

Torah Weekly

On the Haftarah

ת"סב

SHAVUOT

22-23 May

6-7 Sivan

Shavuot Day 1: Exodus 19:1 - 20:23

Numbers 28:26-31

Ezekiel 1:1-28; Ezekiel 3:12

Shavuot Day 2, Shabbat:

Deuteronomy 14:22 - 16:17

Numbers 28:26-31

Habakkuk 2:20 - 3:19

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

The Completion of Our Mission That Began at Sinai

The haftarah¹ for the second day of Shavuot is from our prophet Habakkuk. He says a prayer concerning the many great miracles that G-d did for the Jewish people, starting with the giving of the Torah. He is pained by the suffering of the prolonged exile and then sees a vision of the final redemption, which fills him with joy.

The simple reason for reading this haftarah on Shavuot is because it mentions the giving of the Torah. That explanation, however, only covers the first few verses, so there must be another reason as to why we read these passages specifically on this holiday.

This haftarah is only read outside of Israel, where there is a second day of Shavuot. The reason for this added day is unlike the extra day added to both Pesach and Sukkot. They were added because there was doubt among Diaspora Jews concerning the date of the holiday. Back when we would sanctify the new month according to the testimony of two witnesses who saw the new moon, the community outside of Israel wouldn't know until a while later. The rabbis therefore instituted an extra day, just in case the new month began one day later. Shavuot, on the other hand, is not subject to doubt, as it always falls on the 50th day of the Omer. Rather, the extra day is there so that there be uniformity among the holidays.

This captures the essence of Shavuot as well.

Shavuot is the day we received the Torah and began our mission as a nation. It is the day that G-d gave us the ability to fulfill our purpose. The Midrash³ says that before the giving of the Torah, above and below, spiritual and physical, didn't mix. At the giving of the Torah all that changed, as it says, "And G-d descended on Mount Sinai." There is the ability to mesh G-dliness with the physical, to make this world into a dwelling place for G-d.⁴ We do this by learning Torah, doing mitzvot and using even the most mundane parts of our lives to serve G-d. Our mission began at the giving of the Torah, and it ends with the coming of Moshiach.

Habakkuk was given a vision of the future of the Jewish people. He saw all of our suffering in exile, and he couldn't

take it. He pleaded with G-d, outright demanding on behalf of the Jewish people. But when he saw the time of Moshiach, he understood and was happy. That is why he said this prayer, to ask forgiveness for the harsh words he spoke.

In his prayer, he begins telling of the giving of the Torah, and goes through many of the good things G-d did for the Jewish people. He then tells of the exile, alluding to the difficult war of Gog and Magog that will happen right before the coming of Moshiach, and finally rejoices with his coming.

In other words, he is telling us that what G-d does is good, even if it's not apparent due to the harsh exile. Just as he rejoiced, so will we.

On Shavuot, we received the Torah. The second day of the holiday is one that we transformed from mundane to holy, making this world a dwelling for G-d, fulfilling the purpose of the giving of the Torah. We read the haftarah about the completion of our mission, the coming of Moshiach, when the world will be a home for G-d, having gone from mundane to holy. And that is the connection between the second day of Shavuot and the haftarah.

At the beginning of his prayer, Habakkuk says, "I heard your message and I was afraid." This verse is quoted by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the section of Zohar that is part of the Tikkun Leil Shavuot, which we read as we stay awake on the first night of Shavuot. "Rabbi Shimon rejoiced and said, 'I heard your message and I was afraid,' at that time it was appropriate to have fear, but in our case it all depends on love." Since we read this in the synagogue on the second day of Shavuot, it means that it applies to us here and now. Why does Rabbi Shimon say that, "In our case it all depends on love?"

Habakkuk said that he heard and he was afraid. Hearing implies a certain spatial distance that can cause something to be less understood than when something is actually seen. Hearing, therefore, is associated with awe of G-d, whom we worship from a distance. Seeing, on the other hand, implies closeness and deep understanding, hence it is associated with love.

We see this differentiation when it comes to studying Torah. The written Torah is associated with fear, as it says in Tractate Sofrim, "A face of fear for reading [Torah]." Why fear? Because it is distant. There is a lack of understanding, as we see, that even if one is just reading the words of the written Torah, even if he doesn't understand what he is saying, he is obligated to recite the blessing for learning Torah. On the other hand, learning Talmud, the oral Torah, is associated with love, because it must be understood.

Habakkuk "heard" and therefore felt distant, and was filled with fear. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was close to G-d, and his experience was one of seeing, as he said, "I see now what no man has seen since the day that Moses went up a second time on Mount Sinai."

Each of us stood at Mount Sinai, and saw the great event and the most sublime levels of G-dliness. Therefore, we need to feel close and our experience is one of love as well.

He continues his prayer, talking about the power of the Aron (the Ark of the Covenant) which housed the tablets of the Ten Commandments and, according to some, the Torah that Moses wrote. The Ark symbolized the Torah. He concludes that "the ways of the world are His."

The Talmud¹¹ finishes with a teaching on these words of Habakkuk, and it is recited in our morning prayer. "It was taught

Sacred material please do not desecrate

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in the school of Eliyahu, "Whoever learns [Torah] laws every day, it is certain that he is [going to receive a portion in] the World to Come, as it says, "The ways [halichot] of the world are his," don't read halichot ["ways"], but halachot ["laws"]." Why specifically laws? Why not the study of Torah in general?

The general study of Torah has many opinions. There are 70 ways¹² of understanding the Torah, or 600,000 ways, one for each Jewish soul.¹³ But there is a point where there is no division: the total unity of G-d's will in Torah. This place has only one opinion, that of G-d's essential will. This is not expressed by the general study of Torah, which has many opinions. This essential oneness of G-d, beyond any division, is expressed in halachah, where we have one bottom line that we follow. Since it is the study of laws that brings the essential will of G-d into the world and into practice, it guarantees a place in the world to come.

Even more, through studying halachot, "the ways of the world" become "his." He becomes a master of his worldly affairs.

Habakkuk then speaks of the exile, "For the fig tree will not blossom, and there won't be food growth on the vines..."

Then he became happy with the realization that G-d will help us. "Yet, I will rejoice in G-d, I will be joyful in the G-d of my salvation."

What is he so joyous about? He continues, "G-d the L-rd is my strength. He made my feet [as swift] as the hind's and he guides me on my high places. To the conductor [to play] with my melodies.."

"G-d the L-rd is my strength," meaning, G-d gives us the strength to be victorious over the exile and to bring Moshiach.

"He will make my feet as the hind's." Why does he refer to feet? Because he is talking about the end of the exile, which is called ikvita d'mishicha, the "footsteps of Moshiach," when the way we serve G-d is not so much like the head, with deep understanding, rather similar to the feet that will go and do things that the head can never do. The feet symbolize serving G-d through self sacrifice, which is the calling of the last generation before the coming of Moshiach, our generation. They will be like a deer's feet, which can go far with ease. Meaning, that G-d will give us the strength to win this war and end the exile with ease.

"And He will lead me on high places," means that we will be lifted to the highest levels when Moshiach comes.

"To the choirmaster [lamnatzeach]." Lamnatzeach could also mean, "to the victor," which in this case will be G-d and the Jewish people. "With my songs," is our song, as we will break out in song, as it says about the coming of Moshiach, "And there we will sing a new song."

May we merit to rejoice, just as Habakkuk did, with the coming of Moshiach. May it happen soon.

By Yitzi Hurwitz

Friday, May 22, 2026

6 Sivan, 5786

Torah Given (1313 BCE)

On the 6th Sivan of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), seven weeks after the Exodus, G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai. The entire people of Israel (600,000 heads of households and their families), as well as the souls of all future generations of Jews, heard G-d declare the first two of the Ten Commandments and witnessed G-d's communication of the other eight through Moses.

Following the revelation, Moses ascended the mountain for 40 days, to receive the remainder of the Torah from G-d.

At Sinai, G-d rescinded the "decree" and "divide" (gezeirah) that had been in force since the 2nd day of creation separating the spiritual and the physical into two hermetic worlds; from this point on, "the higher realms could descend into the lower realms, and the lower could ascend to the higher." Thus was born the "mitzvah" -- a physical deed that, by virtue of the fact that it is commanded by G-d, brings G-dliness into the physical world.

Friday, May 22, 2026

6 Sivan, 5786

Cologne Jews Martyred (1096)

During the first crusade (see "Today in Jewish History" for Iyar 8), the Jews of Cologne, Germany chose to be killed rather than convert to Christianity. This was the case, during the first crusades, for many of the Jews who were given the choice between being killed or being baptized. Most of those who converted continued to practice Judaism in secrecy and, one year later, were permitted by Henry IV to openly return to Judaism.

Friday, May 22, 2026

6 Sivan, 5786

Passing of Baal Shem Tov (1760)

In 1734, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov ("BeSHT", 1698-1760), who up until that time had lived as a hidden tzaddik, began to publicly disseminate his teachings. While adding nothing "new" to Judaism, he re-emphasized truths and doctrines that had been buried under the hardships of exile: the immense love that G-d has for every Jew, the cosmic significance of every mitzvah a person performs, the divine meaningfulness that resides in every blade of grass, in every event, and in every thought in the universe. He spoke to the downtrodden masses and to the aloof scholars, giving meaning to their existence, and thus joy, and thus life. Many disciples came to imbibe the "inner soul" of Torah from him, and the new movement came to be known as "Chassidism."

Rabbi Israel passed away on the 6th of Sivan of 1760, and was succeeded (one year later, on the first anniversary of his passing) by his disciple, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch.

Shabbat, May 23, 2026

7 Sivan, 5786

Passing of King David (837 BCE)

David, a descendent of Judah the son of Jacob as well as of Ruth, a Moabite convert to Judaism, was anointed King of Israel by Samuel in 878 BCE. All future legitimate kings of Israel were David's descendents, as will be Moshiach (the messiah), who will "restore the kingdom of David to its glory of old."

David fought many wars, defeating Israel's enemies and securing and expanding its borders. He conquered Jerusalem, purchased the Temple Mount from its Yebusite owner, and prepared the foundation for the Holy Temple (which was built by his son, King Solomon). David served as the head of the Sanhedrin and the foremost Torah authority of his generation; he is also the "sweet singer of Israel" who composed the Book of Psalms that for 28 centuries has embodied the joys, sorrows and yearnings of the Jewish people.

King David passed away on Shavuot of the year 837 BCE, age 70. (While some say it was on Sivan 6. according to many it was on Sivan 7.)