

Pentecost

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”

—Acts 2:1,4

PENTECOST HAS BEEN

observed as a religious holy day by Christians for centuries. It is held in remembrance of the begetting of the Holy Spirit which came upon Jesus’ disciples as recorded in our opening text. The word Pentecost is derived from a Greek word meaning “the fiftieth day” and has as its origin Israel’s Feast of Harvest. This year the Jewish feast, and the Day of Pentecost which it prefigured, will be commemorated on the tenth day of June.

The principal feature of the Feast of Harvest was the waving of two bread loaves before the Lord. These loaves were made from the early fruitage of the grain harvest. Fifty days earlier, on the 16th day of the month Nisan, a “sheaf,” or handful, of ripe grain was waved before the Lord. It was unbaked, and consisted of the very first pure, uncontaminated kernels of grain which had been harvested.

The instructions regarding the waving of the sheaf and the Feast of Harvest are recorded in Leviticus 23:10,11,15-17: “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. 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 [grain] 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.”

The marvelous fulfillment of this picture centers in Jesus. As the antitypical slain Passover Lamb, he died on the cross on the 14th of Nisan. (Isa. 53:6,7; John 1:29; I Cor. 5:7) He was placed in the tomb before sundown the same day, and lay there all the next day, which was the Sabbath. In the early morning of the 16th of Nisan, the third day, Jesus was resurrected. (Matt. 28:1-6; Luke 24:1-7) Thus, the same day that Israel’s priest was waving the sheaf of grain in the Temple, the fulfilment of that picture had taken place—the resurrection of Jesus. He was, as Paul later states, the “firstfruits” of those who “slept” in death.—I Cor. 15:20

Since the Jewish Feast of Harvest was a celebration of the firstfruits of their grain harvest, the “sheaf of the firstfruits” was considered a part of the harvest. This is shown to be true, because the date of the feast was reckoned by counting fifty days

from the day the sheaf was waved before the priest. Likewise, in its greater fulfilment, the fifty days until Pentecost was measured from the resurrection of Jesus.

Beginning at Pentecost, and throughout the present Gospel Age, the Heavenly Father has been seeking those from every nation, kindred, and tongue who will faithfully walk in the footsteps of Jesus, and thereby be counted as part of the firstfruits unto God. The “two wave loaves” of the Jewish feast, which were prepared from flour made from the grain of the new crop, picture this “firstfruits” class. Thus, spirit-begotten followers of Jesus since Pentecost are the first to benefit from his death and resurrection. They have, as Paul says, “the firstfruits of the Spirit.”—Rom. 8:23

The instruction given to Israel was that the two loaves were to be baked with leaven. Leaven is used in the Bible to represent sin. (Luke 12:1; I Cor. 5:6-8) Taking these two things into account, we see that the prospective members of the spiritual firstfruits are selected from the world while still under the effects of sin. However, they become acceptable as an offering to the Lord because the sheaf of grain, Christ Jesus, was offered first, covering their sinful Adamic nature.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

In Acts 1:1-3, we read that Jesus had been seen by the apostles on various occasions for a period of forty days following his resurrection. Now he was assembled together with them one final time. He instructed them not to depart from Jerusalem, but “wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith

he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.” (vss. 4,5; Mark 1:6-8) Jesus then ascended to heaven, and the eleven, following his instructions, waited together in Jerusalem. Ten days later, on Israel’s feast day—the day of Pentecost—we have recorded the words of our opening text. The record says that upon receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles “began to speak with other tongues,” or languages. This was evidence that the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, had indeed been fulfilled.

Since this was one of Israel’s feast days, there was a multitude of people gathered from many regions, who spoke various languages. When they realized that the apostles were addressing them so that each understood in his own language, they were amazed. (Acts 2:5-12) Some, realizing that the apostles were not learned men but fishermen and the like, accused them of being drunk with wine. Peter stood up, however, saying that none of them were drunken, but rather the words of the Prophet Joel were being fulfilled. Quoting from prophecy, Peter said, “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 prophesy, 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 prophesy.”—vss. 13-18

This fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy related to the development of the firstfruits class during the Gospel Age. As of yet, Peter’s hearers knew nothing about the operation of the Holy Spirit as it was to

affect the lives of the footstep followers of Jesus. The only experience that they could relate to was with the prophets of Israel. God had dealt with them, in conveying his message and instructions, by visions and dreams. Therefore, that is how the Lord instructed Joel to describe his dealings with the spirit-begotten during the Gospel Age. Peter's words signified just the beginning of the fulfillment of this wonderful prophecy. Its full accomplishment will be in Christ's kingdom, when God's spirit will be poured out upon the remainder of mankind—"all flesh."

The enlightening effect of the Holy Spirit upon the mind was immediately evident in the Apostle Peter. He was one of those who just ten days before had indicated by the question to Jesus concerning the establishment of the kingdom that he believed it should start at that time. (Acts 1:6) The Holy Spirit had now enabled him to understand that there was a great work to be done before the Messianic kingdom would begin. This new insight was revealed in his interpretation of the prophecy by Joel and by the balance of his wonderful sermons recorded in the second and third chapters of the Book of Acts.

TEACHER, COMFORTER AND HELPER

The night before he died, Jesus promised the apostles: "The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send at my request, will teach you everything, and will bring to your memories all that I have said to you." (John 14:26, *Weymouth New Testament*) An apostle had to be one who had been with the Lord, hearing his words and observing his every action. It was

because of the fulfilment of this promise concerning the Holy Spirit and its enlightening influence, starting at Pentecost, that the New Testament record of the apostles and other writers could be provided in an accurate and harmonious form. Otherwise much would have been lost.

In the last hours of his life Jesus desired to comfort his followers before his departure, and so in a very general way he told them something of the Holy Spirit. He said that after he went away he would ask the Father to send them a “Comforter,” the “Spirit of truth.” It would be a power that would not be discernible by the world, but they would know that they had it because its influence would be upon them and dwell in them. The Spirit of truth, Jesus also said, would guide them “into all truth.” (John 14:16,17; 16:13) The thought was that after the Holy Spirit came upon them, they would be able to receive a complete knowledge and understanding of God’s plans and purposes.

In John 15:15, Jesus explained that because of the enlightenment to come by means of the Holy Spirit, he could make known to them everything he had heard from the Father. This would mean a change had taken place in their status. They would no longer be considered servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. Rather, they would be friends, or associates, and as Paul later says, sons of God. “For, as many as by God’s Spirit are being led, the same, are God’s sons,—For ye have not received a spirit of servitude, leading back into fear, but ye have received a spirit of sonship, whereby we are exclaiming—Abba! Oh Father!”—Rom. 8:14,15, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*

Paul continues, saying that these “sons” are prospective “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” if they suffer with him. (vs. 17) Jesus had indicated this to the apostles prior to his death, saying that because of this close relationship to him and the Father, they would suffer persecution, just as he had suffered.—John 16:1-3

BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

John the Baptist, in identifying Jesus, stated, “He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit.” (John 1:33) Jesus was the first to receive this baptism of the Holy Spirit, and being found faithful, he became the instrument by whom it would then come to his footstep followers. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter thus testified: “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are 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.”—Acts 2:32,33

We are aware of the change that came upon Jesus after he was baptized with the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 3:16, we read: “Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.” The thought seems to be that then all the hidden things of God’s Word began to be revealed to him. Assuredly, Jesus, with his perfect mind, knew the Scriptures. However, there were many hidden things in the prophecies and

shadows of the Old Testament that were not to be revealed until the proper time.

The 40th Psalm is a prophecy about Jesus at this time in his life. Verse 6 reads as follows: "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering has thou not required." The key thought in this verse is that Jesus' ears were opened. In other words, he was able to both hear and understand things that were not known by him before. This information included all the details of God's plan for the redemption and reconciliation of the world of mankind and his part in it. We also believe that Jesus then understood that there would be associates with him who would share in his sufferings and his glory. The first of these were his chosen apostles, to whom he promised to send the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has had an enlightening effect upon the church throughout the Gospel Age. The Apostle Paul describes it as the "earnest," or pledge, of our inheritance. (Eph. 1:14) The Holy Spirit enables us to know and appreciate our relationship to the Heavenly Father. It also makes possible our knowledge of the privilege and responsibilities of sonship. The Apostle Paul stated, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." (I Cor. 2:12) It is a knowledge of these things that enables us to walk more fully in the footsteps of Jesus.

A NEW AGE BEGUN

From the standpoint of the day of Pentecost being a day to be remembered, the following points should

be considered. The work that was started that day marked the beginning of a new age. From this point the Holy Spirit was to be engaged in a work that had never been done before—the development of a New Creation that would have the potential of being like God himself. The apostle wrote: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” —II Cor. 5:17

We recognize, from the standpoint of God’s covenants, that the Abrahamic Covenant and its promises had lain dormant for many centuries. During this time the Law Covenant was added, “till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.” (Gal. 3:19) In verse 16 of this same passage we read: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” The death and resurrection of Christ, the promised seed, activated the Abrahamic Covenant and brought to an end the Law Covenant, which had served as a “schoolmaster” to lead God’s chosen people, Israel, to Christ. (vss. 24,25) Finally, in verses 26 and 27, we learn that Christ is to be composed of many members, and that all the true footstep followers of Jesus are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Pentecost marked the beginning of the development of the heavenly phase of the kingdom. The Holy Spirit cannot be poured out on the rest of mankind until the work of completing the church is ended. Then will come that glorious time when the kingdom will be established, and God’s laws will be obeyed “in earth” as they are “in heaven.”—Matt. 6:10 ■