

חג שבועות 5783

The Festival of Weeks / Pentecost

What is the primary message of this festival which is known by two different names? Both names relate to a methodology of counting; one method is the counting of days and the other is the counting of weeks. It is most significant that in the Bible no calendar date is given for this festival. This festival is one of the three festivals in which there is a Biblical commandment to celebrate this special day in Jerusalem. Although there is confusion about when to begin this count, there is no need for such confusion. The Bible commands that the count begins *ממחרת השבת*, “*from the day after the Shabbat*” (Leviticus 23:11). There is no reason to understand this instruction as relating to the High Shabbat, the 15th day of Nissan, the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. If this were the proper interpretation, then a date could have been provided. Rather, the correct understanding of the term ‘Shabbat’ in this verse is the normal seventh day of the week. This view is also supported by the fact that one also reads,

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם, מִמָּחָרֵת הַשַּׁבָּת, מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם, אֶת-עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה: שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֻעוֹת, תִּמְיַמַת תִּהְיֶינָה. עַד מִמָּחָרֵת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית, תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם

“And you shall count from the day after the Shabbat, from the day you brought the Omer of waving seven Shabbats, they shall be complete, unto the day after the seventh Shabbat, you shall count 50 days.”

Leviticus 23:15-16a

The fact that the Torah commands to count seven complete Shabbats and the final Shabbat is called *הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית* requires that the interpretation be the normal seventh day Shabbat and not understanding the phrase as the High Shabbat, as there are of course not seven High Shabbats during this period of time. In addition, the phrase *שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֻעוֹת* cannot be understood as simply meaning seven weeks as Judaism teaches, as the meaning of Shabbat has already been defined by them with the phrase *מִמָּחָרֵת הַשַּׁבָּת*. They previously stated that this referred to the High Shabbat.

So what is the primary message of this Festival? The answer is **a restoration to do the will of G-d**. When examining the book of Acts and what is said in this passage concerning this festival, there was a restoration of language. In order to properly understand the significance of this holiday, one must remember what took place at the Tower of Babel (See Genesis chapter 11) when G-d confused the languages. The

people were united not to do the will of G-d, but in contrast to His purpose, they wanted to make a name for themselves and not to be scattered throughout the earth. G-d had said to them, וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ “*And G-d said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’*” (Genesis 1:28). It is clear from this verse, G-d commanded humanity to dwell in all the earth. Humanity did not want to obey the will of G-d and they were united in their defiance. It was for this reason that G-d confused their common language (See Genesis 1:7-8).

However, in the book of Acts, by means of the giving of the Holy Spirit upon believers in Yeshua, there was a restoration of language. In this passage it states,

και εν τω συμπληρουσθαι την ημεραν της πεντηκοστης ησαν απαντες ομοθυμαδον επι το αυτο

“And with the fulfilling together the day of Pentecost, they were all in one accord in the same (place). Acts 2:1

There is an emphasis in this verse that is very important. The Greek word ομοθυμαδον means to be together in thought or purpose. The Textus Receptus contains this word, while the Nestle-Aland only has the word ὁμοῦ, which is an abbreviated version of this word and only means ‘together’. The key aspect of being together in thought and commitment is absent in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament. The Textus Receptus captures the true emphasis of the passage with the correct compound word ομοθυμαδον relating to the people’s oneness in regard to the will of G-d. This is what true faith in Messiah Yeshua causes within an individual. Real believers want to submit to all the purposes of G-d.

When reading further in Acts chapter 2, by means of the Holy Spirit coming upon and indwelling believers in Yeshua, these men spoke as the Holy Spirit was giving to them to declare. There is no argument that the Spirit gave these men what to say. However, the miraculous aspect of this event is found in verse 6,

γενομενης δε της φωνης ταυτης συνηλθεν το πληθος και συνεχυθη οτι ηκουον εις εκαστος τη ιδια διαλεκτω λαλουντων αυτων

“But having happened the sound of this, the multitude came together and was confused; because they were hearing, each one with their own language them speaking.” Acts 2:6

According to verse 4, the Holy Spirit gave these men *ετεραις γλωσσαις* other languages when they spoke. It is very important for one to properly understand this Greek phrase. The word *ετεραις* found in this verse is very informative. The word “other” in English, can mean of the same type or of a different type. However, in the Greek language, there are two different words to denote whether the other is of the same kind or of a different kind. In this verse, it is the Greek word *ἕτερος* which appears in this text and means of a **different** type. Therefore, one must conclude that there was **also** something unique about the language which those who received the Holy Spirit were using. This point cannot be ignored or denied; nevertheless, what is clearly the emphasis in this passage is the fact that the men who were speaking were all Galileans, yet those who heard them speaking were from a wide variety of places and each one heard, i.e., understood them, in their own language, speaking about the wonderful works of G-d. It is also very significant that these who heard them speaking in each one’s own language were called *ανδρες ευλαβεις* devout men,

ησαν δε εν ιερουσαλημ κατοικουντες ιουδαιοι ανδρες ευλαβεις απο παντος εθνους των υπο τον ουρανον

“But they were in Jerusalem Jews dwelling, devout men from every nation under heaven.” Acts 2:5

The right question which one should ask is found in verse 12, *τι αν θελοι τουτο ειναι* “*What does this mean?*” In other words, one should seek G-d’s revelation regarding this event. Others who heard the same thing were mocking it, saying that those who received the Holy Spirit were full of wine (See Acts 2:13). It is clear that the Holy Spirit brought about unity for the purpose of believers in Yeshua serving G-d and fulfilling His will. In essence, the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost) relates to a restoration of the will of G-d for His New Covenant people. While on this day the emphasis of the miracle of tongues was upon hearing, this is not always the case. When studying in the New Testament, one learns that there are indeed different types of things meant by the term ‘tongue’. The Apostle Paul states that there are diversities of tongues *γενη γλωσσων* (1 Corinthians 12:28). As I conclude this brief article, allow me to state the following facts concerning tongues, as they are revealed in the Word of G-d.

1. **Not all believers have the gift of speaking in tongues.** It is stated in 1 Corinthians 12:30 *μη παντες γλωσσαις λαλουσιν* “...*not all speak in tongues....*” When examining closely this text, the questions which are being asked demand a negative response; hence, “Not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all are teachers, not all are workers of miracles, not all have gifts of healing, not all speak with tongues, not all interpret.” (See 1 Corinthians 12:29-30). It is very sad and most incorrect when certain individuals and

groups teach that if one has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit the primary evidence for this is the speaking of tongues.

2. **There are tongues which are a personal prayer language and not intended to be shared with others.** These are **not** known languages. Those who state that the Biblical word γλωσσαις only relates to known languages cannot support this view from the Bible. The Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14 *that one who speaks in this type of tongue edifies only himself or herself.* In other words, this type of tongue “*No one understands and in the Spirit he (or she) speaks mysteries.*” When one speaks in this kind of tongue, he is not speaking unto people, but unto G-d (See 1 Corinthians 14:2-4). He also states, “*For if I should pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.*” (Verse 14).
3. **There is also a type of tongues which is indeed for sharing within a local congregation or some other gathering of believers.** This type of tongue **must be interpreted**, however. In fact, there is a specific spiritual gift for interpreting tongues (See 1 Corinthians 12:10). Paul also states that prophesying is superior to speaking in tongues, unless one interprets (1 Corinthians 14:4). Therefore, when tongues are spoken in a congregation, there must be an interpretation of the tongue. If there is no one who interprets, then this one who has the tongue, must be silent and is not allowed to speak (1 Corinthians 14:28). Paul also states that the speaking of tongues in a congregation should be limited to two or three at most (1 Corinthians 14:27).

My hope is that this article might provide some clarification on this subject. May each of you have a meaningful and blessed Shavuot.