

# Pentecost – Grace and Judgment in this Age

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**Like all of God's festivals, the Feast of Pentecost has great significance pertaining to his plan for all mankind. One of the important features of Pentecost is that it can serve to illustrate how grace and judgment are interwoven in how God deals with human beings, including his Church.**

**This article explains how Pentecost relates to both grace and judgment in the plan God is working out for his people.**

God commanded that at the time of the beginning of the harvest, a sheaf of grain was to be cut and waved before the Eternal God, to be accepted by him on the day after the Sabbath during the feast of unleavened bread.

“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’” (Leviticus 23:10-11).

This was to be done, as mentioned, on the day after the Sabbath, this being the **weekly Sabbath** during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (This in accordance with the original command, not the later Pharisaical tradition of offering the wave sheaf on the day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. If Passover, Abib 14, coincides with a weekly Sabbath, as it sometimes does, the wave sheaf would have been properly offered on the day following, which in such a case would be the first day of Unleavened Bread, cf. Leviticus 23:5-6, 10-11, 14-16; Joshua 5:10-11. See our free book [\*When Is the Biblical Passover?\*](#) for further information on the date of Passover).

Then, from the day the wave sheaf was offered, the harvest proceeded, that is, the harvest of grain which began with barley, which is the first grain crop to ripen in Palestine, followed by wheat.

The harvest of **firstfruits**, consisted of grain, barley and wheat (mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8). This early harvest of firstfruits of the land continued for about seven weeks.

At the end of the period of the early harvest of grain was to be a feast to God, called the “Feast of harvest.” This is one of seven annual festivals which was to be kept yearly, at three seasons of the year. “You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); 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 [Hebrew *sadeh*, could be translated 'country']. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God" (Exodus 23:15-17).

This same feast is referred to in Exodus 34:22, where it's called "the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest."

The harvesting of other produce continued and at the end of the civil year, in the fall, was to be another feast, called the "Feast of Ingathering at the year's end" in Exodus 34:22, which took account of the *additional* agricultural produce for the year's harvest from the entire country, including the produce of cultivated fields, vineyards and forests (millet, grapes, olives, dates and many other kinds of produce). The "feast of ingathering" is also called the feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:13).

Continuing in Leviticus 23, with the instructions regarding the wave offering of the sheaf of firstfruits on the day after the Sabbath during the feast of unleavened bread, "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. 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. 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" (Leviticus 23: 14-17).

So the **very first of the firstfruits** was offered to God at the **beginning** of the harvest season, and an offering of firstfruits of grain **baked with leaven** was offered at the **conclusion** of the early harvest of grain.

The sheaf or omer of grain that was offered as the first of the firstfruits was cut at the close of the Sabbath, in the evening just after sunset, and offered in the Temple on the following morning (the first day of the week, as it was to be done according to the Sadducee's tradition and in accord with Scripture).

There is spiritual significance to the omer or sheaf of grain offered. The omer or sheaf of grain offered as a wave offering during the Feast of Unleavened Bread was symbolic of Jesus Christ. It pictured Christ—the **firstfruits** of God.

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has **become the firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits**, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (I Corinthians 15:20-23).

The “wave offering” of firstfruits during the feast of unleavened bread was fulfilled the morning after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when he ascended to present himself and be accepted as the first of the “firstfruits,” the “firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18). Jesus was resurrected at the close of the weekly Sabbath during the Feast, about the time the priests were going out into the field to cut the wave offering.

On the morning after His resurrection at about the time when the wave offering of firstfruits was presented at the Temple, Christ ascended to heaven to present himself to the Father, having accomplished the mission of his having come in the flesh to dwell among men in furthering God’s plan of salvation (John 1:10-14).

Mary Magdalene had arrived at the tomb early in the morning of the first day of the week following Jesus’ crucifixion. Then she saw Jesus, having been resurrected, and then: “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**”’” (John 20:17).

A short time later Jesus appeared again to Mary Magdalene and two other women (cf. Matthew 27:56). But this time, “And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ And they came and **held Him by the feet** and worshiped Him” (Matthew 28:9). This was after His ascension as the firstfruits of the resurrection. The symbolism of the sheaf or omer of grain as the wave offering is now fulfilled.

In a sense, **the entire early harvest of barley and wheat was firstfruits.** Beginning with the day of the wave offering of firstfruits (Leviticus 23:15—“from the day after” or “from the morrow” [KJV] translated from *mi-mochorath*, which is usually translated “on the morrow,” and always has the meaning of including the morrow) seven Sabbaths were to be completed and the fiftieth day, the day following the seventh Sabbath, was to be observed as the Feast of Pentecost (which comes from the Greek *pentekostes* [πεντηκοστής], meaning fiftieth).

The loaves of **bread of the firstfruits** were to be offered as a wave offering along with other sacrifices on the fiftieth day, inclusive, the day after the seventh Sabbath following the wave offering of the firstfruits during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as we read earlier.

On the Day of Pentecost under the Levitical system **two leavened loaves** were to be offered as a wave offering of firstfruits, along with other sacrifices that were offered. The omer offered fifty days earlier was **without leaven**, symbolizing the sinlessness of Christ. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet **without sin**” (Hebrews 4:15). When used in this way, leaven is symbolic of sin (Luke 12:1; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The leavened wave loaves representing the people of God under the Old and New Covenants in this age illustrate that we are not without sin. We are to be striving for perfection, but none of us is yet perfect.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (I John 1:6-10).

On the fiftieth day following Christ's resurrection -- on the Day of Pentecost -- the Holy Spirit was poured out on the New Covenant Church in a special way.

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).

Almost fifteen centuries prior to the events described in Acts 2, God had appeared to Israel on what was very likely the first Day of Pentecost to be observed, and gave them his law, and entered into a covenant relationship with them.

“And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.’ So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord” (Exodus 19:3-8).

Through the covenant God sought to separate Israel to himself as a special people, **a kind of firstfruits**, a model nation through whom eventually he would reach the rest of mankind.

"Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: "I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, The

**firstfruits** of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them," says the Lord" (Jeremiah 2:2-3).

Notice that the physical nation of Israel, having entered into the covenant with God, was the firstfruits to God, the "firstfruits of His increase."

There were two leavened loaves offered on the day of firstfruits, or the day of Pentecost. One of them represents spiritually the "Church in the wilderness" as it is called in Acts 7:38 in the KJV ("congregation in the wilderness" – NKJV). The other the Church under the New Covenant in today's age, still a spiritual wilderness.

In the Bible, certain numbers have significance. Pentecost, as we've seen, means fiftieth. Fifty is a multiple of five and ten.

In the Bible, five and ten are both significant numbers that are often found. And the fact that fifty is used in association with the feast of Pentecost, has meaning for us in terms of its prophetic meaning and what its fulfillment means for God's people in this age.

The numbers five and ten are prominent in the measurements of the tabernacle and the Temple of God in Jerusalem, as described in Exodus 26 and 27. There were specified **ten** curtains for the tabernacle, two pairs of **five** coupled together to make the Tabernacle one edifice. Note that the Church in this age consists of the Old and New Covenant Churches, and the Church as a whole is being "built on the foundation of the **apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, **being joined together**, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:20-22). The physical Tabernacle, and the Temple that replaced it, are direct types of the spiritual "body of Christ," the Church.

Continuing with the instructions for building the Tabernacle, the two pieces were joined together with **fifty** loops of yarn and **fifty** clasps of gold. A covering of goats hair for the tabernacle was made, in two pieces, joined together by **fifty** loops and clasps. Walls for the tabernacle were to be made of boards **ten** cubits long. **Twenty** boards for the north and south sides each, placed in a total of **forty** silver sockets. Note the multiples of five and ten.

**Five** bars were to be made for the boards on each side. For the screened entrance to the tabernacle were **five** pillars of acacia wood on **five** sockets of bronze. The alter made of acacia wood was **five** cubits long and **five** cubits wide, i.e., a square of **five** cubits to a side.

For the court of the tabernacle there were curtains of made of linen **one hundred** cubits long on the north and south sides, with **twenty** pillars and **twenty** sockets

for each side. On the west and east side the perimeter of the court were to be curtains **fifty** cubits long and **ten** pillars and sockets for each side.

The gates were to be **fifteen** cubits on a side, with a screen of **twenty** cubits. The length of the court was **one hundred** cubits, the width **fifty** cubits, the height **five** cubits.

So, although there are other numbers mentioned in the dimensions of the parts of the tabernacle and its entirety, the numbers five and ten and their multiples predominate.

Multiples of five and ten are also prominent in the features of the Temple in Jerusalem as described in 2 Chronicles 3 and 4.

Five is a number associated with **grace**, and ten is a number associated with **judgment**.

God told Abraham that he would not destroy the cities of the plain if even **ten** righteous people could be found there (Genesis 18:32). There were **ten** plagues poured out on Egypt. Israel tempted God **ten** times in the wilderness before he judged that generation by denying them entrance into the land of promise (Numbers 14:22).

Jesus fed **5000** men, plus women and children, with **five** loaves and two fish (Matthew 14, John 6, and elsewhere).

**Ten** virgins (Matthew 25), **five** wise, **five** foolish, **five** went into the wedding festival, **five** did not.

The division of the Bible called the “Law,” consists of **five** books.

There were **five** classes of regular sacrifices offered under the Old Covenant sacrificial system (Leviticus 1-7). They were the burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, sin offering, and trespass offering.

Jesus said, "Are not **five** sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7).

The period of **fifty** days from the wave offering of the first of the firstfruits to the offering of the loaves of firstfruits on Pentecost is the period of harvest of firstfruits, corresponding to the period of God gathering the firstfruits of his Spirit.

Israel, as we've seen was viewed by God as the firstfruits of his increase. They were **judged** in the wilderness, but they also **received grace** in the wilderness.

“Thus says the Lord: ‘The people who survived the sword Found grace in the wilderness -- Israel, when I went to give him rest’” (Jeremiah 31:2).

The Church of God in this age are among those who have the **firstfruits** of God’s Spirit. “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” (Romans 8:23).

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

As such, we are recipients of God’s grace, having our sins forgiven through Christ’s sacrifice.

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being **justified freely by His grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26).

None of us stands justified before God based on his own righteousness, or lawful deeds, so Paul goes on to say, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:27-28).

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by **grace** you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His **grace** in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by **grace** you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:1-10).

“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all

humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His **grace** we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men” (Titus 3:1-8).

So none of us can boast that because we were righteous in God’s sight we have been called and chosen by him. We are among **many**, not just a few, who are **called** in this age. We are among **few chosen** in this age based on our response to God’s calling (Matthew 22:14; see our article "[Are 'Many' or 'Few' Called in this Age?](#)"). But our salvation is made possible only by God’s grace, his willingness to forgive us of our sins, accepting the suffering and death of Jesus Christ as payment for them, as he is a just judge, and justice requires that the penalties for transgressions be satisfied. As we repent, we are counted as free from sin and righteous in God’s sight because our sins are covered by Christ’s blood, through which we are redeemed. “In Him [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

But it’s important to understand that grace goes hand in hand with judgment. Grace is not a license to sin, as many seem to believe.

What it is, is an opportunity to develop into what God wants us to become. As several of the Scriptures I quoted indicate, grace is not an alternative to good works, nor to obedience to God.

“Through Him [Jesus Christ] we have received grace and apostleship for **obedience to the faith** among all nations for His name” (Romans 1:5).

Speaking of Jesus Christ, Scripture says, “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who **obey** Him” (Hebrews 5:9).

“For we are His [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

God, through his mercy, gives us a full opportunity to be in his kingdom. He watches over us, and cares for us, even as he did Israel in the wilderness. Time after time he delivered them from their enemies, he fed them when they were hungry, he gave them water when they were thirsty, their clothes did not wear



out as they trekked through the wilderness for forty years, forty being a number associated with trials, and a multiple of ten.

In a similar manner, God provides for our needs, although we may not necessarily see his presence as readily as did the Israelites in the wilderness, where they saw the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led them (Exodus 13:21-22).

The fact that we are recipients of God's grace ought to teach us that God's judgment and judgments are not harsh, but merciful to those who show they are willing to obey, willing to walk in faith toward God, in submission to his will.

As Christians, we must be willing to endure trials. Everybody in the flesh suffers trials of one kind or another.

But we must not use trials as an excuse to grumble against God, nor must we treat grace as a license to sin.

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (I Peter 4:12).

He goes on to say: “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. **For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first**, what will be the end of those who **do not obey** the gospel of God? Now ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’ Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in **doing good**, as to a faithful Creator” (I Peter 4:16-19).

So let's remember that Pentecost teaches us that God is gathering in the firstfruits of his Spirit in this age. Those among the firstfruits of God's Spirit are recipients of his grace, in ways that others have not yet experienced, though many of them, no doubt most of them, will later. But grace goes hand in hand with judgment, and God is judging us as well, so we must strive to obey him as we live by faith.

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