

We have argued that the Bible gives us a grand story of the redemption that is in the Lord Jesus. While the composition and collection of the books of the Bible evolved over the centuries, there is a single-story line: the glorification of God through the creation and its restoration. The message of the great book comes to us in two volumes, one clearer in its ultimate meaning thus the former one pointing to the other.

“...in respect to a festival...things which are a mere shadow,
of what is to come, but the substance
belongs to Christ (Col. 2:16-17).”

It is important to grasp that the Jews did not read their Bible from a viewpoint that has become more dominant in the West through the rise of the Enlightenment and its corollary, the rise of the Scientific Method. Jewish believers thought in terms of pictures, creating images in the mind that were vivid and personal (precision and the strict rules of logic not such a necessity. Thus, when the fuller explanation came through the apostles and writers, they looked in the Hebrew Scriptures to find parallels in ceremonies, events, rituals, and the feasts. The Old Testament came more fully alive to them as they heard and read of its developed meaning.

So far, we have looked at three feasts that anticipate what is more, fully explained and revealed in the apostolic writings. These three are bundled into one celebration separate by only days and stretching over ten days or so.

Passover: Friday, 14th of Nisan (Deliverance through a Lamb from bondage through blood and miracle). Biblical Salvation.

Feast of Unleavened Bread, 15-21 of Nisan, Saturday to Saturday (separation from evil by the Lamb and through the lamb). Biblical Sanctification.

First Fruits: Sunday, 16th of Nisan (Victory of the Lamb and through the Lamb.). The resurrection of the Lamb and the assurance of ours. Biblical Glorification.

As the feasts related to our Lord:

The Crucifixion (Passover):	3 April 33 AD
The Resurrection (First First Fruits):	5 April 33 AD
The Ascension:	14 May 33 AD
The Church (Second First Fruit, Pentecost):	24 May 33 AD

Thus, you have a picture of the wonder of the gospel of salvation through the death of the Lamb, the doctrine of sanctification in the power of the Lamb, and the assurance of ultimate victory over sin and death because of the Lamb.

The Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*), The Feast of Harvest,
The Feast of First Fruits (Latter), The Feast of Pentecost



- This is the second major feast in the Jewish liturgical calendar; it was the second of the “Pilgrim Feasts” in that it required every adult male Jew to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem.
- This feast was based on the agricultural cycle, marking the beginning of the harvest of wheat after the barley harvest.
- It was to be celebrated beginning seven weeks or beginning in the fiftieth day after Passover. Therefore, in the Jewish calendar it is denominated as Pentecost (the term meaning “fifty”).

I. The Old Testament Feast of Weeks.

- A. The command for the feast was given through Moses at Mt. Sinai and recorded subsequently (Lev. 23:15-16, Deut.16:9-10).

“You shall count seven weeks. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle; is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God...” (16:9-10).

B. The instructions for the observance of the feast.

1. Grain from the harvest is to be presented to the Lord at the Tabernacle and later the temple.

2. Two loaves of leavened bread from the wheat harvest are to be prepared.
3. It was to be an extended family celebration with the entire household.
4. These are a grain offering to the Lord. With these is a burnt offering, a dedication offering, of seven unblemished lambs, one bull, and two rams. Also, there is to be a drink offering poured out to the Lord. With these, there is to be a sin offering (a male goat) and a peace offering (two male lamb a year old). *I am not sure the average family could possess the wealth to make all these sacrifices, so perhaps it was done for them.*
5. It is to be a holy day with no work permitted and it was a permanent ordinance.

“You shall remember that you were a slave
in Egypt” (Deut. 16:12).

C. The observance of the feast after the destruction of the first temple.

1. In the exilic period, without a visible temple and land, the Jewish social and religious life was devastated.
2. With the return of the exiles and the second temple, the feasts were once again a part of Jewish life.
3. With the destruction of the second temple by the Roman in 70 AD and the scattering of the Jews once more, the Feast of Weeks was redefined by the rabbi’s who settled in Haifa in the early second century.
 - a. *Shavuot* shifted from an agriculturally-based feast as the Jews became a mostly urban dwellers.
 - b. With some basis in the Hebrew Scriptures, the emphasis shifted to the giving of the Law of God, though the Bible does not specifically connect the two.
 - c. Exodus 19:1 indicates that the ancient people arrived at Mt. Sinai “in the third month” after the exodus. The fiftieth day would then be in the third month.
 - d. Rabbi’s also use 2 Chron. 15:10, 12: “They gathered together in the third month in Jerusalem.... And they entered into covenant....” Thus, the third month is reflective of the Exodus and Sinai language, and it is there that the Law was given and the people covenanted to obey it as the people of God.

II. The Celebration of the Feast of Weeks in contemporary Judaism

- A. Today to celebrate the feast, synagogues are decorated with greenery and lavish floral arrangements. The emphasis in the feast is joy and blessing! The blessing of the gift of the Law!
- B. To remind them of what happened at Mt. Sinai during the year that they stayed, there the Hebrew Scriptures are read (Exod. 19-20; Ezek. 1:1-28, 3:12; Hab. 2:20-3:19)
- C. It is also customary to read the Book of Ruth.
 1. The book has much to do with grain harvest, the barley early and the commencement of the wheat harvest later.
 2. Ruth the Moabite is an example of a non-Jew embracing the Law of God.
- D. Shavuot, as most feasts, place an emphasis on food and family.

1. Among the food items are cheesecakes, cheese blintzes (fried and triangular), triangular dumplings (triangular because to recognize God's gift of "the Law, Prophets and Writing")



2. The baking of two loaves of bread to represent the two tables of the Law with a ladder in them representing to them that they have access to the Law of God.
- E. It also a custom among many religious Jews to stay up the entire night reading and studying the Law (The Torah) with periodic breaks for coffee and cheesecake. It is said that God revealed Himself to the ancient people at noon at Mt. Sinai, but the Jews were still sleeping, and Moses had to wake them up. Thus, they stayed awake so that there is no need to awaken them!
 - F. Another connection is the Jubilee Year, celebrated every fifty years or after "seven sabbaths of years" when any ancestral lands sold was to be returned to the original families (Lev. 28:5-55, 27:16-25; Num. 36:4).
- III. The Fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks, Feast of the Harvest, Feast of First Fruits (latter), Feast of Pentecost: *The First Fruits of the New Covenant, the Church.*

"In the exercise of His will He brought us forth
by the word of truth *so that we might be,*
as it were, the first fruits among His creatures" (James 1:18).

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were
all in one place" (Acts 2:1).

"What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12b)

A. There is an unmistakable corollary of phenomena between the giving of the Law, Old Covenant, and the New Covenant as it relates to the coming of the revelation of God. For person that knew their scriptures they would have connected the two events.

1. In the giving of the Old Covenant to the people of God at Sinai.

God spoke “in a thick cloud” (Exod. 19:9).

“Sound of a ram’s horn” (19:13)

“Thunder and lightning flashes” (19:16)

“Smoke...like the smoke of a furnace” (19:18)

“Fire...thick darkness” (Deut. 4:11)

The Lord spoke “from the midst of the fire” (4:12, 15, 33).

They “heard his words” (4:36)

2. On the Feast of First Fruits, the Feast of Pentecost.

“A noise like violent rushing wind” (Acts 2:2)

“Tongues as of fire” (2:3)

God spoke through Peter [“This is what was spoken of...”] (2:16).

In both cases, there was divine speech connected with divine fire, but the message could not be more different. One brought the Law; the other the Spirit to fulfill the Law. One formed the ancient people, the other the new people of God, the church, the fulfillment of the Law in Christ!

Promised (Jer. 31:31-34)

Explained by Jesus at the Supper, “This is the New Covenant (Luke 22:20)

Preached by the apostles (Acts 2).

Detailed “I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts” (Jer. 31:32 quoted in Heb. 8:10).

B. The Year of Jubilee has arrived. In the Old Testament, the fiftieth year brought freedom from bondage, the return of possessions (land), and rest from labor. Jesus bestowed all three of these gifts in His ministry according to Luke in quoting Isa. 61:1 (4:18-19): “release to the captives... to set free the downtrodden...to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” The “Spirit of the Lord spoke” through Jesus (Luke 4:18) and in Acts 2 spoke through the apostles with the message of freedom from sin, the gift of life in Jesus.

C. As the “First Fruits” offered to God in the wheat harvest (Lev. 23:17), so the Feast of Pentecost symbolizes the offering to God of His new people.

“...we also, having the *first fruits of the Spirit*,
even we ourselves groan within, waiting eagerly
for our adoption as sons, the redemption
of the body” (Rom. 8:23).

“... you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise
who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view
to the redemption of God own possession,
to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:13-14).

D. The time between Passover and the Feast of First Fruit was a time of great anticipation for the ancient people of God.

1. With the barley harvest was concluding, the ancient people of God anxiously awaited the wheat harvest. Within a span of fifty days Israel observed two major Pilgrim Festivals. The “fifty days” were special with two journeys to Jerusalem and joyous celebrations.
2. After the resurrection, Jesus being the “*the first of the first fruits*” of life procured through death and evidenced on His day of resurrection.
- 3.

“...on the first day of the week, at early dawn,
they came to the tomb” (Luke 24:1).

4. Jesus remained with His disciples for forty days instructing.

“He presented Himself alive...appearing to them
over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of
God” (Acts 1:3).

To wait for the promised Spirit
“Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45).

5. Among the things he taught them was that they were to *anticipate*, after His ascension, the coming of the Spirit and with the Spirit they were to carry the gospel to the nations.

“...forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in my name
to all the nations, *beginning from Jerusalem....* Behold I am sending the promise of
the Spirit *upon you...* (Luke 24:47, 49).

Luke ends his narrative with the words,

“And He led them to Bethany...while he was blessing them
He departed from them. And they returned to Jerusalem
with great joy” (Luke 24: 51-52).

6. Luke adds some further details in the Acts; while they are consistent with the gospel narrative, they re-enforce its importance.
 - a. He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem (1:4)
 - b. He also commanded that they “wait for what the Father had promised (1:4).”ⁱ
 - c. When Jesus said to *wait* for the promised spirit, “not many days from now (1:5), the wait was ten days, the time between the end of the forty days of post-resurrection ministry ending in the ascension and Acts 2, fifty days after Passover (Pentecost).

Applications:

1. How can you not be impressed with the beauty and symmetry of the Bible? It was written over centuries by numerous authors and yet unfolds through those centuries to this day one beautiful message. It is more beautiful than the unfolding of a gorgeous flower or a sunrise or sunset with time-lapsed photography. Behold its utter magnificence should thrill all of us with the wonder of God's great love and complete trustworthiness!
2. The Feast of First Fruits, after the resurrection of Jesus, *the first of the First Fruit*, is the celebration of the birth of the Church, the new people of God. We are a people who have been redeemed through sacrifice as pictured by the Egyptian exodus. We are a people gathered from the nations that includes God's ancient promise of Gen 12:1-4 because the promise to Abraham is now more fully unfolded for us. The redeemed are God's people from all ages now in the entity called the church. We, Gentiles, no longer are required to be proselytes to biblical Judaism; we are co-heirs and co-equal in the very body of Christ. Passover as Jesus re-envisioned it into the Table of the Lord; the event has become a memorial and ordinance to a greater event it prefigured. Another example is that the first of the *First Fruits* has become Easter to us. Should we celebrate the second of the *First Fruits*, the birthday of the church?
3. When I think of the storyline of the Bible, redemption through the gift of God, purchased by Jesus, and grant by the Spirit, I cry out with the writer of the Hebrews: "What is man that you remember him or the son of man that you are concerned about him" (Heb. 2:6, a quotation from Ps. 8:4). What else can we say, but "thank you for your shocking display of kindness and grace."