

Born to Win

A Christian Pentecost

by Ronald L. Dart

This weekend marks one of the most important occasions in the history of the Christian Church. It's the day of Pentecost, and it's actually (and, probably, you may not know this) a lot older than the church. Christians call the day "Pentecost", if they take note of it at all. Considering what happened on that day, I am surprised that there are so many Christians who know so little about the day, and I expect an awful lot of them come up to this weekend with no idea that this is Pentecost weekend. Consider one statement from the Book of Acts to explain what I mean. It's Acts 2, verse one:

Acts 2

AKJV

¹ And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they [*that is, the disciples of Jesus*] were all with one accord in one place.

Now, that the disciples were there observing the Feast of Pentecost is beyond dispute. They were all Israelites, these disciples. They had observed this festival all their lives, and there was absolutely nothing in all the teachings of Jesus up to this point to suggest any change in that practice. In fact, there were three pilgrimage festivals every year—that is, feasts where they were expected to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. Those three were Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. So, they were there. Jesus had told them to wait there and not go home [Acts 1:4]. Going home, they would have just had to turn around and come back for Pentecost again.

Now, there's one curious thing about the Feast of Pentecost. The other two—the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles—occur on *specified dates* in the Hebrew calendar, but there's no date specified for Pentecost. So how do you know when Pentecost has fully come, finally arrived? Well, you have to *count*. The law in this matter is in Leviticus chapter 23, about verse nine.

Leviticus 23

AKJV

⁹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

¹⁰ Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, When you be come into the land which I give to you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest:

¹¹ And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

Now, the idea was: You're going to have a whole new harvest—a crop of grain, in this case—every year. The grain harvest started about Passover time and the harvest season—the grain harvest season—ended at just before Pentecost with the wheat harvest. Okay. What they were supposed to do before they ate *any* of this year's harvest—before they could cook anything with it, before they could make beer out of it, or whatever they were going to do—they were not to do *anything* with it until they had

made an offering, first of all, before God. Okay, on what day was this done? The law says it was on the day after a Sabbath, at the beginning of the grain harvest. That places it in the spring, early in the year.

Now, the Jews understood it to be connected to the Passover, although the law doesn't really specify that. They tried to work their calendar so that the month of the year, when the harvest was *ready* to be harvested, would be right at the time of the Passover. So, on the day after—the first day of Passover—the Jews offered the sheaf of the firstfruits. Now, I say “the Jews”—basically, I'm talking about the Pharisees and what is today Rabbinic Judaism, who look back and their conclusion of the law is that the first day of the Passover feast (that's the 15th day of the first month), which was an annual Sabbath, that was the day after which they would offer the sheaf of the firstfruits.

Now, here's the rationale: The first day of Passover *always* falls on the 15th day of the first month. But that's not always a Sabbath...except in the case that it is a holy day. So far, so good. But there was *another* tradition in Judaism, and it arose from what follows in the law. In Leviticus 23, verse 15:

Leviticus 23

AKJV

¹⁵ And you shall count to you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:

¹⁶ Even to the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new meat offering to the LORD.

¹⁷ You shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals; they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the first fruits to the LORD.

[...]

²¹ And you shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation to you: you shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

So, this festival we're talking about—this Pentecost—is *itself* a holy day, and it is the “morrow after the seventh Sabbath”. Now, if the first day of Unleavened Bread—the 15th day of the first month—falls on, say, a Tuesday, then 50 days later would place Pentecost on a Wednesday. This frequently happens the way the Jews calculate their festival. They don't call it “Pentecost”, they call it “*Shavuot*”, or “Weeks”. But did you notice that the festival of Pentecost (also known as the Feast of Firstfruits) falls on *the day after the seventh Sabbath*. Here's it is again:

Leviticus 23

AKJV

¹⁵ And you shall count to you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:

¹⁶ Even to the morrow after the seventh sabbath[...]

And, unfortunately, there just isn't any way that a Wednesday is the day after *any kind* of a Sabbath that's 50 days after the Days of Unleavened Bread. Now, it's because of this distinction that some Jews and some Christians will be observing Pentecost this Sunday, because it's 50 days from the day after the Sabbath that *follows* Passover. Note: the weekly Sabbath—Saturday—that followed the Passover (even if Passover's on a Tuesday). That's the day you start counting from. And that day, when you start that count, is the day the disciples of Jesus first saw him alive after he was raised from the dead.

Now, there's a curious thing about that day, but I'm obviously going to have to explain that. Pentecost is a feast with three names: The Old Testament names for Pentecost are the “Feast of Firstfruits” and the “Feast of Weeks” (this latter being *Shavuot* in Hebrew [from *shabua*, שָׁבֻעַ, Strong's H7620] which

means “weeks”). Now, this latter is obviously the name because of the seven-week countdown that goes to it. But the name “Feast of Firstfruits” is there because that is *what it was about*. The season of firstfruits was the time of the grain harvest. It began with barley, ended with wheat. Consequently, you could have two loaves of bread, leavened and raised and baked nicely browned, on Pentecost.

So why is there a *Christian* connection in all of this? Well, to understand that, we’re going to have to cast our minds back to the Passover when Christ died—more specifically, to the day he first appeared to his disciples alive from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is the *pivotal event* in the history of God’s dealing with man. Oddly, it was a matter of *controversy* in the early church. The Apostle Paul will address this controversy and, in the process, he will say something that is very important and very often overlooked.

For some reason, the Corinthian church was a hotbed of ideas. I mean, somebody was *always* coming up with some new wrinkle on this or that. And it was strange—it’s hard to get your mind around it—but there were people who didn’t believe in the resurrection from the dead. I suppose we shouldn’t be too surprised because you had these two major divisions in the Judaism of the day: the Pharisees, who believed there *was* a resurrection, and the Sadducees, who believed there *was not*. We encounter both of them in the New Testament. And since we *know* there were people of the sect of the Pharisees who believed [Acts 15:5], it’s logical there were people of the sect of the Sadducees who believed. Whatever. In any case, there were people who did not believe in a resurrection. So here’s Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, trying to straighten out the Corinthian church. He says in verse three:

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

Now, that’s part of the gospel, folks. I don’t know how you can be a Christian without it.

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

⁵ And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brothers at once; of whom the greater part remain to this present, but some are fallen asleep.

⁷ After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

⁸ And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

¹¹ Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so you believed.

¹² Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

You know, as *pivotal* as the resurrection of Christ is for Christianity, you really do wonder where this is coming from. Maybe they believed Christ was raised and nobody else was, but that’s not going to work. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

¹³ But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

¹⁴ And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

And I think a lot of people may not understand that, sometimes: that it is really the *life* of Christ—it is the *living* Christ, raised from the dead—that makes our salvation possible. We could be forgiven of our sins by his death; we can be justified or put right with God; but that doesn't get us there, apparently, because Paul says “Your faith is *pointless* if Christ wasn't raised from the dead.” In fact, not only that, but let's not equivocate. We are found to be liars.

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

¹⁵ Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

¹⁶ For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

Paul really likes to drive this nail in deep and hard.

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

¹⁷ And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins.

So our *life* depends on Christ being raised from the dead. Now, he says, if that were the case:

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

¹⁸ Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

But now he comes to the point we're looking for.

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

Now, this reference to Christ being the firstfruits is no coincidence with the Feast of Firstfruits. It's deliberate and it's connected. He goes on to say:

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

²¹ For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

²³ But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Now, if you're staying with me on this, and if you are a fairly astute reader of the Bible, you're going to realize that what the comparison is here is to that offering of the firstfruits. You couldn't use any of the

grain of this year's harvest until you had made that offering to God. And so, Christ had to be the firstfruits presented before God before any of the rest of us could ever go there. Now, when you understand that 1 Corinthians was written right at the Passover season—right at the beginning of the season of firstfruits—you can see why Paul falls into the use of the term so naturally.

But it's more than that. At the end of the Sabbath after Christ died, a little band of man made their way down to a spot near the Temple Mount where several sheaves of first-ripe barley had been selected. And as soon as the sun was down—ending the Sabbath—they went over to one of these, they picked one out, and the man would stand there with a scythe in his hand. And he would call out to the crowd that had gathered around him, "Is this the one? Is it this sheaf?" And they would all answer, "Yes, that one right there." And finally he would then ask, "Is the sun down? Is the Sabbath over?" And they would all yell, "Yes, it's all over." "Shall I cut?" They say, "Cut." And he would take that scythe and cut that sheaf of grain from the ground with a stroke. *I think that is the moment Jesus opened his eyes in the tomb, not long after Saturday evening at sunset.*

That night the sheaf of barley was threshed; the grain was parched and prepared to be offered by the priest the next morning. He was to take this Omer [אֹמֶר, Strong's #6016]—a basket of this grain—into the temple and wave it before God, to present to God a gift of the first of the firstfruits of the land. Early that morning (the same morning) Jesus made his first appearance. And it was to, of all people, Mary Magdalene. She had come up and was standing outside the tomb. She was concerned. She went down to look in it. She was distraught because Jesus was *gone*. And she had *no idea*, at this point, of resurrection. And she was standing there. And she turned back and saw Jesus standing there and didn't recognize him. And Jesus said:

John 20

AKJV

¹³ [...] Woman, why weep you? She said to them, Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him.

¹⁴ And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, Woman, why weep you? whom seek you? She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, Sir, if you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned herself, and said to him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brothers, and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

And he was gone. Now, later that day he appeared to his disciples; he allowed them to touch him, to handle him. Later on we'd find Thomas sticking his finger in his side to see that the wounds are really there. The presumption is that, at the very moment the priest was offering the firstfruits in the temple, Jesus presented himself to the Father as the firstfruits from the dead. And this is day one of the 50-day countdown to Pentecost. It's a harvest season, and Jesus' chosen metaphor for the work of his disciples was a harvest of people for the kingdom. He's standing where with them one day and he says:

John 4

AKJV

³⁵ Say not you, There are yet four months, and then comes harvest? behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

And what he was talking about was a harvest of people for the Kingdom of God. At the end of the 50 days, the two loaves of bread are offered—symbolic of the remainder of the firstfruits. And if you

follow the idea of firstfruits from the Bible, you will find James saying that *we* are a kind of firstfruits to God and to Lamb [James 1:18]. So that *we* may very well be represented in those two loaves of bread that are presented before God on the Feast of Pentecost. So, as Jesus was presented on a Sunday morning, so the church gathered on Pentecost Sunday—the day after a Sabbath—in the 2nd chapter of Acts. What happened on this day was the beginning of a *revolution*.

It seems unlikely to me that the disciples of Jesus had much of a clue about what was going to happen on this day. They don't seem to have had that much insight, at times, in the ministry. He told him, "Stay at Jerusalem, now. Don't go home, because you're going to be imbued with power from on high not many days hence." They might have had *some* idea about that, but what happened on this day had to be a bit of a shock.

Acts 2

AKJV

- ¹ And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
- ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting [*a great roaring sound*].
- ³ And there appeared to them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat on each of them.

Boy, we need some science fiction special effects right of a shimmering fire, spreading across the top of the room, and then a little tongue of fire falling down on each one of the people there. I doubt if any hairs were lying down; they were all standing straight up when this happened. So, once they saw this happen:

Acts 2

AKJV

- ⁴ [...T]hey were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
- ⁵ And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

Now, when this happened...you remember this is a pilgrimage festival; there were three times a year. I don't think the Jews made it three times *every* year but, nevertheless, Pentecost was a *big* one. It was a time when there were Jews there from *everywhere* in the known world because of the Diaspora. They had all been scattered. They were in business, they were in commerce, but they came home for Pentecost.

Acts 2

AKJV

- ⁶ Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.
- ⁷ And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

How'd they know that? Well, they knew it by their clothes. He said:

Acts 2

AKJV

- ⁸ And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Now, it would be careless of you to think that those Jews who were born in all parts of the empire all spoke Hebrew. In fact, there's indications that not that many Jews who didn't live in Israel (and some that did) didn't speak Hebrew, *per se*. They spoke Aramaic in some cases, they spoke Greek in many cases, but there was no *constant* language. Result? God sent a gift down there to enable every single one of them to receive the gospel in the dialect wherein he was born—what he spoke at home. What were these dialects? Well, there are 13—no less than 13 of them—named right here:

Acts 2

AKJV

⁹ Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

¹⁰ Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and [*this one is interesting*] in the parts of Libya about Cyrene [*it's a local area*], and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

¹¹ Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

Now, it's important, I think, to note here: These were *not* unknown tongues. They were dialects that were known, that were named, and (more importantly) the message was clearly understood by everyone who was there. "We do hear them speak", they said, "in our dialect the wonderful works of God." The message was *known*.

Acts 2

AKJV

¹² And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What means this?

¹³ Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. [*These guys are just drunk.*]

¹⁴ But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said to them, You men of Judaea, and all you that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known to you, and listen to my words:

¹⁵ For these are not drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

¹⁶ But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

Now, at this point this becomes rather interesting, because he pulls from Joel a very explicit prophecy which actually, if you read it in Joel alone, you would think he was talking about the very last days of man on earth. But here is what he said:

Acts 2

AKJV

¹⁷ And it shall come to pass in the last days, said God, I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

¹⁸ And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

Everybody in the house—servants, handmaids, you name it—they're *all* going to have the Spirit poured out upon them and they're going to prophesy. Now, there were 120 disciples there on that day—men *and* women—and the Holy Spirit fell on *all of them*. *Their* sons, *their* daughters, *their* servants, *their* handmaids all prophesied. And I am reasonably certain, in that culture probably, on this day when they baptized 3,000 people, women were probably baptizing other women. (It would have been appropriate, because of dress and what have you, that they do so.) Also, the prophecy goes on. He says:

Acts 2

AKJV

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke:

²⁰ The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:

Now, I don't know what Peter made of that exactly, because he doesn't go on to explain, but the heavenly signs of the sun and moon being turned into blood or darkness *are not there*. So what is this about? I think what Peter begins to understand from this is that this is a *type*—this is an example of what Joel was talking about, and that the final fulfillment of what Joel was talking about would be ahead of us yet. And then Peter says:

Acts 2

AKJV

²¹ And it shall come to pass, that whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

“Whoever”. The door of access to God was being *kicked open*. A major clue here is the gift of *all these languages*. When you couple that with Jesus' commission he gave to his disciples before he left. He said:

Matthew 28

KJ2000

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

¹⁹ Go you therefore, and teach [*make disciples of*] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

You know what the word “nations” is in the Greek? It's the word for gentiles [*ethnos*, ἔθνος, Strong's G1484]. And so it was that the disciples were to go and make disciples of all the gentiles, teaching him to observe everything that good that Jesus had commanded them and baptizing them. It is something that, frankly, no one up to this point had even begun to get their mind around. The Gospel was going out. Later, on this day, Peter would say to everyone there:

Acts 2

KJ2000

³⁸ [...] Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[...]

⁴¹ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Maybe you can see why I said this day marked the revolution.

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