



THE SOUND OF MUSIC

A style of music unique to Judaism is that of the **cantor (cantorial music)**.

The cantor (the Hebrew term is *chazzan*, pronounced kàh-zen) is the individual who leads the prayer service in the synagogue by singing major sections of the liturgy prescribed in the **siddur** (prayer book) for every congregational gathering throughout the year. He is generally a highly trained person who is selected for his spiritual qualifications, as well as his vocal ability. However, often times the latter receives precedence over the former, since many congregations take great pride in the high musical caliber of their services due, in great part, to the exceptional talent of their cantor.

The distinctive characteristic of cantorial music is a very dramatic, passionate tenor solo voice of operatic quality, with spectacular coloratura (runs, trills, and other ornate decorations in vocal music). The best cantors are considered international celebrities and their public concerts, to which admission is charged, are generally sold-out events.

"DON'T FORGET THE YEAST!"

Most people know about the Jewish Feast of *Unleavened Bread*, of which Passover is the beginning. During this time Jews are strictly forbidden to eat any products containing leaven (yeast), according to Exodus 12:14-15. However, there is another holiday on the Jewish calendar which could aptly be called the Feast of *Leavened Bread* because God *commands* the use of leaven in baking two loaves made from the first fruits of the spring wheat harvest and offered to the Lord (Leviticus 23:17).

This holiday is known properly as **Shavuot** (pronounced shah-vòte), meaning "weeks." It is called this because God commands its observance seven "sabbaths" ("sevens") = *weeks* after the day following Passover (Leviticus 23:15). It is, therefore, sometimes referred to as the Feast of Weeks. A third name by which the festival is known is Pentecost ("fifty" in Greek), since the holiday falls fifty days from the Day of Passover (Leviticus 23:16).

Shavuot is one of the seven Biblically mandated "holy convocations" in Leviticus 23. Its original purpose was to serve as a festival of Thanksgiving and worship

through offering back to God the “first fruits” of the wheat harvest. However, later tradition added the view that the Torah (Law) was given to Moses at Mount Sinai on this day and that King David was born and died on Shavuot.

Modern observance of Shavuot by Jews around the world includes:

- Decorating of synagogues with flowers and plants.
- Eating dairy dishes, along with honey (symbolizing the sweetness of the Law of God).
- Reading the Book of Ruth (King David’s ancestor), in which the wheat harvest is the backdrop against which the book is set, and the record of the giving of the Law.
- Graduation of children from programs of religious instruction.
- In Israel, displaying of the “fruits” of the kibbutzim (communal settlements), including industrial products.

Christians will recall that God chose this day to be the birthday of the Church (Acts 2:1ff). Indeed, what

an appropriate choice, since the presenting of two separate leavened loaves as one offering to the Lord is a beautiful picture of the church composed of two groups, Jews and Gentiles, with all of our imperfections (symbolized by leaven), offered up as one body in thanks and praise to God (Ephesians 2:11-22).

In 1997 the date of Shavuot is from sundown, June 10, to sundown, June 11. Happy birthday to the Church of Jesus Christ!

FOUR THINGS YOU MAY NOT HAVE KNOWN ABOUT THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

1. Hebrew is written and read from right to left, rather than from left to right. Therefore, books are read from back to front.

2. The language is tri-consonantal, which means that most words are formed from a root of three consonants.

3. In its purest form, Hebrew is written in consonants only, with vowel pronunciations supplied by the reader.

4. The individual responsible for revival of Hebrew as a modern spoken language, the official language of the State of Israel, was Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922).



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