

SEVEN WEEKS FROM NOW

Most Christians are familiar with the term *Pentecost*. It's considered to be the 'birthday' of the church. Indeed it is a festival that once upon a time had Western national significance, often designated as a bank holiday (known as *Whitsun*).

The origins of Pentecost, however, long precede the beginning of the church, having its roots in an Old Testament ceremony - one of the 'feasts of the LORD' (Leviticus 23). As with all these feasts, Pentecost continued to be observed by the apostles and all early Christians - though it is for most Christians today the sole surviving Biblical festival!

All the festivals - which God designed in a pattern of sevens - fall on specified calendar dates. *Except* Pentecost, which the Bible says is to be 'counted'. This means it falls on various dates in the Hebrew calendar.

Feast of Firstfruits

The count was to begin annually with the firstfruits of the spring harvest, when a ripe sheaf of grain was ceremonially 'waved' before God - 'on the day after the [weekly] Sabbath' (v.11).

From that day seven Sabbaths were counted - the next day (always the first day of the week, Sunday) being the *Day of Pentecost*. The term *Pentecost* means *fiftieth* - it being the fiftieth day from the beginning of the first day of that week. The festival is also termed in Scripture the *Feast of Weeks*.

The 'wavesheaf' was by New Testament times traditionally harvested at the close of the weekly Sabbath during the seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*.

The Biblical account in Leviticus 23, however, does not specify this, merely stating it was the firstfruits of the early harvest. The Jewish authorities, probably for convenience, moved the count from the weekly Sabbath to the first holy day - thus forcing Pentecost to fall on a fixed calendar date.

In this context it is noteworthy that the

'holy days' of *Unleavened Bread* and *Pentecost* are *not*, in the text (Leviticus 23:6-8, 21), designated as regular 'Sabbaths' but are simply called 'holy convocations'. (All the other holy days are called 'Sabbaths'). This emphasizes that the count to Pentecost starts at the close of a *weekly* Sabbath (v.11).

Cosmic Symbol

But Pentecost - and all the Biblical festivals - are not mere relics of an ancient and now obsolete worship system. They were introduced by *the Creator* and have cosmic significance.

Take *Pentecost*. That 'wavesheaf' is the firstfruits of God's human harvest - His plan to save mankind. After Jesus had risen he appeared in his resurrection spirit body on the morning of the first day of the week. It was the very day of the wavesheaf offering in the Temple! There is ample Bible evidence that during that day Jesus ascended to the Father in heaven - presenting to God as the first of 'the firstfruits' (I Corinthians 15:20, 23).

The following weeks are a type of the 'church age' - seven symbolic weeks during which God is calling His firstfruits, His firstborn, human harvest to the Kingdom. They are the 'firstfruits unto God' (Revelation 14:4) and 'a kind of firstfruits' (James 1:18). This spiritual harvest will culminate in the glorious return of Jesus the Messiah, accompanied by an outpouring of the signs and wonders which saw a foretaste at the first Christian *Pentecost* (Acts 2).

At that moment the 'main crop' of the firstfruits harvest - faithful Christians - will be resurrected to reign with Christ in his millennial Kingdom.

The Harvest Isn't Over

Jesus foresaw that nothing would interfere with this divine plan, which he personally oversees. Through the centuries the church of God would survive - often persecuted, always comparatively few. But always jealously guarded by divine power. Many, he said, would be given the opportunity to be part of this firstfruits harvest. But 'narrow is the gate and difficult is the way and

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*providing
leadership,
information and
Biblical teaching.
Matthew 28:19-20*

CONFERENCE 2002

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries (CGOM)* held our annual Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma from March 8-10. The agenda focus was on outreach, and your prayers for insight and good success were appreciated

New readers of *Outreach* may not know that our Conference is representative of like-minded independent local congregations which co-operate voluntarily in a variety of projects - such as the recent ad in *USA Today* newspaper.

The Conference schedule was packed tight, with participation by delegates from assemblies in the United States, Canada and the UK.

A full report will be in the next CGOM Newsletter, but here's a brief preview.

The *CGOM* revised *Statement of Purpose* and *Statement of Beliefs* were reviewed and accepted, clearing the way for more productive discussion.

The results of the ad in *USA Today* - made possible by the generous financial participation of many associating assemblies - were presented, and ways of continuing to use it at local level were discussed.

Plans are afoot to enlarge and improve the *CGOM* web-site (www.cgom.org), with the addition of more articles, lists of associated assemblies to visit etc.

A major project for the coming year is to develop a 'distance learning' training programme for young assemblies. It will address the practicalities of local leadership.

Sites for the 2002 *Festival of Tabernacles* were approved - a site to be determined in Texas or Oklahoma, Collingwood (Ontario, Canada) and in the UK.

As ever, finances are tight! However, it is pleasing that every penny donated is wisely used to fulfil our purpose - with no bureaucratic wastage!

The *CGOM* is also supportive of isolated Christians and can provide a variety of Bible-based publications and taped sermons. New congregations - anywhere in the world! - are welcome to draw on the wealth of experience within our existing associated groups. [Ask for a copy of the new article *Church Leadership...a Biblical perspective.*]

Many local groups, restrained by few resources, are frustrated in their desire to reach out beyond their immediate area - indeed, to the wider world - with Christ's message. By pooling our resources, our effort and our vision we can make this possible.

You are invited to join with us!

OUTREACH - by e-mail

If you have access to an e-mail address you may receive this Newsletter - and other mailings - faster!

Send your request to coguk@aol.com

Church Link

We would ask our readers to pray for God's intervention to restore to health the following brethren, and for their encouragement.

Cilla Young continues to have extremely severe back pain, not controlled even by morphine

Prayer is requested for **Sarah**, who has for over a year been restricted by a neuro-muscular problem in her legs

Also for **Pam Miller**, who is experiencing serious health problems confining her largely to home

Max Martin is 'having pains for weeks' and values your prayer support. He is undergoing hospital tests

*Readers are advised that we in the Churches of God, UK believe that believers may receive Christ's healing touch
We will on request anoint for God's healing*

Your prayers for guidance as to the location for our *COGUK Festival of Tabernacles* are needed! To date we don't have strong commitment to attend from many brethren. If you have not yet told us you intend to come along, it would be helpful with our planning if you would now do so. This year the Festival will begin the evening of *September 20 through September 28.*

PENTECOST: Sunday, May 19

HARVEST... cont'd

there are few who find it' (Matthew 7:14). Few would remain faithful to the end.

The coming seven weeks - culminating on the *Day of Pentecost, Sunday May 19* - are a recurring reminder that God's plan is on track, that His harvest will be completely gathered in according to His perfect timing. Clearly all is not yet 'safely gathered in' - there remains time (though perhaps not much time!) for men and women everywhere to 'count the cost' and to make the costly commitment to real discipleship (Luke 14:25-35).

Request the free articles *What Do You Mean - 'Repentance'?* And *Coming To Baptism.* They provide a Biblical perspective on how you may be part of that firstfruits harvest.

Our booklet *God's Holy Days* explains the Biblical festivals. It is available on request from Lincoln.