

PAST PENTECOST TO PAUL

by Charles W. Wages



1450 Oak Hill Road
Fort Worth, Texas 76112-3017

Speaking the Truth in Love

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There seems to be an almost universal misunderstanding of the significance of Pentecost as it relates to God’s divine plan for the ages. It has taken on ideas and religious beliefs that were never intended in God’s Word. Examples of these “added” beliefs are:

- Pentecost means a particular group of religious people who believe in signs, miracles, healings, speaking in tongues, etc.
- This event marked the beginning or “birthday of the Church.”
- It should be a religious holiday or “Holy” day that should be observed by believers today.
- We should pray for a “return to Pentecost” to be more spiritual.

In order to arrive at the true meaning and significance of this event, we must scripturally define the meaning and trace its history in the Bible.

The Day of Pentecost

In Leviticus 23, we have accounts of various feasts God gave to His people Israel through Moses. Among these was one connected to the wave offering, where they were instructed:

“Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days and ye shall offer a new meat (meal) offering unto the Lord.”

The word “Pentecost” carries the meaning of “fiftieth” as shown in Leviticus 23:16. The Old Testament calls it the “feast of weeks.” This pictures the fifty days between the resurrection of Christ and the day of Pentecost. Also, this helps us see why Acts 2:1 reads:

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come...”

It is now clear that the first chapter of Acts in our Bible covers the fifty days in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in type. The forty days that our Lord was here on earth, after His resurrection, plus ten days the disciples “tarried” in Jerusalem constitutes the fifty days before Pentecost.

It is also important to note that those who assembled on the day of Pentecost were Jews and proselytes (Acts 2:5). They knew the meaning of Pentecost, and the risen Lord had given specific instructions to His disciples, concerning what they were to do. When the apostle Peter stood up to speak, he made it clear that what was happening had been spoken by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16). Now, what does this teach us?

- Pentecost was the anti-type of the Old Testament Feast Day.
- That only Jews or proselytes were there.
- That it was prophesied or spoken of in the Old Testament (Isa. 44:1-6).
- It was the day that the Holy Spirit descended and miracles attended His descent.

The message that Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost is not a message to be preached today in regards to our hope or how to serve the Lord. Peter quoted repeatedly from the Old Testament to show the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that they had crucified their Christ (Acts 2:14-36).

It is instructive to follow the disciples after Pentecost and follow the instructions of the Lord to them in Acts 1:8.

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

The early part of the book of Acts records the disciples fol-

lowing the Lord's instructions. Chapters 2 through 7 pertain mainly to Jerusalem; 8 through 12 with Judea and Samaria; and chapter 13 on with the uttermost parts of the earth.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was something that had been prophesied or spoken of earlier. The prince of prophets, Isaiah, spoke as recorded in Isaiah 44:1-6. He said in verses 3 and 4:

“For I will pour out water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour out my spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thy offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass as willows beside the water courses.”

The Lord Jesus told His disciples of the coming Spirit in John 14:16-17, and John 16:7-15. Then in Luke 24:49, He told them:

“And behold I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry you in the city of Jerusalem until you be endued with power from on high.”

All of this teaches us that the day of Pentecost was a foretold or prophesied event. We see Pentecost was a Jewish feast day and that God gathered the disciples there to receive the power of the Holy Spirit so they might go forth with miracles and signs, proclaiming the risen Christ as the Messiah. This they did. Remember, the Apostle Paul had not yet come on the scene. Also, we must understand that the message of the epistles of Paul had not yet been given. The message that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost was for the purpose of showing the Jewish brethren that they had crucified their Messiah. (Acts 2:16-36). He quoted the Old Testament from Joel 2:28-32 which also verified that God would “pour out of my spirit upon all flesh.” They were prompted of the Lord to sell all that they possessed and to have “all things common” (Acts 2:44-45). Those who cry “Back to Pentecost” should consider this and study the events at Pentecost carefully.

Those persons added to the church at that time were Jews and

proselytes. It wasn't until eight years later that Peter was instructed to go to Gentiles, and then God had to strongly command him to do so (Acts 10:9-16). When we see that God was still dealing with His people Israel during portions of the book of Acts, we can readily see why miracles and signs were in evidence. The Scripture informs us:

“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.” (I Cor. 1:22)

The Apostle Paul Now Comes on the Scene

When we move “Past Pentecost to Paul,” we begin to see God unfolding an entirely new purpose. Paul was also commanded and led of the risen Lord to inform his brethren, Israel, concerning God's plan for them. Yet, Paul's ministry was separated from the twelve disciples, as he was never numbered or counted among them. Matthias took Judas' place. It is not the full intent of this article to go into depth of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, however, it must be noted that he was peculiarly the apostle to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1; Gal. 2:8). It was through Paul alone that God revealed the truth that the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile had been “broken down” (Eph. 2:14). Not at Pentecost, but through Paul did God reveal the mystery dispensation, which tells of the Church being the Body of Christ where there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

The first mention of the Apostle Paul is Acts 7:58. He was called Saul at that time. The salvation, calling, and commissioning of the Apostle Paul is a tremendous turning point in God's dealing with people today. This can easily be accepted in that he was tremendously used of God to pen, under inspiration of God, over half of what we term the New Testament. He predominates the Biblical account, historically and spiritually, from Acts 13 on. That is the reason that the serious student of God's Word needs to have a good working knowledge of his epistles, as well as his journeys. It is through this servant, Paul, that God reveals truth not previously revealed. It is through him we are told:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

We must always keep in mind the very evident truth that most of what is commonly called the “New Testament” was not given before or at Pentecost. We do not have to “return to Pentecost” or try to duplicate the miraculous events that transpired in order to be more spiritual. We must “rightly divide the Word of Truth” (II Tim. 2:15), and distinguish between that given to Israel and that given to the Church through Paul. What a blessing the study of God’s Word becomes when we make these distinctions and apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Some of the gracious, glorious truths given by revelation to and through the Apostle Paul are:

- That the church is the Body of Christ in which there is no distinction made between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-18; Eph. 3:1-11).
- In Paul’s Epistles we learn that the Holy Spirit baptizes, a person who believes in Christ into the church (I Cor. 12:13).
- That the Holy Spirit comes to abide permanently in believers today (I Cor. 6:19-20).
- That our hope as believers today is the appearing of the Lord “in the air” to receive His Church into glory (I Thess. 4:13-18).
- Truths concerning the worship, walk, and work of believers today.

The Gospels, Pentecost, and the work of the “twelve” were primarily in relation to God’s purpose for Israel. It is necessary to move “Past Pentecost to Paul” to fully understand God’s purpose for believers today. For example, the message Peter proclaimed to

the “house of Israel” in Acts 2:38 is different than that proclaimed in Ephesians 2:8-9. Peter pronounced to Israel, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Now, read what Paul was led of the Spirit to write in Ephesians 2:8-9:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast.”

We also see that there was a clear distinction made between Jew and Gentile in the Old Testament, Gospels, and the early Acts period. When we come to the revelation given to Paul, we see that “middle wall” broken down and no distinction made in God’s plan and purpose for His Church, the Body of Christ. (Eph. 2:14-18).

How wonderfully clear and enjoyable does God’s Word become, when we “rightly divide the word of truth” (11 Tim. 2:15), and see that God is progressive in revealing truth in His Word. We shouldn’t be saying, “Back to Pentecost,” but rather “on to Paul.” We must read, study, and stand on God’s Word as stated by the Apostle Paul:

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Christ Jesus; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God; according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” (Eph. 3:8-12)

Practical Applications

In conclusion, what do these precious, priceless truths mean to all of us, whether believers or unbelievers? First we must see and acknowledge,

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

These verses speak of salvation (vs. 15) and then they speak of teaching and instruction, correction and reproof (vs. 16). The purpose is that we may be “perfect” (complete) and properly fitted for good works for our Lord (vs. 17).

The truths concerning Pentecost and its place and meaning in Scripture, will enable the children of God to “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” and to understand His will for us today. Just as we are instructed to move from Law to Grace in our study of the Word, we are taught to progress from Pentecost to Pauline truth. It allows us to know more of the “grace of God that bringeth salvation” (Titus 2:11) and “the dispensation of the grace of God” that shows us our position as members of the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:9-11).

The truth about the real meaning of Pentecost will enable us to detect and correct error and apostasy that plagues the true work and worship of God. It also will provide answers to perplexing problems that have plagued people for ages. Some examples would be the raising of the dead by Peter and Paul in the Acts period. Can people be raised from the dead by “preachers” today? What about the so called “speaking in tongues?” Are believers to sell all their possessions and have them in common? Must a person “repent and be baptized” in order to receive forgiveness of sin? These type of questions could be multiplied and answers can

only be found in a right division of Scripture and embracing the progressive nature of Scripture.

We must move on from God's dealing with Israel at Pentecost to God's dealing with the Church, which is the Body of Christ. The great truth that "the middle wall of partition is broken down" (Eph. 2:14) was not proclaimed at Pentecost but revealed to us by the apostle Paul. The truth concerning how a sinner can be saved, wholly apart from any form of works, is clearly and plainly given in the epistles of Paul for this "age of grace" (Eph. 2:8-9).

This brief account of the purpose of Pentecost and the necessity of moving on to Paul's epistles can make a world of difference in our understanding and enjoying the wonderful Word of God. May God richly bless all who read this little booklet and may it be used to the glory of God.

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col. 1:9-10)
