

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 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? So we need to consider how the ancients calculated the Count of the Omer and what they were memorialising.

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 this literature is looked at with a jaundiced eye merely because it was 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. It is astonishing that lower man could award himself the authority to decide information from a divine source was unworthy of canonisation. 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 vagueness 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 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 it does 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;

- a) The first day of the third month,
- b) The third day of the third month,
- c) The same day of the week as that on which they left Egypt,
- d) 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 of Travel	Omer Count		Event
				Orthodox	Karaite	
Aviv	14	Tue	0			Pesach
	15	Wed	1			First day of unleavened bread
	16	Thu	2	1		Waving of first fruits (Orthodox)
	17	Fri	3	2		
	18	Sat	4	3		
	19	Sun	5	4	1	Waving of first fruits (Karaite)
	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?

Of the four possibilities we can rule out (d) because we will prove later that Moshe was on the mountain itself on the 15th of the month, the date they left Egypt and there were three days of cleansing before the event at Sinai, so they must have arrived at the location at least three days earlier and considering their number and that they had to organise a camp it most probably was earlier than this. To use the word 'same' to express either (a) or (b) is unusual and I favour possibility (c).

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).

The non-canonical literature we are using; the Dead Sea Scrolls, Enoch and Jubilees, all recognise a 364 day year comprising 12 months of 30 days with four additional days added at each quarter. Thus when it says the middle of the third month it is referring to the 15th of the third month that is, the 75th day of the year. Now let us refer to an earlier chapter from Jubilees; chapter six. To save time and space 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).

Clearly it was the Festival of Shavuot that Avraham and his sons celebrated on the 15th of the third month and the phrase, 'until you celebrated it anew on this mountain' would infer Moshe too was on Mount Sinai on the 15th of the third month and celebrated this Festival.

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 influence the equinoxes have on the calendar. As far as I am aware no other calendar is able to satisfy this requisite.¹

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 Ruach Hakodesh (Holy Spirit) as described in Acts 2 and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. 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 that the Festival of Shavuot has a much greater relevance than is recognised today,

¹ More is explained on this point in the separate article 'Which is YHWH's Calendar.'

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. 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. And YHWH appeared to Abram and said to him, "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." And Abram fell on his face and YHWH talked with him, and said, "Behold My ordinance is with you, and you shall be the father of many nations. (Jub.15:1-6).*

*Note there is no mention of two loaves of leavened bread, there was no need of such symbolism until later.

These verses tell us that YHWH confirmed His oath to Abram on the 15th of the third month but there is even more significance to this date,

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 15th of the third month that YHWH made a solemn promise with creation to never flood the earth again and it is commanded for us to **renew** (not just celebrate) YHWH's promise at this time every year. So, insofar as this festival is concerned what we have so far is,

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|---|--|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | YHWH's covenant promise never again to flood the earth | } | Feast of Weeks |
| 2 | YHWH's Covenant with Abram | | |
| 3 | 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).

However there is more,

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).

Shavuot is the time to remember and renew covenant, it is therefore logical to assume that the Torah was re-introduced to the people on this date. We know that the people arrived at Sinai during the third month and the malak's use of the phrase 'you celebrated it anew on this mountain' would confirm that Moshe was on Mount Sinai on the 15th. So post Sinai we would have the following,

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|---|--|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | YHWH's covenant promise never again to flood the earth | } | Feast of Weeks |
| 2 | YHWH's Covenant with Abram | | |
| 3 | The Re-introduction of the Torah at Mt. Sinai | | |
| 4 | Waving of First Fruits | | Feast of First Fruits |

Feast of Weeks

Post Sinai, the ancients identified the Festival of Weeks with YHWH's covenants beginning with the Rainbow Covenant concluded with Noach, the Covenant with Abram and culminating with the Covenant given through Moshe at Sinai. Although there is no explicit instruction for the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants to be added to this celebration, when we consider that this festival is the anniversary for covenant remembrance and renewal and that YHWH chose for both covenant events to coincide with the date of Shavuot this I believe, is sufficient evidence for these events to be included in this celebration. Whilst we acknowledge the outpouring of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) on this date, it lacks any covenant element and adding this event to the Feast of Weeks celebration is baseless.

The book of Jubilees leaves us in no doubt that this festival is for covenant remembrance and renewal. Unfortunately this element of Shavuot is lost today because Judaism insists on following a lunar calendar which, denying the relevance of the 15th of the third month, is unable to recognise the connection between Shavuot and covenant.

Feast of First Fruits

What is readily accepted by everyone is the requirement to wave two loaves of wheat bread but why? 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 renewing covenants, it is obvious that the gentiles cannot be represented in this ceremony. YHWH never made any covenants with the nations, He only ever covenanted with Israel. As the apostle says, Gentiles wanting covenant benefits must be grafted in to 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)

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).

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 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).

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 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 with the malakim coming down and

joining in earthly worship of YHWH thus, when we read the closing phrase of Jubilees 3:21; *'They should keep Shabbat 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 interaction between the two realms.

Conclusion

The Qumran community 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. Only the solar calendar starting with the vernal equinox facilitates the correct timing for the Festival of Shavuot that is, the 15th of the third month and for this day to be the day after the Sabbath.

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 Shabbats and feasts and jubilees. (Jub.6:36-37).

Remember these words were spoken by a malak of YHWH.

As said in the Introduction, Scripture is vague insofar as this festival is concerned, thankfully the book of Jubilees plugs the holes left by the Scriptures and explains 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.'