

Calculating Pentecost

By T.W. Tramm

PUZZLING to many Bible readers is the post-resurrection interaction between Jesus and Mary in which the Lord cautions Mary to avoid touching him. Yet a week later, Jesus invites Thomas to do just that.

The different interactions have to do with the purity requirement for the Jewish priest. When the Lord appeared to Mary He was about to act as the ultimate high priest by presenting himself before the Father as the firstfruits of the resurrection (Heb. 9). According to biblical law, which Jesus came to fulfill (Matt. 5:17), the high priest was forbidden to come into contact with anything ceremonially unclean as this would disqualify him from entering into God's presence. This is why the Lord couldn't allow Mary to touch Him; she could have been defiled by a menstrual cycle, stepping into the tomb, etc. After Jesus' appearance to Mary and the disciples on Sunday, He was not seen (or touched) until a week later (John 20:26). The seven-day time period is noteworthy because, according to Exodus, it takes seven days to consecrate a priest, i.e. ritually purify him to be able to enter into the Lord's presence (Ex. 29).

Thus the question is raised: is it possible Jesus didn't offer Himself up as the firstfruits until the required seven-day consecration period was complete, a week after His resurrection?

The timing of Jesus' firstfruits offering is critical because, according to Leviticus, the Omer countdown to Pentecost begins on the day the firstfruits of the harvest is presented before the Lord (Lev. 23:15).

Counting the seven weeks from the Sabbath after the seven-day consecration period (Nisan 18-25), Pentecost lands on Sivan 15—the middle of the biblical month and the time of the full moon.

Interestingly, because Passover 2020 lands on the same day as when Jesus was crucified in 33AD—a Wednesday—the Omer-count and timing of Pentecost would be the same, Sivan 15 at the full moon.

The prophetic wheat harvest festival landing on the full moon calls to mind a verse from Proverbs:

“The goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: He has taken a bag of money with him; He will come home at the full moon” (Prov. 7:19, 20).

The goodman being away on a long journey recalls the New-Testament parables in which Jesus is the householder and the time of return or reckoning represents the end of the age (Matt. 20; 25: 14).

Is the Omer correctly counted from the Sabbath after the seven days of unleavened bread, placing Pentecost a week later than on most calendars?

Due to the ambiguity around which Sabbath is being referred to in Leviticus 23:11, it's impossible to say for sure. However, the pattern of events 2,000 years ago make it seem at the least a possibility.

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