

# Feast of Weeks

## The Jewish calendar



## The Jewish calendar follows the agricultural cycle

- Spring (Passover), beg. of harvest (Weeks), end of harvest (Tabernacles)
- rhythms of life are matched to an Israelite's identity in God

## What is the Feast of Weeks?

### **Leviticus 23:15-22**

<sup>15</sup> You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath [of Passover], 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.

## Occurs 7 weeks after Passover

- 7x7 = 49, following day = 50 days | thus, called feast of “weeks”
- in Greek, called Pentecost, literally, “50<sup>th</sup>” | Hebrew – Shavuot

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.

## Marks beginning of wheat harvest

- make bread out of “new grain” – first-fruits
- thanksgiving to God as the provider of all things

<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 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.

## Feast of Weeks is a worship service

- holy convocation – gather together as “church”
- day of rest, offering of sacrifices and ministrations of priests

<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.

## Feast of Weeks and Social Justice

- amidst the bounty of harvest, we must not neglect the poor
- economic structure of Israel oriented towards equality and sharing
  - equal distribution of land (Numbers 26:52-56)
  - non-transference of land (Leviticus 25:23-28)
  - every 50 years, original distribution restored (Leviticus 25:8-17)
  - every 7 years, produce of land for poor (Leviticus 25:18-22)
  - every harvest, portion set aside for poor (Leviticus 19:9-10)
  - interest-free loans for poor (Exodus 22:25-27)
  - every 7 years, all debts cancelled (Deut. 15:1-2)
  - tithe to be given to poor (Deut. 14:28-29)

## The Feast of Weeks in the New Testament

- v. 1 – when the day of Pentecost was “fulfilled”
- Feast of Weeks as a signpost of a future fulfillment

### Acts 2:1

When *the day of Pentecost arrived*, they were all together in one place.

## Jesus speaks of his ministry as a “harvest”

### Matthew 9:35-38

<sup>35</sup> And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

<sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “*The harvest is plentiful*, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

## The OT similarly promises a great harvest of people

### Isaiah 2:2-3

<sup>2</sup> It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and *all the nations shall flow to it*, <sup>3</sup> *and many peoples shall come*, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

## Pentecost (Acts 2) was the firstfruits of God’s great harvest

- notice “the nations” pouring into Jerusalem
- Hellenized Jews and Gentile “God-fearers” come to celebrate the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)
- what was described in the Torah as finally come true

### Acts 2:2-12, 37-41

<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>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.

## Feast of Weeks Notes

### 3 major feasts in OT

- pilgrimage feasts – travel to Jerusalem to observe
- follow agricultural cycle: beginning of Spring | beginning of harvest | end of harvest

### Feast of Weeks marks beginning of harvest

- also called “Feast of Harvest” and “Feast of Firstfruits”

#### Leviticus 23:15-22

<sup>15</sup> You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath [of Passover], 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.

### 7 weeks after Passover

- $7 \times 7 = 49$ , then following day = 50 days (counting inclusively)
- thus, called “Feast of Weeks”
- Hebrew – Shavuot | in Greek, called Pentecost, literally, “50<sup>th</sup>” (day)

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.

### Beginning of wheat harvest

- make bread out of “new grain” | first-fruits of food (2/10 of ephah = 1 lb of grain)

### Thanksgiving to God as the provider of all things

- similar to ‘Thanksgiving Day’ | gratitude reorients the heart to God as the ultimate source of life

### First two loaves are given to the Lord

- firstfruits tithe – acknowledgement that everything belongs to God
- support for priests

<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 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.

### Along with bread offering – various burnt offerings to God

#### This is a worship service

- holy convocation – gather together as “church”
- day of rest
- offering of sacrifices and ministrations of priests

<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.

### **Feast of Weeks and Social Justice**

- amidst the bounty of harvest, we must not neglect the poor
- reminder that wealth is not only yours, but to be shared with others
  
- two provisions: do not harvest to the edges | leave gleanings for poor
- hard work – poor are to be given a means to earn their living

### **Economic structure of Israel oriented towards equality and sharing**

- equal distribution of land (Numbers 26:52-56)
  - non-transference of land (Leviticus 25:23-28)
  - every 50 years, original distribution restored (Leviticus 25:8-17)
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### **The Feast of Weeks in the New Testament**

#### **Acts 2:1**

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

### **By time of NT, Greek-speaking Jews referred to Feast of Weeks as Pentecost**

#### **Luke says something very interesting in v. 1**

- English translation – “day of Pentecost *arrived*”
- Greek word – *sumplhro,w* | “to be filled up completely,” as in jar being filled w/ water to brim
- can simply mean: Pentecost has finally arrived – time had finally come
- but Luke could use other simpler words to convey same meaning
- instead, Luke uses very unusual word – idea of filling up
- Luke is saying – OT Pentecost Feast had finally been fulfilled in the events of Acts 2
- all along, in the OT, Feast of Weeks was a signpost of a future fulfillment | implicit promise
- so what is that fulfillment?

### **Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God as a “harvest”**

- notice Jesus evokes metaphor of a “harvest” in describing his ministry

#### **Matthew 9:35-38**

<sup>35</sup> And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*”

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## Pentecost (Acts 2) was the firstfruits of God’s great harvest

- notice “the nations” pouring into Jerusalem
- Hellenized Jews and Gentile “God-fearers” come to celebrate the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)
  - this couldn’t have happened without the pilgrimage feast
- God was orchestrating all history for this very moment – that his Word would be fulfilled

### Acts 2:2-12, 37-41

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<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?”

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