

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

God's Festivals Series

BICOG

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

As hard as it is for others to accept, only God's called and chosen people understand the purpose for human existence. The annual Festival of Pentecost explains why God is working with only a few people in this age.

We have a precious heritage in God's Church; a firm understanding of our incredible human potential.

We alone know the Creator is refashioning our human thinking into His own God plane attitude of mind. His goal is to change our mortal bodies and imperfect minds into spiritually perfect bodies and minds.

What a staggering plan God has set in motion! Today, He is actively working with tens of thousands of human minds, out of all the billions on earth. But in the world tomorrow, literally the whole world will participate in God's spiritual creation.

The Festival of Pentecost tells us what stage God's plan is in now and exactly what He is doing on this earth!

God's truth hidden

For thousands of years after creation, with the exception of a handful of people God called for special purposes, humans lived and died without any inkling as to their ultimate destiny. The knowledge of salvation was not preached to the world. The plan of God simply was not understood. The message of Pentecost was sealed shut.

Consider how tightly God slammed the lid of ignorance over the meaning of Pentecost. Ancient Israel was God's chosen people. But they did not grasp their true spiritual heritage.

Even the ancient House of Judah, who handled and studied the scrolls containing God's plan, at best caught only a faint glimmer of man's ultimate destiny.

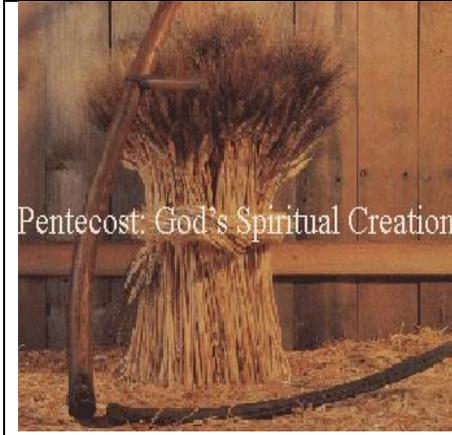
Why? Because God wanted to show that without His Holy Spirit, man could not achieve his incredible potential. God did not offer His spirit to ancient Israel as a *whole*.

But during all those millennia of man's spiritual ignorance, God was laying the foundation for a spiritual Temple - His Church. Pentecost represents that Temple, composed of spirit-begotten children of God.

Paul said to the Corinthian church, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the *Spirit of God dwells in you?*" (I Corinthians 3:16).

Paul wrote this epistle around A.D. 55. This understanding that humans were to become members of the God Family was exciting and new to the first-century Church.

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!



God's Holy Days relate to the agricultural seasons in Palestine. Pentecost, God's third festival, falls in late spring/early summer, when the early, smaller grain harvest occurred. Pentecost shows God is working with only a small group of humans now, in anticipation of the large, fall harvest of the rest of mankind, pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

God's purpose is spiritual it is inaccessible to humans without God's spirit working in their minds. Therefore God's purpose is misunderstood by nearly all of mankind!

Before that time, God had purposely hidden this truth from mankind in general!

Hundreds of years earlier, Isaiah was told: "Go, and tell this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, *but do not* perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart" (Isaiah 6:9-10).

The Eternal had poured out a deep spiritual sleep on Israel and hid His face from His people (Isaiah 29:9-10). Israel's sins had cut the nation off from God (Isaiah 59:2). No Savior had yet come to cleanse the people of sin. Neither had the spirit of God been given to enlighten and empower human minds.

Only when these two events finally occurred did the meaning of Pentecost come clear.

After the northern House of Israel forsook God, the southern kingdom of the House of Judah held on to God's law, however imperfectly. The people could read the Scripture they had and know that at some, future time - in a mysterious period "at the end of the days" (Daniel 12:13) - God would bring His people back to the land of Israel. The nation would then live in a virtual paradise as His chosen people (Isaiah 11). In some vague way, they knew that in the future, these physical descendants would follow God's way and be blessed by Him (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

Judah totally missed the crucial events that had to come first, however. The Eternal was to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. Then, the very mind of God would be given to the tens of thousands making up the first fruits of God's creation.

Almost no one understood these two important steps, portrayed by the festivals of Passover and Pentecost.

Mystery of the ages

Not even those scribes who preserved and copied the Old Testament could see the glory God was preparing for man. God had locked up the treasure map of salvation in His spiritual vault, which

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

could be opened only by a certain special key - the Holy Spirit. Paul likened it to a deep mystery (I Corinthians 2:7-9).

There was a reason why God's purpose could not be understood. The gift of the Holy Spirit was not to be given to men and women until the Pentecost after Jesus' crucifixion. Without this spiritual enlightenment, God's plan would have seemed to them, as it seems to the world today, strange and odd.

Paul explained it this way: "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (verse 14).

Since God's purpose is spiritual, humans cannot accept that purpose without God's enlightening spirit working in their minds. But that spirit was not given to God's New Testament Church until the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31. Therefore God's true purpose, of necessity, was misunderstood by all except a *handful* God called *before* that time.

Peter tells us the prophets caught a glimmer of what God was doing, yet even they did not fully understand: "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

"To them it was revealed that, *not to themselves*, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven - things which angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:10-12). The prophets made up a handful of exceptions, called ahead of time to fulfill specific responsibilities. They became part of the foundation of this new creation that God was in the process of molding (Ephesians 2:20). It was to be a single Church composed of many individual members.

Turning point in history

Then, at long last, the fullness of God's time came in the year 4 B.C. In that year a staggering and then incomprehensible event occurred. God became a man. The Logos or Word who created all things emptied Himself of divinity. He was made flesh and lived among humans as Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1-14).

John put it in these words: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (verse 14). Paul said it this way: "[Jesus] being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:6-7, New International Version).

Jesus, through His death, paid the penalty for sin. That broke down the wall of partition between man and God. The Holy Spirit became available to those God called (John 6:44). In those few, God began the process of salvation - ahead of the vast majority of humans - for a special purpose!

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

God's called people could now grow in godly character and prepare to ultimately be changed in mind and body, inheriting eternal life at the first resurrection. The spiritual meaning of Pentecost - that human minds can learn to think as God does - became clear through the miraculous occurrences of that benchmark day in A.D. 31.

The idea that humans could *become* the *Godkind* was an astounding new concept. As Paul put it: "By revelation He made known to me the mystery...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:3-5).

The amazing truth was that all humanity - not just Israelites - could partake of God's grace. For the people of God throughout the centuries since, the day of Pentecost has been a yearly memorial meant to remind us that God has a specific purpose on earth, and that we as God's specially chosen people are the first to be able to take part in that purpose.

Pentecost at Mount Sinai

Pentecost is also the anniversary of the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. At that time, the Eternal made a covenant with ancient Israel. If they would obey Him, Israel would be God's special people. God promised to be their protector and guide. He would bring them prosperity, health and protection from enemies. Some of these promises are found in Exodus 23:20-31.

The *Pentecost covenant* was then ratified. "Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the Lord has said we will do, and be *obedient*.' And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words'" (Exodus 24:7-8). Pentecost thus represented a covenant in which God selected a special people bound to Him through their acceptance of a system of law predicated on the written Ten Commandments. That Pentecost at Mount Sinai was a landmark day. For the first time in human history, the Eternal had chosen a specific people to represent Him among the nations of the world. He had given them His form of government and laws by which to live.

Nearly 1,500 years later, Pentecost again came to represent the covenant. The law was delivered *a second time* to a nation call "Israel." But this time the covenant people were a *spiritual* nation or Church, and the law was written not on tables of stone but in human minds through the Holy Spirit.



On the day of the Giving of the Law, was the day when God wrote the Ten commandments on Stone. It was the Day of Pentecost. In the New Testament, God writes the Law on our hearts. This began on the Day of Pentecost as well.

Pentecost marks the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. On Pentecost in A.D. 31, God poured out His holy spirit on His New Testament Church. God's spirit enables His people to keep His law and serve Him.

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

Pentecost now represents the coming of the Holy Spirit to create God's New Testament Church. It represents the beginning of God's spiritual creation

Peter himself stood up on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 and quoted a prophecy from Joel "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on flesh" (Acts 2:17). What happened on that Pentecost only began to fulfill that prophecy. For the last 2000 years God has called only a *limited* number of people to receive His spirit. They represent the small spring harvest depicted by Pentecost.

In the near future, Jesus Christ will return to earth to establish this same new, spiritual covenant with all humans!

A New Covenant

Paul, quoting Jeremiah, said: "For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; *I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:* and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:" (Hebrews 8:8-10).

The times when salvation comes to the *whole human race* are pictured by the Festival of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

The New Covenant actually represents God's ultimate re-creative act within the mind of the individual person. It began on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 when God called out individuals to be part of His Church. That was the start of "spiritual Israel." We are part of that spiritual nation (Galatians 6:16).

Peter says of us, as well as of the true Christians who lived in his day, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (I Peter 2:9).

Peter said on Pentecost: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).

Throughout the long centuries between the Pentecost when God gave His law on Mount Sinai and the Pentecost when God began His true Church, humans in general were not privileged to understand what God was doing.

Israel was told to keep the day of Pentecost holy to God (Exodus 23:16, 34:22, Leviticus 23:15-22, Numbers 28:26, Deuteronomy 16:10, 16). But the ancient Israelites had no understanding of what it might mean in a *spiritual* context.

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

Treasures Old and New

As we prepare to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, we members of God's Church need to ask ourselves a crucial question: How can we keep God's Holy Days year after year, yet never get bored with them?

How can the ministry cover the same scriptures about the same festivals and not simply cover old ground?

Has God made it possible for us to look forward with anticipation and excitement to observing His feasts every year?

One of Christ's parables answers these questions.

Notice what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 13:52: "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (New International Version).

We know there are only so many verses that specifically mention any one Holy Day. After a while, we get to know those pretty well. We treasure them for the meanings they reveal and for the promises they make. Aren't these the "old treasures" we get to look at each year?

But God also provides "new treasures." Personally, I am amazed at the deeper understanding God reveals each time God's Church observes a Holy Day. In my job as a preacher, as I study and prepare the sermon for a feast day, new tidbits of understanding, new connections, new depths of meaning appear. "Why didn't I see that connection last year?" I often ask myself. "Have I only forgotten that I knew that fact?" "No," I conclude, "this is simply some new treasure God is providing for His people."

Yes, each time we appear before God on one of His feasts, He provides treasures through His "teachers of the law." They bring out the basic truths God's Church has long understood, so we may savor and appreciate and renew our knowledge of them. Then God gives more - new insights to excite and encourage us and help us develop more of God's own mind in ourselves.

Let's give God thanks that His plan and His Kingdom are like that! God will continually provide us with new treasures and pleasures forever (Psalm 16:11). He tells us, "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Be alert to new understanding God will offer at the Feast of Pentecost!

The wave-sheaf offering

The connection between the giving of the Ten Commandments on Pentecost and the spiritual meaning of the day was hazy. In retrospect we see that this giving of the law prefigured the second giving of the law in its spiritual fullness. The second time, it was poured out into the hearts of men and women through the holy spirit.

The most complete Old Testament explanation of Pentecost is given in Leviticus 23:9-22. Here we are told how to count Pentecost to pinpoint the proper day of its observance. The reference point on which to begin falls within the Days of Unleavened Bread. As we'll see, the connection between these two festivals is vital.

During the Days of Unleavened Bread the following was to occur: "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it" (verses 10-11).

The correct day for Pentecost depends on counting from the time of the wave-sheaf offering: "And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath [between the two Holy Days of Unleavened Bread], from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering" (verse 15).

There was great spiritual significance to this. The wave sheaf came from the very first gleaning of the spring barley harvest. The Jews traditionally cut a sheaf, beat out the grain and ground it into flour. Then the priest offered the flour to the Eternal. The priest shall wave the

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf” (verse 11).

On that same day, a male lamb of the first year was to be offered (verse 12). Both the male lamb and the wave sheaf represent Jesus Christ. The first shows He was the sacrifice for sin. The second points out that Jesus was the first of the first fruits (I Corinthians 15:20, 23, Colossians 1:18).

The first sheaf was *waved* early on a Sunday morning. Once it was waved before God and accepted, the harvest could be used. Only *after* Jesus was crucified, resurrected and accepted by the Father as the wave-sheaf offering for sin could other humans be “harvested” by becoming God’s people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual meaning of Pentecost

On the Sunday morning after His crucifixion and resurrection,

Jesus told Mary, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’” (John 20:17).

Here we have a perfect spiritual analogy!

The risen Christ was preparing Himself as the wave sheaf ready to be waved before or accepted by God. After ascending to heaven and then returning, Christ told His disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Christ had officially been accepted by God as the Savior of all humanity.

The hitherto work of salvation could begin. Christ told the disciples, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

That “power,” the Holy Spirit, would come several weeks later on the day of Pentecost.

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SABBATH
				Passover A.D. 31	1st Day U.S.		Sheaf cut shortly Before sunset
WaveSheaf Offered	1	2	3	7th Day U.S. 4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
	43	44	45	46	47	48	49
Pentecost	50						

How to Count Pentecost

Pentecost is always to be observed on a Sunday, which is the 50th day after the cutting of the wave sheaf during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

To prefigure the imminent reality and to make an official promise, Jesus engaged in a symbolic act with His disciples on the Sunday evening after being accepted by the Father: “Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:21-22).

Pentecost shows that humans cannot be given the Holy Spirit until they are cleared of sin. Pentecost also tells us that God’s spiritual creation depends on the Holy Spirit working in the human mind. Finally, Pentecost represents those few people God has called in this age, the small harvest of humanity.

To the Church of God at Rome Paul said, “We also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23).

Spirit of God *in man*

Paul told the Corinthian church that “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:13). This spirit-filled body of believers, or the Church, was begun on the day of Pentecost.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit enables a human mind to be motivated by God’s thinking. Paul said, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Paul told the Ephesians, “Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Pentecost reminds us that God is *working* in us, remolding and reshaping our character. We should be yielding to His spirit and renouncing the works of darkness.

No scripture better summarizes the Pentecost spirit than this one written to the Galatian brethren: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, *but Christ lives in me*; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Pentecost reminds us that as a result of the coming of the Holy Spirit into our minds, an incredible war is being fought. On one side is the enemy - human nature, allied with the evil pulls of Satan. On the other side is the spirit of God in us, allied with a humble and yielded mind.

Pentecost shows us that we can serve God and keep His law through the power of the Holy Spirit.

PENTECOST: God Begins a Spiritual Creation!

Pentecost in the Christian life

Before the day of Pentecost, it was not possible to understand that character grows out of the spiritual war taking place in the converted mind. In fact, no such war had taken place, since no mind had God's spirit (except for the very few mentioned earlier). People simply did what came "naturally."

Since that Pentecost described in Acts 2, those called by God have come to see that a fierce struggle does indeed rage in the converted mind. The good news, however, is that we win. Through the spirit of God, humans can master and defeat sin.

Before Pentecost, men and women simply did not have the desire or power to mount an effective campaign against sin. Not even God's law given on tablets of stone during that ancient Pentecost at Mount Sinai could help in the struggle. But all that changed when the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost A.D. 31.

Paul wrote: "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the ***righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us*** who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3-4).

As we celebrate this Pentecost, let us remember that sin should not have dominion or control over the converted Christian. By the power of God's spirit we can *put to death* the sinful deeds of the natural mind (verse 13). Then we can say with the apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

The message of Pentecost is that we are the first fruits of God's creation and that we "may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II Peter 1:4).

Our eyes are on Christ, "who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the *power that works in us*" (Ephesians 3:20) - the power of God's Holy Spirit!