

05-02-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene
Torah Portion; Lev 21:1 – 34:23 *Emor* (say)
Haftarah: Ezek 44:15-31
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: 2 Thess 2:13-15

The Two Loaves of Shavuot

Central question of this message: What are the lessons we see with two leavened loaves of Shavuot?

This week we are in parasha *Emor*. Its name is taken from the seventh word in the English, and the fifth word in the original Hebrew.

Lev 21:1-3

21 Then the Lord said to Moses, "**Speak** to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, 'No one shall defile himself for a dead person among his people, 2 except for his relatives who are nearest to him, his mother and his father and his son and his daughter and his brother, 3 also for his virgin sister, who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may defile himself.

21:1 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן
 And said the Lord unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron,
 559 3068 413 4872 559 1121 175

וַאֲמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא־יִטְמָא בְּעַמּוּיוֹ:
 and say unto them, for the dead none shall be defiled among his people:
 559 413 5315 3808 2930 5971

כִּי אִם־לְשֹׂארוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו לְאִמּוֹ
 But for his kin, that is near unto him, that is, for his mother,
 3588 518 7607 7138 413 9999 517

וּלְאָבִיו וּלְבָנוֹ וּלְבָתּוֹ וּלְאָחִיו:
 and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother,
 1 1121 1323 251

וּלְאָחִתּוֹ הַבְּתוּלָה הַקְרוּבָה אֵלָיו אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הָיְתָה לְאִישׁ
 And for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which no hath had husband;
 269 1330 7138 413 834 3808 1961 376

לָהּ יִטְמָא:
 for her may he be defiled.
 3807a 2930

There are a number of very important teachings in this parasha. There are regulations for the sanctification and purity of the priests who will minister before the L-rd (which will be followed once again in the Temple where Yeshua will be seated as King)

There are minimum requirements for any person in Israel, whether he be a Hebrew, or not yet grafted fully into the family, regarding the offerings to be made at the Temple.

This parasha contains the “appointed times of the L-rd” beginning with the Sabbath, and including all the festivals and holy days. The normative church often calls these the “Jewish festivals” as if we invented them, and they are not of G-d.

Within those festivals we find the festival of Shavuot (lit. “weeks”).

Lev 23:15-21

15 'You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 'You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. 17 **'You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord.** 18 'Along with the bread, you shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd, and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their libations, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord. 19 'You shall also offer one male goat for a sin

offering and two male lambs one year old for a sacrifice of peace offerings. 20 'The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the first fruits for a wave offering with two lambs before the Lord; they are to be holy to the Lord for the priest. 21 **'On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.**

This passage is a continuation of the instructions regarding First Fruits and the counting of the omer. It is clear in context that this festival is to be observed “When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest.”

Thus, it literally does not apply outside the Land of Israel. But since we are dispersed now among the nations of the world, we still observe this festival in unity with one another. There are many lessons to be learned in the observance and celebration of these festivals, and we should not neglect them regardless of where we might be living.

This festival is a *mikrei kodesh*, a “holy convocation” in which we are to do no laborious work. The consensus among our Sages is that the prohibition pertains to “servile work” which includes your daily

occupation. There is an exception to this general rule. You may do whatever you must to prepare the food for the meals during the festival.

This year, in accordance with the calendar as we reckon it, Shavuot eve this year will begin at nightfall on Saturday the 23rd of May. We will have a celebration of that holy day in our congregation.

Note that the two loaves are to be waved before the L-rd together with the sacrifice of the thanksgiving offering. This has led our Sages to conclude that these two loaves are also a part of the thanksgiving offering dedicated to this festival.

Note also that the two loaves are to be made of wheat gathered from all of Israel. In a very real way, this is a community sacrifice and a community celebration. It speaks of unity. No one person can say that his contribution wound up in any particular piece of the loaves. The grinding of the wheat into fine flour, then mixing it with leaven, then kneading it well so that it will be uniform, all points to a composite unity of the Body.

We have been talking much of one of the more mystical aspects of this festival – the two loaves. Let's look deeper at these loaves.

17 'You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord.

I had many questions upon reading this passage. Why is this characterized as a “first fruits” offering, when there has already been, some 50 days ago, a “first fruits” offering already? Why is leaven permitted in this offering, when leaven is prohibited in all the others? Why two loaves and not one? Is there any spiritual significance or prophetic message in these two loaves? I was not alone. Many wise men before me had the same questions. Let’s look at some answers to these questions.

First Fruits of What?

Sforno¹ presents a good answer to this question. He wrote regarding Leviticus 23:17:

The Omer was the first ripened barley; the offering mentioned in our verse here represented the first ripened

¹ Obadia ben Jacob Sforno (c. 1470/1475 – c. 1550) was an Italian rabbi, Biblical commentator, philosopher and physician. He became a revered Scriptural scholar who focused on the literal interpretation of the words, and avoided the more mystical interpretations.

stalks of the wheat harvest. This is why the festival of weeks is also known as **יום הבכורים**, “the day of the firstlings offering.” (compare Numbers 28,26 where this **מנחה חדשה**, “new gift offering” is described). The more appropriate translation would be the “gift offering consisting of the new (grain) harvest.”

Thus, the “First Fruits” which we celebrated following Passover this year was the first of the barley harvest, which comes much earlier. These “First Fruits” are of wheat, which ripens considerably later.

Why Leaven?

Chametz doesn't always represent pride, malice and wickedness. It certainly does have that connotation when we are required to purge it from our homes during Passover and Unleavened Bread. But these two loaves (*shteí halechem*) are leavened, and waving an offering before the L-rd representing those traits hostile to His leadership makes no sense at all.

It is important for us to realize that in the context of this festival, leaven represents being “puffed up” not with pride... but with strength and determination to carry out a holy tasking in this world.

There is a statement in a Chasidic commentary called *The Kehot Chumash*, which I believe offers a good explanation. It is quite involved and uses stilted language, so I will offer a much shorter summary.

The loaves are required to be leavened. Leavened bread rises, and represents ego, and being self-driven. Unleavened bread remains flat, and represents us being humble and selfless.

The prohibition of having leaven with the offerings on the Altar in the Temple show us that while we are in the presence of G-d, we are to be engaged fully in humility and seeking His guidance. Being puffed-up is not consistent with His holiness and we should be holy there as well.

But when we leave the Temple, and are about our daily lives, we need to exercise our self-direction with some degree of courage and let our souls be influenced by a “Divine ego” which means we are at one with Him and His agenda in the world. Otherwise we will not be courageous in standing up in this world for His holiness.

So it is that at the beginning (days of unleavened bread following Passover) we are being made ready by a spiritual renewal to gain purity for our season of being influential in the world.

Then, after that time of purification, we are to be strengthened and matured during the time of the counting of the omer during which we grow in our power to assert ourselves. The leavening in our spirit is in this case signifying our increased maturity and the strengthening of our spirit so that we might better assert ourselves.

For that reason, a season of consuming *chametz* (leavening) is not only permitted, but is mandatory, since our directive is not only to subdue and refine our souls in holiness, but also to strengthen them for our divine mission.

Two Loaves and not One

Let's begin by recognizing the size of these loaves. These are not loaves which might be on the typical shelf in any store. They are huge. One person remembers some of those loaves being baked by her mother in her home, and they were upwards of ten pounds each.

An *ephah* is reputed to have been 22 liters, 0.6 of a bushel, or 20 dry quarts in volume. In terms of weight, it is said that an *ephah* was 25.5 kilograms, or roughly 56 pounds. So, a tenth of an *epha* would be 2 dry quarts and about 5.6 pounds. Two-tenths of an *epha* would then be 4

quarts of flour weighing a bit over 11 pounds. Most stores sell bread flour in 5.5-lb bags. So this recipe would take two typical full bags of flour for each loaf.

The typical Challah recipe calls for four cups of flour, which is equal to one dry quart. So, we can visualize that a leavened loaf baked with four times that much flour might be difficult to get into a typical oven, and would likely cover a standard cookie sheet. Now imagine two of those to be hefted and waved before the L-rd. Does this speak of abundance and provision to you?



So, what do these loaves represent? There has been a lot of discussion about this, especially in the normative Christian community. Some say they represent Jew and Gentile. The “two house” adherents say these

represent Judah and Israel. Both of these seem to equate the requirement of leaven in these loaves to represent sinful man being presented to the L-rd. I can't subscribe to either of these.

The term "gentile" is a bit of a problem, from the start. That term, in almost every use in Scripture, clearly refers to someone from among the nations who *does not* believe in the One true G-d. Exodus 12:49 and Leviticus 19:34 both made it clear that there is to be unity between the Hebrew and those grafted-in when G-d directed that there would be "one law for the native-born and for the stranger," and that the native Hebrews were to consider those grafted-in from the nations to be "as one born among you." I submit that once a gentile becomes fully grafted-into the people (as did Ruth), then he can no longer be called by that descriptor, but is now fully a part of the Jewish people.

Regarding the Ephramite² "two house" interpretation, their theology is insidiously supportive of artificial stratification, division and disunity rather than how I see G-d asking His family to be.

² According to this theology:

- Jews are defined strictly as descendants of the tribe of Judah (and sometimes Benjamin).
- Israelites are distinguished from Jews, with Israelites being those descended from the other ten tribes.
- Gentile Christians are viewed not as a separate "Church" replacing Israel, but as the restored House of Ephraim returning to their Hebrew roots and identity.

This view is considered heterodox by mainstream Messianic Judaism and evangelical Christianity, which generally hold that:

- The terms Jew, Israelite, and Hebrew are used interchangeably in Scripture (e.g., by the Apostle Paul).
- There is no biblical basis for separating Jewish believers from Gentile believers in Messiah.
- The "lost tribes" were not entirely lost, and no modern Gentile group has genealogical proof of being Ephraimite descendants.

So, now that we know what the two loaves don't represent, let's take a closer look to see how they might more properly be interpreted.

We have what I believe is a *midrash*³ on the best interpretation found in Paul's second letter to the congregation at Thesoloniki.

2 Thess 2:13-15

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you **from the beginning** for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

Focus first on the translation of the Greek word *aparche* which is rendered as “in the beginning” in this translation.

Critics argue that Ephraimite theology represents a form of replacement theology that erroneously claims Gentiles have replaced Jews as God's chosen people in a physical sense, rather than a spiritual one.

³ A *midrash* is a teaching using a rabbinic mode of interpretation. The Talmud is replete with *midrashim*.

the <u>9999</u>	κυρίου, Lord, <u>2962</u> Kuríou	ὅτι because <u>3754</u> hóti	εἵλατο hath chosen <u>138</u> heílato	ὑμᾶς you <u>5209</u> humás	ὁ <u>3588</u> ho	θεὸς God <u>2316</u> Theós
ἀπαρχὴν from the beginning < <u>536</u> > aparcheén	εἰς to <u>1519</u> eis	σωτηρίαν salvation <u>4991</u> sooteerían	ἐν through <u>1722</u> en	ἁγιασμῷ sanctification <u>38</u> hagiasmoó		

NT:536 ἀπαρχή **aparche** (ap-ar-khay'); from a compound of NT:575 and NT:756; a beginning of sacrifice, i.e. the (Jewish) first-fruit (figuratively):

The translators chose what I believe is a rendering in English which more closely fit their theology, than what I think the original intent of Paul in writing the letter to people he had taught about the Torah. It does seem that a legitimate translation of the passage could be:

... because God has chosen you, according to the pattern of the first fruits offering, for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

Why would Paul combine the idea of the First Fruits offering (of Shavuot) with sanctification by “the Spirit and faith in the truth.” The normative Christian, who has had generations of teaching in one certain interpretation, would say “the truth” means the truth of the gospel. I

don't say that this interpretation is faulty, but I do say it might miss the deeper meaning, and I don't think this is what Paul was trying to say.

When a Jewish person, and in particular a Rabbi, refers to "the truth" when speaking of spiritual things, he often is referring directly to Torah. Let me show you how that is shown. Jews believe that the Torah is "truth." We believe that the very letters of the aleph-bet embody truth, because these are the building-blocks of Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. Take the first letter of the aleph-bet (the *aleph*), and the middle letter of the aleph-bet (the *mem*) and the final letter of the aleph-bet (the *tav*) and make a single word from those letters. You get the Hebrew word *emet* = "truth."

The reason I believe that Paul in this passage is associating the idea of "truth" with Torah is because I can see Paul made that very association himself in the text of the passage. The analysis begins with Paul's instruction that they should follow the traditions they have been taught.

15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions
which you were taught,

Remember that at the time these words were written, there were no "church traditions." There was no "church" at that time to have

developed any traditions. In Acts 15:6-21, the Beit Din⁴ in Jerusalem considered what these new believers in our G-d should do to begin to learn how to graft-into the Jewish G-d, and walk in unity with the Jewish people, consistent with the life of Yeshua the Messiah.

beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. They gave instruction to pass to these *goyim* who were coming to faith from the nations.

Acts 15:19-21

19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles⁵, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. **21 "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."**

The Beit Din ruled that these *goyim* begin by observing four laws of Torah – laws that prohibit the most detestable actions of the idolators who are in the nations apart from Israel. Then these new believers in the

⁴ A Beit Din is a court which renders a decision on matters of spiritual and issues of life in the Jewish community.

⁵ Note how the “gentiles” are described as those who are not yet believers in the One true G-d.

One true G-d were to go to the synagogue and there learn what Moses had to say. What would these new believers learn at the synagogue? Torah and traditional ways of living-out G-d's commandments in everyday life. Taken as a whole, it is clear from the writings of Paul that he lived a life consistent with Torah, he taught the new believers how to live consistent with Torah, and he taught them the traditions that he knew from being a Jew regarding living a proper life.

Let's now build upon that by talking about what kinds of Jewish traditions, as endorsed by Paul to his congregations, might be associated with the two loaves of Shavuot.

Jewish tradition holds that the Torah was given to the Jews on Shavuot. They had left Egypt (crossing the Gulf of Aqaba) and arrived at the wilderness around the mountain (known in Arabic today as *Jabal Musa* – “mountain of Moses.”), and arrived there in the third month of the year. That would be the month of Sivan.

Ex 19:1-3

19 In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 When they set out from Rephidim,

they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain.

They camped at the foot of the mountain during the Hebrew month of Sivan. They spent some time getting ready to receive G-d's words, and then the Torah was given. Was it actually on the very date of Shavuot? I cannot tell you. I wasn't there. But it does seem that G-d seems to do some very special things on His holy days. So, I think the tradition has merit.

This year Shavuot will be the 8th of Sivan. And it is customary for our people to rejoice on Shavuot because G-d loved us enough to give us good instruction to live a holy life to Him and an orderly live with others.

I believe that the Torah represents one of the two loaves of Shavuot.

Let's look at the second important thing that happened at the Mountain on that Shavuot which was also a "first" in human history.

Num 11:16-27

16 The Lord therefore said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. **17 Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you shall not bear it all alone.** 18 And say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying," Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt. "Therefore the Lord will give you meat and you shall eat. 19 'You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, 20 but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"" 21 But Moses said, "The people, among whom I am, are 600,000 on foot; yet Thou hast said, 'I will give them meat in order that they may eat for a whole month.' 22 "Should flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Or should all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be

sufficient for them?" 23 And the Lord said to Moses, "Is the Lord's power limited? Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not."

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent. 25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And it came about that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again.

26 But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp.

Here we have the first “pouring out of the Holy Spirit” upon a large group of people. The sweet ones in the normative church confidently declare that the “Spirit came on Pentecost.” They insist that this is the first instance of such infilling. They are correct, of course, that the Spirit

did come on that festival, but they simply mis-identified the correct Pentecost when this first happened.

The second “coming of the Holy Spirit” as described in Acts 2 was a second manifestation of the first one, seen above. They should be saying, “the Spirit came again, with yet another manifestation of power, on Pentecost after the resurrection.”

So, we see the two supremely significant spiritual events associated with the first Shavuot (Pentecost) are:

1. Giving of the Torah
2. Giving of the Spirit

And let’s put all this together as we once again read his words, as I have retranslated them in a way that I believe more properly conveys Paul’s intent:

... because God has chosen you, according to the pattern of the first fruits offering, for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

Paul equates these new believers as fresh, new growth of a bountiful harvest which has been selected by G-d.

They have been sanctified (set apart) from all the others around them by their faith in the One true G-d.

The theme invokes the Spirit, and the Torah (truth).

Those sweet believers were selected for being redeemed by G-d as the “first fruits” of all believers who would constitute a far greater harvest in later ages. We, in this generation, are also part of that harvest, if we will remain set apart and unstained by the world.

We are not to be puffed up in pride, but rather we should grow in conviction and strength so much as to allow our witness and work in this world to be a super-abundant offering to G-d.

The priests would wave these two loaves in the four cardinal directions, and then upward as well as downward. We can see in that pattern of waving how we should be. We should affect for good all that is around us in every direction, and knowing that while we are in this world we are not of this world, but rather already part of the kingdom of Heaven as well.