

The Festival of Shavuot

Introduction

“And from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, you shall count for yourselves: seven completed Sabbaths. Until the morrow after the seventh Sabbath you count fifty days, then you shall bring a new grain offering to YHWH. Bring from your dwellings for a wave offering two loaves of bread, of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour they are, baked with leaven, first-fruits to YHWH.” (Lev.23:15-17).

When it comes to this particular Festival, Scripture is vague; we are left in doubt about its timing and what it represents. We are told to count a definite period starting from the day after a Sabbath but Scripture is unclear which Sabbath, similarly we are told to wave two loaves of bread but not told why or what they symbolise.

We associate Shavuot with the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, the waving of the first fruits of the wheat harvest and the out-pouring of the Ruach HaKodesh (Acts 2) but are we celebrating correctly? Not if we are to take any notice of the past, the ancients celebrated this Festival well before the Sinai event and certainly before what is described in Acts 2. Thus the Festival of Shavuot was celebrated before some of the events we believe it to represent. Now doesn't that realisation create a paradigm shift in our understanding? Another issue for us is how did the ancients calculate the Count of the Omer and date Shavuot.

When Scripture fails to provide the answers we should not, indeed, according to Mashiach (Matt.15:9) we must not, make up our own rules, thus with respect to;

1. The Correct Date for Shavuot and
2. What Shavuot Memorialises

we have to search other avenues of information: we are forced to look beyond the Scriptures and consider literature that was never canonised.

The extra-canonical information we will be considering is from; the Dead Sea scrolls and the book of Jubilees with some references to the book of Enoch. Oftentimes these two books are viewed with a jaundiced eye merely because they were never canonised. Yet the books of Jubilees and Enoch were, in both cases, recited to the recipient by a malak; a heavenly messenger of YHWH, this itself is a compelling argument for these two books to be considered in the same vein as the Scriptures.¹ It is astonishing that lower man could award himself the authority to decide information from a divine source was unworthy of the canon. Man's decision to exclude this literature was not so much because it lacked credibility but more likely because it obstructed a particular agenda/philosophy.

From the three sources: the Dead Sea Scrolls, the book of Enoch and the book of Jubilees we are, insofar as this festival is concerned, able to resolve the above issues and ascertain the true date for Shavuot and what this celebration is about.

Dating Shavuot

“Speak to the children of Israel, and you shall say to them, ‘When you come into the land which I give you, and shall reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest to the priest and he shall wave the sheaf before YHWH for your acceptance. On the morrow after the Sabbath the priest waves it.’ (Lev.23:10-11)

“And from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, you shall count for yourselves: seven completed Sabbaths. ‘Until the morrow after the

¹ Refer to the separate article 'Exclusivity Or Not of the Canon of Scripture' found at www.undertorah.com under Miscellaneous articles

seventh Sabbath you count fifty days, then you shall bring a new grain offering to YHWH.”
(Lev.23:15-16).

The period specified in Lev.23:15-16 is commonly referred to as the Counting of the Omer. As the verse instructs the Omer period is to start and finish on the day after a Sabbath and is to comprise seven Sabbaths, these facts are very clear. Less clear is from which Sabbath the counting is to begin.

Where to start the Count of the Omer is an issue of contention within Judaism. The Karaites start the 50 day count from the Sunday falling within the week of unleavened bread, whilst others of Orthodox following commence the counting from the second day of unleavened bread. So which is correct, could it be neither is correct? There is a verse from Exodus that is generally overlooked, yet for those who believe the Torah was given on Shavuot the verse does have an impact on this issue,

*In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, **the same day** came they into the wilderness of Sinai.* (Exod.19:1)

The phrase 'the same day' is translated 'on that day' in some scriptures. Whatever translation is used the use of the word 'same' in this verse is ambiguous and may be interpreted as meaning any of the following;

- The first day of the third month,
- The third day of the third month,
- The same day of the week as that on which they left Egypt,
- The same date of the month they left Egypt.

Taking (a)–(d) into consideration, the rules of neither the Karaites nor the Orthodox satisfy any of these alternatives,

Month 1	Date	Solar Calendar	Days	Omer Count		Event
				Orthodox	Karaite	
Aviv	14	Tue	0			Pesach
	15	Wed	1			Day 1 of unleavened bread (Shabbat)
	16	Thu	2	1		Waving of first fruits (Orthodox start)
	17	Fri	3	2		
	18	Sat	4	3		First weekly Shabbat within Matzah
	19	Sun	5	4	1	Karaite start
	20	Mon	6	5	2	
	21	Tue	7	6	3	Last day of unleavened bread
Month 2	↓					
	30	Thu		15	12	Last day of Month 1
	1	Fri		16	13	
	↓					
Month 3	30	Sat	46	45	42	Last day of Month 2
	1	Sun	47	46	43	(a)
	2	Mon	48	47	44	
	3	Tues	49	48	45	(b)
	4	Wed	50	49	46	(c)
	5	Thur	51	50	47	Shavuot (Orthodox)
	6	Frid	52		48	
	7	Sat	53		49	
	8	Sun	54		50	Shavuot (Karaite)

Unleavened Bread

Neither method of counting satisfies any of the conditions in (a) – (d), thus both philosophies ignore Exod.19:1.

Not only does neither teaching satisfy Scripture but neither Judaic authority can prove what they preach, so how can anyone have confidence in what they are advocating?

So concerning the dating of Shavuot let us consider what is said in the book of Jubilees

And in the fifth year of the fourth week of this jubilee in the third month, in the middle of the month, Abram celebrated the first fruits of the grain harvest. (Jub.15:1).

All of the non-canonical literature we are using recognises a 364 day year comprising 12 months of 30 days with four additional days added at the head of each quarter/season. Thus when it says the middle of the third month it is referring to the 15th of the third month which, on the 364 day solar calendar is the 75th day of the year. Now let us refer to an earlier chapter from Jubilees; chapter six. For brevity I have abridged what is written but have kept sufficient not to lose the context. We are only interested in the first half of the chapter which concerns the end of the flood and Noach's exit from the ark. It is important to realise that the book of Jubilees was dictated to Moshe by a malak (a heavenly messenger) and Moshe is learning what happened concerning Noach,

And He gave to Noach and his sons a sign that there should not again be a flood upon the earth. He set His bow in the cloud for a sign of the eternal covenant that there should not again be a flood on the earth to destroy it all the days of the earth. For this reason it is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets, that they should celebrate the Feast of Shavuot in this month once a year.....(Jub.6:15-17)

And this whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noach – twenty six jubilees and five weeks of years and Noach and his sons observed it for seven jubilees and one week of years, till the day of Noach's death, and from the day of Noach's death his sons did away with it until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. But Abraham observed it, and Yitzchak and Ya'akov observed it until your days, and in your days the children of Israel forgot it until you celebrated it anew on this mountain. (Jub.6:18-19).

Reading Jub.15:1 with the above, clearly it was the Festival of Shavuot that Avraham and his sons celebrated on the 15th of the third month. We are told that the festival was observed by the patriarchs, subsequently forgotten and re-instituted with Moshe. What is more the patriarchs could not have been wrong with the timing because we are told that this, as are other moedim, was written down on heavenly tablets and they would not have been allowed to celebrate it incorrectly.

The 15th of the third month is the 75th day of the year which means the start of the Count of the Omer is from the 26th day of the year (inclusive counting), which falls outside the week of unleavened bread. What this means is that we must use a calendar in which the 26th and 75th days fall immediately after a Sabbath, which is only possible using a solar calendar which recognises the equinoxes. As far as I am aware no other calendar is able to satisfy this requisite.

Starting the count of the Omer from the day after the first Sabbath after the week of Matzah is alien to most but the accuracy of doing so becomes clearer when we realise the ancients considered Pesach and the week of Matzah as a single celebration. Consider how Moshe phrases his instructions concerning this festival,

Guard the month of Abib, and perform the Passover to YHWH your Elohim, for in the month of Abib YHWH your Elohim brought you out of Mitsrayim by night. And you shall slaughter the Passover to YHWH your Elohim, from the flock and the herd, in the place where YHWH chooses to put His Name. Eat no leavened bread with it. For seven days you eat unleavened bread with it, bread of affliction, because you came out of the land of Mitsrayim in haste – so that you remember the day in which you came out of the land of Mitsrayim, all the days of your life. And no leaven should be seen with you in all your border for seven days, neither should any of the meat which you slaughter in the evening on the first day stay all night until morning. (Deut.16:1-4)

This passage clearly shows that Moshe did not consider the Pesach a separate celebration to Matzah. The Jewish historian Josephus in his Antiquities of the Jews refers to the 'Pesach week' and also talks of the eight days of unleavened bread which has to include Pesach. Josephus would be talking in terms of what was customary within Jewish society. Scroll 4Q325 of the Dead Sea Scrolls describing the priestly family in service at the time of the Pesach also talks in terms of an eight day Pesach and in the gospel, Pesach is referred to as being on the first day of 'Feast of unleavened bread' (Matt.26:17). Even the Jews today refer to the 15th Abib to be the second day of Pesach and talk in terms of 'the days (not day) of Pesach. Clearly the concept that Pesach included the week of Matzah and vice versa is overwhelming and concurs with the Zadokite understanding that the phrase, '*And from the morrow after the Sabbath*' was a reference to the first Sabbath after the completion of the week of Matzah.

Did Mashiach's Death and Resurrection Effect the Date of Shavuot?

Did Mashiach's death, resurrection and ascension affect the count of the Omer? Are we to correlate the waving of the first fruits of the crop with the first fruits of the resurrection, are they synonymous? When we collect together the following three elements: 1) that Deut.4:2 commands that the Torah is not to be meddled with, 2) Jubilees categorically states that the correct date of Shavuot 15/3 is ordained on heavenly tablets and 3) we are told Mashiach never sinned therefore He never transgressed Torah. How then could He implement a change to YHWH's calendar? What is more, at His Pesach Mashiach specifically said this is the blood of the new covenant not new calendar. If His death and resurrection was to change YHWH's calendar He had the ideal opportunity to confirm this when referring to the sign of Jonah (Matt.12:39-40). Nowhere does Mashiach mention any impending change to YHWH's calendar as a result of His death and resurrection and nowhere does Scripture use the terms 'first fruit of the harvest' and 'first fruits of the resurrection' synonymously, if this was to be correct we would have to enquire how is the second waving of the harvest at Shavuot synonymous of resurrection?

What the Festival of Shavuot Memorialises

Other than to infer thanksgiving for a successful harvest, the Scriptures provide no explanation for this celebration. Today we attach several events to this festival; First Fruits of the harvest, the giving of the Torah at Sinai and the giving of the Ruach Hakodesh (Holy Spirit) as described in Acts 2. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, this Festival was celebrated centuries before these events. So what exactly were the ancients celebrating and should we be celebrating likewise?

The book of Jubilees shows us that YHWH chose the date of Shavuot; the 15th of the third month to enact several salient events,

And He gave to Noach and his sons a sign that there should not again be a flood on the earth. And He set His bow in the cloud for a sign of the eternal covenant that there should not again be a flood on the earth to destroy it all the days of the earth. For this reason it is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets, that they should celebrate the 'Feast of Weeks' in this month once a year, to renew the covenant every year. (Jub.6:15-17)

It was on Shavuot that YHWH made a solemn promise with creation to never flood the earth again and it is commanded for us to **renew/refresh/remember** YHWH's promise at this time every year. Then we have the following additional covenants enacted on this date. To save space I have abridged both abstracts,

Jubilees chapter 14;

¹After these things, in the fourth year of this week, on the New Moon of the third month, the word of YHWH came to Abram in a dream saying "Fear not Abram: I am your defender and your reward will be exceedingly great..."⁹ And He said unto him, "Take Me a heifer of three years, and a goat of three years, and a sheep of three years, and a turtle dove, and a pigeon."¹⁰ And he took all these in the middle of the month.

¹ And in the fifth year of the fourth week of this jubilee in the third month, in the middle of the month, Abram celebrated the feast of the first fruits. ² And he offered new offerings on the alter, the first fruits of the produce unto YHWH, an heifer and a goat and a sheep on the alter as a burnt sacrifice unto YHWH; their fruit offerings and their drink offerings he offered upon the alter with frankincense. ³ And YHWH appeared to Abram and said to him, ⁴ "I am YHWH almighty; approve yourself before Me and be you perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and you and I will multiply you exceedingly." ⁵ And Abram fell on his face and YHWH talked with him, and said, ⁶ "Behold My ordinance is with you, and you shall be the father of many nations. ⁹ "And I shall establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations, for an eternal covenant so that I may be an Elohim unto you and your seed after you. ¹¹ And YHWH said unto Abraham, "And as for you do you guard My covenant, you and your seed after you and you circumcise every male after you.

Note there is no mention of two loaves of leavened bread, as we will see there was no need of such symbolism until later. So, insofar as this festival is concerned what we have so far is,

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | YHWH's covenant promise never again to flood the earth | } | Feast of Weeks |
| 2 | YHWH's covenant with Abram | | |
| 3 | The covenant of circumcision | | |
| 4 | Waving of first Fruits | | Feast of First Fruits |

Thus the Festival of Shavuot has two elements, a fact confirmed by Jubilees,

For it is the 'Feast of Weeks' and the 'Feast of First Fruits:' this feast is twofold and of a double nature: according to what is written and engraved concerning it. (Jub.6:21).

Clearly it was covenant that the ancients attached to this Festival, even the element of 'First Fruits' has covenantal implications as we will see. But we cannot ignore the covenantal element associated with the outpouring of the Ruach Hakodesh upon the disciples also at Shavuot. So post Sinai what we have for Shavuot is,

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | YHWH's covenant promise never again to flood the earth | } | Feast of Weeks |
| 2 | YHWH's covenant with Abram | | |
| 3 | The covenant of circumcision | | |
| 4 | The earthly institution of the new covenant : Acts 2 | | |
| 5 | The command to wave two loaves of leavened bread | | Feast of First Fruits |

It could be argued that item 5 should not be included because Mashiach introduced the new covenant at Pesach not Shavuot however we must remember that the new covenant is the 'Gospel' of Mashiach and it was inaugurated at Shavuot.

The question we now have is this, are we transgressing Deut.4:2 by adding to this celebration? I don't believe so. Clearly Shavuot is YHWH's appointed time to celebrate His covenants a fact confirmed by Jubilees. Items 1,2 and 3 were always a part of Torah, indeed they were written on heavenly tablets and YHWH Himself added item 4 with the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The principle here is that Shavuot is the time of a refreshing of YHWH's covenants and He tells us specifically which covenants are to be celebrated, that is those given on this date. Note again the following passage from Jubilees which states that Moshe celebrated this feast in the same manner as did the patriarchs,

And this whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noah – twenty six jubilees and five weeks of years and Noah and his sons observed it for seven jubilees and one week of years, till the day of Noah's death, and from the day of Noah's death his sons did away with it until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. But Abraham observed it, and Yitzchak and Ya'akov observed it until your days, and in your days the children of Israel forgot it until you celebrated it anew on this mountain. (Jub.6:18-19).

What all this reveals is that the cannon of Scripture is, on its own, inadequate for us to correctly observe Shavuot and proves the necessity of studying extra canonical literature.

Feast of Weeks

But what of the new covenant ordained by Mashiach should this be added to Shavuot? I would say no because this covenant was ordained at a different time and has its own specific celebration – Pesach. However, I have included this covenant in the Appendix for those who may wish not to exclude it.

The book of Jubilees leaves us in no doubt that this festival is for covenant remembrance. Unfortunately this element of Shavuot is lost today because following Judaism many are starting the count of the Omer from the wrong Sabbath and unable to attach any relevance of the 15th of the third month consequently the connection between Shavuot and covenant is lost.

Feast of First Fruits

We know that this part of the ceremony is to give thanks to YHWH for a blessed harvest which is to be symbolised by waving two loaves of wheat bread. But why this specific symbolisation, why not just wave the first sheaf of the harvest as with the barley first fruits? It is because of what the loaves represent and the intrinsic connection this festival has with covenant. However, because most have failed to recognise this connection there is confusion about what the two loaves actually symbolise. Some say the two houses of Israel: others say Jew and Gentile, whilst a third opinion is that the two loaves represent righteousness and unrighteousness. When we consider the two loaves are identical this latter opinion is illogical: how can two identical objects represent two opposites. The same philosophy can be applied to the claim Jew and Gentile. Whilst these may not be opposites they are far from identical. When we consider that this festival is about the refreshing/remembrance of covenants, it is obvious that the gentiles cannot be represented in this ceremony. YHWH never made any covenants with the Gentile nations, He only ever covenanted with Israel. As the apostle says, Gentiles wanting covenant benefits must be grafted into Israel. So Gentiles cannot be represented in this waving of First Fruits. The only alternative left is for the two loaves to be symbolic of the two houses of Israel. In other words a complete Israel is YHWH's first fruits, a fact confirmed by Jeremiah,

Holy is Israel to YHWH the first-fruits of His increase. (Jer.2:3)

But identifying what the loaves most probably represent does not explain the reason for the symbolism commanded by YHWH. Could there be several messages in this; 1) The leavened state of the loaves is a reminder that Israel will remain in a sinful condition until they accept Mashiach and His atoning sacrifice, which will happen on His return (Zach.12:10-11), when all covenant promises concerning Abram's descendants will be fulfilled. 2) Irrespective of Israel's unrighteous condition, YHWH still provides for them in remembrance of His words to the prophet (Isa. 49:15-16). 3) That Israel will remain divided until YHWH collects His body of believers at the end of this age and 4) it is a demonstration of YHWH's accessibility, even for sinners (Isa.55:7).

With all of the above in mind how should we celebrate Shavuot? I have attached an appendix at the end of this article which provides some guidance for those who wish to make use of it.

A Further Comment on Jub.6:18-19

And this whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noah – twenty six jubilees and five weeks of years and Noah and his sons observed it for seven jubilees and

one week of years, till the day of Noach's death, and from the day of Noach's death his sons did away with it until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. But Abraham observed it, and Yitzchak and Ya'akov observed it until your days, and in your days the children of Israel forgot it until you celebrated it anew on this mountain. (Jub.6:18-19).

This passage says that YHWH's commandment never again to flood the earth was celebrated in heaven from the time of creation, that is, it was celebrated by the heavenly host before it was given to Noach. The book of Jubilees leaves us in no doubt of YHWH's omniscience and that all of YHWH's commandments and rules for humanity were preordained and celebrated by the heavenly host in advance of YHWH declaring them on earth.

As an aside, this passage also provides proof of the synchronisation between heavenly worship and earthly worship. In her book on the Dead Sea Scrolls titled 'The Three Temples' Rachel Ellior explains how the scrolls describe the interaction between the malakim and the temple priests thus, when we read the closing phrase of Jubilees 3:21; '*They should keep Sabbath with us*' we can take this phrase literally. Whilst the above passage tells us that the celebration was ceased on earth there is no reason to believe heavenly worship was affected by this earthly cessation. What would have stopped was the synchronisation of worship between the two realms.

Conclusion

The Qumran community were Zadokites who YHWH says never erred (Ezek.48:11): they began the count of the Omer from the 26th day and not from any Sabbath within the week of Matzah. They were advocates of the solar calendar, believing this to be the calendar against which the heavenly host established sacred time and sacred service, a belief that is confirmed in the books of Jubilees and Enoch. They were also the temple administrators and must have had the correct timing for Shavuot. Only a solar calendar acknowledging the relevance of the vernal equinox facilitates the correct timing for the Festival of Shavuot, being the 15th of the third month and for this date to be the day after a Sabbath.

The timing of YHWH's comment to Ezekiel cannot be over-looked. Ezekiel lived during the period spanning the first and second temples and the temple administrators at this time were the Zadokite priests. Thus when YHWH says they 'never erred' He can only be referring to their performance as the temple administrators.

It was because the temple priests accepted a lunar calendar which precluded not only the correct observance of the festival of Shavuot but also the observance of the other festivals on the correct days, that the Zadokite priests separated from the temple and formed the Qumran community.² This defilement was prophesied in the book of Jubilees,

For there will be those who will assuredly make observations of the moon - how it disturbs the seasons and comes in from year to year ten days too soon. For this reason the years will come upon them when they will disturb the order and make an abominable day the day of testimony, and an unclean day a feast day and they will confound all the days, the kodesh with the unclean, and the unclean day with the kodesh; for they will go wrong as to the months and Sabbaths and feasts and jubilees. (Jub.6:36-37).

Remember these words were spoken by a malak of YHWH to Moshe and probably first penned by Moshe himself.

As said in the Introduction, Scripture is vague insofar as this festival is concerned, thankfully the book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls plug the holes left by the Scriptures and gives us the true date and the true principles behind this festival. YHWH promised the outpouring of His Ruach in the end times. We are being blessed today as YHWH reveals more of His truth. But when His truth requires us to undo old beliefs and philosophies are we humble enough to do so, or are we going to let pride stand in the way? Nowhere in the Scriptures is pride spoken of in a positive context.

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² More is explained about the cessation of the Zadokite priests in the separate article 'Which is YHWH's Calendar.'

APPENDIX

Accepting the emphasis of Shavuot is covenant renewal the following is purely a suggested procedure and liturgy for celebrating this feast;

Part 1: Festival of Weeks

The following passages referencing the individual covenants are suggested reading;

- Rainbow covenant and events leading up to it: Gen.6:9-9:17
- Abrahamic covenant starting with the initial promise YHWH made to Abram. This promise is the 'head' of all the subsequent covenants made with Israel:
 - I. Gen.12:1-3
 - II. Gen.15:1-21. YHWH reiterated this covenant with Abraham's descendants Yitzchak, Gen.26:1-5 and Ya'akov, Gen.35:9-12.
- Covenant of circumcision: Gen.17:1-14
- Giving of the Torah at Sinai: Exod.19:1-22:17,(for brevity I restrict this section), Gen.24:4-8

I would conclude the Old Testament provisions with the passages detailing the blessings and curses recited on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal Deut.28:1-68

- Institution of the new covenant: Matt.26:26-29, Acts2:1-4

After revising the individual covenants it is incumbent upon all of us to reconfirm our continuance in covenant with YHWH and you may like consider the following directive which can be recited by all partaking of this celebration,

"At this time as commanded by YHWH I reconfirm my partnership in all of the covenants YHWH Eloheinu (*YHWH my Elohim*) has offered me through Abraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov and in the new covenant sealed with the blood of Yahusha HaMashiach."

Part 2: Festival of First Fruits

Scripture only details the waving of two loaves of leavened bread without identifying what the loaves symbolise, thus, insofar as Scripture is concerned, it is difficult to adopt a liturgy corresponding to this action. The following is proposed in harmony with the explanation offered in the attached article and for those in agreement it may be advantageous to revisit this section of the article.

Today YHWH's Israel, the impending Israel of the millennium will be a community of believers in Mashiach – 'His Body.' So for those who have repented and accepted Mashiach do the two unleavened loaves have any significance? Insofar as the loaves symbolise the unrighteous condition of the House of Ya'akov the answer is no: the body of Mashiach has no relationship with a disobedient Israel. However, we will never be deserving of salvation and as stated in the article, within this symbolism there is the acknowledgment of YHWH's ever existing grace irrespective of human weakness. It is this aspect of the two loaves that we should never forget. So, as instructed in Leviticus, the host should wave the two loaves and all partaking may recite words such as,

"Heavenly Father: YHWH Eloheinu, we are forever wretched and so we come before you always in repentance, undeserving of your grace and favour and so we give thanks that you are a compassionate Elohim who promises to hear the cries of a repentant heart. Thank you Yahusha Mashiach."

I stress the above is a suggested format only.