

## THE JEWISH FEAST OF PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-5, 41

May 28, 2023

Today the worldwide church celebrates Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit, also known to the Jews as the feast of Shavuot (celebrating the giving of the Law). Pentecost was the turning point for Jesus’ followers. Ten days earlier Jesus left them with these instructions before He ascended into heaven: ***“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”*** (Acts 1:4-5). The fulfillment of what John the Baptist preached about the coming Messiah – *“He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.”* Jesus came to fulfill the entire Old Testament and this morning I want us to consider the Jewish feasts that were established in the book of Exodus to remember what God did for the Jews in bringing them out of slavery in Egypt. The seven Jewish Feasts are important for all of God’s people (including Christians), not only as a reminder for His people of what God has done for them in the past, but also to tell them what He will do in the future on the exact dates that they have been celebrated by the Jews for generations. The Jewish festivals were to be seen by the people as rehearsals, so that they will know what to do when the time of their fulfillment eventually comes – when each of the Jewish festivals would be fulfilled by the Messiah.

The Messiah came the first time, to fulfill the three spring feasts – when Jesus died He fulfilled the Feast of Passover, Jesus is our perfect, sinless Passover Lamb, chosen by God to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. When Jesus was buried and laid in the tomb He fulfilled the Feast of Unleavened Bread; when Jesus rose from the dead He fulfilled the Feast of Firstfruits, Jesus is our first fruits, the first to rise from the dead, giving us the promise that one day we will also rise from the dead, also having a glorious resurrected body as Jesus had; and then, the fourth Jewish Feast – Pentecost is currently being fulfilled by the Christian Church by the coming of the Holy Spirit. The fulfillment of this spring Feast gives the church hope that when Jesus returns to this earth, at His second coming, He will fulfill the three remaining Jewish Fall Feasts, again on the exact calendar date that they have been celebrated by the Jews for centuries.

Pentecost is recognized as the beginning of the church; however, according to Jewish tradition – the very first Pentecost celebration took place about 1500 years earlier, fifty days after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, as they were leaving

years of slavery in Egypt. Shavuot is the celebration of the day that God gave Moses the Law at the foot of Mount Sinai, celebrating the beginning of this new Israelite community. It was a new beginning for the people of Israel as they were heading for the Promised Land, and then the Pentecost we are celebrating today is also a new beginning for Christ followers. Luke, writing the Book of Acts, doesn't mention the historical aspect of this feast, because the readers would all understand their Jewish history, so it would have been unnecessary. For the Jew – the Feast of Firstfruits (our celebration of Easter) started the countdown of fifty days to Pentecost. The Jews would count off seven weeks (49 days) and then the following day they would celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. Luke in **Acts 2:1** starts out by telling the reader this very important fact, ***“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come.”*** FULLY COME lets the readers know that it was on that exact day, the day during which the Jews celebrated Pentecost that the Holy Spirit fell, and Luke is connecting what happened at Mount Sinai years earlier to what God is doing once again. But this time giving them a new covenant sealed by the blood of Christ!

That day God was fulfilling **Jeremiah 31:31-33**, ***“The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah...I will put the law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.”*** God did not intend for the law to be written on stone forever, but one day He would write it on their hearts. So, here's what Luke tells us happened that day, ***“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven”*** (Acts 2:2-5). As these God-fearing Jews from every nation were gathered at the Temple that day, as this was one of the three feasts when Jews from all over the known world were to gather in Jerusalem. Hearing the sound of a mighty rushing wind, they took notice, and were most likely reminded of how God spoke to their distant ancestors through thunder and fire and all kinds of marvelous signs at the foot of Mt Sinai. And as they start to gather at the Upper Room, they hear voices speaking in all different kinds of languages and is it any wonder three thousand accepted Christ that day. The words of the prophets were coming to pass right before their eyes, and they knew it!

And then we also need to look at the contrast that we find between **Exodus 32:28** and **Acts 2:41** – we read in **Exodus 32:28**, because of the Golden Calf incident, *“The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died.”* And then look at what happened after Peter preached in **Acts 2:41**, *“Those who accepted the message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”* The giving of the Law brings death because of the people’s sin; however, the coming of the Holy Spirit brings life, eternal life, because of the grace of God available through the Gospel message. The giving of the Holy Spirit is a sign that the church has been activated, given a new identity, new power, new authority, and a new purpose to carry out the divine mission of the Lord to bring God’s Kingdom down to this earth, hosting His presence wherever He has placed or sent His followers. The church takes God’s living Word out to the world – and that’s what Barb, Lloyd and Esther have been doing in the Dominican Republic.