

SHAVUOT, or PENTECOST: The Feast of Weeks

In the new covenant we don't celebrate these feasts rigidly, but regard them as a prophetic blueprint of God's unfolding Master plan. As with the Israelites of old we will not only experience God's presence in the tabernacle (now our bodies), but we will also experience his Presence during the celebration of the feasts.

The feast of Shavuot (pronounced Sha-voo-ote) is called *Atzeret Pesach* in Hebrew - the conclusion of the Passover season. In Leviticus 23: 15-16 the link between the two feasts is illustrated as follows: "And you shall 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. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord." (Pentecost means "fifty" in Greek, since it occurs on the fiftieth day after Passover.)

In agricultural terms these feasts are explained as follows: "You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks ..." (Deut 16:9-10). Since Israel as a nation lived close to the soil, they synchronised their lifestyle to the rhythm of agricultural seasons and harvest times; they also had a clear understanding of God's symbolism in this regard. The Feast of Pesach was celebrated as soon as the harvesting time of the first barley crop arrived; the Feast of Pentecost ran concurrently with the gathering of the first wheat crop. Fifty days after the Israelites had left Egypt in a haste (and celebrated the first Pesach), they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai to enter into a covenant with God, and the second 'big' feast of God was about to take place.

Within the Jewish tradition, Pesach is regarded as the betrothal of God to His people. He would allure her from her home (of slavery) to the desert where He would speak comfort to her (Hos 2:14). There He would remove the Baals from her mouth and their names would not be spoken anymore (Hos 2:17). The seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot are a symbolic indication of the seven days the Bride-to-be needs to prepare for her marriage. Then, she would be ready to call Him her Husband at the solemnization of their marriage (Hos 2:16). According to the Jewish people, this took place at the foot of Mount Zion upon receipt of the Torah, thus signifying their marriage covenant, as a people, with God.

Chapter 19 in the Book of Exodus tells the story of how God presented the Torah as marriage covenant to the people of Israel. The Written Covenant (on stone tablets) is similar to the *ketuba* – the legal contract (in writing), signed by both a Jewish man and woman that regulates and confirms the legal aspects of their relationship (Amos 3:3). That theophany at the time of the Covenant (Ex 19: 16-18) clearly illustrates His preparedness to commit Himself.

The Scroll of Ruth is usually read during Shavuot. It is the prototypical story of God's endeavour to unite the Jewish believer and Gentile believer (Rom 10:12) with Him as Redeemer (Ruth 4:14).

Shavuot means 'Pentecost' in Greek and in the New Testament it followed the same pattern as in the Old Testament: 50 days between Pesach and Shavuot and 50 days from the death of Jesus Christ until the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1)!

Jerome, the acclaimed historian, drew an excellent parallel in his *Ad Tabioli*, section 7, between the happenings on Mount Zion at the time of the Israelites' first establishment of their identity and the formation of the identity of the New Covenant Church: "There is Sinai, here Zion; there the trembling mountain, here the trembling house; there the flaming mountain, here the flaming tongues; there the noisy thunderings, here the sounds of many tongues there the clangour of the ram's horn, here the noisy notes of the gospel-trumpet." Indeed, both happenings are a mirror-image of one another in the formation of a Peoplehood, the birth of a

nation (Israel) and the birth of “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His only special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.; who once were not a people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1Pet 2:9-10).

The covenant at Sinai did not last; consequently God had to complete this cycle within his feasts (Is 29:1) by introducing a new covenant. The necessity for introducing a new covenant is distinctly projected against the backdrop of the failure of the old covenant, and is prophetically foreseen in Jer 31:31-33.

Please note: the law is not external anymore; it is now engraved in their hearts. And the Holy Spirit is the Negotiating Agent in this covenant. Joh 16:13: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” Another beautiful Old Testament declaration on the new covenant can be found in Ezek 36:23-28.

The Tabernacle in the wilderness served as a model of restoration depicting creation as it had been during the times of innocence – fully restored. Likewise the feasts serve as blueprint in the restoration process of creation in the unfolding of events of ordinary life! Each of the feasts clinches what is called by the Jews *Tikkum Olam* – that which the Messiah will completely restore during the millennial or thousand year reign. Each feast therefore commemorates “the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21)!

For the believers in the Old Testament Shavuot pointed to the Holy Spirit that would come in a new dispensation and covenant. For us, in the new covenant, the Holy Spirit is the firstfruits (Ex 34:22; Rom 8:23), pointing to our inheritance in God, a guarantee in which we are sealed (2 Cor 1: 22; 2 Cor 5:5), until such time that we can acquire our full inheritance. “And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” (1 Joh 3:24). And until the fulfilment which is to come, is finally here, God’s appointed feasts help us to rehearse on the rhythms of grace. It is especially true for Shavuot, for it points to that happy day in which the Bride will intimately rejoice in the dance with her Bridegroom in the millennial reign (Jer 31:4, 13).