

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE



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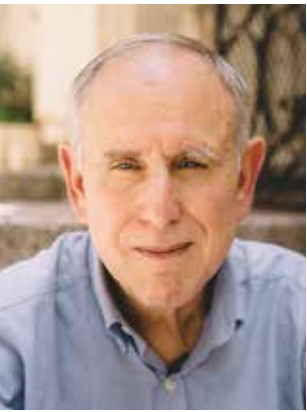
MAY 2020



SHAVUOT

THE GIVING OF THE LAW AND
THE GIVING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

FROM THE PRESIDENT



SHAVUOT

The
Messianic
Fulfillment
of the spring
Festivals

Shalom, friends!

We are looking ahead with anticipation of what our life will be like after the coronavirus pandemic. With Passover and Easter behind us, we now find ourselves also looking forward to the celebration of Pentecost (Shavuot in Hebrew).

Shavuot (Hebrew for “weeks”) is known to Christians as Pentecost. It is one of three pilgrimage feasts found in the Hebrew Scriptures when God commands the Jewish people to go up to Jerusalem and worship at the Temple, and it is also the last of the spring festivals. The festivals of Israel were designed by God to focus the hearts and minds of the Jewish people on God’s redemptive message.

The Spring Festivals

The first two spring festivals listed in Leviticus 23 are Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The offering of firstfruits is mentioned in Leviticus 23:9–13. Each of these observances points to the Messiah in different ways. Passover is a prophetic portrait of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The celebration of unleavened bread reminds us of the sinless nature of the Savior. The offering of the firstfruits points to a Messiah who would rise as the first fruit from among the dead.

The final spring celebration is *Shavuot*, literally “weeks” in Hebrew, from the root word for “seven.” The Lord commanded Israel to count seven weeks from the day of the firstfruit offering (Leviticus 23:15) until the fiftieth day, at which point they observed Shavuot. In Jewish tradition, Shavuot is the day when Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. In Christian tradition, this same festival is called Pentecost, which is the Greek term for “fifty.”

There are other Jewish traditions associated with Shavuot, such as reading the book of Ruth,

spending the entire night studying the Torah, chanting the Ten Commandments, decorating synagogues and homes with aromatic spices, and partaking of a dairy meal.

We read the book of Ruth because Shavuot is a harvest-time account of Ruth, a Gentile, who identifies with the Jewish people by following her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, and her God. Ruth is the great-grandmother of King David and part of the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5), which speaks of God’s intention to include Gentiles in the outpouring of His Messianic blessings.

The Foods of Shavuot

No Jewish holiday is complete without its signature cuisine! According to long-standing custom, dairy foods such as cheese, cheesecake, and cheese *blintzes* (a delicious sweet cheese-filled crepe)



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are eaten on Shavuot. This tradition may be based on a passage in Song of Songs: “*Your lips, my bride, drip honey; honey and milk are under your tongue, and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon*” (Song of Songs 4:11).

This association compares the Bible to the sweetness of milk and honey. In some

European cities, Jewish children are introduced to Bible study on Shavuot by eating honey cakes with passages from the Bible written on them.

The Messianic Fulfillment of the Festival

Now, if Passover was fulfilled in the death of the Lamb of God, the Feast of Unleavened Bread in His sinless character, and the first fruits offering in His resurrection, then we must ask ourselves: How did the first coming of Jesus fulfill the Day of Pentecost? It is no coincidence that God selected this Jewish festival as the day when He would send His Holy Spirit.

The Promise of the Spirit

According to Acts 1:15, there were 120 Jewish believers in one place, of one mind, praying and focusing on God's work. They were waiting in obedience to the command of Jesus (Acts 1:4-5) and were observing the laws of Shavuot regarding "no work" (Leviticus 23:21). Many were pilgrims who had left their homes in other places to be part of this festival, as Pentecost was one of the three festivals when Jewish people were commanded to "go up to Jerusalem" to worship. These worshippers probably remained in Jerusalem between Passover and Pentecost and were, therefore, away from home for two months. God would bless their obedience now in a powerful way.

After many days of patient waiting, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples on the fiftieth day after Passover. It was a new revelation given on Shavuot/Pentecost! The giving of the Torah by Moses at Mount Sinai had come with signs and wonders, as seen in Exodus 19.

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. (Exodus 19:16-19)

There were signs and wonders in the Upper Room, marking this transformed Pentecost. It was the birthday of a new revelation and the fulfillment of God's promises to pour out His Spirit in the last days!

The Tradition of All Israel Being Present at Sinai

According to Jewish tradition, our sages taught that every Jew who would ever live was at Mount Sinai, pledging their obedience to the Law. The rationale for this is that every Jewish person at that moment agreed to keep the Torah. The verse used to teach this is found in Exodus 24:7: "Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of

the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!'"

This Jewish tradition avers that every Jewish person standing at the foot of Mount Sinai that day heard the giving of the Law **in their native tongue** so that they could understand what they were hearing and obey. Now, this is a tradition; we do not believe this actually took place. But this custom is ancient and may have been known by Jesus and His disciples.

This new Pentecost took place fifty days after Jesus, the Lamb of God, died for our sins. There were signs and wonders accompanying the pouring out of the Spirit, just like at Mount Sinai, and those who listened to the disciples preaching heard this new revelation in their native tongue. The giving of the Spirit had come in just as powerful a manner as the giving of the Law at Sinai and therefore had great authority for the disciples and the

Jewish people who had witnessed this event.

How gracious of God to use our culture and human understanding to communicate His truth to us! He communicates with us in ways we can understand: God could make His point otherwise, but He often reveals Himself and His truth in ways that humans can understand.

Perhaps the best example of this is when **the Son of God Himself** took on flesh to communicate with you and me to help us better understand the Father.

Counting the Days

We do not know when the pandemic will end, and therefore we are unable to count the days until this challenging time is finished! We do know, however, that God is at work in the waiting. That is one of the lessons of Pentecost, which is clearly stated in the Psalms, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord" (Psalm 27:14).

As you read through this newsletter, I hope that you are encouraged by some of the other lessons we can learn from the Feast of Weeks.

May you be blessed in your waiting!

Your brother in Messiah,



Mitch



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LESSONS FROM THE FEAST OF SHAVUOT

Jews and Gentiles Together: Living in Unity

In Acts 2, we get our first glimpse of Shavuot in the New Testament, “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). There were Jewish people from almost every region in the Diaspora (Greek for “dispersion”). They became part of the first spiritual harvest on Pentecost because of their obedience to the command to celebrate this holiday in Jerusalem! These Jewish believers seemed to decide as a group that they did not want to return home immediately after the festival, but chose instead to spend time with one another. Luke describes their joy and fellowship in Acts chapter 2:

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44–47)

This first “band of brothers” (and sisters) were all Messianic Jews—there were no known Gentile believers at this point. The Lord taught these early Jewish believers how to live in unity and work through their differences to prepare them for the Gentile harvest that would come a short time later.

We find unity when the Holy Spirit directs our attention and focus on Jesus. *The Spirit of God seals us, baptizes us, and connects us to the Messiah and to one another in a way that is supernatural, miraculous, and without parallel in this world of division and conflict.* It is clear from the text that the impact of Shavuot was a season of incredible unity by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes this unity in greater depth:

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Ephesians 2:13–16)

The Lord makes us His by the power of the Holy Spirit. This same power enables us to work together in unity. So much more can be done together than apart as we proclaim the good news of Yeshua to a broken and needy world.

Preaching with Power

The Holy Spirit eternally exists in perfect fellowship with the Father and the Son. We see His presence from the very beginning, “The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the **Spirit of God** was moving over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Yet, His ministry in the New Covenant is further revealed. His role in the world today is well described by Yeshua in the Gospel of John:



But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (John 16:7–11)

The Greek term “parakletos,” which is translated as “Helper,” literally means “one who is called alongside” to help, strengthen, and partner with each child of God in their life and ministry. The Holy Spirit regenerates us, then He indwells us, fills us, and empowers us to preach. We see this power of the Holy Spirit unleashed in the early sermons of the book of Acts, especially through Peter’s preaching,

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” (Acts 2:37–39)

The Holy Spirit also convicts those who hear the preaching to repent of their sin and be saved. It is God’s job, through His Holy Spirit, to convince others that Yeshua is the Messiah and, by believing in Him, we receive the gift of everlasting life.

The Global Harvest

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The festival of Shavuot/Pentecost reminds us of God’s plan to bring the good news of salvation through the Messiah to the world. When God told Abram that He would bless the world through his descendants, it was clear that God chose the Jewish people not for the sake of the Jewish people alone but to be a blessing to the entire world.

He said to Abram, “*And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed*” (Genesis 12:3).

His blessing through the Jewish people is the gospel—the good news of Messiah Jesus, who died and rose for our sins. Perhaps this is why many view Pentecost as the birth of the church—the mysterious new-covenant community made up of Jews and Gentiles. In his letter to Ephesus, Paul calls this union the mystery that was revealed to him: “*...that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Jesus through the gospel*” (Ephesians 3:6).

This mystery Paul is describing is the joining together of Jews and Gentiles in God’s family, set apart through the sacrifice of the Messiah Jesus and united together by His Holy Spirit.

During Shavuot, two loaves of bread are baked and presented as an offering. The two cakes made with leaven remind us that Jews and Gentiles, sinners redeemed by God’s grace through faith in Yeshua, are made acceptable to God. It is now our joy to work in the Lord’s harvest field until He returns!

Through the miracle of Pentecost, Jews and Gentiles are unified, sharing a common Lord, life, and calling to reach the world for Jesus by the power of His Spirit. Together, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we have a common mission—to spread the good news of Jesus the Messiah to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles! (Romans 1:16).





Dr. Rich Freeman, D. Min., serves as the Vice President for Church Ministries and Conferences with Chosen People Ministries and lives in South Florida with his wife, Julia.

Hebrews 13

FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE WRITER OF HEBREWS

As he concludes his letter, the writer of Hebrews delves once again into contrasting elements of traditional Judaism with faith in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). The Levitical sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem were offered at set times and for specific reasons. Believers in Messiah viewed the sacrifices as continuing in the form of praise, as seen in Hebrews 13:15, “*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.*” Those sacrifices are described as verbal praise, “*the fruit of lips that give thanks,*” and as doing good to others. One cannot help but think of Jesus’ exhortation as recorded in the synoptic gospels, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself*” (Luke 10:27). The writer of Hebrews adds that “*with such sacrifices God is pleased*” (Hebrews 13:16).

Next, the writer exhorts these Hebrew believers to “*obey your leaders and submit to them*” (v. 17). The leaders he has in mind are their community leaders, those responsible for spiritual oversight. He gives four distinct reasons in verse 17 why they ought to obey and submit to their leaders. First, the leaders “*keep watch over your souls.*” The responsibility of spiritual oversight is a heavy burden that can be overwhelming sometimes. Second, the leaders “*will give an account.*” When all believers stand before the judgment seat of Messiah, these spiritual leaders will have to give an account before God of how well they led their flock. Third, the leaders hope to lead “*with joy and not with grief.*” Spiritual leadership is difficult enough without disobedient congregants making it even harder. Spiritual oversight in this situation is done with grief. Lastly, all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Messiah and give an account of how we treat our spiritual leaders. If we cause them grief, it will be “*unprofitable*” for us. It would be good for all of us to ask ourselves if we cause our spiritual leaders joy or grief as they lead us.

In 13:18–19, the writer of Hebrews, as one of those previously discussed spiritual leaders, confesses to coveting the prayers of his brothers and sisters in the faith. He faced the same struggles as his readers, the same persecutions and hardships, and felt confident that he was part of those “*desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things*” (v. 18). Though the writer of Hebrews is not named specifically, it is clear that he is known to his readers as he says, “*And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner*” (v. 19). It seems as though the writer is a prisoner urging his readers to pray fervently for his release.

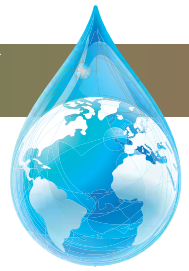
HEBREWS 13:16-21 NASB

¹⁶ And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. ¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. ... ²⁰ Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, ²¹ equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20–21 is the author’s final benediction, which seems to gather together all the major themes of Hebrews. “*Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*” The writer of Hebrews shows his confidence that no matter what is going on in their lives, these struggling believers can have their needs met through the equipping work of Jesus the Messiah, the God of peace.

Finally, he writes that his readers need to “*bear with this word of exhortation*” (v. 22). So much was written throughout the letter about the superiority of faith in Yeshua the Messiah over the traditional sacrifices, yet he says to them, “*...for I have written to you briefly.*” His closing encourages them with the news that Timothy has been released and if he arrives soon, they will all be together.

In the final verse of Hebrews, the author sends greetings from Italy. So, who is the writer of Hebrews? Various scholars have suggested either Paul, or Apollos, or Barnabas, or possibly Luke. All we can do is speculate.



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ISRAELI CAB DRIVER READS ISAIAH 53

Recently, Robin, one of our Israel staff members, took a taxi home after a staff meeting. Usually she walks, but since it was raining hard, and she and her intern Rebecca were carrying a large tray of food, it made sense to call a cab. Daniel (not his real name) was their driver. It was a pleasant drive, with easy conversation, and a lot of laughter and fun. However, the tone shifted when Robin shared what she does for work. Daniel firmly told Robin that she should not read the New Testament and went on for some time about why she should not believe in Jesus. The conversation continued when they arrived at their destination. Daniel began to speak about Moses and the laws Jewish people must obey. Robin said that she believes Moses and the prophets spoke of the Messiah and that things they told us point to Jesus. Daniel responded by bringing up the history of the Crusades and other terrible things done in the name of Jesus. They spoke at length about religion and politics. Robin encouraged him to look at the Torah (Pentateuch) and the Prophets and see what they say about Messiah and how the specifics point only to Jesus. She showed him Isaiah 53 on her phone. He read and then stopped and said, “Well, yes, this is Jesus—it is the New Testament.” When Robin shared that it is from the Tanakh’s (Old Testament) book of Isaiah, Daniel did not know what to say. This same realization is what brought Robin to faith. Robin and Rebecca encouraged him to read Isaiah 53 again and pointed him to the Chosen People Ministries website.

JEWISH MAN COMES TO FAITH IN BROOKLYN

Anna and Jake (not their real names) are a Jewish couple from Massachusetts who reached out to our Brooklyn congregation, Beth Sar Shalom, in order to meet with a Jewish staff member. Rich, our staff member, responded immediately and set up a meeting. Anna and Jake have been married for about eleven years. Anna is a believer in Jesus, but Jake, while spiritually searching, is not; together they have a small martial arts business. They began to share their life and spiritual journeys with Rich. Jake was confused and tormented by his sin. He had tried to be a religious Jew but, in his mind, he failed miserably. He experimented with eastern religions but was left feeling empty and unsatisfied. In his despair, Jake turned to drugs, alcohol, and partying—his guilt and shame increased. Jake looked at Rich with tears in his eyes and asked, “How do I get rid of my sin?” Rich smiled and said, “Jake, you have come to the right place. I just happen to know a sin-bearing Messiah that came to rescue broken people like you and me.” Rich then

proceeded to explain the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24) to him in a Jewish way. As Rich shared, the Spirit’s presence was evident, moving both him and Jake. It was hard to speak through the emotions of the moment, but Jake indicated that he understood and wanted to repent of his sin and receive Yeshua as Israel’s Messiah and the Savior of the world. Praise God!

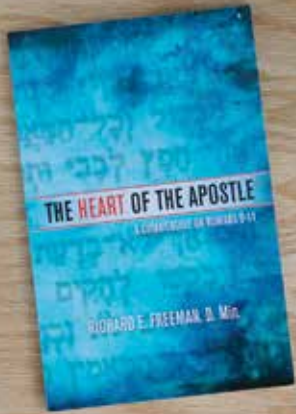


Rich and Michelle, serving in Brooklyn

JEWISH BUDDHIST PRIESTESS HEARS THE GOSPEL

A few weeks ago, the Lord orchestrated a divine encounter for our Canadian director, Jorge. On a flight home from Vancouver, Jorge met Joni (not her real name), who was sitting next to him. She tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the snowy mountain peaks. Joni commented on the beauty of nature, and Jorge replied that God’s creation is really magnificent. He told her about his work, and Joni shared that she found out a few months earlier that her family was Jewish. When Jorge asked her about her spiritual life, Joni said her parents were Christian and she had even sung gospel music with her dad, but she had left the church—and the faith—and was now a Buddhist priestess! Jorge thought to himself, “This is going to be an interesting flight!” They talked for the rest of the trip and read Isaiah 53, verse by verse, with Jorge explaining how the prophet described the events in Jesus’ life seven hundred years before they happened! Joni was really intrigued and wanted to know more; she even emailed her mother right then from the plane to share some of the Scriptures that were read. They exchanged contact information, Jorge promised to send her a copy of *Isaiah 53 Explained*, and as they were getting off the plane, Joni promised she would read the Bible her mother had given her as well as the *Isaiah 53 Explained* book.

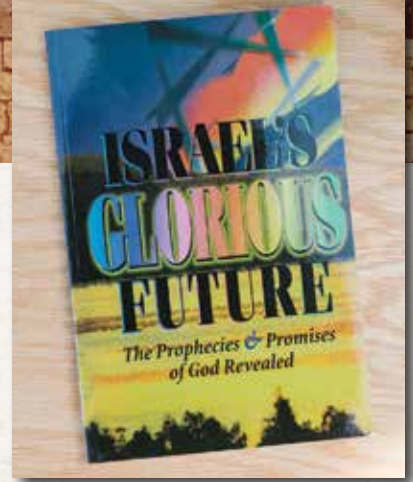
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Through your partnership with Chosen People Ministries at this critical time, you are having a life-saving impact on Jewish people here in the United States and around the world as you help us:

- Share the good news of Messiah
- Equip people to evangelize to the Jewish people
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We are grateful for your faithfulness and want you to know there are some tremendous planned giving options available to extend the impact of your generosity.

If you have a Donor Advised Fund (DAF), now is a perfect time to distribute grants to ministries you care about, such as Chosen People Ministries. You will experience the

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For more information on giving through your Donor Advised Fund, IRA, or other planned giving options through Chosen People Ministries, contact Cindy Forbes at 212-223-2252 ext. 1208, or cforbes@chosenpeople.com. Thank you!



THE CHOSEN PEOPLE



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