



Sabbath Service
Saturday, May 12, 2007
“Pentecost—Part 2”



Sabbath Service — Saturday, May 12, 2007

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CALL TO WORSHIP

This is the day that God has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
O come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before God, our Maker.

Praise and Worship

WORDS OF PRAISE

Blessed be the name of God from this time on and forevermore.

INVITATION

Almighty and everlasting God, my Sovereign, who has safely brought me to this day, bless me once again with your presence: open my mind to hear your Word this day; open my heart to receive with gladness what you would have me learn; defend me with your mighty power; and grant that this day I fall into no sin, nor run into any kind of danger, but that all my doings, being ordered by your governance, may be righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ my Savior. Amen.

OPENING HYMN #152

"Praise Belongs to God!"

Psalm 115

Dwight Armstrong

Not unto us, Eternal God but unto Thy name give praise!
Glory unto Thee belongs, truth and mercy sure.
They who trust in the Lord, they who fear Him, small and great,
He will be their help and shield. Praise belongs to God!

Our God is on His throne in heav'n; He has done what pleases Him.
So why do the heathen say, "Where is not your God?"
Israel, trust in God! He will be your help and shield;
House of Aaron, trust your God; help and shield is He.

Men make their idols with their hands, gods of silver, gods of gold;
They have mouths but do not speak, ears but do not hear!

Israel, trust in God! All who fear Him, He will bless!
He will be your help and shield. Praise belongs to God!

WORDS OF CONFESSION

Gentle and holy God, I acknowledge to you and to myself that I am not what you have called me to be. I have stifled my gifts and wasted my time. I have avoided opportunities to offer kindness, but have been quick to take offense. I have pretended that I could make no contribution to peace and justice in my world and have excused myself from risk-taking in my own community. Have mercy on me, forgive me my sins, and help me to live my life differently, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whose call to follow haunts my every prayer. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Listen to the words of the scriptures: the mercy and the love of God are endless; God's wrath is slow, and God's love is eternal.

READING FROM THE PSALMS

Psalm 47 (NRSV)

¹Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
²For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.
³He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.
⁴He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves.
Selah
⁵God has gone up with a shout,
the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
⁶Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
⁷For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.
⁸God is king over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.
⁹The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted.

REFLECTION ON THE PSALM

This is the first of a group of “enthronement psalms” (the others are Psalm 68, 93, 97, 98, and 99), which were used in ancient Israel in a yearly ceremony initiating the new year by proclaiming God anew as king over the people. God is conceived as sitting on a heavenly throne surrounded by the angelic hosts, reigning over the universe and receiving homage and praise from all creatures.

As a group, the enthronement psalms make mention of the trumpet blast, this enthronement cry, and the joyous praise of the temple congregation, all Zion, the

nations, and the world of nature. With shouts, hand clapping, instrument playing, and singing, the worshippers call upon all other gods, rulers, and the elements to bow down in fear and trembling before the mighty God who has come to rule and judge the world.

Psalm 47 begins with a summons to the nations to join in clapping, shouting, and singing out in praise of the almighty sovereign God, who inspires awe, rules over all peoples, and assures his beloved people their heritage (verses 1-4).

Following this attention-getting call to worship, the enthronement ceremony begins with the holy procession of God the king. The priests carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the symbol of his presence among the people, up to the Temple (see 1 Kings 8:3), accompanied by his subjects, the worshippers. "Gone up" in verse 5 refers to this procession. The people shout, the trumpet (*shofar*, ram's horn) is blown, and the congregation is commended to sing a song of spiritual power in praise to God who once again "is become" king over all creation (verses 5-7). Again for another year God is established on the throne of power and acclaimed as sovereign of the nations (verse 8).

In the psalmist's vision and the liturgy of the occasion, all rulers of surrounding nations gather with the children of Abraham at the throne of God as vassals of the mightiest of gods, who is lifted up and celebrated on this awesome occasion (verse 9). The ascension of God, sovereign over all, is complete.

HYMN #199

"There Shall Be Showers of Blessing"

Ezekiel 34:26

Words, Daniel W. Whittle, 1863

Tune, James McGranahan, 1883

There shall be showers of blessing: This is the promise of love;
There shall be seasons refreshing, Sent from the Savior above.
Showers of blessing, Showers of blessing we need:
Mercy drops round us are falling, But for the showers we plead.

There shall be showers of blessing: Precious reviving again;
Over the hills and the valleys, Sound of abundance of rain.
Showers of blessing, Showers of blessing we need:
Mercy drops round us are falling, But for the showers we plead.

There shall be showers of blessing: Send them upon us, O Lord;
Grant to us now a refreshing, Come, and now honor Thy Word.
Showers of blessing, Showers of blessing we need:
Mercy drops round us are falling, But for the showers we plead.

There shall be showers of blessing: Oh, that today they might fall,
Now as to God we're confessing, Now as on Jesus we call!
Showers of blessing, Showers of blessing we need:
Mercy drops round us are falling, But for the showers we plead.

INVITATION TO PRAYER

God is Spirit, and those who worship God
must worship in spirit and in truth. Let us pray ...

MOMENTS OF SILENCE

SILENT PERSONAL PRAYER

Preparing Our Minds for Learning

SEED THOUGHTS FOR REFLECTION

Man Cooperates with God to Achieve Life's Aims

The experience of the race is clear that some things God never can do until he finds a man who prays.

Indeed, Meister Eckhart, the mystic, puts the truth with extreme boldness: “God can as little do without us, as we without him.” If at first this seems a wild statement, we may well consider in how many ways God’s will depends on man’s cooperation. God himself cannot do some things unless men *think*.

God never blazons his truth on the sky that men may find it without seeking. Only when men gird the loins of their minds and undiscourageably give themselves to intellectual toil, will God reveal to them the truth, even about the physical world. And God himself cannot do some things unless men *work*.

Will a man say that when God wants bridges and tunnels, wants the lightnings harnessed and cathedrals built, he will do the work himself? That is an absurd and idle fatalism. God stores the hills with marble, but he never built a Parthenon; he fills the mountains with ore, but he never made a needle or a locomotive. Only when men work can some things be done. Recall the words of Stradivarius, maker of violins, as George Eliot interprets him:

When any master holds 'twixt chin and hand a violin of mine, he will be glad that Stradivari lived, made violins, and made them of the best ... For while God give them skill I give them instruments to play upon, God choosing me to help him ... If my hand slacked I should rob God—since his is fullest good—leaving a blank instead of violins ... he could not make Antonio Stradivari's violins without Antonio.

Now if God has left some things contingent on man’s *thinking* and *working* why may he not have left some things contingent on man’s *praying*? The testimony of the great souls is a clear affirmative to this: some things never without thinking; some things never without working; some things never without praying! *Prayer is one of the three forms of man's cooperating with God.*

—From “The Meaning of Prayer” by Harry Emerson Fosdick

VOICES IN TIME

Words from past or present men and women of God.

“Obedience is indispensable. *Not to a static code*, however helpful it may be at times. *But obedience to God*, who is present with us in every situation and is speaking to us all the time. Every obedience, however small (if any obedience is ever small) quickens our sensitivity to him and our capacity to understand him and so makes more real our sense of his presence.” —*Albert Edward Day*

Lessons from Scripture

SPECIAL MUSIC — **“He’s Alive”** by Don Francisco (Only available online with the HTML version of the service)

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WORDS OF DEDICATION

Listen to the words of the scriptures: the mercy and the love of God are endless; God’s wrath is slow, and God’s love is eternal.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 24:44-53

REFLECTIONS ON THE SCRIPTURE

This is Luke’s account of the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus. Fear-stricken women had been confronted at the empty tomb by “two men in dazzling clothes” who announced to them, “He is not here, but has risen.” When they returned and reported this to the disciples, their witness was discounted. When Peter ran to the tomb to check, he found only graveclothes lying on the ground and went home amazed (24:1-12).

Then Cleopas and another disciple, leaving the city bereft and despondent, met a stranger on the road to Emmaus, invited him in for supper, recognized Jesus in the sacramental act of breaking bread, and were suddenly left alone to ponder the stunning and mysterious news of the risen Christ. Returning at once to Jerusalem, they rejoined the other disciples and shared the joyous words of faith, “The Lord has risen indeed: (24:13-35)! Suddenly, there in their midst was Jesus himself, announcing, “Peace be with you,” and assuaging their fear and astonishment by showing his wounds and eating a plate of fish (24:36-43).

Imagine how stunned, almost shell-shocked, they must have been! Their emotions must have been on a yo-yo. In seventy-two hours, they had gone from fearful avoidance of arrest, to painful witnessing of the brutal execution of their best friend, to abject disappointment at the death of a beautiful dream, to despondent dispersal of a close-knit community, to the astonishing reappearance of the one they had followed and loved.

And what does he tell them when he rejoins them? First, according to Luke he claims his messianic identity by declaring that the references to the Messiah in the three parts of the Hebrew Scriptures—Torah (law of Moses), Prophets, and Wisdom Literature (Psalms) — were to be brought to fruition in him (verses 44-45). Specifically, he cites

Hosea 6:2 as an allusion to his death and resurrection (verse 46) and the many prophecies of proclaiming God's glory to the nations (Psalm 96:3; Isaiah 49:6, 66:19; Ezekiel 39:21) and their ultimate coming to God (Psalm 67:4; Isaiah 2:2; Isaiah 60:3, 66:18; Jeremiah 27:7; Ezekiel 36:23; Joel 3:2; Malachi 3:12) as forming a mandate for the apostles to begin spreading the good news from Jerusalem outward (verses 47-48). Third, lest they embark on this daunting mission naked and unprepared, he suggests that they stay right where they are for a while until they are garbed and empowered for the task by the cloak of God's Spirit (verse 49).

Finally, after leading them out of the city, down through the garden of Gethsemane, up and over the Mount of Olives, and into the vicinity of the suburb of Bethany—no doubt commanding, explaining, reassuring, and comforting all the way—he raised his hands and gave them a blessing. This may have been some familiar words of Scripture, like: “The LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another” (Genesis 31:49); or, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

Or, it may have been some much needed words of encouragement, like: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13, even though these words had not been written down yet at that time); or, “Cheer up, you can do it. I'll be with you every step of the way.” Or, it may have been a stern challenge like, “We've had three good years together; now it's up to you to carry on”; or, “God called me to speak the word, live the life, and die the death; now God is calling you to do the same.”

Then he was transported away (verse 51). From now on, they would be without his physical presence. But this time their reaction was not one of fear, discouragement, and despair. Instead, they worshipped, returned joyfully, and began spending a lot of time in the temple (verse 52). These three responses are significant. In worship, they turned their attention away from themselves and their grief and onto Jesus and his mission. In returning, they sought out familiar surroundings and a base of support for the awesome task that lay before them; and in doing this gladly, they became heartened by the awareness that their commission was divinely inspired. In going repeatedly to the Temple to praise God, they sought strength for the journey from both the community of faith and the author of life.

BLESSING ON GOD'S WORD

Eternal God, in the reading of the scripture, may your word be heard; in the meditations of my heart, may your word be known; and in the faithfulness of my life, may your word be shown. Amen.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 1:1-11

REFLECTIONS ON THE SCRIPTURE

Like a continuing story that appears in installments, Luke's “Book Two” summarizes the events before moving the narrative forward from the “acts of Jesus” to the “acts of the apostles.” He is addressing Theophilus (meaning “lover of God”), referring either to an actual Gentile convert, or in general to any and all readers motivated by a desire to grow in the faith. He begins by briefly touching on Jesus' life, teachings, death, Resurrection appearances, and ascension (verses 1-3), then notes that he stayed (the

verb could also mean “ate”) with them for forty days, a number often used to denote an extended but indefinite period of time. This same number marked the days of rain leading up to Noah’s flood (Genesis 7:4), the years the Hebrews spent in the desert (Numbers 14:33), the days of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18), and the days of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (Mark 1:13). [While “forty days” does represent an indefinite period of time is not reason that we can’t accept that the above examples were not exactly as stated in the scriptures. This is another one of those cases where something may have duality — the actual and the spiritual.]

This is different information from that presented in Luke 24:51, where Jesus appears to have ascended at the end of the same day he was resurrected, the timing also implied by his promise to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43). This immediate departure is what we have already studied in the Wave-Sheaf Offering symbology in Jesus’ ascension to be accepted by God and then his return. In Acts Luke is making the theological point that the disciples’ experience of the risen Christ — for which more time was needed — was the foundation on which their mission was to be based. They were to remain in Jerusalem, waiting for the infilling of the Spirit to empower them in a way that water baptism by itself could not (verses 4-5).

The instruction by Jesus, conducted in a question-and-answer manner, dwelt on matters of the timing of the coming reign of God (Trust God; don’t expect inside information—verse 7); mission strategy (Move out from Jerusalem in concentric circles—verse 8b); and the source of strength for the mission (God’s Spirit, not their own — verses 8a).

Now all was ready for his final departure. When he had vanished into the air, the disciples were confronted by “two men in white robes” (not mentioned in Luke 24:44-53). This was the traditional clothing of divine emissaries (See Luke 24:4) and indicated that the words about to be spoken were to be a message from God. That message was an insistent invitation to turn their eyes from the skies (the uplifting experience with Jesus that had been) toward the future, in which their ministry in Jesus’ name would lead to their meeting him again in ways demanding and costly, but equally uplifting and rewarding (verses 9-11). Their work on earth, as well as ours, comes before that great day when Christ returns in the same way that he went.

BLESSING ON GOD’S WORD

Eternal God, in the reading of the scripture, may your word be heard; in the meditations of my heart, may your word be known; and in the faithfulness of my life, may your word be shown. Amen.

THIRD SCRIPTURE READING: Ephesians 1:15-23

REFLECTIONS ON THE SCRIPTURE

With this reading we come full circle. The Lord who was enthroned for a glorious reign in Psalm 47, who came to earth through Jesus to live, teach, die, be raised, commission disciples, and ascend, is now reigning in glory once again (Eph. 1:20-21). This reign has the full power and authority of God Almighty, exceeds the dominion of all other entities, both now and in all time to come, and rules over “all things.”

To what end is this universal sovereignty devoted? For the “body of Christ”, the community in which God’s Spirit now dwells in redemptive love and through which

God works in reconciling power. Christ does not just sit on a heavenly throne basking in the glory he has earned through his earthly travail. Rather, in all his fullness, he has come again to dwell amongst his people, continuing his mission of healing, saving, reconciling love (verses 22-23).

Paul commends his readers for their faith in Christ and love for their fellow believers, thanks God for their faithfulness, and prays that they will grow in discernment and insight to understand more deeply the mind of Christ (verses 15-17). He yearns for the illumination of “the eyes of their hearts.” What a beautiful phrase this is! What a different vision of reality we get when we view from the depths of emotion and compassion rather than merely observe the surface appearance of things! When we do so we perceive hope when things seem hopeless, the potential richness of the faith community in the midst of petty bickering and mundane operations, and the great spiritual power available for standing firm and making a faithful witness when the odds seems stacked against us (verses 18-19).

BLESSING ON GOD’S WORD

Eternal God, in the reading of the scripture, may your word be heard; in the meditations of my heart, may your word be known; and in the faithfulness of my life, may your word be shown. Amen.

“Reflections on the Scriptures” by Douglas E. Wingeier, from *Keeping Holy Time*, © 2003 by Abingdon Press.

Benediction

CLOSING CANTICLE

You alone are holy, Lord God, Worker of Wonders.
You are mighty.
You are great.
You are the Most High.
You are omnipotent, our holy Father, King of heaven and earth.
You, Lord God, all good, our highest good—Lord God living and true.
You are charity and love.
You are wisdom.
You are humility.
You are patience.
You are security.
You are peace.
You are joy and gladness.
You are justice and temperance.
You are riches altogether sufficient.
You are beauty.
You are meekness.
You are our protector.
You are our strength.
You are our refreshment.
You are our hope.
You are our faith.

You are our most profound sweetness.
You are our eternal life, great and admirable Lord,
Omnipotent God, merciful Savior!

CLOSING HYMN #23

“Guide Me, O Thou Great Eternal”

William Williams, Welsh, 1745
Verse 1, Trans. Peter Williams, 1771
Verses 2, 3, Trans. William Williams, 1772
John Hughes, 1907

Guide me, O Thou great Eternal, Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy pow’rful hand;
Bread of heaven. Bread of heaven. Feed me till I want no more,
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain, Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through;
Strong Deliverer. Strong Deliverer. Be Thou still my Strength and Shield,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan, Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death and hell’s destruction, Land me safe on Canaan’s side;
Songs of praises. Songs of praises. I will ever give to Thee,
I will ever give to Thee.

CLOSING WORDS

May the God of hope fill me with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power
of the Holy Spirit I may abound in hope. Amen.

THE LESSON FOR THE WEEK

Pentecost — Part 2

Study material is based on the New King James Version or the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Last week we learned that unless Christ's disciples were keeping the Day of Pentecost *they wouldn't have received God's Holy Spirit*. Without God's Spirit NO ONE could ever inherit eternal life. Without God's Spirit you can't even *worship* God as you should. John said, "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth!" (John 4:24).

No one can worship God in spirit if he has not the Spirit of God! A full measure of God's Holy Spirit came to the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. It changed their lives.

Pentecost pictures the little-understood third vital step in God's Master Plan!

Steps in God's Plan Reviewed

God's seven annual festivals outline his master plan. Because the world rejects these Holy Days, it has lost the *knowledge* of the *purpose* for human life. These holy periods of time are not "Jewish," as many believe. They are for all of mankind throughout all his generations.

The Passover is to remind us that Jesus Christ paid a tremendous price for our sins. He offered something more valuable than anything we could offer—the sacrifice of *his perfect human life!*

Because we broke God's law and earned the wages of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23), Jesus had to *die in our stead*. We need the cleansing blood of Christ to pay for our sins. The Passover was given to us as an *annual memorial so we would never forget it*. The Passover is the *first step* in God's Master Plan of salvation.

Next, God reminds us to quit sinning! The Days of Unleavened Bread picture putting the *leaven of sin* (1 Cor. 5:7-8) out of our lives, and beginning to live in complete submission and obedience to God's laws. When we begin to obey God and totally surrender to him, we take the *second step* in God's plan. But that is not enough! We need the Holy Spirit of God if we are to ever inherit eternal life.

This *third step* in God's plan is pictured for us by the Day of Pentecost, or the Feast of Firstfruits.

Pentecost in the New Testament

Last week we looked briefly at the Wave Sheaf Offering and how Christ exactly fulfilled the symbolism of this ancient practice. Once the Wave Sheaf was offered, the spring harvest began. The spring harvest ended with the annual Sabbath of the Feast of Firstfruits, when all the people gathered to give thanks for the produce God had given them. Another name for the Feast of Firstfruits was the Feast of Weeks (Deut. 16:9-12). Among Greek-speaking people it was called "Pentecost."

The word “Pentecost” refers specifically to counting the fifty day that elapsed from the day of the Wave-Sheaf Offering, up to and including the Feast of Firstfruits or Weeks. (Lev. 23:15-16).

1. How long is the Feast of Firstfruits—Pentecost—to continue to be kept among God’s people? (Lev. 23:14, 21)
2. Does this sound like God’s people should still be keeping Pentecost today? (same verses)
3. Did Christ’s disciples appear before God on the Day of Firstfruits —Pentecost? (Acts 2:1-4).
4. Does it appear that they thought God’s Annual Holy Days *were done away by the death of Jesus Christ?* (same verses)
5. Did the apostles continue to keep Pentecost after the crucifixion? (Acts. 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8).

COMMENT: The Apostle Paul kept Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, with Gentile Christians in Asia Minor and Northern Greece years after God sent his Holy Spirit to the New Testament Church!

Counting Fifty Days

1. What day was it that Israel began their early spring harvest? (Lev. 23:10-11, 14).

COMMENT: The Wave-Sheaf Offering was to be made by the Levitical Priesthood. Since there is no Levitical Priesthood today, this ritual is not continued today.

2. What day of the week was the Wave Sheaf offered? (Lev. 23:11)

COMMENT: The day of the Wave-Sheaf Offering—the day after the weekly Sabbath—is the day after Saturday; that is Sunday, the first day of the week. The Sabbath mentioned in this verse does not refer to one of the annual Sabbaths of the Days of Unleavened Bread. It refers to the weekly Sabbath that came during the Days of Unleavened Bread. We know this is true because Pentecost must be *counted* every year. If it were an annual Sabbath that the Wave Sheaf was offered, the Day of Pentecost would never have to be counted. It would always fall on an exact day of the month. But since Pentecost must be counted, it can fall on different *dates* during the month—but it *must always fall on the same day of the week — the day after the Sabbath* — which is the first day of the week, or Sunday!

3. How many days were the Levites to count? (Lev. 23:15-16)

COMMENT: The phrase “seven Sabbaths” does not mean to count seven Saturdays, but “seven weeks,” as Hebrew scholars admit. The word “Sabbath” here comes from an original Hebrew word which can mean “weeks” (Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance*). The NRSV translates this word correctly as “weeks.” The Greeks who translated this word into “*Pentecost*” clearly understood that it *meant weeks*, and that they should number, not seven Saturdays, *but seven weeks and a day—or fifty days!* Turn to Numbers 28:26. Here you find the expression “festival of weeks” (NRSV) or “Feast of Weeks” (NKJV). The Hebrew word here can mean only weeks, not Sabbaths.

4. Does it appear that the disciples of Christ and the nation of Israel at that time understood how to count Pentecost? (Acts 2:1)

COMMENT: If they did not understand how to count Pentecost, they wouldn’t have been able to be “in one accord” and “in one place” on the *exact day* of Pentecost, and the apostles wouldn’t have received the Holy Spirit from God!

God Calls the Few Today

1. When the Eternal brought Israel out of the bondage of Egypt, did he tell them plainly this was not the time for them to be able to understand his master plan completely? (Deut. 29:2-4).
2. Why did God blind these people? (Romans 11:32)

COMMENT: Ancient Israel isn't lost forever. Their time of understanding and participating in God's plan has not yet come. (See Rom. 11:26; 2 Pet. 3:9, 10; and 1 Tim. 2:3-4).

3. Were the vast majority in Christ's day receptive to the witness he gave them? (John 5:18; 10:31)

4. Did Jesus Christ disturb the blindness of the Israelites of his time? (Mark 4:11-12)

5. Do you catch the significance of this verse? Why did Jesus speak in parables? Was it, as you may have heard, to make his meaning clearer? (verse 12)

6. Is this a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah? Did God want them to understand with their hearts? (Isa. 6:9-10)

COMMENT: A man's heart in the biblical sense is the place which is the seat of intellect — or mind.

7. Is it possible for any person with a carnal, natural mind to fully understand the things of God? (1 Cor. 2:14)

8. How are *spiritual things* known and understood? (same verse; see also Rom. 8:7-8; and Eph. 4:18)

9. Are people in our modern world able to understand God's plan, or are they, also, blinded to it? Will it be the great majority, or only the few, who understand God's plan today? (Matt. 7:13-14)

NEXT WEEK: **PENTECOST — Part 3**