

5-23-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene
Special Torah Portion: Shavuot – Exodus 19:1 – 20:23
Special Haftarah: Ezekiel 1:1-28 3:12
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim:

Shavuot / Pentecost – A Time to Reconnect

Central question of this message: Will you reconnect in this season with G-d?

We have a special parasha for the festival of Shavuot (Pentecost), back in the book of Shemot (Exodus). We will resume our regular rotation in the Torah portions next weekend.

Ex 19:1-4

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. 3 And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying,

"Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:

יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּנֵי־	לְצֵאתָ	הַשְּׁלִישִׁי	בַּחֹדֶשׁ	19:1
Israel	the children of	when were gone forth	the third	In month,	
<u>3478</u>	<u>1121</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>3318</u>	<u>7992</u>	<u>2320</u>
מִדְבָּר	בָּאוּ	הַזֶּה	בַּיּוֹם	מִמִּצְרַיִם	מֵאֶרֶץ
the wilderness of	into came they	the same	day	Egypt,	out of the land of
<u>4057</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>935</u>	<u>2088</u>	<u>3117</u>	<u>4714</u>
					<u>776</u>
					סִינִי:
					Sinai.
					<u>5514</u>
סִינִי	מִדְבָּר	וַיָּבֹאוּ	מִרְפִּידִים	וַיִּסְעוּ	2
Sinai,	the desert of	to and were come	from Rephidim,	For they were departed	
<u>5514</u>	<u>4057</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>935</u>	<u>7508</u>	<u>5265</u>
הַהָר:	נֶגֶד	יִשְׂרָאֵל	שָׁם	וַיַּחֲנֶה	בְּמִדְבָּר
the mount.	before	Israel	there	and camped	in the wilderness;
<u>2022</u>	<u>5048</u>	<u>3478</u>	<u>8033</u>	<u>2583</u>	<u>4057</u>
					<u>2583</u>
וּמֹשֶׁה	עָלָה	אֶל־	הָאֱלֹהִים	וַיִּקְרָא	אֵלָיו
And Moses	went up	unto	God,	and called	unto him
<u>4872</u>	<u>5927</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>430</u>	<u>7121</u>	<u>413</u>
					<u>3068</u>
וַיִּתְּנֵהּ	וַיִּתְּנֵהּ	וַיִּתְּנֵהּ	וַיִּתְּנֵהּ	וַיִּתְּנֵהּ	וַיִּתְּנֵהּ
and tell	Jacob,	to the house of	shalt thou say	Thus	saying,
<u>5046</u>	<u>3290</u>	<u>1004</u>	<u>559</u>	<u>3541</u>	<u>559</u>
					<u>2022</u>
					יִשְׂרָאֵל:
					Israel;
					<u>3478</u>
					לְבָנֵי
					the children of
					<u>1121</u>

In this particular parasha, known as *Yitro*, Moses goes up onto the Mountain to receive the Torah. It is the tradition of the Jewish people that the Torah was given on Shavuot (Pentecost) and so our people read this particular parasha once again on Shavuot.

The Calendar of G-d

We are now in the third month of the calendar as G-d established it for the Jewish people (and the mixed multitude that left with them) in Egypt just as we were about to leave that place of slavery.

Ex 12:1-3

12 Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you.

If G-d's calendar begins at the first new moon of the spring (normally in March or April), then how is the entire world now in the fifth month of the calendar we all use today? For that answer, we must go back into history.

And in history we find that mankind has been striving to disconnect itself from G-d and to persecute the Jewish people because of our steadfast adherence to G-d's calendar. It began much earlier, but for our purposes today, let's go back to the days of Julius Caesar.

In 46 BCE Julius Caesar reformed an existing Roman calendar which was governed both by the moon and the sun. This calendar was established as a further means of uniting the vast Roman empire. This new calendar, now known as the Julian Calendar, was 365 days long with a leap-day added every four years. It began on the first day of January every year. This pattern presumed that the solar year was exactly 365.25 days long. But the true circuit of the Earth takes 365.2422 days. That means the Julian Calendar would gain one day every 128 years. The names of the months in the Julian Calendar were given to honor prominent Romans, but those names didn't often survive their deaths. So, there was a lot of change in the names of the months, and the continual slippage of the beginning of the year, relative to the calendar year, became an increasing problem. That was solved by simply adding a number of days between some existing months to reconcile the years. That also caused distress and confusion. Regardless, the Julian calendar was in use for more than 1,600 years, until in 1582 when Pope Gregory established an observatory for celestial research and decided to correct the errors of the Julian Calendar.

Pope Gregory established a new calendar in 1582 which today bears the name "Gregorian Calendar." This calendar uses an Earth orbit cycle of 365.2422 days, which means it will be off by only one tenth

of a day in 400 years. The Gregorian Calendar kept the beginning of the year as January 1st. This calendar is in worldwide use today.

Regardless of who had conquered the Holy Land, the Jews kept following G-d's calendar, which used the moon cycle to determine months (new moon to new moon is one month), and the sun's annual cycle to determine years. But G-d's calendar didn't line-up with the civil calendar established by any of our captors or our occupiers. So, we would relate the year to an important event that everyone knew, so as to orient the reader's mind to the proper year. Or it would be described as being during the reign of a ruler. When months were referenced in the narrative, it would refer to the Hebrew months, not the civil months.

There are a number of ways of rendering the Jewish calendar, and those ways have multiplied as people from among the nations have begun the grafting-in process and have brought in their own beliefs on how things should be done.

The vast majority of the Jewish people have recognized the Hillel calendar. Hillel was the *Nasi* (presiding judge) of the Sanhedrin between 320 and 365 CE. He is the second of our Sages to be called Hillel, so he is often referred to as Hillel II. He is credited with the

creation of the modern Jewish calendar, which finally resolved any variations which had existed prior to that time.

The new month begins on the first sighting of the new moon crescent in Israel, and each month is determined to be 29 or 30 days long. Since 12 months of that length amount to only 354 days, an extra month (Adar II) is added every two or three years to keep the holy days occurring in the same time periods each year.

The Hillel Calendar was calculated upon the observances of the new moon and the solar cycle at that time. And the calculations have proved remarkably reliable until the present day.

But the addition of the “leap month” every few years serves to demonstrate to us that even the Hillel Calendar has its limitations.

In case that is not confusing enough, there seem to be up to four “new year” dates in the Jewish calendar. Two of these are important to us today. G-d ordained the first month of the year would be Nisan, but later the People decided that the high holy days of fall were so important they established Tishri as the “Head of the Year” (Rosh HaShanah) which occurs in September or early October. So,

the festival new year begins in the spring and the new year for repentance begins in the fall, some six months later.

How did the Jewish calendar get this disconnected from the original month which was 28 days long and the original year which was 360 days long? The Earth's rotation has been slowing. The orbit of the Earth around the Sun has been getting further away. The Moon's orbit is getting further from the Earth. All of these mean that days are longer, lunar months are longer, and years are longer.

The good news is that the days of the week have remained unchanged from the original 7-day week until now. Mankind seems to have many ways to mess-up what G-d has established, but at least the 7-day week has remained. And if there was any doubt about what day was the Sabbath, Yeshua resolved that when He walked the Earth as a man some 2000 years ago. If we were worshipping on the wrong day back then, He would have made a correction. He made no such correction. The day of rest is the Sabbath, and if He failed to honor the Sabbath, He could not have been the sinless sacrifice for us. So, we know that the Sabbath day in the time of Yeshua was the correct day.

And since the Jewish people have been faithful to keep the Sabbath since the time of Yeshua, we can be confident that we still have the right day of the week, regardless of all those who wish to tell us otherwise.

I am not going to once again speak about how the Catholic Church changed the weekly day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, for that is beyond the scope of today's teaching. But you can find an exhaustive historical account of how and why that was done in the book entitled *From Sabbath to Sunday*. It was written by Samuele Bacchiocchi and was published by the Pontifical Gregorian University Press in 1977. You can read it or download it for free.¹

To be sure, there are some Messianic communities who still observe the Sabbath on the correct day, but yet insist upon observing the holy days on their own different calendars. They are free to do so, of course, but how does that promote unity? In our congregation, we have chosen to simply follow the Hillel Calendar for purposes of maintaining unity with the greater body of the faith. And so we shall do until Yeshua returns to re-set our calendars to the best one – as it was in the beginning.

¹ <https://www.scribd.com/document/28967287/From-Sabbath-To-Sunday-by-Samuele-Bacchiocchi>

I suspect that when Yeshua re-creates the heavens and the Earth, that He is going to resolve all these issues for perfect unity in His kingdom. And I also believe that the months will once again be 28 days long, and the years 360 days, as it was in the beginning.

Thus the Jewish people have lived under a dual-calendar system for millennia. Our civil affairs must be governed under the civil calendar of the nation in which we live, and our religious calendar must be governed by the holy calendar that G-d Himself gave us – and that which Yeshua honored.

It is not only the matter of the calendar that Jews find themselves under a level of oppression. Satan has hated us from the time of Abraham until today, and he has no shortage of people on every continent who will gladly torment and oppress Jews.

So, every year every Jew must consider that following G-d has a price, and keeping His Torah brings both blessings and curses. But G-d gives us many opportunities during the year to rededicate ourselves to Him and His kingdom. I suggest to you that G-d has for many millennia provided Shavuot as a perfect day for us to seek a closer walk with G-d, and to rededicate ourselves to His service.

Shavuot

Shavuot represents the first wheat harvest, which in many ways represents the promise of a far greater harvest that is yet to come after the long hot summer growing season, terminating in Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Succot.

The two loaves which represent the Spirit and the Torah mark an important milestone in the development of our walk with G-d, both as a nation and individually.

At the Mountain, as G-d began giving us the written Torah, He accompanied that gift with the Spirit.

Num 11:16-18

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.

And

Num 11:25

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.

For the Spirit to come upon the Elders, it seems that they had to be separated for a time from the People, who were constantly complaining regarding the manna, lack of meat, etc.

The complaints of the People suggested adversity, but for them there was no real adversity. They were in the presence of the Living G-d, they had daily bread, they had an abundance of the best water, they had a canopy over them by day to keep the sun off them, and a pillar of fire by night as a “night light” to guide their steps. They had no hard labor and no taskmasters. They had none

of the diseases that had afflicted Egypt. They had all the wealth of Egypt in their bags. But still they complained. It seems that no matter what G-d provided for them, it was never “enough.”

I think that possibly the ungrateful nature of the people during this time prevented the Spirit from coming to them as it did for Moses and the 70 elders.

Ruth

It is the custom of the Jews to read the book of Ruth during Shavuot. This seems to be appropriate, since the narrative of the journey of Ruth from Moab to Bethlehem, and her work in the fields of Boaz illustrate a life-journey from being a foreigner to being fully grafted-into the Jewish people. Her union with the Jewish people was so perfect that it granted her the great privilege of being in the lineage of Messiah. And the story seemed to progress all during the time between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest at Shavuot.

A look at the faith-journey of Ruth helps us understand one of the lessons of Shavuot.

Ruth was a member of a people who were traditionally opposed to the Jewish people, and thus prohibited from becoming part of Israel for ten generations.

Deut 23:3-4

3 "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, 4 because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

She was in Moab when she met her Jewish husband. She was still there when he died, and Naomi was left without her husband and both her sons. All Naomi had left was two foreign women who her sons had married, and then she heard that the famine in Israel had lifted. Naomi wished to return to her homeland, and her home town, Beit Lechem (Bethlehem).

The story of Ruth's life does not tell us how much she learned of G-d's relationship with the Jewish people, the Jewish ways of worship,

or a Jewish lifestyle during her marriage. But it was certainly more than nothing.

Ruth apparently knew enough of G-d and His ways as expressed by her husband's family to find it compelling. She left her homeland, and all that she knew and held dear – and determined to be joined to the Jewish People.

Ruth's story of completely being grafted-in unfolds between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest in Israel. Those days represent the 50 days of counting the Omer between First Fruits and Shavuot.

Ruth was taken into the house of Boaz as his wife, and Boaz served as her kinsman redeemer. This was all possible because Ruth had turned her back on Moab and all that nation stood for, and had fully embraced Israel and all that nation stands for. She fully grasped the Torah of truth, and the Spirit of G-d. Ruth celebrated her first Shavuot in Israel as one of G-d's Chosen People.

Ruth demonstrated how someone from outside the people of Israel can come to embrace G-d and His Torah. But there is another aspect to the lesson of this season for the people of Israel as well.

The Day of Redemption²

On May 18, 1945, only 10 days after the surrender of Germany, Jewish prisoners of the Reich gathered to celebrate Shavuot. It was their first opportunity to celebrate their faith in many years.

At Bergen-Belsen, where 70,000 had died, a British Chaplain CPT Rev. Leslie Hardman led the Shavuot prayers for those survivors who crowded around where he stood.

Rev. Hardman served in the 8th Corps of the Second Army when it liberated the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1945. He told of the events:

The fact that “a religious service” was “being mentioned” was of great solace to the survivors, he said.

The harsh scenes with which he was confronted at the camp led him to momentarily struggle with his faith. However, one Friday, a chance encounter with a survivor who was ill “brought me back to it,” he said.

² The following accounts are excerpted from an article in the Jerusalem Post published June 2, 2025.
<https://www.jpost.com/judaism/jewish-holidays/article-855962>

The survivor asked the chaplain for additional food, in honor of “the first Sabbath I’ve felt free.”

Rev. Hardman brought him tins of sardines, at which point the survivor said, “Stop, Rabbeinu, stop,” the chaplain recollected.

Having noticed Hardman’s tefillin “in a plush bag with Hebrew letters,” the inmate lost interest in the food and asked instead to wear the tefillin. “I haven’t worn them for nearly three years,” the survivor said.

“I thought he might have forgotten how to do it,” Rev. Hardman stated, recalling how he assisted the man. “I took them down, I opened them up for him, and helped him put them on.”

Following the survivor’s prayer, “The whole of his face lit up,” the chaplain recounted. The survivor went back into the camp. “He’d forgotten his sardines.”

The Shavuot service Rev. Hardman officiated offered a poignant scene. Some 200 survivors, mostly women and children, stood in a circle outside, some on stools and chairs to get a better view. They watched intently, some in tears, as Rev. Hardman, wearing a tallit

over his uniform, raised the Torah scroll and intoned the service, siddur in hand.



At the Buchenwald extermination camp, where 56,545 had died, Chaplain Rabbi Herschel Schacter conducted Shavuot services to a room filled with Jewish survivors, many still wearing their striped prisoner clothes.

Rabbi Schacter served in the Third Army's VIII Corps and was among the US troops to enter the camp. Hear his report:

“April 11, 1945, was the most unforgettable day in my life,” Rabbi Schacter said in a 1995 interview with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

While aware of the existence of the concentration camps and the persecution of Jews, “We had no idea of the extent of the tragedy,” Rabbi Schacter stated.

He recounted his shock at the sights that unfolded before him as he entered the camp. In the Kleine Lager, the small camp, he moved from barrack to barrack, encountering “hundreds of men, a few boys,” who were “more dead than alive.” They looked at him, “paralyzed with fear. I looked around. I didn’t know what to say.”

He chose to address the survivors in Yiddish, a language he knew would be a common denominator, calling out “Shalom aleichem yidden, You are free. The war is over.” His words were met by “utter silence” and “incredulous eyes.”

Gradually, those who could muster the strength followed him, touching his “insignia, the little Star of David, and the Hebrew letters.

“Is the war really over?” “Does the world know what happened to us?” “Where do we go from here?” were the recurring questions, he said.

Rabbi Schacter noted how “Jews flocked to a religious service,” and he recalled “the tears, the cries, and the fervent prayers.” The Shavuot service he officiated was no exception. “There was a mass of Jews who had come.”



Survivors, some still in their striped prisoners’ garb, gathered in a large hall, Lulek in their midst. In front of them stood Rabbi Schacter, wearing a tallit over his military uniform, as can be seen in a photo taken at the time.

For survivor Zalman Cohen from Hungary, the moment struck a deeply personal chord, he recalled in a testimony.

Rabbi Schacter “prayed out loud, and we prayed after him,” he said.

Following the prayer, Rabbi Schacter told the survivors to recite the “Kaddish.” “It was the first ‘Kaddish’ I said in this world,” Cohen recounted.

Slovakia-born Simcha Bunem Unsdorfer, who survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald, remembered the Shavuot service in his 1996 memoir *The Yellow Star*. Here is his report:

“On that evening, Buchenwald staged a fantastic demonstration of faith and loyalty to God. Thousands upon thousands of liberated Jews crowded into the specially vacated block for the first postwar Jewish religious service to be held on the soil of defeated Germany,” he wrote.

“But just as you cannot measure the physical strength of an oppressed people, so you cannot gauge its spiritual wealth and power.

“As Chaplain Schacter intoned the evening prayers, all the inmates in and outside the block stood in silence, re-accepting the Torah whose people, message, and purpose Hitler’s Germany had attempted to destroy,” he wrote.

“Jewish history repeated itself. Just as our forefathers who were liberated from Egypt accepted the Law in the desert, so did we, the liberated Jews of Buchenwald, reaccept the same Law in the concentration camps of Germany.”

None of us are Ruth, but some of us have followed in her footsteps to become fully grafted-into the Jewish people to worship the One true G-d. Others are on her path, but have not yet arrived where we hope to eventually be.

None of us were freed from the deathcamps, but some of us have been oppressed and afflicted by evil because of our faith. As we

grow in faith, our blessings will increase, but so will the afflictions placed upon us by those in this world who intend evil.

Regardless of our personal circumstances, we each have an opportunity today.

Our people entered into a new life on Shavuot. Ruth did as well. And so did the prisoners of Nazi Germany.

So can we.

It is my prayer that each of us will follow the path of the mixed multitude gathered at the Mountain that first Shavuot following our exodus from Egypt. We can walk in the footsteps of Ruth. We can shed our prison clothing and begin a new life as they did in 1945.

We do so when we humbly accept G-d's gifts of the Torah and the Spirit, and together with all of those from every generation in whose footsteps we stand, now declare, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!"