



# United Church of God *an International Association*

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Dear Beloved Members,

What are the greatest truths that we as the Church of God are privileged to know and practice? Clearly many precious biblical truths have been revealed to the Church, particularly the knowledge of God's great plan for humanity. The day we now prepare to observe—Pentecost—represents a day saturated with deep meaning. It represents a day that concerns us personally.

We often cite Paul's first letter to the Corinthians as sound proof that a gentile congregation, one that most would expect to have little background in the Hebrew Scriptures, actively kept the earlier part of the Spring Holy Days, including the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Often we simply read over the end of that letter, where Paul specifically mentions Pentecost—the 50th day (1 Corinthians 16:8)—which the Corinthians would have little knowledge of unless they were in fact familiar with the commands given in Leviticus 23. It remains a day that bridges the old with the new, for Jew and gentile alike called to be a part of the Church of God.

Pentecost is traditionally believed by the Jews to be the day when the great "I am" of the Old Testament (a name of God from Exodus 3:14 that Christ referenced to Himself in John 8:58) thundered the words of the royal Law of Liberty. It would have been hard for the Israelites present at that event not to understand the importance of what God delivered, as "all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking" (Exodus 20:18).

Some 1,400 years later, this day reached its magnificent completeness for this age. While on a smaller scale physically, the miraculous signs accompanying that day hold deep and critical meaning for us.

While we in the Church are likely well familiar with the story, let's look at a few key points that we may inadvertently overlook. The capacity of the Greek language fails to fully describe what the Church experienced on that incredible Pentecost morning. The phrase "as of" is used in the New King James Version and "like" in the New International Version to describe the supernatural phenomena that accompanied the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church. There is no declarative verb "is" or similar. Given the context presented by Luke, who is one of the most exacting writers of the New Testament, we can see that the 120 gathered in Jerusalem weren't expecting what appeared: "Suddenly a sound *like* the blowing of a violent wind came...they saw what *seemed to be* tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of

them” (Acts 2:2-3, New International Version, emphasis added throughout). The event was so unusual that it transcended the capacity of the Greek language to express it!

Like the mighty spectacle of the God “I Am” directly presenting the law, the coming of the Holy Spirit was marked by acts that were clearly beyond the capacity of men to even fully describe, much less create.

While the aftermath of the event is not fully recorded, the disciples now directly experienced the fulfillment of what Christ promised in His final evening before His death (John 14:16-17, 26). Christ told His disciples that their “joy may be full” (John 15:11) and it came to pass. During this unique morning, the evident praising and excitement manifested by the disciples led onlookers to assume that they were intoxicated!

Now while all this and the historical elements that follow are critical for us today, I would like to point out some additional aspects that are especially relevant. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus records that the Feast of Weeks, another name for Pentecost, was one of the most heavily attended festivals in Jerusalem. The population of the city would have swelled to nearly double its size for that Pentecost.

The New Testament account of Pentecost is often highlighted by the fact that God worked a singular miracle through the disciples—a direct act of God in both speaking and hearing allowed those thousands present to hear the disciples’ words in their own separate languages and dialects.

Did you know that people from at least 15 separate nations, regions and Roman provinces were present for this miracle? Luke is careful to record that Jews, God-fearers and Jewish converts stretching from Rome to Egypt to Arabia to Mesopotamia personally witnessed the aftermath of the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is not difficult to understand how the story of this event, together with its highly unusual supernatural phenomena, would have been carried back by the Jews to their homes around the known Empire and world.

These stories of Pentecost in Jerusalem would have easily been recounted and retold many times in synagogues around the Mediterranean and into Asia itself. The knowledge of those Pentecost stories could have easily been awaiting the later visits to those same synagogues of people like Peter, John, Paul, Barnabus and others. There the story of the Jerusalem Pentecost would have been directly connected to the unusual visitors at hand.

God made full use of the miracle on that day!

Today, we in the Church have access to a similar power of communication. If you’re reading this online, then you’re reading this in a format that was scarcely believable even 20 years ago, much less 2,000 years ago. From electrons arranged and housed in a computer in the Midwest, these words are sent at light speed across fiber lines around the world. As we near the end of this human age, we have a distinct and wonderful advantage. Even though it may have gone under different group or organizational names through the centuries, the Church of God has

always existed. It has always been led by the true living Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, since its inception on that Pentecost in the first century.

The foundation has been laid. Now that the power to broadly communicate the truths of God has developed in ways never imagined before, it is important that we remember how God used His Church to deliver the gospel to the then-known world nearly 2,000 years ago. While leading ministers like Peter, James and John—and later Paul—were often the high-profile bearers of the gospel message, the stories of men and women in the Church also doing their part are many.

Are you as members of the United Church of God living through the events of a modern book of Acts? Yes, emphatically, *you are*.

In the time leading up to the giving of the law, the Hebrews were told to prepare spiritually for three days prior to the first Feast of Weeks (Exodus 19:10-15). As you complete your preparations for observing the Feast of Pentecost some 3,400 years later, I would invite you to consider an important point. At the beginning of this spring Holy Day season, we were reminded that on the night before Jesus was crucified, He said this: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Beloved members, have we truly learned this again and put it into practice during this spring Holy Day season? Can people in the world truly see that we as members of the Body of Christ “have love for one another”? Echoing the words of Jesus about peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), James tells us that “the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by *those who make peace*” (James 3:18).

We must all be active in doing this as a whole church effort whether young or old, male or female, pastor or church member. We must all be doing our part. May God grant to you and to us collectively the love and unity that permeated the Church on that first day of Pentecost. May God so enrich us spiritually that we may together truly reflect the name by which we are called today—the *United* Church of God.

In deep Christian love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roy Holladay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Roy Holladay