

What Do We Celebrate at Pentecost?

Bill Berends

The advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is universally recognised in the Christian churches, but the full significance of the events that accompanied his coming is often misunderstood. Much of the Christian tradition fails to recognise that Pentecost is the festival which celebrates God's covenant with his people. This is also true of the Reformed tradition, with its emphasis on covenant theology.¹ An improper understanding of the O.T. background to the Pentecost event can easily lead to misinterpretation. Thus Pentecostalism frequently appeals to the events described in Acts 2 for its emphasis on the gift of tongues. In response many traditional churches stress the uniqueness of the events which took place at Pentecost. Here they explain the speaking in tongues with the advent of the Spirit against the background of the events recorded in Gen. 11, the confusion of tongues at Babel. But is this the only, or even primary, O.T. event to give meaning to the story of Pentecost?

No doubt the significance of the tongues at Pentecost is to demonstrate that the Gospel is for all the nations that came from the division at Babel. Nevertheless I am convinced that the O.T. type for the Pentecost events described in Acts 2 is not so much the story of Babel as the events that centred on Mount Sinai the day God gave the Ten Commandments. This day went was remembered by the Israelites as the Day of the *Qahal*, the Assembly, translated in the LXX as the *Ekklesia*, the Church (cf. Acts 7:38). This was the day God assembled his people and made his covenant with them that they might become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 5:2, Mt. Horeb = Mt. Sinai).

That Pentecost is not celebrated in the Christian church with reference to the covenant is surprising considering the fact that the connection between Pentecost and Sinai was recognised in the early years of the church. Thus

¹ One exception is Edmund Clowney, who in his recent book on the Church recognises Pentecost as "the capstone of God's covenant with his people" (p.50). Surprisingly Clowney makes no attempt to link the events at Sinai with those at Pentecost, even though he succinctly argues that the prototype of the New Testament Church is to be found in the Assembly that met at Sinai. See his *The Church* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995).

Augustine had written:

For as fifty days are reckoned from the celebration of the Passover (which was ordered by Moses to be offered by slaying the typical lamb, to signify indeed, the future death of the Lord) to the day when Moses received the law written on the tables of stone by the finger of God, so, in like manner, from the death and resurrection of Him who was led as a lamb to the slaughter, there were fifty complete days up to the time when the finger of God - that is the Holy Spirit - gathered together in one perfect company those who believed.²

Augustine's explanation was taken up by a few post-Reformation commentators, including Matthew Poole and J. Van Andel,³ but until recently most followed John Calvin's "more sober" interpretation, which connected the celebration only with the agricultural festival of the first fruits.⁴ This interpretation was also upheld in Kittel's influential *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, which dated the Jewish traditions connecting the two events to the second century A.D, and concluded: "The story of Pentecost in Ac. 2 bears no relation to the Sinai tradition, nor can the Chr. Pentecost be derived directly from the Jewish."⁵ The influence of such authorities has resulted in a situation where there are few Christians who still recognise the link between Pentecost and Sinai.⁶

Recently fresh information has come to light through the discoveries at Qumran. In consequence a number of contemporary authors are suggesting that, even if there was no actual historical link, Sinai and Pentecost may well have been linked in the minds of those who were present at the events

² Augustine, "On the Spirit and the Letter," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by P. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), vol. V, p. 95.

³ Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, (London: Banner of Truth, 1963), vol. 3, p. 387; J. Van Andel *Handelingen der Apostelen* (n.p.: Tractaatgenootschap Filippus, 1909), p. 23.

⁴ John Calvin, *Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), vol. 1, p. 73. Examples of others who follow his interpretation will be given below.

⁵ E. Lohse, "Pentecost," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Friedrich, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 49.

⁶ For a listing of scholars who deny the Pentecost Sinai connection see Moshe Weinfeld, "Pentecost As Festival of the Giving of the Law," in *Immanuel*, # 8, spring 1978, pp. 7-18.

recorded in Acts 2.⁷ However, few have gone on to investigate the historical basis for this link, or explored the full significance of such a link for the interpretation of the passage.

In the paragraphs that follow we will argue that the events at Sinai are certainly the literary, and possibly also the historical prototypes for the events recorded in Acts 2. First we will investigate the possibility that the feast of Pentecost was specifically instituted as a remembrance of the covenant and the giving of the law as described in Exodus. To that end we will examine the dates, the exodus account, and the concept of the firstlings and first fruits. Next we will examine the thesis that the story of the giving of the law at Sinai was at least the literary prototype to the account recorded in Acts 2. Here we will examine the Jewish traditions, the signs of the Spirit's coming, and the significance of Psalm 68 and Hebrews 12.

If the readers do not find the arguments for a historical link between the feast of Pentecost and the events at Sinai conclusive, we trust that the material presented will at least demonstrate that the New Testament teachings on Pentecost must be interpreted against the tradition which links Pentecost with the events at Sinai. We will conclude with a brief look at what the implications of such an interpretation might entail.

The Dates

The feast of Pentecost was so named because it took place on the fiftieth day after the Passover (the Greek *pentekostos* means "fiftieth"). It was also named "the Feast of Weeks" because it occurred seven weeks and a day after the Passover. This relative method of dating is in itself significant because, unlike the other festivals, it is never identified by any absolute date in any of the five O.T. festival calendars (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:18-26; Deut. 16:1-17; Lev. 23; Num. 28,29). The Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the 1st month, the Feast of Trumpets on the 1st day of the 7th month, the Atonement on the 10th day of the 7th month, and the Feast of Tabernacles on the 15th day of the 7th month. In contrast the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, is never assigned to a specific date, but always designated as taking place

⁷For examples of such authors see below; also J.H.E. Hull, *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Lutherworth Press, 1967), pp. 52ff.

seven weeks and a day after the Passover or Feast of Unleavened Bread.⁸

This method of dating strongly suggests a link between Pentecost and the Passover, a link which is nowhere explained, but which is simply presumed. The most readily available clarification for such a link is the history of events at the time of the exodus. Here we find that there is good reason to believe that a period of fifty days elapsed between the historical Passover in Egypt and the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.

Although the exact timing of the giving of the law is debated, the event clearly took place in the third month (Ex. 19:1, 11). The difficulty is that it is not clear what the timing with reference to the moon in the first verse is meant to indicate. Does the Hebrew word *ḥōdheš* (חֹדֶשׁ) here identify the new moon as the beginning of the month (Cassuto,⁹ Childs¹⁰), or the month with the day unspecified (Driver,¹¹ , Durham¹²)?

Cassuto's interpretation follows in the tradition of earlier Jewish exegetes. He argues:

The mention of the third new moon is not unintentional. Since the Exodus from Egypt, the last two weeks of Nisan and four weeks of Iyyar had passed, and we are now in the sixth week.

And he continues:

If the text implies, as seems likely (see ... v. 9), that these words were spoken to Moses on the fourth of the month, then the words *today and tomorrow* in v. 10 indicate the fourth and the fifth, and consequently the day of Revelation was on the sixth of the month, which marked the end of the seventh week after the exodus of the

⁸ Here we follow the interpretation that these are two names for the same basic festival, the first reflecting Israel's nomadic existence, and the second her agricultural existence.

⁹ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967), p. 224.

¹⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 342.

¹¹ S.R. Driver postulates that the original date may have been taken out to allow for the view that the time coincided with Pentecost; in *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge: the University Press, 1911), p. 169.

¹² J.I. Durham suggests that the day indicated is the day Moses ascended the mountain, as mentioned in verse three; in *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentaries (Waco: Word Books, 1987), p. 257.

Israelites from the land of Egypt. The later tradition that links the Festival of Weeks with the Day of the Revelation on Mount Sinai agrees, apparently, with the actual meaning of the text.¹³

As we have noted, other exegetes are less convinced that the exact date of the giving of the law can be calculated. But if the exact date cannot be determined with certitude, the above material does at least demonstrate that it is entirely possible that the event took place fifty days after the Passover. Here we should also note that the institution of the celebration of Pentecost is first encountered within the revelation given by God at Sinai (Ex. 23:16; cf. 34:22). A higher critical approach may attribute this to the work of a later redactor, but even such an explanation serves to show that in the mind of the redactor the festival of Pentecost dated back to the time of Sinai.

The Exodus story

One of the main objections to recognising a link between Pentecost and Sinai is the apparent lack of connection between an agricultural feast of the first fruits and the events related in the exodus story. Yet a close investigation of the events from the perspective of the Old Testament worldview does reveal a whole network of connections. Many of these become apparent when we follow the account of the exodus events.

The story begins with the Pharaoh's decision to kill every baby boy born to the Israelites (Ex. 1:16,22). However, God saves the baby Moses from this fate, and by way of an Egyptian court education and forty years of wilderness training he prepares Moses for a special task. The nature of this task is revealed when God meets with Moses at the burning bush. Here Moses is instructed to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites take a three day journey into the desert for the purpose of worshipping their God.

We should note that Pharaoh was not asked to set the Israelites free from their bondage, and that in the historical and cultural context the request for time to worship was a very reasonable one. Pharaoh's rejection of this demand serves to show up his intransigence. Johann Keil explains, "God knew the heart of Pharaoh, and therefore directed that no more should be asked at first than he must either grant, or display the hardness of his

¹³ Cassuto, *Op. cit.*, p. 229.

heart.”¹⁴ At this time God also informs Moses that, despite a display of many wonders, Pharaoh will refuse to let Israel go. He is therefore instructed to say to Pharaoh:

This is what the Lord says: Israel is my first born son, and I told you, “Let my son go, so he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your first born son. (Ex. 4:23).

It cannot escape the reader’s notice that here the roles are reversed. The Egyptians had sought to kill Israel’s sons, but now God threatens to kill Egypt’s sons; not every one of them, but the firstborn, as representative of all. A similar reversal occurs with the threat to the Israelites that they will be struck with pestilence or the sword unless they make the required sacrifice (5:1-3). In the end it is not Israel, but Egypt, which receives the threatened misfortunes.

The question whether God’s demand that Israel should sacrifice in the wilderness was actually carried out is not always answered in the same way. Some exegetes interpret the demand as no more than a ruse to escape from Egypt, even as Pharaoh suspected (10:10). Others see it not so much as a deception, as a part of a divine plan to bring Pharaoh to the point of driving Israel out of Egypt (6:1).¹⁵ Israel’s liberation was indeed God’s ultimate intent (3:17-20), but can we simply dismiss God’s demand for a festival of sacrifice as no more than a ruse or part of a plan to a greater purpose? Should we not ask whether Israel actually celebrated the festival which was demanded?

When we consider the option that Israel did observe the festival as demanded we are left with two main possibilities. One is that this took place at Mt. Sinai, when God renewed his covenant with Israel. However, Mt. Sinai could not have been the venue originally indicated to Pharaoh, since it was

¹⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, *Old Testament Commentaries: Genesis to Judges* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., n.d.), p. 340.

¹⁵ G. Bush (cited in W.C. Kaiser, “Exodus,” in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990, p. 322) regards the request as a partial truth, T.E. Fretheim interprets it as a ploy (*Exodus*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991, p. 66), while J.C. Rylaarsdam (“The Book Exodus,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, New York: Abbingdon Press, 1952, p. 188) and J. Keil (op. cit., p. 340), see it more as a strategy.

more than a three day journey away.¹⁶ A three day journey would have brought the Israelites out to the wilderness of Shur to the east of Goshen. Israel did indeed observe a religious ceremony in that region “the very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt” (Ex. 12:51). This was the ceremony of the consecration of all the firstborn males, from among both man and livestock (Ex. 13:1-2, 11-16).¹⁷

The exodus account relates that the consecration of the first born was to become the regular practice for Israelites on reaching the promised land, where Israelite fathers would explain:

With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb, and redeem each of my firstborn sons. (Ex. 13:14^b-16)

Some might object that it would be anachronistic to propose that the consecration of the firstborn was the purpose of the festival Moses requested of Pharaoh, since the death of Egypt’s firstborn had not yet taken place. However, a number of exegetes point out that the slaying of Egypt’s firstborn must be seen against the adoption of Israel as God’s firstborn prior to this event. Some suggest that the dedication of the firstborn may have belonged to Israel’s past, possibly exemplified in the redemption of Isaac on Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22).¹⁸ Others point to the announcement of God’s adoption of Israel as stated in God’s warning to Pharaoh (Ex. 4:22). Thus Keil explains:

... the sanctification of the first-born rested not upon the deliverance of the first-born sons from the stroke of the destroyer through the atoning blood of the paschal lamb, but upon the fact that God sanctified them for Himself at that time, and therefore delivered them. But Jehovah sanctified the first-born of Israel to Himself by

¹⁶ Durham, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁷ It may be asked whether this ceremony took place in the wilderness, as the event appears to have taken place at Succoth, a place sometimes linked to the Egyptian name Tkwt(i), identified with Pithom (see Durham, *op. cit.*, p. 171). This identification is by no means certain, and since the word *succoth* also means “booths”, it may simply indicate a name given to the place where Israel first took to tents (cf. Gen. 33:17, where Succoth in Canaan is named for booths built by Jacob).

¹⁸ E.g. Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

adopting Israel as His first-born son (chap. iv. 22), or as His possession. Because Israel had been chosen as the nation of Jehovah, its first-born of men and beast were spared, and for that reason they were henceforth to be sanctified to Jehovah.¹⁹

Keil's explanation helps clarify why Moses insisted that it was not enough for Pharaoh to let the men go without their families (10:11), or without their livestock (10:24-26). They were all to go to the festival, the men with their family and animals, since all belonged to the Lord. The firstborn of both people and livestock which were devoted to the Lord represented the nation and its flocks as a whole (Ex. 13:1,2,12,13).

The Dedication of First-fruits and Firstlings

Even as the firstborn among men and animals were the Lord's, so the first-fruits of the field were his possession. Fairbairn suggests, "It is but an extension of the principle which gave the impress of sacredness to the first-born of men and beast, to connect with God by a like bond of sacredness the first fruits of the field."²⁰ Similarly Morgenstern, who explains that all living things needed to be redeemed by sacrifice before they could be used by man, observes: "Such redemption sacrifices of the annual crop were known as 'first fruits,' of animals as 'firstlings,' and of human beings as 'first-born.'"²¹

Some scholars have argued that the first-fruit festival was something the Israelites took over from the Canaanites subsequent to their exodus from Egypt. But the story of Cain and Abel suggests that the practice of offering the first of produce and livestock to God had greater antiquity. Any Israelite listening to this story would not have failed to see that Abel pleased the Lord by sacrificing the firstborn of his lambs, whereas Cain failed to receive God's favour because he did not give God his first-fruits (Gen. 4:3-5).

The account of Israel's conquest of Jericho, as recorded in the book of

¹⁹ Keil, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

²⁰ P. Fairbairn, *Fairbairn's Imperial Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), p. 299.

²¹ J. Morgenstern, "FIRST FRUITS," in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), suppl. vol., pp. 270-2. See also P. Fairbairn, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

Joshua, shows that the dedication of all “first-fruits” to God was an established custom when Israel entered Canaan. In the lead-up to this story the author observes that Israel ate the first produce of Canaan on the day after the Passover. Presumably a wave offering accompanied the preparation of the first grain as stipulated (Jos. 5:11, 12; cf. Lev. 23:9-14). The account then goes on to state that in the conquest of Jericho all the booty was to be dedicated to God as *chôrêm* (Jos. 6:17;18, 21).²² The word *chôrêm* indicates objects set aside for the Lord, specifically first-fruits and firstlings (see Ezek. 44:29, 30). At subsequent battles Israel was free take the booty (Jos. 8:2), but Jericho’s booty belonged to God, as the “first-fruits” of conquest.²³

We are now ready to counter the objection that the events at Sinai cannot be linked to the observance of Pentecost because there is no mention of any sacrifice of first-fruits in the original setting. Indeed there is no mention of first-fruits during the exodus, because no crops were harvested during Israel’s nomadic existence. What we do find is the dedication of the firstborn of men and livestock on the day following the Passover, the very day subsequently set aside for the wave offering of the first-fruits of the barley harvest (Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:9-14). This was the day that marked the beginning of the seven weeks harvest time which culminated in the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15).

There is ample indication that the custom of dedicating the first of all fruits, flocks, sons or booty to the Lord as the *chôrêm* was already established by the time Israel entered the land of Canaan. Philo’s explanation may therefore well be correct when he observes that the Jews brought their first-fruits on Pentecost “to give thanks for the past time in which we were not compelled to suffer the plagues of lack and hunger, but rather lived in a fruitful year, and for the future...”²⁴

The Jewish Tradition

Every country has events and customs whose significance is known to every

²² It is probably significant that the number seven figures so prominently in the conquest of Jericho. The seven processions around Jericho remind us of the seven weeks before Pentecost, and the seven Sabbatical Years before the Year of Jubilee. We have no space in this paper to follow this up.

²³ That the word *chôrêm* was also used for all kinds of “first fruits”, including those of harvest, is clearly indicated in Num. 18:12-19 and Ezek. 44:28-31.

²⁴ Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* (II, 187), as cited in E. Lohse, *The New Testament Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 157.

insider, but which may not occur to the outsider to the culture. Thus all Australians and New Zealanders know what they remember on Anzac Day, all Dutchmen are aware why their sports teams wear the colour orange, and all Americans can tell you what happened on the fourth of July.²⁵ I venture to suggest that, in a similar way, every Israelite of biblical times would have known that the significance of the date of the feast of the first fruits was that it commemorated God's gift of the Law at Mount Sinai.

The fact that from the second century onwards the Jews celebrated Pentecost as a day remembering the giving of the law is well documented.²⁶ It is usually presumed that this was something new, a direct consequence of the destruction of the temple. Here it is argued that when there was no longer any place to offer the first-fruits, Pentecost was reinterpreted to fit in with the new situation. However, this presumption is really based on an argument from silence. It is possible that for the Jews Pentecost was always a celebration of the establishment of the covenant and giving of the law, commemorated in the giving of first-fruits. The destruction of the temple may simply have drawn more attention to those features of the festival that commemorated events at Mt. Sinai. Some of these features are discussed in the Jewish Talmud, which clearly recognises a link between Sinai and Pentecost.²⁷

This link can also be found in discussions between the Rabbis Jose and Akkiba which took place some time before 135 A.D. They debated whether the rest of the Torah was given together with Ten Commandments on the 6th of Sivan, the date of the celebration of Pentecost, or separately on the day following. According to A.R.C. Leany, throughout the exchange the association with of the events at Mt Sinai with the Feast of Weeks is never questioned, "but forms the basis of the debate."²⁸ If this is so, the association must be traced back to an earlier time.

The testimony of Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls has shown that the Qumran community celebrated Pentecost as a festival of covenant renewal.

²⁵ These customs are in reference to the commemoration of Australia and New Zealand's war dead, the colour associated with the Dutch royal house of Orange, and the declaration of independence respectively.

²⁶ See below.

²⁷ E.g. in Pesachim, 68b. These features will be discussed below.

²⁸ A.R.C. Leany, *The Rule of Qumran and its Meaning* (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 100.

Both Josephus and the document known as *The Rule of Qumran* relate how new converts were initiated on the day of Pentecost by means of a covenant oath and a ritual washing reminiscent of the later Christian baptism.²⁹ The Qumran community celebrated Pentecost on the 15th of Sivan, in accordance with the 364 day solar calendar worked out to some detail in the *Book of Jubilees*. This book teaches that the date of Pentecost not only celebrated God's covenant with Israel under Moses, but also coincided with the date God made his covenant with Noah.

Leany attempts to explain the association between Pentecost and the celebration of covenant renewal as a product of the Jewish lectionary. In the three year cycle drawn up by pre-Christian Jews for reading through the Torah, the celebration of Pentecost coincided with the story of the giving of the Law. Leany argues:

The Feast of Weeks had originally its own distinct agricultural character. It acquired the character of celebration of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai; some explanation must be found for this pronounced change, and nothing is more likely than that the Scriptures effected it, and it is natural to look for the possibility that they effected it by way of the lectionary. Ex. 19-20 was read on the first two sabbaths of *Sivan* (or month III), but the Talmud (*b. Meg.* 31a) says that Ex. 19 was read on the Feast of Weeks. It is reasonable to suppose that the striking *seder* Ex. 19 was quite early transferred from a nearby sabbath to the festival and so gave it its new character of commemorating the covenant made at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.

It seems to me that it is more probable that the readings were arranged to coincide with this date because of a previous association between Sinai and Pentecost. This is all the more likely when we consider that early traditions for the lectionary for the day of Pentecost also prescribed the reading of Deut. 16 and Lev. 23, which give the regulations for Pentecost, and Gen 11, dealing with the confusion of tongues at Babel, an event Jews also associated with Pentecost.³⁰

²⁹ See J. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 121. Also Josephus, *Bellum*, 2, 8, 7.

³⁰ See Aileen Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 19; E.G. King, "The Reading of the Law and Prophets in a Triennial Cycle," *JQR* 5 (1893), 420-468; *JQR* 6

The antiquity of the Jewish lectionaries is uncertain, although they are clearly pre-Christian.³¹ The testimony of the Book of Jubilees dates back to at least the middle of the second century B.C. We must therefore conclude that the association between Pentecost and Sinai predates Christianity. However, there is good reason to believe that the O.T. itself provides us with an earlier example of the covenant being celebrated at Pentecost. This is found in the story of the covenant renewal that took place under King Asa (2 Chron. 15:10-15).

The three festivals prescribed in the Pentateuch were apparently observed in the days of the monarchy (1 Ki. 9:25). Therefore when 2 Chron. 15:10-14 relates that the citizens of the Southern Kingdom came together at Jerusalem to sacrifice and ratify the covenant “in the third month” the timing may be significant. Raymond Dillard explains:

This ceremony of covenant renewal probably was concurrent with the celebration of the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost; Exod 23:16; 34:22; ...), one of the great pilgrim festivals (Deut 16:16) that would have brought crowds loyal to the Jerusalem temple from the surrounding regions.³²

Significantly, the Aramaic Targum renders v. 11 as: “and on that day, at the Feast of Weeks, they sacrificed before the Lord ...”³³ Is this version merely a reflection of a later tradition, or was there already that connection in the days of Asa? Perhaps on the basis of the material available we can come to no stronger conclusion than that given by J.E. Hartley who, with reference to the regulations for the Feast of Weeks in Leviticus, writes:

... late in the Second Temple it became connected with the giving of the covenant at Sinai (Jub 6:1-21; 14:1-20). This association, however, may be hinted at in 2 Chr 15:10-14, which refers to a feast

(1894), 420-423; Duane L. Christensen, “The Book of Psalms within the Canonical Process,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 39, no. 3, p. 425.

³¹ Their pre-Christian dating is demonstrated by Guilding, who puts forwards the thesis that some NT books are based on the lectionaries; *op. cit.*

³² Raymon B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentaries (Waco: Word Books, 1987), p. 121.

³³ “The Targum of Chronicles,” in *The Aramaic Bible*, trans. by J.S. McIver (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p. 178.

to renew the covenant celebrated in the third month. The date in Ex 19:1 for Israel's gathering at Sinai to receive the law from God supports this connection. In the post-exilic community a covenant renewal ceremony was an important part of this feast...³⁴

However, J.T. Milik is prepared to give the connection a firmer historical endorsement, arguing:

This almost certainly meant a link between Pentecost and the covenant of Sinai in particular: both Ex. 19:1 and 2 Chr. 15:10 specify 'the third month' (the month during which Pentecost was celebrated), and the same link was made by the Samaritans.³⁵

Sara Japhet also argues for a long tradition of covenant renewal ceremony on the day of Pentecost, but on linguistic grounds. With reference to the renewal of the covenant under King Asa (2 Chron. 15:10-15), she suggests:

The Hebrew name of the feast *ḥag haššābu'ōt*, may be seen as derived from *šebu'ōt*, 'oath', rather than *šabu'a*, 'week', i.e. 'Feast of Oaths'. Indeed, according to the book of Jubilees, elaborating on Gen 9:9-16, Pentecost as commanded to Moses is a re-enactment of the covenant with Noah, made 'with an oath' (Jubilees 6.11, 17; 14.1-20)...

The implication, then, is that this gathering in the third month is an observance of the 'feast of Oath', but there is no hint of the identity of the covenant re-enacted here. Is it, as in the tradition of the Jubilees, the covenant between the Lord and Noah (Gen 9), or rather a reliving of the Sinai covenant (Exod 24)?³⁶

Moshe Weinfeld believes there is reason to believe the word *Shavuot* carried both meanings, indicating both "weeks" and "oaths". He supports this by reference to the Book of Jubilees 6:21, which reads, "this feast is twofold and of double nature," explaining: "According to our view the double nature of the festival lies in the double meaning of the root שבע, which underlies הַגַּ שְׁבוּעוֹת."³⁷

³⁴ J.E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Press, 1992), p. 381.

³⁵ J.T. Milik, "Pentecost," in *New International Dictionary* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971), vol. 2, p.784.

³⁶ Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 724

³⁷ Moshe Weinfeld, *op. cit.*

None of the above details necessarily point to a historical link between the feast of covenant renewal under King Asa and the covenant at Mt. Sinai. But J.G. McConville does point out that Asa's execution of those who refused to continue in the covenant was in line with the requirements of the Mt. Sinai covenant, as signified by the sprinkling of blood (Ex. 24:8).³⁸

King Asa reigned from around 912 to 871 B.C., and short of the actual exodus account we looked at earlier, that is as far as we can trace the possible history of the celebration of Pentecost as a feast of covenant renewal. We will now proceed to examine the events that took place at the occasion of the Exodus, to see whether this gives any further hints about the significance of Pentecost.

The Signs

In the exodus story God's presence at Mt. Sinai is indicated by three signs: fire, a storm with the sound of a mighty wind, and an earthquake (Ex. 19:16-19). These same three signs are consistently used in Scripture to express God's presence. Significantly these signs are listed when God meets a depressed Elijah following the triumph on Mt. Carmel. But here, instead of appearing to Elijah in a powerful wind, an earthquake or a fire, God comes to comfort Elijah in a gentle zephyr (1 Ki. 19:11-12).

There are numerous occasions recorded in the O.T. where God uses fire or smoke as a sign of his presence. Identified as an "all consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24), God appeared that way in the burning bush (Ex. 19:18), in the *shekinah* cloud in the desert (Ex. 13:21) and in his presence in the tabernacle and temple (Ex. 40:38; Num. 9:15-23; 1 Ki. 8:11; 2 Chron 7:1). The *shekinah* fire is also mentioned in Isaiah's revelation concerning the coming of the Branch (Is. 4:2-6), which oracle may well have been at the background of John the Baptist's prophecy that Christ would baptise his people with water and with fire (Lk. 3:16,17).³⁹

³⁸ J.G. McConville, *The Daily Study Bible, I and II Chronicles* (Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1984), p. 172.

³⁹ See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), p. 147.

God's appearance in flames of fire at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:18) became a constant refrain in subsequent references to the event (Ex. 24:17; Deut. 5:4; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16; Heb. 12:18). I believe that this forms the background to the sign described in Acts 2. When flames of fire appeared on the heads of the gathered believers this was a sign of the presence of God. It showed that under the new covenant God is no longer distant and unapproachable, as on Mt. Sinai, but present with every believer in the person of his Holy Spirit.

The second sign is the sound of a mighty wind. In Ex. 19 (vv.16 & 19) we read of a storm and a loud sound described as "the voice of a trumpet," or in Hebrew, *qôl shôphâr*. The *shôphâr* was the loudest and most piercing of the Hebrew trumpets, for which reason the Israelites used it for signalling in war (Jos. 6:4, 20; Jer. 4:5,6). It would seem that some early Jewish or Christian exegetes equated the "voice" (*qôl*) of the trumpet (v. 19^a) with the sound of a mighty wind, because Cyril of Jerusalem, who himself makes no mention of a link between Sinai and Pentecost, likens the sound of a mighty wind that brought the crowds together (vv. 2, 6) to a trumpet sound:

And lest men should be ignorant of the greatness of the mighty gift coming down to them, there sounded as it were a heavenly trumpet, For *suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind*, signifying the presence of Him who was to grant power unto men to seize with violence the kingdom of God; that both their eyes might see the fiery tongues, and their ears hear the sound.⁴⁰

The same equation may be implied in the account of Philo, who makes no mention of a trumpet, but has God's voice coming out of the fire:

They had cleansed themselves with ablutions and lustrations for three days past, and moreover had washed their clothes. So in the whitest of raiment they stood on tiptoe with ears pricked up in obedience to the warning of Moses to prepare themselves for a congregation which he knew would be held from the oracular advice he received when he was summoned up by himself. Then from the

⁴⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catechetical Lectures" (xvii, 15), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace. Interestingly Cyril makes no direct reference to the events at Sinai with respect to Pentecost.

midst of the fire that streamed from heaven there sounded forth to their utter amazement a voice, for the flame became articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience, and so clearly and distinctly were the words formed by it that they seemed to see rather than hear them.⁴¹

A number of Jewish traditions similarly speak of God's voice speaking in all the languages of the world at once. The *Midras Tanhuma* explains:

Although the Ten commandments were promulgated with a single sound, it says, 'All the people heard the voices': it follows then that when the voice went forth it was divided into seven voices, and then went into seventy tongues and every people received the Law in their own language.⁴²

This kind of tradition cannot but call to mind the events recorded in Acts 2. Here the flames of fire divide to rest on the disciples, who utter God's words in the languages of the world (Acts 2:8-11). The parallelism becomes even stronger when we consider that the rabbinic tradition in the Aramaic Targums of the Tanach also maintains that at Sinai "the glory of God descended upon the heads of the Israelites as divine diadems when they received the Torah at Sinai [Text 4]."⁴³

We may well ask why these Jewish sources should give explanations that describe events so similar to those recorded in Acts 2. It is hardly likely that Jews would borrow such details from Christian sources,⁴⁴ and as we have seen, there is evidence of a well developed tradition on what happened at Sinai dating back to before the New Testament era. It is more likely that Christians took over some of these ideas from the Jews.

⁴¹ Philo, *The Decalogue*, 45-46.

⁴² *Midras Tanhuma 26c*, cited from M.D. Goulder, *Type and History in Acts* (London: SPCK, 1964), p. 150. According to Leaney, one haggidic tradition added that of all the nations Israel alone agreed to obey God's law; *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁴³ Ole Kvarme, cited in "Pentecost at Ephesus", by Dr. Joseph B. Fuiten Jr., on www.cedarpark.org/cedarparkftp/970504am.htm. No source given.

⁴⁴ That the contrary was the case can be seen in the attempts of the second century Christian-Jewish convert, Aquila, to retranslate the Septuagint from the Hebrew in a manner that would exclude the Christian interpretations.

The third sign of God's presence at Mt. Sinai was a mighty earthquake. There is no hint of an earthquake in the description of events in Acts 2, but in 4:31 we read of a further outpouring of the Spirit at which time the place where Christians were gathered was "shaken." The same Greek word, σαλευω, in Acts 16:26 clearly refers to an earthquake.⁴⁵ The mention of an earthquake in this passage is significant, because it may well indicate a deliberate attempt on Luke's part to relate the Pentecost story to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. This is also the view of C.K. Barrett, who argues that we must regard Acts 2:1 to 4:31 as a single pericope.⁴⁶

In summary, then, we see that the same signs of fire, the sound as of a mighty wind, and an earthquake are displayed at the outpouring of God's Spirit as are used to indicate God's presence at Mt. Sinai. Moreover, it would appear that there is a deliberate attempt to bring the two stories together in the book of Acts. Nor is Luke alone in this, because as we shall see, Paul also makes this connection. This is best illustrated with reference to the Psalm the Jews knew as the Pentecost Psalm.

Psalm 68

In a passage dealing with spiritual gifts Paul refers the Ephesians to some verses in Psalm 68 (Eph. 4:7-13; Ps. 68:18). Commentators are often at loss trying to explain the significance of this citation, both because the Psalm seems to have little to say about the matter at hand, and because Paul appears to change the wording significantly to make it fit his message. Thus Calvin observes, "... Paul has departed not a little from the true meaning of the quotation."⁴⁷ G.K. Beale lists the citation as one of only ten in the N.T. where the new meaning seems to bear no relation to the meaning in the original context.⁴⁸ Similarly W.C. Kaiser comments: "... Paul's use of Psalm 68:19 in Ephesians 4:8 atomizes the text to extract the phrases 'he went up' and 'he gave' for his own novel use, thereby wrenching it from its context."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Josephus uses the same Greek word for a sign of God's presence. *Antiquities*, VII, iv, 1.

⁴⁶ C.K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary on Acts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 113, 149.

⁴⁷ J. Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 271.

⁴⁸ G.K. Beale "Positive Answers to Questions," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, G.K. Beale (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), p. 289.

⁴⁹ W.C. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 8.

Those who view Paul's citation of the Psalm as a distortion point out two features in support of this. First, Paul changes the pronouns from the second person to the third person, and second, the reception of gifts is changed to a presentation of gifts. This is illustrated in the following comparison:

Ps. 68:18a (NIV)
When you ascended on high,
you led captives in your train;
you received gifts from men,

Eph. 4:8b (NIV)
When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men.

According to C.L. Mitton, Houldin regards the change in text as a deliberate alteration, while Ellicott adds that Paul had an apostolic right to make such alterations. Mitton himself regards the variance in terms of an unintentional misquotation.⁵⁰ Others do not necessarily see this as an error on Paul's part. Markus Barth points out that a number of early translations support Paul's use of the verb "to give", including some Ethiopian, Sahidic, Bohairic, Arabic and Syriac translations of the Psalm. He adds that some of these also support Paul's use of the third person.⁵¹ A possible reason for this change in reading is provided by A.T. Lincoln, who suggests that the verbs *to take*, לקח, and *to distribute*, פלג, are similar enough to be confused and lead to a copying error⁵²

There are many different viewpoints on the original context and significance of the Psalm, and we cannot go into the matter in this short paper.⁵³ What is of importance to us here is how the psalm was used and understood in Paul's time, how its meaning would have been explained to him at the feet of Gamaliel. As Markus Barth puts it, "The author of Ephesians is guilty of wilful distortion of the Scriptures - unless it can be shown that this interpretation makes sense in terms of the use and understanding of the psalm contemporary with him."⁵⁴ Barth then proceeds to show "that the

⁵⁰ C.L. Mitton *Ephesians, The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 145.

⁵¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians, Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), p. 475.

⁵² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentaries, Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), p. 243.

⁵³ About the original significance of the psalm J.W.R. Stott comments, "Psalm 68 is a call to God to come to the rescue of his people and vindicate them again, as in the olden days. For he went in triumph before his people after the exodus ...", in *The Bible Speaks Today, The Message of Ephesians* (Leicester: IVP, 1979), p.

⁵⁴ Markus Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

author of Ephesians was acquainted with a Targum and other antecedents of Talmud and midrash, and that the psalm exposition of Eph. 4:8-10 takes up and corrects contemporary exegesis.”⁵⁵ The contemporary exegesis Barth refers to was a Jewish tradition which interpreted the psalm as speaking of Moses’ reception of the law on Mt. Sinai, an event which was remembered in the celebration of Pentecost. In the words of A. Patzia:

At a later period, the rabbis interpreted this passage as referring to Moses’ ascension of Mount Sinai to receive the law (Exod. 19). The giving of the Torah (Law) became associated with the festival of Pentecost. In this usage of the psalm, the rabbis understood that Moses ascended the mountain to receive gifts, that is, the law, for people so that he, in turn, might give it to people.

When the author of Ephesians comes to discuss the spiritual gifts that Christ bestowed upon the church, he draws upon the psalm because he sees Christ’s ascension to the Father as its prophetic fulfilment (**when he ascended on high**). As Moses was given the law for the people of Israel, Christ, as a second but greater Moses, gave the Spirit to the church, which, in turn, included the gifts mentioned in 4:11.⁵⁶

This explanation of Paul’s use of the psalm in Eph. 4:8 is supported by a number of recent scholars. Thus Lincoln explains:

The application of Ps. 68:18 to Christ’s ascent and his distribution of gifts by the Spirit may well have been aided by the psalm’s association with Pentecost ... the psalm citation was connected with Moses and the giving of the law, and Pentecost, besides celebrating harvest, was more and more becoming regarded as the feast which commemorated the law-giving at Sinai. There is good reason to believe that this association existed from the middle of the second century B.C.E.

And he concludes:

⁵⁵ *Op cit.*, p. 476.

⁵⁶ A. Patzia, *New Testament International Commentary, Ephesians, Colossians, Philipians* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984), p. 236.

... the movement of thought from Christ's ascent to his gifts in the Church requires a descent in the Spirit ... It is this order which is followed in the exegetical tradition which applied the psalm to Moses and which is in the background here ... Caird holds that for the author of Ephesians Ps. 68 is no longer to be viewed as a Jewish Pentecostal psalm concerning Moses but as "a Christian Pentecostal Psalm, celebrating the ascension of Christ and his subsequent descent at Pentecost to bestow spiritual gifts upon the church."⁵⁷

Lincoln points out that by Caird's interpretation of the passage Christ's descent is to be taken as the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, in that Christ and the Spirit are closely identified in a number of Pauline passages (Eph. 1:13; 3:16,17; 4:30; 1 Cor. 15:45; Rom 8:9-11). But Lincoln suggests another interpretation could be that Christ's descent speaks of his incarnation.⁵⁸

If Paul's explanation of the gifts of the Spirit must be understood in terms of the Jewish tradition linking Psalm 68 with the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai it adds considerable weight to our argument that the events described in Acts 2 must be interpreted against the background of God's covenant with the *Qahal* or "church" at Mt Sinai.

The argument for a Sinai-Pentecost connection would be strengthened even further if it can be demonstrated that Peter's speech in Acts 2 also alludes to this psalm. A number of scholars have made this connection. Thus Marshall raises the possibility that Peter made the connection with Psalm 68 in his Pentecost sermon, but cautions, "... it must be emphasized that this view is somewhat speculative, and it is doubtful that Luke himself had detected the allusion."⁵⁹ David Williams gives the connection a stronger endorsement, pointing out: "Significantly in the quotation from Joel it was God who would pour out his Spirit (v. 17), but now Jesus acted on God's behalf."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Lincoln, *op. cit.*, p. 246. For the citation from Cairns he refers to "The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:7-11," *Studia Evangelica*, 1964, p. 541.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247

⁵⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale N.T. Commentaries (Leicester: IVF, 1980), p. 78.

⁶⁰ David J. Williams, *Acts*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985-90), p. 53.

Perhaps the strongest argument for this connection comes from J. Dupont, who suggests that “[i]n the course of his speech at Pentecost, Peter refers to the gift of the Spirit by the exalted Christ to the church (Acts 2:33), using language which seems to recall Ps. 68:19.”⁶¹ While he points out that many critics ignore or counter such an interpretation, he reasons:

Other scholars have shown, on the other hand, that the whole context is illuminated if the verse is seen against the background of a Jewish midrashic tradition, in which Psalm 68 is interpreted of (sic.) the promulgation of the law at Sinai. The application of this tradition to the Christian idea of the gift of the Spirit is confirmed by Eph. 4:8. Moreover the citation in Ps. 68:19 in the latter passage has important agreements with the Targum against the Hebrew and the Septuagint. That Luke was capable of using this tradition in this way is suggested by his use of a typology of Moses elsewhere (compare Acts 5:31 with 7:35).

Dupont’s conclusion is especially pertinent for our own focus of study in this article. Here he writes:

In the case of Acts 2:33, recognition of an allusion to Ps. 68:19 has important consequences. It means that Christianity can take over the Jewish ideas connected with the feast of Pentecost, and interpret them afresh in the light of the Christ event. The gift of the Law through Moses and Sinai, which this psalm celebrates according to rabbinic exegesis, is now replaced by the gift of the Spirit through the exalted Jesus, the second Moses.⁶²

The Covenant

There is little doubt that the events at Sinai constituted the making of a covenant between God and his people (Ex. 24:8; Deut. 5:2), but can the same be said for the events described in the second chapter of Acts? While the passage itself does not describe the event in terms of a “covenant,” other N.T. passages clearly link the new covenant to the coming of the Holy

⁶¹ J. Dupont, “Ascension du Christ et don de l’Esprit d’après Actes 2:33” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. by B. Lindars & S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973)

⁶² *Ibid.*, “English summary,” p. 228.

Spirit. In 2 Cor. 3:6 Paul identifies himself and his co-workers as ‘ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit.’ In the context a contrast made is that between the letter of the law engraved in stone at Sinai, and the “letter of Christ” written on the human heart by the Spirit (vv.3, 7). Paul continues that even as at Sinai Moses’ face became radiant when he met with God, so those who have the Spirit will reflect the Lord’s glory as they become transformed into his likeness (v.18). Similarly, in Gal. 4:21-31 it is those who have been born of the Spirit who are identified as standing in the new covenant relationship with God.

Behind Paul’s teachings are the O.T. prophecies which speak of a time when God will write his commandments on men’s hearts. Ezekiel links this to the permanent presence of God’s Holy Spirit, while Jeremiah places it in the setting of a new covenant (Jer. 31; Ez. 36). Jeremiah’s covenant theme is taken up by the author of Hebrews, who appeals to the prophecy to demonstrate the superiority of the new covenant (Heb. 8). Returning to the theme in chapter 12, he contrasts the circumstances which mark the old and new covenants:

¹⁸ You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰ because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.” ²¹ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”

²² But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.
(NIV)

W.L. Lane points out that the “joyful assembly”, or πανηγυρις, is used in the LXX for a “joyful gathering in order to celebrate a festival” (Amos 5:21; Hos. 3:13; 9:5; Ez. 46:11, LXX). Moreover the twice repeated

προσελμυθατε (vv. 18, 22), “you have come to,” has the connotation of approaching God in worship, as in pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for festival.⁶³ Lane explains that, whereas the first “coming to” is in reference to Israel’s assembly at Mt. Sinai, the New Testament counterpart is to be found in Christians coming together in worship as the ἐκκλησια, as represented in the house churches (cf. Heb. 10:25).⁶⁴

But is this explanation exhaustive for the meaning of the passage? Is there not, besides a picture of events at Sinai, a further reference to the festivals observed by the Jews, especially the festival of Pentecost? G.W. Buchannan maintains that at the background of the passage is the picture of a Jewish festival, but he suggests either the festival of the Atonement or the New Year.⁶⁵ But in view of what we have seen above, perhaps we should rather be thinking of the festival of Pentecost.

A connection between this passage and Pentecost is claimed by Aileen Guilding, who has argued that the whole book of Hebrews appears to be based on the Jewish triennial cycle of lectionaries associated with Pentecost: the stories of Melchizedek and God’s covenant with Abraham, the events at Mt. Sinai, and Aaron’s budding rod (Gen. 14:18-15:21; Ex. 19; Num. 18), as well as Ps. 110. By this analysis Heb. 12:18ff. deals with the Ex. 19 passage of the Pentecost lectionary.⁶⁶

While it cannot be concluded with certainty that the account in Hebrews 12 is indeed an overt reference to Pentecost, certainly the passage affirms our contention that Sinai was the prototype for the feast of the *chôrêm*, the firstfruits and firstborn dedicated to the Lord. Earlier the author has identified Israel as God’s firstborn (Heb. 11:28; cf. Ex. 4:22; Jas. 1:18), but here it is the N.T. *ekklesia* that is identified as the πρωτοτοκοι, the firstborn. In the N.T. the firstborn are those who have been sprinkled with the blood of Christ. They are God’s new covenant people. They are the objects of God’s election, whose names are written in heaven.

⁶³ W.L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary, Hebrews* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), pp. 460, 466, 467.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁶⁵ G.W. Buchannan, *To the Hebrews*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), p. 223.

⁶⁶ Aileen Guilding, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

Conclusion

In the above paragraphs we have tried to argue that the events at Mt. Sinai may well have formed the basis for the Jewish feast of Pentecost. The dates, the exodus story, the *chôrêm* and Jewish traditions all point to this possibility. We have also argued that, even if there should be no historical connection, there is every reason to believe that this connection was present in the minds of the authors and first readers of those N.T. accounts which describe the coming and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This, we submitted, is demonstrated in the fact that both Peter and Paul appear to appeal to Targums that support the tradition linking the two events, a tradition which predates the birth of Christianity. We also noted how the gift of the Law and the gift of the Spirit are associated with the old and new covenants respectively. But what are the implications of such a connection?

Space and time prevent me from going into detail here, and I will therefore present the following points for consideration for further study:

1. The identification of a link between the events at Sinai and those at Pentecost is important to a proper interpretation of the passages studied above.
 - In that it would affect the interpretation of an introductory chapter to the book of Acts, it would colour the interpretation of the rest of the book.
 - It would indicate that in using Ps. 68 in his explanation of spiritual gifts in Eph. 4 Paul is interpreting the psalm in a manner consistent with how it was understood by his contemporaries.
 - It would add a new dimension to our understanding of the theology expressed in Hebrews 12.
2. A link between events at Sinai and the Christian Pentecost undergirds the covenantal understanding of salvation history.
3. If Acts 2 is to be seen interpreted against the background of events at Mt. Sinai it lends strong support to the view that the “promise” (ἐπαγγελία) extended in v. 39 covers not just the gift of the Holy Spirit, but all that is included under God’s new covenant (cf. Rom. 9:4).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Cf. F.W. Grosheide, *Handelingen, Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift* (Kampen: Kok, 1941), pp. 43f. Vox Reformata, 1998

4. Interpreting the signs at the coming of the Holy Spirit against the background of the Jewish understanding of the covenant at Sinai guards against the misinterpretation of speaking in tongues as a permanent sign of the Spirit's presence.

Above all, a link between Sinai and Pentecost will confirm Christians in their conviction that what happens in this world is not the product of blind chance, but divinely ordained by a God who works everything according to his perfect will.