

What is Shavuot? Importance, meaning, Shavuot foods and more
What is Shavuot and why is it important?
Beit shalom Messianic Congregation, Pozzuoli, Naples, Italy

Shavuot - or "The feast of the weeks" - is one of three biblical pilgrimage feasts, along with Pesach (Jewish Passover) and Sukkot. Sivan 6 in Israel and Sivan 6 and 7 are celebrated in the diaspora.

The Bible describes the festival of Shavuot as an agricultural celebration: the festival of the harvest (Jeremiah 5:24, Deuteronomy 16: 9–11, Isaiah 9: 2). Today Shavuot is widely known as the Jewish holiday commemorating the day Hashem (God) gave the Torah to the nation of Israel on Mount Sinai, although Biblical references to Shavuot refer only to a spring harvest festival.

According to the Torah, the Israelites took seven weeks to travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai. The name Shavuot, which means "weeks", refers to this seven-week period. Every day is counted, which is known as the Counting of the Omer, or Sefirat HaOmer.

At the time of the Temple, the counting marked the seven weeks from the wheat harvest during the Jewish Passover spring festival, to the barley harvest on Shavuot.

During the Jewish Passover, the people of Israel were freed from Egyptian slavery; on Shavuot, they received the Torah and pledged to serve Hashem (God). While the Jewish Passover marks their release from slavery, Shavuot marks the renewal of their commitment and dedication to Hashem (God).

It is this national decision (often referred to as a "marriage" between Hashem (God) and the Israelites) that created the Jewish people. After accepting the commandments of Sinai, the Jewish people were no longer only descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now, they have become the chosen people of Hashem (God), who had chosen Hashem (God) in return and would study and respect the laws of the Torah as part of their service to the Almighty.

We explain more about the importance and greater relevance of this holiday in our introductory video of Shavuot of 28 May 2020 that you can find on our website at the link:

<https://villageofhopejusticeministry.org/weekly-messianic-bible-studies-studi-biblici-messianici-settimanali/>

Meaning of Shavuot

Shavuot's Jewish Spring Festival has many names and meanings, each of which can teach us something about the nature of the festival. Shavuot is pronounced in Italian "Shah-VOO-ot", and is also known primarily as the Time of the gift of the Torah (Zeman Matan Torah) and Pentecost (for the Gentiles).

Festival of the Weeks - חג השבועות (Exodus 34:22, Deuteronomy 16:10)

Shavuot means "Weeks" in Hebrew, which is why it is also known as "The Festival of the Weeks" in English or Pentecost (Gentiles). The name derives from the seven weeks of counting the Pesach (Jewish Passover) which culminate in the feast of Shavuot.

Harvest Festival - חג הקציר (Exodus 23:16)

Each of the three pilgrimage feasts marks a new period in the agricultural season:

1. Jewish Passover is also known as Chag ha-Aviv, the Spring Festival, which marks the beginning of the new plantation season. The basic meaning of the word Aviv is the stage of grain growth when the seeds have reached their maximum size but have not yet dried.
2. Chag ha-Katzir, or Wheat Harvest Festival, is when the first harvest of the season is ready. This happens in the time of Shavuot.
3. The next agricultural step is the harvesting of all crops. This happens with the third pilgrimage festival, Sukkot, which is also called the gathering festival, Chag Ha-Asif.

The day of the first fruits - יום הבכורים (Numbers 28:26)

Yom Habikurim (The day of the first fruits) comes from ancient times, when people brought Bikkurim, their first and best fruit, as an offering to the Holy Temple. The Bikkurim were brought from the Seven Species for which the land of Israel is praised: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates (Deuteronomy 8: 8).

Shavuot and Pentecost

The Greek name for the feast of Shavuot, Pentecost, means "Fiftieth day". This name refers to the fifty days between the Jewish Passover and Shavuot.

Yom Habikurim: Understanding the First Fruit Festival

The first fruit festival (Yom Habikurim) was a ceremonial way for Jewish farmers to thank Hashem (God) for providing another harvest and for the generous land of Israel in general. In preparation for the First Fruit Festival, the canes or ropes would have been tied around the first wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates to mature each spring. This special product, known as bikkurim, was exhibited in beautiful baskets and brought to the Holy Temple in a joyful procession. Farmers would recite a passage from Deuteronomy 26: 5 (which refers to Jacob's escape from his father-in-law Lavan)

Farmers would recite a passage from Deuteronomy 26: 5 (which refers to Jacob's escape from his father-in-law Lavan) which marks the miracle of the Jewish nation that flourishes successfully in the land of Israel.

Difference between first fruits and tithes

The giving of Bikkurim, or first fruits, is not the same as fulfilling the biblical commandment of the tithe of the earth. There are two types of biblical tithe: [\(Link to Your Tithe and Bikkurim\)](#)

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1. Terumah is a portion of corn, wine, oil, vegetables and fruit set aside to provide for the Kohen, or priest.
2. Maaser is one tenth of what remains of the harvest that is given to the Levites.

Neither Kohanim nor Leviim owned land in Israel, and Terumah and Maaser provided their livelihood while serving in the Holy Temple.

When is Shavuot 2020?

Shavuot 2020 will be observed from the evening of May 28 - evening of May 30. Shavuot festival is generally celebrated at sunset on the 6th of Sivan:

- **Thursday 28-29 May 2020 (5780)**
- Sunday 16-17 May 2021 (5781)
- Saturday 04–05 June 2022 (5782)
- Thursday 25-26 May 2023 (5783)
- Tuesday 11-12 June 2024 (5784)
- Sunday 01–02 June 2025 (5785)

How is Shavuot celebrated? Traditions, customs and rituals of Shavuot

Due to the agricultural and spiritual significance of the festival, there are many Shavuot traditions that celebrate both the Jewish people who receive the Torah and the Jewish harvest festival.

Unlike most other Jewish holidays, Shavuot did not prescribe the commandments of the Torah in addition to traditional festival observances, such as joyful holidays, special prayers during the holidays and abstention from work. Shavuot, however, has many minhagim or customs.

Tikkun Leil Shavuot: night learning

According to Midrash, the Israelites went to bed early in the evening before receiving the Torah to rest well for the important day ahead, but then they overslept and had to be awakened by Moses himself. To atone for this national error, many Jews study the Torah all night long, in symbolic anticipation of receiving the Torah on the day of Shavuot. This practice is also known as Tikkun Leil Shavuot.

Counting the Omer to Shavuot

The Torah teaches us to count the weeks between the first barley harvest and the Festival of the weeks. Talmudic sages explain that these seven weeks, known as Omer, connect the Jewish Passover and Shavuot festivals. The Omer is a half-mourning period, ending with Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the Omer.

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Shavuot flowers

According to Midrash, Mount Sinai suddenly blossomed with flowers and greenery in honor of the gift of the Torah. So today many Jewish families decorate their homes with greenery and flowers in honor of the festival.

Shavuot prayers

Shavuot's prayers include a blessing on the lighting of candles, the blessing of Kiddush on wine and the blessing of Shechianu.

Shavuot Food: Why Do We Eat Dairy Products in Shavuot?

It is customary to eat dairy products on Shavuot. Ashkenazi Jews often enjoy cheesecake and cheese during the Shavuot festivities, while Sephardic Jews eat dumplings and cheese pancakes. Jews from Greece, Morocco and Tunisia often eat a seven-layer sweet bread called pan de sei cielos (bread of the seven heavens).

Dairy products are consumed in Shavuot for a number of reasons:

1. Shavuot occurs during the milking season, when milk is abundant and fresh.
2. Before receiving the Torah, the Israelites did not follow its ritual slaughter laws for animals, so their utensils had not yet been purified for the use of kosher meat. So instead of meat, the Israelites celebrated with dairy products.
3. King Solomon compares the Torah to milk in the Song of Songs: "Like honey and milk, it lies under your tongue" (4:11).

Not all Jews eat a milk-based meal on Shavuot night. If meat is served during the meal, dairy products will not be served, in accordance with the laws of Kashrut.

Shavuot: Reading the Torah

The Book of Ruth, one of the five scrolls of Tanakh, is read at Shavuot's Morning Cults. Megillah Ruth takes place mainly during the harvest season (Ruth 1:22), so we read about it on Shavuot's Harvest Festival.

There are many other reasons why the Book of Ruth is read on Shavuot:

1. King David, descended from Ruth, was born and died in Shavuot (Chagigah 2: 3).
2. Ruth was a convert, entering into the covenant with Hashem (God) on her own initiative. The Israelites did the same when they entered into their covenant with Hashem (God) in Shavuot by receiving the Torah.
3. In the Torah, there is a command that states that no Moabite can marry in the nation of Hashem (God) (Deut. 23: 4).
4. Ruth was only able to marry Boaz thanks to the oral law's interpretation of that command, which states that this law only applies to Moabite men. Ruth's story is told on Shavuot to highlight the need for the written and oral Torah.

What is Ruth's book about?

Watch our Video Intro at Shavuot of 28 May 2020 on: <https://villageofhopejusticeministry.org/weekly-messianic-bible-studies-studi-biblici-messianici-settimanali/>

The basic story

During the era of the judges, there was a famine in the land of Judah. An Israelite family - Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their children, Mahlon and Chilion - leave their home in Bethlehem and go to Moab. Shortly thereafter, Elimelech dies and the children marry Moabite women. Chilion marries Orpah and Mahlon marries Ruth. Ten years go by and Mahlon and Chilion die without heirs.

Naomi feels that the famine has ended in Judea and decides it is time to go home. As she prepares to leave, her daughters-in-law begin to follow them, but Naomi tells them to return to their families. Ruth and Orpah cry and protest, telling Naomi that they wish to return to her people with her. But Naomi continues to resist, urging her daughter-in-law to return to her home, saying that she has nothing left to offer.

Once again the two women separate and Orpah kisses Naomi, but Ruth clings to the mother-in-law. Naomi tries to convince her to leave, but Ruth isn't convinced of this. So she says his famous loyalty lines:

“Don't urge me to leave you, to go back and not follow you. Because wherever you go, I will go; wherever you stay, I will stay; your people will be my people and your God my God ”(Ruth 1:16).

When Naomi sees how strong Ruth is, she agrees and the women return to Bethlehem together.

Return to Bethlehem

Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Ruth goes to find sustenance for herself and her mother-in-law, hoping that someone will allow her to harvest the remaining grain. The camp he finds belongs to Boaz, a close relative of his deceased father-in-law, Elimelech. Boaz asks about the strange woman in his fields and discovers his relationship with her. Learning about the great loyalty he has towards Naomi, Boaz shows his special kindness and generosity.

When Ruth returns and tells Naomi everything that has emerged, Naomi is thrilled by this "coincidence" since Boaz is one of Ruth's redeeming relatives. This means that since Boaz is a close relative of the Elimelech family, he is obliged by the law of Levirate (Yibum) to marry Mahlon's widow, Ruth, to carry on the family lineage. (See Shavuot Intro Video of May 27, 2020: <https://villageofhopejusticeministry.org/weekly-messianic-bible-studies-studies-biblici-messianici-weekly/>)

A "scandalous" love story

Naomi orders Ruth to go to Boaz in the middle of the night, uncover her feet and lie there. Ruth does it and when Boaz wakes up in shock, she tells him who she is and says: "Spread your tunic on your servant, because you are a redeeming relative" (Ruth 3: 9). Doing so would be considered a formal act of marriage (Ezekiel 16: 8). Rabbi Frye explains more about this strange part of the "love" story between Boaz and Ruth in the Introductory Video to Shavuot on May 28, 2020: <https://villageofhopejusticeministry.org/weekly-messianic-bible-studies-studi-biblici-messianici-settimanali/>

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Boaz understands his intentions and says that these actions show even greater loyalty than staying with Naomi, because she is now showing loyalty to her late husband, trying to perpetuate her legacy. Although Boaz is a close relative, he tells Ruth that there is another close relative who is truly the next to "redeem" her from Levirate's law. Boaz tells Ruth that he will see if this other man redeems her and, if not, marries her himself.

A significant ending

In the morning, Boaz meets Ploni Almoni in front of the ten elders to discuss the matter. Ploni Almoni, not wanting to endanger his property, renounces his right of redemption. Boaz was now free to marry Ruth. Ploni, according to the practice of Levirate, takes off his sandal and passes it to Boaz. Boaz proclaims that he is now acquiring all of Elimelech's assets and acquiring Mahlon's wife to perpetuate Mahlon's name. Boaz and Ruth are married and have a son named Obed. Obed is the father of Jesse, who is the father of King David the precursor of Yeshua (Jesus the Messiah).

Ruth's book: a study guide

What's so significant about Ruth's story? When we read Megillah Ruth aloud in Shavuot, it is difficult to find anything exciting in this story of marriage, death and daily life in ancient Israel. But looking deeper into Megillah Ruth reveals a story of the origin of the nation of Israel and the perfect chronicle for Shavuot.

We therefore invite you to join us in person and online to get to know Ruth and Boaz more closely and learn to celebrate Shavuot from tonight to Saturday evening with us live, on **Shabbat at 5.00 pm (Italian time)** on our Beit Shalom Facebook page **To learn more about all aspects of Shavuot, here are the links to the Biblical Study last night May 28, 2020 on Boaz and Ruth:** <https://villageofhopejusticeministry.org/weekly-messianic-bible-studies-studi-biblici-messianici-weekly/>

For Your Tithes in Israel the Link here: <https://villageofhopejusticeministry.org/donation-donazione/>

For the Bikkurim Offer (First Fruits) here the Link: <https://villageofhopejusticeministry.org/donation-donazione/>