



The Biblical holiday of *Shavuot* was one of the three pilgrimage *moedim*—“appointed feasts” in which all adult Jewish males would travel to Jerusalem. According to Leviticus 23, they were to return 50 days after the Sabbath day associated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Because it required a period of seven weeks plus one day, this feast was called *Shavuot* in Hebrew (“weeks”) and Pentecost in Greek (“fiftieth”), although it is also called *Chag HaBikkurim* (the Festival of First Fruits) in Numbers 28:26.

In second temple times, the people brought first fruits offerings of the seven species of produce in Israel: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. At the temple, the central feature was the wave offering of two loaves of wheat bread by a priest on behalf of the nation.

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., Judaism shifted to an alternative theme—the giving of the Torah (Law) to Moses on Mt. Sinai. And it is true that a careful reading of the text of Exodus 19 shows that it was exactly 50 days after Israel departed Egypt that Moses received the Torah, thus technically making it the first *Shavuot*.

So it has become the practice to emphasize the reading of Torah on *Shavuot*, with some groups studying all night. In addition, the book of Ruth is customarily read in services because its story takes place during the barley harvest and it

depicts a Gentile woman, Ruth, becoming part of Israel.

Another custom emerged in which dairy foods are eaten during the holiday. Some say that this tradition is a recognition of the Promised Land being “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). But it is more likely a practice that began in order to fuel the all-night studies of Torah. In any event, it is a time to enjoy cheese-filled foods like blintzes, cheesecakes, and kugel. And, in keeping with its original biblical theme, it is also customary to eat the seven species of produce.

The main feature of *Shavuot* remains the simple waving of the two loaves. It is an act with great symbolic significance. For just as there are two loaves waved on *Shavuot*, there are two people groups—Jews and Gentiles—who are accepted by the Lord into His kingdom. And that acceptance is based on the exact same way of redemption for all, through faith in Yeshua and the transformation of our lives by the Holy Spirit.

The two loaves, then, represent the complete body of Messiah. But, when the commandment was originally given to wave the loaves, the number of righteous Gentiles was small. A great breakthrough was needed for both Jew and Gentile to be presented before God in equal measure.

That is exactly what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of *Shavuot* described in Acts 2. On that day, 3000 Jews believed in Yeshua, received the forgiveness of their sins, and were indwelt by the Spirit. Soon afterward, a great number of Gentiles began believing in Yeshua, thus fulfilling the symbolism of the waving of the loaves.

There is no coincidence that both the Torah and the Spirit were given on the same day of the Hebrew calendar. For when we become redeemed through faith in Yeshua, and thus indwelt by the Spirit, the Spirit gives us discernment regarding the Scriptures, as well as the ability to live out God’s instructions for righteous living.

Altogether, the giving of the Word of God and the Spirit of God on the day of *Shavuot* is a powerful combination in building the kingdom of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles side by side, just like the loaves that are waved on this day.