

Pentecost 2007

Overview

The Jews have several names for the feast of Pentecost:

- Hag ha-Shabuot, the feast of weeks (Exod 34:22; Deut 16:10)
- Hag ha-Katsir, the feast of Reaping (Ex. 23:16)
- Yom ha-Bikkurim, the Day of the First Fruits (Num 28:26)
- Matan Torah, the giving of the law

The first three deal with the agricultural significance of Pentecost, which we considered in 2005.

Today, we focus on its historical significance, as the day of the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai.

Historical Significance

Work out the chronology of Exod 19. NB: The OT does not refer to this interpretation (and in fact only refers once to the celebration of the feast, in the list of Solomon's offerings in 2 Chr 8:13). But

- The interpretation has been pervasive in Judaism since the time of Maimonides (late 12th century).
- There is an explicit reference to the alignment by Rabbi Eleazar in the Talmud. He is usually dated to the 3rd century. It is usually accepted that such references reflect older traditions, and it is very possible that the first century Jews would have understood the feast in this way.
- At least a rough coincidence with Sinai is required by the dates in Ex 19. Let's read through the chapter and count.

1 In the third month.--They ate the Passover on the evening of 14 Nisan, and left Egypt the next day, the 15th. Thus there have passed

- two full weeks of Nisan
- the whole of the second month, Iyar, four weeks (since these are lunar months).
- This is thus the start of the seventh week, the first day of Sivan.

the same day.--The day of the third month; probably the first day of the month. This is when they "came ... *into* the wilderness of Sinai. 2 ... there Israel camped before the mount."

3 And Moses went up unto God.--He could hardly have done this the same day they arrived and made camp, so this is probably the second day of the third month.

7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people.--Here he returns to the camp, presumably the evening of the second day.

And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD ... 9 and the Lord said unto Moses.--Another trip up the mountain, the third day.

And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.--These are additional words to those in v. 8. They presume that he descended at the end of the third day, conferred with the people, and is now returning again, the fourth day.

10 Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow.--That is, the fourth and fifth days.

11 And be ready against the third day.--That is, the third day from today, which would be the sixth of the month.

14 And Moses went down from the mount unto the people.--The evening of the fourth of Sivan.

16 And it came to pass on the third day in the morning ... 20 ... the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up.--This is now the sixth of Sivan.

25 So Moses went down unto the people.--The evening of the sixth.

Moses' next return to the mountain is in 20:21, *after* the giving of the law. Thus, images of Charlton Heston in the movie notwithstanding, we are to understand that God spoke the law directly to all the people while Moses was among them. Deut 4:10-13, 33; 5:4-6 confirm this:

4:10 *Specially* the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them **hear my words**, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and *that* they may teach their children. 11 And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. 12 And **the LORD spake unto you** out of the midst of the fire: **ye heard the voice of the words**, but saw no similitude; only *ye heard* a voice. 13 And **he declared unto you his covenant**, which he commanded you to perform, *even* ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

4:33 Did ever people **hear the voice of God speaking** out of the midst of the fire, **as thou hast heard**, and live?

4 **The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire.**

Spiritual Significance

The OT itself told Israel to look forward to a sequel to Sinai. We'll look at those promises first, then see how they are fulfilled in the NT.

The Prophetic Foundation

The OT promises of the New Covenant anticipated a time when the indwelling Spirit would supplement the external law.

Jer 31:31-34 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: 33 But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of

Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, **I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts**; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Eze 36:25-28 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 **And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.** 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Note here key points that are reflected in the NT teaching:

- the inefficacy of the law by itself (Jer 31:32, “which my covenant they brake”).
- the role of the indwelling Spirit (Ezek 36:27, “And I will put my spirit within you”).
- the effect of the Spirit in producing conformity to the law (Ezek 36:27, “I will ... cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments”). “Statutes” and “judgments” (along with “charges” and “commandments”) are specific terms for different kinds of laws, or for the law viewed under different perspectives. Far from supplanting or replacing the law, the Spirit has come to enable us to achieve the righteousness that the law prescribes.

NT Passages

The difference between the old and the new covenant is reflected in a series of contrasts, pairs of words that the NT frequently juxtaposes with one another. See handout for some of the main texts, with the contrasting words color-coded. The two covenants have

- different Seats (Mount Sinai vs. Mount Sion)
- different Credentials (righteousness of the law vs. righteousness of God by faith)
- different Vehicles (flesh vs. Spirit)
- different Mechanisms (works vs. faith)

Sinai vs. Sion: The Seats of the Covenants

Pentecost took place at the temple on Mount Sion, while the original giving of the law took place on Mount Sinai. It is perhaps in reference to this pair of events that Gal 4:21-31 and Heb 12:18-29 both contrast the two mountains.

- Both passages make reference to the change in covenant.
- Gal focuses particularly on the role of the Spirit.
- “Flesh/promise” in Gal 4:23 corresponds to “flesh/Spirit” in v. 29; for Paul, the promise is the Spirit, based on the New Covenant prophecies.

Righteousness of the Law vs. Righteousness of God by Faith: The Credentials of the Covenants

The two covenants offer two different kinds of righteousness as our credential before God's judgment. (Bear in mind that the verb "justify" is derived in Greek from the noun "righteousness," so to be "justified by faith" is to receive the "righteousness which is by faith.")

- The law offers the prospect of "the righteousness of the law," which consists in behaving in accordance with the dictates of the law. Rom 9:31 describes this obliquely as "attaining unto the law of righteousness." Note that Israel was *unable* to attain to this righteousness. It is not something that they did and that was bad, but something that they could not manage to do.
- The new covenant offers "the righteousness of God by faith," sometimes abbreviated as "the righteousness of God" or "the righteousness which is by faith." This righteousness is of or from God, given to us as a free gift, completely apart from any behavior on our part.

It would be a mistake to think that because the New Covenant offers us the righteousness of God by faith, the righteousness of the law is bad or undesirable. Recall the emphasis of the New Covenant promises on the continuity of the law:

Jer 31:33 I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts

Ezek 36:27 I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments

And the NT emphasizes that the ultimate effect of the Spirit's work will in fact be to fulfill the righteousness of the law (Rom 8:4), though with an instructive variation. Elsewhere, "righteousness of the law" is *dikaiosunh*. The word here (and in 2:26, describing what the Gentiles achieve) is *dikaiwma*.

- *dikaiwsunh* describes a characteristic of a person.
- *dikaioma* means first of all "ordinance," then by extension an action that conforms to the ordinance. It focuses on the actions, not the person.

The *dikaiwsunh* of those in whom the Spirit dwells (Rom 8:4) is of God by faith, not of the law, but they alone are capable of performing the *dikaiomata* required by the law.

Flesh vs. Spirit: The Vehicles of the Covenants

The law described how people should live, and thus focused on the flesh, the physical person. God has equipped the flesh with certain appetites to ensure that it functions, in a purely mechanical sense.

- Hunger ensures that we take in the fuel we need to live.
- Libido ensures that the race continues.
- Pain warns us about events that might harm us.

Our bodies are designed to be indwelt and piloted by God's Spirit. Otherwise, these appetites take over, and we live to gratify ourselves. Thus the Scriptures often contrast the flesh and the Spirit. Among many such passages, let's read two that carry the contrast through an extended paragraph: Rom 8:1-13 and Gal 5:19-26.

Note: in Greek, “carnal” is the adjectival form of “flesh.” “Flesh” and “body” are different Greek words, but clearly are to some degree interchangeable (e.g., Rom 8:13).

It's interesting that both of these paragraphs refer to one side of the last contrast we considered—the righteousness of the law vs. the righteousness of God by faith.

- Rom 8:4 says explicitly that the effect of the Spirit's work in us is to fulfill the righteousness of the law.
- Gal 5:23 backs into this theme: it describes conduct that satisfies the requests of God's law by saying that the law is not against it. In fact, no law is against it. Thus it satisfies the requirements of every law.

The HS is intensely practical. The effect of the coming of God's Spirit on Pentecost is to enable us to live a life that we could not live without the Spirit, that is, in the flesh. Pentecost does not abrogate the law, but enables us to fulfill its demands—which is just what the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel would lead us to understand.

Works vs. Faith: The Mechanisms of the Covenants

The two covenants offer different mechanisms for obtaining our credential. The standard of the law is works:

Lev 18:5, Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I *am* the LORD.

The various actions required by the law are called “the works of the law,” which appears eight times in the NT, six of them in Gal 2 and 3, where it is opposed to “faith,” the mechanism of the new covenant. Works are all that the flesh can do, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (2 Cor 2:14), and faith can only proceed from the new birth (John 1:12-13).

This contrast dominates Rom 3:28; 9:31-32; Gal 2:16; 3:2-5. Although Israel pursued the law of righteousness through works (Rom 9:32), Paul, even as a Jew, realized that justification could only be achieved through faith (Gal 2:16). No one was ever saved in any age in any way other than by faith. (OT saints were saved, not by the works of the covenant of Sinai, but by faith under the covenant with Abraham, as Gal 3:15-18 makes clear.)

Another passage that contrasts works with faith extensively is James 2, which insists that “faith without works is dead.” We have already seen that works do not in fact attain to “the law of righteousness” (Rom 9:31, 32), while those who walk after the Spirit can attain to “the righteousness of the law” (Rom 8:4). True faith does not abandon practical righteousness, but is the only way to attain it.

Law vs. something?

With the emphasis on the giving of the law at the first “Pentecost” in Exod 20, we might expect the law to be contrasted with something. Surprisingly, contrasts with the law are very rare in the NT. I've found only two examples. The handout gives all of the verses I've found for each.

Law vs. Grace.--This contrast appears only in John 1:17; Rom 6:14-15; and Gal 5:4. Eph 2:8-10 provides the key to understanding it.

- “Grace” refers to a free, unmerited gift, which is achieved by “faith.”

- We've already seen that the opposite of "faith" is "works," usually amplified as "the works of the law."

Thus I believe we should see the infrequent contrast of law and grace as shorthand for the much more common contrast of the works of the law and the faith by which we receive God's gracious gift.

Law vs. Spirit.--Since the law was given on the first Pentecost and the Spirit on the second, we naturally expect to have a contrast between law and Spirit. Surprisingly, only two verses attest this contrast: Rom 7:6 and Gal 5:18. These verses do not teach that the law is gone (note in particular the corrected translation of Rom 7:6, which follows from the preceding context). The Spirit has superseded the law, fulfilling it in our lives, and it is a mistake to seek justification "under the law," by keeping the law. But as we have seen, the law continues to express the mind of God with regard to holiness of life, and the Spirit will show his presence by fulfilling the righteousness of the law in our lives.

The absence of a direct contrast with the Law is important. The Spirit came, not to replace the law, but to enable us to fulfill it. The covenant of Sinai challenged Israel to attain to the law of righteousness on their own. They could not, so God provided his own righteousness as a free gift, appropriated by faith, and backed up by the indwelling Spirit. Through the Spirit's work, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us."