

The Biblical Feasts – 3

The Feast of First Fruits

by Rufus Barnes



The last of the spring feasts takes place seven Sabbaths plus one day (50 days) after the Day of First Fruits – thus, because the Sabbath is on Saturday, this Feast is always on a Sunday. On the Day of First Fruits the people of Israel gave thanks for the first fruits of barley harvest and on the Feast of First Fruits they gave thanks for the latter fruits of the wheat harvest. The name normally used by Jewish people for this Feast in Hebrew is Shavuot, which translates to ‘Weeks’, reflecting the fact that seven weeks have to be counted after the previous Feast.

Traditionally the rabbis have taught that the Law was given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai at the time of Shavuot and today the Jewish people celebrate this act at the time of the Feast. The more observant Jews stay up all night (remember that the Jewish day runs from sunset to sunset) studying the books of Moses – the Torah.

It is, however, not the seven Sabbaths plus one day the ‘Weeks’ or the Hebrew, ‘Shavuot’, but the 50 days after the Day of First Fruits that gives Christians a clue to our link to this Feast. The New Testament was written in Greek and the Greek name for the Feast is ‘Pentecost’, meaning ‘fiftieth’, and it is, of course at Pentecost that we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit, referred to so vividly in Acts chapter 2.

In Deuteronomy chapter 16 and verse 16, God decrees that all Jewish men shall appear before Him three times a year at a place that He chooses, later determined to be Jerusalem. Those three occasions were to be Passover, the Feast of First Fruits and at a feast we have not yet looked at, Tabernacles; these three Feasts are known as the Pilgrim Feasts. So, when we are told in Acts 2 verse 1 that ‘When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all together in one place’ we can understand, in obedience to God’s command that they should be in Jerusalem for the Feast of First Fruits/Pentecost. Jesus’ disciples were indeed

there and that the 'one place' would have been the Temple, because that is where they could 'appear before God'.

Acts chapter 2 continues with the exciting record of the Holy Spirit descending on the disciples and empowering them as Jesus had promised in His last words to them, recorded in Acts chapter 1, before He ascended to Heaven. Jesus had commanded them not to leave Jerusalem until they were baptised with the Holy Spirit, which He told them would take place 'not many days from now'.

The Old Testament records a number of people who received the Holy Spirit as individuals. Traditionally, however, the Jewish people believed that at some point at Shavuot/Pentecost there would be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' words to His disciples after his death at Passover and His resurrection on the Day of First Fruits, but before the then impending Feast of Shavuot/Pentecost would, therefore, have been entirely plausible. The reaction of the crowd to Peter's subsequent speech, in which he tells them that he and the other the disciples have been filled with the Holy Spirit, was positively received and we are told that on that day about 3000 people repented and were baptised.

Later in the New Testament we can read of many examples of Believers being filled with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes Christians suggest that we can only be baptised with the Holy Spirit if we have first been baptised with water, however, the Bible tells us that is not always the case. For example, in Acts 10 and verse 44ff we are told that when Peter was speaking to the crowds the Holy Spirit fell on all those who were listening. Peter's reaction was to command those who had been filled with the Holy Spirit be baptised with water.

God works in mysterious ways and we must never limit our thinking to that with which we are familiar. He can and does surprise us and let us pray that at Pentecost we will be so empowered by the Holy Spirit that we will be able to completely fulfil our potential as Christians.

Rufus Barnes – April 2020

*After becoming a Believer and getting married, Rufus Barnes went to Bible School in Jerusalem where his eyes were opened to the Hebraic root of the Christian faith. He is currently Vice-Chair of **CMJ UK**, is on the leadership team of **Hephzibah Cambridge** and leads an Israel prayer meeting in his home town in Essex UK. He has led a number of study tours to Israel and was Chair of **Love Never Fails**.*