

# HOW TO BE A WITNESS

## A Devotional Meditation on Shavuot (Pentecost)

Exodus 19:1-20:23; Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17; Ezekiel 1:1-28, 3:12; Ruth 1:1-4:22; Habakkuk 2:20-3:19; Acts 1:6-8, 2:1-47, 9:1-17; 2 Corinthians 11:16-31; 1 Peter 2:9-10

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May 23, 2026

If you're a Christian, you're familiar with Pentecost as the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. We read that story in the second chapter of Acts. If you're Jewish, you observe Shavuot as the day God gave the Torah to Israel. If you're a Hebraic Christian, as one of my rabbi friends calls people like us who follow Messiah Yeshua and honor the Torah, you learn that Pentecost and Shavuot are two different words for the same holy day of the Lord.

At Mount Sinai, the God of Abraham issued his marriage proposal to the people of Israel, and when they accepted, he gave them the Ten Commandments to explain how they should live. At the Temple in Jerusalem on Pentecost, God renewed that marriage proposal, giving his Spirit as the pledge of the New, or Renewed, Covenant so his whole Torah could be written on the hearts of his chosen people – both the native born and those grafted in from the nations.

Another connection between these events is that God revealed himself in great power. He spoke at Sinai from a dark cloud, accompanied by thunder, lightning, and an earthquake. In Jerusalem, he made himself known in a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire resting on the heads of the faithful. The people gathered in Jerusalem from many lands didn't hear the audible voice of God as their ancestors had at Sinai, but they did hear him speaking in their native languages through Yeshua's disciples.

Those displays of holy power testify to the reason God called and sanctified this holy people. Moses, Yeshua, and Peter tell us that we are to be his witnesses to the whole world. That's a Kingdom mission, as Yeshua said just before he returned to his Heavenly Father:

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 1:6-8 ESV

We appreciate messages like this. They confirm our identity and give us direction for our lives. It's good to have something greater than ourselves to provide meaning and hope in a world filled with sorrow. But then reality hits, and we begin to realize what Paul learned soon after he encountered the risen Messiah. We might remember that the Lord



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had told Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, to go heal Paul of his blindness, but we probably overlook that the Lord also told Ananias,

Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

Acts 9:25-26 ESV

Years later, Paul wrote about his suffering in one of his letters to Messiah's community at Corinth:

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

2 Corinthians 11:24-31 ESV

This is the part of the story we'd rather not hear. We like the exciting displays of God's power, and all the blessings of being included among his set-apart people, but we don't really understand until we walk through it that lots of suffering comes with those blessings. That's hard, and it hurts. It hurts even more when we don't see the spectacular displays of power coming through to rescue us and those we love in the hard times. And yet, the alternative is even worse. If we can't hang on to our God in such times, then we might drift away in this ocean of human pain and have no lifeline or beacon to bring us back to a place of shelter.

So we hang on, believing desperately that our faith really is the substance of the peace we hope for, and the assurance of the rescue we're not yet seeing. And when that peace finally comes, whether or not things turn out the way we wish, then we have the chance to become the beacon and the lifeline for others drowning in that ocean. That's what it means to be God's witnesses, in every sense of the word.