

The Day of Pentecost

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they [Jesus’ disciples] were all with one mind in the same place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, like a violent wind rushing; and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ... And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the spirit gave them utterance.”

—Acts 2:1-4, The Emphatic Diaglott

The Christian world com-monly recognizes three outstanding events as the basis of their religious beliefs: The miraculous birth of Jesus by his mother Mary; the death of Jesus upon the cross of Calvary; and the resurrection of Jesus on the “third day” to the divine spirit nature. There is a fourth event of vital importance to the Christian—one which, however, does not generally enjoy the same depth of appreciation as it should be given. It is the Day of Pentecost, which took place fifty days following Jesus’ resurrection. It is our purpose in this present consideration to examine the origin, background, and most importantly,

the meaning of this special day in the history of the Christian faith.

The word “Pentecost” is found only three times in the Bible and, being a Greek word, appears only in the New Testament. The most familiar usage is found in the words of our opening text. The word is used later in Acts 20:16: “Paul had determined to sail by 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.” The final use of the word is in I Corinthians 16:8: “I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.” In these latter two references, it is intimated that Pentecost was more than just the notable event that is described in Acts chapter 2 concerning the giving of the Holy Spirit. In reality, Pentecost had its origin as one of the feast days of the Jews described in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Feast

What became known in New Testament times as Pentecost was one of the three annual feasts of Israel. In the Old Testament, it went by two names—the “Feast of Harvest” and the “Feast of Weeks.” We read of it by its name, Feast of Harvest, in Exodus 23:14-16: “Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: ... And the feast of harvest [Pentecost], the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.”

Another reference to this feast is in Deuteronomy 16:9,10,16, where it is called the Feast of Weeks.

“Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks [Pentecost] unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee. ... Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles [ingathering]: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty.” The Feast of Weeks is also referred to in two other places: Exodus 34:22 and Numbers 28:26-31.

Leviticus chapter 23 explains in detail exactly when Pentecost occurred, its purpose, and why it was described by two names—Feast of Harvest and Feast of Weeks. Verses 5-7 read, “In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD’S pass-over. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread. ... In the first day [the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the fifteenth day of the first month] ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.” This first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be a “holy convocation,” that is, a special Sabbath day. Sabbath days were those in which the Israelites did no servile work. In this case, it was not the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, but a special Sabbath—a holy convocation to the Lord.

Continuing with verses 10 and 11: “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.” This “waving” of the sheaf, or handful, of the firstfruits of Israel’s grain harvest, was to be done on the sixteenth day of the first month, the “morrow after” the special Sabbath, which was on the fifteenth, as previously noted.

Verses 15 and 16 read: “Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering [the sixteenth day of the first month]; seven sabbaths [49 days] 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.” This fiftieth day was the Feast of Weeks—or the Feast of Harvest. It is referred to as the Feast of Weeks because the date on which the feast occurred was determined by the counting of seven weeks, plus one day, from the time that the sheaf of the firstfruits was offered. Additionally, the Greek word *pentecost* means “the fiftieth day.” Depending on the Jewish reckoning each calendar year, the Pentecost date can fluctuate between the latter half of May and the first half of June. Based on the Leviticus 23 calculation, the corresponding date for Pentecost this year was May 23, 2026.

Purpose of Israel’s Feast

This feast of Israel was to be a celebration of thanksgiving to God for the firstfruits of their harvest, hence the second name, Feast of Harvest. This was a special harvest. It was not the harvest

of vegetables or fruit, but was the harvest of grain—specifically barley and wheat. The firstfruits of this harvest were dedicated to God. During this feast, many offerings were given. There were burnt offerings, meat offerings, drink offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings—all given as a celebration of thanksgiving to God for their grain harvest.—Lev. 23:16-20

A special offering of this feast was to be a “new meat offering,” as noted in verse 16. This offering is described in verse 17: “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 Israelites were to offer two loaves of bread made from the firstfruits of their grain harvest. The loaves were to be waved before the Lord as a thanksgiving and a dedication to him for the bounties of their harvest.

Correspondence to the New Testament

The reason for going into detail regarding Israel’s Feast of Harvest, or Feast of Weeks, is that it connects specifically to the New Testament Day of Pentecost. First, we note the correspondence of the timing of this feast. As earlier quoted from Leviticus 23:5, the 14th day of the first month was Israel’s Passover. In the New Testament, this corresponds to the death of Jesus as the greater Passover lamb—“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Jesus’ death occurred exactly on this same date. Referring again to Leviticus 23:10,11, two days later, on the 16th day of the first month, the sheaf, or handful, of the firstfruits

was waved before the Lord. This corresponds to the resurrection of Jesus, which likewise occurred two days after his death as the Passover lamb. Just as he had foretold, Jesus was in the grave for parts of three days—part of the 14th, all of the 15th, and part of the 16th day of the first month, Jewish reckoning.—Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22

The Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 15:20 that Jesus was “the firstfruits of them that slept.” He was the sheaf, the handful, of firstfruits—the very first one raised from the dead to eternal life by the mighty power of God. (Col. 1:18) This symbolic “waving” of the sheaf of the firstfruits showed God’s acceptance of Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice, the result of which was his resurrection from the dead by divine power. Finally, counting seven Sabbaths plus one, or fifty days, from the resurrection of Jesus, the sheaf of the firstfruits, brings us to the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts chapter 2.

Just as Israel’s feast was the dedication of the firstfruits of their grain harvest, the Day of Pentecost encompassed the dedication of the greater firstfruits—the “wheat”—to God. The church, made up of faithful Christians, was to be included as part of the firstfruits class. Jesus was the “first” of the firstfruits class, but the church also, as stated in James 1:18, is a “kind of firstfruits.” John the Revelator speaks also of faithful Christians as the “firstfruits” in Revelation 14:4, where he describes these as being “redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.” This dedication of the church began at Pentecost, in which it was symbolically waved, or shown, before the Heavenly Father as dedicated to him.

In viewing the Day of Pentecost, it was a culmination of three very important and vital events in God's plan. The first was the ransom price, which Jesus provided when he died as a corresponding price for Adam on the cross. (I Tim. 2:5,6) The second of these outstanding events was Jesus' resurrection by the mighty power of God. (Eph. 1:19-21) The third was the Day of Pentecost—the day of dedication of the prospective church to the Heavenly Father.

The Day of Pentecost

The events that encompassed the Day of Pentecost are numerous. It was not merely the day that the Holy Spirit came upon the church. This did indeed happen, and the benefits were not only to those that were present then, but have extended throughout the entire period since, to those who have made an acceptable dedication of their lives to God.

For those one hundred and twenty followers of Jesus gathered in the upper room who had dedicated their lives to him, the Day of Pentecost signified many things. (Acts 1:15) It meant that God had accepted their consecration to him. It meant that they were now justified in his sight. It meant that now their life of sacrifice would begin, and it meant that begetting of the Holy Spirit had taken place. As a result, they would now be New Creatures in Christ Jesus.—Rom. 5:1; 12:1; I Pet. 1:3; II Cor. 5:17

The Day of Pentecost has also been of great significance to all true Christians down to the present time. It signified the opening of the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) Pentecost also denoted the anointing, or the dedication, of the church as a class, to be God's “royal priesthood.”

(I Pet. 2:9) It showed that the opportunity was now open for each individual prospective member of that priesthood to receive the things that those in the upper room were receiving—God’s acceptance of their consecration, justification, the beginning of their sacrifice, and the begetting of the Holy Spirit. Since Pentecost, each prospective member of the royal priesthood has come into that same relationship because of the events that took place then.

The Holy Spirit

Understanding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is key to appreciating the full significance of Pentecost. What is the Holy Spirit? In general terms, the Holy Spirit is the invisible power and influence of God. It has always existed. God is from everlasting to everlasting, and so his power and his influence—his Holy Spirit—is also from everlasting to everlasting.

There is a deeper meaning, however, to the Holy Spirit as it applies to dedicated Christians. For these, the Holy Spirit can be defined as the holy and righteous influence and power of God that gives the spark of life to, nourishes, and governs their new life “in Christ.” (II Cor. 5:17) The word “spirit” is from the Greek word *pneuma*, and means “breath.” To simplify the definition of the Holy Spirit to the Christian, it can be likened to what the breath of life is to the natural body. The body must have the physical breath of life. If the breath is taken away from the natural body, it dies within minutes. Likewise, without the Holy Spirit—God’s holy and righteous influence—the Christian’s new life in Christ cannot live, develop, and grow to maturity.

The Holy Spirit at Pentecost

Acts chapter 2 describes what happened on the Day of Pentecost relative to the giving of the Holy Spirit. Verses 2-4 read: “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 [Greek: languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Why did God provide such an outward demonstration of the giving of the Holy Spirit as a “sound from heaven,” a “rushing mighty wind,” “cloven tongues” like fire, and speaking in other languages? There were two reasons why this was done.

First, it was a witness to those present. The account states, “There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” Many Jews had traveled to Jerusalem because this was one of their feast days. When the giving of the Holy Spirit activated the apostles, and they began speaking [or perhaps being understood] in other languages, it was a witness to all those gathered there. (vss. 5,6) Many were amazed and wondered what these things meant. Others accused the apostles of being drunk. (vss. 12,13) This caused Peter to stand up and speak to the multitude. He quoted from the Prophet Joel, and from the Psalms, giving a beautiful witness of God’s plan, centered in Jesus. (vss. 14-40) The result of that witness is stated in verse 41: “The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

Second, the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a demonstration of God's power and influence as never before seen in his human creation. This power rested in a special way upon the apostles in that they were given various "gifts." The Apostle Paul identified some of these gifts in I Corinthians 12:28-30 as: "gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues ... workers of miracles." These were all part of the outward gifts of the Holy Spirit that were given to help establish the Early Church and the authority of the apostles. They were a tremendous demonstration of God's power and influence upon them, manifesting his authority on their behalf.

Greater Significance

As extraordinary as these demonstrations were, as exciting as the gifts were, and although they added three thousand prospective members to their numbers in one day, none of this was the most important significance of Pentecost. The greater meaning of Pentecost concerned the principal work of the Holy Spirit, which was to be inward. This work was not to be seen by man. It was, in fact, to be the work of developing the New Creature life of each individual member of "the body of Christ." —I Cor. 12:27

The most significant event associated with the Day of Pentecost was the personal begetting of each of the disciples by the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 12, Paul discusses this very matter. After recounting the various gifts of the spirit in previous verses, he states in verse 31, "Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent

way.” The “more excellent way” was the subject of the very next chapter—I Corinthians 13—in which the apostle focused exclusively on the character quality of love. Love is the sum total of the fruits of the spirit, in which is described the development of the new life in Christ. (Gal. 5:22,23) This was the more excellent way, the more excellent work of the Holy Spirit, and the greatest significance of Pentecost.

Works of the Holy Spirit

The 8th chapter of Romans contains a detailed discussion of the Holy Spirit, which gives much enlightenment and guidance to the followers of Christ. The phrase “Holy Spirit” or “Spirit” is mentioned some twenty times in this chapter alone. The works of the Holy Spirit as described here can be divided into ten areas.

1. Verses 1 and 2 speak of the Holy Spirit as a “law”—a law of life. The Christian must have the Holy Spirit—a law of life—or the New Creature dies. These verses read: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. ... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” Not only does this passage say that the Holy Spirit is a “law” of life, it also has made Jesus’ footstep followers free from that other law that they were previously under—the “law of sin and death.”

2. The Holy Spirit is an influence by which one walks and thinks. Verses 4 through 6 bring this out: “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do

mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

3. The begetting of the Holy Spirit embodies the thought of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27) Romans 8:9,10 allude to this, saying, “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” This Holy Spirit of God or, as Paul additionally refers to it, the “Spirit of Christ,” has to be “in” his followers. Christ is not literally in us. It is his spirit of begetting, his influence, which is in our heart, and which motivates us. —I John 2:27

4. The fourth work of the Holy Spirit is described in Romans 8:11, which says, “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.” The Holy Spirit “quickens”—it gives life. It gives one the opportunity to serve God, to understand his Truth, to be an acceptable sacrifice, and will eventually give the “crown of life” to those who are faithful even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

5. The action of the Holy Spirit upon our minds assists us in mortifying, or putting to death, the deeds of our fallen flesh. Romans 8:13 says, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

6. Another work of the Holy Spirit is stated in verse 14, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The Holy Spirit leads and directs the Christian. This can be thought of as God's providential care over his followers. His Holy Spirit brings about this care by being with his followers along each step of the narrow way. The hymn poet has written, "I'd rather walk in the dark with God, than go alone in the light." God's people are able to say this because it is the Holy Spirit—his providential influence and power—which leads and directs their lives.

7. The begetting of the Holy Spirit is an assurance of sonship. Verse 15 states, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption [Diaglott: sonship], whereby we cry, Abba, Father." What an assurance the Spirit gives the followers of Christ that they are the children of God!

8. Verse 16 says, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." This is an assertion that our spirit, our heart, our motives, which have been given to the Lord in consecration, are on the same "wavelength," as it were, with God—that is, they "bear witness" with the Holy Spirit. When these bear witness together, it is a declaration that we have the same objectives which God, through the Holy Spirit, purposes in us.

9. The Holy Spirit does not prevent us from sharing in the trials and the "groanings" of the present life while in the flesh. It is true that God's power can accomplish anything, and he perhaps could use his Holy Spirit to prevent us from going through the trials and the groanings of the flesh.

However, this is not in our best interest. This aspect of the Holy Spirit is shown in verse 23: “Ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

10. Verses 26 and 27 say, “The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind [Greek: inclination] of the Spirit, because [it] maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” The Holy Spirit, as it bears witness with our spirit, helps us in those times when we have difficulty praying to the Father as we would desire, or do not know what we should pray for. As the verse states, the spirit intercedes “according to the will of God.”

Filled with the Spirit

We are warned by the Apostle Paul not to “quench” the Spirit—willfully renounce the New Creature’s life-giving power. (I Thess. 5:19) We must be on guard for even partial willfulness in this regard. “Grieve not the holy Spirit of God,” Paul says in Ephesians 4:30. Rather, let us strive to obtain the fullest measure possible of God’s influence and power—to “be filled with the Spirit.” (Eph. 5:18) Thus, by being faithful even “unto death,” we may truly appreciate the significance of Pentecost and its resulting blessings to Christians who have dedicated their lives to follow in Jesus’ footsteps of sacrifice, suffering, and service to the Heavenly Father. ■