

## Lesson 7 – Pentecost (Shavuot שבועת / Feast of Weeks)

**Observed** – Sivan (May / June) – 50 Days from Passover

### In the Old Testament

Lev 23:15-22; Ex 23:14-17; 34:18-24; Num 28:26-31; Deut 16:9-12, 16

#### **Leviticus 23:15-22 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> “You shall count **seven full weeks** from the **day after the Sabbath**, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. <sup>16</sup> You shall count **fifty days** to the **day after the seventh Sabbath**. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. <sup>17</sup> You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be **baked with leaven**, as **firstfruits** to the LORD. <sup>18</sup> And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. <sup>19</sup> And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. <sup>20</sup> And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. <sup>21</sup> And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

<sup>22</sup> “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.”



Pentecost is celebrated **50 days after Passover**. Technically it was 50 days from the day after the Sabbath during Passover (Lv 23:15-16; Deut 6:9). Over time it came to be simply 50 days after Passover. The days from Passover to Pentecost are counted at weekly Sabbath services.

**Shavuot** means “weeks;” **Pentecost** means “fifty” in Greek. The word “Pentecost” is found in the Septuagint translation of Lev 23.

Pentecost is the time to present an offering of grain of the summer **wheat harvest** to the Lord to show joy and thankfulness. This festival is also known as the **Feast of Harvest** or Latter / Second **Firstfruits** (Ex 23:16).

Pentecost is a **pilgrimage feast** (Ex 23:14-17; 34:18-24; Dt 16:16).

It is also called **Matan Torah**, “**giving of the Law**,” because it is believed that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments at this time due to the phrase “**the third new moon**” in Ex 19:1. In the Hellenistic period, (300 b.c.-a.d. 300) Pentecost began to lose its association with agriculture and came increasingly to be associated with the religious history of the Hebrew people.

### In the New Testament

- In Jesus’ time, he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem following his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (Acts 1:4).
- The disciples were all together in the upper room for Shavuot on the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week (Acts 1:12-14).
- Then the sound of a mighty wind filled the house and tongues as fire came to rest on the disciples, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2-4).
- The apostle Peter referred to the prophet Joel who said that God would “pour out his Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28–32); God had poured out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32–33).
- The people responded to Peter’s message and about 3,000 were baptized (Acts 2:41).
- The church, the body of the Messiah, was established on Shavuot, 50 days after His death.

Giving of the Law	Giving of the Spirit
Exodus 19:1–20:20; 32	Acts 2
Spiritual birthday of Israel	Spiritual birthday of the body of the Messiah
Traditionally believed to have happened about 50 days after the Israelites left Egypt (Ex. 19:1).	Believers in Jesus were gathered together on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after they celebrated Passover. (Acts 2:1)
Fire and noise as God descended Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:16–18).	A violent, rushing wind and tongues as fire descended upon the believers. (Acts 2:2-4)
3,000 people died because of their idolatry (Ex. 32:28).	3,000 people were made spiritually alive because they believed in Jesus. (Acts 2:41)
Law given to instruct the Israelites.	Spirit given to empower and guide the body of the Messiah—including both Jews and Gentiles.

**James 1:17–18 (ESV)** - <sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup> Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a **kind of firstfruits** of his creatures. *This ties to Pentecost, the “Second Firstfruits.”*

**1 Corinthians 15:20–28** - <sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep... *This ties to Passover, the “First Firstfruits”*

## Background Passages

### Exodus 19:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.

### Exodus 23:14–17 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> “Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. <sup>15</sup> You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. <sup>16</sup> **You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field.** You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. <sup>17</sup> **Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God.**

### Exodus 34:18–24 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup> “You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. <sup>19</sup> All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. <sup>20</sup> The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed.

<sup>21</sup> “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. <sup>22</sup> **You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end.** <sup>23</sup> **Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel.** <sup>24</sup> For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.

### Leviticus 23:15–22 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup> **“You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering.** <sup>16</sup> You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. <sup>17</sup> You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD. <sup>18</sup> And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. <sup>19</sup> And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. <sup>20</sup> And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. <sup>21</sup> And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

<sup>22</sup> “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.”

### Numbers 28:26–31 (ESV)

<sup>26</sup> “On the **day of the firstfruits**, when you offer a grain offering of new grain to the LORD at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, <sup>27</sup> but offer a burnt offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD: two bulls from the herd, one ram, seven male lambs a year old; <sup>28</sup> also their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, three tenths of an ephah for each bull, two tenths for one ram, <sup>29</sup> a tenth for each of the seven lambs; <sup>30</sup> with one male goat, to make atonement for you. <sup>31</sup> Besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, you shall offer them and their drink offering. See that they are without blemish.

### Deuteronomy 16:9–12 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> “You shall **count seven weeks**. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. <sup>10</sup> Then you shall keep the **Feast of Weeks** to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. <sup>11</sup> And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there. <sup>12</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

### Deuteronomy 16:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> “**Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God** at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the **Feast of Weeks**, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

### 2 Chronicles 8:12–13 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> Then Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of the LORD that he had built before the vestibule, <sup>13</sup> as the duty of each day required, offering according to the commandment of Moses for the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths.

### Joel 2:28–32 (ESV)

<sup>28</sup> “And it shall come to pass afterward,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;  
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
your old men shall dream dreams,  
and your young men shall see visions.  
<sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

<sup>30</sup> “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. <sup>32</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

**Acts 2:1–42 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” <sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. <sup>15</sup> For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. <sup>16</sup> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;

<sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> And I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

<sup>20</sup> the sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

<sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

<sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves

know—<sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.<sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.<sup>25</sup> For David says concerning him,

“ I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
my flesh also will dwell in hope.  
<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.  
<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

<sup>29</sup> “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.<sup>30</sup> Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne,<sup>31</sup> he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.<sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.<sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.<sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“ ‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand,  
<sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.” ’

<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”<sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”<sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”<sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

## Pentecost

(תַּשְׁבֻּעַת שִׁבְעָתַיִם, *chg shb't*, “weeks”; πεντηκοστή, *pentēkostē*, “fiftieth”). In the Hebrew Bible, Pentecost is an annual harvest festival that occurs seven weeks after Passover. It became an important Christian holiday after God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the Jerusalem church on the first Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection.

### Biblical Relevance

#### *Pentecost in the Hebrew Bible*

Leviticus 23:15–21 instructs the Israelites to hold an annual one-day harvest festival seven weeks, or 50 days, after Passover (see also Exod 34:22). This festival included extensive sacrifice (Lev 23:15–21; Deut 16:9–10; 2 Chr 8:13). At Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks, Israelite farmers would start their journeys toward Jerusalem to present their firstfruit offerings (Wigoder, “Shavu’ot,” 707; Werblowsky, “Shavu’ot,” 628).

#### *Pentecost in Acts*

On the Pentecost immediately following Christ’s resurrection, God pours out (ἐκχέω, *ekcheō*) the Holy Spirit upon the Jerusalem church, thus enabling them to perform extraordinary deeds such as healings, speaking in tongues, prophesying, and inspired preaching. Fulfillment of Jesus’ promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8) occurs on Pentecost while the disciples are gathered in a house (Kee, *Good News*, 30). The Holy Spirit rushes into the house as a strong wind, and tongues of fire appear over each of the disciples. Fire is a conventional literary feature of theophanies (e.g., Exod 3:2; 2 Thess 1:8; 4 Ezra 13:10).

**Fire and Sinai.** At some point during the intertestamental period, the Jewish people had begun to observe Pentecost as a commemoration of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai—an event that involved a fiery theophany (Exod 19:18). VanderKam suggests that Acts 2 understands Pentecost to be a covenant renewal festival (VanderKam, “Covenant and Pentecost,” 239–254). Thus, Acts may be portraying the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 as the establishment of a covenant between God and the Church in a way reminiscent of the events on Sinai (Davis, “Acts 2,” 43–45; Witherington, *Acts*, 131).

**Fulfillment of Joel.** Peter quotes the Septuagint’s translation of Joel 2:28–32, which prophesies that “in the last days,” God will “pour out” (ἐκχέω, *ekcheō*) the Holy Spirit upon all “flesh.” Thus, all humans—regardless of age, gender, and social status—will prophesy, have visions, and have prophetic dreams (Acts 2:17–18).

For Luke, the extraordinary events of Pentecost inaugurate the miracles and wonders that occur throughout Acts (Treier, “Fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32”). Later, the Holy Spirit also fills the Samaritan and Gentile converts, who then become participants in the same signs and wonders described in Peter’s quotation of Joel (Acts 8:14–17, 25; 10:16–48; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 65, 84; Witherington, *Acts*, 134, 359–61).

### Historical Development of Pentecost

Two separate but related Pentecost traditions developed among Jews and Christians.

### *Pentecost in Jewish Tradition*

In Jewish tradition, Pentecost retained its connection with the annual harvest, but it also became a covenant renewal festival and a celebration of God giving the law.

By the middle of the second century BC, Pentecost had become a covenant renewal celebration (*Jubilees* 14.1–6; 15.1–16; 22.1–9; Kee, *Good News*, 30–31). At some point in the Graeco-Roman period, the festival became *primarily* a celebration of the giving of the law (*b. Shabbat* 88b; Witherington, *Acts*, 131). A revival of Pentecost as a harvest festival has occurred among modern Jews, especially among Israelis (*New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, “Shavu’ot,” 707–8). Historically, two traditions for the dating of Pentecost exist. The Sadducees and Karaites understood “Sabbath” in Lev 23:15 to refer to the Saturday after Passover; thus, Pentecost would always be on a Sunday, but never on the same date every year. However, Rabbinic Judaism has understood “Sabbath” to refer to Passover; thus, since at least the second century AD, Pentecost typically begins on 6 Sivan (Wigoder, “Shavu’ot,” 707).

### *Pentecost in Christian Tradition*

In regards to the historicity of the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2, three primary options exist:

1. The events of Acts 2 are a relatively accurate account of actual events.
2. Acts 2 is primarily a historical fiction created by Luke from numerous traditions regarding the early Christians’ experiences of the Holy Spirit.
3. Luke freely uses several traditions regarding actual events to create a unified narrative that bears some resemblance to actual historical events.

**Acts 2 as History.** While it is possible that Acts 2 narrates the events of the first Pentecost exactly as they happened and appeared outwardly, it is also possible that the early Christians’ experiences at Pentecost were subjective in nature. That is, the miraculous events of Pentecost were primarily “inward experiences” (Bruce, *Acts*, 54–56).

**Acts 2 as Fiction.** It is possible that Luke had few significant sources regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit and that Acts 2—including its setting at the Feast of Pentecost—is mostly a literary creation. Three literary aspects of Acts 2 support this theory (Haenchen, *Acts*, 171–96):

1. Luke shows his dependence upon disparate traditions regarding the speaking of other tongues. In some places it appears as glossolalia (unintelligible ecstatic speech) and at others places as xenolalia (speaking other intelligible human languages; Acts 2:4–13).
2. The theology of Peter’s speech appears so similar to Luke’s own perspective throughout Acts that it seems likely that, like the historians of his time, Luke did his best to recreate an unrecorded speech by supplying the words himself.
3. Luke summarily describes the post-Pentecost Jerusalem in such ideal terms that it appears a theological exaggeration (Acts 2:42–47).

**Composite View of Acts 2.** Between these two extreme opinions stands a variety of more mediating opinions, which accept the relative historicity of the Pentecost narrative and also recognize Luke’s significant creative influence on the narrative. For instance, Acts 2 may rely on numerous traditions recounting the coming of the Holy Spirit to various believers—despite whether these comings all occurred simultaneously at Pentecost (Hull, *Holy Spirit*, 84; see also

Barrett, *Acts*, 1:108; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 16; Pervo, *Acts*, 71). Scholarly consensus generally maintains that Peter's speech is primarily Luke's own creation following the typical literary conventions of the day (Barrett, *Acts*, 1:131).

There is little consensus regarding the historicity of the summary description of the post-Pentecost life of the early Jerusalem church. It can be viewed either as a relatively accurate historical description or an idealized literary account by Luke (Barrett, *Acts*, 1:159–161; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 22–24; Witherington, *Acts*, 158–163).

#### *Later Traditions*

Christian tradition has remembered Pentecost as the day God sent the Holy Spirit unto the Church. In the Christian liturgical calendar, Pentecost is 50 days after Easter. It serves as a commemoration of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the Church (Unger, "Significance of Pentecost," 169–77). Within the Charismatic movement, particularly Pentecostalism, the day of Pentecost carries important theological significance as the inaugural occurrence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Alexander, "Bishop King and Pentecostalism," 159–83).

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## Pentecost

—i.e., “fiftieth”, found only in the New Testament (Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8). The festival so named is first spoken of in Ex. 23:16 as “the feast of harvest,” and again in Ex. 34:22 as “the day of the firstfruits” (Num. 28:26). From the sixteenth of the month of Nisan (the second day of the Passover), seven complete weeks, i.e., forty-nine days, were to be reckoned, and this feast was held on the fiftieth day. The manner in which it was to be kept is described in Lev. 23:15–19; Num. 28:27–29. Besides the sacrifices prescribed for the occasion, every one was to bring to the Lord his “tribute of a free-will offering” (Deut. 16:9–11). The purpose of this feast was to commemorate the completion of the grain harvest. Its distinguishing feature was the offering of “two leavened loaves” made from the new corn of the completed harvest, which, with two lambs, were waved before the Lord as a thank offering.

The day of Pentecost is noted in the Christian Church as the day on which the Spirit descended upon the apostles, and on which, under Peter’s preaching, so many thousands were converted in Jerusalem (Acts 2).<sup>2</sup>

## PENTECOST, FEAST OF.

In Lv. 23:16 LXX reads *pentēkonta hēmeras* for the Heb. *ḥ<sup>a</sup>miššîm yôm*, ‘fifty days’, referring to the number of days from the offering of the barley sheaf at the beginning of the Passover. On the 50th day was the Feast of Pentecost. Since the time elapsed was 7 weeks, it was called *ḥaḡ šābu’ôt*, ‘feast of weeks’ (Ex. 34:22; Dt. 16:10). It marks the completion of the barley harvest, which began when the sickle was first put to the grain (Dt. 16:9), and when the sheaf was waved ‘the morrow after the sabbath’ (Lv. 23:11). It is also called *ḥaḡ haqqāšîr*, ‘feast of harvest’, and *yôm habbikkûrîm*, ‘day of the first fruits’ (Ex. 23:16; Nu. 28:26). The feast is not limited to the times of the Pentateuch, but its observance is indicated in the days of Solomon (2 Ch. 8:13), as the second of the three annual festivals (*cf.* Dt. 16:16).

The feast was proclaimed as a ‘holy convocation’ on which no servile work was to be done, and at which every male Israelite was required to appear at the sanctuary (Lv. 23:21). Two baked loaves of new, fine, leavened flour were brought out of the dwellings and waved by the priest before the Lord, together with the offerings of animal sacrifice for sin- and peace-offerings (Lv. 23:17–20). As a day of joy (Dt. 16:16) it is evident that on it the devout Israelite expressed gratitude for the blessings of the grain harvest and experienced heartfelt fear of the Lord (Je.

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts, R. D. (2016). [Pentecost](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>2</sup> Easton, M. G. (1893). In [Easton’s Bible dictionary](#). New York: Harper & Brothers.

5:24). But it was the thanksgiving and fear of a redeemed people, for the service was not without sin- and peace-offerings, and was, moreover, a reminder of their deliverance from Egypt (Dt. 16:12) as God's covenant people (Lv. 23:22). The ground of acceptance of the offering presupposes the removal of sin and reconciliation with God.

In the intertestamental period and later, Pentecost was regarded as the anniversary of the law-giving at Sinai (Jubilees 1:1 with 6:17; TB, *Pesaḥim* 68b; Midrash, *Tanḥuma* 26c). The Sadducees celebrated it on the 50th day (inclusive reckoning) from the first Sunday after Passover (taking the 'sabbath' of Lv. 23:15 to be the weekly sabbath); their reckoning regulated the public observance so long as the Temple stood, and the church is therefore justified in commemorating the first Christian Pentecost on a Sunday (Whit Sunday). The Pharisees, however, interpreted the 'sabbath' of Lv. 23:15 as the Festival of Unleavened Bread (cf. Lv. 23:7), and their reckoning became normative in Judaism after AD 70, so that in the Jewish calendar Pentecost now falls on various days of the week.

In the NT there are three references to Pentecost: (1) Acts 2:1 (Gk. *tēn hēmeran tēs pentēkostēs*). On this day, after the resurrection and ascension of Christ (c. AD 30), the disciples were gathered in a house in Jerusalem, and were visited with signs from heaven. The Holy Spirit descended upon them, and new life, power and blessing was evident, which Peter explained was in fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. (2) Acts 20:16. Paul was determined not to spend time in Asia and made speed to be in Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost (AD 57). (3) 1 Cor. 16:8. Paul purposed to stay at Ephesus until Pentecost (AD 54 or 55), because an effectual door was opened to him for his ministry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Mishnah, *Menaḥot* 10. 3; Tosefta, *Menaḥot* 10. 23, 528; TB, *Menaḥot* 65a; L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees*, 1946, pp. 115ff.

D. FREEMAN.<sup>3</sup>

## Pentecost

**Pentecost** (pen'tuh-kawst; from the Gk., 'fiftieth'), a religious observance that has roots in the OT and continues to be observed in both Judaism and Christianity.

As a designation for a particular religious observance, the Greek word appears only twice in the LXX, namely, in Tob. 2:1, and 2 Macc. 12:32. In the Hebrew OT, the customary name for the observance is the Feast of Weeks (Heb. Shavuot). It is regarded as the second of three obligatory observances, coming between Passover and Tabernacles (cf. Exod. 23:14–17; 34:18–24; Deut. 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13). In Exod. 23:16, it is called 'the feast of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field.' In Exod. 34:22, the Feast of Weeks is further defined as 'the first fruits of wheat harvest.' These phrases indicate that the Feast of Weeks was originally an agricultural festival, an occasion on which the community was expected to show gratitude to God for the first fruits, i.e., the early harvest.

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<sup>3</sup> Freeman, D. (1996). [Pentecost, Feast Of](#). In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., pp. 898–899). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

**Dating:** The dating of this festival also suggests its original agricultural context. Deut. 16:9 says that it is to be dated seven weeks 'from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain.' Lev. 23:15–16 directs: 'And you shall count from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven full weeks shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after the seventh sabbath.' Josephus calculated the date of Pentecost as the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover, and, in time, this manner of calculation became standard.

According to OT regulations, one was not allowed to work on the day of Pentecost. The sacrifice of various animals and of bread made from newly harvested grain was required (cf. Lev. 23:15–21; Num. 28:26–31).

In the Hellenistic period, (300 B.C.-A.D. 300) Pentecost began to lose its association with agriculture and came increasingly to be associated with the religious history of the Hebrew people. The book of *Jubilees*, continuing to refer to it as 'first fruits' (22:1), identifies it with the covenant between God and Noah (Jub. 6:1-21; cf. Gen. 8:20–22; 9:8–17). It was probably after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 that Pentecost was finally transformed into an observance of the giving of Torah on Mount Sinai. Exod. 19:1 was interpreted to mean that the interval between Passover and the arrival at Sinai was fifty days. Thus, in Judaism, *Shavuot* continues to be an observance of thanksgiving for Torah.

The NT shows clearly that Pentecost was celebrated in the first century and that it came to have a special Christian significance. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul says that he plans to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8). Apparently, he expects his readers to understand his meaning, a fact that has led some interpreters to suggest that Pentecost had become a Christian observance as early as Paul's time. Paul does not make another explicit reference to Pentecost, but in Rom. 11:16 he appears to have the observance in mind when he speaks of offering a lump of dough as first fruits.

**Pentecost in Acts:** The book of Acts also speaks of Pentecost in connection with Paul's travels (20:16), but of greatest interest is the description of the first Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:1–42). In this passage, the apostles and others have convened in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The author of Acts reports that there was a sudden sound 'like the rush of a mighty wind' (v. 2) from heaven, followed by 'tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them' (v. 3). As a result, the apostles began to speak in tongues, i.e., in languages that were understood by Jews and proselytes from many nations. The apostle Peter then interpreted the event as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32. He proclaimed that the last days had arrived and that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and he called for repentance. As a result, about three thousand persons were added to the group of believers.

Within the literary context of Acts, the events associated with Pentecost constitute the fulfillment not only of the prophecy of Joel but also of the promise of Jesus. In Acts 1:8, just prior to his ascension, the risen Jesus had said, 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' Thus, the events of Pentecost are presented in Acts as the fulfillment of this promise: on that day, the Holy Spirit did indeed come upon the apostles and empowered them to witness to Jesus the Christ. The event is celebrated in many Christian bodies on Pentecost Sunday, which is the seventh Sunday after Easter in the church calendar.

**See also** Acts of the Apostles, The; Feasts, Festivals, and Fasts; Spiritual Gifts; Tongues as of Fire; Tongues, Speaking with. J.B.T.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In [Harper's Bible dictionary](#) (1st ed., p. 769). San Francisco: Harper & Row.