

## Let The Saints Be Joyful In Glory!

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Though the material sacrifices and offerings such as the burnt, the grain, the peace, the sin, and the trespass offerings are no longer required because they were fulfilled once and for all in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, they still have much to teach us.

When we take a closer look at what God established in Leviticus 23, we see that these were never merely rituals or agricultural observances. They were designed to reveal something much bigger—God's plan of salvation.

The instructions surrounding the wave sheaf offering, the counting of seven weeks, and the Feast of Weeks, that is, Pentecost are all connected. And together they form a complete picture of the spring produce, and at the center of that picture is the idea of a harvest. But it is not just a physical harvest, it is a spiritual harvest.

So let us remind ourselves of the basic doctrine having to do with this as we go through, for a few minutes, that very thing.

The wave sheaf offering given at the very beginning of the harvest season represents the first of the firstfruits. It marked the starting point of a count, a deliberate meaningful progression leading to the Pentecost 50 days later. Now that period was not random, it was intentional, and it was to teach us something. In the Old Testament, it was tied to the grain harvest, but in the New Testament, we see the deeper meaning, and these harvests represent people being called, prepared, and brought into God's Kingdom.

Now Jesus Christ is described as the first of the firstfruits and the first to be raised, the first accepted, and then in time, others will follow. It includes those being called now, you and I. So when we look at this 50-day period from the wave sheaf to Pentecost, we are not just looking at a sequence of observances. We are seeing a step-by-step picture of how God works with

His people—from Christ's acceptance as the perfect sacrifice to the preparation and eventual gathering of His people in His Family. So once we see that, these instructions take on a whole new level of meaning. They are no longer distant and symbolic, they become very personal.

Leviticus 23:9-21 outlines God's instructions for the wave sheaf offering, the seven-week count, the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. And when we understand the purpose of God's holy days and how they outline God's plan of salvation, we see that this entire period focuses on what the first of the firstfruits has made possible by preparing the saints for God's spiritual harvest. Now the full impact of the wave sheaf offering on God's people becomes clear when we recognize the importance of the counting required for observing Pentecost.

Please turn with me to Leviticus 23, verse 9. Now the count begins on the day the ancient Israelites offered the annual wave sheaf offering. The wave sheaf offering happens once a year and is not a holy day, but it is a significant event. Its establishment by God shows that the present is not humanity's time of salvation. The primary instruction regarding the wave sheaf appears here in Leviticus 23, verses 9 through 14.

**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. 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 and cut at the start of the spring harvest. Now because it came from the very beginning

of the firstfruits, it is called the first of the firstfruits. So each Israelite with a harvest was required to offer an offering. Then a priest would lift and wave each sheaf before God for acceptance. Now in the Old Testament, the wave sheaf offering represented a thankful acknowledgment to God as the Giver of the harvest. In this way, it was sanctified or dedicated to Him.

Now in the New Testament, the spiritual purpose of this offering is revealed. The Old Testament places God's festivals within the agricultural harvest. But in the New Testament, these agricultural harvests become types of God's spiritual harvest of people into His Kingdom. So this period begins with the offering of the barley sheaf symbolizing Christ and then ends 50 days later with two leavened loaves representing God's people, imperfect yet accepted into His Kingdom. Together, these elements illustrate the full scope of God's work with His firstfruits, from Christ's perfect sacrifice to inclusion of His followers in His Family.

Both Exodus 23:19 and Exodus 34:26 contain the phrase first of the firstfruits. And 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 labors which you have sown in the field. In Numbers 28:26, Pentecost is called the day of the firstfruits. Now the firstfruits were the early part of the harvest. The first of the firstfruits would be even earlier in the harvest season. So the wave sheaf offering represents a small initial harvest, and it carries significant symbolic meaning representing the pure, sinless, and risen Christ.

Please turn with me to I Corinthians 15, verse 20. Now Jesus is not specifically referred to as the first of the firstfruits in the New Testament. However, in Romans 8:29, the apostle Paul calls Him the firstborn of many brethren. In I Corinthians 15, he clearly links firstfruits and therefore harvest with a resurrection.

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

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

Now James confirms that we are part of the same spiritual harvest as Christ. In James 1:18, he writes, "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 Christ, the excellent wave sheaf, was harvested from the physical world by being resurrected from the dead, accepted by God, and became the firstborn of many brethren.

Let us now flip back to Leviticus 23.

To quickly summarize, this 50-day period begins and ends with a waving of an offering. It starts with the waving of the sheaf for the firstfruit barley representing Christ, and it ends 50 days later with two loaves baked with leaven being waved before God, and these represent God's people, 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. Now Pentecost culminates a period of spiritual harvest in which the firstfruits of the Kingdom are emphasized.

Here in Leviticus 23 and verse 15, it begins the instructions for keeping the joyful day of Pentecost.

**Leviticus 23:15-16** And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath [that is, the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread], 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; and then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.

So God does not change that counting rule. The count is always from the day after the Sabbath, that is, the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It is a rule God has set, a command He has set, and we follow it every year. As we continue in Leviticus 23, we will see that on the fiftieth day, special offerings were to be brought. One concerns the significance of the Pentecost prophetic meaning and the other concerns the offerings we are to take up.

Now in Deuteronomy 16, it says that after you count out seven weeks, you are to make an offering on the Feast of Weeks, that is, on Pentecost. (We heard about that in the offertory today.)

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

This has significance in relating to those firstfruits who will be in the church and in the resurrection. And then it gives the offering the Israelites were to offer there in Leviticus, all the rams and lambs and so forth, an offering made by fire for a sweet smelling aroma.

**Leviticus 23:18-21** 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 you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two 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. And you shall proclaim on the same day [that very day, the fiftieth 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.

And since this is a holy day, we do take up an offering, as we did earlier, and it represents the firstfruits. And God said that you shall not fail to bring your firstfruits to Him. It is essentially important.

Now, please turn over to Philippians 2, verse 17. The offering we bring is to be applied to ourselves in a similar way to how Paul did when 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.

Which we are doing today.

Paul uses himself as an example here though only briefly. In fact, he uses only one verse to describe his own attitude and conduct here, not wanting to overemphasize himself. In verse 17, Paul is using a strong image. The verb that is 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 burnt on the altar. Following this sacrifice, the priest would make an additional offering called a drink offering. He would take a cup of wine and pour it on the altar, thus pouring it on the sacrifice that was already burning because the altar was hot and the drink offering would immediately disappear in a puff of steam.

So Paul refers to this offering here in verse 17. Essentially, he is saying to the members of God's church in Philippi, "I know that you are worried about me because I'm in prison in Rome and my life soon is offered up, but my life is not important. The important thing is your faith. Your faith is a substantial and valuable offering, and when I am killed, it will only be a drink offering poured out upon a greater offering of your faith which you show by your sacrifice and service." So we see there that it is very, very important that we offer our offerings, not just monetarily, that is a minor part of it, but as a sacrifice, a sacrifice to God's work and a sacrifice to one another and serving one another.

Paul was placing his own achievements, even his martyrdom, at a very low point on the scale of Christian service. Of course that martyrdom was part of Christian service, and so I do not mean to lighten that, but it really shows the importance of our service to one another, especially to God. So this is an example of the humility and obedience to Jesus Christ that Paul was writing about here. 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 so we cannot just think we are going to be saved at the last moment. It takes a lifetime, or whatever God has given us as a lifetime, to develop or allow God to develop His character in us, and we, of course, have to make sure that our election is sure by doing our part.

Now if we are to emulate Paul's unpretentiousness, we must be prepared to begin early in our conversion, and we must learn small lessons in humility before we can actually be larger examples, so to speak. We must consider our offerings, understanding that because we are part of the firstfruits and to be harvested at the resurrection, our growth in character and grace and knowledge also prepares us for our own resurrection at the appointed time. Of course God is the one that is actually doing the preparation, but we are required to do our part by overcoming.

We must also plan to bring an offering to God—we must prepare for it, and we must prepare it in advance. And so those offerings that we took up earlier in the service, we should have thought about long before today.

And that is why Paul gives it as a living principle in 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," which includes, and very importantly includes, our service. We have seen this principle at work in people's lives, not only in the world but especially in the church. This living principle implies that if we are stingy with God, He is going to withhold blessings from us, whether in our character or our prayers or our growing, our overcoming, our studying, our thinking, our finances. The whole lifestyle that we have must be a serving one.

Now God gave the Ten Commandments on the Feast of Firstfruits or the Day of Pentecost. The Day of Pentecost did not picture the firstfruits until after they entered the land as far as the harvest was concerned, but it did picture God's firstfruits by designating Israel as the first nation. It also pictures those people whom God has called, beginning with Seth and continuing through the righteous line of Noah, whom we find before the Flood, and then through Noah to Abraham after the Flood and so forth, whom we know as Jesus said, will be in the first resurrection.

Do you remember what happened at Mount Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given there? The trumpet blew long, loud, louder, and even louder, and God spoke the Ten Commandments. He got their attention right off the bat and would not leave it and would not let their attention dwindle.

Let us go to Acts 2 because there are several things happening there on the Day of Pentecost. In the book of Acts on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and entered the first 120 of the church. It was the first time there was any group salvation, so to speak, and it was the day the church of God was established. Three thousand more were added, and these were those God had called and 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 why God did it here and on the Day of Pentecost at the Temple. The three reasons for this: 1) because now 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 in the place where God chose to place His name, and it was at the Temple at that time. And 3) since it was possible by the power of God's Spirit to do it, the gospel was enabled to be preached to the entire world.

And then God caused the miracle of the apostles speaking so that when they spoke in their own language, the audience heard it in their native language. So this was a tremendous thing that God was showing. This was also a prophecy that people would have access to God the Father through Jesus Christ by way of the Spirit into the Temple in heaven.

Now Acts 2, verses 1 through 4 describes how the Spirit of God descended upon them in abundance and power. And the gift of the Spirit was accompanied by supernatural manifestations, as you know.

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

As we are here today, either physically or at least by way of the Internet, as the modern technology allows. "Had fully come" is more accurately

translated from the Greek, was being fulfilled. The disciples heard a sound from heaven which rushed with mighty force into the house and filled it as a storm rushes, but there was no wind.

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

So it was the sound that filled the house, not the wind. It was an invisible cause producing audible effects. 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 John 3:8 it says, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." So just as the first Adam received the breath of physical life, so the second Adam, Jesus Christ, brings the breath of spiritual life. And the idea of spiritual life as generated by the Holy Spirit is understood in the wind at Pentecost. In verse 2, the wind at Pentecost was rushing and mighty, a powerful windy sound that nevertheless did not extinguish the tongues of fire.

Next, tongues appeared as flames that rested on each of the apostles.

**Acts 2:3-4** 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 [that is, languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Luke described tongues distributed among them, each disciple sharing in the gift equally with the others. "As of fire," or more exactly as *if* of fire, indicates the appearance of the tongues, not that they were aflame, but that they prefigured the marvelous gift with which the disciples were now endowed. The fire is often associated in the Old Testament with the presence of God and His holiness. It is similar in the New Testament where fire is associated with the presence of God as in Hebrews 12:29, and in Revelation 3:18, fire relates to the purification He can bring to human life.

So God's presence and holiness are both implied in the tongues as a fire in Acts 2:3, and fire is identified with Christ Himself in Revelation 1:14 and

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also Revelation 19:12. So this association naturally underlies the gift of the Holy Spirit, which opens to our understanding the things of Christ. The tongues in Acts 2:3 symbolize God's truth proclaimed by preaching. This is the antithesis of Babel's confusion of the tongues and gathering of people under one ambitious will. However, the New Testament is the center of God's spiritual Kingdom of peace and righteousness.

Turn with me to Ephesians 4, verse 3. Now in contrast, Babel is the center of Satan's kingdom and of human rebellion. It ignores God and the true bond of union, therefore, it is the city of confusion. As Babel's sin disunited the people, the Spirit of God given on Pentecost unites God's church in peace.

**Ephesians 4:3-6** [E]ndeavoring 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 in other languages as the Spirit gave them 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. It was a brand new understanding that they were teaching. It had not been done before, not openly like that, and God was signaling the way He would deal with His church and His people. A very important event took place here when Peter preached. They were convicted in their hearts and minds about what had happened at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; it was not a preference for them. It became a conviction, and it is extremely important that we are convicted of our beliefs, we are convicted of the truth, we are convicted of our service to God and His people.

Peter was preaching to those who may even have been part of the mob that demanded Jesus' crucifixion. When it finally reached them and they repented and were baptized, it was a tremendous, miraculous event. On that day Jesus spoke these words recorded in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And was applied to them.

Let us pick it up in Acts 2, verse 37 and we will see how this follows along with what we read back 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 there is always something we must do. We do not sit back, kick up our feet on the desk, and wait for God to do everything. We have work to do and often it is quite grueling work. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

**Acts 2:38-39** Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise [that is, of the Holy Spirit] is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord God will call."

Again, showing that God is the one who calls us into His church.

The apostles did not go out soliciting converts. God called them. It was God, not the apostles, who added to the church. Yes, they did have to go out and preach and do their part to get the word out, but when it gets down to the essence of it, it is God who calls each person and He provides ways for people to find out about it. I remember an old story back in the Worldwide days where a man, I do not remember where he was, it might have been the Caribbean, but a Plain Truth blew up against his leg and stuck there and he picked it up, started reading it, and then came into the church. So you know, God can choose any number of ways to get people's attention.

So on Pentecost, Peter made it clear from the beginning that it is a calling from God through Christ and that it fulfills what Jesus said in 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." And later, Jesus clarified it further in 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 Jesus declares Himself as the way, the truth, and the life, meaning He is the sole path to the Father through relationship, through justification, following His example in obedience and submission.

Peter continues his Pentecost sermon by warning them about what they must be saved from.

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

We are still trying to do that today, are we not? With all of the media and their lives and all of the poor, horrible entertainment and music and movies and books and all of that, we are constantly bombarded by Satan's world and so we have to work on being saved from it as well. Even though God does the work, we have our part to play by overcoming sin and our faults. If there is any perverse generation, it is today, and it is going to become even more perverse, so perverse that He must nearly destroy this world, to cleanse and purify it from all the sins, corruption, and Satanism that is in the world.

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

Three thousand were added on that first church-age Pentecost, and this day was of great significance for us. This is why God gave the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

Now in God's great plan, as revealed in the holy days, He is going to save the vast majority of mankind at their appointed time, and God will offer them the same opportunity for repentance and forgiveness that we have today. And since God called us the firstfruits, we have a great and tremendous promise, greater than that of anyone else entering the Kingdom of God after us, that is, after the firstfruits. Proverbs 28:18 says, "Where there is no revelation [or vision], the people cast off restraint, but happy is he who keeps the law." And this world certainly does not keep the law and in fact, they are trying to ban it in some countries now. They are trying to ban the Bible, the reading of it. And I am sure they will be successful somewhat, according to God's will. Christians who have little or no understanding of what the future holds for God's people eventually fall away from their calling and are unable to make their call and election sure.

Please turn over back over to I Corinthians 15 and this time we will be going to verse 12. We must understand and appreciate the greatness of God's plan. It must be at the forefront of our minds because it will lead, inspire, and give us hope and strength and provide the patient endurance we need for our spiritual health. We do not always know God as we should, even when it comes to the resurrection.

**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.

So we must not disappoint God by neglecting our study of His Word, as even some in the church of God during the time of the apostle Paul were doing. They were negligent in their basic understanding of the greatness of God's plan.

**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.

Paul continues his 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 shall have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable.

Because if this were the case, if our hope were limited to this physical life, we would be as miserable mentally and spiritually as the world. And because

we would suffer in vain, we would go through trials in vain and we would not be developing the character of God and we would have a false belief in Christ.

And it is important to realize that our suffering is different than the world's suffering, even though it may be the same disease, because our suffering is to make us better and others around us in the church better and sharpen our character and become more complete for God's purpose and our responsibility in the Kingdom. But the world is suffering in vain. They are suffering most of the time for their sins or the sins of society, which we in God's church do also, but we have purpose and we have a reward that they do not, and it is a huge difference between the two. So you cannot look at the world and what they are suffering with and equate it to God's people and their suffering because one is so much more important than the other, although both are important.

**I Corinthians 15:20-23** But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [that is, died in the faith]. For since by man came death, by Man 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 first of] the firstfruits, afterward those [firstfruits] who are Christ's at His coming.

Please turn over to James 1, verse 17. Now let us see about His coming. It is going to be quite a fantastic event, and that is an understatement of the greatest magnitude! It is not something that happens in just one day. Now let us apply this to ourselves by seeing 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.

So James shows that we are firstfruits and underscores the importance of remaining 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, in chapter 12, where we see the term "firstborn" and are "called the church of the firstborn."

Here is where we find the parallel between the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, all that followed, and our coming to the resurrection and being part of coming to Mount Zion, the city of the living God. This is about the glorious company.

**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 words should not be spoken to them anymore.

Of course referring back to the ancient Israelites when God was on the mountain giving the Ten Commandments. So they heard God speak, but none of us has heard that, and we have a greater experience than that. We have the Spirit of God dwelling in us. We are the firstfruits of God's Spirit, so we do not have to hear that booming in order to get our attention that those ancient Israelites needed to hear.

**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.")

And now we are going to see that what they are experiencing was nothing compared to what it is going to be like when Christ returns, because it is going to be an awesome, fantastic account greater than any other. Next, we get the big picture of what will take place worldwide at that time.

**Hebrews 12:22-24** But you have come to Mount Zion [this is not the 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 the 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.

The phrase in verse 22 "to an innumerable company of angels" as rendered in many translations misses the true meaning of the phrase, which is better translated in the ESV as "to innumerable angels in festal gathering." And this accuracy is very important here because it indicates when this is happening. According to *Barnes' Notes*,

To an innumerable company of angels literally in the Greek here is to myriads or ten thousands of angels in an assembly or joyful congregation. Tens of thousands is often used to represent a great and indefinite number. In verse 23 in the Greek word rendered general assembly, it refers to an assembly or convocation of the whole people to celebrate a public festival or other solemn gathering.

It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and refers to angels gathered around God's throne praising Him. It is a special day, probably a holy day.

Now in verse 23, the firstborn are identified with the happy and honored church of God. A powerful incentive to persevere. Now it is a consideration that should lead us to God's truth in all temptations and persecutions because we are identified with the great faithful saints who have lived God's way of life and died in faith, and we are to share their honors and joys. So we are united in faith and honor and destiny with the elected saints of all the earth and of all times. So we should feel honored to be Christians. We should yield to no temptation that would lead us to part from such an excellent fellowship as we share in God's church together. The fact that this is the celebration of a joyous festival indicates that it is very likely the Day of Pentecost, a festival gathering of the church of the firstborn.

Jesus Christ is the first among the firstborn. In Romans 8:29 Paul writes, "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." So we see here first of the firstfruits, which is first of the firstborn. The firstfruits comprise the church of the firstborn, and that is what we are called, and this means we are registered in the Book of Life in heaven.

Now God is decisively present throughout the 50-day count from the wave sheaf to Pentecost, and He gave us His law from Mount Sinai on the Day of Pentecost, and thus we see God present in the providence of His law, the standard by which we are to live. So God gave His church the Holy Spirit of power and inspiration and the help that we need to live His way of life. It enables us to see God and follow Him and to submit to Him in faith. By His sinless life and teachings, He has shown us how to live and He has done what is necessary 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.

Please turn over to I Corinthians 1, verse 2. So who are we? Why would He do such a wonderful thing for us? What sets the saints apart? Christians are called saints 60 times in the New Testament, including 39 instances in Paul's epistles.

**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 alternative meaning of sanctified is set apart, and we are set apart for a specific purpose.

Please turn over to I Peter 1, verse 15. What sets the saints apart? Our English word saint derives from the Latin and means sacred or holy one. It is used to translate biblical Hebrew and Greek words meaning sacred or holy one. Now we have an obligation to work hard to be holy in how we live and think and reason and discern. Of course, ultimately it is God who accomplishes it. But we certainly have to be submissive to Him.

**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 single synonym fully captures what it means to be holy. In a general sense, holy means clean, without blame or blemish, irreproachable, and set apart as from the world.

Please turn over to Ephesians 5, verse 26. When we become true Christians or saints, we are sanctified. The word sanctified also means to make holy. Jesus the Bridegroom gave Himself for His church, the Bride composed of individual saints, and He is preparing us for a spiritual marriage.

**Ephesians 5:26** [Paul writes] that He might sanctify and cleanse her [that is, His church] with the washing of water by the word.

Initially, this cleansing is done by the blood of Christ. I John 1:7 says, "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." So the ongoing cleansing process is being carried out right now by the instrumentality of God's truth and the Word of God, as Paul reveals in verse 27.

**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.

So the terms sanctify and cleanse and be holy are used together. To be clean is to be set apart from filth, and we are saints or holy ones because we have been sanctified, set apart for spiritual purity from the sinful ways of this world.

The Levitical priesthood was told to do this very thing in Isaiah 52:11. It says, "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." So a saint undergoes an ongoing purification process, the sanctification process. Ultimately, God is the one who makes us clean and pure throughout this process, beginning with Christ's spilled blood. And we cannot do it ourselves, but we do have our part to play and to do by contending earnestly for the faith. We have a responsibility to cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Please turn over to I Thessalonians 3, verse 12. Perfecting holiness is a process that requires significant effort. It requires repenting of sin, obeying God's law, resisting temptation, and producing the fruit of the Spirit. Saints are cleansed, purified, set apart, made holy, and kept that way by 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.

Blameless. The goal of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians and all Christians is that Jesus Christ would grant us the spiritual strength to be blameless in holiness before God the Father at Jesus Christ's return. And then jumping to chapter 5 of I Thessalonians, verse 23, the strength is rooted in love for God and for one another.

**I Thessalonians 5:23-24** [Paul writes] 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 will also do it.

To be blameless, we must truly love one another. Love is the foundation that unifies us and because God is faithful, He guarantees that if we truly love Him and one another, we will receive eternal blamelessness, incorruptibility.

Now jump over a book to II Thessalonians 1, verse 3. So once cleansed and purified and made blameless, the saints are judged worthy of God's Family. Here in II Thessalonians 1, we are going to read verses 3 to 5 and then 10 and 11. It speaks of God's final judgment and glory.

**II Thessalonians 1:3-5** We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 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 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 essential that we not only pray that we are personally worthy, but also that we pray that our brethren are counted worthy of God's calling as well.

Please turn over to Ephesians 4, verse 1. Important aspects of what it means to be worthy are found here in Ephesians 4, and we are going to read verses 1 through 3.

**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.

Paul has in view the meeting of Christ with or among His saints, and the saints' reward will be participation in the glory and wonder of Christ's return. In a unique sense, He is the glory and object of wonder. Yet He aims to share them among His holy people, the saints, and the saints participate in the glory, but Christ remains the focal point.

Now please turn over to the book of Jude, verse 14. God's righteous judgment promises severe consequences for the ungodly, but also affirms that we will be deemed worthy of God's Kingdom. He assures us of relief from our struggles and of receiving salvation and glory rather than the dreadful punishment our persecutors face. Jude 14 and 15 are a powerful conviction of the ungodly.

**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."

So what do you think Jude's emphasis was in this verse? Ungodly. He was not using it as a nice term, of course. Jesus is mentioned as coming with angels in Matthew 16:27 and also in Matthew 24:31. And Daniel 7 speaks of God judging humanity in the presence of millions of angels. And add to that tens of thousands of His saints.

Please turn over to Psalm 149 and we are going to read verses 5 through 9. Psalm 149 outlines some of the responsibilities of the saints 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, 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 we, the saints, become joyful in glory. We cannot even imagine what that is or what that means. It is far beyond our imagination. As God's government takes hold, there will be an increase in what is holy, cleansed, purified, and without blemish, all because of God's presence. And everything in His Kingdom will become holy because everything will be dedicated to His holy purpose.

Now please turn over to Psalm 37. 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, for He has promised to accomplish His purpose in us. In Psalm 37 we are going to read verses 22 through 24, then 28 and 29. David was inspired to write in verse 22,

**Psalm 37:22-24** For those blessed by Him [that is, the Lord] shall inherit the earth, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in His way. Though he may fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.

**Psalm 37:28-29** 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. The righteous shall inherit the land [that is, God's Kingdom], and dwell in it forever.

The Lord does not forsake His saints. He preserves us forever. What an amazing promise that is! Preserved is from the Hebrew word *natsar*, and it means, to watch, to guard, to keep. It has a sense of keeping with faithfulness, and many references are made to God as the one who preserves His people from dangers of all kinds.

God will glorify all His Spirit-begotten children at the resurrection of the firstfruits, granting us great power and glory like that of Jesus Christ. Before He became human, Jesus Christ possessed a glorious, powerful spirit body like His Father's, and after His resurrection and ascension, He was restored to His former power and glory and even more authority than He had before. And Christ's bright face and powerful spirit body now radiate light brighter than the sun, full strength, with eyes blazing like flames of fire. Remember, biblically, fire is often associated with the presence of God and His holiness.

And this is the awe-inspiring future God has prepared for us if we are baptized through His Holy Spirit and draw on its power to grow in character through our lives. At the conclusion of the seven thousand years of God's plan of salvation for humanity, the sinless God Family, possessing holy, righteous, and perfect character will continue for eternity, populating and beautifying the rest of the vast universe. We will be constantly looking forward in joyous anticipation and excitement to still greater and more wonderful responsibilities through the whole endless universe, and we will always be building on the supreme and glorious accomplishment that only an almighty God could achieve.

Now when you step back and take it all in, this entire period, the wave sheaf to Pentecost, shows us something incredibly encouraging. God is not working randomly. He is not working without purpose. He is working *with purpose*. And from the moment Christ was accepted as the first of the firstfruits, a process began, one that continues right now. A process of calling and shaping and preparing people to be part of His Family, and that includes us. It includes you and I. It is so encouraging.

We are not just observing these days or reading about them. We are part of what they point to. We are part of that early harvest, the firstfruits God is preparing. That should change how we see our lives. The struggles, the growth, the effort to overcome, it all has meaning. It is all part of being prepared for something far greater than we can fully see right now.

And just as surely as the wave sheaf was accepted and just as surely as Pentecost follows, God will complete what He has started. He does not start something and leave it unfinished. We can move forward with confidence, not because everything is easy or clear, but because God is faithful and His plan is certain. And yet that gives us something steady to hold on to. Because this is not just about a harvest that was, but it is about a harvest that is, and one that is still to come!