

The Purpose of Pentecost

John 15:26—27; 16:4b—15

Introduction

As I was thinking about Pentecost this year, I started thinking about the meaning and purpose of the celebration. We often celebrate what happened, the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit upon all Jesus' disciples in the Upper Room, their suddenly being able to speak in tongues, and how that drew a large crowd of people to hear Peter's sermon. We think of how three thousand people were added to the church that day by the Spirit through Peter's sermon, so we think of it as the beginning of the church. Some Christians have focused on one aspect of it, the speaking in tongues, and formed a doctrine that says all Christians should speak in tongues. If they don't, they're not "complete" Christians, for they obviously don't have the Holy Spirit. Taking the name "Pentecostal", they have seriously skewed the meaning of the celebration. So, what is the real meaning, the real purpose?

Pentecost Is an Ancient Israelite Festival

First, Pentecost is not original with the church. It was a festival commanded by the Lord in all five books of Moses. It is the Feast of Weeks, celebrated seven weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which included Passover. It was one of the three festivals where the people were required to come to the temple at Jerusalem to worship (Read **Deuteronomy 16: 16**). That's why there were so many people speaking so many languages that day. Worshipers of Yahweh were coming from all over the known world as required by Law.

Pentecost and Passover

When we think of Passover, we think how Jesus used the Passover meal, called the *seder*, to institute a new celebration we call the Lord's Supper. The Passover celebrated the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of slavery to the Egyptians by the blood of the Passover lamb. The Lord's Supper celebrates the deliverance of all people from the bondage of slavery to sin and the devil by the blood of *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)*. Jesus amplified and fulfilled the Passover.

The Original Meaning of Pentecost

The Feast of Weeks involved a wave offering of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, a burnt offering of commitment, a sin offering for forgiveness, and a peace offering. But what stands out is the wave offering (Read **Leviticus 23:16—17**). This and the thanksgiving offering of **Leviticus 7** are the only offerings using leavened bread.

Leaven and Unleavened

Passover was the anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt; the Feast of Weeks, seven weeks later, is the anniversary of the giving of the Law. Leaven was not used for Passover because there wasn't time for the bread to rise. Also, leaven is symbolic of sin, especially that of pride.

Giving the Law

According to Jewish scholars, the giving of the Law elevates the world to the spiritual level that existed before the sin of Adam. They say that, as then, we are now able to use this evil inclination as a positive force. That's the Jewish take on *Shavuot*, what we know as Pentecost.

A Wave Offering

The wave offering was a thanksgiving offering. It was waved in the four directions, up, and down to acknowledge the One who created the four directions, heaven and earth. It also served to bless the four winds and the dew so they would be beneficial.

Fulfillment in Christ

As we said about Passover, Christ fulfills the sacrifices of the Old Testament. At Pentecost, He gave us the Holy Spirit, who *will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8)*, just as the Law does. He will also *bear witness about [Jesus] (John 15:26)* and *guide [us] into all truth (John 16:13)*. On Pentecost, the Holy spirit was poured out on all the world, to fulfill His mission of spreading the Law of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. He fills all Christians, so He may accomplish this mission through us. That is the purpose of Pentecost.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
