

THE FEAST OF WEEKS

Selected Scriptures

Introduction:

For thousands of years, people have been building walls—walls to protect and defend themselves; walls designed to separate and divide people. There are many examples we could cite:

- The Great wall of China – stretching for more than 1500 miles, most of it 25 feet high and 12 feet across, wide enough for horses to travel on. It took almost 1500 years to build and was designed to keep northern invaders out of China. It still stands today but really only as a tourist attraction and as a monument to fear, isolation and separatism.
- The Berlin Wall, built to split the city of Berlin with the intent of keeping the capitalist influence of the west out of the communist country of eastern Germany. In 1989 that great wall was destroyed.
- The West Bank Wall in Israel – most of it is a fence, but in places there is a great barrier designed to protect the residents of Israel from the guns and grenades of the terrorists who would seek their destruction.

There is another wall described in the Bible—in the passage in Ephesians that we read earlier. (*Read Eph. 2:11-12*) This wall is not made of bricks or concrete, but of *“the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.”* Paul refers to it as *“the dividing wall of hostility”* (KJV – *“the middle wall of partition”*). This wall has also resulted in isolation and separatism, in this case between Jews and Gentiles. As one writer put it, *“The post-exilic history of Judaism became the history of a ‘fenced’ community. But a fence, while it preserves, also excludes. The Torah, which differentiated the Jew from others, also separated him from them.”*

The tearing down of that “dividing wall of hostility” is foreshadowed in one of the key feasts on the Jewish calendar, the Feast of Weeks or Shavuot, also called Pentecost. This morning we are going to look at this festival and see how it is fulfilled in Yeshua, the Messiah.

Before we get into the details of the Feast of Shavuot, let’s just take a few moments to review. There are seven main Jewish feasts or festivals that were instituted by God, besides the Sabbath day which was to be observed weekly on the seventh day of the week. Three of these festivals were to be observed in the spring and three in the fall. All of the festivals were designed to remind the Jewish people of various aspects of God’s provision and protection for them as people and as a nation. But more than that, they all pointed to the Messiah, the Promised One. The festivals are really shadows of a coming reality. That reality is seen in Jesus Christ.

We have already looked at the first three of the spring feast. They all take place in an eight-day period in early spring. Passover is a one-day celebration remembering God’s deliverance of the people from slavery in Egypt. This is followed by a seven-day celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is a reminder of God’s call to put away all sin from their lives. During this week-long feast, the day after the Sabbath was a special day known as the Feast of Firstfruits, a commemoration of God’s provision as they began the spring barley harvest.

These feasts are all fulfilled in Jesus’ death and resurrection, as we have talked about in past weeks. The Feast of Weeks or Shavuot wraps up the first cycle of feasts, the spring feasts.

The Biblical Instruction and Practice

Shavuot (Hebrew for *weeks*) was the second of three pilgrim festivals that all adult males were expected to attend at Jerusalem. The first was Passover, and the third was Tabernacles, which came in the fall.

There are other names used in Scripture to refer to this celebration. It is referred to as the feast of harvest, because it inaugurated the wheat harvest. It is also called Pentecost, meaning fifty, because it occurs on the fiftieth day from the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits.

Shavuot is very closely tied to the feast of firstfruits. In fact, some scholars tie the two together, calling Shavuot part of the feast of firstfruits. Bruce Scott (Holiday Series, Friends of Israel) says, *“Together they serve as the bookends of one central theme—first fruits. Waving the omer (that is, the sheaf) denoted the first fruits of the barley harvest,*

and waving the two loaves on Pentecost denoted the first fruits of the wheat harvest.”

With that in mind, let’s take a look at what the Scripture says about this, the final festival of the spring cycle of holidays. Turn to Leviticus 23.

Read vv. 15-16 – seven weeks (fifty days) from the waving of the sheaf of first fruits on the day after the Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread until this feast. That is why it is called the feast of Weeks – it is a counting of the weeks from firstfruits to Shavuot. The season of Weeks begins with the waving of the omer (sheaf) as the firstfruits of the barley harvest.

Once the omer was reaped and waved before the Lord, the people would begin to count the days, for seven weeks. Each day, in the evening, the number of days is counted out until they reach 49 days. Then the 50th day would be Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks.

Because this feast is also a pilgrim celebration, people from all over the nation and beyond would be making their way to Jerusalem, often bringing with them the firstfruits of their crops. These crops would include, but would not be limited to wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and honey. Thousands of Jewish pilgrims would make the trip to Jerusalem to join in the festivities there.

The celebration itself was centered around a series of offerings that are outlined in vv. 17-20. *Read vv. 17-20.*

- The two loaves – made from wheat, baked with leaven, in contrast to the unleavened bread of the earlier festivals.
- They are brought from the homes of the people and were waved before the Lord twice – once before the slaughter of the two sheep and again after.
- They are then given to the priests to be eaten.
- According to rabbinic tradition the two loaves would be held on a single sheet or pan which would be waved before the Lord.

Verse 21 tells us that Shavuot was to be a day of convocation. There was to be no work done, but would be a day of worship for all the people. *Read v. 21.*

The Messianic Implications

So what significance do we see in the Feast of Shavuot or Pentecost? There are several things which are important. We will look at three things in the New Testament associated with this important but often missed Jewish holy day.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

In Acts 2 we have the first mention of this occasion in the NT. It is never mentioned in the gospels. In Acts 2 we have the arrival of the day of Pentecost or Shavuot. Note the sequence of events:

- Ten days earlier, Jesus had ascended into heaven, but before he left, he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem – *read Acts 1:4-5.*
- 1:12ff – return to Jerusalem; waiting in an upper room; devoted to prayer; chose Matthias to replace Judas as one of the twelve.
- 2:1 – still waiting as Jesus had instructed when Pentecost arrived.

The passage tells us that there were Jews there in Jerusalem from all over the known world – close to 15 places or people groups mentioned. They had come as instructed in the Law for the celebration of Shavuot. It was now 50 days since Firstfruits. And don’t forget that it was on the day of the Feast of Firstfruits that Jesus rose from the dead.

As they waiting, something incredible happened. The Holy Spirit—the Comforter that Jesus had promised—descended upon them in a special way. They experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit as He came upon them and filled them with power and special gifts. The filling of the Holy Spirit was not new. It happened on certain occasions to certain people in the OT. But this spirit baptism was new. And it happened on Pentecost.

It was by this spirit baptism that they became a part of the body of Christ, a whole new entity that became known as the church – the called out ones.

The Birth of the Church

The second area of fulfillment of Shavuot is the birth of the church. On that Pentecost day, as Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit, preached the Word of God to the people gathered there, thousands

came to faith and the church was born. Acts 2:41 tells us that after Peter's message that day three thousand souls were added to their number. God began a whole new work that day, as he began calling out those who would believe and placed them into a new body, by means of the baptism of the Spirit.

There is one other important aspect about the Shavuot celebration which has an interesting fulfillment in the church.

Breaking Down the Wall

This is what Arnold Fructenbaum calls the "Two Loaves Concept." He says,

"...it was pointed out that two loaves were to be offered on a single sheet. The Feast of Pentecost was fulfilled by the birth of the Church, which is composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers united into one Body. One loaf represents the Jews, one loaf represents the Gentiles, and the single sheet represents the fact that Jewish and Gentile believers are united into one Body."

This is the wonderful truth that we see described in Ephesians 2. I want to read those verses again. As I do think of what this means for us today – the breaking down of the wall.

Read Eph. 2:11-18...

Conclusion

For centuries, there was a great wall that separated Jew and Gentile. Gentiles were far off from God. His dealings were with the Jewish people. But in Christ, that wall has been broken down. *"...though Him we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access in one Spirit to the Father."*

And so, God invites both Jews and Gentiles to come to Him in the same way—through faith in the resurrected Messiah. That is the good news of Shavuot (Pentecost).

This ends the first cycle of feasts. These feasts were fulfilled in the program of the first coming of the Messiah (review fulfillments). The second cycle will be fulfilled in the program of His second coming. Between the two there are four months symbolizing the present Church Age that separates the fulfillment of the two cycles of feasts.