

TORAH PORTIONS

Shavuot II (on Shabbat)

THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION

Shavuot II (on Shabbat) / שבועות יום ב' (בַּשַּׁבָּת) Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17 & Habakkuk 2:20-3:19

In this week's guide...

The **COMMENTARY** is going to introduce all but our most experienced Gentile students to a Jewish *Shavuot* custom known as, “*Tikkun Leil Shavuot*.” Aside from the benefit of discovering more about this cultural tradition, it reveals the very essence of our relationship with God. You have been invited to so much more than a mere “belief system”! This week’s study will underscore the grace-filled way of life that is available to all believers.....1

Our **NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN** takes us into the assigned reading from the Prophets known as the *Haftarah*. The conclusion of Habakkuk is not only beautiful and memorable, but also unique in all of Scripture! By including the Septuagint in our analysis, we explore a connection between the poetic words of this Old Testament prophet and *Yeshua*’s compelling promise just prior to His Ascension.....2

The **HEBREW WORD STUDY** focuses on more than a word—it considers a concept. Our Torah reading features an oddly pleasant command: “rejoice!” Though this Hebrew word is not radically different than the English one *on the surface*, the biblical understanding of it (on a deeper level) is. We can appreciate this Hebraic perspective as we reference the words of that respected Rabbi from Tarsus: Saul (commonly known as the “Apostle Paul”).....4

OVERVIEW

This week’s Torah Portion breaks away from the regular schedule in recognition of *Shavuot*, also popularly known as the Feast of Pentecost. This was one of the three major feasts of the Lord, when all the men were required to come up to Jerusalem in celebration (i.e., *Shalosh Regalim*). For Jewish worshipers, this time commemorates the giving of the Law at Sinai. Followers of *Yeshua* also celebrate the giving of the Spirit as recorded in Acts 2. **This is an ideal time to reflect on our lives...are we walking by the Spirit and embodying the essence of God’s law being written on our hearts?**

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FUSION GLOBAL WITH RABBI JASON
Weekly Torah Portion—שבועות / *Shavuot* 5783

COMMENTARY

by Staff Contributor

A unique component of the modern observance of *Shavuot* (“Pentecost”) is that it includes relatively few major observances and customs compared to the other holidays. But don’t worry—this holiday contains all sorts of practices and traditions to encourage and inspire God’s people.

One of these unique customs is to stay up all night studying Torah on the first night of *Shavuot*. This tradition is known as “*Tikkun Leil Shavuot*,” which means “repairing the night of *Shavuot*.” Which raises the question, “*What needs to be repaired on the night of Shavuot?*”



Shavuot celebration in Jerusalem

According to Jewish tradition, the Jewish people did something quite surprising (and even humorous in retrospect). As the story goes, the night before the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people went to bed early and slept so well that they overslept. The Midrash says they were still sleeping when God was ready to give the Torah to the Jewish people on the morning of *Shavuot*. So, like a modern parent trying to pry their kids out of bed on Tuesday before school, Moses had to wake them up. And the Midrash even quotes God as saying, “*Why have I come and no one is here to receive me?*” Thus, the name for the custom of all-night study on the first night of *Shavuot*—“Repairing the Night of *Shavuot*”—refers to “repairing” what happened according to this innocent yet important Midrashic story.

Remember, as always, that the Midrash is not something we should take literally. Instead, it is a creative interpretation of a Torah text to make a point. This specific Midrash is intended to emphasize the importance of diligence in our generations’ responsibility to receive the Torah.

Another *Shavuot* custom involves reading Talmud *Tractate Sotah* in the 49 days leading up to *Shavuot*. This is a fascinating and relatively recent custom (likely with an origin in the 16th century). Again, this raises a question: *Why is there a custom to read Tractate Sotah leading up to Shavuot?* [A “*Sotah*” in the Torah is a woman suspected of adultery. *Tractate Sotah* addresses how to deal with various relational problems.]

There are a few layers to this idea. On a fundamental level, *Tractate Sotah* contains 49 chapters. Thus, this Tractate was identified as a fitting section of the Talmud to study one chapter daily on each of the 49 days between Passover and *Shavuot*.

Even if it has 49 chapters, how does it help one to prepare for Shavuot? Actually, it’s a perfect fit. The holiday of *Shavuot* recalls when Israel entered a marriage-like covenant with God. Israel received the Torah—the terms of the marriage agreement—at Mount Sinai. And so, reading *Tractate Sotah* reminds us of the importance of maintaining relational peace in marriage and the pain and damage that comes when we fail to do so. Marriage, of any kind, involves hard work. This is where these two *Shavuot* customs intersect. This “appointed time” reminds us that we are in a covenant relationship with God.

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Jews were given the Mosaic Covenant at Mount Sinai. God, through the work of *Yeshua*, grafted the Gentiles into that covenantal relationship. Together, we are responsible for working out the covenant relationship that God has given us. God has graciously blessed us with a relationship with Him. He has given us His Torah. And as disciples of *Yeshua*, we embrace the reality that He has poured out His Spirit so that we can sense His nearness.

But, like marriage, this relationship takes work and requires discipline. A healthy, enduring relationship requires that we not be “lazy and oversleep.” We need to be intentional about “staying up all night,” as it were, and not falling asleep in our marriage relationship with God. Along this line, I recently heard a great question: **If someone could only see my actions and not hear my words, what would they say are my priorities?** *Shavuot* is a great time to consider if our actions demonstrate the priority of our covenantal relationship with God.

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN

by Staff Contributor

Many Christians commonly associate the Feast of Pentecost with the story we read in the Book of Acts:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a noise like a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And tongues *that looked* like fire appeared to them, distributing themselves, and *a tongue* rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them *the ability* to speak out. (ii.1-4 NASB)

Of course, the opening phrase of that chapter suggests that “the day of Pentecost” was already a thing before those events transpired. Pentecost was, in fact, the backdrop for those events. A faithful reader of Scripture will be looking for continuity between the events described by Luke and what was already well-established in Jewish custom and tradition. Isn’t it odd to readily presume that there is one God at work throughout these “breathed-out” texts yet not also presume the events described in the New Testament have direct continuity with the Hebrew Bible?

The *Haftarah*ⁱ on the *Shabbat* of *Shavuot* [שְׁבוּעוֹת יוֹם בִּי (בְּשַׁבָּת)] helps us discover this theological continuity between the Testaments—almost like a “tie-in”...



fig tree in Israel

Though **the fig tree** does not blossom,
and there is no yield on the vines,
Though the olive crop fail,
and the fields produce no food,
the flock is cut off from the fold,
and there is no cattle in the stalls.
Yet will I triumph in *Adonai*,

I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!
ADONAI my Lord, is my strength.
He has made my feet like a deer’s,
and will make me walk on my high places.

—Habakkuk 3:17-19 (*emphasis added*)



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Before we examine the text more closely, it's worth noting that this excerpt from the prophet is formatted as a poem or song. One Jewish scholar identifies this *Haftarah* reading as “a psalm, celebrating the power of YHWH as a warrior god.”ⁱⁱ The inclusion of “Selah” in the margins confirms this claim. There is a textual detail that also establishes this passage of Scripture as psalmic. The use of “Lord GOD” (*ADONAI YHWH* / אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה) in verse nineteen is significant, as its only biblical appearance outside of the Book of Psalms is right here in Habakkuk.

But notice the reference to the fig tree not blossoming. You will recall [the story in the Gospels](#) of *Yeshua*'s attempt to eat fruit from a fig tree as He approached Jerusalem. Israel's spiritual state during the life and ministry of *Yeshua* was not particularly fruitful. **The “fig tree” was not blossoming during that year's *Shavuot* festivities** (described in Acts 1-2). The very people who would have indeed claimed to await the Messiah's arrival eagerly were hostile toward Him. *Yeshua* cleansed the Temple after cursing the fig tree, after all. As biblical scholar R.T. France notes, “At any rate, a tree which promises fruit but provides none is an apt symbol of a religion without godliness, and the summary destruction of the tree can only point in the same direction as Jesus' demonstration in the temple.”ⁱⁱⁱ This admonition remains valid for all of God's people today.

Habakkuk offers three powerful words in response to all the adverse conditions he described: **“Yet I will...”** (iii.18). This sense of holy determination reminds me of the 120 disciples waiting in the Upper Room between the Lord's Ascension and the Day of Pentecost. Habakkuk was determined to do two things—triumph and rejoice. And in the next verse, he tells his audience the grounds for his determination: **“*ADONAI* my Lord, is my strength.”** Here is the fascinating connection between Habakkuk's prophecy and the extraordinary moment described in Acts 2—in the Septuagint, the word we read in English as “strength” is the Greek word *dynamis* (δύναμις). Do you remember *Yeshua*'s words to the disciples just prior to His Ascension?

“But you will receive power [*dynamis*/ δύναμις] when the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* has come upon you” –Acts 1:8a (*emphasis added*)



God has not given us His Spirit merely for our privatized ecstatic experiences. Instead, He has poured out His *Ruach* on all flesh so that in the most challenging (even unfruitful!) times, we will have the power (*dynamis*) to triumph and rejoice as His faithful witnesses.

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HEBREW WORD STUDY: *samach* (שמח) / “joyful, be glad, rejoicing”

by Staff Contributor

In word studies, one can occasionally find a depth of meaning that is lost in translation. The imperfection of translation from one language to another, especially across linguistic families, often leaves a treasure trove of meaning awaiting our exploration. Of course, there is commonly a one-to-one correlation, and there isn't much to unearth in those instances. But even in such cases, all is not lost. We can look at usage, comparing what a concept meant at the time of writing versus what it means today.



With all of this in mind, let's turn our attention to *samach* (שמח), which means “joy, be glad or rejoice.” Consider this intriguing verse in the Torah readings for *Shavuot*, “You may spend the money for whatever your soul desires—cattle, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever your soul asks of you. Then you will eat there before *Adonai* your God and rejoice [*vesamachta* / ושמחת] you and your household” (Deuteronomy 14:26). God *commanded* the Israelites to rejoice. ***How can one be commanded to have joy?***

Once again, we're broaching a topic we discussed in our *Ahavah* word study: emotions. Biblically speaking, they are a choice. Our circumstances should not dictate much of our emotional state; we choose it despite our circumstances. The Psalmist David offers us a classic “Exhibit A”:

“I will be glad and rejoice in Your lovingkindness,
for You saw my affliction. You knew the troubles of my soul.” —Psalm 31:8

Note especially the context of the Psalm. David was clearly distressed (which becomes abundantly clear if we read further in the Psalm). Yet despite this, he rejoiced because, by faith, he understood that God saw him in that distress.



Paul elaborated on this idea—the rich interaction of emotion and will—in his epistle to the believers in Galatia, “But the **fruit** of the *Ruach* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23 *emphasis added*). N.T. Wright makes an astute observation: the fruit of the *Ruach* is a fruit, not a gift. In other words, these qualities emerge in a garden that we must cultivate. We express an active discipline as we choose to “walk by the Spirit” rather than indulge in the “desire of the flesh” (cf. Galatians 5:16). In this sense, “joy” is a spiritual exercise. The more we follow the Spirit's leading, the more we should expect joy to flourish in our lives.^{iv} Thus, Paul could also insist:

“Rejoice in the Lord always—again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all people. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything—but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

—Philippians 4:4-6 (*emphasis added*)

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To answer the original question, how could God reasonably **command** His children to *samach* (rejoice)? The simple answer is that our joy is ultimately a matter of our choices. It always has been, despite how our culture's understanding of the concept has changed. As followers of Messiah living a Spirit-filled and led life, we are supernaturally empowered to overcome our circumstances and rejoice. When life (or even dark spiritual powers!) has taken its very best shot, we can still choose to abide in joy and thus be more than overcomers.

All biblical passages referenced are in the Tree of Life Version unless otherwise noted.

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present
HEBREW WORD STUDY
שמח

שמח / *samach*: vb. To rejoice, to be glad, to be joyful, to make someone joyful.

Joy can be viewed by the biblical authors as a good thing if done by God's people or the righteous but as a bad thing if the rejoicing is done by enemies of God's people. In the prophetic woe oracle against the king of Babylon, the cypress trees and cedars of Lebanon rejoice over the downfall of the king (Isaiah 14:8). Jonah rejoiced for the plant that God caused to grow up over Jonah to give him shade (Jonah 4:6). The psalmist calls upon God to make those who seek him be glad and rejoice (*samach*; Psalm 70:4).

taken from the Lexham Theological Wordbook

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THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- Let's revisit the question posed at the conclusion of this week's Commentary : **"If someone could only see my actions and not hear my words, what would they say are my priorities?"** Wow! The call to live as God's faithful spouse is sobering yet thrilling. We're invited to intimacy with our Creator, but also to conduct ourselves accordingly in public. If you're feeling brave, share the above question with a close friend and ask them for an honest reply.
- We've talked a lot about joy and rejoicing this week. More specifically, we've emphasized the biblical perspective on joy as a choice (Hebrew Word Study) that one makes in response to what is true of God (NT Tie-in). If you're struggling to walk in true joy, Shavuot is the ideal time to lean into the Person of the Holy Spirit. Renew your commitment to walk with Him. Participate in His work in you and start watching for His fruit to emerge.

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NEXT WEEK'S READINGS // *Parashat Nasso* / פרשת נשא

TORAH	<i>Sunday</i> / Numbers 4:21-37
	<i>Monday</i> / Numbers 4:38-49
	<i>Tuesday</i> / Numbers 5:1-10
	<i>Wednesday</i> / Numbers 5:11-6:27
	<i>Thursday</i> / Numbers 7:1-41
	<i>Friday</i> / Numbers 7:42-71
	<i>Saturday</i> / Numbers 7:72-89
HAFTARAH	Judges 13:2-25
NEW TESTAMENT	Luke 1:11-20

ⁱ A reading from the Prophets that is thematically linked to the weekly Torah portion that precedes it.

ⁱⁱ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 2, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 1337.

ⁱⁱⁱ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 307.

^{iv} Wright, N.T., *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision*, IVP Press, 2009 p. 192-193