

God's Spiritual Harvest

Pentecost, the Harvest of First Fruits

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Though the material sacrifices and offerings are no longer necessary since they were once and for all time primarily fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ, they can still teach us a great deal about living God's way of life. Leviticus 23:9-21 covers God's instructions of making the wave sheaf offering and in counting the seven weeks and the observance of the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost in the New Testament.

When we understand the application of God's holy days and how they map out God's plan of salvation, we see that this entire period concentrates on the firstfruits of salvation.

Now the full impact of the wave sheaf offering on God's people is truly seen when we are made aware of the importance of the counting that is required. Most mainstream Christians, even some members in God's church are unaware that the count begins when the ancient Israelites made the annual wave sheaf offering.

Occurring on only one day each year, the day of the wave sheaf offering is not designated a holy day by God, nevertheless it is not a minor event. Its establishment by God is foundational to our salvation. The primary instruction regarding the wave sheaf is found in Leviticus 23 and we will pick it up in verse 9.

Leviticus 23:9-14 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. [That is the day after the Sabbath that is during the Days of Unleavened Bread.] And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of

the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the Lord. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the Lord, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.’”

So the wave sheaf consisted of an omer of barley still on the stalk, cut at the beginning of the spring harvest. An omer was roughly a handful or 1/10 of an ephah which in today's terms would be equal to less than a half gallon dry measure.

Since it came from the very beginning of the harvest of the firstfruits it is called the first of the firstfruits and each Israelite with a harvest was required to give an offering. Then a priest would lift and wave each sheaf before God for acceptance.

In the Old Testament the wave sheaf offering represented a thankful acknowledgment of God as the Giver of the harvest, in this way it was sanctified or dedicated to Him. Now in the New Testament the spiritual reason for this offering is revealed. The Old Testament places the festivals of God within the agricultural harvest, but in the New Testament these agricultural harvests become types of God's spiritual harvest of people into His Kingdom.

In both Exodus 23:19 and Exodus 34:26 contain the phrase “first of the firstfruits.” In Exodus 23:16, God refers to the Old Testament “Feast of Weeks” and the New Testament “Day of Pentecost” as “the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of your labor which you have sown in the field.” Then in Numbers 28:26, Pentecost is called “the day of the firstfruits.”

If the firstfruits were part of the early harvest, the first of the firstfruits would have been from even earlier in the harvest season. The wave sheaf offering represents this small initial harvest.

The count to Pentecost, which is the culmination of the early harvest, begins from the cutting of the wave sheaf. Jesus Christ if not referred to as “the first of the firstfruits” in the New Testament, however in Romans 8:29 the apostle Paul calls Him the “firstborn among many brethren.”

In I Corinthians 15, he clearly links firstfruits, and therefore a harvest, with a resurrection. We will read verse 20 here.

I Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

He then repeats the firstfruits reference, adding us into the resurrection harvest picture in verse 23.

I Corinthians 15:23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Then James confirms that we are part of the same spiritual harvest as Christ in,

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

So, Jesus Christ, the arch-typical wave sheaf, was harvested from the physical world by being resurrected from the dead and as the firstborn of many brethren, He was lifted into, through the heavens, to God's throne to be accepted by Him as the sacrifice for our sins and as our High Priest.

To summarize this briefly, this 50-day period begins and ends with the waving of an offering. It starts with the waving of a sheaf of first fruit barley, representing Christ, and it concludes 50 days later with two wave loaves baked with leaven being waved before God and these represent the called-out people of God, the elect.

The waving of the firstfruits in the form of loaves of leavened bread pictures the Father's gracious acceptance of vary fallible human beings into His Kingdom.

In this period then the entire panoramic of God's work with His firstfruits as portrayed and from Jesus Christ being accepted as the perfect sacrifice for sin and as our High Priest, all the way to the time when all of His brothers and sisters in Christ, fully enter His Family.

Pentecost culminates a period of harvest in which the firstfruits of the Kingdom are emphasized. Leviticus 23:15 begins the instructions for keeping Pentecost.

Leviticus 23:15-16 'And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.'

We see that on the 50th day it tells us what we were to bring. So there were special offerings that were to be brought on that day. One has to do with the significance of the prophetic meaning of Pentecost, and the other has to do with the offerings that were to be taken up at that time. In Deuteronomy 16 it says that when you have Pentecost, also called Feast of Weeks, after you count out seven weeks, you are to have an offering on the Feast of Weeks, which then is the 50th day as Leviticus 23 points out. Now continuing on in verse 17.

Leviticus 23:17 'You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord.'

Now there is a significance in relating to those who are going to be in the church and the resurrection and then it gives the offering that they were to offer. Continuing on in verse 18.

Leviticus 23:18 ‘And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the Lord.’

Then it talks about the sacrifice of the sin offering and peace offering in verse 19-20.

Leviticus 23:19-20 ‘Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.’

So holiness was of extreme importance having to do with these offerings. Waving the same thing as when you go back to the first day of the 50-day count, what do you have on the first day of the count? You are to have the premier sheaf, that was specially cut that is waved before the Lord. We know this symbolizes the ascension of Jesus into heaven on the first day of the count to Pentecost, to be accepted by the Father as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

We have the same thing here where the priests shall wave them and with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the Lord. So if it applies to Jesus ascending and being accepted by God the Father on the first day, then this also has to apply to those who are in the church to be waved and accepted by God on the 50th day, the day of Pentecost. Continuing on in verse 21.

Leviticus 23:21 ‘And you shall proclaim on the same day [the 50th day] that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.’

Since this is a holy day and we do take up an offering and it is the firstfruits, we must understand that God said that you shall not fail to bring your

firstfruits to Him. It is absolutely important that we give an offering on this day.

Now turn to Philippians 2 and we will see something interesting about the drink offering. We rarely talk about the drink offering. We need to understand that the offering that we bring, we need to apply to ourselves in a similar way, the way the apostle Paul did in referring to his service to God and the brethren.

Philippians 2:17-18 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Paul uses Himself as an example here and although he does so very briefly, not wanting to over-emphasize himself. He was a humble man and very careful not to make himself the center of attention.

To understand verse 17 we need to realize that Paul is using a strong image here. The verb translated “poured out” is a technical word for a certain part of a sacrificial offering. In performing such an offering, first a valuable animal would be killed and then burned on the altar. Following this sacrifice, the one offering it would make an additional offering called a drink offering. He would take a cup of wine and pour it on the altar and thus pouring it on the surface that was already burned, because the altar was already hot and would immediately disappear in a puff of steam.

So Paul is referring to this offering here in verse 17. Essentially, he is saying to the members of God’s church in Philippi, “I know that you’re worried about me because I am in prison in Rome and my life may soon be offered up. But my life is not the important thing. The important thing is your faith. Your faith is the substantial and valuable offering. When I’m killed it will only be a drinking offering poured out upon a far greater offering of your faith, which you show by your sacrifice and service.” As we heard from John, sacrifice is a great part of giving a proper offering.

Paul was placing his own achievements, even his martyrdom, at a very low point on the scale of Christian service here. He was holding up the faith and

achievements for his brethren for admiration, and this is an example for the humility and obedience to Jesus Christ that Paul was writing about here.

This begs the question: do we show such humility as we meet with other Christians? Or are we too busy wanting to give our opinion? If not, we need to apply Paul's self evaluation to ourselves and not reckon our achievements too highly.

Paul's frame of mind was not something that came about in an instant of course, his humility was the product of a long-term relationship with God. And if we would emulate Paul in his unpretentiousness, we must be prepared to start at the beginning and we must learn small lessons in humility, before there can be large examples set by us.

We need to plan for the offerings. We need to realize that just as we are a part of the firstfruits, which are going to be harvested when the resurrection occurs, so likewise, as we are planning to grow in the grace, knowledge, and character to be able to be raised from the dead when that time comes, then likewise we bring an offering to God that we need to plan and prepare for ahead of time. Otherwise it will be just whatever we think of or happen to have at the time and will not be appropriate. That is why the apostle Paul gives it as a "living principle" in II Corinthians 9.

II Corinthians 9:6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

We have seen this principle at work in the lives of people that we have come across in the course of our lives, not only in the world, but especially in the church. This "living principal" implies that if you are stingy with God, He is going to withhold blessings from you. Whether it is in our conduct, our prayers, our growing, our studying, our thinking, our overcoming, or even our finances we will see the results of whatever attitude we have when we give offerings.

God gave the Ten Commandments on the day of Pentecost, at least as far as we can determine. The Day of Pentecost did not picture the firstfruits until after they got into the land. But it did picture the firstfruits of God in calling

Israel as the first nation. It also pictures those people that God has called, beginning with Seth and all through the righteous line that we find before the Flood; then with Abraham after the Flood and so forth, whom we know that Jesus said would be in the first resurrection.

Do you remember what happened at Mount Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given? The trumpets blew long and loud and got louder and then God spoke the Ten Commandments. Let us turn to Acts 2, because there are several things going on there on the Day of Pentecost that are “attention-grabbing” to say the least.

Now in the book of Acts, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and entered into those first 120 people in the church. It was the first time that there was any spiritual group salvation, so to speak, and it was the day that the church of God was established, and then 3,000 more were added. These were the ones that God had called. He had predestined them to be called at that time.

So the Day of Pentecost was when the church began with the power of the Holy Spirit being given to it, and there are several reasons God did it here on day of Pentecost at the temple. Here are three reasons:

1. Because the Holy Spirit was given to empower the people to keep the Ten Commandments of God.
2. It was given at the Temple so there is a consistency of the place where God chose to place His name and it was at the Temple.
3. Since it was possible by the power of God’s Holy Spirit to do it, the gospel was enabled to be preached to the entire world, and then God caused the miracle of the speaking of the apostles, so that when they spoke in their own language it came out in the language of wherever they were from and those that came there to keep the Feast of Pentecost.

This was a tremendous thing that God was showing on that day. This was also a prophesy that now people would be able to have access to God the Father through the Spirit into the temple in heaven.

This was also a prophecy of the coming demise of the whole sacrificial Temple system. Acts 2:1-4 describes that the Spirit of God descended upon them in abundance and power, and the gift of the Spirit was accompanied by supernatural and extraordinary manifestations. The disciples heard a sound from heaven which rushed with mighty force through the house and filled it as a storm rushes. But there was no wind, it was the *sound* that filled the house, not the wind, and it was an inevitable cause producing audible effects. We will read Acts 2 here.

Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

The term “had fully come” is more accurately translated from the Greek as “was being fulfilled.” So when the Day of Pentecost was being fulfilled they were all with one accord in one place.

Acts 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Spiritual references to the power of wind are numerous and are always understood to be under God’s control. More significant than wind as power, is wind as life. In the Old Testament, for example, the same Hebrew word translated “breath” in Job 1:10, is translated as “wind” elsewhere in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, Spirit is compared with wind as in John 3, where it says:

John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Just as the first Adam received the breath of physical life, so the second Adam, Jesus Christ, brings the breath of spiritual life. The idea of spiritual life, as generated by the Holy Spirit, is understood in the “wind” at Pentecost.

Next there was an appearance of tongues as a fire that rested on each of the apostles.

Acts 2:3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Most of you are aware that in the *King James Version* it says “cloven tongues” there, and that is a little misleading because it seems to suggest that each fire-like tongue was cloven or forked. But this is not what Luke meant of course. Rather he described tongues distributed among them, each disciple sharing in the gift equally with the others in a language that each of them heard.

The phrase “as of fire”, or “as if of fire,” indicates the appearance of the tongues, not that they were actually aflame, but that they prefigure the marvelous gift with which the disciples were now endowed.

Fire is often associated in the Old Testament with the presence of God and His holiness. And it is similar in the New Testament where fire is associated with the presence of God, as in Hebrews 12:29, and the purification He can cause in human life as mentioned in Revelation 3:18.

God’s presence and holiness are both implied in the tongues of fire in Acts 2:3. Fire is actually identified with Christ Himself in Revelation 1:14, and in Revelation 19:12.

This association naturally underlies the gift of the Holy Spirit which opens the understanding the things of Christ. The tongues in verse 3 symbolize God’s truth proclaimed by preaching and this is the antithesis to Babel’s confusion of tongues and gathering of peoples under one ambitious will.

However the New Jerusalem is the center of God’s spiritual Kingdom of peace and righteousness. God is not the author of confusion. There is absolutely no confusion in His Family or the Kingdom of God!

In contrast, Babel is the center of Satan’s kingdom and of human rebellion—it ignores God, the true bond of union, and therefore it is the city of confusion. As Babel’s sin disunited people, in contrast the Spirit of God given on Pentecost unites God’s church in peace, order, and organization.

Ephesians 4:3-6 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

So the apostles began to speak with other languages, well they spoke in their own languages, but it was heard in other languages, as the Spirit gave them the words to proclaim. And what did they do? They preached the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the receiving of the Holy Spirit through repentance and baptism, a brand-new idea to these people.

This is something that had not been done before. God was signaling of how He would now deal with His church and His people.

A very important thing took place here in Acts 2, when Peter preached and they were convicted in their hearts and minds about what had happened with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He was actually preaching to those of whom some of them may have been in the mob that demanded Jesus' crucifixion.

When it really got to them, they repented and were baptized. That was a tremendous and miraculous event. Because on that day the words that Jesus said, recorded in Luke 23:34, was applied to them. We will pick up the story here in Acts 2:37 and we will see how this follows along with what we read in Leviticus 23.

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

So, for those that are called, there is always something that *we must do*. Because as the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Now after the Holy Spirit had come upon the church, Peter confirmed that it is God who calls people to receive His Spirit, thereby becoming members of His church.

Acts 2:39 “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

The apostles did not go out and solicit converts. God called them! It was God, not the apostles, who added to the church. But in faith they did the works that were required to carry out that faith and serve and sacrifice themselves for the work of God.

A few days later a few thousand more were added and then for a very short while the church membership multiplied, but soon the persecution scattered the converts and the growth apparently diminished somewhat and soon the true gospel was suppressed and this has been continued ever since.

Pentecost is to remind us every year that we, the church, are only the first small harvest of God’s calling people to salvation out of the world. We are those who have been predestined to be called now, and we should greatly appreciate this unique and very special opportunity.

We have been called to receive the Holy Spirit and to prepare for the coming Kingdom of God, so Peter made it clear, right from the beginning, that it is a calling that comes from God through Christ and fulfills what Jesus said:

John 6:44 “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Later Jesus clarified it further in John 14 by saying:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

So here it is initially fulfilled right here on the day of Pentecost. Now continuing on in verse 40-41.

Acts 2:40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

Now if there is any perverse generation it is today and it is going to get much more perverse. It is going to get so perverse that just as God had to destroy the Temple system and destroy Jerusalem, He is also going to have to nearly destroy this world in order to cleanse it and purify it from all the sins and corruption that is in the world today.

Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

If you do not believe that Jesus is raised from the dead then your faith is in vain, and Paul emphasizes this. I hope that all the people here believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, but there are people, even in God's church, who doubt. If you do not believe that Jesus Christ was God before He became a human being, that He was God manifest in the flesh, then you do not understand the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and cannot comprehend the deep love that God the Father and Jesus Christ have, for not only the church and the people that He calls, but also for all humanity.

It is God's great plan through the things that we know from the holy days that He is going to save the vast majority of mankind, and God is going to offer them the kind of repentance and forgiveness that we have now as baptized members of God's church.

Since God called us as the firstfruits we have a great and tremendous promise, greater than anyone else who comes into the Kingdom after that, and so we need to really understand this.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

Christians who have little or no understanding of what the future holds for God's people eventually fall away from their calling because basically they have a preference rather than a true conviction in their obedience to God. They are unable to make their call and election sure.

Now you have to understand and appreciate the greatness of the plan of God. Keep it in the forefront of your minds that it will lead and guide you, inspire you, and give you hope and strength and the patience that is necessary for spiritual health.

We need to understand this because there were those even in the church of God back in Paul's day who should have had the basic knowledge of the greatness of God's plan, and Paul addresses that here in I Corinthians 15.

I Corinthians 15:34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

There are a lot of people today who do not have the knowledge of God as they should. In verses 12-14 Paul is talking to the members of the church in Corinth and to all the brethren from there on.

I Corinthians 15:12-14 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

Let us understand this. Any minister, church, or man that preaches that you go to heaven is preaching in vain, false doctrine because they are not preaching the resurrection of Christ and they are therefore not teaching God's truth.

Do not be deceived by watching or reading the material of these false Sunday-keeping preachers. God will not back up liars and He excludes them from His Kingdom. Satan works with a little bit of truth hidden among lots of errors.

Paul continues with this long rhetorical statement that if Christ did not rise from the dead, then he and the other apostles are false ministers.

I Corinthians 15:15-19 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

That means that if that is all we have is hope in Christ and not a hope in a resurrection, that we will be resurrected just as He was, then we are pitiable men. If this were the case and our lives were limited to this physical life, we would be miserable—mentally, spiritually—as the world. And because you would suffer in vain, you would go through trials in vain, and you would not be developing the character of God, you would have a false belief in Christ, as mainstream Christianity does.

I Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [or died in the faith]

That goes back to the wave sheaf offering day, the first of the first fruits, the premier sheaf that was accepted by God the Father.

I Corinthians 15:21-23 For since by man came death, by Man [referring to Christ] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

His coming is going to be a fantastic event. It is not something that happens in just one day. Turn to James 1:17 and we will apply this to ourselves and see what James says concerning the church.

James 1:17-18 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Here James shows that we are firstfruits and we see how important it is to remain faithful. Because God, of His own will and desire, brought us forth by Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

Now let us look at it in the book of Hebrews where we see the term “firstborn” and that we are called “the church of the firstborn.” Turn to Hebrews 12. Here is where we get the parallel between the giving of the law at Mount Sinai and all the things that took place after that and are coming to the resurrection and are part of coming to Mount Zion which is the city of the living God.

Hebrews 12:18-19 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. [speaking of the Israelites when the law was being given at Zion.]

They heard God speak, but none of us have heard that. But we have a greater experience than that. We have the Spirit of God dwelling in us who are the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 12:20-21 For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”

You know that Moses was a great leader, second in command and over all of the armies of Egypt, and then God humbled him for forty years in preparation to lead the church. Nevertheless, in every way, Moses was an extraordinary man, yet when he faced that sight, he said he was exceedingly afraid and trembling. It is hard to imagine.

Now we are going to see that what they all experienced was nothing compared to what it is going to be like when Christ returns, because it is going to be an awesome, fantastic, tremendous event. Next we get a picture of what is going to take place worldwide at the time.

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion [this is not the Mount Zion on earth] and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

So the phrase in verse 22 translated in many translations misses the true meaning of the phrase which is better translated in the ESV as “to innumerable angels in festal gathering.” It was a feast! This accuracy is very important because it indicates when this is happening.

According to *Barnes Notes*, the phrase, “to an innumerable company of angels,” literally in the Greek here is “to myriads or ten thousands of angels in an assembly or joyful convocation.” What is a convocation? It is a holy day. Tens of thousands is used to represent a great and indefinite number.

Now in verse 23, the Greek word rendered “general assembly” refers to an assembly or convocation of everyone in order to celebrate any public festival or solemn gathering. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and refers to the angels viewed as assembled around the throne of God and celebrating His praises. It is a special day, and very likely it is a holy day.

In verse 23, the firstborn have become identified with the happy and honored church of God which is a powerful motive to encourage us to persevere, because wonderful and fantastic things are going to happen in our lives in the future, if we are faithful.

It is a consideration which should make us adhere to God's truth in the midst of all temptations and persecutions, because we are identified with the great faithful saints who have lived God's way of life and have died in the faith and we are to share their honors and their joys.

The Christian is united in faith, honor, and in destiny with the elect saints of all the earth of all times and we should feel honored to be a Christian. We should never be ashamed of the term, even though the world has trashed the term. We should yield to no temptation which would induce us to part from such an excellent fellowship as we have in God's church with one another.

The fact that this the celebration of a joyous festival indicates that it is very likely the Day of Pentecost, which is a festival gathering of the church of the firstborn and Jesus Christ is the first of the firstborn.

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

We see here the first of the firstfruits, we have the first of the firstborn and we have the firstfruits and then we have the church of the firstborn, that is what we are called and we registered as in the Book of Life in heaven.

God is decisively in this picture, during this 50-day wave sheaf to Pentecost period. Remember that God gave His law from Mount Sinai on the Day of Pentecost and so we see God present in His providence of His law, the standard by which we are to live. So even on the Day of Pentecost God's law is still emphasized.

People say that the law is not mentioned or declared very much in the New Testament, but it is and it is to be continually kept.

God gave His church the Holy Spirit of power, inspiration, and the help that we need to live His way of life. He enables us to see God, follow Him, and to submit to Him in faith.

God provided the wave sheaf offering, which is a tremendously important part of the whole process, because Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and High Priest has opened the way to a relationship with God. By His sinless life and teachings He has shown us the way to live and He has done what is needed so that the rest of us can follow and we can have salvation because He lives, guiding us through this period of sanctification toward eternal life.

But who are we and why would He do such a wonderful thing for us? What sets the saints apart? Christians are called saints (*agioi*) 60 times in the New Testament and 39 times in Paul's epistles alone.

I Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

An alternate meaning for “sanctified” is also “set apart.” We are set apart for a specific purpose and God takes special care of us because of it.

Our English word “saint” is derived from Latin and is basically means: “sacred” or “holy one.” It is used to translate biblical Hebrew and Greek words meaning the same thing. We have an obligation to work hard to be holy in how we think, how we live our lives, how we reason and discern.

I Peter 1:15-16 But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

No one will go into the Kingdom unless he is holy. No one can have a personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ without being holy. So God has designated the saints as holy, but we also have to work to fulfill that. There is no one synonym that expresses all that is entailed in being holy. In a general sense being holy means clean, without blame, without blemish, irreproachable and separate as from the world.

When we become a true Christian or a “saint” we become sanctified. The word “sanctified” is also to make holy. Jesus the bridegroom gave Himself for His church, the bride, which is composed of individual saints, and He is getting us ready for spiritual marriage. In Ephesians 5, Paul writes:

Ephesians 5:26 That He might sanctify and cleanse her [meaning the church] with the washing of water by the word.

Initially this cleansing is done by the blood of Christ.

I John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The ongoing cleansing process is being done right now by the instrumentality of God’s truth, the Word of God, as Paul reveals in verse 26. In verse 27 he says:

Ephesians 5:27 That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

The terms “sanctify,” “cleanse,” and “be holy” are all being used together. To be clean is to be set apart from filthiness. We are saints or “holy ones” because we have been sanctified or set apart from the purpose of being clean spiritually from the sinful ways of this world. That is what it means to come out of the world and not be of the world.

It is not just a matter of obeying the Ten Commandments, it is also necessary to resist the Devil, to avoid the ways of the world. It is impossible in one sense, because we are human beings and we have that corruptibility in us, but it is possible because God has given us the Holy Spirit to be able to resist Satan and the world.

The Levitical priesthood was told to do this very thing.

Isaiah 52:11 Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her, be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord.

A saint goes through an ongoing purification process and this is the sanctification process. Ultimately God is the one who makes us pure and clean in this process. We cannot do it all ourselves, however we do have to do our part to contend earnestly for the faith. We have a responsibility to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and Spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Perfecting holiness is a process that requires a great deal of effort. We cannot just sit around thinking that we get all we need by just listening to services over the internet on the Sabbath. That is not enough! There is far more to do than that. It requires repentance of sin, obedience to God's law, overcoming temptations, and producing the fruit of the Spirit which is produced in peace.

Saints are cleansed, purified, set apart, made holy and kept that way through the power of God's Holy Spirit.

I Thessalonians 3:12-13 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

The goal of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians and all Christians is that Jesus Christ would grant them the spiritual strength to be blameless in holiness in the presence of God the Father when Christ returns. This strength is found in love for God and each other. Paul writes,

I Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

He is the one that accomplishes this, but we must make the effort. To be blameless, we have to truly love one another. Love is the foundation that unites us. Because God is faithful, He guarantees that if we truly love Him and one another, He will give us eternal blamelessness, or rather incorruptibility.

Once cleansed, purified, and made blameless, the saints are judged worthy of God's Family. We will read II Thessalonians 1:5. This begins by speaking of God's final judgment in glory.

II Thessalonians 1:5 Which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.

II Thessalonians 1:10-11 When He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. Therefore we also pray always for you [Paul speaking to the church here] that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power.

So it is essentially important that we not only pray that we are personally worthy, but also that our fellow brethren are worthy of their calling as well. If you are only praying for yourself then it is a selfish prayer and does not go any higher than the ceiling. We must pray for each other.

Important aspects of what it means to be worthy are found in Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:1-3 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Keeping the unity in the Spirit is work. Endeavoring means to force yourself to continue to do something that is not easy.

Paul has in view the meeting of Christ with or among His saints in the air. Included in the reward of the saints will be preparation in the glory and wonder of Christ's return. In a unique sense He is the glory and object of wonder, but He purposes to share these in the midst of His holy people, the saints. The saints participate in the glory but Christ is the focal point.

The righteous judgment of God assures a devastating penalty against the ungodly but also guarantees that we will be counted worthy of God's Kingdom, find rest from hardships, and experience salvation in lieu of the terrible fate awaiting our persecutors. We will read Jude 14-15 but notice how many times the term "ungodly" is mentioned in verse 15.

Jude 14-15 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

We, as the saints, will judge them with Jesus Christ for all of these horrible things they are doing and all the perversions that we see.

Now turn to Psalm 149, which shows some of the responsibilities of the saint when we return with Christ.

Psalm 149:5-9 Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand [We know that the sword in the armor of God is the Word of God. So it is saying let the Word of God be in their hands.], to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints. Praise the Lord!

So as God's coming government takes hold, there will be an increase in what is holy, cleansed, purified, and without blemish because of God's presence. Eventually everything will become holy that will enter His Kingdom, because everything will be dedicated to His holy purpose and service.

There is no greater calling than to be a saint, sanctified for holy service to God's holy purpose and we have assurance from God that we are neither forgotten nor neglected by Him because He has promised to accomplish His purpose in us. Now in Psalm 37, David was inspired to write this:

Psalm 37:28 For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.

It does not get any more permanent than that. God will glorify all of His spiritually begotten children at the resurrection of the firstfruits giving us similar great power and glory to that of Jesus Christ.

To be glorified means to be given great power and brightness. Before He became a human being, Jesus Christ had a glorious powerful Spirit body like His Father's. And after His resurrection He was restored to the same power and glory. Christ's bright face and powerful Spirit body now radiates light greater than the sun at full strength, with eyes blazing like flames of fire. Biblically fire is often associated with the presence of God and His holiness.

This is the awe-inspiring future God has in store for us if we are begotten by His Holy Spirit and draw upon its power to grow in character during this physical life of ours.

At the conclusion of the 7,000 years of God's plan of salvation for humanity, the God Family, all of us possessing holy, righteous, perfect character, unable to sin, will then go on to eternity to populate and beautify the rest of the vast universe.

We will be constantly looking forward in joyous anticipation and ecstasy to stow more wonderful and greater things to do throughout the whole endless universe, always building on the supreme and glorious accomplishment that only Almighty God could do.