

From The Ascension To Pentecost: The Ten Days

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Pentecost was a feast of the Judean people. In the Old Testament three other names are given for the feast: It was called the "Feast of Harvest," the "Day of the Firstfruits," and the "Feast of Weeks." By New Testament times the Greek word *pentekoste*, translated "Pentecost," became the popular term used for this feast.

The derivation of all four of these names is actually simple to understand. We can understand the term "Pentecost", by observing its timing in relation to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread one weekly sabbath would always be included. The day after that weekly sabbath (the date would vary from year to year) would be the first day in the counting of fifty days toward Pentecost. The first day of counting was also the day of the firstfruits wave-offering. The feast is called "Pentecost," because of the fifty days of counting. The Judeans would count seven weeks or forty-nine days: then the next day, the fiftieth, which would always be a Sunday in our time-reckoning, was the Feast of Pentecost. Because of this method of counting, it was called the "Feast of Weeks."

In the Old Testament there were three major times in the year when Israel celebrated a harvest. The first harvest was observed in Nisan during the Feast of Unleavened Bread when the Hebrews brought a sheaf of barley for the wave-offering of firstfruits of the barley harvest. Barley was the spring harvest which marked the time the Judeans began counting toward Pentecost.

The second harvest celebration was the wheat harvest at the Feast of Harvest, Pentecost. It occurred in the third month, in the summer of the year. This celebration was also called the Day of Firstfruits because the first fruits of the wheat harvest were being dedicated.

The third harvest celebration was designated as the Feast of Tabernacles in the middle of the seventh month. This final harvest, including the harvest of grapes, was at the end of the agricultural year, before winter. It was also known as the Feast of In-Gathering.

Not only did these three major feasts celebrate the three times of harvest, they also commemorated three great events in the history of Israel. The first, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, celebrated the exodus of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. The second, Pentecost, was traditionally believed to mark the time when God gave the law at Mount Sinai. That Pentecost and the giving of the law were both in the third month is indicated by scripture.¹ The

¹Exodus 19:1 states that the children of Israel arrived at Sinai "in the third month." Shortly thereafter, probably that same month, the law was given as recorded in Exodus 20. Since Pentecost was fifty days from the middle of Nisan, it also would fall in the third month.

third feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, was a seven-day feast to commemorate God's watchful care over Israel as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years.²

Although the law dictated three feasts of harvest, for our present purposes Pentecost is of most concern. The following are God's commandments to Israel concerning the celebration of this feast. All of these scriptures are necessary to gain a full understanding of God's original instructions to the children of Israel concerning the observing of Pentecost.

Exodus 23:16:

*And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits [in Hebrew, *bikkur*] of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field...*

Deuteronomy 16:9-12:

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 [archaic word for "grain"]

And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks 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:

And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place his name there.

And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes. Numbers 28:26-31:

Also in the day of the firstfruits, when ye bring a new meat offering unto the Lord, after your weeks be out, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work:

But ye shall offer the burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the Lord; two young bullocks, one ram, seven lambs of the first year;

And their meat offering of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals unto a bullock, two tenth deals unto one ram, A several tenth deal unto one lamb, throughout the seven lambs;

And one kid of the goats, to make an atonement for you.

Ye shall offer them beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering,(they shall be unto you without blemish) and their drink offerings.

2. The ritual of all three major feasts is outlined in detail in Leviticus 23.

Leviticus 23:15-22:

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath [the weekly sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread], 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.

And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the Lord, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the Lord.

*Christ's redeeming work
made possible
the great Pentecost
when the gift of holy spirit
was given to begin
another administration*

Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings.

And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.

And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God.

The seven weeks of counting tied together Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread with the Feast of Pentecost. Technically, because of the counting, Passover began the anticipation for Pentecost. Old rabbinical writings called Pentecost the "concluding feast," because it was understood as the conclusion of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At the time of the first Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread the children of Israel left the bondage of Egypt. The children of Israel thought of the conclusion of that exodus as the giving of the law at

Sinai, an event with which Pentecost came to be associated.³

The symbolic relationship of Passover to Pentecost does not end with Israel, however. The last passover, Jesus Christ, represented our exodus from death and the bondage of the law. Christ's redeeming work made possible the great Pentecost when the gift of holy spirit was given to begin another administration, the Administration of Grace or the Church of the Body, when the law was fulfilled and made of no further effect. The parallels are significant and interesting. To many Israelites, Pentecost signified the giving of the law. To us, the Church of the Body, it signifies the giving of holy spirit. Also, for us Pentecost is associated with our one true passover, Jesus Christ, because Pentecost was the conclusion of what he came to make available by being the passover lamb.

The three harvest times are also deeply significant. Jesus Christ was resurrected as the first harvest during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, being the firstfruits from the dead.⁴ Then at Pentecost that same year, Christianity began, in which believers are a harvest, having the firstfruits of the spirit.⁵ We are a kind of firstfruits of God's creation.⁶ We in this Age of Grace have the firstfruits of the spirit, and we will meet Christ in the air when he returns to finally gather us together. The final, complete harvest will be at the return of Christ when all are resurrected. God's Word describes this as the harvest at the end of the world.⁷

3. J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2nd edition (London: Soncino Press, 1966), p. 521.

4. I Corinthians 15:20 and 23: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

5. Romans 8:23: "And not only *they*, but 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."

6. James 1:18: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

FIRST MONTH (NISAN OR ABIB)							SECOND MONTH						
Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.
				1	2	3							1 <small>14</small>
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	2 <small>15</small>	3 <small>16</small>	4 <small>17</small>	5 <small>18</small>	6 <small>19</small>	7 <small>20</small>	8 <small>21</small>
11	12	13	I 14	15	16	II 17	9 <small>22</small>	10 <small>23</small>	11 <small>24</small>	12 <small>25</small>	13 <small>26</small>	14 <small>27</small>	15 <small>28</small>
III 18 <small>1</small>	19 <small>2</small>	20 <small>3</small>	21 <small>4</small>	22 <small>5</small>	23 <small>6</small>	24 <small>7</small>	16 <small>29</small>	17 <small>30</small>	18 <small>31</small>	19 <small>32</small>	20 <small>33</small>	21 <small>34</small>	22 <small>35</small>
25 <small>8</small>	26 <small>9</small>	IV 27 <small>10</small>	28 <small>11</small>	29 <small>12</small>	30 <small>13</small>		23 <small>36</small>	24 <small>37</small>	25 <small>38</small>	26 <small>39</small>	V 27 <small>40</small>	28 <small>41</small>	29 <small>42</small>

THIRD MONTH						
Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.
1 <small>43</small>	2 <small>44</small>	3 <small>45</small>	4 <small>46</small>	5 <small>47</small>	6 <small>48</small>	7 <small>49</small>
VI 8 <small>50</small>	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

*This represents the Hebrew calendar for the first three months during the year Christ was crucified. For convenience, modern names are given for the days of the week.

LEGEND:
 ICrucifixion
 IIResurrection
 IIIFirst of the Resurrection Appearances
 IVAppearance to Twelve
 VAscension
 VIPentecost

The Feast of Pentecost began with the normal morning sacrifice of a lamb. For this Feast, the bread that was to be offered was to be leavened. Leaven is symbolic in the Bible of corruption. On the Pentecost following Christ's ascension, God wrought the miracle of putting His perfect divine nature into people who also had a corrupt, sinful nature. The festive sacrifices of

 7. Matthew 13:38 and 39: "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels."

Pentecost included ten animals for a burnt offering, plus one kid of the goats, sacrificed for a sin offering, and two lambs for a peace offering. In addition, the offerers would carry out the usual evening sacrifice of a lamb. Pentecost was to be a day of holy convocation, a special sabbath in which no servile work was to be done. There was to be a tribute of a free-will offering given according to the measure with which God had blessed the giver. While harvesting, the Hebrews were instructed to leave the extra abundance in the field for others who had need of it, such as sojourners and the poor. The Judeans were to rejoice with their family, servants and guests, for all that with which God had blessed them. Pentecost was, and still should be, a festive time of thanksgiving, abundance, and rejoicing.

Over fifty days previously, Jesus Christ had not only been the passover lamb, he also replaced every sacrifice for all time. He was the fulfillment of the law. He was the complete, final atonement. When all requirements were fulfilled, man was fully and completely redeemed. The climax of Christ's accomplishments began over fifty days before, when Jesus Christ was selected and prepared as the passover lamb. All the suffering which culminated in his death became vitally significant in the various aspects of redemption.

Our redemption was not made possible by our working to please God, as had been the case under the law. Our

redemption was made possible by God's working in Jesus Christ and offering him as the perfect sacrifice. Christ's redemptive work as our passover was building toward Pentecost. With Pentecost, the magnificent Age of Grace was unveiled. Since that time the free-will offering of believers is to live and fellowship with God and use the mighty power He has given us.