

“Pentecost: The Most Significant Holiday We Don’t Celebrate”**

Main Idea: Today we’re going to answer four questions about Pentecost from the Word of God. In so doing, we’ll see that Pentecost is perhaps the most significant holiday we don’t celebrate, but should.

- I. What is Pentecost?¹
- II. What is the Old Testament significance of Pentecost?
 - A. It’s called the Feast of Weeks.
 - B. It was a time of great rejoicing in Israel.
- III. What is the New Testament significance of Pentecost?
 - A. It’s the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus (Acts 2).
 - B. It apparently was a special day in the early church.
- IV. What difference should Pentecost make in our lives?
 - A. We remember who the Holy Spirit is.
 1. He’s the One foretold by the prophets (Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28).
 2. He’s the One announced by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11).
 3. He’s the One promised by Christ (John 14:16-17).
 - B. We remember what the Holy Spirit did.
 1. He came to indwell the followers of Christ (Acts 2:1-4).
 2. He baptized all of God’s people into one body (1 Cor. 12:13).
 3. He formed the Church (Eph. 4:4).
 - C. We remember what the Holy Spirit does.
 1. He regenerates lost people (John 3:5; 16:8-11; Gal. 3:3; Tit. 3:5).
 2. He bestows spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:7).
 3. He gives us power for ministry (Acts 1:8; 4:31).
 4. He enables us to worship (Phil. 3:3).
 5. He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27).
 6. He produces the fruit of Christlikeness in us (Gal. 5:22-23).
 7. He gives us assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:16).
 8. He teaches us (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 John 2:20, 27).
 9. He transforms us (2 Cor. 3:3, 18).

Tomorrow is a special day, Memorial Day, in which we pause to remember those who have given their lives so that we might enjoy the freedom that is ours. When a sacrifice has been made, it’s only fitting that those who benefit from the sacrifice take note and express their appreciation.

And so we rightfully take time on this special day to take note. We are here enjoying the life that is ours because of what’s been done in the past for us.

But someone else did something for us in the past, and there’s another special day that’s worthy of our attention. Did you realize that one week ago today was a special day, a holiday, a "holy" day? It certainly was, and yet, for most of us, it came and went without a thought. That’s unfortunate, and perhaps quite indicative. The truth is, whether you realize it or not, if you are a Christian your life has been greatly impacted by what happened on this special day.

Someone did something for you, and you are here today because He did. It’s called *Pentecost*. Pentecost is a Christian holiday that few in our Baptist circles talk about, for that matter, even *know* about.

You say, “Pentecost? That’s a charismatic holiday, isn’t it?” Actually, in the Church historically, according to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, “It [the day of

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹Throughout this presentation I’m indebted to helpful information found in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 2, pp. 1639-40.

Pentecost] was the third great Christian feast after Christmas and Easter. In the liturgy of the Anglican Church it is called Whitsunday, from the custom of wearing white clothing on that day.”²

So, no, Pentecost is not merely a charismatic or *Pentecostal* holiday, for throughout history this special day has been recognized throughout the Church.³

Today we’re going to answer four questions about Pentecost from the Word of God. In so doing, we’ll see that Pentecost is perhaps the most significant holiday we don’t celebrate, but should. And I say *should*, not because I’m interested in merely adding another special day to our church calendar. I say *should* because I wonder if our lack of attention to this day may be linked to our lack of attention to that which this day represents.

We don’t think about God the Holy Spirit enough. We don’t think about who He is and what He accomplished and what He’s doing right now, and we don’t think about this to our own detriment.

So these are significant questions, because this is a significant person.

I. What is Pentecost?

Let’s talk about the name for a moment. It’s from the Greek word *pentekoste* which means "fiftieth" and stands for the festival celebrated on the 50th day after Passover. Its Old Testament name is *Shavuoth* (which means "weeks"), and is there referred to as the Feast of Weeks. Other names include: The Day of Firstfruits, and The Feast of Harvest.

Deuteronomy 16:10 “Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you.”

Numbers 28:26 “On the day of firstfruits, when you present to the LORD an offering of new grain during the Feast of Weeks, hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.”

So Pentecost has an Old Testament background. It also has a New Testament significance. This day celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Church.

It fits into the yearly church calendar as follows:

Advent (means "coming")--the four weeks prior to Christmas

Epiphany (means "manifestation")--Christmas

Lent--the time of preparation before Easter

Easter--the celebration of Jesus' resurrection

Pentecost (means "fifty")--the coming of the Holy Spirit; in addition, Pentecost is the longest season in the church calendar, lasting 27 or 28 Sundays until the next observance of Advent.

The actual observance date of Pentecost changes from year to year, just like Easter does, because it always occurs 50 days after Passover. Passover is always on the 14th day of Nisan, on the Jewish calendar, but the Jewish calendar uses lunar months which are 29 or 30 days in length, rather than solar months, as in our calendar. So because Passover moves on our calendar, so does Easter and Pentecost.

² *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 835.

³ It’s worth noting also that, historically, Pentecost became a popular occasion for baptisms.

In case you're wondering, next year Pentecost will take place on June 8 (2014). Last year it was May 27 (2012).

To repeat, in our circles not much emphasis is given to the Day of Pentecost. That's why I'm calling it the most significant holiday we don't celebrate. That brings us to our next three questions, which all have to do with *significance*.

II. What is the Old Testament significance of Pentecost?

A. It's called the Feast of Weeks.

It's one of three OT pilgrimage festivals in which the people appeared before the Lord with gifts and offerings. Again, it occurred seven weeks after Passover.

Can you name the other two major feasts, and what they signified? They are the Feast of Passover (which celebrates deliverance from bondage in Egypt) and the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (which celebrates God's provisions during the journey through the wilderness en route to the Promised Land).

Pentecost happened between the Feast of Passover (which occurs in the early Spring) and the Feast of Tabernacles (which occurs in the Fall)

In OT times Pentecost was a harvest festival. Traditionally, the Jewish grain harvest went from the time of Passover to Pentecost. That is, the first grain was cut around mid-April and the final grain was brought in in mid-June. That helps explain why the historian Josephus called Pentecost "closing" for it closed out the harvest season.

Exodus 23:16 calls it the "Feast of Harvest" because of its relationship with the harvest season. Numbers 28:26 refers to it as the "Day of First Fruits" because on it two loaves made from newly ground grain were presented before the Lord.

B. It was a time of great rejoicing in Israel.

Here's the background.⁴ Each year the Jews celebrated Passover, the day which reminded them of God's act of rescuing His people from bondage in Egypt. The seven days after Passover were called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Each year on the day after the sabbath in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the priest waved a sheaf of newly harvested grain before the Lord.

Then the people counted off 50 days from the offering of the first sheaf of grain until the day after the seventh sabbath (Lev. 23:11). On that day two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of flour and baked with yeast were waved before the Lord (Lev. 23:17). Then freewill offerings were encouraged. In addition, various animals were sacrificed (Lev. 23:18; Num. 28:27).

So this Harvest festival (or Pentecost) was a time of great rejoicing. It was a holy assembly and no work was done.

So how does this OT background help us better appreciate what happened in Acts 2? For starters, it explains why the city of Jerusalem was full of people on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jews from all over the world had gathered for this special holy day, as they did every year. Is there other significance? That brings us to question 3.

III. What is the New Testament significance of Pentecost?

It boils down to this...

A. It's the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus (Acts 2).

⁴ As mentioned earlier, I'm indebted to the *Baker Encyclopedia* for this information.

Let me resketch the setting. In Acts 1 Jesus met with the disciples and told them He was returning to heaven. He also announced that the Holy Spirit was coming. In Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Of course, what Jesus predicted is precisely what happened. Pentecost took place ten days after the Lord ascended to heaven (Acts 1:5). The Holy Spirit came just as Jesus promised. He came on a *day*, specific day 50 days after Passover.

Why is that important? I can't underscore this enough. The coming of the Holy Spirit was a historical event. It happened at a point in time on a particular day (just like the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus did). Pentecost is part of the historical, redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

That means we don't repeat Pentecost. When someone prays, "Oh, Holy Spirit, do Pentecost again like you did in Acts 2," it's an unbiblical prayer. It's like saying, "Oh, Jesus, die again on the cross." Or, "Rise again from the grave." No, Pentecost is a one-time, non-repeatable historical event. We don't need another Pentecost. What we need is for the Lord to give us a fresh understanding of the implications of that event, not to repeat it.

And don't miss this. On that day the Living God established a new era, for Pentecost marked the beginning of the Church, which is the era of, or the dispensation of, the Holy Spirit.

There's something else we learn about Pentecost when we read our New Testament.

B. It apparently was a special day in the early church.

We see two indications of this, both in comments from the apostle Paul. The first is something he told the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 6:7-9, "I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me."

Notice that. In 1 Corinthians 16:8, Paul says he delayed his visit to Corinth until after Pentecost. Apparently this was a special day to him and others in the church.

The other text is Acts 20:16, which says, "Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost."

So Paul wanted to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. The question is *why*. Why would Paul want to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost? My sense is because he knew that at Pentecost there would be lots of Jewish people in Jerusalem, as there always were for this great holiday. That meant it would be a great time for ministering the gospel there, and so Paul said, "I want to get to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost."

That brings us to our fourth and most important question.

IV. What difference should Pentecost make in our lives?

This isn't simply a history lesson. *That* day has implications for *this* day. Let's talk about three. First of all, on Pentecost...

A. We remember who the Holy Spirit is.

1. *He's the One foretold by the prophets (Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28).*

Over 700 years before Christ the prophet recorded this divine announcement in Isaiah 44:3, “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.” So Isaiah said, He’s coming. The Lord is going to send His Spirit.

Joel said something similar in Joel 2:28, ““And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.” Notice that, *on all people*. Not just on the Jews, but on all people groups. Peter quoted this verse in his sermon in Acts 2 as he explained the significance of the phenomena that had the people scratching their heads.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is the predicted one, the one foretold by the prophets.

2. *He's the One announced by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11).*

Remember John, the forerunner of the Messiah? Listen to what he said in Matthew 3:11, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

3. *He's the One promised by Christ (John 14:16-17).*

One of the most important passages regarding the Spirit is found in John 14:16-17, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

Notice that. How does Jesus describe the Holy Spirit? He calls Him “another” Counselor [in some translations ‘Comforter’]. Who was the first Counselor? Jesus was. Jesus is announcing that He’s sending a Person who would be to His followers everything He had been to them. Plus this. The coming Counselor would never leave them. He wouldn’t have the limitations of a physical body that needed rest, like Jesus experienced.

If we’ve come to know Christ, that ought to encourage us greatly. We have living in us an ever present, divine Counselor. And let’s not forget that the Holy Spirit is not an “it” or impersonal force. He is the third person of the Triune God.

There’s something else that Pentecost gives us occasion to remember. First, who the Holy Spirit is. Second...

B. We remember what the Holy Spirit did.

By what He did I mean what He did *on the day of Pentecost itself*. And on that day He did three things that have tremendous implications for us.

1. *He came to indwell the followers of Christ (Acts 2:1-4).*

Consider again the familiar account of Acts 2:1-4, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 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.”

So the Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus. Luke says they were *filled with the Holy Spirit*. And what did they do? Speak in other languages which they previously could not speak.

Why are there languages in the world? Because of what God did at Babel, right? In Genesis 11 God sent confusion of speech to a rebellious world. Now in Acts 2 He’s

reversing Babel. He's reconciling to Himself those scattered people groups by the ministry of His Spirit.

And what message did those followers preach to the scattered people groups? It's the message Peter preached in Acts 2, the message of repentance and forgiveness through Jesus, namely His death, burial, and resurrection.

The Spirit did something else on Pentecost.

2. *He baptized all of God's people into one body (1 Cor. 12:13).*

That's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Baptism is an activity that identifies a person with the one in whose name he is baptized. Paul says that baptism is something that the Holy Spirit did for the benefit of each of Jesus' followers. When? He did it on the day that He came to the earth to establish the church, on *Pentecost*.

In a very real sense, what happened in Acts 2 is the answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17. In John 17:21 Jesus prayed for His followers "that all of them may be one." In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit worked to answer that request. He came on Pentecost day, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13, to baptize all of Jesus' followers, whether Jews or Greeks or slave or free, into one body.

So unity is something we already have. We just need to live it out, to cooperate with the Spirit, to keep in step with the Spirit, as Paul says in Galatians 5:25.

And where do we find this unified people of Jesus? There's only one place, and it exists, likewise, because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

3. *He formed the Church (Eph. 4:4).*

Listen to Ephesians 4:2-5, and keep in mind that Paul is talking to a local church here, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

When the Spirit came on Pentecost, He brought into existence something the Bible describes as "called out ones," *ekklesia* is the Greek term, the *church*.

So on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to indwell Jesus' followers, baptized us, and formed the Church. That being the case, how would you respond to someone who said, "Have you experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit yet?" Answer this. What again is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? It's a historical event that happened in A.D. 30. It's not a repeatable event, any more than Jesus' crucifixion is repeatable. We remember it but He doesn't repeat it. It happened one time.

Furthermore, the moment a person repents and believes in Christ, that person experiences the implications of the baptism of the Spirit, just like he experiences the implications of the work Jesus accomplished. By faith, that person is justified and simultaneously baptized into the Body of Christ.

That's His past tense work. What about His present tense work? Pentecost gives us a wonderful opportunity to remember, thirdly...

C. We remember what the Holy Spirit does.

The NT identifies nine activities that the Spirit does for individuals.

1. *He regenerates lost people (John 3:5; 16:8-11; Gal. 3:3; Tit. 3:5).*

Listen to these important texts...

John 3:5 “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’”

John 16:8-11 “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”

Galatians 3:3 “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

Titus 3:5 “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

How does the Spirit accomplish His work of regeneration? According to James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23, He uses the Word of God to generate life in a dead heart.

2. *He bestows spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:7).*

Listen to 1 Corinthians 12:7, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Who has a spiritual gift? *Each one*. Who gives it? It’s a *manifestation of the Spirit*. And for what? *For the common good*.

Other questions to consider: What are spiritual gifts? Where do we learn about them in the Bible? Do you know what your spiritual gift is? Are you using it?

3. *He gives us power for ministry (Acts 1:8; 4:31).*

“You will receive power,” said Jesus in Acts 1:8, “when the Holy Spirit comes.” Power for what? “To be my witnesses.”

We see a great illustration of this power in Acts 4:31, “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

4. *He enables us to worship (Phil. 3:3).*

Paul tells the church at Philippi, “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh (Phil 3:3).”

5. *He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27).*

These are not easy days for believers, but here’s some good news. We’re not alone. Romans 8:26-27 says, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

6. *He produces the fruit of Christlikeness in us (Gal. 5:22-23).*

You say, “What’s the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work today? Here it is. Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Other than lacking biblical support, what’s the danger of viewing the Spirit’s ministry today in terms of the sign gifts? It keeps us from focusing on what He wants to accomplish in our lives. What’s that? To produce His fruit in us.

7. *He gives us assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:16).*

Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Keep this in mind if you’re trying to help a person who lacks assurance. It’s

not our responsibility to give someone assurance of their salvation. It's the Spirit's. What is our part? To share the Word with them so they learn what the Spirit has said.

8. *He teaches us (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 John 2:20, 27).*

John 14:26 “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

By the way, how does the Spirit "speak" to us today? Through His written Word.

1 Corinthians 2:13 “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”

1 John 2:20, 27, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.”

9. *He transforms us (2 Cor. 3:3, 18).*

Listen to what Paul told the church in 2 Corinthians 3:3, 18, “You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

So the Spirit is the change-agent. Again, how does He change us? He uses His Word and the experiences of life to mold us (Rom 8:28-29).

So let's thank God for Pentecost, for Pentecost gives us a special occasion to thank God for the person of the Holy Spirit!

Some questions to consider as we take inventory...

1. Are you allowing the Spirit to work in your life?
2. Can you see His fruit being produced?
3. What area is He currently working on in your life?
4. Many people associate the Holy Spirit's ministry with emotion and feelings. That is dangerous. Why so?