

Pentecost: The Church is Born! (Part 2)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

The rich symbolism prescribed for the ancient Hebrew celebration of Pentecost culminated in the inauguration of a brand-new entity in the program of God. It all occurred, according to His perfect plan, on the Pentecost Sunday which was the 50th day following the resurrection of Christ.

As Bruce Scott stated, even in the Hebrew Bible, “Both the so-called Feast of First Fruits and the Feast of Weeks are inextricably linked” (*The Feasts of Israel: Seasons of the Messiah* [Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1997], 58).

When we come to the New Testament, we find that Jesus rose from the dead on the day of firstfruits, “*and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). Then—*linked* to His resurrection and ascension—He promised that something monumental would transpire on the day of Pentecost, which the Christian world marked last Sunday.

And that day is remembered with good reason! It is the day in which the Holy Spirit would work within Jesus’ apostles and, by implication, their own disciples, in a very different way.

Jesus summarized it by saying: “He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17).

By contrast, in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit worked within those people who were given a unique place of responsibility in the theocracy of Israel, and He did so only for particular purposes and periods of time (see, for instance, 1 Sam. 10:6; 16:13-14; Ps. 51:11).

But now in the New Testament church—which He launched on the day of Pentecost—the Holy Spirit has an entirely different type of relationship with all believers—whether they are Jewish or Gentile. The Spirit places each of them “in one body” (Eph. 2:16) in an act that we call the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13).

On three occasions in the book of Acts (2:6-13; 10:44-46; 19:6) this baptism resulted in the exercise of the miraculous sign gift that is commonly called speaking in tongues. This gift soon ceased for the duration of the church age—ending at the point when the New Testament revelation was complete (see 1 Cor. 13:8-13).

But while that specific gift has ceased, the greatest gifts of the Spirit continue on. By indwelling each believer, He becomes the “guarantee” (2 Cor. 1:22) of our glorification, which we wait to receive when Christ returns to rapture His church. Note Paul’s use of this term for the same purpose also in 2 Cor. 5:5 and Eph. 1:14.

Of course, the nature and attributes of God the Holy Spirit did not change on the day of Pentecost. He is and remains, from eternity past, the third Person of the Godhead—fully

possessing the essence of God, and exercising perfectly abilities such as omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. Jesus made reference to the Spirit's deity in John 14:16 and 15:26.

Rather, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit simply began to interact and function in a manner that was different than anything He had done previously. While He had always been omnipresent, He had never before indwelt all believers as He now does during the church age. I believe that He will conclude this unique ministry at the time of the rapture, which ends the church age (see 2 Thess. 2:6-7).

Jesus predicted the events of Acts 2 all the way back in John 7:37-39—referring to this new coming of the Spirit in terms of “rivers of living water” (v. 38).

With the confluence of all these happenings and more—which would have interlocked so completely in the minds of the Jewish people with the bountiful imagery and traditions that had grown up around the Feast of Weeks—it is hard to fathom a more suitable beginning for the age of the church.

Some Bible students have gone “beyond” (1 Cor. 4:6) the dispensational system of theology and offered extreme—if not fanciful—explanations to justify their belief that the church did not, in fact, begin on the day of Pentecost, but rather much later in, or even beyond, the book of Acts. In this view, a tremendous amount of the New Testament is written, not for the church that we have known—a New Testament “mystery” (Eph. 3:3, 4, 9) composed of all believers, Jewish and Gentile—but, rather, for a Jewish group being offered the millennial kingdom, either in the first century, the future, or both.

However, if the church did not begin in Acts 2, we certainly have no clear indication of when it began—or even if it began at all! It seems almost as if one would have to utilize Acts 2 as the model for the beginning of such a church, while also denying that this was its actual starting point. This would leave the church without her Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), and with precious little revelation to govern her directly over the course of the past 2,000 years.

But, of course, the amazing alignment of events in Acts 2 points to something of remarkable significance. And it is not merely a *Jewish church*, or a *Gentile church*—but *the church*, “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27), God’s previously unrevealed plan for this age.

In the flow of the book of Acts, the birth of the church in Acts 2 establishes a foundation for understanding all that follows, as God progressively reveals more—and actually accomplishes more—toward “the edification of the church” (1 Cor. 14:12).

As believers, we can look back with gratitude and celebrate the fact that, by faith in Christ alone, His Spirit has graciously taken us—Jewish and Gentile people, alike—and made us part of “one body” (1 Cor. 12:13), the most wonderful and blessed institution on Earth, “the church of God” (1 Cor. 10:32).

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

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