



Pentecost & Shavuot: the “Feast of Weeks”.



Pentecost is especially significant for Christians, though it seems many may not know it!

Historically, it marks the “birthday of the Church” (Acts 2). It commemorates the “coronation gift of the Holy Spirit” as Jesus of Nazareth was exalted to the throne at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:36; Heb. 1:3; Jn. 14:23). It was the day when believers were “baptized by one Spirit into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. Jn. 14:17; Rom 8:9; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30).

Sadly, not all born again believers appreciate the fundamental fact that **Pentecost finds its genesis in the Jewish feast of Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks.**

Shavuot consists of two inter-connected feasts. One was the Feast of First Fruits; the other, the culmination feast fifty days later: the Feast of Weeks.

The Israelites, it will be remembered, were commanded to appear before

God in the Temple three times a year. The occasions were **Passover** (Pesach), **Pentecost**, or the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) and the **Feast of Tabernacles** (Sukkot).

Rite and Reality

The Feast of First Fruits involved the waving of the *first barley sheaf* before the LORD (Lev. 23: 9-14). The convocation depicted “ingathering” – the harvest had begun, and God’s people expressed their thanks for His faithfulness through another year and their dependency on Him for all their needs.

The Feast of Weeks saw the making of two loaves from finely ground flour (up to 13 times) and waved before the LORD (Lev. 23:15-22). This culminating celebration depicted the



final ingathering of the harvest at the year’s end (Ex. 34:22).

These two feasts (separated by fifty days), were in fact really one. They were inextricably linked. The first guaranteed the second. The “two” aspects were but twin dimensions of the “one” central truth joined by “the counting of the omer” (Lev. 23:15) – the ingathering of the harvest was assured and the waving before the LORD of two wheat loaves baked with leaven!

So what does all this mean for true followers of Jesus of Nazareth, their Saviour and Lord?

To illustrate, let us think of it this way. The Great Wall of China stands today as an ancient monument to fear, isolationism and separation. The Berlin Wall divided the German nation for decades – West Germany from East Germany, and vice versa. Scripture speaks of another wall – an intangible, divisive, separationist “wall”. Paul called it “the middle wall of

partition” (Eph. 2:14). It was not made from stacked stones and pounded earth like the Great Wall of China, nor of concrete slabs like the Berlin Wall, but of “the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (verse 15). Paul’s point is clear: Jews and Gentiles are isolated from each other, primarily because of God’s unique relationship with Israel and the covenant-related corollary: specific regulations for His ancient people. In their unregenerate state, Jew and Gentile are separated outside of Christ. But, when they believed in Christ and received Him, this “middle wall of partition” (exemplified in the separated “Outer Court” [of the Gentiles] and the “Inner Court” [of the Jews] in the Temple, came crashing down just like the walls of Jericho. It was God’s redemptive, purposive intent that His people would see and experience His liberating salvation!

How did God accomplish this? Answer: In the good news of His gospel of grace! And this story of salvation is foreshadowed in the subject of this present study: Pentecost (Shavuot), the Feast of Weeks.

The Meaning of Pentecost (Shavuot)

“Pentecost” is the Greek name for the Old Testament terms “Feast of Weeks” (Ex. 34:22), the “Day of the First Fruits” (Num. 28:26 and Deut. 16:10), and the “Feast of Harvest” (Ex. 23:16).

According to Leviticus 23:15-16, on the seventh Sabbath (seven weeks or 49 days) after Passover, the Israelites were to celebrate their harvest by bringing voluntary offerings to the LORD.

In the New Testament, this celebration was called “Pentecost” (Greek: fiftieth day) because it was to be held on the day after the seventh Sabbath, viz., the fiftieth day after Passover Sabbath.

During the Feast of Weeks, the primary offering of God’s ancient people was new grain consisting of “two wave loaves of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the first fruits to the LORD” (Lev. 23:17, NKJV).

Fifty days earlier, the first sheaves of *barley* were waved back and forth, up and down, in similar fashion.

Interestingly, the two *wheaten* loaves contained leaven (from the bread of the previous barley harvest). Because it contained leaven, it was not placed on the altar but eaten by the Levitical priests.

The second offering was a burnt offering of seven male lambs, a young bull, and two rams (Lev. 23:18). A grain offering and a drink offering were brought with the burnt offering (verse 18). The people also brought a male goat for a sin offering and two male lambs for a peace offering (verse 19). Portions of the lamb and grain offerings were waved before the LORD and then eaten by the officiating priests (verse 20). The

convocation (and feast) was a sacred occasion: no work was allowed on that day (verse 21).

Over the centuries, God’s covenant people – so tied to the Land God said would be theirs forever (Gen. 15:18; 17:8) – celebrated this annual feast of “Ingathering”. This “first fruits of the wheat harvest” was a thanksgiving festival to their God, upon whom they were totally dependent for their harvest and daily needs.

Following the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, the purpose of the Feast of Weeks changed. Being closely associated historically with Passover and Tabernacles, the rabbis connected the Feast of Weeks with the giving of the Law (Torah) on Mt. Sinai. Thus, from around the first century A.D., Pentecost changed from a celebration of the first fruits of harvest to the commemoration of the giving of the Law. That’s why orthodox Jews today will stay up all night on 6th-7th Sivan (9th-10th June this year) and study the Law.

On these days, Jewish synagogues around the world will be decked out



with greenery, flowers and baskets of fruit – all symbols of harvest. Then these scriptures will be read:

- (1) Exodus 19-20 (the giving of the Law);
- (2) Ezekiel 1 (the prophet's vision of God's glory), and
- (3) The scroll of Ruth is also read since it takes place in the Spring-time harvest.

How apropos is this amazing story: Bethlehem (the house of bread); Ruth, the Moabitess, a Gentile woman who comes to faith in Naomi's God, the God of Israel; the "go'el" – the kinsman redeemer --, typified in Boaz; Ruth became the ancestress of King David, and his greater son, Jesus, the Messiah!

The Birthday of Judaism

Being the anniversary of the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai, orthodox Jews regard Pentecost as the "birthday of Judaism".

In Leviticus 23:11, we read that "on the day after the (Passover) Sabbath", the priest was to bring the sheaf of the wave offering into the Temple. This signified the beginning of the new harvest, the beginning of "first fruits".

What prophetic significance is found in this statement! The One who on the morrow after the (Passover) Sabbath, was to rise from the dead to become the "first fruits of them who slept" (1 Cor. 15:20).

Then on the Day of Pentecost, two "wave loaves" were brought to the LORD. Two loaves, made with fine flour ground of the newly harvested wheat, were baked with leaven. Significantly, believers should note, these **two loaves alone** were baked with leaven. Why with leaven? Why two?

Leaven is symbolic of sin. Recall that the Passover bread was unleavened. It signified the sinlessness of the

Incarnate Christ, but who later on the Cross, "was made sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21). Moreover, the two loaves were symbolic of Israel, in whom exists the leaven of sin – and still today, because of her rejection of Messiah and unbelief.

The Birthday of the Church

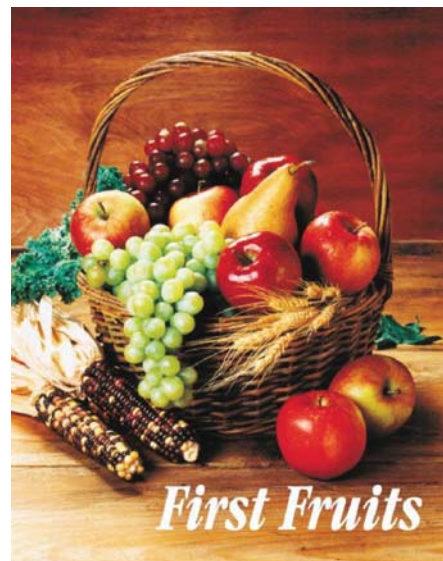
Fifteen hundred years had passed since God commanded His people through Moses to observe the Feast of Weeks. God's unfolding drama of redemption was revealed through the prophets. All, like Isaiah in chapter 53, foretold of the coming Saviour to redeem Israel from her sin. In the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), God sent forth His Son (Pr. 30:4; Is. 48:12-16; Jn. 3:16), Israel's Messiah, to be the Saviour of the world (Isa. 45:22). He came to be crucified (Is. 53; Mk. 10:45; 1 Pet. 2:22ff). He came to fulfill the promises and purposes of the Father (Is. 43:10-15, 25ff). He came to save Israel (Is 43:25) and Gentiles (Is. 56:1-8) who would hear, believe and receive Him into their hearts (Eph. 1:13-14; 3:1-10; 1 Jn 2:2; Jn 1:12).

Victor Buksbazen writes with spiritual insight when he states:

"Then He (Jesus) arose, as prophesied (Ps. 16:11; Is. 53:10-12, verses added). Before ascending into heaven, He commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they would be endued with the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:44-48; Acts 1:8, *verses added*).

"They waited forty-nine days after His resurrection even as the Jewish people waited forty-nine days from Passover to Pentecost." * (*The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel*, FOI Books, Reprint: 2004, pp. 23-24).

Acts records that "when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (2:1). The gift of the Spirit was given to all believers, there associated with



supernatural phenomena – wind, cloven tongues of fire, and speaking in tongues so that each one heard in their own dialect (verse 9). Consider that in accordance with the Jewish tradition on Pentecost, these Galilean disciples would have read Ezekiel 1 where the prophet describes "the almost indescribable" – the glory of the sovereign God in apocalyptic terms. Now His glory was manifest in and on His "baptized" people. Peter then preached, focusing on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah (verse 36). He called for his hearers to repent and respond in faith (verse 40). Then "those who gladly received his word were baptized" and the text says some "three thousand souls were saved" (verses 41-42).

Most of these new believers were Jews, but there were some Gentiles. The church – consisting of converted Jews and Gentiles – was born!

In this context, observe the spiritual meaning of the "two wave loaves baked with leaven". The "two" become "one" in Christ. Relative to the grace of God in the gospel of salvation, "there is neither Jew nor Greek", in Him (Gal. 3: 28). And neither Jew nor Gentile is not without sin, as typified with the

inclusion of leaven. Perfection is only found in Him!

Christ, the “First Fruits”.

Through His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4), Jesus Christ became the “First Fruits” (1 Cor. 15:20). He became the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:19-20) and Lord of all (Phil 2:9-11; Rev. 19:11-16). On the day of Pentecost – an historic day, never to be repeated in terms of the Holy Spirit being given to the Church – three thousand Jewish and Gentile souls were saved. He became the spiritual “first fruits” to the Church, all of whom will be resurrected to everlasting life with God, because of Christ’s being raised from the dead.

Thus the Old Testament symbol, the two wave loaves, became a glorious reality in the New Testament, sealed with Messiah’s precious blood (Mt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 11:9).

Conclusion

To sum up the finding of this study, the following should be noted:

- Christians should become more *au fait* with the Feasts of Israel for in them the good news of the gospel is readily apparent.
- In the Old Testament, Shavuot – the Feast of Weeks – we find a foreshadowing of Pentecost in the New Testament. Rite becomes reality.
- The former Jewish festival of Shavuot may commemorate the “Birthday of Judaism”, but the latter (Pentecost) definitely identifies the “Day” on which the Church was born.
- Christ is the “first fruits” because of His resurrection. In Him, the Old Testament type is fulfilled in the New Testament anti-type.
- The Church is the “spiritual commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:11-13, 19-22). The text reads: *Therefore remember that you, once*

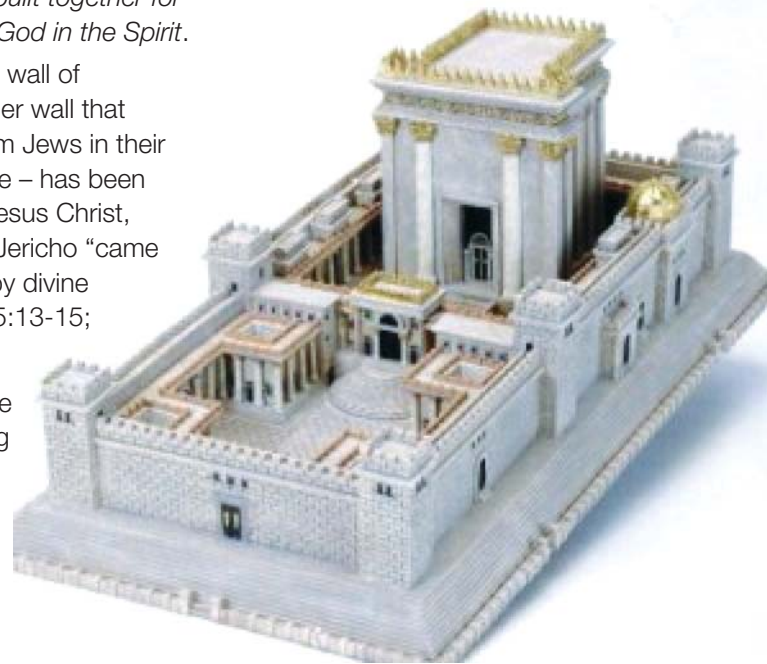
Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called Circumcision made by the flesh of hands – (12) that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ... (19) Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of the household of God, (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, (21) In whom the whole building being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, (22) In whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

- Indeed, the “middle wall of partition” – the barrier wall that divides Gentiles from Jews in their pre-conversion state – has been “broken down” in Jesus Christ, just as the walls of Jericho “came a-tumbling down” by divine intervention (Josh. 5:13-15; 6:1-27).

Dear Jewish or Gentile friend, are you trusting Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour? Believe in Him now, receive Him by faith and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).

We trust you had a meaningful Pentecost on 11th May. You will be blessed to remember it again on 9th-10th June (6th-7th Sivan) when Jewish friends celebrate Shavuot – the Feast of Weeks. How we pray that many would embrace the reality of Pentecost by trusting in their Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.

With warm Christian greetings,
Deane and Margaret Woods.



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