last and, that year as every year, the Israelites sacrificed their Passover lambs. Unbeknown to them, this year, Yeshua was destined to be one of those lambs.

Yeshua died, and was resurrected on the first day of the week which, according to our understanding, was *Yom HaBikkurim*; how appropriate, since Paul says of Yeshua that He is the first fruit of the resurrection:

For since death came through a man, also the resurrection of the dead has come through a man. For just as in connection with Adam all die, so in connection with the Messiah all will be made alive. But each in his own order: the Messiah is the firstfruits; (1 Corinthians 15:21-23)

Yeshua walked the earth in his resurrected body for forty of the 50 days of the *Omer* count, and then left the earth to join His Father in Heaven. But he instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for someone He called the “comforter” and whom we now know was the Holy Spirit. Yeshua's disciples did not understand what He meant, but they were going to Jerusalem anyway to perform their annual *Shavuot* sacrifices. Little did they know that that year, on that day, they would be visited by the Holy Spirit who (as promised) came in place of the Lamb of God (Yeshua) who had taken leave of them ten days earlier. This special *Shavuot* is the day Christians call “Pentecost.”

Where does the giving of the *Torah* fit in? John 1:1-3, 14 reveals that Yeshua was the "Word" of God made flesh.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”... “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Now, putting this all together: *Shavuot* is a day to remember God's agricultural provision for Israel, but it is also a prophetic foreshadowing of God's greatest provision – His visitations to us – first as the *Torah* (the written Word – that is, if the rabbis are correct), second as the Messiah (the Word made flesh – see my paper "Messiah Born in the Spring"), and third, as the Holy Spirit. So, although Scripture first introduces *Shavuot* as a day to be thankful to God for the Harvest, as it relates to the *Torah*, Messiah Yeshua, the Holy Spirit, and the New Covenant, its significance is so much greater.