



PENTECOST

May 23, 2010

*Working Towards UNITY in the
Body of Christ*

Most Christians throughout the world join in celebrating today as the Feast of Pentecost. The word is from a Greek word meaning fiftieth (also fiftieth day). The feast was celebrated in the Old Testament as a harvest celebration. It continued into the era of the New Testament; however, Christians focused attention on celebration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament the annual harvest festival was named “Pentecost” because it fell on the 50th day after the first sheaf of barley was harvested. (Lev. 23:11) A special presentation of the barley sheaf as a wave offering to Yahweh began the festival. The fifty-day interval encompassed the entire period of the grain harvest, beginning with the first cuttings of barley and ending with the completion of the harvest. The celebration on the 50th day paid tribute to Yahweh as the Owner of the land and Source of its produce.

In the New Testament a very large gathering of people and many “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). The Disciples of Jesus had also assembled there. It was precisely in this setting that Jesus kept His promise to send “the Counselor,” the Holy Spirit, amid the signs of wind and fire.

Christians have selected the fiftieth day after Jesus’ resurrection for celebration of Pentecost. Jesus’ resurrection is paralleled with the presentation of the first sheaf of barley. Perhaps one connection can be made with 1 Cor. 15:20: “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Christ as “first fruit” is a guarantee that there will be a second, third, fourth, etc.--that those who are identified with Christ through faith will also be raised at His second coming. The seven weeks thereafter (among Greeks the number 7 represented entirety, totality) refers to all of remaining history.

Pentecost, then, is the celebration of the Holy Spirit’s presence and work now and the anticipation of its completion when the Gospel shall have been preached in every corner of the globe, when the harvest of the redeemed shall have been gathered.