

Lesson 1 Acts 1-2 Handout – Pentecost

The feast of the **Law** of Moses originally known as the feast of Weeks (Deut 16:10) or the feast of Harvest (Exod 23:16). Later, among Greek-speaking Jews, the feast came to be called Pentecost (Tob 2:1). The Greek *penētkostē* means “fiftieth” and refers to the timing of the festival, which took place fifty days after the spring celebration of **Passover** (Lev 23:15–16). Pentecost became a Christian feast when the Holy Spirit rushed down on the apostles seven weeks after Jesus celebrated his final Passover (Acts 2:1–4).

In the Old Testament, the feast of Weeks (Pentecost) is one of three major feasts listed in Exod 23:14–17 (where it is known as the harvest festival), along with the festival of Unleavened Bread and the festival of Ingathering at the end of the year (cf. Exod 34:22). In Lev 23:15–21, the feast is calculated to occur seven weeks from the day of the presentation of the first sheaf of the barley harvest during the Passover celebration. In Num 28:26–31 and Deut 16:9–12, it is known as the “feast of Weeks.” Tobit 2:1 and 2 Macc 12:32, as well as Josephus (*Ant.* 3.252), refer to it to as the festival or feast of Pentecost.

In ancient Israel, the feast of Weeks was a harvest festival. Loaves of bread baked with wheat from the spring harvest were offered to the Lord as a gift of the first fruits (Lev 23:15–17). It was also a day of sacred rest and worship with prescribed sacrifices (Num 28:26–31). The Deuteronomic **covenant** made it a pilgrimage feast requiring participants to celebrate the holy rites in the Jerusalem sanctuary (Deut 16:9–12). In later times, the feast of Pentecost was also a time to remember the giving of the **Law** on Mount **Sinai**.

The Christian feast of Pentecost is celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Easter. According to Acts, on the day of Pentecost the apostles

were gathered in one house in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit descended upon them, sounding like a mighty wind and appearing as tongues of fire upon each of them. The apostles then miraculously spoke in foreign languages, went forth preaching the gospel without fear or hesitation, and Peter delivered a sermon that resulted in the conversion and baptism of some three thousand people (Acts 2:1–47). Pentecost is thus remembered as the founding of the Church as the bearer of God’s Spirit to the world (CCC 731–32, 767, 1076, 1287, 2623).¹

¹ Hahn, S., ed. (2009). In [*Catholic Bible Dictionary*](#) (pp. 693–694). Doubleday.