

## Pentecost in God's Plan

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Is this the only "day of salvation?"

Most churches teach that:

- All who shall be saved are being saved now, in this present age
- All who die "unsaved" can never receive salvation
- There is a contest in progress between Christ and Satan the devil, and that God has placed a time limit on this contest
- Christ, by means of the world's churches is desperately trying to "get the world saved"
- God has permanently cast away Israel and the Jews, and that they are eternally doomed and lost

Brethren, if these teachings are true, then God's plan is an abject failure! Why? Because to date, only a very few have been truly saved.

One third of all of the human beings on earth today have never even heard the name of Jesus Christ. His name is the only name whereby we can be saved!

Some more questions for you:

Are the majority of all who have lived so far, eternally "lost" because they have never been given the opportunity to hear the true gospel?

Are these millions, or even billions, lost and condemned without being given a chance?

When Christ returns, will He be helpless and unable to save the world from Satan the devil? Will it then be too late? Too late because, as some churches teach, "probation will be closed?"

God teaches us clearly through his holy days that this present age is not the only day of salvation.

The purpose of this sermon this afternoon is to remind you (and this is a reminder) as many of these things you will know already, but to show you how the lessons of the Feast of Pentecost fit into God's great plan of salvation.

First, we see that the answers are revealed in God's word in the Bible. The New Testament church of God was founded on this day. We believe that it was founded in 31AD on this annual Sabbath called, in the ancient Greek, "*Pentekoste*," and in our modern anglicized version, "Pentecost."

Acts 2:1 and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

The disciples, who became apostles, were in one place with one accord on the Feast of Pentecost.

We know that Paul and the fledgling church of God continued to keep the Feast of Pentecost well after Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension.

Pentecost, like all of the other holy days, is not just a New Testament observance. It was initiated thousands of years earlier by God, who commanded it. In the Old Testament, it was called by a few different names, one of those names was the "the feast of harvest," and another name was "the day of firstfruits."

Exodus 23:16 and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.

Numbers 28:26 Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to the LORD at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.

In the New King James Version, the phrase "*after your weeks be out*" is rendered, "*at your feast of weeks.*"

And we see that "the Feast of Weeks" is another Old Testament name for the Feast of Pentecost.

This name is supported in at least another four scriptures:

Exodus 34:22 And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end.

Deuteronomy 16:10, 16 "Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

II Chronicles 8:13 according to the daily rate, offering according to the commandment of Moses, for the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the three appointed yearly feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

So, there we have the Old Testament names of the Feast of Pentecost.

The New Testament church of God continued to keep all of God's commanded holy days, including Pentecost, and again we will come to that later.

God gave the Feast of Pentecost in order to reveal that this present church era is only the first preliminary "harvest of souls."

The purpose of all of God's holy days is to keep God's people in a true understanding of His

great plan.

The yearly harvest seasons in ancient Israel symbolize God's spiritual harvests of souls. The two main annual harvests in Israel were the spring grain harvest and the fall harvest.

The holy days picture year by year that only those that God is calling during this age can become His spiritual children now. But, the members of the church of God today are merely the firstfruits of a great spiritual harvest to be reaped later on.

Let us go back and look briefly at the wave-sheaf offering.

The Feast of Pentecost is like a bridge between the spring holy days and the fall holy days. Pentecost looks back to the spring holy days and their meanings, and it looks forward to the fall holy days and their meanings

First, let us take a look back to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the specific instructions that God gave for the wave sheaf offering.

Leviticus 23:9-14 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "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. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The ancient Israelites were not allowed to harvest any of their early grain crops until the day of the wave sheaf offering.

In the early evening of the day following the weekly Sabbath that falls within the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (i.e. on the Saturday evening after sunset), the Israelites held a solemn ceremony at which the first sheaf of the year's grain was cut out of the field.

The wave sheaf offering:

- Was to be kept on the day after the Sabbath that fell within the Feast of Unleavened Bread
- Contained a sheaf (Hebrew "omer") of grain which, in today's measure equals approximately 2.087 quarts (1.98 litres), it would be a good-sized bowl of grain when threshed out.
- Was to be brought to the priest
- Was to be solemnly waved before God
- Was to be accepted for them the following morning (Sunday)
- Pictured the resurrected Christ ascending to heaven, to be accepted by God the Father as the first human being born of God

- Pictured Jesus Christ as the first of the firstfruits of the first harvest of souls. Jesus Christ was preeminent in everything

I Corinthians 15:20, 23 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Jesus Christ our High Priest presented Himself, the first of the firstfruits, to His Father on the Sunday morning after His resurrection at sunset the previous evening, on the Saturday evening.

How do we know that Jesus returned briefly, to His Father that Sunday? By comparing these two scriptures:

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, "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.'"

So at this point in time when Mary met Jesus outside the tomb, He said, "Touch me not for I am not ascended." Then later on that very same day, on the Sunday morning on wave-sheaf Sunday we read this:

Matthew 28:9 And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.

At this point in time Jesus allowed the disciples to touch Him and to hold Him so we know that He had ascended, briefly returned to God the Father, and come back again.

The timing of Jesus' resurrection exactly matches the wave sheaf offering which symbolizes it.

In that particular year, the fulfillment of the wave sheaf offering took place on Nissan 18, in God's sacred year, which was the day after the Sabbath, which fell during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, just as commanded.

However, as the date of the weekly Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread will vary from year to year, so will the date of the wave sheaf offering vary from year to year and hence so does the date of the Feast of Pentecost. That is why we need to count it—we need to calculate it.

As already mentioned, the word "Pentecost" is the anglicized version of a Greek noun used only in the New Testament. The word signifies "count fifty" or "fiftieth (day)."

Here is the entry from the theological dictionary of the New Testament about this word:

Pentekoste {pen-tay-kos-tay'}: av - Pentecost: "the fiftieth day": the second of the three great feasts, celebrated at Jerusalem yearly, the seventh week after the Passover, in grateful recognition of the completed harvest.

As mentioned previously, in the Old Testament the Feast of Pentecost is called the "Feast of Firstfruits" and the "Feast of Weeks," the latter because, in the calculation for the Feast of Pentecost, God's people are instructed to count seven weeks:

Leviticus 23:15-16a 'And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be completed. 'Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

That Sunday, that fiftieth day, is the Feast of Pentecost!

God then continues by instructing the Israelites on how they should keep this feast.

Leviticus 23:16-17 then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. 'You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven.

This is really interesting, please remember that. These two loaves were baked with leaven.

Leviticus 23:17-21 They are the firstfruits to the LORD. 'And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD. 'Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. 'The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. 'And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

Pentecost is the only holy day that must be determined by counting. All the others are on set dates of the sacred year. It is very important for us to calculate the correct day, because only this day was made holy by God. Suppose the apostles had miscounted! What if they counted wrong?

Acts 2:1 and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

If the disciples had counted wrongly, instead of being "*with one accord in one place,*" they might have rather been in great discord—some coming together on the preceding day and some on the following day, and some of them may have come even a whole week earlier or a whole week later! This would have caused confusion and discord.

But Jesus had been with them for three and a half years. Jesus Christ was the Old Testament YHVH YHVH who initially commanded the Feast of Pentecost and how it should be counted. So He had personally taught them which was the right day! So they knew how Pentecost was supposed to be counted.

The Pharisees, however, calculated incorrectly. Most Jews today also count incorrectly to Pentecost. They had the wrong starting point. Instead of starting their count after the weekly Sabbath that fell within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they began their count after the first

annual Sabbath, or the first Day of Unleavened Bread.

When Jesus Christ walked the earth the Pharisees did not have control of the temple or the timing of the holy days for the Jews. They did not take control of the holy days until the middle of the first century AD. Before the Pharisees took over, the Boethus family, who were Sadducees, had control of the timing of the holy days. They correctly began the count for Pentecost on the day after the weekly Sabbath within the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Here is what the Mishnah (the written law that was written approximately AD 200) has to say about this:

"The Boethusians say: 'the cutting of the sheaf does not take place at the end of the day of the feast [*i.e. The first Day of Unleavened Bread*], but only at the end of the next regular Sabbath."

So this correct calculation from the weekly Sabbath was handed down among the priests, and this proper method was used as long as Sadducees remained in control of the temple and the temple rituals.

There are still some Jewish groups—the Samaritans and the Karaite Jews (who date from the eighth century AD)—who also calculate Pentecost starting from the weekly Sabbath.

Therefore, if wave sheaf offering Sunday is day one, then day fifty will always fall on a Sunday. It will not, however, always fall on the same day of the month each year. The Feast of Pentecost needs to be "counted" every year, and it can never be a set day of the month neither in the Hebrew nor Roman calendars.

Again, another quote from the Mishnah:

"The Boethusians say that Pentecost always falls on the day after the Sabbath."

That is coming from the Sadducees from many hundreds of years ago. The Boethusians agreed with the Holy Scriptures on this

Leviticus 23:15-16 And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

Regarding this timing of the Feast of Pentecost God also gave this second instruction:

Deuteronomy 16:9-10 You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain. "Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you.

The time that the sickle was first put to the standing grain was on the evening of the wave sheaf offering day.

But what is the meaning of the Feast of Pentecost? We know that Passover symbolizes Christ's sacrifice for the remission of our sins, and that the Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolizes the putting away of our sins. Pentecost pictures the next step in God's plan. It is the first part of God's spiritual harvest, and the calling out of God's people. The church of God is His called-out ones.

Leviticus 23:17, 20 You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD. 'The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest.

In the Old Testament celebration of the Feast of Pentecost they had these two leavened "wave loaves." They were waved and offered as the firstfruits to God and they were baked from flour that was ground from the first grains of the early harvest.

The New Testament church of God, which we are part of, is comprised of people, imperfect leavened human beings subject to sin who have been gathered out of the world to be the firstfruits of salvation. We are still physical human beings—part of the New Testament church of God—part of what was symbolized by those leavened wave loaves. On wave sheaf offering Sunday the leaven-free wave sheaf was lifted up into the air and waved. This symbolized Jesus Christ's brief journey to heaven and His return. Jesus as we have seen was perfect, unleavened, sin free and He was the very first of the firstfruits.

Fifty days later, on the Feast of Pentecost, we have two leavened wave loaves being lifted up into the air and waved similar to the wave sheaf offering. However, these two symbolize a future time when God's people will temporarily leave the earth to meet Jesus at the time of His returns.

I find it inspiring that these things symbolized Jesus Christ on wave sheaf offering Sunday, and fifty days later a similar ritual takes place and that is pointing to us and something that we are going to do. Jesus Christ went to heaven and returned, we are going to go and meet Jesus Christ in the air, and we are going to return to rule on earth.

I Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord

It is important to note that God has not permanently cast away physical Israel. He has merely blinded them temporarily. We are not just talking about the Jews; we are talking about our brothers and sisters perhaps, who God has chosen not to call at this time.

Through Israel's fall, God made possible His offer of salvation to the Gentiles. Through Jesus Christ, Gentile believers can now be grafted into the family of Israel.

The eleventh chapter of Romans gives the details on this. God is now calling and choosing

human beings into the church of God to train to be kings and priests who will reign and work with Jesus Christ in the millennium:

Revelation 5:10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

That is our future.

Acts 15:14-17 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'

So the Gentiles were going to get their opportunity to be called.

In this New Testament era, the vast majority of the descendants of ancient Judah and Israel are blinded to the truth. You can look around in the world and see who is keeping the Feast of Pentecost properly today.

In the world tomorrow after Jesus Christ's return the rest of mankind will seek God, both Israel and Gentiles alike.

Romans 11:25-27 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

God is going to revisit Israel, and what a wonderful time that will be.

The firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest, that is you and me brethren, will then be unleavened. We will be perfect and immortal. We will reign as kings and priests with Jesus Christ and we will help Him to build a new and wonderful civilization.

When their eyes are opened by God, the people of Israel, again our brothers, sisters and those people out there in the streets today, will be brought to repentance and they will be saved from sin through God's mercy and forgiveness. Once again in our era today, in this New Testament era, the vast majority of the people of Israel have not believed.

But, through God's firstfruits, those of us who have been picked out by God in this age, we will then be kings and priests with Jesus Christ. Israel, and the other presently unconverted peoples of this world shall obtain mercy.

Romans 11:31-32 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

Again, pounding this home that Jesus Christ is the first of the firstfruits. The saints of this dispensation, our New Testament era, are the subsequent firstfruits of God's salvation:

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

We saw the scriptures that showed that Jesus Christ is the first of the firstfruits and here we see that we too, God's people in His church, are called firstfruits as well.

Romans 8:23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

This New Testament era and this picking out of God's people from the world began on this very day on the first New Testament Feast of Pentecost.

Please note that Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Pentecost fall at the beginning of God's sacred year, and the events that they picture occur at the beginning of God's plan of salvation.

Likewise the fall holy days come in the seventh month of the year, they symbolize future events of His great plan, and their fulfillment introduces the seventh millennium of man's time on earth.

It is not the job of God's firstfruits to convert everyone in the world in this age, although it is part of our job to declare the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Herbert w. Armstrong wrote this:

"...many have been called during this time, but only few actually chosen, and still fewer have remained faithful to the end!"

If only Mr. Armstrong might have known how few have remained faithful to the end.

Again, the purpose of this era of the church of God is for the picking out a comparatively few "firstfruits" of the millions, billions in fact, who eventually will be saved.

The firstfruits are being trained, tried and tested in order to qualify for positions as kings and priests in the Kingdom of God and to assist Jesus Christ in the eventual salvation of the world as a whole.

God is not going to do these things during our era today, but rather at the time of the return of Jesus Christ. The church did an excellent job back in the sixties, seventies and eighties, and the church was big in those times. It was not even a patch on what it is going to be like when Christ returns and give the truth to all of the people of the world.

Let us read some of those inspiring scriptures:

Isaiah 11:11 It shall come to pass in that day That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath

and the islands of the sea.

Isaiah 66:15-16, 19 For behold, the LORD will come with fire And with His chariots, like a whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword The LORD will judge all flesh; And the slain of the LORD shall be many. "I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations: to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles.

Those days are going to come brethren, and we are going to have a part in that.

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

This is the part of Pentecost that looks forward to the Feast of Tabernacles and these are Feast of Tabernacles scriptures.

Micah 4:2-3, 6-7 Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war any more. In that day," says the LORD, "I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast And those whom I have afflicted; I will make the lame a remnant, And the outcast a strong nation; So the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on, even forever.

These are probably some of the very first verses that we learned when we came into the church. I know it was in my case. They are marvelous promises that we need to concentrate on.

These prophecies do not apply to the church of God at this time, but they apply to the time of the Kingdom of God, after Jesus Christ returns.

In our era, ours today, God is permitting human beings all over the world to prove what sinners they are—totally helpless of themselves.

Mankind must learn its final lesson that only when Jesus Christ returns and rules with a rod of iron can the world really be saved.

The firstfruits of God are now being saved, as John Ritenbaugh talked about this morning. There is a time sequence: the past, present and future. The firstfruits are being saved. It is a process. And they will then be given the honour of being Christ's assistants in His great work of redemption.

God's true plan of redemption is pictured, as we have seen, by the holy days and has been

taught in God's word all the way from Genesis to Revelation. If the churches of the world had kept God's holy days they never would have lost sight of His wonderful plan.

Finally, Pentecost was, and is, observed by the New Testament church of God. When people ask me why we are different as a church or what we believe, I tell them that we take the Bible and try to do what it says. We look at the New Testament church of God, and we try to, as much as possible, believe what they believed. The original New Testament church of God kept all of God's holy days including the Feast of Pentecost.

I Corinthians 16:8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.

So, here we see that Paul was keeping the Feast of Pentecost.

Acts 20:16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.

The apostle Paul, like the other apostles, was keeping the Feast of Pentecost.

If Paul and the other apostles had claimed, as so many professing Christians do today, that at Jesus Christ's death God nailed the holy days to the cross of Jesus Christ, and that God abolished the holy days as "old covenant rituals," then they would never have kept that first New Testament Feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit would not have come, and the New Testament church of God could not have been started. What an awful thought.

But, the apostles did keep the Feast of Pentecost! It was not nailed to the cross! It was not abolished! They kept it and they knew its meaning. All of their brothers and sisters in the fledgling church of God kept the Feast of Pentecost and knew its meaning.

We believe that we are the end-time church of God. We too keep the Feast of Pentecost because we are commanded to. We too know its very great meaning!