

Pentecost

Also Known As:

- **Pentecost:** Meaning “fifty,” alludes to the number of days between Passover and the Festival of Weeks.
- **Festival of Weeks** (Shavuot): Alludes to the seven weeks which are counted from Passover. (See Deuteronomy 16:10.)
- **Festival of Reaping:** Refers to the reaping of wheat. (See Exodus 23:16.)
- **Festival of First Fruits** (Bikkurim): Commemorates the additional offering of two loaves of bread from the new produce and also marks the beginning of the period for bringing the offerings of first fruits from the seven species of the land of Israel. (See Numbers 28:26.)
- **Atzeres** (Eighth): A name used by the Sages to connote that the essence of this holiday is a concluding eighth day for the seven days of Passover.

Time of year:

Springtime, May or June. Pentecost is on the sixth day of the Biblical month Sivan, which is the third month from Nisan. (See Exodus 19:1.)

Scripture References:

Exodus 34:22, Leviticus 23:15-22, 2 Chronicles 8:13, Acts 2:1, Acts 20:16, 1 Corinthians 16:8

Themes:

Celebration of the Giving of the Torah

- Traditionally, Israel received the Torah at Mount Sinai on Pentecost, 50 days after their departure from Egypt.
- The Torah was given at a public assembly and in the wilderness, a place that belonged to no one. It is said that the Torah was given in this manner so that whoever wishes to accept may come and accept it.
- When God spoke the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, it is said that His voice spoke in all the languages of mankind, which, traditionally, is 70 languages. Thus, anyone is able to hear and obey.

Anniversary of the Betrothal between God and Israel

- Traditionally, Pentecost is the anniversary of Israel entering into covenant with God.
- The tablets of the Ten Commandments are likened to a “ketubah” (a betrothal document from a groom to his bride). God “proposed” and promised that Israel would be His treasured possession among the nations, and Israel responded affirmatively, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do!” (See Exodus 9:5-8.)

Harvest Festival

- Wheat, the latest grain in the fields of Israel, is reaped during this season. When the wheat is reaped, the yearly work is considered to be completed and is marked by bringing the offering of new grain to the Temple.

Pilgrimage Festival

- Pentecost is one of the three Pilgrimage Festivals. (The other two are Passover and the Feast of Booths.) On Pentecost, Israelite males were commanded to appear before God in Jerusalem, bringing offerings of the first fruits of their harvest.

וידבר אלהים את כל-הדברים

King David's Day:

• It is said that King David was born and died on Pentecost. It is customary to read the entire Book of Psalms and to light candles. (Some communities light 150 candles to correspond to the number of chapters in the Psalms.) In Jerusalem, people visit the site of his grave and recall David's acts of righteousness on behalf of Israel, until the redeemer will come to Zion.

Celebration of the Giving of the Holy Spirit

• Acts 2 tells the story of the early believers being gathered together, in one place (the Temple) and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.
• Legend says that when God spoke the Ten Commandments, His voice took the shape of fiery sparks that rested on each person present. The tongues of fire and the speaking of every tongue in Acts 2 are direct allusions to God speaking on Mount Sinai. These events create a connection between the giving of God's Torah and the giving of His Holy Spirit.

Messianic Significance:

• In Acts 1, Jesus told His believers not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which, you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now....you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth." (See Acts 1:4-8.)

Traditions:

It is customary to:

- Teach children the Torah on the day of Pentecost.
- Read the Book of Ruth.
- Recite the entire Hallel (Psalm 113-118).
- Decorate with leaves and branches.
- To stay awake during the night of the Festival and study the Scriptures in anticipation of the hour when the Torah was given.
- Immerse in water on the eve of Pentecost.
- Recite "Yizkor," meaning "Remember," a special memorial prayer for the departed.

Foods:

It is customary to eat:

- Dairy foods.
- Cakes baked or fried in honey.
- A meal of meat and wine.
- Sweet challah.

Scripture Readings for the day:

Exodus 19:1-20:23, Numbers 28:26-31, Ezekiel 1:1-28, 3:12

וידבר אלהים את כל-הדברים