

The Feasts of the Lord, Part 4 – Weeks (Pentecost)

(Lent 5, March 22nd, 2015)

Leviticus 23:15-21

Introduction

Many Christians are familiar with, or have heard of Passover, and likewise there is a similar familiarity with the term Pentecost, usually known for its New Testament expression in the Book of Acts. But most are not usually familiar with the Old Testament Feast of Pentecost, celebrated by Israel.

Summary

- FoW, or *Shavuot*, was the marked the beginning of the summer wheat harvest. It was the offering of the summer wheat, 50 days after FF.
- *Pentecost* is the Greek translation of *Shavuot* in the LXX.
- This was a solemn feast, the second to require a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, with a solemn assembly. It was also a day of rest on which no work was to be done.
- Like FF, the Israelites were forbidden from using any part of the wheat harvest in any way until the offering had been made.
- Similar to the barley in the spring, a first fruit sheaf and loaf of wheat was offered. However, unlike FF the wheat offering was in the form of two (leavened) wheat loaves (Lev 23:17). They were not burned (since leaven was forbidden to be burned as an offering) but instead waved, along with seven lambs, one bull, and two rams, which all served as the meal for the feast later on.
- A provision was also instituted for the poor: fields were not to be reaped right up to the edges, nor should the gleanings (or leftovers) be removed from the field, so as to leave a portion for the poor in the community to have the opportunity to take some of the harvest for themselves, and thus too benefit from the harvest's bounty.
- Later in the second century, after the great Jewish Revolt of 135 AD, the emphasis of Weeks was shifted by a rabbinical council from harvest to the giving of the Law on Sinai. Although the Scriptures nowhere make an explicit connection between the giving of the Law and Pentecost, this decision was not arbitrary, as God gave the Law on the third day in the third month (Ex 19:1).

Meaning/Significance

- This feast was a celebration of the good things the harvest, and ultimately the Lord had provided

- If FF was about the things God promised, and the people through their offering demonstrated trust in the full harvest to come; then Weeks was about the people demonstrating their gratitude for what has been provided.
- Two of the great qualities God's people must have are trust and thanksgiving
- The instructions regarding the fields to be left for the poor is an expression of generosity; for the appropriate fruit of a thankful heart is generosity, those to whom much has been given, much is required.
- To quote Allen Ross, we may sum up the Feast in these terms, "In thanksgiving for God's bounty, God's people must give him a token of what his bounty has produced and make provision for the poor."

Application & Fulfillment

- Application: How does our gratitude to God find its expression? With generosity.
- Fulfillment
- The two loaves presented contained leaven, as opposed to the feast of UB which did not, and these loaves represented what the harvest produced, i.e. the result of the harvest.
- If FF points to the resurrection of Christ, the first fruits from the dead, and UB indicates the sinless-ness of the Messiah, his 'unleavened' state, then Weeks points to what the Resurrection of that sinless Messiah produces, namely his body the church.
- This Body is not perfect, like the loaves it contains leaven; Christ is the unleavened bread, we, his people, although redeemed still have leaven. Luther, *simul iustus et peccator!*
- The Feast of Weeks also commemorated the giving of the Law at Sinai, during which the Lord appeared with a great thunder and rushing wind. In Acts 2, at the feast of Pentecost, the Lord sends his promised Spirit, but this time the rushing wind brings life, not death, and the new covenant with the Spirit writing the law, not on stone, but on the hearts of those who trust in Christ (Jer. 31:31-34, which was the original appointed reading!)