

Pentecost & Shavuot: Three texts

Acts 2

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.' (NRSV)

Exodus 19

19 At the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ²They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.

³Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.'

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⁹Then the LORD said to Moses, 'I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.'

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16 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. ¹⁷Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. ¹⁹As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. ²⁰When the LORD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. (NRSV)

From the Midrash

Source: Bialik & Ravnitzky (eds.) *The Book of Legends: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).

At Sinai, when the Holy One gave the Torah to Israel. He manifested marvels upon marvels for Israel with His voice. How so? As the Holy One spoke, the voice reverberated throughout the world. At first Israel heard the voice coming to them from the south, so they ran to the south to meet the voice there. It shifted to the north, so they ran to the north. Then it shifted to the east, so they ran to the east; but from the east it shifted to the west. Then it shifted to heaven. But when they raised their eyes toward heaven, it seemed to rise out of the earth. Hence Israel asked one another, "But wisdom, where shall it be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12).

"And all the people perceived the thunderings" (Exod. 20:15). Since there was only one voice, why "thundering" in the plural? Because God's voice mutated into seven voices, and the seven voices into seventy languages, so that all the nations might hear it. (1)

(1) The Torah is intended for all nations; it is not to remain Israel's sole prerogative. Exod. R. 5:9; Tanhuma B, *Shemot*, #22