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Bible
CORRESPONDENCE COURSE



PENTECOST
FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

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Lesson 27

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About Our Cover . . .

People of many nationalities, races and ethnic groups are now being called by God to understand His way of life. Called the "firstfruits" in the Bible, they are a comparatively small group, but have a tremendous job to do. They are in training to become the rulers and teachers, with and under Christ, in the soon-coming world tomorrow. These spiritual firstfruits—the first group to be offered salvation—are pictured by the third annual Holy Day, the Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost.

Warren Watson—A.C.

PENTECOST

Only “Firstfruits” Now Called!

*God is not trying to convert the world now—believe it or not!
Now is the time God is calling to salvation only a tiny
minority—the firstfruits of salvation. Why?*

NEARLY 5,000,000,000 human beings are alive today. Of this incredibly large number, God has called and put into His Church in the last 50 years little more than 100,000. For every person God has put into His Church, there are 50,000 people He has not!

Why?

There is an astounding reason!

This vast majority, your Bible reveals, will be called *later*—most not until after Christ’s return. These thousands of millions cannot come to Christ and become part of God’s Church now—even if they try! Jesus said so, plainly, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44). Comparatively speaking, God has been drawing

only a few in this age, but for a great purpose.

Why has God called the few He has? For what purpose has God drawn and put into His Church His firstfruits? Has God drawn these few and put them into His Church, as some think, just so they can get salvation and enjoy the fellowship and social life of the local congregations?

Where We Are Now in God’s Plan

God has a Master Plan pictured by seven annual festivals.

The first festival is Passover. It pictures the Messiah—Christ—who volunteered before the foundation of the world to be slain as the Passover Lamb, the Savior of the world (I Pet. 1:19-20;

FEW NOW CALLED—From among the multitudes of human beings alive today, only a tiny minority—the “firstfruits”—have been called by God and put into His Church.





Barry Baker—A.C.

LEARNING TO TEACH OTHERS God's way is what the firstfruits of salvation, the members of God's Church, are now doing. God's Church is the training school for the rulers and teachers of the world tomorrow.

Rev. 13:8). That was accomplished in the spring of A.D. 31.

The second festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, pictures overcoming sin. The first humans, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and sin entered the world. God then sentenced the human family to 6,000 years of spiritual exile, during which the human family is, as a whole, cut off from the possibility of salvation (except for those few He would choose for a special purpose).

We are now near the end of the first 6,000 years, during which humans have experimented with every imaginable form of government, religion, social and economic idea. Soon the *fourth* step in God's plan will occur—the return of Jesus Christ to restore the government of God on earth. This event is pictured by the fourth Holy Day, the Feast of Trumpets. It is after that event that the vast majority will be called to salvation in a world ruled and guided by God's Family. But before the vast majority can live in such a world and be taught the true way to salvation, rulers and teachers must be trained. That is where we who are the firstfruits of salvation in God's plan enter the picture!

Church in God's Master Plan

We are now in the age of the Church. God is not working through isolated prophets, nor through

independent Christians. He is working through a small group of tens of thousands of Spirit-begotten humans, organized and unified by His laws, His government, His truth.

God's Church is the means by which God is now preparing this world for Christ's return! It is through God's Church that He is preparing the future rulers and teachers of His Kingdom. God has laid the foundation; He is now beginning to build the world tomorrow through His Church today!

Those now called into God's Church are part of God's spiritual *firstfruits*—the first group to be offered salvation. Those now in God's Church have been called first—for the special **PURPOSE** of being prepared for God's Kingdom!

Once the Church is prepared and ready, God's firstfruits will become Christ's ruling and teaching assistants, helping teach the true way to salvation to everyone in the world tomorrow. They have been called for the special *service* of qualifying to eventually help bring the knowledge of salvation to the vast majority!

The firstfruits of salvation are pictured by God's third annual festival—the Feast of Firstfruits, which is called Pentecost in the New Testament. Let's look, now, at what traditional Christianity has no knowledge of—what the Bible reveals about the Feast of Firstfruits, God's Church and the third major step in God's Master Plan for the salvation of all mankind.

LESSON 27

New Testament Church Began on Day of Pentecost

Jesus told His disciples shortly before His trial and crucifixion: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). Christ would continue to teach and support the apostles, but not in person, for He ascended to heaven. So how would He come to them?—by means of the Holy Spirit.

1. Did Jesus promise His disciples they would receive power from heaven? Luke 24:49. Where did He tell them to wait for this power? Same verse and Acts 1:4-5, 8.

2. In what miraculous way did God's Spirit come to Christ's disciples? Acts 2:1-6. What was the name of the day on which this great display occurred? Verse 1.

COMMENT: The day of Pentecost is the third annual festival given to ancient Israel. Its Old Testament name was Feast of Firstfruits, since it came at the end of the first or spring harvest in the Northern Hemisphere (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Num. 28:26). It was also called the Feast of Weeks, since it came seven weeks after the first Sunday after Passover (Deut. 16:9-10, 16). Since it was also the fiftieth day of the spring harvest season, Greek-speaking Jews and Christians called it *pentekoste*, which means "fiftieth."

Pentecost A.D. 31 marked the beginning of God's Spirit-begotten New Testament Church. *Ekklesia*, the Greek word for "church," means an assembly of "called-out ones." The whole world is not "called out"—only a tiny minority are predestined to be called for a special purpose. This is pictured by and commemorated by the annual Festival of Pentecost.

World Cut Off from Holy Spirit

Why does God *call* people to salvation? Why is God calling only a few before He calls the vast majority? Once a person is called and put into God's Church, what does he or she *DO*?

1. As the first step in reproducing Himself, God created Adam and Eve and gave them basic instructions in the right way to live. Did God offer Adam and Eve an opportunity to receive His Spirit? Gen. 2:8-9, 16-17.

COMMENT: Adam had mortal life. The tree of life

represented *eternal* life, which can come only from God's Spirit. If Adam had eaten of that tree, he would have received God's Spirit, been begotten as a son of God. Adam, conditionally, would have received the earnest or down payment of eternal life. God's Spirit would have enabled Adam and Eve to overcome temptation, grow in righteous character and become perfect, eventually ready to be given spirit-composed eternal life unconditionally. Even Jesus had to grow, learn, overcome and *become* perfect (Luke 2:40; Heb. 5:8; Rev. 3:21; Heb. 2:10).

2. Adam and Eve, however, did not eat of the tree of life. From which tree did they choose to eat? Gen. 3:1-6.

COMMENT: Though God had warned them of the penalty of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Eve was persuaded by the devil's clever arguments to eat of the fruit that led to self-centeredness and *death!* Adam also willingly ate the forbidden fruit.

Whether Adam fully realized it or not, he thus lost his opportunity to conquer Satan and replace him as ruler of this world. Instead, Adam obeyed Satan, placing himself under Satan's government.

3. What was Adam and Eve's punishment for disobeying God? Gen. 3:16-19. Were they denied further access to the tree of life and therefore cut off from God's Spirit? Verses 22-24.

COMMENT: After Adam disobeyed, God cut off all humanity from access to His Spirit and thus cut them off from salvation! Until a son of Adam—the Son of Man—could qualify where Adam failed, could conquer Satan, pay the penalty of human sin and ransom the world from its kidnapper, no one could restore God's government on earth, and no one could be given salvation.

The Messiah, and He alone, could do all this. Of necessity, then, God's plan required that mankind in general be *not yet judged*. God has therefore not permitted them to have access to His Spirit, nor access to salvation. They will have their opportunity for salvation in a special resurrection to judgment, which will be *after* God's government has been restored over the entire earth.

God Calling Only a Few

The one great purpose now uppermost in God's mind is *the restoration of His government on*

earth. God set apart a period of 7,000 years in which to accomplish His purpose. The first 6,000 years He sentenced mankind to be cut off from salvation.

For His supreme purpose, God has called a few. Hebrews 11 mentions Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and others. Apparently each was called for a *special mission* preparatory to the salvation of humanity. In order for them to perform their mission, it was necessary that an exception be made and they be empowered by God's Spirit.

The work done by the patriarchs and prophets became the foundation on which the Church was built (Eph. 2:20), and the Church, in turn, is the instrument God is using to eventually bring about His Kingdom and the restoration of His government over the entire earth.

Even ancient Israel, as a whole, was never offered God's Spirit. They were given God's laws, but, as a nation, they were purposely denied access to God's Spirit. God gave proof, through Israel, that without His Spirit, humanity is *helpless*. The ancient nation of Israel knew about God and could appeal to Him, but without His Spirit in them, the Israelites could not have the love of God in them and they consequently could not be spiritually righteous.

Nevertheless, after the nation of Israel became two people, the separate nations of Israel and Judah were used by God to further His plan. God caused the nation of Judah to preserve the knowledge of His law and His Word even though they did not have a spiritual understanding of it. Into this nation Jesus Christ was born.

When Jesus Christ came to earth nearly 2,000

In this age before Christ begins to rule over the whole earth, each person is specially chosen. . . . These firstfruits are called for a special mission.

years ago, it was not to set up His Kingdom (John 18:36). Christ did not, at that time, come to restrain Satan from deceiving the world. Let's understand why.

1. Did Jesus speak in parables to make His meaning clear, or to *hide* His meaning from the general public? Matt. 13:10-15, 34; Mark 4:11-12. Was this because the time had not yet come for most to be forgiven their sins and converted? Mark 4:12.

COMMENT: Christ preached the Father's Gospel to the public as a *witness*. They heard it but did not comprehend it. The only ones Jesus really wanted to understand the truth were a few specially called and chosen students.

2. Can everyone who wants to come to Christ receive God's Spirit and thereby become a member of His Church? John 6:44, 65.

COMMENT: In this age before Christ begins to rule over the whole earth, each person is specially chosen. Like the prophets before them, these firstfruits are called for a special mission—a purpose preparatory to the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth and the salvation of the majority! Otherwise, no exceptions can be made—the world as a whole *must remain cut off* from access to salvation until Christ returns.

That is why God's Church does not try to convert anyone. Only God can do that. God's ministers do not beg or plead with anyone to repent or be baptized or support God's Church. But they do make God's way easy to understand for those whom God is calling.

If God wanted everyone to understand, everyone would. Instead, hardly anyone does. God's "hands off" policy that began in the Garden of Eden will continue until just before Christ's return.

3. After Christ's resurrection, how many disciples were there? Acts 1:15. Were they given God's Spirit, thus making them the first members of God's Church? Acts 2:1-4; I Cor. 12:13.

COMMENT: Out of the thousands who had heard Christ, about 120 believed Him. Those 120 had been taught by Jesus. The 3,000 who were begotten of God later that day (Acts 2:41) were from various parts of the world (verses 5, 8-11); they had not, as a whole, been taught by Christ. They were now being taught by the apostles, who had been trained and commissioned to teach (Matt. 28:19-20).

The number of Christians continued to grow and may have increased to about 100,000. But then persecution began, just as Jesus had prophesied (John 15:20). Persecution first came from the Jews, then later the Romans and false brethren (Acts 20:29-30; III John 9-10). It was some decades later that these false brethren outnumbered the true.

Most congregations were eventually taken over by men who attempted to combine Christ's teachings with traditional customs, compromising the truth by attaching Christian-sounding names to pagan ideas. Satan, the god of this world, was deceiving many with a counterfeit, falsely labeled Christianity.

True Christians remained a small minority—probably never more than about 100,000—fleeing to new areas when persecution became too intense.

Why does God have this small flock? What is its purpose?

Church: Preparing for Kingdom of God

God created man incomplete—needing finishing touches. Man was given a human spirit, needing God's Spirit. He was made mortal, needing to be given immortality. He was created a free moral agent, needing to develop character.

Just as God does not create all at once, but in successive stages, so He is bringing salvation to mankind in successive stages. Every stage is a progressive step toward the goal of establishing His Kingdom and restoring His government on earth.

1. Did Malachi prophesy that God would send a messenger to prepare the way before the Lord? Mal. 3:1. Was this prophecy in part fulfilled by John the Baptist, who came before the Lord's First Coming? Luke 7:24, 27. Did John prepare the way by making a people ready for Christ? Luke 1:17.

COMMENT: John preached repentance—obedience to God's law—to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous. Thus when Jesus began preaching, some people were ready to listen. Many of John's disciples later became Jesus' disciples.

2. Did Christ tell His disciples that John's work in the spirit and power of Elijah was a prototype of another "Elijah" yet to come? Matt. 17:11-13. (Notice Jesus said he "shall"—yet future—come.) Did Malachi prophesy that this "Elijah"—God's messenger—would come *before* the day of the Lord—when Christ comes in power to punish the disobedient and rule in righteousness? Mal. 3:1-2, 5; 4:5-6.

COMMENT: John was a prototype of a messenger God would send in the spirit and power of Elijah before Christ's *Second* Coming. A people would be prepared for Christ through a message about the return of Christ, the establishment of God's Kingdom and the need for people to repent.

3. In what way is God's Church now preparing for the end of Satan's world and the ushering in of God's Kingdom? Matt. 24:3, 14; Mark 13:10.

COMMENT: From these verses, it is clear that the true Gospel was not preached *to the world* for some 1,900 years, for the end is not yet here. The true Gospel was suppressed, and, according to this prophecy of Jesus Christ, the "gospel" preached to the world was another gospel, a counterfeit!

God's Church, by preaching Christ's Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world as a witness, is preparing *millions* for Christ's return. Although most people pay little attention to the message now, they will remember it when Christ and the saints begin to rule and Satan the deceiver has been restrained. Many who do not believe the message now will nevertheless have been prepared to believe when taught by Christ and His assistants.

God's Church is also preparing for God's Kingdom in another way. Those who believe Christ's Gospel now are being prepared for a special role as part of God's soon-coming Kingdom. Malachi 3:1 says the Lord will come to His Temple. Let's notice what this means.

4. What is the spiritual Temple Christ will return to at His Second Coming? I Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-21.

COMMENT: God's Church, composed of those who have God's Spirit within them, is the spiritual

Just as God does not create all at once, but in successive stages, so He is bringing salvation to mankind in successive stages.

Temple to which Christ will come. Paul told the Ephesians that the Church must be "fitly framed together," growing, "builded together." This united growth can be achieved only through God's government.

5. Has God also chosen ministers within His Church and assigned them the responsibility of teaching the members, giving them spiritual nourishment? I Cor. 1:10; I Pet. 5:1-3; Eph. 4:11-13.

COMMENT: The members of God's Church do not establish their own doctrines. If they did, confusion would result, for each member is at a different level of growth in knowledge and character. God's Church is organized, speaking the same thing, unified through the authority God has placed in His ministers. The doctrines of God's Church come from God through Jesus Christ through His Word and His inspiration in the men He has chosen to direct His Church. The Pastor General and his staff teach the local pastors, and they, in unity, teach the members of God's Church around the world.

Let it be emphasized that the Church's purpose is not merely to give salvation to Church members—the purpose is to *teach* and *train* them to

PERFORMING THEIR COMMISSION

The firstfruits who have been called into the Church in this age have been called to loyally back up God's Church in whatever way they can—to loyally support the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world.

With today's modern technology, they are reaching millions of people via television, radio, satellites, the printing press and other means of mass communication. By their participation and support—whether financial contributions, labor, encouragement or prayer—the firstfruits grow in spiritual character, becoming better prepared to rule and teach in the world tomorrow.

PASTOR GENERAL Joseph W. Tkach, right, greets well-wishers from the Church's plane. Below, data entry operators update subscriber files at the Mail Processing Center.



Nathan Faulkner—A.C.



Left and right: Ambassador College



THE CHURCH IN ACTION—Clockwise, Richard Ames above taping a *World Tomorrow* program; video control room at the Church's television studio; operators answer phone calls from interested viewers of the *World Tomorrow* program; seven language editions of the *Plain Truth* magazine.



Warren Watson—A.C.



Nathan Faulkner—A.C.



become the instruments God will use to save the vast majority.

Church Members Preparing for God's Kingdom

1. Did Paul understand that the people of Israel were spiritually blinded? Rom. 10:16, 18, 21. (Although they heard the true Gospel, they did not obey it.) Did God purposely allow their blindness? Rom. 11:8, 25, 32.

2. Nevertheless, did Paul know that the Israelites would have a *future* opportunity to receive salvation? Rom. 11:26. Did God purposely blind the majority of Israelites so they could obtain mercy later—through the mercy of those who were called first? Verse 31.

COMMENT: Verse 26, which quotes Isaiah 59:20, explains when most Israelites will have their opportunity for salvation—after a Deliverer (Isaiah says “Redeemer”) comes out of Zion to call them to repent of ungodliness. The Redeemer from Zion is Jesus Christ, but Paul was not referring to His First Coming, for Israel was still blinded at the time Paul wrote this.

All Israel shall be saved when the Deliverer returns with power and glory to *rule*. And then, wrote Paul, the Israelites shall receive their opportunity for salvation through the mercy of the first-century Christians and those who would be called into God's Church through the centuries. When Christ returns, all true Christians will be resurrected and/or changed to immortality to help Him rule and teach the way of salvation to both Israelites and Gentiles.

3. Will many nations go to Jerusalem—the headquarters of Christ's government—and ask to be taught His way? Micah 4:2. Will the earth become full of the knowledge of the Lord? Isa. 11:9.

The only reason any person is called to salvation in this age is to qualify to help in ruling and teaching in the world tomorrow. . . .

4. In addition to being rulers, will the Spirit-born children of God also be priests? Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6. What is the function of a priest? Mal. 2:7; Ezek. 44:23.

COMMENT: Just as ancient Israel's priests were

assigned to teach God's laws, Spirit-born members of God's Family will be *teachers* of God's way of life, helping bring the knowledge of the way to salvation to everyone.

Salvation for all mankind in the world tomorrow will come through the life and work of Christ and the Spirit-born saints. In a sense, then, they, as priests, will be *co-saviors* with Christ.

Is God unfair to give these positions of leadership to only the few He has specially chosen? Not at all. God has not called anyone for special favors—He has called them for a special purpose—a tremendous job to do. God rewards us according to our *works* (Matt. 16:27). Those called now have to overcome Satan and his society. That requires effort, self-denial and willpower, a price most humans are not willing to pay.

Before Jesus could qualify to rule, He had to overcome Satan while Satan was ruling. Since the Church will rule with and under Christ, Church members must also qualify by resisting and overcoming Satan while he is still ruling (Rev. 3:21).

That will not be required of the overwhelming majority. God will call them to salvation when the world is ruled by Christ and the saints—when it will undoubtedly be easier to live God's way. It will be easier because of the *advance work* now being done by God's firstfruits.

In order to qualify for their future jobs, those whom God has called into His Church have been freely given God's Spirit and the opportunity for salvation. The rulers and teachers of God's Kingdom are, by necessity, given opportunity for salvation before their future students can be. The Church is a necessary instrumentality preparatory to bringing salvation to all humanity!

The *only* reason *any* person is called to salvation in this age is to qualify to help in ruling and teaching in the world tomorrow—to help call and save those alive then.

God's Spirit Empowers Church

God has given His people a job to do, and He gives them the power to be able to do it. God's Church could not preach the Gospel to the world as it is being done today without God's Spirit! Nor can God's people prepare for their future leadership roles without this divine power.

1. Could Jesus do any spiritual works, including obedience to God, with just His human strength? John 5:30; 8:28. Where did He get the necessary power? John 14:10, last part.

COMMENT: The Father “dwelt” in Jesus through the Holy Spirit!

2. Did Christ promise the same spiritual help to His disciples? John 14:16. What is the “Comforter”? Verse 26. Does Christ, through the Holy Spirit, live in His followers today? Rom. 8:9-10; Col. 1:27; I John 3:24.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ went to the Father’s throne in heaven to send God’s Spirit to His disciples (John 16:7). Through God’s Spirit, Christ lived in them—not in person, but in *spirit*. True Christians’ hope of glory—our hope of becoming part of God’s glorious Family—is in Christ, our Savior, *living in us* through the Holy Spirit.

3. Is it necessary to obey God to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Acts 5:32. Did Jesus obey God, and does He expect Christians to obey Him today? John 15:10. Are Christ’s commandments exactly the same as His Father’s? John 14:24.

4. Must Christians not only have God’s Spirit, but also be yielded to it, letting it transform them so they become more like Christ and the Father? Rom. 6:13; 8:14; Phil. 2:5; II Cor. 10:5.

COMMENT: God’s Holy Spirit gives His Spirit-begotten children supernatural power to help them live the way today that Jesus Christ lived more than 1,900 years ago. Through that Spirit, Christ is enabling them to obey God, overcome sin and endure to the end of this age. God’s Spirit is the power by which God’s firstfruits are now being prepared for their jobs in God’s Kingdom.

God’s Spirit is also the power by which God’s Church accomplishes its commission to preach Christ’s Gospel to the world.

5. By what power was the work of God done during the days of God’s servant Zerubbabel, who built the physical Temple (later refurbished) to which Jesus came? Zech. 4:6. What power was given to Jesus’ disciples to enable them to perform their commission? Acts 1:8. Was this also the power by which Paul was able to preach Christ’s Gospel? Rom. 15:19.

COMMENT: The work of God’s Church is ultimately done by the *power of the Spirit of God!* The Kingdom of God is being preached and published in all the world today by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The “fruits” God is producing through His human instruments today are the *same fruits* His Spirit produced through the human Jesus and the collective “Body of Christ” in apostolic days!

6. Did Christ say His servants would do even *greater works* than He had done while on earth? John 14:12. What work would the Church do in preparation for the end of this age and the return of Christ? Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10.

COMMENT: Right now, the divine commission to publicize the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a

witness to all nations is being fulfilled in a dramatic way. God’s Church today is reaching *far more* people than Jesus was ever able to reach on foot.

With today’s modern technology, God’s Church can reach *millions* of people via television, radio, satellites, the printing press and other means of mass communication!

These facilities enable the Church to do a tremendously greater work than the first-century apostles could. These facilities, however, also cost more money. Without the tithes and offerings of the members, the Church’s commission could not be fulfilled!

God could send angels to preach His Gospel. Instead, He is using humans because by supporting the work, they are being trained! And they

God’s Spirit is the power by which firstfruits are being prepared for their jobs in God’s Kingdom.

cannot be trained without their participation and support!

It would be easy for God to supply money miraculously. Instead, He uses humans to provide that support. Tithes and offerings don’t enrich God any. He has commanded His people to support His Church for *their own* good. They grow in spiritual character, they become better prepared to rule, partly through their support—whether financial contributions, labor, encouragement or prayer—of the work being done!

Every Christian who is growing spiritually has his heart completely in the work God has given His Church to accomplish. Our “works” include our part in supporting the work God is inspiring His Church to do—preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the whole world as a witness. God’s Spirit-begotten children are His instruments in fulfilling His great commission to His Church in the end time!

The members’ spiritual character growth and the work of the Church are inseparable. If any member stops supporting the work being done, that member will stop growing. But as the members support the Church, they will also grow spiritually! And as they please God, He will bless and magnify the effectiveness of the work being done!

Why Called Feast of Firstfruits?

Thus far in this lesson we have referred to the Feast of Firstfruits only briefly—yet what we

have studied relates directly to the *meaning* of this festival! Understanding God's plan of salvation and especially the Church's role in God's Master Plan is *essential* to understanding the meaning of God's third annual Holy Day. Why? Because the day of Pentecost *pictures* the firstfruits of salvation, and the job they are now doing, empowered by God's Spirit!

God established His annual festivals and Holy Days in conjunction with the two annual agricultural harvests in the land of Palestine. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread come at the beginning of the spring grain harvest; the Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost comes at its end. The fall festivals are associated with the large fruit harvest of summer and early autumn.

But it is the *spiritual* harvest God is most concerned with! The spiritual harvests are patterned like the physical harvests—first a small harvest, then a large one.

The spring festivals illustrate to God's Church yearly that those He calls into His Church in this age are the "firstfruits"—the first group to be given God's Spirit and offered salvation—the relatively *small beginning* of His spiritual harvest.

1. What were God's instructions regarding the Feast of Firstfruits? Lev. 23:15-17, 20. Was this Feast an annual Sabbath on which the people were to assemble? Verse 21.

2. How long is the Feast of Firstfruits—Pentecost—to be kept annually by God's people? Lev. 23:14, 21. Did Christ's disciples know they should keep the day of Pentecost? Acts 2:1; 20:16; I Cor. 16:8.

COMMENT: Jesus did not abolish Pentecost or any other annual Holy Day. Quite to the contrary, Christ told His disciples to be in Jerusalem so on that Holy Day they would receive God's Spirit. If the disciples had not been observing God's Holy Days, they would not have been there to receive God's Spirit! And long after Christ's death, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, kept the Festival of Pentecost with Gentile converts.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has this to say about the New Testament Church's observance of Pentecost: "The Jewish feast was primarily a thanksgiving for the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, but the rabbis associated it with remembrance of the Law given by God for the Hebrews to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The church's transformation of the Jewish feast to a Christian festival was thus related to the belief that the gift of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus was the firstfruits of a new dispensation that fulfilled and succeeded

the old dispensation..." (article "Pentecost," 15th edition).

3. What special offering did the Old Testament priests make on the day of Pentecost? Lev. 23:17. Does the leaven in these loaves typify sin? I Cor. 5:7.

COMMENT: Since the Feast of Firstfruits was a harvest festival, representing an end result, baked loaves, rather than unbaked flour, were waved to be accepted by God. The leaven in the loaves represented the fact that God's spiritual firstfruits had sin in their lives. (Of course, they had to repent of sin and be cleansed by Christ to be acceptable to God.) There were *two* loaves—one to represent the patriarchs, judges, prophets and kings of the Old Testament period whom God called and the other to represent the true Christians of the New Testament Church.

Pentecost, or Firstfruits, pictures God's first spiritual harvest—mortal human beings translated into Spirit-composed God Beings! God's Church shall be that firstborn harvest (Heb. 12:23)—born into God's Family at Christ's return.

4. Are Spirit-begotten Christians the firstfruits of God's Master Plan of salvation? Jas. 1:18. Do Christians today have the firstfruits of God's Spirit? Rom. 8:23. Are specific Christians also called firstfruits in the Bible? Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:15; Rev. 14:4.

COMMENT: The 144,000 of Revelation 14:1-5 are not the only firstfruits (the Greek text has "firstfruits," not "*the* firstfruits"). All who will be in God's first spiritual harvest, the first resurrection, are firstfruits. This will include Old Testament prophets and all true Christians.

5. What defines whether one is a member of God's Church and part of the spiritual firstfruits? Rom. 8:9, 11, 16; I Cor. 12:12-14. Did the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets have God's Spirit? I Pet. 1:10-11. But when was the first time God gave His Spirit to a large group? Acts 2:1-4. Did the day of Pentecost thus mark the beginning of the New Testament Church? Verses 1, 41, 47.

COMMENT: On the day of Pentecost, A.D. 31, God sent His Spirit to begin His Church—to beget and strengthen the firstfruits He was beginning to call into His Church, symbolically represented by one of the "wave loaves." The New Testament Festival of Pentecost is now a *memorial* commemorating the founding of the New Testament Church of God through the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

God's Church observes the Feast of Firstfruits as an annual reminder of this step in God's Master



THE FIRST OF THE FIRSTFRUITS, picturing the risen Christ, was cut, prepared and waved before God on a Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, two loaves of baked bread were waved, representing the firstfruits of the Old and New Testament periods.

Plan: God's people today are merely the firstfruits—the small first group to be offered salvation through Christ.

The world, except for the few called, is cut off from God—not yet called to salvation—neither saved nor lost—not yet judged. But the members of God's Church *ARE* being judged (I Pet. 4:17)—judged in how well they are preparing for God's Kingdom!

The day of Pentecost pictures the Church being called and trained for the special mission of preparing for the time when God will open salvation to the world, when they will be kings and teachers, co-rulers and co-saviors with and under Christ their Husband!

Christ—First of the Firstfruits

The Feast of Firstfruits pictures God's firstfruits—all who will be born into God's Family at the first resurrection—the first group of humans to be harvested by God and given glorious, powerful immortal life.

But one human has *already* been born of God—more than 1,950 years before the first resurrection. He is the *first* of the firstfruits, and was pictured in Old Testament rituals by a symbolic ceremony during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, 50 days before the Feast of Firstfruits. The meaning of this ceremony is important, even though it is no longer performed since the Old Testament priesthood is no longer needed.

1. Was the first part of the spring grain harvest to be waved before God to be accepted by Him? Lev. 23:10-11.

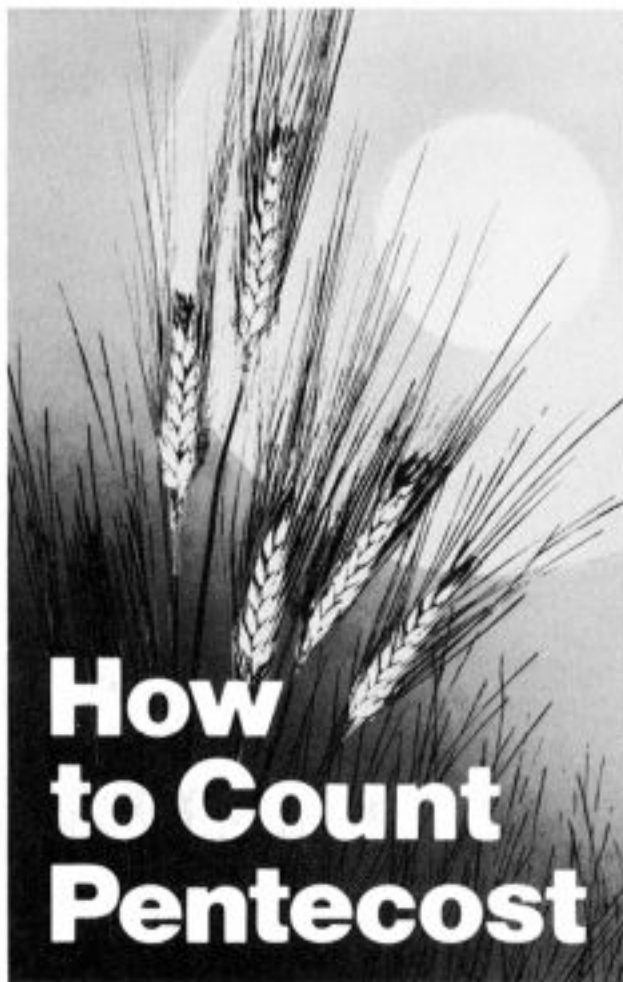
COMMENT: Since most modern translations use the word "sheaf," the traditional name for this wave offering has been "wavesheaf." However, the priests did not wave a sheaf.

The word "sheaf" is translated from the Hebrew word *omer*, which means a measurement of about two quarts or two liters. The Jews traditionally cut a sheaf, beat out the grain, then ground the first of the firstfruits into flour and offered an omer of that flour. (See the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, article "Omer.")

Some modern translations of the Bible have given the passage describing this wave offering the erroneous subhead "the Feast of Firstfruits." Subheads are not part of the original text; they are not inspired. The wave offering was not a "feast"; it was merely a ceremony that involved primarily the priests. The difference is clear when we look at the original Hebrew words.

As we learned earlier in this lesson, the Feast of Firstfruits is another name for the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. In the verses that refer to the Feast of Firstfruits (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:17, 20; Num. 28:26), "firstfruits" is translated from the word *bikkuwr*. It refers to the results of the entire spring harvest.

However, the firstfruits referred to in Leviticus 23:10-11 are *reshiyth*, perhaps better translated "first of the firstfruits." This was the very first of



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SABBATH
			Passover A.D. 31	1st Day U.B.		Sheaf cut at Sunset
1	2	3	7th Day U.B. 4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48	49
Pentecost 50						

Pentecost is always to be observed on a Sunday, which is the 50th day after the cutting of the wavesheaf during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Illustration by L. Greg Smith

the spring harvest, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

2. On what day was the first of the firstfruits wave offering made? Lev. 23:11.

COMMENT: The Pharisees interpreted “the morrow after the sabbath” as the day after the first annual Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Sadducees, who were mostly priests, said the wave offering should be made on the day after a *weekly* Sabbath—always on a Sunday. The correct day becomes clear when we examine the context.

3. Must the date for the Feast of Weeks be counted beginning on the day the first of the firstfruits was offered? Lev. 23:14-16; Deut. 16:9-10.

COMMENT: According to the reasoning of Rabbinic Judaism, Pentecost is on the 6th day of the third month.

4. The offering of the first of the firstfruits marked the beginning of the first harvest of each year. Now let’s notice the way in which Jesus Christ, the first of God’s spiritual harvest, became the spiritual fulfillment of that offering. Who was the first to be resurrected from the dead into God’s Family? Acts 26:23. Was He therefore the first of the firstfruits of God’s spiritual harvest? I Cor. 15:20, 23; Col. 1:13-15, 18.

COMMENT: All who will be born into God’s Family at the first resurrection will be firstfruits, the

results of God’s first spiritual harvest. They are pictured by the Feast of Firstfruits. Christ, who became a born Son of God at His resurrection more than 1,900 years ago (Rom. 1:4), was the *first* of the firstfruits, pictured by the first of the firstfruits ceremony—50 days before Pentecost.

5. After Christ was resurrected from the dead, did He have to ascend to His Father in heaven? John 20:17. On that same day, after returning to earth, could His disciples then touch Him? Read Matthew 28:1-10, especially verse 9, and John 20:19, 27. What day of the week was it? John 20:19, first part.

COMMENT: Early on the Sunday morning during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Christ would not let anyone touch Him because He had not yet ascended to His Father. But later that same day, Christ did allow His disciples to touch Him. This clearly shows that Christ ascended to heaven and was accepted by His Father as the spiritual “first of the firstfruits” on the same day the Levitical priests were commanded to offer the first of the firstfruits to be accepted by God!

Christ therefore fulfilled the symbolism of the first of the firstfruits on the morrow after the *weekly* Sabbath—not an annual sabbath. If it had been the first annual sabbath that was intended by the words “the sabbath” in Leviticus 23:11, then the sheaf or omer would have been waved on Friday in A.D. 31. But on Friday the Messiah was

dead, buried in a sealed tomb. So the explanation in Rabbinic Judaism of Leviticus 23:11 is incorrect.

Christ's resurrection or harvest was necessary before any of the remaining spiritual harvests could be reaped (see Lev. 23:14 for this truth in symbol).

Now notice also how Pentecost is counted.

6. How are the authorities in the Church to count the days toward Pentecost? Lev. 23:15-16.

COMMENT: The Hebrew wording in Leviticus 23:15-16 means "beginning *with*" the starting point. The English word "from" is therefore misleading.

The *New American Bible* (1970) makes the correct method of counting very clear: "*Beginning with the day after the Sabbath, the day on which you bring the wave-offering sheaf, you shall count seven full weeks, and then on the day after the seventh week, the fiftieth day . . .*," you shall keep the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:15-16).

The day of the wave offering, the Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was day one. Day seven would be the next weekly Sabbath. Day 49 would be the seventh Sabbath, and the 50th day would be a Sunday, "the day after the seventh week" or "sabbath" as the original Hebrew and the *Authorized Version* have it. A more detailed proof of how to count the day of Pentecost is in our free reprint article "How to Reckon the Day of Pentecost."

The correct dates for Pentecost for the next few years are published in *God's Sacred Calendar*. It is free for the asking.

New Covenant— Completion of First Harvest

The Sinaitic covenant, commonly called the "Old Covenant" by Christians, was a marriage agreement between Israel and the *Logos*, the Spokesman of the God Family. The basis of that covenant was the Ten Commandments, which Israel agreed to obey, as a wife obeys her husband. According to Jewish tradition, the Ten Commandments were given on the day of Pentecost. But the Holy Spirit was not then given to the nation. The coming of the Holy Spirit did not occur until another Pentecost (Acts 2) for the New Testament Church. The Sinaitic covenant ceased to be in effect when the *Logos*, Christ, was killed. We now look forward to a new covenant.

1. Has the Lord promised to make a new marriage covenant with His people? Jer. 31:31-34.

COMMENT: The weakness of the Sinaitic covenant was not its laws, but in the people (Heb. 8:8). They were not able to keep the law because they did not have the Holy Spirit.

2. Under the terms of the proposed New Covenant, what will the Lord do? Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-27; II Cor. 3:3.

COMMENT: The New Covenant will not be made with mortals who cannot keep their promises—it will be established only with immortal spirit beings who have proved, by their lives, their willingness to obey their future Husband, the "LORD" of the Hebrew Bible who became, through human birth, the Jesus of the Greek New Testament.

Although the New Covenant has been proposed, and Christians today overcome sin and live by the laws of that covenant through the power of the Holy Spirit, it will not be finalized until the first resurrection. Only then will God's children be given the fullness of God's Spirit to enable them to perfectly resist all sin.

3. Are Spirit-begotten Christians now engaged or betrothed to Christ? Rom. 7:4; II Cor. 11:2. When will the marriage—the ratification of the New Covenant—take place? Rev. 19:6-9.

COMMENT: God's Church will be the Bride of Christ. Christ, the Messenger of the Covenant (Mal. 3:1), will come to His spiritual Temple, and make the New Covenant—a marriage agreement. God's law will be written in their hearts so completely that they can be perfect, righteous and able to assist Christ in ruling, teaching and administering God's law perfectly.

The Spirit-born Church will become Christ's New Covenant *wife*, and that divine marriage will produce children. Christ and His Spirit-born Bride will be a ruling and teaching team. Through them God will open salvation to all, ultimately producing thousands of millions of additional Spirit-born

***The Church will become Christ's
New Covenant wife and that
marriage will produce children.***

children of God. More on that in future lessons.

Notice in Revelation 19:7 that the Church will have "made herself ready." Each member of God's Church must grow in righteous character and be prepared—ready—to help Christ rule and teach. Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) shows that some who think they are prepared for the New Covenant marriage will be shut out.

When the Church is ready both in numbers and in character, and the world has been sufficiently warned, Christ will return. Our next lesson reveals the exciting details of the events leading up to Christ's return!



Where is the true Church?

Is there really only one? If so, what about the people who are not a part of it? Are they forever lost, cut off from God's Spirit? You will find the answers to vital questions such as these in the recommended reading for this lesson: *Where Is the True Church?*, *Predestination—Does the Bible Teach It?* and "Just What Is the Holy Spirit?"

Be sure to use the literature request envelope included in this lesson!