



# THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

WEEK 7  
10.18.15

## FOCUS VERSES

### Deuteronomy 16:10–11

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.

## LESSON TEXT

### Leviticus 23:15–21

15 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:

16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.

17 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.

18 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.

19 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.

20 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.

21 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.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was the firstfruits of a great harvest of souls that is still going on today.



## Reaping at the Margins

**A** John Deere dealer introduced me to some of the most amazing technology: tractors, combines, and other implements being guided by GPS. A worker need merely sit in the cab of the vehicle and watch while the machine sows seed or reaps the harvest from the field. With digital satellite precision, farmers can utilize every inch of their fields and recapture every penny of their investment, leaving nothing to waste. This type of harvesting would not have been acceptable under the law of Moses.

God stipulated that His people leave the edges of their fields unreaped. They were not to glean every kernel of profit but to be a little slack in their harvesting. The goal was

not to encourage poor business efficiency but to provide needy people with a harvest as well. This is the spirit of the holiday called Pentecost.

Pentecost was a harvest blessing that included everyone, young and old, rich and poor, male and female. No one was to be left on the fringes. Our churches cannot become exclusivist groups, or we violate the very foundation of our name. Is your church becoming so digitally socialized there is no inclusion of those on the edges of society? Are you too high tech for the outcasts to find a place in the harvest? I pray we will never lose the original spirit of Pentecost.

### OUTLINE

#### I. THE FEAST OF WEEKS

- A. A Firstfruits Celebration
- B. Celebration of Giving of the Law

#### II. BEGINNING OF THE HARVEST

- A. Manner of the Celebration
- B. Bread Loaf Wave Offering
- C. A Day of Rejoicing

#### III. THE DAY OF PENTECOST

- A. Holy Ghost Was Poured Out
- B. Salvation Was Preached
- C. Salvation Is Available to All the World

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

As Pentecostal believers, we often use the term *Pentecost*. However, we often forget this is a Jewish holiday and Christians do not have exclusive rights to the term. Many Christians do not even consider the background to this ancient holiday that began with Moses. A brief reflection on this tradition will improve our understanding of what Pentecost means to us today.

How many times have you quoted or read “when the day of Pentecost was fully come”

without considering what it meant? The original readers of this verse of Scripture would have known what Pentecost was all about, and it would have carried as much meaning for them as Thanksgiving Day does for North Americans.

What was this feast that brought them all into unity in one place? It was one of the most joy-filled celebrations in Jewish culture. However, this even was different because something came “from heaven” like “a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2). Then tongues like fire divided and sat upon each of them causing those worshipers to speak with other tongues as the Holy Ghost gave them the ability (Acts 2:3–4).

If we force this story through the funnel of our contemporary experience, we will slosh most of the meaning out of it. Let us pause for a moment and revisit the roots of Pentecost—a unique holiday. We will discover how the outpouring of the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost as the firstfruits, or beginnings, of a great harvest of souls still going on today.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

To understand Pentecost, we cannot look to modern religious movements or historical revivals. We must look further back in history than Acts 2 because for those who received the Spirit that day, a world of meaning would unfold just with hearing the term *Pentecost*. Our present understanding brings to mind a host of pictures, ideas, experiences, and expectations different from those of the first Jewish believers.

To understand all the meaning and power of Pentecost, one must reach back to Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and even an unexpected book like Ruth. The celebration of Pentecost is as deep with meaning as any of the Jewish traditions such as Passover. In fact the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast of Pentecost all flow out of the Passover.

Passover was the point of the Israelites' departure from bondage in the land of Egypt. Similarly, Jesus' death is the point of departure from our bondage to sin. We celebrate Passover by communion and joining the Lord in His bloody, flesh-tearing death. Shortly after the Jewish Passover Feast, another celebration occurred where a wave offering of grain was presented to the Lord. The Feast of Pentecost is largely foreign to Christians today, but it carried prophetic meaning for our faith and is fulfilled in Christ.

### I. THE FEAST OF WEEKS

Perhaps believers today have never heard of the Feast of Weeks, but this was the name most Jews used to refer to Pentecost.

Spring is an exciting time for an agrarian society. The dead ground springs to life, and the new growth gives hope of survival for a new year. In Jewish culture, around Passover the workers began to harvest barley, the first of the crops for the year. Since the first portion of this crop was required to go to the Lord, it called for a new festival: Firstfruits. Beginning the Sabbath Day after Passover, one can count seven weeks until another day of celebration: Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks.

In modern culture since Pentecost comes on Sunday, it marks fifty days from the wave

offering of Firstfruits. In other words, seven weeks of seven days equal forty-nine days plus one, or fifty. From the Greek word for fiftieth we get the English word *Pentecost*.

### A. A Firstfruits Celebration

The Lord declared, "Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year" (Exodus 23:14). He wanted the people to come together for these monumental occasions. A feast was a social event with multi-sensory stimuli to help one remember a significant event and to allow participants to make new memories. These three feasts were "the feast of unleavened bread," or Passover; "the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours," or Pentecost; and "the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year," also called the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:15–16). This third one we will examine in a later lesson.

God wanted His people to prioritize Pentecost along with the other feasts. If there was any question about it, God made it clear once again, saying, "Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God" (Exodus 23:17). He wanted these people to go out of their way to celebrate these feasts. These were not just something to fit in along the way but to shape their calendar around. More specifically about where they were to observe this feast, He said, "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God" (Exodus 23:19). No wonder so many people were in the Temple precincts when the Spirit fell on the Day of Pentecost.

These terms begin to blend together: Feast of Firstfruits, Feast of Weeks, and Pentecost. They all refer to one extended event. Workers first harvested the barley. Several weeks later they would reap the wheat. The festival involved expectancy, leading up to a day of rejoicing—the one-day Feast of Pentecost.

### B. Celebration of Giving of the Law

Jewish tradition says the law of Moses was given on the Day of Pentecost. The sequence of events from Egypt to Sinai could fit within the Passover-to-Pentecost time frame (Exodus 19:1) even though the biblical record does not give the exact day of the giving of the Law. The law of Moses, according to Jewish tradition and slight biblical witness, came down by the hand

of angels. Even more intriguing, if Pentecost was the day the commands were delivered, is the Jewish story of fire falling on that day.

When the Lord came to deliver the Law to Moses, the people were terrified because they saw a burning mountain (Exodus 19:18; 20:18). One historic document (which may or may not be legitimate history) describes the giving of the first commandment as bringing “meteors and lightning and as torches of fire; a fiery torch to its right and fiery torch to its left, which burst forth and flew in the air of the heavenly expanse; it proceeded to circle around the camp of Israel” (David Brickner and Rich Robinson, *Christ in the Feast of Pentecost*).

According to Brickner and Robinson, Philo, whose writings came about two hundred years before Christ, recorded that “from the midst of the fire that streamed from heaven there sounded forth to their utter amazement a voice, for the flame became articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience, and so clearly and distinctly were the words formed by it that they seemed to see rather than hear them” (quoted from *The Decalogue*). Still another tradition amplified (or embellished) the story to record that the glory of God (the fire?) “descended up on the heads of the Israelites as divine diadems (crowns) when they received the Torah at Sinai.” Rabbi Ishmael emphasized that “the people saw the thunderings,” and Rabbi Akiva says, “They saw the fiery word coming out from the mouth of the Almighty as it struck upon the tablets” (*Christ in the Feast of Pentecost*).

Perhaps Jewish enhancements to the story could be overdramatizing it. However, when speaking of the power of God’s voice, David declared, “The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire” (Psalm 29:7). Did this happen at Sinai? We do not know for sure, but David follows this statement by saying, “The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness” (Psalm 29:8). Maybe, just maybe, the first Day of Pentecost involved divided flames of fire similar to those appearing as the word of the Lord came to His people and gave them commandments written in stone in the Hebrew language.

Of course, those familiar with Pentecost as experienced in the new covenant can instantly see how these possibilities would converge “when the day of Pentecost was fully come”

(Acts 2:1). The Hebrew people rejected the message God had given through Moses in the Hebrew language. Therefore, He vowed to speak to them in “another tongue” as a witness that they had rejected Him (Isaiah 28:11).

Paul referenced this when dealing with the church in Corinth where speaking in tongues had become almost the “be all, end all” of their religious experience. He gave them the proper perspective about why tongues had come by quoting the Isaiah passage: “With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:21). So the unknown language that came on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 was not a friendly gesture toward Israel, but God’s way of reminding them they had rejected Him. Paul said, “Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not” or in other words, a witness against those who rejected Him (I Corinthians 14:22).

At Sinai, the Lord had given His commandments written on stone. After His people rejected Him and broke the Law, He purposed to do something greater than Sinai. Through another prophet, He promised, “I will make a new covenant,” which would not be like “the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake.” Instead “this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:31–33). The Day of Pentecost following the ascension of Jesus became far greater than Sinai because now the desires of God would be inscribed on people’s hearts. No longer would they be people of the rules but a people after the Lord’s own heart.

## II. BEGINNING OF THE HARVEST

### A. Manner of the Celebration

The instructions for this two-part feast began in Leviticus 23:9. After giving instructions for Firstfruits, the Lord continued by giving instructions for Pentecost. A new section then followed with a separate statement by the Lord about another feast, the Feast of Trumpets

(Leviticus 23:23). So the Feast of Pentecost was not a separate event from Firstfruits but completed what began at Firstfruits. The forty-eight days in between were important and made up what is known as the “counting of the sheaf.”

Calendars make waiting more meaningful. Children may enjoy marking off each day coming up to vacation or a holiday. The Feast of Weeks became known as the Feast of Pentecost, possibly because it was not enough to mark off each of the seven weeks as they passed. Instead, they counted the days—all fifty of them.

In contemporary culture some today observe the “twelve days of Christmas” or take time to reflect and refocus during the forty days before Easter. Making each day meaningful can heighten the anticipation and make the main day of celebration more significant. That is the essence behind the tradition of “counting the sheaf” or numbering off each day leading up to the fiftieth.

The original holiday injunctive read: “Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, 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 (Leviticus 23:15–16).

Jews developed traditions surrounding each day of this holiday season as they counted and waited. Historic events occurred during these times, lending special significance to specific days of the countdown.

Jesus’ resurrection marked the beginning of the counting of the sheaf. God had a new harvest that would follow the Firstfruits. During the counting of the sheaf, He showed Himself alive to His followers for forty days.

As Passover tied to the Hebrew’s departure from the land of bondage, Pentecost connected with their bounty of the Promised Land. The Lord told Moses, “When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest” (Leviticus 23:10). So this first cut of the crop marked the beginning of the seven-week celebration, generally right on the heels of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

## B. Bread Loaf Wave Offering

The Lord commanded His people to have the priest “wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you” (Leviticus 23:11). This “waving” or “elevating” of the sheaf of barley became a token way of saying, “Lord, we give you credit for providing for us as you promised.” This offering unto the Lord presented the gift and the giver in an unusual way.

God commanded them that “on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Leviticus 23:11). So it appears that whenever the first sickle was thrust in on the fields, that first omer, or sheaf, would be brought to the priest to offer unto the Lord. Some debate the meaning of this “morrow after the Sabbath” and see it as pertaining to the Passover and/or the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, the reaping of the firstfruits may have varied away from the timing of Passover from year to year. It appears that at the death of Christ, the Passover and Firstfruits fell back to back. He gave Himself as our Passover Lamb and rose again as our Firstfruits.

At Firstfruits, they elevated the barley sheaf unto the Lord. At Pentecost, the priest also offered a ram lamb, bread loaves from the latter harvest of wheat, and a drink offering (Leviticus 23:13). Until this offering had been made, the Lord said, “Ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God” (Leviticus 23:14). This was more than just “pray before you eat.” Here stood a people who depended on the food they raised in their own communities to get them through another year. After coming to the end of their winter supplies, they would have been overeager to eat some fresh grain they could reap from their fields. But before any merry-making of that sort, they first had to stop and honor the One who had brought bounty to their tables again.

The Firstfruits, counting of the sheaf, and the Day of Pentecost were not only a season of reflection, contrition, and celebration, but also a time to rest and remember the poor. The Lord decreed, “Ye shall do no servile work therein” (Leviticus 23:21), making it a mandatory day off for all of God’s people. In the New Testament, “when the day of Pentecost was fully come” (Acts 2:1), God’s people found

the rest the wandering Hebrews had never entered into.

When the Israelite farmers gathered their harvests of barley and wheat, they were not to be thorough about it. Rather than pick the fields clean, this harvest season required them to “not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger” (Leviticus 23:22). These edges of the field and left-behind grains left plenty for the needy to receive not just a handout but a hand up.

The story of Ruth came at the time of Firstfruits and through the season of counting the sheaf. Not only did her story illustrate the importance of caring for the poor, it also gave us insight to the lives of those involved in the lineage of Christ. In addition, it reminds us Pentecost includes the poor—the disenfranchised and marginal people of the world.

### C. A Day of Rejoicing

On the Day of Pentecost, special sacrifices were to be made. The Israelites were to bring offerings of loaves of bread to present before the Lord as firstfruits of the wheat crop, which ripened at this time, about fifty days after the barley harvest. The decree came that they should bring “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” (Leviticus 23:17).

Also, they were to offer animal sacrifices of contrition and thanksgiving: “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” (Leviticus 23:18). The Lord also called them to “sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings” (Leviticus 23:19). Pentecost was not only a celebration of God’s goodness, but also a time to humble one’s heart in repentance before the Lord.

The Day of Pentecost commanded the people to “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” (Deuteronomy 16:11). Every person of every social level was to rejoice. This was for everyone!

It was not just an invitation to rejoice if one felt like it. Regardless of the worries, losses, and distractions of the past year, the people were to rejoice. This was as important as any other part of the event. The male workforce in the Temple danced before the altar. Parents and children, leaders and followers, managers and workers, poor and rich were all to celebrate in God’s presence.

## III. THE DAY OF PENTECOST

As Pentecostals, we feel we own Pentecost. However, when we realize this holiday began with the Hebrews and recognize the history behind it, we come to understand it better. When the Day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, God’s long-term plan unfolded upon the faithful worshippers. The Firstfruits brought in the barley and Pentecost the wheat. The fulfillment of Pentecost is the bringing together of two harvests: the Jews and the Gentiles.

### A. Holy Ghost Was Poured Out

Nearly 120 men and women gathered to worship as both the Law and the resurrected Lord had commanded them. In the Old Testament, the Lord commanded the devout to appear before Him at His Temple, “in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place his name there” (Deuteronomy 16:11). The outpouring of the Holy Ghost could have happened in the upper level of a home or in the Temple itself. Clearly, Peter could not have preached to three thousand people in someone’s home. The only place in Jerusalem that such a crowd could gather would have been the Temple Mount, which could fit about 75,000 people (Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 1).

### B. Salvation Was Preached

Jesus became our wave offering, presenting Himself alive after His death as representative of the rest of those who would be born from the dead. Hence, the Scripture calls Him the “firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). We enter into His resurrection life by salvation. We identify with His death in

baptism and His resurrection by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Was Pentecost about Jesus, or the Holy Ghost? It is possible for modern Christians to become so excited about the experience of receiving the Holy Ghost that it might appear they forget about Jesus. Peter did not make that mistake for he knew Pentecost was about Firstfruits. After Passover, the next big Jewish event was counting the sheaf, beginning on the day of Firstfruits—which appears to have coincided with Jesus’ resurrection. Our Lord Jesus, “risen from the dead,” has “become the firstfruits” of those old-covenant believers who have died in faith (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). His resurrection marked the beginning of a celebration that peaked at Pentecost. The 120 disciples were then the firstfruits of the second harvest under the new covenant (James 1:18). Indeed, all who are in Christ now “have the firstfruits of the Spirit” (Romans 8:23).

### C. Salvation Is Available to All the World

Pentecost was not meant to be only for the Jews. Though it began with the Jews, now it is for everyone of every race. It is a time to celebrate after forty-nine days of solemn reflection. In effect, this fifty days of purpose helped refocus the Jewish believer each year.

Lest any think this event was only for the Jews, Simon Peter stood up and announced, “The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off” (Acts 2:39). It was not localized or gender-, racial-, or age-specific. Pentecost is for “as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

The grain, loaves of bread, and sacrificial animals were presented before the Lord as wave, or presentation, offerings. When individuals become consecrated to Christ our Firstfruits, they are presented before the Lord

in the waters of baptism. Their identity and new devotion come with the new name they take on by faith in Jesus. It is the Lord’s desire to “present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).

The presentation offering before the Lord was a way of remembering, a way of giving thanks, and a way of focusing attention on the One who deserves all the glory. When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, the people sat before the Lord, speaking in languages they had never learned. Some in the streets overheard and understood and were amazed that these people were speaking the wonderful works of God. By responding to the message of salvation Peter preached in Acts 2:38, everyone who so chooses can take part in Pentecost and enter His presence with exceeding joy.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The Sabbath Day reminded the Jews of the One who created everything. The Feast of Weeks reminded them who their Creator was seven times over as they gave thanks for a new spring crop with both major grain harvests in Israel. How much more aware we should be of our Creator in this time of a spiritual harvest as He remakes His own creation.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was the firstfruits of a great harvest of souls still going on today. We have so much to celebrate that this event does not cling to just a calendar day. Every day is Pentecost for those who have partaken of the Firstfruits, our Lord Jesus Christ. We feast on His life-giving power.

This is not just a celebration for a niche group of people; it is for everybody. We must invite the world to this festivity. When they find the joy of the Holy Ghost, they too will dance, shout, and sing that the harvest has come. ■

## REFLECTIONS

- Should we be told we “have to” rejoice at Pentecost? How do we have more incentive to celebrate than an agricultural society just coming out of winter?
- How is Jesus the Firstfruits of the harvest?
- How do we help remind ourselves of what God has done in the past and what He will do in the future?