

שבועות / Shavuot

Shavuot (*Weeks / Festival of the Giving of the Torah / Pentecost*)



The Torah

The festival of *Shavu'ot* (or *Shavu'os*, in Ashkenazi usage; *Shavu'ot* in Classical and Mizrahi or Modern Hebrew Hebrew: שבועות, lit. "Weeks") occurs on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan in late May or early June. *Shavu'ot* commemorates the anniversary of the day Gd gave the Torah to the entire Israelite nation (Am Yisrael) assembled at *Mount Sinai*, although the association between *the Giving of the Torah* (Hebrew Pronunciation: *Matan Torah*) and *Shavu'ot* is not explicit in either the Torah nor in the Biblical text. The holiday is one of the *Shalosh Regalim*, i.e. the three Biblical pilgrimage festivals of *Pesach*, *Shavu'ot* and *Sukkot*. The Festival of *Shavu'ot* marks the conclusion of the *Counting of the Omer*, from *Passover* to *Shavu'ot* (Omer is the Hebrew word for 'Sheaf' or in the plural, 'Sheaves').

The word *Shavu'ot* means "weeks", the day marking the conclusion of the **Counting of the Omer** and its date is directly linked to that of **Passover** as the Torah mandates the **seven-week Counting of the Omer**, beginning on the second day of **Passover**, to be immediately followed by the festival of **Shavuot**. This counting of days and weeks is understood by tradition to express a certain anticipation and desire for the actual *Giving of the Torah*.

A religiously oriented bottom line: On *Passover*, the people of Israel were freed from their enslavement to Pharaoh; on *Shavuot*, they were given the Torah and only then became a nation (i.e. an *Am Yisrael*). Subsequently we say that **it was this**

defining moment in which they became committed to the Gd of Israel on their way **home** to the *Land of Israel*.

- **In the Bible** / i.e. the **Tanakh** . . . < -- an acronym for **Torah**, **Nevi'im** and **Khetuvim**

In the *Torah*, *Shavu'ot* is called the "Festival of Weeks" (Hebrew: חג השבועות, *Chag HaShavuot* Exodus 34:22, Deuteronomy 16:10); "Festival of Reaping" (חג הקציר, *Chag HaKatzir*, Exodus 23:16), and "Day of the First Fruits" (יום הבכורים, *Yom HaBikkurim*, Numbers 28:26).

Shavuot, the plural of a word meaning "week" or even the word "seven," alludes to the fact that this festival happens exactly seven weeks (i.e. "a week of weeks") after *Passover*.

- **In the Talmud** / i.e. the **Oral Torah**

The Talmud refers to *Shavuot* as 'A ṣ eret (Hebrew: עצרת, "refraining" or "holding back", referring to the prohibition against work on this holiday and to the conclusion of the holiday and season of *Passover*. Since *Shavuot* occurs 50 days after *Passover*, The Jews of Alexandria (of Septuagint fame) gave it the name "*Pentecost*" (which is *Koine Greek*: Πεντηκοστή, for the "fiftieth day").

- **In the Ritual of the Temple in Jerusalem**

At the Temple in Jerusalem, each farmer would present his *Bikkurim* to a *Kohen*, (i.e. a *Priest*) in a ceremony that followed the text of *Deuteronomy 26 1-10*.

This text begins by stating: "**An Aramean tried to destroy my father,**" referring to Lavan's efforts to weaken the Biblical patriarch Jacob and rob him of his progeny (*Rashi on Deut. 26:5*)—or by an alternate translation, the text states "**My father was a wandering Aramean,**" referring to the fact that Jacob was a penniless wanderer in the land of Aram for 20 years (*Abraham Ibn Ezra on Deut. 26:5*).

The text proceeds to retell the history of the Jewish people as they went into exile in Ancient Egypt and were enslaved and oppressed; following which Gd redeemed them and brought them to the *Land of Israel*.

Religious Bottom Line: This ceremony of *Bikkurim* (or 'First Fruits') conveys a certain gratitude to Gd both for 'the agricultural 'first fruits of the field' and for '**His guidance**' throughout Jewish history.

- **A note on the Christian Pentecost or some might understand it as 'the Pentecostal' tradition:**

The Christian observance of Pentecost is thought by some scholars to be somewhat of a different holiday. The consensus is that Pentecost in the Christian Bible (*i.e. the New Testament*) is an event which happened around the gathering of Jesus's followers on the Shavu'ot Jewish holiday (see ***Acts of the Apostles 2:1*** and following).