



What's in a name....?

Pentecost? Funny, it doesn't sound Jewish! And sadly, within much of the wider Christian church, many people don't think that it is.... Unfortunately, many might think that Pentecost is a Christian invention - but when its original Hebrew name is used – SHAVUOT – it suddenly takes on a different 'flavour'. But does that matter? Isn't the fact that the Holy Spirit was poured out, as recorded in Acts 2, the main thing? Well, yes! But those events didn't happen in a vacuum, so let's have a closer look at the context, some of the lessons of Shavuot and what its message is to us today.

Firstly, as we know, the word Pentecost is from the Greek word that means 'fifty'. It was used by Greek-speaking Jewish people to refer to Shavuot, which means 'weeks'. In Lev. 23:15,16, God commanded Israel to count 'seven complete Sabbaths' - fifty days - after Passover, when a sheaf (Hebrew: Omer) of the wave offering name was brought. On the 50th day, they were to observe the feast of First Fruits. The numbering of the days is called 'the counting of the Omer'. The feast seems to be inextricably linked to agriculture – to land - and yet it was a 'feast unto the Lord', a spiritual observance. Hmm...

Within the context of this Leviticus passage (v.22), we also find the command to allow some grain in the outskirts of the fields, so that the poor and the stranger could glean

there. This is why, traditionally, the Book of Ruth is read during the feast of Shavuot. Her story takes place at the beginning of the barley harvest and involves gleaning!

In Deut. 16, we find that Shavuot was one of the three most important feasts that Israel was commanded to observe, yet today, ironically, it is one of the **least known and least observed** in the Jewish community, worldwide!

In Israel, Shavuot is a known festival because it is a public holiday that has become the culinary festival of dairy products. However, most Israelis are not aware of any significance of the festival beyond this custom to eat cheese and other milk dishes. In the Diaspora, Shavuot does not have a "national" significance and in some situations Jewish people are not even aware of the very existence of the festival. This "non celebration" of Shavuot is paradoxical given the Biblical significance of the festival!

There are various Rabbinic and Kabbalistic traditions that have developed over the centuries, in the observation of the feast, but these do not seem to have much Biblical basis. Though there may not be as many Bible references about Shavuot as there are for the other 'pilgrim feasts' for us to study, let's try to **glean** what we can from Scripture.

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For one thing, we know that the story of Ruth begins to pick up momentum when she travels with Naomi to Bethlehem 'in the beginning of the barley harvest' and begins to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 1:22, ff). In the Bible, barley is a symbol of great spiritual significance! Barley, itself, is a coarse, cheap grain – not as refined as wheat. It doesn't make great bread and was eaten by the poor.

Remember the Amalekite's dream, in Judges 7, when he dreamed that a 'cake of barley bread' brought destruction upon the enemy tent? The interpretation of that dream was that the barley bread was the sword of Gideon – a timid, but willing man, whose army was stripped down by the Lord.

And think about the well-known, well-loved story, in John 6, about the lad who had the 5 barley loaves and 2 fish! Again, a description of weakness, but willingness and Jesus used those to feed 5 thousand people!

Barley seems to represent weak, insignificant, 'poor' people – who have no personal strength or greatness, but who yield themselves to God and whom God uses in mighty ways! In his sermon, in Acts 2, Peter quotes from Ps 110. Verse 3 of this psalm says, 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.' To me, this is a summary of the meaning of 'Barley'!

Let's turn our thoughts to references in the New Testament:

Each of the Gospels refer to the counting of the Omer; the numbering of the Weeks. Matt 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1 and John 20:19 all say, in the literal Greek: 'the first of weeks' (the word 'day' does not appear and the word is weeks, not week!). Then in John 20:26, we read that 'after eight days' Jesus appeared again to the disciples and Thomas... Acts 1:1-5 shows us that

Jesus was alive on earth, after His death and resurrection, revealing Himself - teaching and speaking about the Kingdom of God – for forty of those fifty days! He then told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, 'not many days hence'!

Acts 2:1 reads, 'And when the day of Pentecost was **fully come!**' The fiftieth day! As we know the story so well, there is no need to go into detail about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but it would be good to look at one of the prophecies that Peter used in his 'sermon'.

Peter quoted from the book of Joel, indicating clearly that it was God's plan all along to gather (or re-gather) the Jewish people – **to Himself and to the Land** – and to pour out His Spirit upon them! We also know that this is clearly God's intent from other prophecies, such as Ezek 11:19,20 and 36:26-38 (note the agricultural references!).

The book of Joel also contains many agricultural references, as well as a very vivid – and chillingly up-to-date – description of a terrifying, destroying army horde, which leaves devastation in its wake (ch. 2).

Now, of course, one of the most obvious aspects of Shavout is that of **counting!** Think about it! When we 'count the days' toward something, it's not just a marking of time – **it's anticipation!** While, yes, the events in Acts happened according to prophecy, there will yet be a final fulfilment of all these things: the full re-gathering of Jewish people to the **Land of Israel** AND the Lord's Spirit being poured upon them (Ezek 37)! Knowing this, are we, as God's people, just marking time and getting on with our lives? Instead, let us be 'counting the days', discerning the times, watching and praying, offering ourselves willingly and working until all Israel is saved!

Chrissy Rodgers and Debbie Rodgers

Zion for whom no one cares?

Recently I attended a lecture during 'Jewish Book Week' in north London, where the Jewish writer, Frederic Raphael, considered why 'intense hostility has been directed so relentlessly towards Jews for more than two millennia.' The main reason he gave was 2000 years of Christianity, which, he said, accused the Jews 'of the unique crime of deicide, which is to say the murder of God Himself in the crucifixion of Jesus'. He went on to give his opinion that Christianity is dying out in Europe and implied that as a result this source of anti-Semitism would decline.

The Jewish lady sitting next to me knew I was a Christian and was rather apologetic to me after the meeting because of the hostile statements he made about Christianity. I was able to share with her that I understand the problem Jewish people have with Christianity in view of anti-Semitism in church history. However I went on to explain that this history is the result of a distortion of the New Testament, which does accuse the Jews of 'the murder of God' but shows us that Jesus died and rose from the dead in the will of God as a sacrifice for our sins in fulfilment of the prophecies of the suffering servant Messiah of Isaiah 53.

This incident was another reminder of the huge roadblock, which anti-Semitism in the name of Christianity has placed in the way of Jewish people considering the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah. As we bear witness to Jewish people we have to acknowledge that such things have happened in the name of Christianity, but not in the will of the Lord. At the same time we have to say that this 'Christian' anti-Semitism is not the main source of hostility to the Jewish people in the modern world. Since the horrors of the Holocaust most of the church has acknowledged its error in blaming the Jews for the death of Jesus

and teaching contempt for the Jewish people.

However anti-Semitism is by no means dying out. Jews are leaving France in record numbers because of rising anti-Semitism. Jews living in Germany and Sweden no longer feel safe since the influx of large numbers of Muslim immigrants into their neighbourhoods has increased attacks on Jewish people. In Britain Jewish students suffer hostility and abuse from anti-Zionist activists at our universities. The Labour Party has been shaken by anti-Semitic incidents and members have been suspended from the party for attacks on Israel and allegations of Jew-hate.

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) concluded its 60th annual session in New York by ignoring the abuse of women all over the Muslim world and condemning only Israel as an abuser of women's rights. Israeli MK Yaer Lapid described the UN's treatment of Israel as 'pure, old fashioned, anti-Semitism. There is only one country in the Middle East in which the rights of minorities are protected, in which women's rights are protected ... and that's the country the UN Human Rights Council constantly attacks.'

In Europe most of the hostility to Jews comes from Muslims and the hard left who unite in support of the Palestinian cause and opposition to Zionism. Some of these see Israel as a source of cosmological evil, with the anti-Semitism previously directed against Jewish people now directed at the Jewish State. Israeli Ambassador Mark Regev commented on the hostility to Israel describing it as 'demonising the Jewish state, a vilification of my country and its very right to exist. There's a difference between legitimate criticism and hate speech. Hating Jews is a red line that cannot be crossed.'

Hating Jews is a red line, which is often crossed by supporters of the Palestinian cause. Some quote Islamic texts saying how Allah has 'cursed' the Jews and will turn them into apes and swine because they are 'infidels'. Hamas has incorporated into its charter the hadith (a saying attributed to Mohammed): 'The Day of Judgement will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews, when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Muslims, O Abdullah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.' Israel's supposed peace partner, Mahmoud Abbas, gave a speech on September 16th 2015 broadcast on Palestinian TV inciting terror attacks against Israel. He spoke about the 'Jews filthy feet' defiling al Aqsa (the Temple Mount) and said 'We bless every drop of blood spilled for Jerusalem. This is clean and pure blood, blood that was spilled for Allah. It is Allah's will that every martyr will go to heaven.'

Commenting on this hatred, Israeli President Rivlin addressed the Knesset with apocalyptic terms: 'Lately we have witnessed more and more attempts by political leaders, and others, to turn the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a religious conflict. From such a conflict, there would be no return. A war of Armageddon, Jihad, or the end of days. The attempts to stoke the fire of conflict, by passionate fundamentalists is an attempt to set fire to this earth upon which we all sit.'

Just such a conflict is prophesied by the Hebrew prophets. Jeremiah 30 warns: 'Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but **he shall be saved out of**

it.' Zechariah 12.10 tells us that Israel's salvation will come as '**they will look on Me whom they pierced**', clearly pointing to Yeshua, Jesus the Messiah who has come as the Suffering Servant Messiah of Isaiah 53 and who is coming again to reign as the King Messiah of Isaiah 2.1-4 and Zechariah 14. He is the one who will comfort and redeem Israel: 'But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the Lord, 'because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.' Jeremiah 30.17.

While most of the world does call Zion an outcast and does not care for her, God wants true believers in Jesus to comfort and stand by Israel and the Jewish people, pray for their peace and protection and resist anti-Semitic hatred. We should also point all people to the only one who can bring peace and salvation to Israel and the world, Yeshua, Jesus the Messiah.

Tony Pearce

Please pray for our workers:

Gillian, Dean, Simon, Tony and Andrew in the UK, Margaret in Toulouse, Leigh in Capetown, Roisin in St Petersburg, Jakob in Cologne, Anatol in Aachen, Ivan in Koblenz, Yossi and Liron in Karmiel, Michael in Rishon LeZion and Rudi in Beersheba.

And for our trustees:

Colin Leyshon (chairman), Brian Chapman, Tim Gamston, June Marshall, Mike Roberts and Debbie Rodgers

Save the date!
WELSH ANNUAL MEETING
Saturday, October 1, 2016
Venue:
Bethany Pwllgwaun Pontypridd
Details to follow in next Selah!

We Didn't Do It. It's a set up!

Some time ago, I gave a New Testament to Peter, a Jewish friend who had shown some interest in Spiritual things.

A week or two later we met again and when asked what he had read, he said he had started reading Acts, but stopped after reading that the Jews killed Jesus. [e.g. 3:13,14] "We did not kill anyone by crucifixion! That was a Roman method of execution."

"Well," I replied, "you are quite right in one sense, yet the Jewish Authorities were involved in accusing Him, and persuading Governor Pilot to execute Him.

"But this had to happen for the Torah to be fulfilled, and we read Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 together, showing it was the Father's plan to lay our sin on Him."

After some discussion, I said that there was another reason why Jewish people were responsible:

Jewish priests had to be present for any sacrifice to be acceptable to the Holy One. Also, God prescribed what the sacrifice was to be, and where, and even when it was to be offered.

One couldn't sacrifice in Nazareth or anywhere of your choice, it had to be offered at the Temple in Jerusalem, and you couldn't offer a frog or a fox, it had to be a sacrifice acceptable to God; a

clean animal like a lamb. And even if you were to sacrifice an acceptable animal in Jerusalem without a priest, it was still not acceptable to the Holy One of Israel.

Just as the Jewish priests were the priests for all the families in Israel, so the Torah states that the Jewish Nation is the Priestly nation for all the nations of the world [Ex 19:6,7].

Jesus came into the world to be sacrificed as the Lamb of God, so He had to die in Jerusalem and at Passover, with our people present. Without the Jewish nation being there and being responsible, we would all continue to be spiritually dead, because Ha Shem in Haftorah says, "All souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." [Ezekiel 18:4]

So you see, I am very glad that the nation of Israel was involved, and we know from the New Testament Ha Shem has accepted Yeshua's sacrifice to make an atonement for our sins.

How dark and even hopeless our lives would be if we didn't have this assurance that our sins are forgiven, and this certainty that we are clean and acceptable in God's sight, because of Yeshua's atonement.

Tom Mayr-Lori

