

## **PENTECOST: THE POWER OF GOD**

Morgan County Correctional Complex, Pentecost 2011

[Note from this service were being reformatted into an article]

This message is part three of a seven part series of articles that cover, in broad strokes, the holy days that God revealed to the ancient nation of Israel as recorded in your Bible. I originally worked on the installments in this series in the time frame in which each observance came to pass on the calendar, but as we have little control over when the paper is printed, each is designed to stand on its own merits.

In the first installment, we talked about the death of Jesus Christ, His crucifixion and the sacrifice our Creator made on that faithful Passover evening in AD 31. Remembering Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:26, to "show the Lord's death till He comes," we talked about the new symbols of bread and wine Jesus instituted at that early Passover meal with His disciples the night before His crucifixion.

Following Passover is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the occasion Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 5:7: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: *Therefore let us keep the feast*, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Paul had just warned the former gentiles in the Church at Corinth, in verse 6: "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (*see also* Gal. 5:9). Paul knew the pervasive nature of sin, like leaven it would spread throughout the congregation if left unchecked. The Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures the Christian's duty to "put sin out" of their life as they yield to Jesus Christ.

Today we are going to look at the next biblical feast on the calendar and its prophetic significance. In that process we will review the timing of Jesus' resurrection, the symbolism He fulfilled the next morning and the miraculous birth of the New Testament Church of God on the following Feast of Pentecost, 50 days after our Lord's triumph over death.

### **A Transformative Time**

The word "Pentecost" itself is derived from the Greek word for "fiftieth," *Pentekostos*, and is so called for the timing of its date (Vine's). Deuteronomy 16:9-10 gives the formula and one of its more ancient names: "Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill

offering in proportion to the blessing the LORD your God has given you.” 50 days is seven weeks plus one day.

Commenting on this seven week period, Kevin Williams, writing for RBC Ministries – the people who produce *The Daily Bread* devotionals – says that “In synagogues and in Jewish homes the observant Hebrew greets each evening (the beginning of the [biblical] day) with special prayers to mark off the days until [Pentecost]. This observance is not a countdown, but an anticipation of the coming appointed time of God. During this time Psalm 119 is read in the synagogues as [observers] meditate on its words of encouragement. ...

“[The Jew] looks to these days as a time of introspection, with [their] nightly prayers helping to examine his or her life in anticipation of the great work he expects the Creator to do on the 50th day, the Day of Pentecost.

“Leviticus 23:15 instructs the celebrants to be mindful of the passage of time from Passover to Pentecost, the 49 intermediary days. Some rabbis teach that this time is like waiting for a friend who is coming from afar for a special visit, bearing with him great news. ...

“In the church today, Pentecost is calculated in the same way: 49 days after the resurrection. Few Christians, however, pay [any] attention to [this] period ... If [all] believers followed this example of Israel, they might experience unexpected blessing. The days that mark the period from the cross to the dramatic beginning of the church (from the resurrection to the coming of the Holy Spirit) could become a time of quiet soul-searching and renewal. It could give the church an annual opportunity to contemplate the return of the Messiah in power to the earth!”

Williams is right. Just think about the time the disciples spent with the resurrected Messiah and how transformative it was to their understanding and possibly necessary to their conversion. The Apostles who received God’s Spirit at Pentecost were far different men than the disciples who deserted their Master at the cross. Even Paul drew on his experience with the risen Christ in teaching the Corinthians.

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: And that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. ... After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). Paul goes on to express regret for persecuting the Church of God, but those who had walked with the resurrected Savior would not relent at Saul’s heavy hand, nor that of any other.

The Apostle John, who tradition tells us was boiled in oil for his steadfast belief, testifies of “That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:1-4). It is in these testimonies that we have our faith – faith in Jesus’ resurrection, in the witness of His Apostles, in the history of His dealings with man. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

### **Traditional Errors**

For those of you who have studied the history of God’s people, not only the New Testament Church of God, but that of the Church in the wilderness – Israel and Judah – many of you can see the parallels between the two. How quickly we take God’s revelation and go off track, trading the truth of God for the adversary’s lie.

Jesus said of the Jew’s religion, “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7). He said to their leaders, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him...” (John 8:44a).

Paul said of the Apostate church, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angle of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Lets take a look at some of their work.

*Today’s Handbook of Bible Times and Customs* tells us that “The 50 days from Passover to *Shavuot* [the Hebrew name for Pentecost, which means, “Feast of Harvest”; Exodus 23:16] have been calculated several ways, the method being a source of disagreement between Pharisees and Sadducees.” Today most Jews erroneously hold to the Pharisaical view and calculate the date from the first *annual* Sabbath of the biblical calendar, falling on the 15th of Abib, or, as the month was later named, Nisan. It was this same Sabbath, as we discussed at Passover, which hastened Jesus’ burial and prompted the breaking of the criminals’ legs at Calvary. This was the first day of Unleavened Bread, the annual “high day Sabbath” of John 19:31, which began at sunset the evening following our Lord’s death.

Many Christian churches today try to place Pentecost by the modern calendar, following the dictates of Emperor Constantine. At the Council of Nicea in AD 325, the Emperor forbade the

observance of any biblical feast. This excluded the use of Unleavened Bread for fixing the date, so he based his Pentecost on the first Sunday after the vernal equinox, the same method recognized for fixing the date of Easter. The vernal equinox is the day each spring when the day and night are of equal duration. It occurs when the Sun's alignment crosses the earth's equator.

The biblical calendar, in which God scheduled His holy days, is based on the rotation of the moon around the earth. The calendar we use today is based on the rotation of the earth around the sun. Occasionally, these two calendars line up, as they did in the spring of 2009 and the spring of AD 31, but the occurrence is rare. Unfortunately Constantine's calculation remains forever anchored to the earth's orbit and God's Pentecost to the cycle of the moon – and the twain seldom meet.

Now I do not want to use too much space in this article explaining how religionist have gotten this wrong, but the information is out there if you are willing to look. And look you should – for how can we acknowledge the founding of the Church, in which we claim to belong, if we do not know when it happened?

God further designated this day for a holy “convocation,” or gathering of believers (Numbers 28:26). It is the one and only holy day that requires us to count. Had the Disciples of Christ been following the current commandments of men, depending on who they listened to, they likely could have all shown up at different times. But scripture tells us they were “with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1b). They knew that every other feast in Scripture is given an exact date, but Pentecost requires *observation*.

### **Christ First**

So leaving the world's deception behind for now, let's take a look at the biblical instruction for calculating Pentecost and how Jesus' fulfillment of certain ceremonies fixes for us His intent in this revelation He gave to Israel. This is also where we get our fourth and final Biblical name for Pentecost: the Feast of Firstfruits

In Leviticus 23:9, we find instructions for what the Bible calls a “wave-sheaf” offering. The Israelites were not allowed to harvest any of the early grain crops until this solemn ceremony of the Levitical priesthood had taken place on the day designated by God. This will also be our starting point for figuring “when the day of Pentecost [has] fully come” (Acts 2:1a).

“And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Leviticus 23:9).

As we shall see, this is the **weekly** Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The first sheaf, or cluster of grain was cut and brought to the priest who solemnly waved it before the Eternal God to be accepted for the people. This pictures the resurrected Christ ascending to heaven to be accepted by His Father as the very first human being to actually be born of God – the firstfruit of the spiritual harvest, the first human resurrected to immortality!

Colossians 1:15 calls Christ “the firstborn of every creature.” Verse 18 says “He is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead;” Romans 8:29 says He is “the firstborn amongst many brethren.” And Hebrews 12:23 tells us of “the general assembly, and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven...”

The gospel accounts tell us that Mary, Mary Magdalene and other female followers of Christ show up at Jesus’ grave site before sunrise on the first day of the week, to find an empty tomb. After a conversation with two angels who tell the women that Christ has already risen, Mary Magdalene finds herself face-to-face with the immortal Jesus Christ.

Now notice what He says to her: “*Touch Me not*; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God, and your God” (John 20:17). This is the firstfruits offering, the time when Christ presented Himself before the Father. 1 Corinthians 15:20: “But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

Matthew says in his account of the risen Christ that later in the day, as the women were on their way to tell the other disciples of the empty tomb, that “Jesus met them, saying, ‘All hail.’ And they came and *held him* by the feet, and worshiped Him.”

Down in verse 19 of our account in John 20, it says “...the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, ‘Peace be unto you.’ And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. ...” Luke adds Jesus’ reassurance to His frightened followers, “handle Me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have” (Luke 24:39).

Jesus’ heavenly presentation now complete the disciple held Him and touched Him, and eight days later Thomas got the opportunity to “put [his] finger into the print of the nails, and thrust [his] hand into His side” (v.25).

Christ presented Himself before the Father on the Sunday morning He first appeared to Mary Magdalene. Pentecost, therefore, is always on a Sunday because Sunday always follows the **weekly** Sabbath. And 49 day from one Sunday is always another Sunday!

So now that we know when the days of Pentecost are fully come, 49 days after the weekly Sabbath following Passover, let's take a look at Leviticus 23 and verse 15. This Scripture, calling for the counting of weekly Sabbaths, should make more sense now. This also gives us the opportunity to look at one more ceremony and its significance to the Church today.

“And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD” (Leviticus 23:15-17).

### **The Church Follows**

This offering of baked bread with leaven represents the Church of God: those the Father has given Christ from out of this present evil generation, this corrupt age of man, “called out” from this perverse world, just as the Israelites brought the bread out from their habitations. “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:23). They are those who have received of His Holy Spirit, those who have overcome this corrupt world, the redeemed for which Christ is returning. James 1:18 says, “Of His own will begot He us with the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” This ceremony is the presentation of God's Church. The feast foreshadows the first resurrection.

Most people associate Pentecost with the coming of God's Spirit but fewer understand the role the Holy Spirit plays in our future redemption – the agent of identification, resuscitation, the hereditary mark of God's family. Jesus says in Luke 20:35 that “they which shall be accounted worthy ... [of] the resurrection from the dead ... are the children of God, being children of the resurrection” [35-36].

Paul tells us in Romans 8:11, “... if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.” He goes on to say in verse 16: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ...” In verse 23 he says we “have the firstfruits of the Spirit.” Verse 29: “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn amongst many brethren.” This is the point of the harvest feast.

In the 49 days between the wave-sheaf and the loaves of bread, Israel harvested the barley crop, the first crop of the agricultural season. The New Testament is full of analogies that speak to the spiritual harvest in the last days, at the end of the age: *The Sower and the Seed*, *The*

*Wheat and the Tares, The Fields White for Harvest* (John 4:35). Pentecost is a celebration of the firstfruits of that harvest – the Church of God.

Christ lives in us through His Spirit, just as the grain was in those loaves of bread; you could not have the bread without the barley. And just as we still struggle with sin, these loaves of bread were baked with leaven, contrasting the unleavened bread that Christ gave of Himself at Passover. You see Jesus was without sin, which the New Testament equates with leaven (Matthew 16:5-12; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8), but John tells us: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

I want to make two more points before we close out today. For the first, I am going to go back to Williams’ commentary. He says, “Earlier we spoke of the Jewish reading of Psalms 119... of meditating on the commandments of God, and of the importance of self-examination for 50 days after Passover. This emphasis on a thoughtful relationship to the Word of God is important because it is universally commemorated in the synagogues that on Pentecost the Law (or “teachings” of God) was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Accompanied by fire, the Almighty wrote the Ten Commandments for the children of Israel.

“Because Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, is associated with the giving of the Law and the coming of the Spirit, it is interesting to compare the outcome of those two events. We read in Exodus 32:28 that 3,000 men died at Mount Sinai because of the sin of worshipping the golden calf. Contrast that loss of 3,000 lives with the New Testament *Shavuot* when 3,000 men came to new life in Jesus 50 days after the celebration of Passover.

“The believers of Pentecost were worthy of death. But because their faith rested on the great High Priest, Jesus, who had made atonement for their sins, they were now alive eternally – part of the firstfruits harvest, the first tithe, and the promise of Jeremiah 31:31.”

As I wrote to you at Passover, the Old Covenant was based on the Law written in stone by the finger of God on Mt. Sinai; the New Covenant is based on that same Law written in our hearts by the Spirit of God poured out from Jerusalem at Pentecost. And that brings me to our final point. We have talked a lot so far about the physical people of Israel, the Old Covenant Church in the Wilderness. We have looked at some of their ceremonies, which Christ fulfilled and the New Testament Church is fulfilling, but we have not talked about the need for the New Covenant.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that “...since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Hebrews 4:1-2). Scripture says that even this faith is a gift from God.

Peter tells us in the first chapter of his first epistle that the prophets of old had the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:11), but the congregation of Israel as a whole did not. They had the ability to see the truth in the prophet's instruction but not the heart to continue therein. And we often see the frustration in God's messengers over the people's stiff neck and their inability to comprehend God's revelation and live His Way of life.

God Himself lamented in Deuteronomy 5:29, "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments that it might be well with them and with their children forever" (NKV). The New Covenant came with a gift, an earnest on our eternal life, and a power to fulfill the commandments of God.

Jeremiah 31:31: "Behold the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the LORD. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

We are about to see how this prophecy began to be fulfilled at the New Testament Church's first Pentecost observance. Speaking of Pentecost, *Today's Handbook of Bible Times and Customs* tells us: "After the Exile, Jews were expected to observe this festival in Jerusalem at the temple. It became the second of the three great annual pilgrimages to that city. Besides its religious ceremonies, this was another festive occasion with much eating, drinking and music."

"The ancient festival of Pentecost worked to the advantage of the Christians because Jerusalem was packed with pilgrims. Consequently Jews from throughout the world saw a manifestation of the power of God and heard the Good News (Acts 2:5ff.). Three thousand of that crowd believed in Jesus Christ and received baptism (Act 2:41). They then returned to their homelands with the message they had accepted." (*Today's Handbook of Bible Times and Customs*, William L. Coleman, © 1984)

It should be noted that the New Testament Church continued to observe Pentecost after everything that was abolished in the Old Covenant had been done away. Acts 20:16: "For Paul had determined to sail by [past] Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, *to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.*" As we noted earlier, Paul was a latecomer to the ranks of the first-century Apostles. His desire was likely to be among the main body of believers, the Mother Church in Jerusalem.



Temple worship was never incumbent on the New Testament Church – in fact none of the ceremonial law given to the Levites transfer over to the New Covenant: there are no animal sacrifices to be made, no grain or bread to be presented by the priest today. Jesus covered those sacrifices with His blood and supersedes those priests with His ministry.

### **True Worship**

Today's teaching is perhaps a glimpse into that heavenly sanctuary. These ceremonies simply illustrate the revelation and foreknowledge of God in types and shadows and how His plan of salvation is pictured in the observance of His holy days – both then and now! Paul's mandate for this sacred day was simply to gather with other true believers in the Church, the New Testament Temple of God. Paul told the Corinthian Church, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

In that same epistle, he told them of his plans to spend that year's Pentecost with the Church at Ephesus, "...I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit. But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened to me, and there are many adversaries (1 Corinthians 16:7-9).

It was because the disciples were assembled for this holy convocation on the first Pentecost after Jesus' ascension, that we have this astounding account recorded in Acts, Chapter 2: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because each man heard them speak in their own language. And were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, 'Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.'

"And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, 'What meaneth this?' Other mocking said, 'These men are full of new wine.' But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, 'Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose,

seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, 'I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophecy: And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come; And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'"

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning Him, 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hades, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.'

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hades, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

"For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, 'The Lord said unto my Lord, "Sit thou on My right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool.'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:1-36).

He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Follow Him.

Amen.