



"I know the price of success: dedication, hard work and an unremitting devotion to the things you want to see happen."  
—Frank Lloyd Wright

**20-Apr-12**

## **The Work of the Firstfruits**

[Leviticus 23:9-21](#) covers God's instructions concerning making the [wavesheaf offering](#), the counting of the seven weeks, and the observance of the Feast of Weeks, called Pentecost in the New Testament. With an understanding of the application of [the holy days](#) to the plan of [God](#), it is easy to see that this entire period concentrates on the [firstfruits](#) of salvation. As the apostle Paul writes in [I Corinthians 15:22-23](#), "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." The wavesheaf is of the firstfruits; it is the first of the firstfruits. As we know, it represents [Jesus Christ](#) being accepted before God as our High Priest. He is the first of the Firstborn ([Romans 8:29](#)), those who are glorified in the [first resurrection](#).

As last week's essay, "Count for Yourselves," illustrated, by counting throughout the whole fifty days from wavesheaf to Pentecost, we are to be concentrating on the theme of this period: on the harvest of the firstfruits and on God's part in it.

This period begins and ends with a waving of an offering. It starts with the waving of the sheaf of firstfruit barley, representing Christ. At the conclusion of the fifty days, [two wave loaves](#) baked with leaven are waved before God, and these represent the people of God, the called-out ones, the elect. This waving of the firstfruits in the form of loaves of leavened bread pictures the Father's gracious acceptance of very fallible human beings into His Kingdom.

In this period, then, the entire panorama of God's work with His firstfruits is portrayed—from Jesus Christ being accepted as the perfect sacrifice for [sin](#) and our High Priest all the way to the time when all of His brothers and sisters, the children of God, fully enter His Family. The holy day culminates a period of harvest, in which the firstfruits of the Kingdom are emphasized. It excludes almost everything else. During this time, God is concentrating on His people.

In the instructions on this period, God emphasizes something that many people miss. In [Exodus 23:16](#), God calls the harvest "the firstfruits of your labors." He adds, "which you have sown in the field." The Pentecost offering, described in [Leviticus 23:16-17](#), is to be of new grain, and it is brought "from your dwellings." These phrases hint that God stresses what His people *do* during this period. His people are hard at work in their fields and their dwellings.

Applying these types spiritually, we can say, then, that Pentecost tends to emphasize the Christian's work, and it is split between the field, his external labors, and his house, his internal labors. He has responsibilities to produce godly character and growth in his behavior and in his heart and mind. We are being converted inside and out, and it takes a great deal of hard work.

Thus, the period from the wavesheaf to Pentecost pictures a time of intense labor of sowing and reaping carried out by human beings whose goal is to be offered before God as an acceptable offering. God, though, is firmly in the picture. He may not be completely in the foreground, but He is certainly there by our side. He is working alongside us, blessing our efforts just as He blesses the efforts of a farmer bringing physical crops to harvest.

A farmer goes out into his field, tills the soil, plants the seed, pulls weeds, and toils ceaselessly to bring the harvest in. But who provides the rain and the sun? Who made the soil with all its nutrients? God is there and active in the work, but the farmer is the one whom other people see doing the labor. Yet, God is also there, unseen, helping things along. It is from these joint efforts that the new grain is produced.

From what we know from both Old and New Testaments, God is firmly in this picture during this Wavesheaf-Pentecost period in at least three ways. First, it is traditional that God gave His law from Mount Sinai on the Day of Pentecost—or very near to it. Biblical chronology places it firmly in the third month, Sivan, when Pentecost falls. Thus, we [see God](#) present in His providence of His law, the standard by which we are to live.

Second, Acts 2, of course, narrates the story of the giving of the Holy Spirit to the fledgling church. The Holy Spirit gives us the power, the inspiration, and the help that we need to do what is right—to see God, to follow Him, and to make right decisions.

Third, we should never forget what the wavesheaf offering represents. We could say it is the most important part of the whole process because Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior, and High Priest, has opened the way to a relationship with God ([Hebrews 10:19-22](#)). By His sinless life and teachings, He has shown us the way to live ([John 14:6](#)). He has done what is needed so that the rest of us can follow. We can have salvation because He lives, guiding us through this period of sanctification to eternal life ([Romans 5:10](#)).

These three factors are always in play, though in terms of work, they perform invisibly. However, just because they cannot be readily seen does not minimize the part they play in the harvest of the firstfruits. What God provides during the salvation process far surpasses all that we do. And for that we give Him glory.

Even so, the emphasis during this period—the fifty days of the count—seems to be on what *we* have to do. We know that God will do His work; He finishes what He starts (see [Isaiah 55:11](#)). He is faithful ([I Corinthians 1:9](#)). He never slacks off in His work—and this is exactly why the emphasis is on

what we do because we will certainly drop the ball one time, several times, many times. Some would say we fail to carry the load most of the time!

Thus, we need to be prodded every year that there is still work to be done. We have to get in line with God the Father and Jesus Christ—the First of the Firstfruits—so that what He desires to be built in us is accomplished. While our part may be small, it is very important. We must work out our own salvation ([Philippians 2:12](#)).

In the book of Ruth, one of the five Megilloth—Festival Scrolls—and the one we should read in conjunction with the Feast of Pentecost, a great deal of work is done. Ruth, a type of the Christian, is a very diligent worker. Throughout the narrative, she is constantly working, serving, helping. More importantly, she is growing the whole time. Notice how many times she is commended for what she does.

Her work "pays off." She marries the kind, wealthy Boaz, a type of Christ, and becomes part of a joyous, blessed family. If she had not done the works, she would never have received the blessings. There is a wonderful lesson in this for us as we prepare for God's Kingdom.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Pentecost and the Holy Spirit](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The receiving of God's Holy Spirit is not so much for our use as it is for God's use that He might carry out His creative effort in our lives. Metaphorically, the Holy Spirit can be compared to the water which the potter uses to bring the clay to the right consistency. God's Spirit brings about a transformation- turning something from a state of destruction into a state of purity. God desires to give us His Spirit and gifts in abundance, but

on the condition that our motives for wanting them are unselfish. God uses His Spirit: (1) as a bridgehead through which He works His spiritual creation, (2) to empower the church, and (3) to empower us to yield to Him.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Is the Christian Required To Do Works? \(Part Four\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The Bible makes it very plain that salvation is by grace, but it is also clear that we are 'created in Christ Jesus for good works' (Ephesians 2:10). Having explained justification, John Ritenbaugh tackles the process of sanctification, showing that the far greater part of God's saving work in us occurs *after* baptism!

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