

“We Are Witnesses”

Lesson
28
Summary

Acts 1–5

Scripture Summary:

Jesus ministers for forty days after His resurrection—Kingdom to be restored to Israel at a later time—The Twelve to bear witness in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth—Jesus ascends into heaven—Matthias chosen to fill the vacancy in the Twelve. Spirit poured out on day of Pentecost—Peter testifies of Jesus’ resurrection—He tells how to gain salvation and speaks of the gift of the Holy Ghost—Many believe and are baptized. Peter and John heal a man lame from birth—Peter preaches repentance—He also speaks of the age of restoration preceding the Second Coming—He names Christ as the prophet of whom Moses spoke. Peter and John are arrested and brought before the council—Peter testifies that salvation comes because of Christ—Sadducees strive to silence them—Saints glory in the testimony of Jesus—They practice a united order. Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Lord and lose their lives—Apostles continue the miracles of Jesus—Peter and John are arrested; an angel delivers them from prison; they testify of Christ—Gamaliel counsels moderation.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

What Reason did Pentecost Happen on a Certain Jewish Holiday? The profound gift of the Holy Ghost was given to provide a witness of the completion of the Savior’s atonement. Being “set at liberty from our bruises” and happy to share our newfound freedom, we need the gift of the Holy Ghost to be witnesses. Fifty days after the Passover, when Jesus was crucified and resurrected, there was a day of Pentecost when Disciples received the Gift of the Holy Ghost (the Higher Law). It is also a holy day for the Jews called Shavuot. The most significant part of the celebration is commemorating receiving of the Torah, the Law of Moses (the Lesser Law).

Biblical and Traditional Basis for “Fifty Days”: “Shavuot (Hebrew for “Weeks”), the name of the festival which celebrates the end of the spring barley harvest and the beginning of the summer wheat and fruit harvests. According to rabbinic tradition, Shavuot is also the day on which the Torah was revealed to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai.”

“Shavuot is the only holiday for which the Torah does not give a specific date. The biblical text (Leviticus 23:4) states that Passover should be celebrated on the fifteenth of the first month (Nisan). It then says “From the day after the Sabbath . . . you shall keep count [until] seven full weeks have elapsed . . . you shall count fifty days . . . then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the Lord.” What is the meaning of “the day after the Sabbath?” Does the word “Sabbath” mean “Saturday” or does it mean “the day of rest” which can also apply to the festival? The rabbis of the Talmud understood it in the latter sense and so Shavuot always falls 50 days after the second day of Passover. These 50 days represent the period of the counting of the *Omer*. In English, the festival is often known as Pentecost, from the Greek word which means “the fiftieth day.”

“The Bible refers to Shavuot as *Hag Shavuot* (“The Festival of Weeks,” Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10), and *Hag ha-Kazir* (“The Harvest Festival,” Exodus 23:16). Shavuot is also called *Yom ha-Bikkurim* (“The Day of the First Fruits,” Numbers 28:26) and is, therefore the festival which marks the beginning of the summer fruit harvest as well as the beginning of the wheat harvest. According to the Book of Leviticus (23:17 ff) two loaves of bread, baked from the first wheat crop, were brought to the sanctuary as part of the festival offering. According to the Book of Deuteronomy (16:9ff), Shavuot is a holiday on which the entire community is to rejoice “at the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name (Jerusalem). The observance of Shavuot also included a “freewill” offering in proportion to one’s ability to contribute.”

“Seven weeks after the Exodus from Egypt a horde of slaves stood before Mount Sinai and freely accepted the spiritual and moral teachings which gave meaning and depth to their newfound freedom.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

The Comforter Comes Down as the Savior Goes Up: The imagery of receiving the Torah from above on Shavuot (Jewish Pentecost), leads to understanding the New Testament day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended. The Holy Ghost descended so that the Savior could ascend. Likewise, we must have the Holy Ghost descend on us so that we can ascend to our Savior, who will bring us to His and our Father in Heaven.

Holistic Healing: The Savior’s healing power was given to his apostles as they learned to work in his name. Healing was part of the person becoming whole, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The great Jewish Rabbi, Maimonides, felt

that healing had to be holistic. He was a physician as well as a doctor. “He abhorred the thought of using Torah learning as a means of support. This was a serious point of contention between him and the geonim of the religious establishment, and he turned to the profession of medicine. Jews and Muslims were among his patients. His ideas on medicine were advanced and sympathetic: he rejected the use of magic and charms in healing, and added that the doctor must know the whole patient in order to diagnose properly.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Power Given to the Apostles – an Ancient Pattern: There is another image that may help us understand the Savior’s power, entrusted to his apostles through the priesthood and gift of the Holy Ghost. It is the comparison of Aaron to Moses. “Aaron was clearly given a lesser role than Moses. Aaron experienced revelations from God and, being an eloquent speaker, acted as prophet and miracle- worker before Pharaoh in the matter of the Plagues of Egypt. However, it is significant that even where he plays an active role in performing the miracles, it is not a result of his own ability or initiative, but solely by divine command given through Moses.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Concentration and Consecration: Following the example of Aaron who attributed his work to divine command, we should direct our concentration on the highest power, that of the Lord. That helps us consecrate everything to and for Him. In turn he provides us with healings, blessings, repeated guidances through the gift of the Holy Ghost. These are manifestations, witnesses of the Lord’s great gift of atonement. Our living reflects Him . . . we are witnesses!

Daniel Rona, born in Israel and living in Jerusalem has authored Old & New Testament and Book of Mormon Supplement Study Materials to be used in conjunction with the weekly LDS Gospel Doctrine Lesson study. NOTE: Three versions of the supplemental study materials are available *FREE* at www.HolyLandsRevealed.com. (Just click “LDS SUPPLEMENTS”)

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