

Christian Faith and Practice Through...Pentecost

“Then you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name.” (Deut. 16:10,11 NASB)

This is another in a continuing series of articles geared toward the person who is new to the understanding that submitting to our Father’s Word includes accepting and living by His Torah or instructions. For us “rookies” the task of beginning to walk His Ways can be a little confusing, and it may take a little time to work our way through all the new information. So these articles are designed to give you a start.

Pentecost is one of the seven annual “appointments” (literally) that the Father set up for His children, summarized in Leviticus 23 (Sabbath being a weekly appointment). Shavuot (shaw-vo-oat or Pentecost), comes on the day after seven complete Sabbaths are counted from the day of HaBikkurim (feast of First Fruits, the first Sabbath after Pesach (Passover), which is a Sunday (Lev. 23:16). Shavuot is also known as the Feast of Weeks, and the counting of the Sabbaths is called the counting of the Omer. An omer is a measure of grain, and First Fruits is the beginning of the offering of the barley crop to the Father.

As the verses above show, this is a time of rejoicing (Deut. 16:9-12). Oh no, not another party! I have pointed out before (and will gleefully point out as many times as I think I need to), that it seems every time we turn around our Father wants us to celebrate, rejoice, party, and just generally kick back and whoop it up. This is another one of those times. According to the Word, it includes everybody – kids, servants, strangers, orphans, widows, even Levites can get down, get funky, and get loose. All of us are to come together in one place, the “place where He puts His name (Deut. 16:11,16).” This is called a “holy convocation” which in Hebrew is *miqra qodesh* (mee-kraw ko-desh).

The theological implications of this statement are too involved to delve into here. But this is one of the so-called “pilgrimage feasts,” meaning we have to go to a place that He chooses, and perhaps this could be understood as gathering together in a really large group. For a long time the actual place was understood to be Jerusalem because of the Temple, but now in my opinion it just might mean something a teensy bit different. Where is His name now? Has He chosen a different place? If we are a Temple, what does this mean for the feast location?

We are not to be at the party empty handed – we are supposed to give a freewill offering (Deut. 16:10, 17). The sacrifices and offerings are listed in Leviticus 23:17-20, and among these are two loaves of bread made with leaven that are brought from the dwellings of each person (verse 17). I suppose this might be called B.Y.O.B.....for Bring Your Own Bread. When they make bread for Sabbath (called challah), many Jews will take a small portion of the dough and “wave” it before the Father, then burn it up. This, I believe, is related to the wave offering of First Fruits. So, the 50th day is a Sabbath, with a *miqra qodesh* (gathering), a feast with rejoicing, and a freewill offering along with two loaves of bread.

I want you to notice that the “stranger” is included in this celebration. The word for stranger (*ger*, pronounced *gare*) applies to the nations, also known as Gentiles or *goyim*. This is for those hair-splitting *goyim* who want to try and prove that the Feast is for Jews only. Even if you want to limit the meaning to “in the midst of,” I think we can all agree that due to the scattering of Israel we can’t be any MORE in the midst of them than we are at the present. This is pretty much an all-inclusive statement from our Father nailing down exactly what He means without leaving any wiggle room at all.

Two important events happened at this Appointed Time, the memory of which is part of the celebration. These two were also somewhat prophetic, but that is more than this short article can accommodate. The first was the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, and the second was the outpouring of the Spirit in a room full of Yahshua’s disciples at the Temple, after the risen Messiah had ascended to the Father. Each of these by themselves would be a tremendous incentive for joy and celebration because of the freedom they represent. However, it is a mistake to see them as separate events, or mutually exclusive of one another.

When the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai, the Spirit accompanied it (Num. 11:17-29). And when the Spirit outpoured on the disciples, the Torah was also present (Acts 2:11 – mighty deeds of God is The Word or Torah). Both included flames (Ex. 20:1; Ps. 29:7; Acts 7:30) or lightnings (Ex. 19:16, Job 36:29, 37:2-5; Rev. 4:5, 10:3,4), and both had languages associated (trumpeting, voices Ex. 20:2, Rev. 14:2; thunderings II Sam 22:14, John 12:28-29; tongues Job 26:14, 40:9, Ps. 18:13). The Word of Yahveh cannot be separated from the Spirit of Yahveh, any more than Yahshua (who is the Word made flesh) could ever be separated from the Father. They are *echad* (eh-khod), one or unity.

Many people want to believe that The Church started with the outpouring at the Temple. But according to Scripture, this is simply not true. The “congregation,” “assembly” or “called out ones” (OT Hebrew *qahal* pronounced kah-hall, *edah* pronounced eh-daw; NT Greek *ekklesia* pronounced ek-kles-see-ah), has been in existence ever since the beginning. This group of people is also called the “remnant.” Membership has always been by Grace through Faith, and there are many members added throughout recorded history, but maybe not as numerous as we could wish for. The point is, there is only one

group of people that is God's. Some confusion comes from the fact that these words are also used to describe simple gatherings of people for a particular purpose.

Psalm 74:1 & 2 is perhaps one of the clearer examples of my position. In verse one the psalmist identifies "the sheep of your pasture" which is identical to the word "congregation" used in verse two (see also Scriptures such as Ps. 107:32, 149:1).

O God, why have You rejected us forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation (edah), which You have purchased of old, Which You have redeemed to be the tribe of Your inheritance; And this Mount Zion, where You have dwelt. (NASB)

Stephen speaks of the "congregation in the wilderness" referring to the gathering of Israel at Mt. Sinai (Acts 7:38 *ekklesia*). Stephen also calls the Torah "living oracles."

38 "This is the one who was in the congregation (ekklesia) in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.

39 "Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, (NASB)

Hebrews 2:11,12 says that Yahshua and the "ones set apart for God" are brothers:

For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION (EKKLESIA) I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." (NASB)

This is a quote from Psalm 22:22, and comparing them both together shows that the Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) is the same as the Hebrew word for assembly or congregation or "church" (*qahal*).

I will tell of Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly (qahal) I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. (NASB)

Hebrews 4:2 says that the same gathering (assembly, congregation, or church) had the gospel preached to them at Mt. Sinai (Messiah in the Torah).

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (NASB)

The Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven) is a related term, except that "body" or "remnant" indicates those that willingly belong to Yahveh, while the Kingdom includes (at the present time) additional elements (people and spirits or angels) that do not want the rule of Yahveh in their lives (much like a mustard tree has birds – Mat. 13), although in the end they will be weeded out. Of course, Yahveh ultimately rules anyway, but in

the present form of the Kingdom some people are not very cooperative. These people may look like they are part of the Kingdom, but they will not continue.

Those who “persevere” or “overcome” (the remnant) will be included in the future form of the Kingdom, but those who falter will not. Overcomers produce fruit, pretenders (or tares) do not. This is referred to in parable form by Yahshua in Matthew 13. At this time Yahveh has not assigned the task of weeding these people out to anyone (Parable of the Tares, also Mat. 13). So we are not called to determine who is “in” and who is “out,” but to continue with discipleship using all of our heart, mind or soul, and strength; to exhort and encourage and correct those others who at least profess to be part of this group.

Paul discusses the nature of the olive tree (another name for Kingdom of God) in Romans 11. He says that branches are broken off due to lack of faith, and other branches are grafted in by faith. Why would branches be broken off unless there was no fruit on them? Therefore we should watch ourselves lest we be found to be without fruit, whether Jew or Gentile. John the Immerser says this is fruit in keeping with repentance (Mat. 3:7-12). This goes back to Genesis 1:11,12, where vegetation bears fruit because of the life Yahveh puts in it. The Spirit will produce fruit in us because of the nature of His Life.

I conclude that redeemed people known as an assembly, church or body, have existed from the start as part of larger assemblies or congregations of people or nations, some of which are called by the same names. All Isra’el is not Isra’el, as Paul says, and there are hints all through the Word as to the reality and makeup of this assembly. From giants of the faith such as Abraham and Sarah, Noah, and Moses, to the humble of station such as Ruth; from queens like Esther to judges such as Samson, Deborah and Gideon; from Rahab the harlot to mighty kings like David and Solomon; the one Father has been adding to one body through one faith by one Spirit and one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6).

Shavuot is then, in my opinion, a celebration of freedom (Passover) from captivity (Egypt) and entry into the remnant portion of the Kingdom of God by embracing all of the instructions of the Father. In other words, we left sin and the world system by way of the blood of the Lamb, journeyed into the wilderness where His living oracles (the Torah - Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:11) were delivered to us, and by trusting obedience (faith) we will enter into the final form of His Kingdom, also known as His Rest. By refusing to obey His Ways we will fail to enter (Acts 7:39; Heb. 4:6).

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.” (Heb. 4:6,7 NASB, last part quoting Ps. 95:6-11)

May the Father keep our hearts soft and bring us into His rest.

Bruce Bertram