

Shavuot – the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost as it’s called in the New Testament, is unique among all of YHVH’s annual festivals. It is the only one that is not determined from the beginning of the month. Instead, it is based on the day the Wave ‘Sheaf’ is offered. The text instructs us to –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Leviticus 23:15-16** ... count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. <sup>16</sup> 'Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

The children of Israel were instructed to begin counting seven complete weeks beginning with the day the offering was made, which was Sunday – the first day of week. After the seven weeks were complete (Saturday night), the next day would be the festival of Shavuot.

So why did God have Israel determine the timing of this festival by counting weeks instead of having the festival fall on a specific day following the beginning of the month? After all, that is the way all the other festivals are determined. Was there something special He was trying to convey. Is Shavuot somehow attached to the Wave Sheaf offering?

As a matter of fact, it is!

The Wave Sheaf Offering is always tied to Passover, and when God was giving instructions to Moses pertaining to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, He also gave Moses a sign. He said –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 3:12** ... "I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

As you will recall, Moses was at that time standing on Mount Sinai, talking to a burning bush. So God’s sign was that when Israel was freed from Egypt, they and Moses would return to Mount Sinai and would there serve the god that just freed them from slavery. The Hebrew word for ‘serve’ in this passage is ‘avad’ ( עָבַד – 5647) which means ‘to work, serve, serve another by labor’. In another words, when Israel got to the mountain, they had a job to do. In fact, all through the Torah and Tnakh you see that Israel’s job is to serve YHVH. Just a few examples include:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Deuteronomy 10:12** " And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul ...

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalms 100:2** Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing.

Serving God implies a number of things. It implies paying homage to Him, refusing to pay homage to another god, and of course, it implies observing His law. But another way you serve YHVH is by teaching about Him.

King David, in his prayer of repentance said –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalms 51:11-13** Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit. <sup>13</sup> *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

Israel was called to teach the nations about God, but unfortunately, they failed to do so. The writer of Hebrews states such when he said –



<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 5:12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Though I strongly believe that all of God's people have in one way or another, been called to teach others about God's way, that is not the purpose of this message. Instead, I want to show how God – on the festival of Shavuot - provided a miracle by which the disciples of Yeshua – a group of fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots - gained the confidence to do their service to God, to teach the Messiah's message, and to inspire others to teach it as well.

### Disciples Calling

Let's start by reviewing the job that Yeshua commissioned His disciples to perform.

Yeshua had spent 3 ½ years training his disciples how to speak. Speaking probably came naturally to them because they basically spoke what He had told them to say, and because their message was exciting, at least to them.

They spoke the message of their Master, and their Master's message was all about the promise of the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. During those years, it was easy to teach the message because, in their minds – they and their master were going to be a part of the fulfillment of the message.

But things quickly changed when one evening, the Master was arrested, and after a mock trial, put to death. Though Yeshua was resurrected days later, his imminent departure left them wondering what was going to happen next. Their association with a seemingly "failed" Messiah would surely come back to haunt them.

Before His ascension, Yeshua clarified their calling by commissioning them to:

- raise up disciples unto Him (Matt. 28:19)
- be a witness of His death and resurrection (Luke 24:46-48)
- teach His message of good news (Mark 16:15)

To encourage them, He told them -

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 24:49** ... behold, I am sending<sup>1</sup> the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 1:4** And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me;

The Promise of the Father was not the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> It was the message that they had heard Him speak for the past three and a half years, the same message spoken by Moses<sup>3</sup> and by the various Prophets. Yeshua placed that message on them. They alone would be responsible for getting the message out to the four corners of the earth – all the places to which the tribes of Israel were scattered.

In order to do their job, they would need help and guidance. Yeshua promised to give them power by adding to the Holy Spirit that they had already received<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 1:8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

<sup>1</sup> 'apostello' (649) – to appoint, to send

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/PromiseOfTheFather.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Deut.29:9–30:10

<sup>4</sup> John 20:19-22



## Messianic Expectations

Why was it important for the disciples get the message out at that day and time? Probably because the events of the day – Yeshua’s fame, death, and resurrection – were fresh in the minds of the Jewish people. That, coupled with the belief that the advent of the Messiah was near, was fertile ground for growing the understand that Yeshua was indeed the Messiah.

It’s important to realize that in first-century Judea and Samaria there was a great expectation that the advent of the Messiah was near. This is evident by Luke’s account of John the Baptist’s early ministry. He wrote -

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 3:15-16** <sup>15</sup> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Apparently, the Jewish people had interpreted the prophecies of the coming messiah to indicate that he would come in their day. Seeing John as a fulfillment of the role of Elijah the prophet<sup>5</sup>, they believed the Messiah would soon follow, which would then be followed by the expulsion of the Romans and restoration of the Davidic kingdom. It is likely that those messianic expectations extended well beyond the borders of Israel and into the various places the Jewish people had migrated. Wanting to be a part of the Kingdom, many Jewish people likely moved back to the land, especially to Jerusalem – the would-be capital of the restored Kingdom.

Let’s begin now to decipher the events of the Acts 2 Shavuot.

## Where Were They?

The text gives us no real clue as to where this event took place, but it’s likely that it took place somewhere at or near the Temple precincts. The Greek word that is used (oikos – 3624) simply means ‘a house’ and is used for a variety of houses including God’s house – the Temple.

The text implies that the area had to be large enough to accommodate a large number of people, but it does not indicate that it has to be a private place. From childhood, I had the image in my mind that they were at church, sitting in rows of chairs. After years of contemplating this event, I now believe it was a place somewhere near, or even at the Temple. The Temple is where a person observed Shavuot. In addition, based on the number of people that were baptized that day, they would need to be close to a number of ritual bathing pools, and the Temple would have provided that.

## Why Were They There?

If indeed this event took place at the Temple, why were the disciples and all the people there on that day? The answer is quite simple – they were there to observe the festival. But knowing they were “wanted men” by both the Romans and the Jewish leadership, they knew they would have to try to remain unnoticed. Maybe they thought that since there were so many people in Jerusalem and at the Temple for the festival, they would just blend in. Obviously that did not happen!

## The Crowds

For whatever reason, Luke deemed it important to write about the nationalities of those in attendance that day. Writing about what he had witnessed, Luke said –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 2:5, 9-11** <sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven ... <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and

<sup>5</sup> Mal. 4:5-6



Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians - we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

What we see here is that many, but not all of those in attendance were Jewish. Most of them were not native to the land of Israel. The Greek word for 'dwelling' in vs. 5 as well as 'residents' in vs. 9 is 'katokao' (2730) and means 'to dwell, to settle', indicating that some of these people had immigrated to Israel from these places. Along with the immigrants, there were visitors from Rome and other places, some of which were Jews, while others were proselytes.

Being careful not to read too much into the text, we should not assume that all these people were believers in Yeshua. The Greek word for 'devout' (yolabas – 2125) means "taking hold well". They had 'taken hold' of the God of the Jews. They were also familiar with, or maybe even one-time followers of Yeshua (vs. 22). Maybe they had followed Yeshua for a while, but somewhere along the way, given up on Him as a candidate for being the Messiah.

There was likely a number of cynics in their midst, and some may have even taken part in accusing Yeshua – motivating Pilate to put Him to death. On the other hand, some probably had heard of the Jewish rabbi who claimed to be the messiah, had had died, but was then resurrected. Based on their understanding of the prophets, they believed Yeshua was the Messiah and they therefore came to Jerusalem to take part in what they hoped was going to be the restoration of Israel.

One last point in regards to those nations named here – they are much the same as those listed in Peter's first epistle, which he defines as Israelites from the northern tribes (1 Peter 1:1-2; 2:9-10)

### Divided Tongues

Probably the hardest part in understanding Act 2 is figuring out the first four verses.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Acts 2:1** When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

A few things to note here are:

- **Supernatural Events Affected Only the Disciples** - in the Greek, the passage begins with the conjunction "kahee" (2532) which is typically translated "and". Thus this passage is connected to the previous passage which talks about the 12<sup>th</sup> apostle being chosen. From this we can conclude that the "tongues of fire" fell on the twelve; not on all the others who were present
- **Holy Spirit Given Only To the Disciples** – Yeshua had promised that the Power would be given to them for the purpose of being able to spread the message (Acts 1:5,8). The Holy Spirit was later offered to the crowd after repentance and baptism, which implies becoming a follower of Yeshua. (Acts 2:38)
- **The phrase 'divided tongues'** - is from the Greek words 'diamerizo' (1266) and 'glossa' (1100). Diamerizo is understood to mean 'to divide so as to distribute', and 'glossa' can mean both the 'organ of speech' or 'a language or dialect'.

If 'language' is the intended meaning of 'glossa', then what was happening is that there was a burning desire in the disciples to speak out to all in attendance about what they had witnessed the previous 3 ½ years. The problem they faced is that those in attendance were from differing nations and spoke in languages other than that of the disciples. All they could do is speak the words that were given them by the Holy Spirit. That would have been exactly what Yeshua had told them would happen.



**Luke 12:11-12** <sup>11</sup> "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. <sup>12</sup> "For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

### Language Barrier Vanishes

Jumping down to verse six, it says –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Acts 2:6-8** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?

What we see from this passage is that the multitudes knew who the disciples were. They were the followers of Rabbi Yeshua – the Galilean. They also knew that the most common languages of that area were Aramaic and Greek. It appears that the disciples were all speaking in their own language, possibly to various people in different groups. Those in each group – though they probably understood Greek and Aramaic – only heard the disciple's words in that person's native language. From the movement of his lips, the person could see that the words the disciples were speaking were not the same words he was hearing. You might say it was "the Tower of Babel in REVERSE"!

Because the majority of people could not explain what was happening – how each person could only hear the disciple in his own native language, while at the same time the people could converse with each other in their commonly spoken language – they were at a loss for words . . . they had never witnessed anything like this.

So what do you do when you can't explain something? You criticize and mock it, and that's just what some of them did. They accused the disciples of being drunk as they began to walk away.

### Likely Scenario

So what happened that caused them to be noticed and ultimately caused Peter to give a message that changed the lives of so many people?

We obviously don't know for sure, but by using what information we find in the scriptures, we can put together a possible scenario:

The twelve had all agreed to 'risk' going to the Temple to observe the Festival. They found an area where just a few people were mingling, and sat down to discuss what was next for them. At the third hour, the crier cried out – announcing the start of the morning sacrifices. At that precise moment, the sound of a violent wind could be heard throughout the Temple – but there was no wind. As the people turned to find the source of the sound, the disciples noticed the appearance of fire dancing on each other's head. The fire was not hot, and it did not burn them. The disciples were obviously alarmed and stood up to help each other put the fire out, but to no avail. The fire remained.

Much to their chagrin, the phenomena began to draw a crowd. The disciples began to talk amongst themselves as to what was happening. "This seems like Moses and the Burning Bush" one of them said. As they continued to talk among themselves, those nearby overheard them speaking, but noticed that the words they were hearing were in their own native language. "These men cannot be speaking in my language" they thought, "they're Galileans".

As the crowds gathered around, they began to ask the disciple questions. "You men are the disciples of Rabbi Yeshua?". "What really happened to His body?" "Did you really see him ascend to the heavens?" But though they asked their questions in the language of the Jews, the answer always came back in their native language.



This had to be a frightening experience for the disciples. They could not simply flee because there were too many people. They could not use the 'Peter' ploy and simply deny that they knew Yeshua ... too many people now knew who they were. Without any real options, they apparently chose to trust in Yeshua and let Him take care of them, and take care of them He did.

At that point, all the disciples stopped talking while Peter stood up to address the entire group. With one voice that could be heard by each person in his own native language, he explained that what they were witnessing was the work of the Holy Spirit as prophesied by the prophet Joel. What many fail to see is that even though Peter quoted a small part of the prophecy, the bulk of the prophecy – which these people would have known - is about the gathering of the exiles of Israel, something that could not take place until redemption was made available by the death of Messiah Yeshua.

What God was showing is that, like Moses, the disciples were being sent to gather His people once again, and the tool by which they would perform their work was WORDS, words that could be understood by people from all over the world – not only by the Jews.

As a result of what happened that day, 3000 people from nations all around the known world became followers of Yeshua. They served God by taking the Messiah's message with them and teaching it in their congregations. From time-to-time, the apostles would visit those congregations or write them words of encouragement, and the word spread.

The miracle that God bestowed on the disciples on that day was the gift of words – what to say, and when to say it. The impact of those words gave them confidence that would propel them and their message for years to come.

Shalom Alecheim