
Fifty Days To Pentecost

by: Ronald L. Dart

How many people know anything about Pentecost? The surprising thing to me about Pentecost is that it isn't a much bigger deal with Christians than it is.

The listeners to our one radio station in the British Isles will know Pentecost as Whit Sunday, or White Sunday, that is, from the custom of the newly baptized wearing white.

I was surprised, when I visited London a few years ago, to find that Whit Monday is also a holiday there. The Brits get a paid two-day weekend based on an ancient Jewish holiday. The Jews know it as Shavuot or the feast of weeks.

What Is Pentecost?

Now when you understand what Pentecost is, it is a wonder it isn't a much bigger thing among Christians. Pentecost was the day, when the Holy Spirit was poured out in power on the early Church. It was the day they baptized 3,000 people in one day (Acts 2:41), I don't think the Church has done that since. It has been called the birthday of the Church and you would think it would be celebrated in fine style. But for most of liberal Protestant Christianity it passes unnoticed. It is just another Jewish holiday and they don't even notice that.

Pentecost Means Fiftieth

Pentecost is the Greek word that means fiftieth.

In Acts 2 verse 1, "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

Now what this is saying is, when the 50th. day had arrived, they were all together in one place, but the 50th day from what? To answer that question, we have to go back a way. The Jewish holidays, as we are apt to call them, are all outlined in the book of Leviticus chapter 23.

God's Appointed Feasts

"God said to Moses, saying, {2} "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim to be sacred assemblies."

There are seven appointed feasts throughout the year. But the one we are talking about is spoken of in Leviticus 23 beginning in verse 9, "The LORD said to Moses, {10} "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. {11} He is to wave the sheaf of grain before the LORD, so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath."

Now there is not a lot of information here, even the time of year would not be known, except for one thing, it turns out to be that we are talking about the very first ripe grain of the new year. Historically we know that would be barley in Palestine and we know that that day is very close to the first day of unleavened bread.

"When you enter the land," He said, now presumably during the 40 years in the wilderness, this could not be done because they didn't plant nor harvest during that period of time.

An Offering To God

Later in verse 14 of Leviticus 23, "You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God."

You know, in a way, it's like saying, "None of this crop is yours until, first of all, you acknowledge that I, God, gave it to you."

The first thing you have to do is, don't eat any grain in any form, harvest a sheaf, just one, bring it in before Me, have the priest wave it back and forth, admitting I gave you this and thank Me for it, and after that you can eat the crop to your heart's desire.

Continuing in verse 15, He says, "From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks, {16} Count off 50 days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. {17} From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of the firstfruits to the LORD."

Now this is done on Pentecost, which is also called the feast of first fruits. Now what on earth does this have to do with Christianity? Well, more than you might think.

Firstfruits

Take that word 'firstfruits.' The idea at first seems to be merely a requirement that, before you indulge yourself in the fruit of the ground, you have to put God first. Now that lesson alone is

worthwhile, and so the ceremonial acknowledging of God as the source of every good and perfect gift is a good thing (James 1:17).

But the concept of firstfruits, took on special meaning to the early Church, and you might wonder as you read through the New Testament, and it crops up, where does this come from? How did they arrive at this?

For example, here's first Corinthians chapter 15, which if people know their New Testament well, will call the resurrection chapter.

The apostle Paul, in first Corinthians chapter 15 verse 19 says this, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. {20} But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept. {21} For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. {22} As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, {23} But every man in his own order. Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

We immediately see something here, that there is this connection with the resurrection from the dead, that Jesus Christ was the first one resurrected from the dead, and since it calls him the firstfruits it is suggestive that there is more to follow.

James draws the same meaning for this, in the first chapter of the epistle of James, he says this, "Every good and perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. {18} Of his own will He begat us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

So now we have Jesus Christ who is the first of the firstfruits, now we learn that we also are a kind of firstfruits. And then there is an enigmatic cohort of people you find in the book of Revelation often referred to as the 144,000.

In Revelation chapter 14, John is standing and "He sees a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. {2} He said "I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, as the voice of the great thunder, and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. {3} And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four creatures that were there and the elders. And no man could learn that song, but the 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth."

Here it tells us this about the 144,000, {4} "These are they who were not defiled with women for they are virgins. These are they who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed from among men being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."

Gentile God Fearers

So, the early Church, even the Gentile Church, was strongly connected to what you and I call the Old Testament. They called it 'The Holy Scriptures' because it was all the Scriptures they knew. What we call the New Testament didn't exist, even in part, for some 20 to 30 years of history of

the Church, but the Gentiles of that era were what people call God fearers, that is, they believed in and worshiped the God of the Old Testament before they ever heard of the gospel.

Instead of accepting a Greek god, or a Roman god, these Gentiles accepted the true God, and served Him to the best of their abilities and they listened to the law being read in the synagogue every Sabbath day, so they would know what God's will was.

For these people, Jews and Gentiles, who were Christians, the imagery of the firstfruits was inexorably tied to the resurrection of the dead. Paul makes this very clear in the first chapter of the book to the Colossians.

Paul said, in Colossians 1 verse 12, "Giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance of the saints in light; {13} Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, who has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; {14} In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Outline of Who Jesus Is

Then Paul outlines who this Jesus is. He says in Colossians 1 verse 15, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, {16} For by him were all things created that are in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities or powers: all things were created by him and for him, {17} And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

Paul really gets his hammer out and drives this nail in, and then he says this, after he is sure you know who he is talking about, and he is talking about Christ, {18} "He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Christ is not only the firstborn of all creatures, He is the firstborn from the dead, and this idea, of a harvest of people from this Earth, at the time of the resurrection, of them being born from the dead, as Christ was born from the dead, is what this is all about.

Now, keeping all of this in mind, we are going to walk back 50 days from that first Pentecost of the Christian Church, and we are going to see what we find there.

Wave Sheaf Sunday

Walking back 50 days before that first Pentecost of the Christian Church brings us to the day when the high priest would normally be waving that sheaf of the firstfruits before God. That sheaf, that one omer of grain, that they couldn't eat any of the grain until they had actually presented it to God, and that curious ceremony is normally considered a Jewish ritual. However, when you look at this, the harvest begins on that day when he takes that basket of first ripe grain into the Temple and waves it before God. The harvest began on that day and for 50 days thereafter, they worked six days then rested on the Sabbath. Worked six days and rested on the Sabbath, for seven Sabbaths, until Pentecost, the morrow after the Sabbath.

But something else was going on here, on that same morning. No one saw the moment of Jesus' resurrection, so we have no testimony as to exactly when that took place, but what we do know from the gospel accounts is that Mary Magdalene came to the sepulcher while it was still dark (John 20:1) and found the tomb opened and Jesus gone.

So here we are, Jesus has risen, He is not there. Mary Magdalene standing there puzzled, hurt and confused. You will find this in the 20th chapter in the book of John.

Verse 11, "Mary stood outside the tomb crying, as she wept, she bent over to look inside. {12} She saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been. One at the head and the other at the foot. {13} They said, "Woman, why are you crying? And she said, "They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they put him." {14} Then she turned around and she saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Him." I don't know why, perhaps His appearance was altered, but also it may still have been dark.

Jesus said, {15} "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" She thought Jesus was the gardener, and she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, would you tell me where you put Him, and I will get him." {16} And Jesus said to her, called her by name, "Mary." She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni." {17} And Jesus said, "Don't hold on to me. I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Now there is something important to understand here. Jesus would not actually ascend from the Earth to the Father permanently for another 40 days. So, what does He mean, when He said, "Go tell my disciples that I am returning to my Father and your Father?"

Well, between the time He appeared to Mary Magdalene and the time He later saw His disciples, the same day and let them touch Him, hold Him and handle Him, He had ascended to heaven and presented Himself to the Father in the intervening time. Probably at the same time, the priest was waving that sheaf of the firstfruits in the Temple before God, Jesus was appearing before the Father in heaven.

The striking thing about so much of the Old Testament ritual is, it is all about Jesus Christ.

Common Errors with the First Day of the Week

Now this happened on a singular day of the year. It was the first day of the seven weeks of harvest leading up to Pentecost, also called the feast of firstfruits. This underlines one of the most common errors people make about the New Testament. This was on a Sunday morning to be sure, but the Jewish manner of speaking of Sunday, was to call it 'the morrow after the Sabbath.' The N.I.V translates it as, 'the day after the Sabbath.' They did not call it 'the first day of the week.' It is a term unknown and never used in either the Old Testament or the New Testament by Jews.

So, what are the disciples saying, when they describe this day as 'the first day of the week?' Well, it is the first day of the seven weeks of harvest. Day one of the 50-day countdown to Pentecost, literally in the Greek, it is the first day of the Sabbaths, and the word is plural.

There is no Greek word here for 'week,' The Jews basically use the term 'seven' for that, but this is the first day after the Sabbath.

Now it's odd how strong the idea of 'the first day of the week' has entered into Christian tradition, when it is really not a reference to a 'day of the week' but a 'day of the year' when the wave sheaf was offered.

The First Pentecost

Let's walk back down that 50 days to the first Christian Pentecost. Jesus had told His disciples, "Don't go home, wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon you with power" (Acts 1:4).

Now the disciples were not entirely clueless what this meant. The Holy Spirit had come upon men of old, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and usually the result of it was they prophesied, they had a word from God that they passed on to men. As I said they were not clueless but there was no way they could have anticipated what was about to happen and what it was going to really mean.

Now they didn't have long to wait. A mere 10 days after Christ's ascension when the day of Pentecost was fully come. They were all together in one place, which of course, is exactly what you would have expected the disciples to do.

The disciples had kept this day, the feast of first fruits, feast of Shavuot, from which we call Pentecost, all their lives. It was one of the appointed times of God. They knew that God acted in history on these appointments of God and therefore they must have expected that the fulfillment of what Jesus had promised, in terms of being empowered by the Holy Spirit, would come at this time.

They were all together, in one place (Acts 2:1), and I have very little doubt in some anticipation. {2} "And suddenly the sound like blowing of a violent wind came from heaven, and filled the whole house where they were sitting , {3} And they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each one of them."

I think you could call this a hair-raising experience, having that incredible roaring and all of a sudden, a stream of fire coming across the ceiling and a little stream of it descending on each one of them.

Speaking in Tongues

My, what a moment and there's no way that they could have anticipated the physical manifestations of the Spirit they saw and felt on this day.

Verse 4 of Acts 2, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

Now this underlies a long-standing belief that people have of speaking in unknown tongues as they call it, glossolalia as it is otherwise called. Speaking in tongues is thought to be a manifestation of the Spirit, kind of a proof of the Spirit, a baptism of the Spirit, if you will.

On this occasion, it was a manifest alright, but it was not merely that. Listen to what followed, verse 5, "Now they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. {6} Now when they heard this sound, the crowd came together in bewilderment because each one heard them speaking in his own language."

Mind you, these were not unknown tongues, they were known languages, the men who ran together recognized probably from the garb of the disciples, they were local to Palestine.

"Utterly amazed," {7} "They asked, "Are all of these speaking Galileans? {8} "How then do we each hear them in our own native language?" Now much is made of the question of the precise miracle here. Was it in the speaking or was it the hearing? There is no doubt when you see the whole picture, the disciples were speaking in languages they had never learned, when they were enabled to do so by the Spirit. More important than that, these languages are named (Acts 2:9-11).

Now how this differed, what happened on this day, from what happens, I guess from Sunday to Sunday in some charismatic churches around the country, where the preacher, may be speaking and all of a sudden, he starts saying things nobody understands. He lapses into 'speaking in tongues,' or people in the congregation may start 'speaking in tongues' and no one knows or understands.

I can tell you in pretty clear terms what happened here on this first Pentecost and you can judge whether it's same or not. First of all, every one of these people started speaking. People ran together because they heard the noise and they hear them speaking in languages.

Now here's what they said. Acts 2 verse 9, "We hear them, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, {10} Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and in the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, {11} Cretes and Arabians, we hear them declaring the wonderful works of God in our own languages."

Now it depends on how you take this, there were 14 or 15 known named languages being spoken by the disciples, which basically covered the entire known world. Not only that, but it was a concrete recognized message.

"We hear them speak, "one says, "I am from Arabia and I hear these people speaking in my language, in Arabic, the wonderful works of God." It is recognized.

The Great Commission

Now here's a question, didn't all the Jews speak Hebrew? Well, apparently not, but even if they did, the miracle becomes all the more significant. Why did the disciples need all these languages if their sole mission with the gospel was to the Jews? Now I can't think of anything that should impress on their minds the universality of the gospel more than this, but many of them, including Peter would not really get this through their heads for many years after this. Not long before this, just before Jesus left, in fact, He told them what they were to do.

It's a short passage of Scripture called the great commission. You will find it right at the end of the 28th chapter of Matthew. Jesus came and spoke to them and said, {18} "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. {19} Go you therefore and teach (disciple) all nations." The Greek word for 'nations' is 'ethnos' which elsewhere in the New Testament, in fact everywhere you find the word Gentiles in the New Testament, it is Greek word 'ethnos'.

"Go you therefore, and teach, make disciples of the Gentiles, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: {20} Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you, even to the end of the world."

Where were they to take the gospel? Everywhere! You don't have to be too swift to realize that if you are going to take the gospel everywhere, somebody is going to have to be able to speak some languages, that people elsewhere speak and understand. It's clear.

What Does This Mean?

But now, on this Pentecost, everyone is trying to make sense of what happened. Verse 12 of Acts 2, "Amazed and perplexed they ask one another. What does this mean? {13} Some people made fun of them and said, "They have just had too much to drink," {14} But Peter stood up with the 11, raised his voice and said to the crowd, "Hey, fellow Jews, all you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you. Listen carefully to what I'm saying. {15} These men are not drunk, as you think. Hey, it is only nine in the morning. {16} What you are seeing is a fulfillment of what was spoken by Joel the prophet, {17} "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit upon all people, your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men shall see dreams, your old men will have visions, {18} They will all prophesy.""

What Peter goes on to say in this first sermon on this first Pentecost of the Christian Church is, "We are seeing a fulfillment of prophecy that is in a direct line between where we have been and the last days. Something new has happened on earth." Peter still doesn't understand fully, that the door that was opened on this day was the door and the empowerment to go through that door to take the gospel everywhere. And it happened on Pentecost, the 50th day of the harvest of God, which basically boils down to, these people who were being baptized began to form part of the firstfruits. 3000 of them in one day.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think that the majority of Christians ignore Pentecost?
2. Why isn't Pentecost more important than Christmas, which is a non-Biblical holiday?
3. Is it possible to fully grasp the teachings in the New Testament without knowing and understanding God's Holy Days?
4. Do you think that the New Testament writers ever considered their letters and writings to be considered part of God's word?
5. Do Christians neglect studying the Old Testament?
6. Do you see the connection of the Wave Sheaf Offering and Christ and the rest of the first fruits and Pentecost?
7. Do you feel that one of the misconceptions about God's appointed times is because people call them the "Feasts of the Jews"?
8. Do you ever imagine what it must have been like on that first Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Christ?
9. What do you think of Mr. Dart's idea that the reason they spoke multiple dialects, once receiving the Holy Spirit, was because they were going to have to take the gospel everywhere and somebody had to be able to speak the languages?
10. What do you think would happen if we had a modern day Pentecost experience?