

# CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Dear Brethren,

We are now in the midst of the 50-day countdown to Pentecost. We began counting on the day the wave sheaf was offered in ancient Israel, the Sunday during Unleavened Bread. This year, Sunday, April 16, was day 1, and Sunday, June 4, will be day 50, Pentecost.

The Israelites were instructed to count these days, since no calendar date was given. “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:15-16).

The Jews insist that the wave sheaf was always offered on the 16th day of the first month, the day after the first day of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6). Adding 50 days to a specific date (Nisan 16) on the calendar will always produce another specific date. Today Jews observe Pentecost (also called the Feast of Weeks) on the set date of Sivan 6.

One could argue that there is no need to count if you know the calendar date from which you begin. In other words, the real issue is not a matter of which calendar one uses, but an issue of interpreting the Scriptures. Is the Bible speaking of the first day of Unleavened Bread as the “Sabbath” in Leviticus 23:15-16, or is it referring to the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread? We believe the latter is the proper interpretation.

According to Jewish tradition, the 10 Commandments were given to the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai on the Day of Pentecost. Even though the commandments preceded the Old Covenant agreement (and therefore were not done away with by the New Covenant), they were a central part of that agreement. When the Israelites formally agreed to the conditions of the covenant, they became a nation with God as their ruler.

But what does that mean for us? We members of the Church of God are not the physical nation of Israel, but we are referred to as a special people and a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). Whatever our race, our gender or our nationality, through the sacrifice of Christ we become one body, with the same potential to be members of His family, to be one of the “many sons [brought] to glory” (Hebrews 2:10).

Pentecost is a celebration of the harvest of firstfruits, but that physical harvest wasn’t completed on Pentecost. And the spiritual harvest of firstfruits isn’t complete until the return of Jesus Christ, when the resurrection takes place and those who are alive are changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52), a marvelous event pictured by the Feast of Trumpets.

Pentecost pictures our being sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) as a “type of firstfruits” (James 1:18). Just as the grain harvested during the 50 days leading up to Pentecost was put in a barn or stored in another location to mature, so must we mature as Christians. This maturity isn’t accomplished overnight—it requires a lifetime of effort. Therefore, we have two separate holy days in God’s plan: Pentecost is the selection and sealing of the firstfruits, but the Feast of

Trumpets pictures the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the saints, the completion of the first harvest.

I have kept the Passover every year since I was baptized in the spring of 1969, but 2017 was the first year that our family faced a serious, life-and-death trial prior to the holy days. Two weeks prior to the Passover, our daughter Jamie, who lives in El Salvador, became seriously ill due to contracting a rare and deadly bacteria. Thankfully, God was merciful to her (and our family) by restoring her health. We knew we weren't worthy, and we knew of others who walked down this dark road in the past, having lost a close family member. We learned a lot about ourselves during this Passover season. We learned that when it comes to a trial of life and death, we are helpless of ourselves. We learned to better appreciate the value of human life, but then we also realized the outcome in this case was out of our hands. We felt powerless watching this unfold before our eyes and, quite honestly, were in a state of shock.

We all should learn each year in different ways that we can't succeed in this spiritual journey without help. And that help must come from God. Through the death of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sin, we begin a new life. It is God's Holy Spirit that seals us and provides the help we all need. The Holy Spirit is even referred to as the "helper" in John 16:7. Don't be confused by the pronoun "He" used in a number of Bible translations. The Holy Spirit is not a person, but it is "the helper." It is through God's Holy Spirit that we are given the strength we need to endure the trials that come. None of us will escape tragedy in this life. And some tragedies seem impossible to endure. It is at these times that we realize God's Spirit provides the help we need.

The world is truly groaning and in need of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:22). No human government can save this world from the global war that is looming on the horizon. We need God's intervention individually and collectively. God's Holy Spirit is essential for each one of us. What a powerful lesson about ourselves and the world around us! Just as Passover and Unleavened Bread describe the beginning of God's plan, Pentecost illustrates the essential next step, the receiving of God's Holy Spirit to seal us as a type of firstfruits.

The lessons of the spring festivals (Passover, Unleavened Bread and Pentecost) should have a profound impact on our lives. I know, speaking personally, this was the most emotional Passover and Unleavened Bread that I can ever remember. Trials can cause you to think more deeply about what God is doing in your life and how much you need Him on a personal level.

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,

  
Jim Franks