

Pentecost

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Part 1

God instituted Pentecost in conjunction with the first Passover; but you won't find the word "Pentecost" anywhere in the Old Testament. That's because the original name of the festival, which you do find several places in the Old Testament, is a Hebrew word translated as "Feast of Weeks." The Feast of Weeks was seven weeks plus one day after Passover. 7 times 7 days is 49 days, plus 1 makes 50 days after Passover. Pentecost comes from the Greek word for 50. The New Testament, written in Greek, uses the Greek name "Pentecost" instead of the Hebrew word for "Feast of Weeks." It is one holy day with two different names. One name is Hebrew, the other name is Greek.

As Christians, we believe that the Jewish festivals and ceremonies prefigured the ministry of Jesus. For example, the Passover didn't just commemorate the redemption from bondage in Egypt—it pointed forward to the redemption from sin that Jesus would give through His death on the cross. Passover is filled with symbols explaining the plan of salvation. The blood on the doorposts that saved the Jews represents Jesus blood which saves us today. The lamb that was sacrificed represents Jesus, the Lamb of God. The messianic symbolism associated with Passover is a fascinating study that we will have to save for another broadcast. Today we are talking about the meaning of Pentecost.

Like all the other Jewish festivals, Pentecost has a spiritual meaning beyond the basic meaning. Here's the Jewish perspective from a website called "JewFAQ.org".

"The Festival of Weeks is the second of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance. Agriculturally, it commemorates the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the Temple. Historically, it celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

"The period from Passover to the Festival of Weeks is a time of great anticipation. We count each of the days from the second day of Passover to the day before the Festival of Weeks, 49 days or 7 full weeks, hence the name of the festival. The counting reminds us of the important connection between Passover and the Festival of Weeks: Passover freed us physically from bondage, but the giving of the Torah on the Festival of Weeks redeemed us spiritually from our bondage to idolatry and immorality. The Festival of Weeks is also known as Pentecost, because it falls on the 50th day; however, the Festival of Weeks has no particular similarity to the Christian holiday of Pentecost, which occurs 50 days after their Spring holiday.

"It is noteworthy that the holiday is called the time of the giving of the Torah, rather than the time of the receiving of the Torah. The sages point out that we are constantly in the process of receiving the Torah, that we receive it every day, but it was first given at this time. Thus it is the giving, not the receiving, that makes this holiday significant."¹

Although this Jewish website doesn't see any connection between the Jewish Pentecost and the Christian Pentecost, A Christian website called ChristCenteredMall.com does. This Christian website sees a messianic connection. Here is their take on the Feast of Weeks.

"The Feast of Weeks is a symbolic festival which pointed to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the Church. The Son of God arose from the grave on Firstfruits. He then spent forty days with His disciples in post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:3).

"Immediately after forty days, Jesus informed them that it was necessary that He leave them and ascend to His Father in Heaven (in order to apply the benefits of His once and for all sacrifice). However, He told His disciples that they would not be left abandoned and comfortless. He would then send them His Holy Spirit who would come alongside to help in His absence (John 14:16-17).

¹ <http://www.jewfaq.org/holidayc.htm>

"The disciples were commanded to tarry at Jerusalem until He came (Acts 1:4), and they knew exactly how long they would have to wait. The coming of the Holy Spirit would occur on the next Jewish holiday - a festive time when Jews from different countries were to be in Jerusalem to celebrate the completion of the harvest season. This annual feast was none other than the Feast of Weeks. The disciples waited as they were commanded; however, their wait was not long - only ten days. And then it happened. The Spirit of God descended on those first-century believers."²

Ironically, the Jewish website sees Pentecost as the birthday of the Law, and the Christian website sees Pentecost as the birthday of the Church. A nit-picker might say both are wrong because both the Law and the Church have existed since creation. When Cain killed Abel, he broke the Law. When Noah urged the people of his day to get on the Ark, he was trying to get them to join the God's church. So Pentecost doesn't mark the actual beginning of the law or the church; but it does commemorate a time when God brought new honor and clarity to both. No matter how you look at it, Pentecost commemorates two important milestones in our faith.

So that's the background leading up to one very important Pentecost described in Acts, chapter 2, of the Bible. Jews from all over the world had come to Jerusalem to celebrate God giving them the Law. They did not know that God was about to add the power of the Holy Spirit to the Law. God was about to empower the church in a way never before known. He was about to lead them by the Holy Spirit. So, let's listen to the Ridgecrest United Methodist Church Choir, directed by Janice Anderson, as they sing *Led by the Spirit*.

["Led by the Spirit"]

Part 2

The Bible tells what happened that fateful day in Acts, chapter 2. Ellen White wrote these thoughts regarding that day in Chapter 4 of her book, *Acts of the Apostles*.

Chapter 4

Pentecost

[This chapter is based on Acts 2:1-39.]

The disciples did not now mourn over disappointed hopes. They had seen the risen Saviour, and the words of His parting promise echoed constantly in their ears. In obedience to Christ's command, they waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father--the outpouring of the Spirit. They did not wait in idleness. The record says that they were "continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

"And when the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting."

"And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The Holy Spirit, assuming the form of tongues of fire, rested upon those assembled. This was an emblem of the gift then bestowed on the disciples, which enabled them to speak with fluency languages with which they had heretofore been unacquainted. The appearance of fire signified the fervent zeal with which the apostles would labor and the power that would attend their work.

² <http://www.christcenteredmall.com/teachings/feasts/weeks.htm>

"There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." During the dispersion the Jews had been scattered to almost every part of the inhabited world, and in their exile they had learned to speak various languages. Many of these Jews were on this occasion in Jerusalem, attending the religious festivals then in progress. Every known tongue was represented by those assembled. This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. The Holy Spirit did for them that which they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was a strong evidence to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven. From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language.

"Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? and how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

The priests and rulers were greatly enraged at this wonderful manifestation, but they dared not give way to their malice, for fear of exposing themselves to the violence of the people. They had put the Nazarene to death; but here were His servants, uneducated men of Galilee, telling in all the languages then spoken, the story of His life and ministry. The priests, determined to account for the miraculous power of the disciples in some natural way, declared that they were drunken from partaking largely of the wine prepared for the feast. Some of the most ignorant of the people present seized upon this suggestion as the truth, but the more intelligent knew it to be false; and those who understood the different languages testified to the accuracy with which these languages were used by the disciples.

In answer to the accusation of the priests Peter showed that this demonstration was in direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, wherein he foretold that such power would come upon men to fit them for a special work. "Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem," he said, "be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall 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."

With clearness and power Peter bore witness of the death and resurrection of Christ: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it."

Peter did not refer to the teachings of Christ to prove his position, because he knew that the prejudice of his hearers was so great that his words on this subject would be of no effect. Instead, he spoke to them of David, who was regarded by the Jews as one of the patriarchs of their nation.

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day." "He . . . spake of the resurrection of Christ, that

His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."

Some of those who listened to the apostles had taken an active part in the condemnation and death of Christ. Their voices had mingled with the rabble in calling for His crucifixion. Now they heard the disciples declaring that it was the Son of God who had been crucified. Priests and rulers trembled. Conviction and anguish seized the people. "They were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

The disciples were astonished and overjoyed at the greatness of the harvest of souls. They did not regard this wonderful ingathering as the result of their own efforts; they realized that they were entering into other men's labors.

Ever since the fall of Adam, Christ had been committing to chosen servants the seed of His word, to be sown in human hearts. During His life on this earth He had sown the seed of truth and had watered it with His blood. The conversions that took place on the Day of Pentecost were the result of this sowing, the harvest of Christ's work, revealing the power of His teaching.

The arguments of the apostles alone, though clear and convincing, would not have removed the prejudice that had withstood so much evidence. But the Holy Spirit sent the arguments home to hearts with divine power. The words of the apostles were as sharp arrows of the Almighty, convicting men of their terrible guilt in rejecting and crucifying the Lord of glory.

The truths they could not understand while Christ was with them were now unfolded. With a faith and assurance that they had never before known, they accepted the teachings of the Sacred Word. No longer was there any doubt that Christ was the Son of God. They knew that, although clothed with humanity, He was indeed the Messiah, and they told their experience to the world with a confidence which carried with it the conviction that God was with them.

[Music – “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing”, Steven Anderson]

Part 3

Acts chapter 2, verses 5 through 8 describes how the Holy Spirit helped the Apostles preach on the Pentecost that followed Jesus' resurrection.

"Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?'"

We usually call this "the gift of tongues," but it would be more accurate to call it "the gift of ears." The passage tells us that everyone heard the sermon in a different language simultaneously. The disciples weren't speaking multiple languages simultaneously. It was like a speech at the United Nations, where the ambassador gives the speech in his own language, and several translators simultaneously translate the speech into other languages so all the delegates hear it at the same time in their own languages. The Holy Spirit was translating the disciples' words individually to all the God-fearing Jews there.

The Holy Spirit still does that today, but not as dramatically. When you witness to your friends and neighbors, the Holy Spirit will give you words to say, and will give them ears to hear. God respects your friends' rights to choose, so God will let them refuse to listen if that is their choice. Not everyone accepted Jesus' words when He spoke them personally, so not everyone will accept them today when you say them. But you can rest assured that the Spirit is with you when you share God's Word.

["Breathe on Me, Breath of God", Steven Anderson]

Let's close our broadcast now as the Ridgecrest United Methodist Church Choir sings the Spirit Song.

["Spirit Song"]