

Bible Stories

A CHURCH IS BORN

Acts 1:8

September 09, 2023

There were 3 feasts on the Jewish Calendar, known as the Pilgrim Feasts, that required all able-bodied men to go to Jerusalem:

- *Passover - Comes at the beginning of the "Feast of Unleavened Bread," which lasts for 7 days - celebrating the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian captivity.*
- *7 weeks later came Shavuot, "Feast of Weeks" - better known to us by the Greek term, "Pentecost," which means fifty - celebrating the wheat harvest and the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.*

God commanded the Jews to count seven full weeks beginning on the second day of Passover, and then present offerings of new grain to the Lord as a lasting ordinance. The observance of the Feast of Weeks is recorded in the Old Testament in Exodus 34:22, Leviticus 23:15-22, Deuteronomy 16:16, 2 Chronicles 8:13 and Ezekiel 1.

- *The Feast of Booths - celebrating God's provision and protection for Israel during the 40 years of desert wandering.*

Why is this important? Because it ties the system God set up for Israel in the Old Testament to the Mission and Ministry of Jesus (and the new church) in the New Testament.

For our purposes in this series, we will only be covering the first 2 feasts - Passover and Pentecost.

Jesus died at Passover. He was the sacrificial lamb of the Exodus - freeing the captives held so long in sin.

Acts 1:3 tells us that, after he was raised from the dead, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples.

During that time, He spoke to them about the Kingdom of God and told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promised Holy Spirit.

They came together for the final time on the Mount of Olives and, what is interesting to me is that, even then, Jesus' disciples still did not completely understand Christ's Mission:

- *Acts 1:6-8 - So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

After Jesus said this, He was lifted up and a cloud took him out of the disciple's sight. As they stared in amazement at the sky, 2 men in white robes spoke to them:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

With that, the 11 disciples made their way back to Jerusalem.

For the next few days, they, along with Jesus' mother, His brothers and other followers (totaling 120) devoted themselves to prayer..... and to the choosing of a disciple to replace Judas. After praying for God's guidance, they cast lots and Matthias was chosen.

The Day of PENTECOST finally arrived. The company of believers were still together in the upper room

Suddenly, they heard a noise like a violent wind rushing through the house and what looked like tongues of fire came to rest on each person in the room – they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and the whole group began to speak in different languages.

Because it was Pentecost, there were many Jews in Jerusalem who had come from all over the known world:

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Cretans and Arabians. Residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and visitors from Rome - both Jews and Jewish converts.

These folks began to gather, because they, too, had heard the sound of the rushing wind. A look of confusion crossed their faces as they began realize that the Apostles were speaking to them of the mighty works of God.... in their own languages.

Many in the crowd wondered, “How is this possible? These men are all from Galilee”

Others in the crowd accused the Apostles of being drunk.

Peter addressed the crowd: *Listen to me... These men are not drunk. It's only 9 in the morning! This is a fulfilment of the prophecy spoken by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32a), which said, 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out 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; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'* Men of Israel.... Jesus of Nazareth, a man confirmed by God, did mighty works and wonders and signs, as you yourselves know. This same Jesus, according to the plan and foreknowledge of God, was crucified at the hands of lawless men.....at YOUR insistence. God raised him up, because it was not possible for death to hold him captive. We have all seen him alive. David said concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore, my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' David, our patriarch, is dead and buried and his tomb can be seen to this very day. God swore to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, and as a prophet, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. Jesus Christ is, even now, exalted at the right hand of God. He has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, which he has poured out on us. You are seeing and hearing the results.... Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. - Acts 2:14-36

The crowd was deeply moved by Peter's speech: “What shall we do?”

Peter: *Repent and be Baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.*

3,000 people were baptized that day.

From that moment they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship.

They went to the Temple together.

They ate together.

They prayed together.

With glad and thankful hearts, they shared what they had for the common good and sold all they had for the benefit of those in need.

Awe came upon every soul as the Apostles performed many signs and wonders.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

What do we do with this story?

More to the point, why does the body of Christ today look nothing like the body of Christ in the book of Acts.

Might I suggest that we have lost our awe of God.

We have lost our expectancy that He is going to act.

We have replaced relationship with God with facts about God.

We have reduced the Holy Spirit to a weak secondary-god – and in doing so, we have limited His ability to work – both individually and corporately.

We have replaced the power of the Holy Spirit with our own.

We have replaced the agenda of the Holy Spirit with our own.

We have replaced the conscience of the Holy Spirit with our own.

We have replaced the guidance of the Holy Spirit with our own.

We have replaced the building of the kingdom with buildings of our own making.

Instead of taking our marching orders from Him ----- We are giving OUR marching orders to Him, “Here’s my list, keep up.”

We leave His armor in the closet and proudly put on our flimsy, plastic, Wal-Mart armor and then wonder why we are not victorious against the devil – see Ephesians 6:10-18.

We are content to put in our time once a week from 9 to noon, then we lock the door behind us and go about our week. Maybe never once considering, consulting or leaning into the Word of God.

The result is a weak and ineffectual body of Christ.

- **Revelation 3:14-17** - To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm -- neither hot nor cold -- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

A.W Tozer has some thoughts:

- Religion today is not transforming the people - it is being transformed by the people. It is not raising the moral level of society - it is descending to society's own level and congratulating itself that it has scored a victory because society is smiling - accepting its surrender.
- If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference.

But all is not lost:

- The same God who led Israel with pillar of cloud and fire, who spoke at Pentecost through the tongues of flame, who opened Peter's prison doors, is waiting to work the greater wonders of His grace for us.