

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL  
SESSION 7 | THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

## THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION FOR THE FEAST

### LEVITICUS 23:15-22

- Verse 15 - As stated in session 6, there is a schism in Judaism over what day the count begins. The most literal is that it begins **from the morrow after the sabbath**, speaking of Sunday, which becomes the first day.
- Verse 16 – the feast is exactly **fifty days later**, thus on a Sunday also (with the literal interpretation). On this day, **a new meat offering** was to be presented to the Lord.
- Verse 17 - On this day, **two wave loaves** baked **with leaven** were to be presented to the Lord.
  - The unleavened bread of Passover reminded of oppression.
  - The two loaves of leavened bread of Pentecost reminded of *freedom*, as it was made from the grain of the Promised Land.
- Verses 17-21 – several instructions were given for a national sacrifice.
- Verse 22 – The law of gleaning was established.

Note: the feast is one of the three “pilgrimage” feasts found in Deuteronomy 16.

## THE MEANING OF THE FEAST

The meaning of Pentecost is something that “everybody knows, and nobody knows.” The Scripture does not give it an exact date, making it strange for the commemoration of an event. The Scripture also does not give it an exact meaning, simply giving the instructions for its fulfillment.

The debate is whether it is a feast of *law* or of *land*. The best answer is probably...*Yes!* While the feast is mostly recognized today as a celebration of the giving of the Torah, in Scripture it is chiefly a celebration of the Promised Land. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks referred to the feast as “the celebration of Jewish unity.”

The Torah was given **in the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt** (Ex. 19:1). However, the giving of Torah and Passover are never undisputedly connected in Scripture.

All through the Scripture the festival is agriculturally based. Ancient Jewish teachers referred to it as a farmer’s holiday (some even proclaiming that the reason it was traditionally held on Sunday was to give the farmers two consecutive days of rest.) In Joshua 5:11-12 the Manna ceased with the first harvest in the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 8:7-10 speaks of entering the Promised Land and celebrating its bounty. This is the passage from which Jews began the custom of eating *after* the meal. It is almost impossible to believe that a God who gives a feast of remembrance for *leaving* Exodus (Passover) and *journeying through the wilderness* (Tabernacles) would not also give a feast to celebrate the most distinguishing characteristic of His chosen people: the promised land. In fact, one of the ancient, non-Biblical customs of Pentecost is eating dairy, recalling the “land of milk and honey.”

During and the Babylonian exile it became customary to observe Pentecost as a celebration of the *giving of the Law*. The land could be taken away, but the Law was theirs forever. The Torah became “the key to Jewish identity” during this time (Sacks).<sup>1</sup>

## THE IMPACT OF TORAH ON HUMANITY

When Jews celebrate the giving of Torah, they do not in any way view it as God placing them into bondage. It is something to be celebrated as a great liberator that preserves freedom. It is also considered to be the birth of the nation. They had previously (since Abraham) been a “social group” but beginning at Sinai they were a “body politic.”

What was the cultural contribution of Torah? It was certainly *not* basic morals (“thou shalt not bear false witness...”). The contribution of Torah is in a wholly new view of government, one that curtailed the *abuse of power*. Previously, “cosmological myth” was the basis of reality for societies. The myth, differing by society, determined who or what would be in power. The myth always turned “some into gods” and “the majority into slaves.”<sup>2</sup> The Torah, however, created a boundary between God above and man below, with *all* mankind under *God*. With Torah, *God alone was King, the sole lawgiver* (compare Judges 8:23 and 1 Sam. 8:7). Later, under the monarchy, the King was not a legislator (that role was saved for God, who had given them the Law in full). Even the king was subject to God’s law. Additionally, the King had no religious authority, and the religious authority was completely independent from the monarchy.

In the Torah, God the Creator was sovereign, entering into covenant with *the nation* as a whole. And the principle was given that “there is no justified government without the consent of the governed, even if the Governor is Creator of heaven and earth.”<sup>3</sup> Moses secured the agreement of the people prior to entering this covenant with God (Ex. 19:8).

## THE CHRISTIAN ROBBERY OF THE FEAST

In the Christian world, it is *almost* universally accepted that Pentecost is the birthday of the church. Such theology is built upon theological conjecture alone, and cannot stand the test of Biblical scrutiny.

If Pentecost is the birth of the church, God took that which was Israel’s and transferred it to the church, plain and simple. This is replacement theology. The church, which has *no land* and *no Torah* somehow celebrates *the arrival into the land* and *the giving of the Torah* as its birthday.

How did this happen? Theologians *assumed* that God’s promise to the Jews of a last-days pouring out of the Holy Spirit was meant *for them*. Once again, this is eisegesis, plain and simple. The likely source of this thinking is the same theological sources upon which Catholicism was built. Protestant reformers did not reform this area of theology.

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<sup>1</sup> This section based upon *Ceremony & Celebration: Introduction to the Holidays* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Maggid Books, New Milford, CT. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pg. 289

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Pg. 295

One of the most important rules of Biblical interpretation is this: *If God meant it for Israel, it is Israel's through all time.* What God meant for Israel He *never, ever* removes from them and gives to the church.