

The Day of Pentecost

Read through this lesson (in stages if you prefer), looking up as many of the referenced scriptures as you can as these support the text and will enable you to prove this material for yourself.

In these Holy Day Lessons we have been learning that God has a plan for mankind. I'm sure most of you understand that God's Plan is to give everyone the chance to live forever in His Kingdom and be part of His "Family".¹ **2 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 1:5; Hebrews 2:10-11** and **1 John 3:2** all talk about the family relationship God wants to have with us. **2 Peter 1:4** explains that God wants us to share in His *divine nature* - this means that when we become part of God's Family we will be composed of spirit like God is.

But as you all know by now, this isn't something that will happen all at once. God has designed His Plan to unfold step by step and the Holy Days (or Feasts) are full of important meaning and symbolism that teach us how He designed His Plan to be accomplished.

Christ Makes It Possible

The first Feasts that we celebrate each year are the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (**Leviticus 23:4-8**). The Passover reminds us that Jesus died so that everyone can have the chance to be in God's Family. The Bible tells us that everyone has sinned - and that the penalty for that sin is death (**Romans 6:23**). This is not just referring to the fact that we all die at the end of our physical lives (because of Adam's sin), but also to the "second death" - a *permanent* death that will last forever - when the wicked are thrown into the Lake of Fire (**Revelation 20:14-15**). This is something we all deserve, because we are ALL sinners! But it's not what God wants - and that's why He sent His Son to this earth. Jesus came to die for us (**Hebrews 2:9**) and to pay the death penalty on our behalf so we don't have to die, and so we can live forever in God's Family.

The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that because of Jesus' sacrifice our sins can be forgiven and we can be "cleansed" of sin (**Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7**). God then considers us as "unleavened" - or without sin (**1 Corinthians 5:7**). This is very important because in order to be part of God's Family we have to be "without sin". God can't have anyone in His Family who sins (**1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:7-8**), and of course we all do. But once we've come to understand that Jesus died for us individually, and we have repented of our sins and been baptised, then God forgives us of every last one of our sins (**Psalms 103:2-3, 10-12**). We now stand "clean" before Him - even if we do still slip occasionally and sin after we've been converted.

¹ The Bible reveals that God is creating a "family" and that His Plan is to make us part of that family. For example, **2 Peter 1:4** explains that God wants us to share in His divine nature and **2 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 1:5; Hebrews 2:10-11** and **1 John 3:2** describe the "family" relationship He wants to have with us.

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Eating unleavened bread during the Days of Unleavened Bread reminds us that we still have our part to play. We need to stop sinning (doing the wrong things and breaking God's Law) and make sure that we always do what God wants us to. Once we've been converted (made a decision to live God's Way of Life, submitted ourselves to Him, been baptised and received His Holy Spirit) then we become a "new" person and we are to live in a "new" way - God's Way (**Romans 6:1-6; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:1-10**).

Choosing to Live God's Way

You young people are not yet converted, but because you are the children of Church members you have already been "sanctified" or set-apart by God (**1 Corinthians 7:14**).² This means that you can choose to live God's Way of Life if you want to - and God will bless you for doing so. Although it may be years before you are baptised,³ you are still old enough to determine in your own mind to live this "new" way in the best way that you can. And God will give you the strength to do so - if that's what you desire.

The New Testament is full of instruction about how we are to live this new and godly life - instruction that is all based on the Ten Commandments that God gave to ancient Israel through Moses (**Exodus 20:1-17**). And this leads us nicely to the next Holy Day and the next step in God's Plan, the Day of Pentecost - the day on which, according to Jewish tradition, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses! I'm sure you all realise, of course, that the Ten Commandments were not just for the Israelites. They are God's Law for ALL mankind, for ALL time, everywhere!⁴ And the Day of Pentecost shows us HOW we can keep the Ten Commandments in the way that God wants us to.

Leviticus 23:9-22 records how the Day of Pentecost was observed in the Old Testament, but we need to start in the New Testament to find out what part this Holy Day plays in God's plan of salvation for mankind.

Pentecost in the New Testament

The good news of the Bible is that three days and three nights after Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins, God resurrected Him. This was the most wonderful thing that has ever happened in the history of mankind! The Bible tells us that it is because Jesus was resurrected after *His* death that we can have the chance to live again after *we* die (**1 Corinthians 15:20-22**). Because Jesus lives forever, we can live forever too! (**John 14:19**). If Jesus hadn't been resurrected, there would be no hope for us (**1 Corinthians 15:12-14**). God's Plan would have failed and there would be no Millennium and

² See the 1st Teen Lesson, "A Special Relationship" for more information about this.

³ Baptism is not something to enter into lightly. It is for those who are mature enough to "count the cost" and understand the seriousness of the commitment they are making. Therefore, it is a step for young adults and grown-ups rather than young people. You can find more information about baptism in the series of lessons for older teens.

⁴ This will be covered in more detail in the Teen Lessons.

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no Kingdom! But God's Plan will NEVER fail and what God wants WILL come to pass! Remember, that's why God sent Jesus to this earth in the first place. Jesus came to die for us and then be raised to life, so that EVERYONE could have the chance to live forever (John 3:16-17; Romans 5:8-10; Romans 6:23).

After Jesus was resurrected, He appeared to His disciples and, as you can imagine, they were overjoyed to see Him again! (Matthew 28:5-8; Luke 24:41). Jesus spent 40 days with them before it was time for Him to go to heaven to be with His Father, and during that time He taught them many things about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:2-3). Jesus had previously explained that He had to leave and had told them why (John 16:7; John 14:1-6, 25-29). But the disciples had been sad to think that they wouldn't see Him again (John 16:5-6). After all, Jesus was their best friend and they had spent 3½ years of their lives, living and working with Him. Who would teach them now? Who would comfort them? Who would show them what God wanted them to do?

Thankfully, God the Father and Jesus had already sorted this out - and everything was happening exactly according to God's Plan! Jesus reminded His disciples of this and told them to wait in Jerusalem until the Day of Pentecost. Something very special was going to happen that day - they were going to receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit, just as God had promised! (Acts 1:4-5). And the *Holy Spirit* would be their friend and teacher. *It* would show them what God wanted them to do (John 14:16-17, 26; John 16:13). *It* would help them keep God's commandments because God's Laws would now be WRITTEN on their hearts and minds! (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 10:15-17). God's Spirit would empower them to take on God's very own character! And because they would have God's Spirit IN them, Jesus would always be there with them in Spirit, even though He was no longer there in person (1 John 4:13; John 14:18-20; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 13:5-6). When they realised this, the disciples stopped feeling sad and were able to rejoice when Jesus left them to be with His Father (Luke 25:50-53).

The Arrival of the Holy Spirit

The disciples followed Jesus' instructions and waited in Jerusalem until Pentecost. And what a day that turned out to be! Here's what happened:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a noise came from heaven. It sounded like a strong wind blowing. This noise filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something that looked like flames of fire. The flames were separated and stood over each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak different languages. The Holy Spirit was giving them the power to speak these languages (Acts 2:1-4, NCV).⁵

⁵ This was a special miracle that God allowed for that particular Day of Pentecost. It isn't what usually happens when people receive the Holy Spirit!

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Many other people had also gathered in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Pentecost that day. They had come from different countries and spoke different languages, but they were all Jews by birth or Proselytes (non-Jewish people who had converted to the Jewish religion). When they heard the disciples speaking about the great things that God had done, they were amazed because they could understand what the disciples were saying. This was a miracle - not only of the speaking, but also of the hearing! But it was also confusing because they didn't know what it meant. How could these men suddenly speak in different languages? It just wasn't possible! Some of the people marvelled at what they were hearing, but others started making fun of the disciples and said they were drunk!

So Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, stood up and said in a loud voice:

My fellow Jews, and all of you who are in Jerusalem, listen to me. Pay attention to what I have to say. These men are not drunk, as you think: it is only nine o'clock in the morning! But Joel the prophet wrote about what is happening here today: "God says: In the last days I will give my Spirit freely to all kinds of people...then anyone who asks the Lord for help will be saved" (Acts 2:14-17, 21, NCV; for a fuller version read verses 17-21).

And here we begin to learn a little about what the Day of Pentecost pictures in God's Plan. You see, all of the followers of Jesus so far had been Jews or Proselytes. But on this Day of Pentecost, the very BEGINNING of God's Church in the New Testament, God was showing that salvation (the opportunity to have our sins forgiven and live forever in God's Family) wasn't just for the Jews! It was for EVERYONE (Acts 2:21; Acts 28:28; Titus 2:11).

God's Spirit Available to ALL Those God Calls

God's Spirit had previously been made available to a very few people whom God had been working with - people like Abraham, Moses and King David. But it had never been made more *generally* available. God's Spirit would now be given freely, which means that the way to salvation was now open to all those God would call and who would respond to His calling (John 6:44-45; Acts 2:37-39). This is something that was only possible through Jesus Christ and because of what He did for us (John 3:16; Acts 4:10-12).

God's Spirit gives us His power (Acts 1:8; 2 Timothy 1:7) and His loving nature (Romans 5:5). He gives it to us to help us live His way of life after we have repented of our sins and been baptised. And once we've received God's Spirit we become *His* people! At this time, you young people don't have the Holy Spirit IN you because you aren't converted - you haven't yet gone through the process that leads to baptism and receiving God's Spirit. But because you are sanctified, God already considers you one of His! And if you are willing to obey God, then the Holy Spirit will be WITH you to give

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you the extra help you need to live His Way of Life, until the time comes when you can be converted and baptised and receive God's Spirit for yourselves (**John 14:15-17**).

The Bible tells us that it's only those people who have God's Spirit in them who will be resurrected to eternal life (**Romans 8:8-11,14; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:13-14**). But God's Plan has always been that one day everyone will have the chance to receive that Spirit and live forever as part of His Family. This is something that the prophets wrote about in the Old Testament (see for example, **Joel 2:28-32; Isaiah 49:6**). And it's also something that is revealed in the names that are used for the Day of Pentecost in the Old Testament.

The Feast of Weeks

One of these names is the *Feast of Weeks*. This name reflects the fact that we have to COUNT to find out WHEN we should celebrate Pentecost (see **Deuteronomy 16:9-10; Leviticus 23:15-16**). God tells us exactly WHEN we should keep the other Holy Days, but to find out when Pentecost is, we need to count 50 days from the day after the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. This is where the name Pentecost comes from. It is the Greek word⁶ for "50th". And when we "count 50" as God instructed, we discover that Pentecost is always on a Sunday!

On that day after the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Israelites had to make a wave sheaf offering (**Leviticus 23:9-12**). This was an offering of the first grain or fruit (the firstfruits) from the barley harvest that took place at that time of year. We understand today that this looked forward to - or was a picture of - Jesus Christ, who was the "first fruit" of God to be resurrected to eternal life after death (**1 Corinthians 15:20**).

The Day of the Firstfruits

The Day of Pentecost is also called the *Day of Firstfruits* in the Old Testament (**Numbers 28:26**). From this we learn that Jesus is not the only firstfruit. There are more! Jesus is the first of the firstfruits, but everyone who obeys God and has God's Spirit is also a firstfruit (**Romans 8:23; Revelation 14:4**).

Pentecost was known as the *day of the firstfruits* because it fell at the time of the smaller, early harvest of the year. During this harvest, the farmers gathered in the first crops, which were called the firstfruits. This pictures something else in God's Plan - He is not calling the whole world to understand His truth at this time! God is only calling the "firstfruits" (**1 Corinthians 16:15, NKJ; James 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:13**) - a few people⁷ - who will be resurrected at Christ's return, and who are being prepared

⁶ Greek is the language that the New Testament was written in.

⁷ 1 Peter 2:9 refers to our calling; Luke 12:32 describes the people of God as a LITTLE flock (few in number).

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now to help Christ as He establishes God's Kingdom on this earth (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Revelation 5:10; Revelation 20:6).

The Feast of Harvest

The final name used for Pentecost in the Old Testament is the *Feast of Harvest* or *Ingathering* (Exodus 23:16). This verse reminds us that there were two harvests in the year; the smaller one in the spring (just before Pentecost) when the first crops or firstfruits were harvested, and a larger one in the fall (just before the Feast of Tabernacles) when the rest of the crops were harvested.⁸ In God's Plan for mankind there are also two harvests - two SPIRITUAL harvests - and they picture the time when God's Plan comes to fruition and people are resurrected to become part of God's very own family.

The first harvest happens when Jesus Christ returns to this earth and the firstfruits (God's people throughout the ages) are resurrected to eternal life in God's Family.⁹ The second harvest happens during and after the Millennium (pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day) when EVERYONE else who has ever lived will have the chance to become part of God's Family.¹⁰

Conclusion

The Feast of Pentecost is a very special Holy Day that teaches us many things about God's Plan. It reminds us that God has given us His Holy Spirit to help us keep His commandments and live His way of life - and to make it possible for us to be part of His Family in the future. It also shows us that God is only giving His Spirit to relatively few people now - those who are the firstfruits - people He has called to be part of His Church at this time. But most importantly, the Day of Pentecost reveals that God wants to give His Spirit to *everyone* in the world. And one day He WILL make it available to ALL those who choose to live His Way of Life!¹¹ What a wonderful day it will be when EVERYONE in the world has had the opportunity to receive God's Holy Spirit and become part of His Family - and God's plan of salvation has finally been accomplished!

⁸ The celebration of the Holy Days was linked to the harvest seasons (see Exodus 23:14-16) and the Bible reveals a parallel between the physical harvests and a future "spiritual" harvest (see, for example, Luke 10:2; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; John 12:48; Revelation 14:14-15).

⁹ You can find information about this in "The Holy Days and God's Plan" and "The Feast of Trumpets" Holy Day lessons.

¹⁰ You can find information about this in "The Holy Days and God's Plan" and "The Last Great Day" Holy Day lessons.

¹¹ This is covered in "The Holy Days and God's Plan" and "The Last Great Day" lessons in this series.