



# Minutes With Messiah

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## To Be (Im)Precise

A few years ago I wasted a couple of hours after a midnight in a discussion with a man who believed the King James Version of the Bible was the original, inspired, infallible version of scripture. Talk of the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic languages was dismissed as "propaganda." To point out the errors in translation or even the changes in the English language over the years, was futile. It was equally hopeless to point out that the English language was so imprecise that many places it was ambiguous.

It has been said that part of the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4) which God was waiting for to send his Son was that the Greek language was universal, specific, and static. That is, it was spoken throughout the known world, it was a precise language, and it was soon to be "dead" in that form, thus easier to understand throughout the ages.

A prime example of how the English language lacks that precision is the second person pronoun. In

whose quality is that of the Holy Spirit," similar to "a place of rest." There are even a couple more, less likely, interpretations of the case we translate as "of." For the most part, however, the Greek is more precise than English and was a more appropriate language in which the Word of God could be written. I will give but one example where the English translation is ambiguous but the original Greek is not. Ephesians 6:17 speaks of the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." In English, which word, "sword" or "Spirit," is being referred to by "which"? We often interpret this, "the sword (belonging to or coming from the Spirit) which is the word of God." Unlike the English, the Greek word for "which" has a gender, neuter, which agrees with "spirit" (neuter) rather than "sword" (feminine). Thus the proper interpretation would be "the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God." This makes the Spirit the word, rather than the sword. It is a fine, but important, distinction, especially when speaking about inspiration.

If you have read this far, you are possibly asking what difference all this makes. Going back to my midnight discussion, it makes a big difference. "God is not an author of confusion." (I Cor 14:33) If the English of 1611 is the original, then we need either to learn Middle English, or translate from that to Modern English. Either way can lead to confusion as compared to translating from the original Greek and Hebrew. Can we learn the word of God in English. Certainly! But we learn it better from a better, more modern translation that takes into account the precision of the original languages.

### In the South the plural of "y'all" is "all y'all."

English we use only one word, "you," for singular and plural. Granted the south uses a plural form, "y'all," and in the northeast there is "youse." But even these can be singular. (The plural of "y'all" is "all y'all.") Even King James' English was better, with "you" for the singular and "ye" for the plural. But for the most part, English is the only language where, when you say "you" in a group, no one can be sure how many people are being addressed.

Even the Greek can be ambiguous at times. For instance, in Acts 2:38 it refers to the "gift of the Holy Spirit." Does that refer to "the gift which is the Holy Spirit," the most common interpretation? Should it be the most grammatically common usage, "the gift which belongs to the Holy Spirit?" What about the logical "gift whose source is the Holy Spirit," or "the gift

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# ***Pesach: Passover—Four Children***

Pentecost (Greek for “Fiftieth Day”) is of supreme importance to the Christian church. It was on that day, according to Acts 2, that the Holy Spirit came on the apostles and they preached the first gospel sermon. It is from that day that the church can effectively date its existence. In fact, it is from that day that one major sect of Christians gets their name—Pentecostal. Now I have succeeded in summarizing the average knowledge of Christians about the holiday of Shavuot, also called Pentecost.

God gave His feasts to the Israelites for a purpose. His calendar has meaning to the Jews. Because Christianity has its basis in Judaism it would be of some value for Christians to know some background of this holiday. Perhaps we can gain some valuable insights from this knowledge.

The holiday of Shavuot is commanded in Leviticus 23, along with the other major holidays of the Jewish calendar (not counting the “Rabbinic” holidays such as Purim and Hanukkah). The passage states:

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall

sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest. And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations. And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God. (Lev 23:15-23)

Here we see the ordinance of counting fifty days from Passover and the law of the holiday. Because of the nature of the offerings it has also been called the “Feast of Firstfruits” or “Feast of the Harvest” as well as (based on the counting) the “Feast of Weeks” (Shavuot, from Shiva—seven) or Pentecost. It is one of the “holy convocations” in which no “servile work” is to be done.

## **The Offering of Firstfruits**

On the surface, the primary significance of this holiday is the offering of firstfruits to the Lord. Thus it is a yearly reminder of God’s providence (providing) for His people. In one very real sense, this was tax day, for the firstfruits were to be brought to provide for the tribe of Levi.

“And this is thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it. All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine; every one that

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**In one very real sense,  
Pentecost was tax day.**

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offer a new meat offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord. And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the Lord, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the Lord. Then ye shall

is clean in thine house shall eat of it.” (Nu 18:11-13)

Just as God provided for His people, they were obligated to provide for the religious “government.” Pentecost, then, serves as a constant reminder to God’s people that everything comes from Him. It is not our own, and we have an obligation to acknowledge this by offering the first of our “harvest” back to God. God taxes his people, but reminds them that, if it were not for Him they would have nothing to be taxed.

To a Christian, there is additional meaning to the offering of firstfruits. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.” (1Co 15:20-23) “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (Jas 1:18) The “Feast of Firstfruits” looked forward for centuries to that One who was to be the “firstfruits of them that slept.” It also looked forward to God’s select people, “a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” It celebrates the resurrection of life in the harvest, but also the resurrection of Messiah and his followers. What significance from a feast we often forget!

## **The Season of the Giving of the Law**

Perhaps of less understanding, but equal significance to Christians, is another aspect of Shavuot. Jewish tradition holds that Shavuot was also the anniversary of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Some would say this takes some “creative accounting” to reconcile this with the scriptures. On the other hand, it simply requires an understanding of Jewish time. In the western world we generally consider three days, for instance, as three full days. If something happened on Friday, three days later is probably Monday. To the Jew, however, it is probably Sunday. Thus Jesus was in the grave “three days,” even though it was a total of about 36 hours. The Jewish nation arrived at Sinai “after the third new moon from the time the Israelites went forth out of Egypt.” (Ex 19:1) Most Westerners would think this is more than a hundred days after Passover. However, if you count Ex 12:1 (the new moon before Pesach) as the first new moon

(as Jewish accounting would), then there are about fourteen days after Passover, then one full month of 28 days, and the day following (the new moon). That accounts for three new moons, and leaves some eight days after arriving at Sinai before the giving of the Law. So it is entirely possible, even probable, that the Jewish sages are right in attributing the giving of the Torah on the day of Shavuot.

This gives an additional significance to the holiday for Jews and for Christians. For the Jew, Shavuot is a constant reminder of his obligation to keep the Law, an obligation put upon him when his fathers said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” (Ex 19:8) In so saying, they bound a covenant

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## **Shavuot was also the anniversary of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.**

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between themselves (and their descendents) with God. It was a covenant they often broke, but one to which they often returned. Because the Temple has been destroyed, the offering of firstfruits is no longer made, so this aspect of the holiday has become paramount.

This aspect of the holiday is also dominant to the Christian today. Not the aspect of God and the Israelites making a covenant at Sinai specifically, but certainly the idea of the making of a covenant with God. We speak of the New Testament, which is another way of saying a New Covenant. That covenant was made in Jerusalem on Shavuot when men asked “What shall we do?” and were told the terms of entering the covenant. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you.” (Acts 2:38) On that day, over 3000 people entered the covenant, were added to the church. (Acts 2:41, 47) Pentecost, then, should be a constant reminder to Christians of the making of a new covenant—one called by the writer to the Jewish Believers (Hebrews) a better covenant based on better promises. This covenant is not obligatory because of the chance birth into a nation. Each individual enters into the covenant by voluntary birth into the church through obedience.

As Pentecost/Shavuot is celebrated on June 9th this year, we should each remember and renew our covenant with God.

# ***Replacement Theory***

It's a strange thing that I have heard, and it goes against all I was ever taught about God. Somebody actually thinks that God doesn't know everything. Somebody says that, no matter how long and how carefully God plans, no matter what He said through His prophets, no matter that He is God, a small group of the people He created can make God change His plans against His own will. Not just one somebody says that. It seems that many people claiming faith in Jesus as the Messiah believe that God doesn't have the power to do what He says He will do.

These people advocate what is sometimes called "replacement theology." In its basic form, this theory says that when God sent His son to this world, He intended to set up His kingdom on earth. Jesus was supposed to lead a revolt against Rome and set up a worldwide kingdom of God. However, the Jews killed him instead of following him in this plan. Because of this, God had to replace his planned kingdom with the church, until He gained enough power to place Jesus directly on the throne. But God will, in the near future (it's been the near future for almost two millennia), set up that kingdom, and Jesus will reign on earth for a thousand years.

It is not necessary to quote all the prophecies of the kingdom. Those are accepted by the definition of the theory. It should not be necessary to point out that Jesus, himself, said his kingdom was not of this world (Jn 18:36) and that he declined a crown from the very people that replacement theologians say refused his rule (Jn 6:15). It should not be necessary to quote the

scriptures that say the church is the kingdom. All that should be necessary to refute this theory is to prove God's power.

To that end, three of the many possible scriptures concerning what God can and can not do may suffice. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." (Ro 13:1) Are we to believe that a God who sets up nations on earth could not set up His own nation? "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (Rev 19:6) This verse, taken from a favorite chapter of replacement theologians calls God "omnipotent." Is He? I believe He is. Somehow it seems those who accept this form of premillennialism do not. "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;" (Tit 1:2) Paul says God can not lie about His plans. So were his promises of establishing a kingdom a lie? I think not!

I believe God was truthful in what He said through the prophets. I believe He had power to do what He said, and has done so. I believe Paul when he says the kingdom was not delayed, but that he was already in it. "Who hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Col 1:13) Whom else should I believe?

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