

Relationship of the Feasts of Firstfruits and Pentecost

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Soli Deo Gloria!

Introduction to the Feasts of the LORD

Israel's 7 annual feasts (cf. Leviticus 23; Numbers 28-29) are imputed with significance in three ways: 1) each commemorated important event(s) in the history of the nation of Israel (and in some cases the world), 2) each was tied to the progression of the fall (i.e., winter) and spring (i.e., summer) agricultural cycles in Israel, and 3) each will be fulfilled in a topological/prophetic sense. The first 4 of the feasts have been fulfilled. Passover was fulfilled at the cross by the sacrifice of Christ as the lamb of God (cf. Jn1:29; 1Cor5:8); the Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled by the burial of Christ (cf. Jn12:24); the Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled by the resurrection of Christ (cf. 1Cor15:20); and the Feast of Weeks was fulfilled by the events on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Act2:1). Note that the prophetic fulfillments of the first 4 feasts occurred on the very day in which those feasts were being celebrated, such that this pattern is expected to continue for the 3 remaining feasts. The last 3 feasts await a future fulfillment during the time of the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and the Millennial Kingdom. The already fulfilled feasts of Firstfruits and Weeks (a.k.a. Pentecost) have an important relationship that is generally overlooked, which has resulted in a poor understanding of what Pentecost was really all about; exploring that relationship is the subject of this article.

Historical Fulfillments of Firstfruits and Pentecost

From the agricultural perspective, **the Feast of Firstfruits** occurs in the spring when the first ears of barley appear on the stalks. As a part of the observance of the feast, the priest would wave a "sheaf"¹ (i.e., a handful of stalks with the ears attached) of barley before the LORD (Lev23:10-11); its acceptance by the LORD indicated that a full harvest at its appointed time was assured. In its prophetic fulfillment, the resurrection of Christ was the first resurrection from the dead in the history of the world (1Cor15:20), and the LORD's acceptance of it indicates that the future resurrection of all who are "in Christ" is assured (1Cor15:22), albeit "every man in his own order" (1Cor15:23; i.e., the resurrections of different categories of saints will not all occur at the same time). The Feast of Firstfruits was to be observed "on the morrow after the sabbath" during the week of Unleavened Bread (Lev23:11), such that it was always celebrated on the Sunday immediately following Passover; obviously, the resurrection of Christ occurred on the Sunday (i.e., the first day of the week; Matt28:1) following His crucifixion on Passover in the year 32 AD².

From the agricultural perspective, **Pentecost** occurs in the early summer at the time of the Barley harvest (i.e., the conclusion of the fall/winter growing cycle). Observance of the day of Pentecost was reckoned as follows: "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

¹ Quotations of Scripture are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

² The chronology of Sir Robert Anderson (*The Coming Prince*, Trumpet Press, 2014), which dates the crucifixion of Christ in the year 32 AD, is accepted as accurate.

number fifty days"; in other words, seven weeks, a week of weeks (hence the name, Feast of Weeks), was counted from the observance of the Feast of Firstfruits, with Pentecost celebrated on "the morrow after" this week of weeks, or on the fiftieth day (hence the name Pentecost, Greek for "fiftieth"). This formula results in Pentecost always occurring on a Sunday, just like Firstfruits. Thus, Firstfruits and Pentecost are closely connected in their formulae for calculating the days of their observances, and both always occur on Sunday (which is not true for any other feast).

As part of the observance of Pentecost, the priest would wave two "loaves ... baked with leaven" (Lev23:17), which are also called "the bread of the firstfruits" (Lev23:20). Of significance is that the promise associated with Firstfruits of a full harvest has been realized; what existed as a few separate and disparate kernels of grain at Firstfruits has culminated in complete loaves of baked bread (i.e., an utterly unique union as an organic body; Cp., 1Cor15:37-38). Thus, the prophetic fulfillment of Pentecost is intimately connected to the consummation of a work that began at Firstfruits. Specifically, the resurrection of Christ on Firstfruits initiated a divine activity that was to culminate in Christ's ascension to Heaven and His subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit, an outcome that Christ Himself said was only possible after He was "glorified" (Jn7:38-39; 16:7). Indeed, it was on the celebration³ of Pentecost (Act2:1-4) that the Holy Spirit was given in a profoundly new manner and ministry. That new ministry included the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit in which individual believers (placing their faith in Christ's death for their sins, His burial, and His resurrection; cf. 1Cor15:1-4) would be incorporated into the Body of Christ (1Cor12:13); that is, the prophetic fulfillment of Pentecost was the birth of the Church (cf. Eph1:22-23; Col1:18).

Modern Christianity tends to view Pentecost as being primarily about the Holy Spirit, but this is a scripturally distorted view. The giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a means to an end, and that end is the building of the Church, the Body of Christ. The resurrection of Christ on the Feast of Firstfruits set in motion a series of events that would culminate in the Church of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt16:18), whose primary mission today is to testify to His resurrection (cf. Act1:22; 1Cor15:1-4).

A Future Fulfillment of Pentecost?

The Feast of Pentecost was fulfilled by the birth of the Church on the day of its observance in 32 AD. However, there may be an aspect of Pentecost that still awaits fulfillment. The Church, including the dispensation of Grace during which it will be built, was a "mystery"⁴ unrevealed to and unknown by the prophets of the O.T. (cf. Eph3:1-12). Thus, the birth of the Church on Pentecost placed the prophetic program of Israel on pause, inserting a great parenthesis (i.e., the Church Age) into the previously revealed plan of God. The resumption of God's prophetic program for Israel awaits the completion of the Church (Rom11:25) and its pre-tribulational rapture to remove it from this world (cf. Jn14:2-3; 1Thess1:10; 4:13-18; Rev3:10). Whereas the rapture of the Church has been an imminent event since the days of the Apostle Paul (cf. 1Cor15:51-52; 1Thess4:17), signs that the Church Age is drawing to a close (cf. 2Tim3:1-5) and

³ Note that in Acts 2:1, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come" could be rightfully rendered as "And when the day of Pentecost was *come in fulfillment*".

⁴ The mystery nature of the Church, and the fact that the Feasts of Firstfruits and Pentecost are most directly related to it, are consistent with the fact that: 1) unlike the other feasts, these two are not observed on a specific, predetermined date on the calendar, and 2) these two feasts always occur on Sunday.

the events of the Tribulation are on the near horizon lead one to suspect that it might occur soon. And while nothing in Scripture necessitates that the rapture of the Church occur on the day of Pentecost, it would in many ways be fitting if it did. The ritual of the Feast of Pentecost made use of baked "loaves", which could be intended to represent a *completed* Church; the Church will not be complete until its rapture. Furthermore, a rapture of the Church on the day of Pentecost would see God's prophetic program for Israel resume on the very same day of the calendar on which it was paused; as such, God's prophetic program for Israel would begin again exactly where it left off. For reasons such as these, a Pentecost rapture would seemingly be appropriate. "Even so, come Lord Jesus" (Rev22:20). Maranatha!