

## MINISTUDY Pentecost Pictures the Firstfruits in God's plan

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God's master plan continues to unfold before your very eyes! As you discovered in the last two ministudies, there are seven annual festivals picturing God's plan of salvation for mankind.

God instituted these festivals to remind His Church year after year of how He is bringing about His stupendous purpose for our lives - of ultimately becoming spirit born members of His divine, universe-ruling Family.

The Passover is the beginning, the very first step, in His master plan for mankind. It is a memorial to remind us that Jesus Christ ("our Passover" --- I Cor. 5:7) paid a tremendous price for our sins.

Once we have been forgiven by God, we must strive to put all the "leaven" of sin out of our lives, as pictured by the Feast of Unleavened Bread (I Cor. 5:8). That is our part of God's plan, which we are to act out every spring by putting physical leaven out of our homes and eating unleavened bread during seven days. This seven-day Festival reminds us of our continual need to obey God's commandments.

But God knows that to successfully put sin out of our lives and keep it out, our own human willpower and abilities are not enough. We need the spiritual strength of God's Holy Spirit to help us obey God's spiritual law.

This is the third step in God's master plan, pictured by the third annual Festival, the day of Pentecost

. What were God's instructions regarding this Festival? Lev. 23:15,17, 20. Was this Feast a Holy Day, or Sabbath of rest on which the people were to assemble? Verse 21. Was it to be kept by God's people every year forever? Same verse.

At this point in our study we need to understand the symbolism of a ceremony associated with the Feast of Unleavened

Bread, and how it ties in with the third annual Festival. Although the meaning of this ceremony is important, it is no longer performed today because it pictured a future event which has since occurred,

2. What kind of offering had to be presented to God before the spring harvest could begin? Verses 9-11, 14.

As explained in the first of this series of seven studies, God established His festivals in conjunction with the two annual agricultural harvests in the land of Palestine. God uses these harvests as a pattern for the two spiritual "harvests" of His great master plan.

The first harvest of this part of the world is the relatively smaller spring grain harvest following winter rains. Anciently, it began on the day of the "Wavesheaf" offering and ended just before the Feast of Firstfruits, or day of Pentecost as it is called among Greek-speaking peoples. (Pentecost is a Greek term meaning "fiftieth [day].")

in the late summer and early autumn, the second and much bigger harvest is reaped. It follows the late spring rains in Palestine and anciently ended just before the Feast of Ingathering, otherwise known as the Feast of Tabernacles.

These physical harvests help us to understand that God is not dealing with the vast majority of the world today. God is calling only the few into His Church during the period between Christ's life on earth as a human being and His Second Coming. And so God

intends the spring festivals to illustrate to His Church yearly that all of those He has called to become His Spirit-begotten children since Christ's first coming are the "firstfruits" (Jas. 1:18) - the relatively small beginning of His spiritual harvest of mankind into His divine Family.

Later, as pictured by the festivals of the much larger autumn harvest season, God will call the billions to salvation and sonship in His glorious Family after Christ's return.

As we read in Leviticus 23, the Days of Unleavened Bread occur at the beginning of the spring harvest season. Many shoots of grain, planted earlier, have grown to maturity. They are now fruit-bearing stalks ready to be harvested.

The spring harvest began in the following manner: On the morning of the first day of the week (Sunday) during the Days of Unleavened Bread, a sheaf of newly sickled barley was brought to the priest to be accepted by God. This was called the "Wavesheaf offering" and represented the first of the firstfruits harvest.

Once the Wavesheaf was offered, the harvest could begin. The spring harvest ended by the time of the Feast of Firstfruits 50 days later, when the people gathered on this annual Sabbath to give God thanks for the firstfruits of the year's crops He had given them (verses 15-17, 21). Now let's see the connection between the Wavesheaf offering and Jesus Christ.

3. Who was the first ever to be resurrected from the dead into God's Family? I Cor. 15:20. Was He therefore the first of the firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest? Same verse, Col. 1:18. Therefore, are Spirit begotten Christians clearly the firstfruits of God's great master plan? Jas. 1:18, Rom. 8:23.

4. After Christ was resurrected from the dead, did He have to ascend to His Father in heaven? John 20:17. On that same day after returning from heaven, could His disciples touch Him? Compare Matthew 28:9 with John 20:19-20, 27-28.

This was the first day of the week (Sunday) during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It was on the very same day that the Wavesheaf was offered that Jesus Christ was accepted by His Father as the spiritual "Wavesheaf" offering in heaven.

Christ therefore fulfilled the symbolism of the Old Testament Wavesheaf offering. He was the first resurrected Son of God - the first harvested product of God's master plan. He became the firstborn Son of God - the first human to complete the process of salvation and be "born again."

But Jesus could not have become the captain of our salvation and our elder brother without possessing an all-important ingredient from God - something we all must have to be born again as He was.

5. Could Jesus do any spiritual works, including obedience to God, with just His human strength? John 5:30, 8:28. Where did He get the necessary power? John 14:10, last part.

The Father "dwelt" in Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

6. Did Christ promise the same spiritual help to His disciples? Verse 16. What is the "Helper"? Verse 26. What else is the Holy Spirit called? Verse 17.

God's Spirit had been with the disciples, but Christ promised to send it to be within them, as it had been within Him.

7. After He had been crucified and resurrected from the dead, did Jesus repeat His promise to send the Holy Spirit? Acts 1:8. Where did He tell His disciples to wait until they received God's Spirit? Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4-5. 8. On what day did the disciples actually receive God's Spirit? Acts 2:1-4. Did they thus become members of God's spiritual Church? I Cor. 12:12-14.

It was on the day of Pentecost that God first sent His Spirit to begin His Church - to beget and strengthen the firstfruits He was beginning to call into His Church, symbolically represented by the two "wave loaves" mentioned in Lev. 23:17, 20. Fifty days after Christ's sacrifice was accepted in heaven, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples just as He had promised.

The New Testament Festival of Pentecost is now a memorial that commemorates the founding of the New Testament Church of God, for it was on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 that the firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest began to be prepared for reaping into His Family.

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