

From the West Meadow
By Pastor Wes Higgins

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come...” This sentence, found in the book of Acts at the beginning of the second chapter, is well known among Christians. It is the descriptive entrance to the day the Christian church was born. What most Christians don't realize is that 50 days before Pentecost – the word “pentecost” means “count 50” – there was a ceremony, ordered by God and performed by the priests on the Temple grounds, that tied Pentecost and the death of Jesus Christ together. God called this ceremony the “wave sheaf offering”.

Most Christian churches are aware of Pentecost, even if they don't celebrate it. Very few churches, and even fewer church members, are aware of the wave sheaf offering. Yet had the wave sheaf offering not been fulfilled – I am speaking literally – Pentecost would never have come.

Let me explain. Instructions for the wave sheaf offering, also known as the first fruits offering, can be found in Leviticus 23, right along with God's other appointed days of worship. Leviticus 23:2, 4, “The feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are my feasts. ... These are the feasts to the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.” The people were instructed not to eat of the new grain harvest until the first fruits of the harvest were waved before the Lord, “to be accepted on your behalf”, Leviticus 23:11, 14. The Apostle Paul wrote that these ceremonies are “a shadow...the substance is of Christ”, Colossians 2:16-17. Paul also explained in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 that Jesus Christ is the firstfruits risen from the dead.

The writer of the book of Hebrews explained that the priestly ceremonies and even the Tabernacle and the articles it contained were “the copy and shadow”, Hebrews 8:5; 9:24, the true reality being found in heaven. With that in mind, we realize that the ceremony found in Leviticus 23:9-14 is a shadow of the true ceremony in which Jesus Christ was “accepted on our behalf” as our savior. Jesus Himself mentions this ceremony to Mary on the morning after His resurrection, before He presented Himself to the apostles: “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'”, John 20:17, NKJV. It is from this ceremony, ordained by God, that the date for Pentecost is counted (see Leviticus 23:15-16).

How do we know this ceremony was actually performed? Leviticus 23:9-14 describes it; Jesus, the firstfruits of the harvest, said He was ascending to heaven; Peter assures us that the receiving of the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost was a direct result of Jesus ascending to the Father and being accepted as our Savior. “This Jesus God has raised up ... Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear”, Acts 2:32-33, NKJV.

Had Jesus, the wave sheaf offering, not been accepted on our behalf as our Savior, the day of Pentecost would never have “fully come”. We would never have received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you”, John 16:7, NKJV.