

PENTECOST – and God’s Plan of Salvation

Light on the Rock

by Philip Shields

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Use this for a sermon on or just before Pentecost Sunday, June 4, 2006. Why is Pentecost tied to the spring and early summer harvests? Is God trying to save everyone today? What earth shaking events happened on the first Pentecosts in both the Old and New Testament – and what do they mean? How does Pentecost help explain God’s plan of salvation? You’ll hear all this and more.
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As I record this, we’re about ready for another holyday of God, one of the “Feasts of the Eternal”: Pentecost. You know Pentecost as the day when God sent His promise and baptized His people with His Holy Spirit, in Acts 2. There is so much to Pentecost. It’s *so* exciting.

God’s holydays do more than just demonstrate a major event in church history. His holydays (not holidays) also reveal God’s plan on how He is going to save mankind. Let’s get straight too, *whose* holydays these are, for all too many consider the Biblical holydays to be “feasts of the Jews”.

Leviticus 23:1-2

‘**And the LORD** spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: '**The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.**'”

It can’t get any clearer, can it? Greetings again, brothers and sisters. This is Philip Shields and today’s message is all about PENTECOST, which this year is Sunday June 4, 2006.

Today we’re covering

- how Pentecost fits into God’s inspiring plan of salvation
- what happened in the Old and New Testament Pentecosts and what all those things mean
- we’ll answer whether or not we New Testament Christians need to keep God’s holydays
- we’ll also see how Pentecost EQUIPS God’s saints for the calling and tasks He’s given us (but this really deserves its own full sermon)
- whether or not God is trying to save everyone in the world right now
- I also will have another sermon coming soon going in depth into why the book of RUTH is read on Pentecost.

God’s plan of salvation for mankind is actually revealed by His feasts and holydays, which center on the harvest seasons of the Promised Land. *God’s plan is about spiritual harvests: the harvest of humanity in this case.*

Most of what I read and study about Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks or Feast of Sabbaths (*Shavout* in Hebrew), focuses entirely on the harvest celebration and of course the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. *But most expositors miss the point of tying in to a spiritual meaning the fact that the spring and summer harvests were smaller harvests when compared to the fuller autumn harvests of the Feast of Tabernacles – when the fruit, nuts, vegetables and so much more was harvested.*

So what does all that mean?

Making – or missing – *that* point, is everything, when it comes to understanding the fuller spiritual meaning of the Feast of Pentecost.

IS GOD DESPERATELY TRYING TO SAVE EVERYONE RIGHT NOW?

Most of Christianity believes that if someone does not accept Jesus as Lord in this life, they are doomed to be tortured forever in hell fire. Because of this, missionaries have tried their best over the last two millennia to get the word to everyone on earth so they don't burn in hell. I commend their zeal. And certainly we can't forget that Jesus did tell His disciples to make disciples of all nations. Jesus also said "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world *for a witness*, and then the end shall come" (Matthew 24:14).

God is desirous that everyone be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (**1 Tim. 2:4**). That is clear. But is God trying to desperately save everyone right NOW?

If He is, then who is winning: God or Satan, based on what we can see going on right now and in the past 2,000 years?

Here's the breakdown, according to one source I looked up, of the top 6 world religions or faiths:

- Christianity 2.1 billion (how many really know Christ though?)
- Islam 1.3 billion
- ATHEISTS, agnostics, secularists, no religion 1.1 billion
- Hindus 900 million
- Chinese religion 394 million
- Buddhists 376 million

Even if all 2.1 billion "Christians" truly were to know God (and they don't!), what do we do with the other 3 billion or more? Will God really consign all of them to hell? And yet we also know that no other name except that of Jesus has been given by which mankind can be saved (**Acts 4:12**). You can't receive salvation as a Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim – *or even as a nominal Christian* – unless you accept Jesus as your personal Savior.

Consider all the billions who have lived and died and never even heard the name of Jesus in their life time, or even had the opportunity to even hear that Name. Are all of them really consigned to everlasting hell fire?

Anyone keeping score fairly would have to say Satan is winning this battle hands down!

But Satan is *not* winning, because right now God is choosing only a small percentage of the world's population, only a few people, as His children at this time. But even then, precious few even are having their minds opened, when compared to the billions and billions who have ever lived.

This is the premise for this sermon, and for some of you hearing it for the first time, you might be in shock that I could believe such a thing.

But I must make clear: I do not preach a "2nd chance" message of salvation. I want you to hear this clearly: God gives everyone a good, strong one chance to be called, to be chosen and to be a

spirit-led and spirit-begotten child of God. And that is what the holydays really tell us, when we understand them in context of the harvest seasons of the Promised Land.

We surely cannot say that the many millions and billions in the deepest parts of Asia and Africa during the past 6,000 years who never even heard of Jesus as Savior, ever got their first chance!

Would it be fair then, to consign all of them to eternal punishment in an ever burning hell fire – when they never even had an opportunity to be converted and imbued with God's spirit?

As you ponder that, I will tell you also that I absolutely believe in a real hell fire. But when God does put someone into His hell fire, it is *not* to torture forever and ever.

Could we really say a God who would torture forever and ever the vast majority of humankind – is a loving Father and a loving God? Perhaps the assumption that billions are being tortured needs to be examined!

That's for another sermon, but I will absolutely show you when I give it, that the true Biblical hell fire will burn up those who are put into it. They will become ashes under the feet of the righteous (**Malachi 4:3**). Hell fire the way the Bible teaches it is "the 2nd death" – not eternal life in torment! The wages of sin is death, not eternal torture. The results of God's punishment is everlasting punishment – everlasting in its consequences – not everlasting punishing (**Matt. 25:46**) The fire is unquenchable, but when you throw people into God's lake of fire, they will burn up. We'll address that in more detail in future sermons. If you feel I'm dead wrong – email me your study and I'll read it. I have studied and studied it. There's just no way an *Almighty* God would be losing if He was really trying to save everyone right now.

And the God I know is not losing. The God I know has a plan of salvation, and each in His own time and His own order. God is not at all panicked by the small number of true converts to His way.

This sermon is going to show that – just like the harvests in Palestine – God will call, work with and save people in their order, at their time, according to His will. God is *not* frantically trying to turn a losing battle around! He's not trying to "win souls", as it were, begging people to please accept Jesus while they can. If that were so, God would surely have to be feeling all despondent because the vast majority of the world have no interest in Christ right now and are perfectly contented to remain a Muslim, or Hindu or Buddhist or atheist or of the Jewish faith.

By the Fall feasts, it will all be clearer. Today I want to talk about the meaning of Pentecost and how it relates to those being called now.

Keep in mind the KEY is to understand the harvests in Israel – and then applying that understanding to the SPIRITUAL harvest of humanity for salvation. *There is not just one harvest time for everything, at one and the same time.* First we have the firstfruits, then the rest of the general harvest of barley. Then later comes the firstfruits of the wheat, and then all the summer wheat harvest. And then later, we have the general harvest in the fall of the fruits, vegetables, nuts, and this is the large harvest.

In the same way, God is not harvesting everyone now. First was Christ, the first of the firstfruits. Then those of you being called now – training to be leaders, teachers, priests and kings in the

Kingdom of God. OUR judgment time is also now (1 Peter 4:17). The book of Revelation actually reveals the sequence of God's plan of salvation for all humanity pretty clearly in Rev. 19-22.

Read Revelation 20. When Christ returns, those who are in Christ will be changed to spirit beings in the kingdom of God. We will reign with King Jesus a thousand years, right after Satan is bound and cast out. At this time the rest of humanity who have survived the cataclysms leading to Jesus' 2nd coming are given spiritual understanding of God's way *for their very first time*. After a thousand years, all the rest who have ever lived and died, will be resurrected and they too will be given their *first* real chance at conversion and going God's way.

Once again: WHERE'S God's PLAN OF SALVATION IN THIS? Turn to 1 Cor. 15. Just as you *first* have the first fruits of the **barley** sanctified and offered before the rest of the barley harvest could start, in the same way Jesus had to be offered up "to be accepted on our behalf", sanctifying the rest of the harvest to follow! (**Lev. 23:9-11; John 20:17**).

Then towards the end of the barley harvest was the spring **wheat** harvest in Palestine. But first the firstfruits of the wheat had to be offered on Pentecost, before the rest of the wheat harvest could be finished. And then comes the huge autumn harvest of fruits, nuts, vegetables and everything else – when the rest of the harvest comes in.

First Christ sets the pathway down and leads the way as Captain of Our Salvation – then those God is calling now, then the rest of all humanity will have a time to be called – but not everyone all at once right now, contrary to the belief of many practicing Christians.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

"But now **Christ is risen** from the dead, and *has become the firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ *all shall be made alive*. 23 **But each one in his own order:** Christ the firstfruits, *afterward* those who are Christ's at His coming".

James 1:18 "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, *that WE might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures*."

You might check out the website for the 2 sermons on "Why were YOU called?" – as I won't be repeating that material here, but recommend you hear it also in this Pentecost season. But you should have a solid idea of why God chose you.

GOD'S PLAN REVIEWED, As we come up to PENTECOST

God's Plan of Salvation starts with Christ crucified on the tree or cross on Passover day, the 14th of the first Hebrew month of Abib or Nisan. The plan of salvation starts with the way to forgiveness clearly shown to us, for all of us have sinned, and all of us have incurred the penalty of eternal death. ***Passover shows us the one and only way back to God: by accepting Jesus crucified for us as we repent.*** As I've often explained, God calls each of us to repentance, in HIS time, His way.

Even God's calendar is based on the harvests.

The start of the first month of God's calendar depends on the barley being ready to harvest.

There had to be firstfruits of barley to present shortly after Passover, so if the barley was late one year, they would insert, or "*intercalate*", a 13th month at the end of the Hebrew year, to keep the Passover just before the spring barley season. The barley has to be in a certain stage of development, called '*Abib*', so at the end of the 12th month they could know whether or not there would be harvestable barley in about another 2 weeks. If not, then add the 13th month.

Passover shows us we have all earned the death penalty for our sins. But God is willing to *pass over* our sins (Rom. 3:25) if we have to repent of: *what we are, what we've done, and what we should have done*. Then we accept Christ crucified, to pay for our sins, to redeem us from captivity and death, and we proclaim Him as our Lord and Master. In fact we agree to be symbolically crucified with Him. The world and its ways become crucified to us.

Many ministers understand that God's plan of salvation starts with Passover (Christ on the cross) – but they also tend to the plan as ending with that. Thus they miss the fact that even though Passover and Jesus crucified, is a huge part of God's plan – ***God's plan doesn't end there! Passover is but the first Feast of God, and it's not even a holyday. God's plan of salvation just begins with Passover.***

You can read about the first feasts – and in fact all the feasts – in Leviticus 23. You can do that on your own time for now, as I wish to just review for now.

After Passover, which is a feast of God but not a holyday, we come to the evening ending Passover and starting the 15th of Nisan – what we've come to call, from the KJV, "**the Night to Be Much Observed**" – and I've explained before that this night was the evening they were free, and left Egypt's stranglehold and captivity. I've also explained that the real meaning is a "**night to be observant**", commemorating when God watched over them, watched their back. WE meet on this evening once a year to celebrate the victory over sin that God gave us through His Son Jesus Christ.

This evening also starts **7 Days of Unleavened Bread**, picturing how we must take in Jesus, the bread of Life, completely and totally in our new lives while putting out the leaven of all sin – which is commandment breaking (**1 John 3:4**) and sin includes pride and vanity, hypocrisy, drunkenness, adultery, sabbath breaking, idolatry and so forth.

As we observe the 7 day spring feast, we must not forget its point: Christ is our bread of life, He is our righteousness which we receive by faith in Him, while we show our appreciation by *living* a new way to God's glory. We now make a concerted effort to keep out the leaven of all sin out of our lives after we have accepted God's forgiveness for past sins. These holydays also show us that people who continue to live a way of life of sin do not know God (**1 John 2:3-6**) and will not be in God's kingdom (**1 Cor. 6:9-11**). We are called to be overcomers through Christ.

THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS (the Wavesheaf Offering of firstfruit barley)

On the Sunday following the Night to be Observant, during the days of Unleavened Bread, is another feast day which FEW keep anymore, but we should! It's **WAVESHEAF of the Barley firstfruits – the first of the firstfruits SUNDAY** – commemorating the day Jesus rose to heaven to be accepted by His father after His resurrection. It is one of God's feasts!

Jesus, by ascending to be consecrated on that Wavesheaf Sunday, consecrated all the rest of the harvest. Remember, the wavesheaf was waived “to be accepted on your behalf” – Lev. 23:11.

Wavesheaf Sunday, as I now call it, is also inextricably tied to the next holyday – Pentecost – for on this Wavesheaf feast, we start counting 50 days to Pentecost. The fifty days start with a Sunday and end on a Sunday Pentecost. The 50 days starts with a special wavesheaf offering of firstfruits of barley and end with an offering of 2 leavened loaves of firstfruits wheat on the day of Pentecost.

Both days – the beginning and the end of the 50 days – can be called a “feast of firstfruits”. Study it and you’ll see that’s correct. The first day is firstfruits of the wavesheaf barley, and the 50th day (Pentecost) is the Feast of Firstfruits of the wheat harvest, presented as 2 leavened loaves.

I said earlier that most Christians no longer remember Wavesheaf Sunday. Many traditional Christians would object and protest that “of course we remember Jesus’ resurrection and then ascension to heaven” – but by that, they mean Easter Sunday. But remember these points, which you can easily check out with any simple research in your library or even on the internet:

- **Easter** sunrise services were kept by pagans as a celebration to the fertility and sex goddess Ishtar, pronounced Easter, long before Christ walked the earth and was a spring fertility rite – hence the rabbits and eggs and so forth. Even Ezekiel hears God’s condemnation of those who were facing the east, worshipping the sun as it rose (**Ezek. 8:16-17**).
- The Catholic Church adopted it as a way, I believe, to bring in pagans, then they re-labeled the pagan celebration with Christian labels. Martin Luther and Protestants in general continued this practice when they broke off from the Catholic Church. But God says over and over to His people NOT to learn the way of the heathen and neither are we to worship HIM as the heathen worship their dumb idols and gods (**Deut. 12:29-31**).
- Remember Jesus Himself said he would be resurrected exactly 3 days and 3 nights after He was put into the tomb, and it was the *only* sign He gave that He was the Messiah (**Matt. 12:40**). Christ was clearly put into the tomb just before sundown at the end of Passover day in the middle of the week (Dan. 9:27) – not on Friday -- , and so He was resurrected just before or at sundown 3 days later exactly, to the second.

The disciples wanted Him buried before the Sabbath started, but *that* sabbath was *not* the *weekly* sabbath, but an annual holyday – a “high day” – **John 19:31**. Jesus was crucified on Passover, the 14th of Nisan in the afternoon, then just before sunset they entombed Him, just before the 15th of Nisan began – which began the 1st day of Unleavened Bread, a holyday, an annual sabbath or “high day”.

So the disciples entombed Jesus just before sunset of Passover day (**Mark 15:42; Luke 23:53-54**). By the time Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early Sunday morning just *before* daylight (“while it was yet dark” – **John 20:1**), He had *already* been resurrected – *before* sunrise.

- **Wavesheaf Day is a FEAST day of God**, but not a holyday, and is what GOD says to observe. I call it “God’s forgotten Feast day”, because precious few keep Wavesheaf today

with the understanding of what it is. The early Christians did NOT keep Easter and Easter is nowhere mentioned in the Bible except for one horrible *mistranslation* by only the KJV, in Acts 12:3-4, which should have been correctly translated as Passover, as every other translation has it.

Lev 23:9-12 – remember this whole chapter is about “the FEASTS OF THE LORD” – v.1-2. So let's read what God says about the Wavesheaf offering feast.

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring **a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest**. 11 He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; **on the day after the Sabbath** the priest shall wave it. 12 And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD.”

I think we should remember Wavesheaf day, though it's not a rest day; nor is it an annual sabbath. In fact, the barley harvest began in earnest right after the ceremony of the wavesheaf. We don't do it today because Jesus totally fulfilled it, and we certainly do not sacrifice lambs today – on Wavesheaf day or on Passover. *Jesus, the Lamb of God, our Passover, fulfilled the need to ever sacrifice a lamb.* HE is the very first of the harvest.

COUNTING THE OMER (THE 50 DAYS) TO PENTECOST

The next holyday starts with a 50-day count beginning with Wavesheaf Sunday, which is the day after the weekly sabbath that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Jews have taken to calling this “counting the omer”. This next holyday is called Pentecost, or in the Old Testament, Feast of Firstfruits or Feast of Weeks. The way I believe it is counted, it always ends up on a Sunday. The way some of the Jews count it, from the annual sabbath of the 16th of Abib or Nisan, always ends up on Sivan 6 of the Hebrew calendar. There's no NEED to count that way.

(Remember that the priests – the Sadducees – and the Karaites counted Pentecost from the weekly sabbath that falls during the days of Unleavened bread.)

The issue is over whether the “sabbath” you count from is a weekly or annual sabbath (**Lev. 23:11**). **However, the Hebrew word for “sabbath” when used by itself is never used to refer to an annual feast. Never. Even the Day of Atonement is designated by the compound expression “shabbath shabbathon”, which most often is translated as “a sabbath of solemn rest” (Lev. 23:32; 16:31). That is the word used only for the weekly sabbath, and the Day of Atonement.** It is never used in any scriptures for any of the other holydays. Even Atonement is a slightly different usage. And as I said, if the counting of 50 days started from the first day of Unleavened bread, there would be no need to count because Pentecost would always be on the same day of the calendar.

Since 7 sabbaths pass before Pentecost, it – Pentecost - is commonly called the **Feast of Weeks** in the Old Testament. The Jews call it *Shavout*, meaning Weeks. Some feel strongly it should be called the **Feast of Sabbaths**, instead of “weeks”. They may have a good point. Right now I'm just giving an overview, but we're going to get into close detail later in this and the next sermon.

In any event, they were not to begin the early spring BARLEY harvest until the first wavesheaf, or omer, of the firstfruits of the barley had been cut loose from the earth and then offered to God, as the High Priest raised his arms with the firstfruits of barley to God. These first sheaves were first beaten, then ground into very fine flour, then it was the flour that the Jews offered up.

That firstfruit of barley – cut loose from the earth and raised up high toward heaven – obviously pictures Jesus, the real first fruits of God’s plan, and Jesus rose to heaven to His God and Father, and to our God and Father, to be accepted in our behalf, so then the rest of the barley harvest could begin (**John 20:15-17**).

So the harvest of barley began during the Days of Unleavened Bread. There is *never* a time I can find when the priests *ever* postponed the wavesheaf until after the days of unleavened bread.

Because the book of Ruth has to do with the barley harvest, this is also **why that book is read on Pentecost**, because it has everything to do with the meaning of the day. Look for a coming full sermon on “Ruth and Pentecost”.

Pentecost has a lot to do with God making a covenant with His people and being betrothed to them.

Next year I will go into immense detail on how *that* wavesheaf, offered on the day after the weekly sabbath that falls within the days of Unleavened bread, picture **JESUS**. **He is the first of the firstfruits and the HARVEST of the rest of God’s children could not begin until Jesus had been offered and accepted on high by God our Father. He had to leave before the Comforter, or Helper (the Holy Spirit) could come, remember.**

For the term “first of the firstfruits” see Ex. 23:19; 34:26.

Then *starting with* that Sunday, God’s people are to count 50 days to the next holyday – Pentecost, Feast of Sabbaths. It is incorrect to think Pentecost would fall on any day other than Sunday.

Leviticus 23:15-22 PENTECOST

'And you shall count for yourselves **from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. 16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; [that’s a SUNDAY isn’t it?] then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. 17 You shall bring from your dwellings **two wave loaves** of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD...[jump to v 21] .21 And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is **a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever** in all your dwellings throughout your generations.” (**Num. 28:26-27 also**).**

Why 2 loaves? The honest answer is: the Bible doesn’t say. So all the conjecture by various ones is just that: conjecture. Some feel its Gentiles and Israelites. Others feel its Old Covenant/New Covenant people of God. Whatever it is, most agree they picture the people of God down through the ages.

Why were they leavened? Leaven is usually depicted as a type of sin (though Jesus used it also to show that the Kingdom of God would also spread thoroughly throughout the world some day).

And guess what? If those loaves picture us, it could make sense that they're leavened, for we indeed have also been sinners.

But one thing that makes me ponder about what exactly those 2 leavened loaves could really be: when we are presented to God, we are presented spotless, without blame or sin. When we stand before God, we will stand before him faultless (**Jude 24 and Rev. 14:5**), having put on the righteousness of Christ, of "the Lord our Righteousness".

It's also noteworthy of course, that Jesus' fulfillment of wavesheaf occurred on a Sunday as well – which also started the "counting the omer" to Pentecost. The Jews have since added a meaning or significance to each day of the counting, though we can't say there's any scriptural basis for that.

Exodus 34:22

22 "And you shall **observe the Feast of Weeks (or sabbaths)**, of the **firstfruits of wheat harvest**, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end."

The FIRST Pentecost in the Old Covenant

I personally do *not* subscribe to the notion that God's holydays were revealed to Adam and Eve and that all of the godly patriarchs kept them from Genesis 1. I see no indication of that at all. Sure, some historical events did occur on the same date as the night to be observant, and the Passover, and so on, but there's no indication they were kept as holydays prior to Exodus 12.

Passover was a night to commemorate the passing over of the death angel. Not anything earlier. The night to be observant (eve of the 15th of Abib) was to commemorate the night they were free to leave Egypt and were no longer slaves. Pentecost is not mentioned specifically in fact until Moses writes about it.

When was the first Pentecost? First a little background. The Jews believe the first Pentecost was when God gave Israel His law at Mt. Sinai. But they didn't always make that the focus of Pentecost until 140 AD. Here's the background:

The Jews, after the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 AD, made the decision to change the focus from the wheat harvest of Israel to something else - - since all the Jews had been thrown out of Israel after Bar Kochba's revolt. The Sanhedrin in 140 AD passed a resolution declaring the new focus of *Shavout* (the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost) would be on God giving Israel the Torah (the Law) at Mt. Sinai. Though the Bible does not specifically say the Torah was given on Pentecost, it is highly possible it was. The Torah was given in the 3rd month, and Pentecost falls in the 3rd month (**Exodus 19:1**). The timing of Exodus 19 seems to fit Pentecost perfectly.

One thing I must strongly disagree with is to say anything like "Pentecost is the birthday of Judaism". ***I reject that, because the religion of the Bible in the Old Testament – hear this clearly – is not, in my view, the same thing as Judaism as it is practiced today!*** Do we not remember how Jesus condemned over and over how they had added so many man-made customs and edicts to the point where they have made God's law "of none effect" and actually broke God's commandments in doing so!?! (**Matthew 15:3-6**).

So the Jewish rules about how to keep the Sabbath day, for example, are *not* based on scripture and Jesus gladly broke those rules, over and over. But He never broke the 4th commandment of GOD to honor and observe and rest on the Sabbath day. The Jews went WAY overboard, and I think some modern sabbath keepers do too! We have to remember that the Sabbath was *made for* man, for our benefit - not man for the Sabbath (**Mark 2:27**). And remember it's made for *MAN*, not just the Jews. The Sabbath is to be a DELIGHT (**Isa. 58:13**) – not a chore and a bore.

Though I believe it is very probable that the LAW was given on Pentecost day from Mt. Sinai, I think when the Jews moved the focus from *the wheat firstfruits* to the giving of the law, they lost a large part of the spiritual meaning of the Feast of Pentecost. What did they lose? That God is first calling and choosing **HUMAN, SPIRITUAL FIRSTFRUITS** of a harvest before the entire harvest that follows!

We lose part of the meaning that God starts His covenant with a small group – before He does with everyone. But even then, when we understand that God not only gave Israel the law and the 10 commandments on Pentecost, but also entered into a special covenant with them at that time, the meaning is still clear: God first works with a smaller group –the 12-tribe nation of Israel -- before working with the whole world.

That smaller group (the nation of Israel) in fact was to be holy and be a light to the rest of the nations around them.

So let's review some details of the first Pentecost, which very likely indeed was what happened in Ex. 19-and onwards.

Exodus 19:1-12

"In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. 2 For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.

3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 4'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how **I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself**. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and **keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people**; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And **you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

7 So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. 8 Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. 9 And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

10 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. 11 **And let them be ready for the third day.** For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

Let's jump to verse 16:

Exodus 19:16-20

“Then it came to pass on the third day, ***in the morning***, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 **Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire.** Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. 20 Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.”

Then in Ex. 20:1-17, God thunders out the 10 commandments. Let's continue:

Ex 20:18-21 “Now **all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking**; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. 19 Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." 20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." 21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.”

You know what happened at that time: the mount was all ablaze, with high towering clouds of smoke that billowed for miles upward and around. The whole mountain moved with great earthquakes, thunders, lightnings and a loud trumpet blast, and finally the voice of God. (**Exodus 19:16-20; Deut. 12:11-12**).

Jewish tradition says even more than that happened.

The *Midrash*, the Jew's commentary on the scriptures, explains how while God was speaking the 10 commandments: “God's voice, as it was uttered ***split up into seventy voices***, in seventy languages, so that all nations should understand....”

Now that's their tradition. I can't vouch for sure if that really happened or not, but in light of Acts 2, it's interesting. And why 70 voices? I think it has to do with the 70 nations listed in Genesis 10 that came out of Noah and his descendants.

Now tie it in to what it says in Acts 2:5 “and there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews..from EVERY NATION...”.

The Jews' embellishment of the Biblical account in Ex. 19-20 continued with the tradition that with each commandment spoken by God, the words came out as fire that traveled around the camp.

Giving the Law made Israel a cohesive nation, working together, with God as their king. It gave them a brand new start. They were not a nation of priests and they had the chance to really start new.

However, Israel failed miserably, as you know in the story of the gold calf. That's part of the lesson too. We can't and we won't properly obey God if all we have is His law. We also need His SPIRIT – the tools, if you were, to beat down the drawbacks of our fleshly nature.

So in the New Testament, it got pretty exciting too.

THE NEW TESTAMENT PENTECOST

Now let's read the introduction to the New Testament Pentecost. Pentecost means "fiftieth".

So, got it? Wavesheaf Sunday was the barley firstfruits picturing the risen and accepted CHRIST; and Pentecost Sunday was the wheat firstfruits, picturing the FIRST of the people of God being called by God now. There were 50 days in there of "counting the omer" and counting up to the day of Pentecost.

Remember, the physical is but a SHADOW OF THE SPIRITUAL. Just as the physical Pentecost pictures the beginning of the wheat harvest, so the SPIRITUAL PENTECOST pictures the first harvest of people God is calling!

- Christ was sacrificed on the precise day, at the precise time, that the Jews were sacrificing their lambs – on the afternoon of the 14th. That is when God sacrificed HIS Lamb of God.
- Christ ascended to heaven to be accepted of the Father on the precise day, at the precise moment, the priests were raising the **barley wavesheaf first fruits** as an offering to God. **Jesus had said that the promise of the Father – the Comforter, the Helper - the Holy Spirit** – could not and would not come until and unless He left them and went to the Father in heaven (**John 16:17**).
- Jesus comes back down to earth and meets his disciples meeting on still the same day – "for fear of the Jews" – and remains on earth being seen here and there for about 40 more days.
- So what's going to happen on Pentecost? THE NEXT STEP in the plan of salvation!

So, since the physical is a shadow of the spiritual, should we even keep the Feast of Pentecost in the New Testament? Keep in mind that the first PENTECOST recorded for us in the New Testament occurs after the resurrection of Jesus! If they didn't have to keep the day of Pentecost, why would Jesus make them WAIT until Pentecost to receive the Holy Spirit?

Acts 1:4-8

"And being assembled together with them, **He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father**, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**" 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 **But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;** and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

It was the same promise John the baptizer gave in **Mark 1:8** – "I baptize you with water, but One coming after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

After Jesus' resurrection 50 days earlier, He ascended to our Father (John 20:17) to be accepted in our behalf as firstfruits, sanctifying all the rest of the harvest. Then He came back down on the same

day and appeared to all the disciples and continued on earth for 40 days. Then Jesus ascended to heaven (**Acts 1:1-3, 4-9**), a few days before Pentecost. He promised to return, which we still await. Jesus did not give them a clear idea that it would be at least 2,000 more years before He would return. In the meantime, He had promised they would be baptized by the Spirit. It is this baptism of the Spirit that makes us God’s children and members of His body (**1 Cor. 12:13**).

Keep in mind the men *and women* disciples were meeting daily leading up to Pentecost in an upper room (**Acts 1:13-14**). v.14 – “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Soon after that they picked the replacement for Judas Iscariot. Now let’s pick up in Acts 2:1.

Using the NKJV and KJV, in **Acts 2:1** it says:

Acts 2:1 “When the Day of Pentecost *had fully come*, *they were all with one accord in one place.*”

Keep in mind that the Pharisees had already had their Pentecost a few days earlier, because they counted from the 16th of Nisan. Luke says THIS Pentecost “had fully come”.

Other translations just say, “when Pentecost had come”, but the Greek does imply something here that’s more. **Literally translated, the Greek verb means “was being fulfilled”**. It’s an awkward verb unless Luke was intentionally using it to make a point.

The Sadducees – who were the PRIESTS – and the Karaites were going through their Pentecost routine with the grain wave offering of the 2 leavened loaves at the very precise moment the men and women disciples of God were being given the Holy Spirit!

During the weeks between Wavesheaf and Pentecost we should be reviewing all these things and our sermons should be on these topics. It’s called a FEAST OF WEEKS, because not only did they count 50 days, 7 weeks plus 1, but also because they literally did feast for weeks! There was great joy in Israel that the crop was ready.

Don’t forget the MEANING OF 50 in all this. Fifty was the number for the Jubilee, when all debts are forgiven, the land reverts back to the family owner and slaves are all freed. It’s a great picture. With Pentecost in the New Testament, we once more are given freedom and a new live. Just like the Jubilee.

Acts 2:2-7

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a **rushing mighty wind**, and it filled the whole **house** where they were sitting. 3 **Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.** 4 And they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak** with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.”

So it’s *not* hard to see how the Jews could tie what they saw happening in Acts 2, to their traditions of the first Pentecost in Ex. 19-20.

You know what happens in Acts 2: the Holy Spirit is given on the day of Pentecost. Peter preaches. 3,000 are baptized and later in Acts 4, 5,000 are baptized – making 8,000, a new beginning. These picture the firstfruits of the harvest of lives that was beginning. But again, keep in mind, this was still the SMALL HARVEST compared to the large harvest in the FALL, pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles.

I find it interesting that in the Old Testament Pentecost – soon after – 3,000 are KILLED for worshipping the gold calf and for their sexual orgies. In the New Testament, on Pentecost, exactly 3,000 are given new life, new begettals into the body of Christ – and a new start.

In a future sermon I will talk at length about what the Holy Spirit gives us – or should be giving us, at least, as begotten children of God.

DO WE HAVE TO KEEP PENTECOST?

What would have happened if some felt they didn't have to keep Pentecost? Or kept it earlier, instead of "when it had fully come"? They would not have been there to receive the spirit of God.

I personally do keep God's holydays. They're GOD'S feasts, not man's. The early church was there on Pentecost when it counted. They also obviously kept Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread. And I mean the GENTILE churches of Corinth did in particular (**1 Cor. 5, 11**). Why would Paul be talking to GENTILES about how they kept Passover if it was a moot point!? Remember, Paul was sent to the Gentiles, and he makes it clear that the Corinthian church was predominantly a Gentile church (**1 Cor. 12:2**). So were the Ephesians (**Eph 2:11**) and Thessalonians and Galatians.

Keep in mind that we are all now being put into a new nation, called the ISRAEL OF GOD, which is a spiritual nation composed of Jews and Gentiles, male and female, and so on. Christ is marrying spiritual Israel when He returns, a new nation, a new body composed of people from all over the world, and this is the message of Acts 2.

Remember Acts 2: they heard the preaching in every language! Cretans, Greeks, etc. Remember the Midrash states God's voice was seen as tongues of fire that spread through the camp?

Paul also says this to the *Gentile* Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:2) in a way that seems to show they perfectly understood what Pentecost was:

1 Corinthians 16:8 "But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost".

Pentecost was not kept by Gentiles at all, unless they were in God's church - and so mentioning it would mean nothing to the Corinthians unless God's Gentile converts were keeping it!

Acts 20:16 "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was ***hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.***"

Fair enough, we're not told why he wanted to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost, but it seems to me that it would be natural to want to be at Jerusalem for a high day.

It’s also noteworthy, that the early church historians all record the early Christians did keep Passover – instead of Easter. Then later we had the “Quartodeciman Controversy” which centered on that very issue.

Church historian Eusebius (about 260-340 AD) calls Pentecost “the feast of feasts”. Other early church leaders also refer to Pentecost as a glorious feast day.

Keep your finger here, but turn now to Zechariah 14. Some object that these feasts were never intended for Gentiles. If you’re in a group, I suggest you pause the tape when I say so, and as a group take 2-3 minutes or so to discuss what you would say to people to show these were not just for Israel. I really want church services to be participatory as much as possible. Now God *does* say in Leviticus, “say to the children of Israel...” OK – Pause and discuss for a minute or two then return.

Some say the holydays are Feasts of Israel and not something Gentiles have to keep. Remember, God says “these are MY FEASTS”, the “Feasts of the LORD”.

- God was working primarily with Israel at that time.
- Gentiles living in Israel were expected to obey the laws of Israel (the “stranger” – *Deut. 16:11-12*)
- When we are converted, we become part of “the Israel of God”. God is NOT marrying a Gentile wife. Rather, all of us – whether of physical Israel or physical Gentile – when we are converted become part of the Israel of God. God’s Son is going to marry a wife of the House of God, just as Isaac married REBEKAH, who was of the house of BETHUEL – which means, guess what: HOUSE OF GOD!
- EGYPT – definitely GENTILE - has to come to the Feast of Tabernacles, during the Millennium. Why, if Gentiles don’t have to keep the feast?

Zechariah 14:16-19 “And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and ***to keep the Feast of Tabernacles***. 17 And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. 18 If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. 19 ***This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.***”

JESUS’ EXALTATION

I believe it is also possible that it was on this day that Christ is seated to the right hand of the Father.

Peter says, in **Acts 2:30-33**

30 Therefore, [David] being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would **raise up the Christ to sit on his throne**, 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 ***Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.***”

What’s Jesus doing? Is He busy? I’ll say!

- He bestows on us the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33)
- He is the head of the Church and guides and leads it
- Preparing His Bride to present Her to Himself spotless and without wrinkle (Eph 5)
- He is finishing what He started in each of us (Phil. 1:6).
- our High Priest and brings us directly into the presence of God our Father
- Our Advocate to the Father and defends us against Satan’s charges (1 John 2:1)
- He mediates repentance and forgiveness of Believers
- He makes our prayers acceptable to God (“in Jesus’ name”) – John 16:23-24; Rev. 8:3
- He’s gone to prepare a place for us

Let’s recap so far: in the NEW COVENANT TIMES:

- THE New Covenant disciples were there in one accord on the day of Pentecost, and it was on this day that God gave them the promise of the Holy Spirit.
- This also made them the reality of the wave offering of WHEAT that was presented in the Old Testament. WE are firstfruits of God’s calling.
- Pentecost was the birth of the new Israel of God, the beginning of the New Covenant church of God.
- It is probable that Jesus was officially seated to the right hand of God at this time, and then sent the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT is very significant. Once they were baptized with the Spirit, these disciples **completely CHANGED**. Peter went from a man scared to death to identify with Christ in difficult times to a man who freely confessed Jesus as Messiah, Lord, King and God. The Holy Spirit transformed these men and women into a powerful force of people openly witnessing to the risen Christ! We should not be “closet disciples”.

Can we learn from them? Are we more closet disciples?

We’ll end it there for this time around – and pick right up where we are leaving off.

Until next time, this is Philip Shields, your brother wishing you a wonderful Pentecost and may God bless you fully. ***Share the website*** with those who may not have heard about it yet, if you are being helped and blessed by the materials in this website. It’s your website too. I solicit input, ideas and research you feel could be helpful.

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