

Seeing Christ in the Jewish Feasts



Class 2

Shavuot

The Feast of Weeks

- Reading: Leviticus 23:9-21
- What is the most famous Shavuot mentioned in the Bible?
 - You might know it by another name: ***Pentecost***
- The apostles virtually began their ministry on the Day of Pentecost - The beginning of the Feast of Weeks.
- Traditional Judaism holds that the Torah (the first five books of Moses) was given on the day of Pentecost.
- On Passover they were freed from slavery in Egypt
- 50 Days later they were given the law on Shavuot
- The Feast of Weeks lasts 50 days, so the celebration at the end of it has come to be referred to as Pentecost (the fiftieth day).
- There is no clear indication of when this tradition began, but the belief is now central to the celebration of the holiday.
- The Book of Ruth is traditionally read during Shavuot because of its descriptions of barley and wheat harvests and because of Ruth's desire to become a member of the Jewish People and accept the Torah.

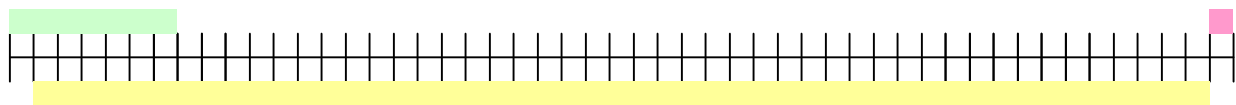
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

- The second of the sacred assemblies set forth in Leviticus 23 is Shavu'ot, the Feast of Weeks.
- It is also the second of the pilgrimage holidays and is closely tied to the Passover celebration.
- Leviticus 23:10–11 commands that the first sheaf of grain harvested in the Promised Land be taken to the temple priests as a wave offering.
- This is the festival of Firstfruits, celebrated on the second day of Passover. It begins a 50-day period known as the “counting of the omer (sheaf),” which culminates with the Feast of Weeks.
- In Israel, the grain harvest begins with the barley harvest in early spring.
- This barley harvest begins the counting of the omer, which continues through to the wheat harvest, approximately seven weeks later.
- The firstfruits of the wheat harvest coincide with the end of the counting, 50 days after Passover, on the day of Pentecost.

7 Days of Passover

Shavuot Follows Immediately Thereafter



The 7 Week “Counting of the Omer” Begins on the Second Day of Passover

- In Hebrew, the holiday is called Shavu'ot, which means “weeks.”
- The celebration is named for the 7 weeks (or “week of weeks”) between the festival of Firstfruits and the end of the harvest period.
- The whole concept of harvest as a blessing is one which combines works and grace in a clear and succinct way.
- Without the work of plowing, sowing the seed, and working the fields, no harvest can be expected.

- Yet without the blessing of fine weather, sufficient rain, and the creative spark of life itself, there will also be no harvest.
- The harvest blessing depends on God and man working together in harmony.
- The Feast of Weeks is the culmination of the first harvest season of the year, as well as the first harvest reaped in the Promised Land.
- Just as the Hebrews were told to present a wave offering from the harvest of the land, the harvest of the Law is of great significance in Judaism.
- The Law is followed not for the sake of the Law itself, but in order to reap the blessings (and avoid the curses) associated with the Law.
- These blessings and curses are specific to this lifetime. Judaism does not focus on eternity or the afterlife, but on the blessings to be had by the righteous in this life.
- Health, a good harvest, a large family, an increase in your flocks - these are the rewards of obedience to the Law.
- This viewpoint is reinforced by the commandment to “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Ex. 20:12).
- Reaping the blessings of the harvest is contingent on doing the work of sowing the seed and tending the fields.
- Reaping the blessings of the Law is contingent on keeping the Law, both in word and in deed.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

- There are three spiritual lessons that we would like to get from Shavuot:

- 1. Harvest the fruit, not the tree.**
- 2. Harvest the fruit in season.**
- 3. Enjoy the fruits, share the fruits.**

1. Harvest the fruit, not the tree.

- Judaism rejoices in the Law.
- There is great affection and love for the Law, as evidenced in numerous rituals surrounding the place and use of the Torah scrolls in the life of the synagogue.
- The keeping, studying, and interpreting of the Law is central to post-Temple Judaism.
- Yet the harvest is a result of what the Law brought forth in your life, not of simply studying and interpreting the Law.
- Only by applying the Law to everyday life can one hope to reap the blessings promised to the righteous.
- The Feast of Weeks celebrates this harvest alongside the harvest of the land.
- In Christian tradition, the Pentecost is associated with the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4) and the subsequent “harvest” of new believers.
- There is another way to look at this harvest of first fruits, however: that of harvesting the fruit of the Spirit.
- Galatians 5:22-23
- Judaism celebrates Pentecost as the day on which the Law was given; Christianity celebrates it as the day the Holy Spirit was given.

- Just as Judaism reveres and loves the Law, so should Christians revere and love the power of God.
- And just as Judaism celebrates and gives thanks for the fruits of obeying the Law, so should we rejoice in the fruits of life in the Spirit.
- The lesson, then, is to harvest the fruit of the Spirit.
- The goal of the harvest in this sense is that we might live lives of blessed abundance - abundant in peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, love (and all the rest of that wonderful list from Galatians 5, and even more!) rather than in material blessings.
- And as we begin to bear these fruit in our lives, we become more and more attractive to the parched and fruitless souls in this world.
- This will lead inevitably to the harvest of souls associated with the traditional Christian understanding of the day of Pentecost.

2. Harvest the fruit in season.

- Anyone who has ever had a vegetable garden knows that harvest season is a cyclical time.
- A few crops at a time come in, starting with the early spring harvest and ending with the final autumn harvest.
- The fruit of our labor come deliberately, each in its own season.
- So it is with the fruits of the Spirit.
- We often think that all of these fruits are the immediate of our time spent around the Word of God.
- But rather than a wholesale harvest of every single fruit at once, we need to take a lesson from nature and wait for each fruit in its season.
- While some fruits may “ripen” quickly, others can take far longer to come to fruition.
- As we take care to work the “soil” of our lives, and to rely on God’s blessings, we can expect to see these fruits maturing and growing in us, each in its own season.

- Seen from this perspective, the entirety of our lives in Christ can be viewed as one long harvest season.
- How often have you encountered a gentle, mature soul in the autumn of his or her life who exhibits the sweet fruit of longsuffering or self-control, and wished that you could be like them?
- Have you ever compared yourself unfavorably with such persons, and despaired of ever bearing such fruit yourself?
- Yet if you are not also in the autumn of your life in Christ, such wishes are akin to wanting sweet corn to be ripe in spring, or pumpkins to be ready for harvest in the middle of July.
- We need to take stock of where we are in our walk with Christ, not in comparison to others, but in comparison to who we were before Christ started his work in us.
- Are we bearing the fruits which come early in the harvest?
- Can we do anything to increase the harvest of this season?
- Are we looking forward to the blessings of the seasons to come?

3. Enjoy the fruits, share the fruits.

- The idea of salvation as Christianity understands it - the saving of the soul from an otherwise assured and deserved damnation - does not exist in Judaism.
- For the Jew, simply being born a Jew is enough.
- If you are one of the chosen people, it is damnation which must be “earned,” not salvation: you are born saved and can lose your salvation only through gross disobedience to the Law (see Lev. 7:19–27, for example).
- The Jewish tradition is one of living righteously so as to reap the blessings of righteousness.
- The goal is a blessed life, not a blessed afterlife.
- Leviticus 26 makes it clear that the rewards for keeping the Law are temporal and material rather than eternal.

- Peace in the land, victory over enemies, a good harvest - all these and more can be anticipated by those who faithfully obey the Law.
- Similarly, the consequences of disobedience are temporal and material: poor crops, wild beasts attacking your family, cities laid waste, and defeat at the hand of your enemy.
- Blessings and curses alike apply to this world, this life, this land.
- Seen in this context, Paul's enumeration of the fruit of the Spirit takes on a new shade of meaning.
- The goal of bearing the fruit of the Spirit is not just to get to the Judgment Seat and hear "well done, my good and faithful servant," but rather to be blessed and to bless others here on Earth.
- When we love God and love others, we reap an immediate harvest in the here and now.
- Such fruits as patience or self-control are themselves the rewards for obedience to the Spirit.
- When we bear much fruit, we are blessed ourselves, just as we bless those around us.
- This frees us from the trap of trying to be "good" in order to reap an eternal reward.
- Our salvation was guaranteed when we began our life in Christ; it is not a consequence of bearing fruit or failing to bear fruit.
- We follow the Spirit that we may bear fruit in this life, and we bear fruit that we may enjoy and share that fruit.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

- While not taking away from salvation through Christ, the melding of works and grace - the “harvest blessing” mentality - adds to the richness of our life here on Earth.
- In order to reap the fruit of the Spirit, we need to work the soil of our souls, to plow the stubborn earth of our human nature, and to plant the seed of the Word of God.
- When God’s blessings are poured out on soil that is prepared in this way, then and only then can we expect to reap a harvest.
- As we begin to see the fruit of the Spirit expressed in our lives, it is essential not to become impatient.
- Each fruit will come in its own season.
- Be content with the fruits of today, even as you look forward to coming seasons.
- Weed, prune, tend the garden of your soul with diligence and thanksgiving, knowing that the Lord will bring the increase in his time.
- And finally, don’t neglect the enjoyment of the fruits that are even now being revealed in you.
- If all that is ripe in you is love, love extravagantly!
- If peace, share your peace with others that it may grow even greater.
- The joy of the harvest blessing is to be found most richly and abundantly right now, right here, in this specific season of your life in Christ.