

What is the Meaning of Pentecost?

Text: Acts 2:1–8, 12–19

Introduction

When the Spirit fell on 120 believers on the Day of Pentecost, they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). The event was noised abroad, and a multitude gathered, asking, “What meaneth this?”

Pentecost means an annual festival, a new dispensation, the birth of the Church, and a glorious experience for believers.

Message

1. An annual festival.

- a. “The feast of harvest” (Exodus 23:16) marking the end of the wheat harvest. It was a holiday like Thanksgiving when Israel thanked God for manifold blessings.
- b. “The feast of weeks” (Exodus 34:22). It was observed about 7 weeks or 50 days after the start of the corn (actually barley) harvest (Deuteronomy 16:10). It became known as Pentecost because Pentecost means fiftieth (Leviticus 23:16).
- c. “A holy convocation” (Numbers 28:26). It was a day of offering sacrifices; not just a holiday but a holy day.
- d. A commemoration of the giving of the Law (Exodus 19,20). Although this meaning is not mentioned in the Scriptures, the Jewish people in the mid-12th century A.D. began to look on Pentecost as a memorial to the giving of the Law at Sinai and the birth of their national existence. At Sinai God entered into a new relationship with an entire nation, prefiguring the time when He would enter into a new relationship with the corporate body, the Church, by pouring His Spirit upon the assembled believers.

2. A New Dispensation.

- a. The dispensation of grace (Ephesians 2:8,9). Pentecost marked a shift of emphasis from works to faith and a great change in God’s dealings with man. Now the Gentiles who had been “far off” were made partakers of God’s favor, having been “made nigh” by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13).
- b. The dispensation of the Holy Ghost. The power and anointing of the Spirit, which had rested only upon selected Old Testament individuals called to a particular service, now was available to all believers (Acts 2:39).
- c. A fulfillment of prophecy. Joel had promised it (Joel 2:28). Peter said, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).

3. The Birth of the Church.

- a. A new institution. Jesus had said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), and Pentecost marked the founding of that institution. With the Spirit’s outpouring and the conversion of 3,000 souls, the Church was inaugurated and set in motion.
- b. A building of living stones, a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). Whereas the Jewish temple was built of material stones, the Church consists of believers in whom God dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16).
- c. A new force in the earth. Jesus had told His disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The Spirit was outpoured to enable them to evangelize everywhere (Acts 1:8). Before beginning their worldwide evangelism, the disciples were to remain in Jerusalem until they were “endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). This enduement came at Pentecost when a great new force was introduced to mankind—the supernatural power of the Holy Ghost working in human lives to enable them to lead men and women to Christ.

4. A glorious experience for the believer.

- a. Power to be holy in this present evil world. The Bible says “friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). No one rises above this evil world except through the power of the Holy Spirit. “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit,” the apostle said (Galatians 5:17), but he added, “The Spirit [lusteth] against the flesh.” Through the Spirit’s power we can overcome evil.
- b. Power to serve God. Jesus said, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8). The disciples were weak, quarrelsome, and intolerant before the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. (See Luke 9:54; Matthew 20:21; 26:33–35, 38–45, 56, 69–74.) Fearful and timid, they hid behind closed doors (John 20:19). But after they were filled with the Holy Ghost, they were fearless and faithfully proclaimed the gospel, even when threatened with death (Acts 5:27–33).

- c. The gift of the Comforter. Jesus had said He would send the Comforter (the Holy Ghost) to abide with them as their Teacher and Helper (John 16:7).
- d. The impartation of spiritual gifts. These are as needed today as in Paul's day. (See 1 Corinthians 12:8–11.)
- e. Power to produce the fruit of the Spirit. Those who are filled with the Holy Ghost should bear the fruit of the Holy Ghost. (See Galatians 5:22,23.)

Conclusion

What does Pentecost mean? To the Jews, an annual festival. To the world, a new dispensation. To the Church, an impartation of power. To the individual believer, a glorious new life in the Spirit. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2).

James E. Hamill