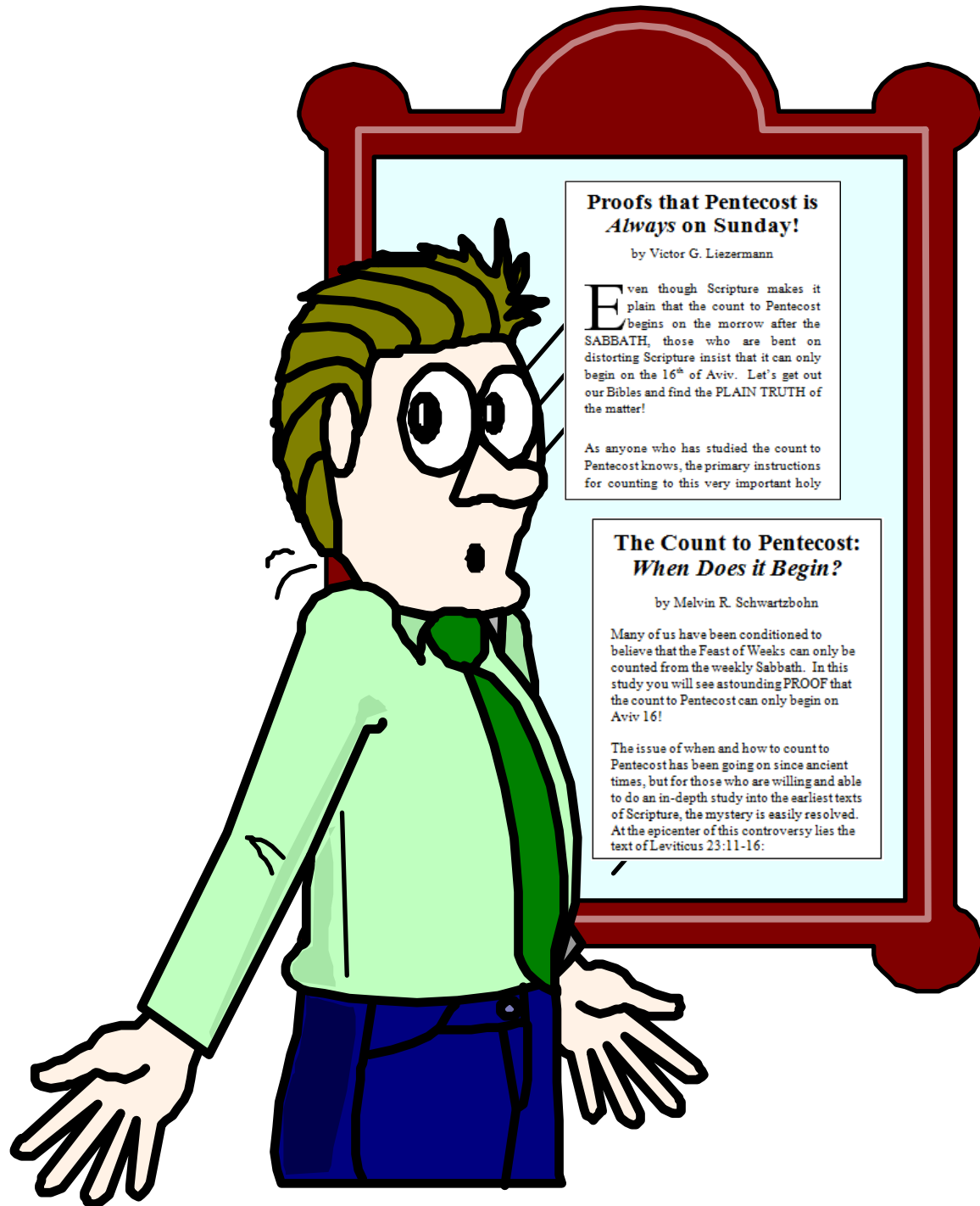


Facing The Pentecost Controversy



Proofs that Pentecost is *Always on Sunday!*

by Victor G. Liezermann

Even though Scripture makes it plain that the count to Pentecost begins on the morrow after the SABBATH, those who are bent on distorting Scripture insist that it can only begin on the 16th of Aviv. Let's get out our Bibles and find the PLAIN TRUTH of the matter!

As anyone who has studied the count to Pentecost knows, the primary instructions for counting to this very important holy

The Count to Pentecost: *When Does it Begin?*

by Melvin R. Schwartzbohn

Many of us have been conditioned to believe that the Feast of Weeks can only be counted from the weekly Sabbath. In this study you will see astounding PROOF that the count to Pentecost can only begin on Aviv 16!

The issue of when and how to count to Pentecost has been going on since ancient times, but for those who are willing and able to do an in-depth study into the earliest texts of Scripture, the mystery is easily resolved. At the epicenter of this controversy lies the text of Leviticus 23:11-16:

By Larry and June Acheson

FACING THE PENTECOST CONTROVERSY

by Larry and June Acheson

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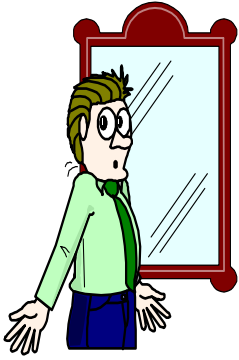
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Facing the Pentecost Controversy

by Larry and June Acheson

Introduction

We initially had no intention of addressing this issue, but in June 2002 a couple of personal encounters prompted my desire to speak out on the reasons why June and I count to Pentecost as we do. We want to make it perfectly clear at the outset that if you choose to count to Pentecost every year and if you do your best to set that day aside in accordance with Yahweh's directive, then June and I offer you no criticism, regardless of how you do it, presuming you are in fact doing your *best* to honor Yahweh and His Word with the method you employ. June and I have attended various Sunday Pentecost celebrations on several occasions, even though we personally disagree with their method of counting to that day. In spite of our disagreement, June and I approach this matter from the perspective that hopefully we are all striving to please the Father, and we all have our own ways of approaching a topic of such a controversial nature. We believe we should allow our love for each other and for Yahweh to rise above this controversy.

Sadly, June and I have met individuals who are not so understanding of different views with regard to the count to Pentecost, and this type of experience was never more evident than it was over a year ago, when one individual went so far as to call me (long distance) for the express purpose of informing me that if I had reckoned Pentecost the way *he* counts to it, then I would have been given so much power (emphasis his) that I would not have the "bad attitude" that I now have. In a previous conversation, this same individual informed me that the reason I have not received Yahweh's Spirit is because I don't count to Pentecost "correctly."

Well, I don't know if Yahweh's Spirit is leading June and me to believe the way we do or not. All we can do is pray that it is. That, in addition to studying, is all any of us can do. As you may have already discerned, the problems we have with the individual I just mentioned go way beyond how to count to Pentecost!

I spoke with another individual last year who was much more understanding with regard to the position that June and I hold concerning the count to Pentecost. He expressed understanding that this is indeed a very controversial topic, and he agreed that there is so much good logic on both sides that neither side has just cause to castigate the other side for the way they choose to count. This was refreshing to hear. In the same year of 2002 we met with yet another believer in his home to discuss this issue. We spent eight hours there, mostly listening to a Pentecost presentation that he has delivered to various individuals and groups. Although we are not in agreement with him concerning the Pentecost controversy, we are thankful to report that he was a gentleman throughout the discussion, and we consider him to be a good friend.

June and I are thankful that those who choose to count to Pentecost have chosen to obey Yahweh in this area rather than observe the "holidays" of the world, such as Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day and Halloween. We know that most of those who have chosen Yahweh's holy days over the world's "holidays" have done so out of their love for Yahweh. Thus, even if we cannot agree on how to count to Pentecost, can we at least agree that we're all striving to please the Father out of our love for Him and His

ways? And even if we cannot agree on how to count to Pentecost, can we at least agree to love and respect each other for *trying* to do it correctly?

What June and I hope to accomplish in this study is this:

- 1) We want each of us to commit to greater understanding and acceptance of other views. It is our hope that each of us can somehow find a way to presume that those of differing persuasions regarding how to count to Pentecost are counting the way they do because they love Yahweh and are acting on what they understand to be true and proper. It is our desire that each of us come away with this understanding of each other. From there, we hope that all of us will commit to pursuing scholarly inquiry on this matter combined with the *respectful* sharing of ideas and beliefs.
- 2) In response to those who have presented their position and have unfairly dismissed the way we count to Pentecost as being “wrong,” we would like to respectfully present the logic we have for believing as we do, not in an attempt to “slam” the other side, but to demonstrate that we are not demented or confused for counting to Pentecost the way we do! We recognize that there are actually several methods of counting to Pentecost employed by various individuals and groups, but we will only deal with the two most common teachings, one of which we personally recognize, with all due respect, as “having the most logic.”

1. Let's try to be a little more understanding towards each other ...

Let's face it, the debate over when to begin the count to Pentecost has been brewing for *millennia*. What has been gained? Very little is ever gained when we present our viewpoint from the "I'm right and you're deceived" perspective. Sometimes we wonder if Yahweh actually intended for this particular debate to unravel just so He could watch how *both sides* work things out. Certainly Yahweh *could* have inspired the writers of Scripture to have written something like this: **"You shall begin your count from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that occurs during the Feast of Unleavened Bread."** That would have cleared up a lot!

Conversely, Yahweh *could* have inspired the writers of Scripture to have written something like this: **"You shall begin your count on the sixteenth of Abib."** That would have cleared up a lot, too!

As it is however, we are left with no choice but to go with what we have and pray that we are guided by Yahweh's Spirit. We all have our own views as to what we believe is the most sound logic, and debating the issue with pointed fingers and condescending words will not serve our purpose well, nor will it reflect true, humble servants of Yahweh out doing His work. To both sides on this issue: If indeed our position turns out being the "correct position," let's show loving patience, understanding, and acceptance towards those of opposing views. We may not agree on how to count, but can't we at least agree to love each other in spite of our differences? How do we convey love when we use trigger words in our speech, such as labeling the opposing view as being the "wrong position"?

Top scholars confirm that this is an age-old controversy. Yigael Yadin, in his book *The Temple Scroll*, devoted an entire chapter to a discussion of this controversy:

With all the grave implications of different calendars, the prime issue, irrespective of which calendar was followed, was over the day of the month on which the Pentecost was to be celebrated. This was the subject of controversy within Judaism from time immemorial, and became, as we have seen, a source of bitter division between Jewish sects and normative Judaism in the latter part of the Second Temple period (and continues to this day with the Samaritans and the Karaites).¹

Yigael Yadin was one of the most respected scholars of the 20th century. He was very much involved in not only retrieving the Dead Sea Scrolls, but also in translating them. In his book, he made no attempt whatsoever to "choose sides," opting instead to present the actual enigma. Here is what he wrote:

"Pentecost" is the shortened form of the Greek for "the fiftieth day." And "seven full weeks" is the basis for the Hebrew name of this festival, the "Feast of Weeks." Thus, with no mention of a day or month, the only certainty being the fifty-day link between Pentecost and the Waving of the Sheaf, all depended, for accurate dating, on the interpretation of "the morrow after the sabbath." Which sabbath of the month? And what was the meaning of the word "sabbath" in this context? It was the different answers to these questions that contributed to the basic rifts between the several Jewish sects in antiquity. The rabbis, upon whose decisions rests normative Judaism, held that "sabbath" in this context meant "Passover," the day following the evening ritual, namely, the fifteenth of the first month. The "morrow" would therefore be the sixteenth of the first month, and that should be the date of the Sheaf-waving Feast, with the celebration of the Pentecost fifty days later. The Sadducees, the Samaritans and several additional Jewish sects, on the other hand, gave the Pentateuchal words their

¹ Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, Random House, New York, 1985, p. 87.

plain and literal meaning, with ‘sabbath’ signifying simply “the sabbath day,” namely the sabbath after Passover.²

In providing us the recipe for this hot debate, Mr. Yadin avoided becoming involved. Instead, he described the setting, implying that the vague instructions for when to begin the count opened the door for the debate that has ensued. Not only does the controversy over when to celebrate the Feast of Weeks exist among the different sects within Judaism, but it also runs rampant among other groups seeking to follow the instructions as found in the Torah.

The late Samuele Bacchiocchi was a very well known and respected Seventh-Day Adventist scholar and author. In his book *God’s Festivals*, he wrote:

... I concur with Alfred Edersheim: ‘The testimonies of Josephus, of Philo, and of Jewish tradition, leave no room to doubt that in this instance we are to understand by the ‘Sabbath’ the 15th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it might fall.’ This means that Pentecost was celebrated by most Jews fifty days after Passover, on whatever day of the week it fell.³

Upon reading this remark by Bacchiocchi, those of our persuasion say, “Yes! Great point, Mr. Bacchiocchi!” However, it appears that even Mr. Bacchiocchi was somewhat confused when it comes to which side of the fence he wants to stand on, for notice what he wrote on page 233 of the same book:

At this point in my research I tend to support the reckoning of the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover.⁴

On the one hand, Bacchiocchi expressed support for beginning the count to Pentecost on the sixteenth of Abib. On the other hand, he expressed support for beginning the count on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath occurring during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Obviously the count cannot begin on both days. It’s either one or the other!

Before we dismiss Mr. Bacchiocchi as a confused wannabe scholar, please allow me to point out that he was the first non-Catholic to graduate from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, and not only that, but he received a gold medal from Pope Paul VI for earning the academic distinction of *summa cum laude*. In other words, he was a pretty smart guy. He also received various degrees here in the United States and authored at least ten books that we are aware of.

The point we are trying to make here is this: Some pretty savvy scholars have had a very tough time dealing with this issue. Many scholars prefer to not touch the Pentecost debate with a ten-foot pole! Yet here we are, somehow caught up in the middle of an ancient debate that has never been fully settled, yet many of us are convinced that **we** have thoroughly investigated the matter to the point that we have the **final answer** as to which is the correct method. How arrogant we are sometimes ... and how foolish we must appear to Yahweh. We dare say that we have run across some folks within the Yahwist Movement that, if it were up to them, yea if Yahweh gave them the power to judge ... they would cast those of differing persuasions into the Lake of Fire for not seeing eye to eye with them on how to count to Pentecost. It is truly at times such as these that we are most thankful that the Heavenly Father we worship is a Mighty One of mercy ... Who examines our hearts and understands when an individual is doing his or her best to worship Him in spirit and in truth ... even if that same individual is mistaken in some areas.

² Ibid, p. 88.

³ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History*; Part I “The Spring Festivals,” Biblical Perspectives, Berrien Springs, MI, 1995, p. 169.

⁴ Ibid, p. 233.

Yahweh understands our human frailties and fallacies ... it's too bad that some of our fellow humans do not.

We are therefore hopeful that we will all commit ourselves to better understanding and respect of other positions, especially when it comes to matters so controversial as the count to Pentecost. What we are about to present will include evidence supporting the position that we embrace with regard to how to count to Pentecost. One can hardly hope to study this issue without arriving at a personal conclusion, and we admit that we do hold a certain opinion. Yet, as we have already shared, we respect other views as well, especially when it is obvious that those who count differently than we do are doing so with the full intent of pleasing the Father, for that is our sole motivation ... pleasing and honoring Yahweh. We are also motivated to try and get along with others who seek to please and honor Yahweh ... even if we don't agree on how to go about doing it!

2. Examining Leviticus 23

A thorough investigation into the matter of how to count to Pentecost must include an examination of the 23rd chapter of Leviticus, specifically Leviticus 23:9-16. However, Leviticus 23 is not the first passage of Scripture where we read about this feast. We first read of Pentecost in *Exodus* 23, where it is referred to as “the feast of harvest.” *Harvest of what?* That question is answered in the next Scriptural reference to Pentecost. According to Exodus 34:22, Pentecost is the celebration of the firstfruits of the *wheat harvest*:

²²And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year’s end.

Notice also that in addition to being termed “the feast of harvest,” Pentecost is also referred to as “the feast of weeks.” If one didn’t know anything else about Pentecost at this point, he might only be able to perceive that it is a celebration of the wheat harvest, plus he should discern that we are told to count off an unspecified number of weeks in order to determine which day we are to set aside for that celebration.

Pentecost is also termed “the feast of weeks” in Deuteronomy 16:9-10, where we read the following:

⁹Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from *such time as thou beginnest to put* the sickle to the corn.

¹⁰And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto Yahweh thy Almighty with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give *unto Yahweh thy Almighty*, according as Yahweh thy Almighty hath blessed thee.

Our reading of this passage from Deuteronomy clearly specifies two important factors in determining “when” to initiate the count to Pentecost:

- 1) We are to count off seven weeks in order to arrive at this special day.
- 2) We are to begin the count when the sickle is first put to the grain.

Equipped with this knowledge, we can at this point discern the reason why Pentecost is known as the “Feast of Weeks,” plus we know the count begins at a certain time ... a time when the grain was first harvested. The question is, “When was the sickle first put to the grain? Does this refer us to a certain, specific date on which to begin the count to Pentecost?” Well, as we’ve already covered, the answer is no, it does not, and *that* is the problem.

Now that we have examined these passages, it is time for us to turn to the 23rd chapter of Leviticus, wherein lies the crux of this whole controversy. The context of the passage we are about to read places it within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which tells us that we should begin the count at some point within that festival. What follows is Leviticus 23:9-16 as found in the *New Revised Standard Version*:

⁹Yahweh spoke to Moses: ¹⁰Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. ¹¹He shall raise the sheaf before Yahweh, that you may find acceptance; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall raise it. ¹²On the day when you raise the sheaf, you shall offer a lamb a year old, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Yahweh. ¹³And the grain offering with it shall

be two-tenths of an ephah⁵ of choice flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Yahweh; and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin⁶. ¹⁴You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your Mighty One: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements. ¹⁵And from the day after the Sabbath, from the day on which you bring the sheaf of the elevation [wave] offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete. ¹⁶You shall count until the day after the seventh Sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to Yahweh.

Since we have already determined that we are to count seven weeks to arrive at the day of Pentecost, we need to find the day from which we begin numbering those weeks. The passage we just read from Leviticus 23 is where we must turn to find the answer to that question. We are told in verse 11 that the priest “raises” or waves the sheaf of the harvest before Yahweh on the “day after the Sabbath.” This phrase is rendered the “morrow after the sabbath” in the *King James Version*. This is when the priest waves this offering before Yahweh. Then, according to verse 15, it is from this “Sabbath” that we are to begin numbering the seven-week count to Pentecost, or as it is also known, the Feast of Weeks.

This command seems very clear. Since the “day after the weekly Sabbath” is always Sunday, it appears obvious that we are to begin numbering the weeks beginning on a Sunday. Furthermore, verse 16 tells us to count **fifty days**. If we begin numbering our count to Pentecost on a Sunday, day 50 will also be on a Sunday. Thus, many understand that Pentecost should fall on a Sunday every year.

However, as alluded to by scholars such as Yigael Yadin (quoted earlier), determining the date of Pentecost simply isn't that easy!

⁵ An ephah is a Hebrew unit of measure equal to a little over a bushel.

⁶ A hin is a Hebrew unit of measure equal to nearly six pints.

3. The Meaning of the Word “Sabbath”

We are told in Leviticus 23:11 that the wave sheaf offering was waved “on the day after the sabbath.” In verse 15 we are told to count from the “day after the sabbath.” In verse 16 we are told to count until the “day after the seventh sabbath.” If the word “sabbath” can *only* refer to the weekly Sabbath, then the Feast of Weeks must fall on a Sunday every year.

However, as we have already learned from Yigael Yadin’s explanation of the debate, some Jews (the Pharisees) understood the word “sabbath” to also refer to the “high day” of festivals, and this is in fact their understanding of Yahweh’s intent in Leviticus 23:11-16. In other words, according to Pharisaical understanding, when Yahweh said, “... day after the sabbath,” He *meant* “... day after the ‘high day sabbath.’”

Another sect of the Jews, the Sadducees, understood the word “sabbath” to refer only to the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In other words, according to Sadducean understanding, when Yahweh said, “... day after the sabbath,” He *meant* “... day after the ‘weekly Sabbath.’”

We all know (we hope) that the Hebrew word “Shabbat” can be used in reference to the weekly Sabbath. This fact is not in dispute. The question we need to answer is, “Can the word ‘sabbath’ *ever* refer to anything besides the weekly Sabbath?” The answer is “Yes,” and the proof is found within the 23rd chapter of Leviticus, in reference to the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) falls on the 10th day of the seventh month of Yahweh’s calendar. The 10th day of any given month may fall on *any* day of the week, so it goes without saying that such is the case with regard to the Day of Atonement. Nevertheless, Yahweh refers to this one day as being a “sabbath,” as shown below:

²⁶Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ²⁷Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you: you shall deny yourselves and present Yahweh’s offering by fire; ²⁸and you shall do no work during that entire day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before Yahweh your Mighty One. ²⁹For anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people. ³⁰And anyone who does any work during that entire day, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people. ³¹You shall do no work: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements. ³²It shall be to you a sabbath of complete rest, and you shall deny yourselves; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening you shall keep your sabbath.

The Hebrew word translated “sabbath” in reference to the Day of Atonement is word #7676 in *Strong’s Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary* (שַׁבָּת), and is the very same Hebrew word translated “sabbath” in Leviticus 23:11. As we can discern from the Day of Atonement, it is classified by Yahweh as being a sabbath, even though it may fall on any day of the week. Thus, we may reasonably conclude that the word “sabbath” is *not* restricted to being a reference to the weekly Sabbath.

4. Consistency Dilemma

If we are to conclude that the word “sabbath” as found in Leviticus 23:11-16 can refer to both the weekly Sabbath *and* the high-day sabbaths, a dilemma arises. As a proponent of a “Sunday only Pentecost” put it,

*If ... we insist on calling the first day of the feast of unleavened bread (Abib 15th) a Sabbath, and start the count on the day after, we must also call the **last** day of unleavened bread a Sabbath. Seven Sabbaths are to be complete (verse 15). Counting the last day of unleavened bread as a Sabbath gives us **eight** (8) Sabbaths,⁷ not seven, within the 50 day count. To have eight Sabbaths is contrary to the command. This effectively shows the count cannot begin on Abib 16⁸. Therefore, “Sabbath” and “Sabbaths” in Lev. 23:15 & 16 certainly appear to refer to the weekly Sabbath.*

Do we err by not knowing history and the traditions of men? Or is it the Word of Yahweh we should know? (Mt. 22:29; Jn. 20:9; 5:39; Acts 17:10-13; Isa. 34:16).

If we (1) insist that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a Sabbath, and (2) start the count the next day (the 16th), then (3) we must recognize Abib 21 as a Sabbath, and (4) contrary to the command, this gives us eight (8) Sabbaths within the 50 day count, as illustrated in the chart on the following page.⁹

In other words, as we believe the author of the above commentary would submit, *consistency*, or the lack thereof, is the dilemma encountered by those who maintain that the word “sabbath,” as used in Leviticus 23:11-16, refers to the first “high day” of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Or to put it another way, if we were to insist that “morrow after the sabbath” means “morrow after the high day sabbath,” then when we count “seven sabbaths” to Pentecost, we must include that last “high day sabbath” of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as one of the “seven sabbaths.” As the author’s chart on the following page reveals, the “morrow after the seventh sabbath,” if we were 100% consistent with our interpretation of the word “sabbath,” falls on day 39 of the count to Pentecost.

Therefore, according to the individual quoted above, if one is going to be 100% consistent with his or her interpretation of the word *sabbath* in Leviticus 23:11-16, he or she must conclude that it can only refer to the *seventh-day sabbath*. Hence, the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, can only fall on a Sunday every year.

⁷ True in all years except when Abib 15th falls on the first day of the week.

⁸ True in all years except when Abib 15th falls on the weekly Sabbath.

⁹ Excerpt from a study entitled “Sabbaths in Leviticus 23,” given at the 1987 Unity Conference, author’s name withheld by request.

COUNTING TO PENTECOST FROM ABIB 16th

1st Day	2nd Day	3rd Day	4th Day	5th Day	6th Day	Sabbath Day
			15th Abib Feast U.B.	Start Count 1	2	3 1st Sabbath
4	5	Last U.B. 2nd Sab. 6	7	8	9	10 3rd Sabbath
11	12	13	14	15	16	17 4th Sabbath
18	19	20	21	22	23	24 5th Sabbath
25	26	27	28	29	30	31 6th Sabbath
32	33	34	35	36	37	38 7th Sabbath
39	40	41	42	43	44	45 8th Sabbath
46	47	48	49	50		

Obviously, we should not begin the count on Abib 16th.¹⁰

Some individuals, in their zeal to promote the belief that Pentecost may fall on any day of the week, insist that when the text tells us to count “seven sabbaths,” the word “sabbaths” should here be interpreted as meaning “weeks.” This is the position maintained by rabbinic Judaism, and many scholars promote

¹⁰ Ibid. The above comment and chart is a reproduction of the page from the study “Sabbaths in Leviticus 23,” given at the 1987 Unity Conference, author’s name withheld by request.

this view as being a valid interpretation of the Hebrew word “shabbath” (#7676 in *Strong’s*), even though there is a separate Hebrew word for “week” (shabuwa, #7620 in *Strong’s*). Note, for example, the commentary found in *Keil & Delitzsch’s Commentary on the Old Testament*:¹¹

That שבתות (v. 15) signifies weeks, like שבועות in Deut. 16:9, and τὰ σάββατα in the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 28:1), is evident from the predicate תמימה, ‘complete,’ which would be quite unsuitable if Sabbath-days were intended, as a long period might be reckoned by half weeks instead of whole, but certainly not by half Sabbath-days. Consequently ‘the morrow after the seventh Sabbath’ (v. 16) is the day after the seventh week, not after the seventh Sabbath.¹²

The point made by Keil & Delitzsch is this: It doesn’t really make much sense to say “seven complete Sabbaths,” as it is generally understood that no “partial Sabbaths” could possibly be included in that count! This begs the question, “Seven complete Sabbaths ... as opposed to *what*? Seven partial Sabbaths?”

It’s a “given” that all seven sabbaths would be “full and complete” before the next day (Pentecost) could begin! However, if one understood the word “shabbatot” to mean “weeks,” then it makes sense, as the intention is expressed that all seven weeks be complete before the day of Pentecost can begin.

Notwithstanding, the dilemma encountered by Keil & Delitzsch is the same as that encountered by all who interpret the word “shabbatot” as meaning “weeks”: How do they explain the fact that there is a separate Hebrew word for weeks? If the concept of “seven complete *weeks*” was intended in Leviticus 23, why wasn’t the proper Hebrew word for weeks inspired to be written there?

Considering the fact that there is a separate Hebrew word for the word “week” that could have been used (but wasn’t), it is reasonable to conclude, based on the evidence we’ve covered thus far, that the phrase “seven complete sabbaths” was intended by the writer of Leviticus 23:15.

¹¹ Ibid. The above comment and chart is a photocopy of the actual page taken from the study “Sabbaths in Leviticus 23.”

¹² From *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, by C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MS, 2001, p. 615 (originally published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1866 – 91).

5. No Produce Eaten Until the Offering is Brought to Yahweh

Our examination of Leviticus 23 would not be complete if we left out a seemingly minor, yet very significant command, found in verse 14. This command prohibits eating “bread, parched grain or fresh ears” until the day on which the wave offering to Yahweh has been “brought.” Some interpret this as meaning that absolutely no food consumption is allowed during the Feast of Unleavened Bread *until* that offering is brought to Yahweh. However, the context of the entire passage (vs. 10-14) lends support to the understanding that this is a reference to partaking of the grain of the new harvest. Furthermore, there is a complete absence of historical evidence that anyone ever interpreted this command in any other way.

In verse 10 we are told that when the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land, and when they reaped the harvest thereof, they were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits to the priest. In verse 11 we are told that the priest was to wave that sheaf before Yahweh to be accepted on the Israelites’ behalf. In verse 12 we are told that on the same day the sheaf is waved, a lamb of the first year was offered as a burnt offering to Yahweh. Verse 13 lists the grain offering and drink offering that were prescribed in addition to the previous offerings. We are instructed, then, in verse 14, to not eat bread, parched corn, or green ears until that same day that the offering is “brought” unto the Almighty. Again, the context implies that this is referring to food derived from the fresh grain of the harvest, and that is how this mandate has traditionally and historically been interpreted.

This brings us to a very significant passage relevant to this particular command. According to a verse found in the fifth chapter of Joshua, when the Israelites celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land, they ate from the fresh produce of the land “on the morrow after the Passover.” Did they “legally” partake of the food from that harvest? Had they made provision for the Wave Sheaf Offering to be made before indulging in the “produce of the land”? Let’s read Joshua 5:10-12 to see if we can get a handle on this situation. Because the *King James Version* does a less than spectacular job of properly translating this passage, we will be quoting from the *New Revised Standard Version*:

¹⁰While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the Passover in the evening of fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna: they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

The problem with the above passage as it relates to the count to Pentecost is this: No one was supposed to eat from the new crop until the wave sheaf offering was made, and the wave offering wasn’t made until “the morrow after the Sabbath” (Lev. 23:11). For example, if the Israelites’ Passover week that year looked anything like the one shown on the following page, they sinned a great sin, for they would have eaten from the new crop *before* the Wave Sheaf Offering was offered to Yahweh:

ABIB

Produce Eaten
↓

Sunday		Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday		Sabbath	
11		12		13		14		15		16		17	
						PASSOVER		First High Day Sabbath					
18		19		20		21		22		23		24	
WAVE OFFERING								Last High Day Sabbath					

As the above “potential calendar” illustrates, if the Israelites ate from the new crop “on the morrow after the Passover,” presuming that Passover fell on a Wednesday that year, they disobeyed the command to not eat of the new crop until the Wave Sheaf Offering took place.

Those who believe the Wave Sheaf offering was offered on the morrow after the “High Day Sabbath” -- instead of the regular “Weekly Sabbath” -- fare no better with the above calendar. Using the same calendar dates as illustrated on the above calendar, the only thing they would change would be the date on which the Wave Sheaf Offering was offered. In other words, here is how their calendar would look:

ABIB

Produce Eaten
↓

Sunday		Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday		Sabbath	
11		12		13		14		15		16		17	
						PASSOVER		First High Day Sabbath		WAVE OFFERING			
18		19		20		21		22		23		24	
								Last High Day Sabbath					

Those who believe Pentecost may fall on any day of the week, as opposed to Sunday, do so because they believe that when Yahweh commanded the Wave Sheaf Offering to be offered on “the morrow after the Sabbath,” He was referring to the “high day Sabbath” of Abib 15. Therefore, the “morrow after the Sabbath” will always be Abib 16. However, if Joshua and his fellow Israelites ate of the produce of the land on the morrow after the Passover, we need to note that “the morrow after the Passover” will *never* occur on Abib 16! With this in mind, presuming that Abib 15 is indeed “the morrow after the Passover,” and presuming that the Wave Sheaf Offering was indeed waved on Abib 16, Joshua and his fellow Israelites clearly disobeyed Yahweh’s orders as found in Leviticus 23:14.

Is there a way to make this scenario fit in such a way so as to demonstrate that those Israelites ate the produce of the land in compliance with Yahweh’s directive? Yes, there is, and as it turns out this method of reckoning requires that the Wave Sheaf Offering be offered on the morrow after the *weekly Sabbath!*

Shown below is another version of a “potential calendar,” which, as it turns out, is the *only possible scenario* that keeps Joshua and the Israelites in compliance with Yahweh’s commandment in Leviticus 23:14:

ABIB						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sabbath
9	9	10	11	12	13	14
Produce Eaten ↓						PASSOVER
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
First High Day WAVE OFFERING Sabbath						Last High Day Sabbath

The day of the week on which Passover occurs is subject to change from year to year. As illustrated by the calendar above, it is suggested that Passover fell on the weekly Sabbath during the year in which Joshua and the Israelites entered into the Promised Land. This being the case, if Yahweh intended the Wave Sheaf Offering to be offered on “the morrow after the weekly Sabbath,” then it would have been offered on Abib 15 that year. Thus, the Wave Sheaf Offering would have been offered both on “the morrow after the Sabbath” *and* on “the morrow after the Passover” that year, and the enigma is apparently resolved by those who believe the count to Pentecost should be reckoned from the morrow after the regular weekly Sabbath that falls within the Passover week.

As can be expected, a flurry of protests to the above scenario are forthcoming from the “opposing camp” – from those who believe the count to Pentecost should begin on the morrow after the *high day Sabbath* that occurs during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Here is how one such individual resolves the problem:

Now notice carefully! God had commanded them to NEVER eat of the harvest of the land until AFTER the wave sheaf offering, on the ‘morrow after the Sabbath’ (Lev. 23:10-11,14). This was a statute FOR EVER (verse 14).

But notice! When they entered the Promised Land, they ate of the harvest ‘ON THE MORROW AFTER THE PASSOVER!’ In other words, the morrow after the First Day of Unleavened Bread! Remember, Passover was celebrated at the END of the 14th of Nisan, at evening, and was actually eaten on the 15th day of Nisan, after sunset. Thus it led right into the First Day of Unleavened Bread (see Exodus 12:13-16). This is why there were ‘seven’ days of unleavened bread, including Passover, and not ‘eight’ days.

Therefore, as this mysterious verse in Joshua 5 shows, it was the ‘MORROW AFTER THE PASSOVER’ -- or the day after the First Holy Day of Unleavened Bread -- when the Israelites ate of the "old corn of the land, unleavened cakes, and parched corn IN THE SELFSAME DAY" (Joshua 5:11). This verse indicates that they ate of the harvest of the land that year, after wandering 40 years in the wilderness and eating manna, on NISAN 16 -- the day of the wave sheaf offering, the day after the first holy day of Unleavened Bread! What could be clearer?

Clearly, then, the ‘morrow after the Sabbath’ of Leviticus 23:11 and the ‘morrow after the Passover’ of Joshua 5:11 are the SAME DAY -- the day after the ANNUAL SABBATH -- NOT THE WEEKLY SABBATH! This verse PROVES it beyond doubt!¹³

The author of the above commentary emphatically explains his position, dogmatically asserting that “morrow after the Passover” means “morrow after the first day of Unleavened Bread.” Noticeably lacking from this assertion is a quote from Scripture wherein the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is ever termed “the Passover.” Instead, the Torah consistently places “the Passover” on Abib 14. While we share the above author’s belief that the Passover lambs were killed in the late afternoon hours of Abib 14, and that the actual Passover (passing over) took place later that night, after the beginning of Abib 15, this is beside the point. The Torah clearly specifies that the 14th day of the first month (Abib) is the Passover, and the following day is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as we have already read from Leviticus 23:5-6:

⁵In the fourteenth *day* of the first month at even *is* Yahweh’s passover.

⁶And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the feast of unleavened bread unto Yahweh: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.

Yahweh’s Torah establishes a clear line of demarcation between the Passover and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For us to label the fifteenth day of Abib “the Passover” is to ignore the Scriptural instruction that the Passover is on the *fourteenth* day of Abib. Although it is true that by the time of the Messiah’s birth the Feast of Unleavened Bread became known as “the Passover” (*cf.* Luke 22:1), there is nothing in the more ancient writings substantiating such an understanding.

Furthermore, teaching others that Abib 15 is the Passover begs the question of what we are to call Abib 14. Shall we label them *both* “the Passover”?

Thus far we believe we have presented a fairly accurate case in favor of believing that the Wave Sheaf Offering was made on the morrow after the *weekly Sabbath*, with Pentecost subsequently falling on a Sunday each year. Therefore, we hope it is obvious that we have great respect for the logic of anyone choosing to count to Pentecost from that day. Before we close the lid on this case, however, we believe there are several “loose ends” that are either not addressed or are not *properly* addressed by the “Sunday Pentecost camp.” It is time to give these points the attention they deserve.

THINGS WE ARE NOT TOLD

The “Sunday Only Pentecost Camp” does an outstanding job of outlining why they begin their count on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that falls during or immediately before the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They cite several valid texts of Scripture supporting their position, culminating with the example from the book of Joshua that seems to seal the matter in their favor. However, over the years June and I have received scores of literature from various groups outlining the very evidence we have already provided ... yet for some reason they frequently leave out other pertinent information. In other words, they don’t cover all the bases as they should. Then, after giving us what is often a very biased “take” on

¹³ Dankenbring, William F., "How Do You ‘Count’ Pentecost?", Triumph Prophetic Ministries (Church of God), page 7; although this article is not dated, we accessed it online in 2002 at http://triumphpro.com/how_do_you_count_pentecost.htm. Curiously, this article has since been modified and relocated to the following URL: <http://triumphpro.com/pen-count.htm>. The most noticeable modification involves the author’s current belief that Yeshua was crucified on a Thursday.

how they believe we should count to Pentecost, they often depict those of opposing views as being mildly confused at best, and hopelessly lost at worst. As we've already mentioned, one individual has already gone so far as to tell me that I cannot have Yahweh's Spirit working in me since, in his opinion, I don't count to Pentecost correctly! It is to those who believe this way and treat others in this manner that we are mainly addressing this study. We believe the best way to properly present the "other view" with regard to counting to Pentecost is to simply point out information that, for whatever reason, is not addressed in the literature we are accustomed to receiving from the various individuals and groups. With that in mind, we are devoting the rest of this study to addressing those "things we are not generally told" by those who teach that we should count to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. We do not intend for the rest of this study to detract from what we have already written, yet we hope it will serve to at least balance things out.

6. “My Reference is More Reliable Than Your Reference!”

As mentioned in chapter one, the Pentecost Controversy has raged for millennia. The Sadducees (also referred to as the Boethusians) argued for a “Sunday Only” Pentecost, whereas the Pharisees pushed for a “Whichever Day It Falls On” Pentecost. The question naturally arises, “Which sect of the Jews had the prevailing view?” Or, to put it another way, “Which sect was in charge?”

This question arises mainly because there is no record in the “New Testament” of there being a controversy pertaining to how to count to Pentecost. Very little is written about this feast day in the New Testament, and what little is written evades the issue of how they began their count. The absence of controversy lends support to the belief that there wasn’t one, at least not during that particular time frame. In other words, whichever view was dominant had enough administrative authority to prevent its being a point of contention during the days of Yeshua’s ministry. In fact, since Yeshua Himself is not recorded as having criticized the method routinely employed in counting to Pentecost, this can logically be interpreted as His silent approval for whichever method was used. The question becomes, then, “WHICH method was used?”

In order to answer that question, many simply choose to answer the earlier question; namely, “Which sect of the Jews was in charge?” If the Pharisees were in charge, then apparently everyone celebrated Pentecost on “Whichever Day It Falls On.” If the Sadducees were in charge, then apparently everyone celebrated it on “Sunday Only.”

It should come as no surprise that those who want to believe Pentecost should always be on a Sunday are able to come up with evidence supporting the *Sadducees* as having been in charge. And of course those who push the other view are able to produce evidence supporting the *Pharisees* as having been in charge. Is it possible to know which view is correct?

Well, let’s briefly examine this perspective of the argument by quoting from some of the literature we have received on this subject. The following information is found in a tract written by an individual promoting a “Sunday Only” Pentecost:

The following information is from *The New Bible Dictionary*, by J.D. Douglas, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1964; ‘Pentecost,’ p. 964:

‘The Sadducees celebrated [Pentecost] on the 50th day (*inclusive reckoning*) from the first Sunday after Passover (*taking the ‘Sabbath’ of Leviticus 23:15 to be the weekly Sabbath*); their reckoning regulated the public observance so long as the temple stood The Pharisees, however, interpreted the ‘Sabbath’ of Leviticus 23:15 as the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* (*cf. Lev. 23:7*), and their reckoning BECAME normative in Judaism AFTER A.D. 70, so in the Jewish calendar Pentecost now falls on various days of the week’ (*emphasis added*).

“As long as the temple stood, the public worship was regulated by the Sadducees, who counted from the day after the weekly Sabbath during the Passover or *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Yeshua and the Apostles participated in the normative public worship. It was only later, after 70 C.E., that the Pharisees were able to change the time for the observance of Pentecost.

“This, of course, was after the time of the Apostle Paul, who was executed about 67 C.E., three years before the temple fell. Paul evidently observed Pentecost in the normative public worship as did most, if not all, of the Jews of his day; that is, counting from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. That there was at that time a unity of observance among both the believing and unbelieving Jews is evident from reading the account in Acts chapter 2.¹⁴

¹⁴ From the tract “How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day,” p. 7.

The author of the tract quoted above responsibly cites a credible reference in promoting his view that the Sadducees were in charge of regulating public worship, which in turn would indicate that they dictated “how” to count to Pentecost ... at least until the year 70 CE. Nevertheless, the author does not mention the fact that other references tell us exactly the *opposite* story ... that it was the *Pharisees* who presided over “how” to count to Pentecost. Let’s examine the information on this subject as found in *The Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary*:

Thus the Sadducees were the party of those with political power, those allied with the Herodian and Roman rulers, but they were not a group with influence among the people themselves. The views of the Pharisees prevailed among the common people, so that even though the two groups differed with regard to items in the laws of purity and details of temple procedure during the feasts, the Sadducean priests were compelled to operate according to the Pharisees’ views.¹⁵

As we can see, according to *this* credible reference, it was the *Pharisees* who were in control, not the Sadducees.

Lawrence H. Schiffman¹⁶ wrote an article entitled “New Light on the Pharisees – Insights from the Dead Sea Scrolls,” which appeared in the June 1992 issue of *Bible Review*. Here is an excerpt:

With new evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls it is now possible to demonstrate that for much of the Hasmonean period Pharisaic views were indeed dominant in the Jerusalem Temple. In short, the reports of the religious laws, or *halakhah*, attributed to the Pharisees in later talmudic texts are basically accurate. Moreover, we can now prove that some of the teachings attributed to rabbinic sages who lived after the Roman destruction of the Temple actually go back to earlier, pre-destruction, Pharisaic traditions.¹⁷

This is yet another unbiased scholarly testimony candidly asserting that it was the *Pharisees* who dictated how things were done, not the Sadducees. So which sect of the Jews was dominant during the period of the second Temple? Well, it seems to depend upon which “credible reference” one chooses to believe! My own *personal* observation has been that those who count to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath tend to reject the scholarship of those who conclude that the *Pharisees* were in control of the Temple services, and those who count to Pentecost from the morrow after the “high day” Sabbath often reject the scholarship of those who conclude that the *Sadducees* were in control.

We’re certainly not trying to take away from the scholarship of references whose authors have claimed historical support for the “Sunday Only Position.” As we have already shown, references such as the *New Bible Dictionary* claim that until the year 70 CE, all Jews observed a “Sunday Only Pentecost.” If we disagree with this claim, shall we proceed to discredit the author? Or should we investigate to see *which* reference offers the most accurate information?

Instead of taking the “My reference is more reliable than *your* reference” approach, we suggest examining *all* the evidence in as unbiased a manner as possible. Instead of trying to prove the other guy

¹⁵ *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, article “Sadducees,” published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987, p. 902.

¹⁶ Lawrence H. Schiffman is a professor of Hebrew and Judaism Studies at New York University, New York City. He authored the book *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Doubleday, 1995), which the Australian Broadcasting Corporation hails “the leading overview of contemporary research into the Scrolls.” He has also co-edited *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ From “New Light on the Pharisees – Insights from the Dead Sea Scrolls,” by Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Bible Review*, Volume VIII, Number 3, June 1992, p. 31.

wrong or discrediting his references, our goal should be to accurately determine exactly how Yahweh intends for His people to count to Pentecost based upon a complete examination of all facts, both historical *and* Scriptural.

We know some folks have belittled that fact that June and I give such a high regard to historical evidence. Some people have said things like, “Well, I go by Scripture and Scripture alone!” This sounds like such a noble and pious position to take, yet if we really and truly ponder such a response, we know that such an individual is *really* saying, “Well, I go by my *interpretation* of Scripture and my *interpretation* of Scripture alone!”

On the surface it seems quite virtuous to claim to go by Scripture and Scripture alone, but hopefully we are all aware of a myriad of downright weird beliefs taught by people making the claim to go by “Scripture and Scripture alone.” Again, what they *really* go by is their interpretation of Scripture alone. This is why we need to balance our interpretation of Scripture with *historical* evidence of how the ancients interpreted Scripture and practiced their faith.

7. The Testimony of Josephus

Many references upholding the Pharisees as being dominant derive their information from the writings of Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, who plainly stated that the Jews' count to Pentecost began on the sixteenth of Abib. Here is what Josephus wrote:

The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month, and continues seven days, wherein they feed on unleavened bread; on every one of which days two bulls are killed, and one ram, and seven lambs. Now these lambs are entirely burnt, besides the kid of the goats which is added to all the rest, for sins; for it is intended as a feast for the priest on every one of those days. But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them. And while they suppose it proper to honor God, from whom they obtain this plentiful provision, in the first place, they offer the first-fruits of their barley, and that in the manner following: They take a handful of the ears, and dry them, then beat them small, and purge the barley from the bran; they then bring one tenth deal to the altar, to God; and, casting one handful of it upon the fire, they leave the rest for the use of the priest. And after this it is that they may publicly or privately reap their harvest. They also at this participation of the first-fruits of the earth, sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt-offering to God.

6. When a week of weeks has passed over after this sacrifice, (which weeks contain forty and nine days), on the fiftieth day, which is Pentecost, but is called by the Hebrews *Asartha*, which signifies Pentecost, they bring to God a loaf, made of wheat flour, of two tenth deals, with leaven; and for sacrifices they bring two lambs; and when they have only presented them to God, they are made ready for supper for the priests; nor is it permitted to leave any thing of them till the day following.¹⁸

Notice that Josephus describes the offerings that took place on the “sixteenth day of the month,” then later he writes that Pentecost falls fifty days later. This is how Josephus matter-of-factly describes the way his people counted to Pentecost. What is helpful to consider here is the fact that Josephus was writing to a non-Jewish, Roman audience. In other words, he was not writing in such a way so as to persuade anyone to observe Pentecost *his way* – he had no ax to grind, he was simply describing how it was done. Josephus makes no mention of there ever having *been* a Pentecost controversy. He went into extensive detail with regard to the various quirks and idiosyncrasies of other sects, such as the Sadducees and the Essenes¹⁹, yet failed to describe the apparent controversy between the Pharisees and the Sadducees pertaining to the count to Pentecost. Josephus had no reason (or “agenda”) to persuade his Roman reading audience that the Pharisees’ count to Pentecost was “more Scriptural” than the Sadducees’ method. In effect, he was simply telling them how it was done.

We have found that many who disagree with Josephus do their best to paint a very negative picture of his character. We have heard Josephus labeled everything from a liar to a traitor. Please keep in mind that whenever a biased person rejects the testimony of an author, often times his first reaction is to attack the author’s character and/or credibility. This is what we term *selective scholarship*. When we use selective scholarship, the author’s credibility is largely determined by whether or not he agrees with our position. Certainly, we all need to be careful when researching any topic, for it is true that there are some pretty wild, far-out teachings out there. For example, we would hope that no one will attach any credibility to Marshall Applewhite, the leader of the mass suicide group in California, who authored the book *Heaven’s Gate*. No serious truth seeker would dare quote from his writings, at least not in an

¹⁸ From *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, Vol. II, translated by William Whiston, A.M., *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book III, 5, 6.

¹⁹ For example, in Wars, Book II, chapter viii, sections 2-14, as well as Antiquities, Book XVIII, chapter i, sections 2-6, are devoted to describing the various beliefs and particular characteristics of the Essenes, Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Pentecost controversy, presuming there was one, is not mentioned.

attempt to quote from a respected, trustworthy source. Yet, if we *reject* everything, we gain nothing. If we *accept* everything, we have total confusion. I don't know if the cult leader Jim Jones authored any books or not, but if he did, it is no wonder that you never hear any of his writings being quoted in order to prove a point. Any testimony coming from either Jim Jones or Marshall Applewhite must be considered suspect, which is the opposite of "credible." The key, then, is *balance*. We need to be very careful about slamming the credibility of an author simply because he or she doesn't share our view on a matter. The writings of Josephus are a prime example of what we mean by this word of caution.

We're not about to label Josephus as having been 100% accurate on everything he cited in his works. However, we don't believe we know of *any* historian who got the facts exactly right. One man I know called Josephus a liar because he "apparently" manipulated some Bible stories, adding information to the storyline that isn't found in the Scriptural account. Before we accuse Josephus of being a liar, though, we believe it is only fair that we consider the likelihood that when he described certain Biblical events, he not only drew from his knowledge of what he had read from Scripture, but also from exaggerated stories that had been passed down to him from his ancestors. We believe Josephus' accusers would be more sympathetic if they would consider the fact that Josephus could not have had the luxury of having a Bible at his disposal for quick and easy reference as we do today. Many of his accounts were doubtlessly exaggerated, but let's face it: He had no reason to lie to the Romans with regard to how his people counted to Pentecost.

Was Josephus a traitor? Many of those who don't appreciate the way he described the count to Pentecost believe so! Of course, even if he *were* a traitor, that would certainly not have given him the impetus to lie to the Romans with regard to how his people, the Jews, counted to Pentecost. In fact, when I try putting myself in Josephus' shoes, I rather imagine I would be fearful of what might happen if someone caught me fibbing about such a thing. What if some Roman read my account of how to count to Pentecost, and then approached the Roman emperor stating, "Hey, this Josephus guy lied about how to count to Pentecost! I was in Jerusalem a few years ago, and it so happened it was during their 'Feast of Unleavened Bread.' Towards the end of their feast, on the nineteenth day of the month, on a *Sunday*, they had this ceremony called 'the Wave Sheaf offering,' and I was told that they begin counting to Pentecost on *that* day, not the sixteenth day as written by Josephus! He clearly *lied* in his book, Mr. Emperor!" Again, Josephus had no motivation for lying with regard to how to count to Pentecost.

On the subject of Josephus' reputation, it is worth noting that many scholars hold him in high regard. Note the commentary offered by Moti Aviam, District Archaeologist for Western Galilee, Israel Antiquities Authority:

After many years of reading and excavating, I can't look at him as a traitor. Josephus went to Yodefat to win a war. He fortified the Galilee and believed that God would be with them—they would win the war. When it looked like a loss was inevitable, he thought about surrender but there was no way back. I think the story of the cave never happened, but I think he was trying to convince the others not to commit suicide. Three years later in Jerusalem, standing with Titus, he tried to convince the Jews to stop fighting and thereby not lose the Temple. He wanted to prevent destruction of the Temple. His goals were always very pragmatic.²⁰

Like it or not, Josephus filled in many historical gaps. According to the *Encyclopedia International*, "But for his writings, the history of the Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman period (c. 333 B.C.- c. 100 A.D.) would be virtually unknown."²¹ Magen Broshi of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, wrote an article entitled

²⁰ From PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) Web site *PBS Online*, presentation "Echoes from the Ancients," p. 15. Web address: <http://www.pbs.org/echoes/tghst.html>.

²¹ From *Encyclopedia International*, Vol. 10, Grolier Incorporated, New York, 1972, p. 59.

“The Credibility of Josephus,” which first appeared in *Journal of Jewish Studies: Essays in Honor of Yigael Yadin*, 1982, by the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies. In his concluding paragraph, Broshi had this to say:

This duality of sharp criticism alongside fulsome appreciation has consistently accompanied the scholarly treatment of Josephus’ works. It has not been our intention here to prove that he is always exact or correct in every statement, but to show that his data are in many instances accurate, and that they stem from reliable sources to which he had access from the very beginning of his literary career.²²

Broshi doesn’t heap words of praise on the writings of Josephus, yet he realistically acknowledges that Josephus, in spite of his faults, produced a reasonably accurate account of events as he saw them, or as those events were handed down to him.

A gentleman who attempted to dissuade us from attaching any level of credence in Josephus’ writings gave us a photocopy of the conclusion to a book entitled *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaea in the First Century CE* by James S. McLaren. McLaren came right out and charged Josephus of being biased in his writings, and our friend kindly pointed out that this proves that we cannot trust anything that Josephus wrote. However, the man who gave us the photocopy did not choose to comment on the following portion of McLaren’s conclusion. Let’s read what else McLaren had to say about Josephus:

Where historians interested in recent events may be burdened by a great abundance of source material, those concerned with the ancient world often lament the paucity [scarcity] of sources they have at their disposal. More often than not ancient historians are left guessing, trying to piece together a picture when many of the pieces in the puzzle are missing. The general paucity of material makes the occasional availability of major narrative texts a ‘gold-mine.’ Scholars flock to the texts in relief that, at last, there is a source which provides sufficient data to focus on a period in some detail.

Josephus is one such gold-mine. For scholars interested in Roman, Jewish and early Christian history the texts of Josephus provide a substantial body of information. Although Josephus is not the only source for historical inquiry into the late second temple period in Judaea, he stands out. It is only Josephus who provides a narrative of events that covers the entire period. Moreover, he has the added bonus of being a contemporary of the events which mark the end of the period. In fact, in Josephus the historian has a kindred soul. Just as Josephus was interested in preserving information and providing understanding, so too is the historian who reads his texts.²³

We could spend all our time debating the credibility of Josephus, but the fact remains that there are top scholars who do voice respect and appreciation for his writings. Moreover, those who attempt to malign Josephus’ character and credibility, unless we haven’t been paying attention, have failed to produce the writings of an alternate historian refuting Josephus’ testimony as to how the Jews of his day counted to Pentecost. Finally, as we expressed earlier, Josephus had no reason ... no ulterior motive, to lie about how his people counted to Pentecost.

²² This article can be read its entirety at the following Web address: <http://www.centuryone.com/josephus.html>.

²³ From *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaea in the First Century CE*, by James S. McLaren, Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, pp. 289-290.

8. What Josephus Had to Say About the Sadducees and Pharisees

We believe that we have established that there is no good reason for anyone to outright reject the writings of Josephus; in fact, there is good reason to examine what he had to say in order for us to better grasp Jewish practice and belief in the first century. What, then, did Josephus have to say about who controlled the Temple rituals? Well, in reading his works, we find that at one point in time the Sadducees were indeed in complete charge. This was nearly a century prior to the birth of the Messiah. To understand the time frame during which Josephus records the Sadducees as having been in control of the Temple services, we have to know a little about the history of the Jewish nation after the time of the Maccabees. It was because of the actions of Judas (the “Maccabee”) and his band of Jewish faithful that Antiochus Epiphanes and his Syrian army were defeated, the Temple was cleansed from the swine that had been sacrificed there, and *Hanukkah* was subsequently incorporated as a Jewish national festival. This occurred in the year 165 BCE, and beginning with Judas the “Maccabee,” a dynasty known as the *Hasmonean Dynasty*²⁴ was established. The Hasmoneans began ruling as high priests, and in some instances, as kings as well. Judas was succeeded by his son Jonathan, who was in turn succeeded by Judas’ brother Simon. In 135 BCE, Simon was succeeded by John Hyrcanus I. It was during the reign of John Hyrcanus I that the two sects, the Sadducees and the Pharisees officially emerged, and it was during this time that the Sadducees were given control of the Temple services.²⁵

During the reign of John Hyrcanus’ son, Alexander Jannaeus, the Sadducees were still in charge of the Temple rituals. In fact, Alexander Jannaeus had over 6,000 Pharisees executed as a result of their protest of how he conducted the sacrifice at the Feast of Tabernacles.²⁶ However, on his deathbed, Jannaeus counseled his wife, Alexandra Salome, to make peace with the Pharisees and to give them authority. Josephus provides the account of Alexander Jannaeus acceding to the Pharisees’ authority in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XIII:

After this, king Alexander, although he fell into a distemper by hard drinking, and had a quartan ague, which held him three years, yet would not leave off going out with his army, till he was quite spent with the labors he had undergone, and died in the bounds of Ragaba, a fortress beyond Jordan. But when his queen saw that he was ready to die, and had no longer any hopes of surviving, she came to him weeping and lamenting, and bewailed herself and her sons on the desolate condition they should be left in; and said to him, "To whom dost thou thus leave me and my children, who are destitute of all other supports, and this when thou knowest how much ill-will thy nation bears thee?" But he gave her the following advice: That she need but follow what he would suggest to her, in order to retain the kingdom securely, with her children: that she should conceal his death from the soldiers till she should have taken that place; after this she should go in triumph, as upon a victory, to Jerusalem, and put some of her authority into the hands of the Pharisees; for that they would commend her for the honor she had done them, and would reconcile the nation to her for he told her they had great authority among the Jews, both to do hurt to such as they hated, and to bring advantages to those to whom they were friendly disposed; for that they are then believed best of all by the multitude when they speak any severe thing against others, though it be only out of envy at them. And he said that it was by their means that he had incurred the displeasure of the nation, whom indeed he had injured.

²⁴ According to Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews*, XII, vi., 1, the term “Hasmonean” is derived from Judas “the Maccabee’s” great-grandfather, Asamoneus.

²⁵ Cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, x., 5-6, where we read that John Hyrcanus left the party of the Pharisees to become a Sadducee, whereupon he abolished “the decrees they [the Pharisees] had imposed on the people, and punish(ed) those that observed them.”

²⁶ Cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, xiii., 6.

"Do thou, therefore," said he, "when thou art come to Jerusalem, send for the leading men among them, and show them my body, and with great appearance of sincerity, give them leave to use it as they themselves please, whether they will dishonor the dead body by refusing it burial, as having severely suffered by my means, or whether in their anger they will offer any other injury to that body. Promise them also that thou wilt do nothing without them in the affairs of the kingdom. If thou dost but say this to them, I shall have the honor of a more glorious funeral from them than thou couldst have made for me; and when it is in their power to abuse my dead body, they will do it no injury at all, and thou wilt rule in safety." So when he had given his wife this advice, he died, after he had reigned twenty-seven years, and lived fifty years within one.²⁷

Alexandra Salome thus succeeded her husband and became queen of the Jewish nation. In compliance with her husband's dying request, she granted authority to the Pharisees. Notice how Josephus describes the turn of events:

So she made Hyrcanus high-priest because he was the elder, but much more because he cared not to meddle with politics, and permitted the Pharisees to do every thing; to whom also she ordered the multitude to be obedient. She also restored again those practices which the Pharisees had introduced, according to the traditions of their forefathers, and which her father-in-law, Hyrcanus, had abrogated. So she had indeed the name of the Regent; but the Pharisees had the authority; for it was they who restored such as had been banished, and set such as were prisoners at liberty, and to say all at once, they differed in nothing from lords.²⁸

Notice that Salome "restored" the practices previously introduced by the Pharisees. In order to be "restored," a custom must have been practiced in earlier times. We aren't told what those practices were, or whether or not they included the method the Pharisees employed in counting to Pentecost. However, it is certain that if it is true that the Sadducees had instituted the count to Pentecost as beginning on the "morrow after the weekly Sabbath" during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, then the Pharisees changed it to "restore" it to beginning on the morrow after the first day of the festival (Abib 16). There is no question that both the Sadducees *and* the Pharisees also practiced "traditions" that defy Scriptural teachings, which we will deal with a little later. Our present concern, though, is with the custom of when the Pharisees began the count to Pentecost, and when their method of reckoning became normative among Judaism.

One very well respected author who had a high regard for the writings of Josephus was a 19th century author named Alfred Edersheim. Edersheim published a renowned work entitled *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* in 1883. This author wrote from a Messianic perspective, but he was determined to add the element of the Messiah's Jewishness to his writings, adding a special element that helps to open our eyes to what the world was really like during those days. Notice what Edersheim had to say about what happened when the Pharisees regained control of the Temple rituals during the days of Queen Salome:

Queen Salome had appointed her eldest son, Hyrcanus II, a weak prince, to the Poltificate. But, as *Josephus* puts it (Ant. xiii. 16. 2), although Salome had the title, the Pharisees held the real rule of the country, and they administered it with the harshness, insolence, and recklessness of a fanatical religious party which suddenly obtains unlimited power. ... So sweeping and thorough was the change wrought, that the Sadducees never recovered the blow, and whatever

²⁷ Cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, xv., 5.

²⁸ From *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, xvi., 2.

they might teach, yet those in office were obligated in all time coming to conform to Pharisaic practice (*Jos. Ant.* xviii. 1.4; *Tos Yoma* i.8).²⁹

Other scholars agree with Edersheim's assessment that it was during this time frame that the Pharisees were given control over affairs. Notice the commentary from Emil Schürer, in his book *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*:

For six years Jannaeus with his mercenaries was at war with the Jews led by the Pharisees. All that he finally obtained was the outward intimidation, but not the real subjection, of his adversaries. For with their emphasis on religious interests, the Pharisees have the mass of the people on their side. Thus it is not surprising that Alexandra, for the sake of peace with the people, and also because of a personal preference for the Pharisees, handed over power to them. The victory was now complete; the whole conduct of internal affairs was in their hands. All the Pharisaic decrees abolished by John Hyrcanus were reintroduced; the Pharisees largely dominated Jewish public life.³⁰

Although the Pharisees had been given the authority, this did not mean that they had been given the office of high priest, as this role still belonged to the Sadducees. However, as Josephus reveals, this office was largely more of a "figurehead," as the actual authority belonged to the Pharisees:

But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this; That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of any thing besides what the law enjoins them; for they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent; but this doctrine is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity; but they are able to do almost nothing of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them.³¹

Emil Shürer, in his book *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, adds his commentary regarding the "role reversal" that took place:

During the ages that followed, amid all the changes of government, under the Romans and the Herodians, the Pharisees maintained their leadership in spiritual matters, especially in urban circles. It is true that the Sadducean High Priests stood at the head of Sanhedrin. But in fact it was the Pharisees, and not the Sadducees, who made the greatest impact on the ordinary people, as Josephus states again and again. The Pharisees had the masses for their allies, the women being especially devoted to them. They held the greatest authority over the congregations, so that everything to do with worship, prayer, and sacrifice took place according to their instructions. Their popularity is said to have been so high that they were listened to even when they criticized the king or the High Priest. They were in consequence best able to restrain the king. For the same reason, also, the Sadducees in their official functions complied with the Pharisaic requirements because otherwise the people would not have tolerated them.³²

Since the Pharisees were in control of the "official functions," does this include the method used in counting to Pentecost? According to Alfred Edersheim, the answer to that question is, "Yes":

²⁹ From *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, by Alfred Edersheim, Vol. 2, Appendix IV, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1953, originally published in 1883.

³⁰ From *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, by Emil Schürer, Vol. II, T. & T. Clark LTD, Edinburgh, 1979, originally published in 1885, pp. 401-402.

³¹ From *Antiquities of the Jews* xviii. I. 4.

³² From *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, by Emil Schürer, Vol. II, T. & T. Clark LTD, Edinburgh, 1979, originally published in 1885, p. 402.

The Pharisees held, that the time between Easter [sic] and Pentecost should be counted from the second day of the feast; the Sadducees insisted that it should commence with the literal 'Sabbath' after the festive day. But, despite argument, the Sadducees had to join when the solemn procession went on the afternoon of the feast to cut down the 'feast sheaf,' and to reckon Pentecost as did their opponents.³³

Please bear in mind that Edersheim wrote the above from a purely objective vantage point. He was the son of Jewish parents, but he was converted to Christianity at an early age, becoming a Presbyterian minister and, later, an Episcopalian minister in England. The matter of how Judaism counted to Pentecost during the days of the Messiah would have been of little, if any, interest to him personally. He clearly had "no ax to grind," and based upon the historical data available to him, Edersheim concluded that Pentecost was counted in accordance with the reckoning of the Pharisees.

³³ From *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, by Alfred Edersheim, Ward & Drummond, New York, 1876, pp. 240-241.

9. The Megillath Ta'anith

We have thus far demonstrated that it was during the reign of Queen Salome of the Hasmonean dynasty when the authority over such matters as the Temple rituals was removed from the Sadducees and restored to the Pharisees. The references we have consulted concede that this historical information is credible, if not completely accurate. In fact, we have not personally encountered any references that even attempt to refute this testimony from Josephus.

As we stated earlier, we have been given various forms of literature by well-intentioned individuals, in their personal attempt to persuade us that, in fact, it was the *Sadducees* who determined when to begin the count to the Feast of Weeks. Often, the literature contains quotations from scholarly resources that would ordinarily establish justification for believing that, indeed, it was the Sadducees, not the Pharisees, who made the decisions on this matter. Curiously, these otherwise credible references do not themselves cite the historical proof to back up their statements.

One instance that we find very interesting involves the well-known author and commentator F. F. Bruce. We were given a photocopy of a page from *The New International Commentary of N.T.*, Book of Acts, by F. F. Bruce, published by Eerdmans Publishing Co. In his commentary on Acts 2:1, Bruce writes the following:

The day of Pentecost was so called because it was celebrated on the fiftieth (Gk. *Pentekostos*)² day after the presentation of the first harvested sheaf of the barley harvest, *i.e.* the fiftieth day from the first Sunday³ after Passover (*cf.* Lev. 23:15f.).

Please note that in F. F. Bruce's commentary above, he footnoted the word "Sunday." Shown below is that footnote in its entirety:

³ This was the reckoning of the Sadducean party in the first century A.D. In the phrase 'the morrow after the sabbath' (Lev. 23:15) they interpreted the sabbath as the weekly sabbath. While the temple stood, their interpretation would be normative for the public celebration of the festival; Christian tradition is therefore right in fixing the anniversary of the descent of the Spirit on a Sunday. (The 'fifty days' of Lev. 23:15 are to be reckoned inclusively.) The Pharisees, however, interpreted the 'sabbath' of Lev. 23:15 as the festival day of unleavened bread itself (on which, according to Lev. 23:7, no servile work was to be done); in that case Pentecost would always fall on the same day of the month (an important matter in the eyes of those to whom it marked the anniversary of the law-giving), but not on the same day of the week. The Pharisees could appeal to Josh. 5:11 ('the morrow after the passover'), read in the light of Lev. 23:10-14. It was the Pharisaic reckoning that became normative in Judaism after A.D. 70; thus in A.D. 1953 the first day of unleavened bread falls on Tuesday, March 31 (Nisan 15, 5713), and the first day of the feast of weeks falls on Wednesday, May 20 (Siwan 6, 5713), on the fiftieth day by inclusive reckoning from the second day of unleavened bread. *Cf.* Mishnah *Menachoth* x. 3; Tosefta *Menachoth* x. 23.528; TB *Menachoth* 65a; see also L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* (Philadelphia, 1946), pp. 115 ff.

We thus learn that F. F. Bruce's apparent conclusion is that the Pharisees, from their inception until the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, were constrained to count to Pentecost in the manner prescribed by the Sadducees. Bruce cites no historical references supporting his claim. In fact, the historical references he offers are from the Talmud, a source which matter-of-factly expresses agreement with the Pharisees' method.

What makes Bruce's commentary so interesting is the fact that we own another of his works entitled *The International Bible Commentary*, of which he was the General Editor. Notice the information found in *this* commentary edited by F. F. Bruce:

According to the more usual method of reckoning First Fruits always fell on Nisan 16; this was the day of our Lord's resurrection and the significance of the date was evident to Paul as he wrote about His being raised from the dead as 'the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.' (I C. 15:20-23).³⁴

While we're not about to label F. F. Bruce as "confused," it is nevertheless interesting that on the one hand he mentions that, until the destruction of the Temple, the Wave Sheaf Offering always took place on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. On the other hand, he states that the "method of reckoning First Fruits always fell on Nisan 16," which, as we hope we all recognize, can fall on *any day* of the week! One has to wonder which method he *really* believes was employed!

We are definitely left with the impression, based on the resources mentioned by Bruce, that Edersheim conducted a much more in-depth investigation into this issue. We are left to wonder why F. F. Bruce ignores the testimony of Josephus in offering his conclusion(s).

Josephus' testimony that the Pharisees' power was restored to them during the reign of Queen Salome brings to mind yet another Jewish document that we have recently been exposed to. A very scholarly and well-respected man who supports the validity of the Sadducean method of counting to Pentecost produced an English translation of a very ancient Jewish document entitled *Megillath Ta'anith* ("Roll of Fasts"). This document was written to advise Jews when to fast and when *not* to fast. One significant characteristic of the *Megillath Ta'anith* involves its listing of certain days marking the victories of the Pharisees over the Sadducees in their disputations. Of particular interest to our present study is a portion mentioning the "reestablishment" of the Feast of Weeks, an apparent reference to the Pharisees' victory regarding the manner in which the count to Pentecost is reckoned. For those interested in obtaining a copy of the *Megillath Ta'anith*, it can be found in Volume 2 of Edersheim's book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Of particular interest is the very first portion of that document:

These are the days on which it is not lawful to fast, and during some of them mourning must also be intermitted.

I. NISAN. 1. From the 1st day of the month Nisan, and to the 8th of it, it was settled about the daily sacrifice (that it should be paid out of the Temple-treasury), mourning is prohibited. 2. And from the 8th to the end of the Feast (the 27th) the Feast of Weeks was re-established, mourning is interdicted.³⁵

Upon introducing us to the above text, our friend explained that this "proves" the Jews didn't begin reckoning the count to Pentecost from Abib 16 until the destruction of the Temple. Since this is the same friend who labeled Josephus a "liar," I realized it probably wouldn't do me any good to explain that, according to Josephus, Pharasaic power to "re-establish" the Feast of Weeks was established during the reign of Queen Salome, long *before* the destruction of the Temple!

What is even more intriguing is the fact that our friend offered us photocopies from various resources to "prove" that the *Megillath Ta'anith* refers to the time period following the destruction of the Temple.

³⁴ From *The International Bible Commentary*, F. F. Bruce, General Editor, Marshall Pickering/Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986, p. 208.

³⁵ From *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 2, by Alfred Edersheim, Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1959, p.698.

Well, none of the photocopied references he offered us even *hinted* that the *Megillath Ta'anith* was referring to the post-70 CE time frame. As a matter of fact, *one* of the photocopies he provided ***expresses support for the time frame that we believe was referenced by the author of Megillath Ta'anith!*** We have included a scanned copy of that page with this study for your review (see the following page). The photocopy is taken from *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, and here is what it has to say, both about when the *Megillath Ta'anith* was written ***and*** the time frame that its author was referencing:

MEGILLAT TA'ANIT (Fast Scroll). Ancient Aramaic text that with extreme brevity lists the days on which fasting is not permitted, since on these days joyful historical events took place. It follows the CALENDAR beginning with Nisan and ending with Adar. The Talmud ascribes the work to Hananiah ben Hezekiah ben Goren, who lived in the first part of the first century. Some scholars date its composition to the early stages of the war against Rome; others view it as having been composed at the time of the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132 CE). In either event, its purpose seems to have been to inspire Jewish soldiers in their struggle by holding up to them the example of Jewish victories over the Seleucids in the period of the HASMONEANS. Of the historic events recorded, 33 fall in the Maccabean period and only one in the Roman period — namely, the cancellation of the decree by Gaius Caligula ordering the Jews to worship the emperor. There is a commentary on the work written in tannaitic and amoraic times. This interprets most of the days recorded in the scroll as marking the victories of the PHARISEES over the SADDUCEES in their halakhic disputes. In the course of time, the significance of the dates recorded was no longer relevant, and the days listed became indistinguishable from normal days. The Scroll is an important source for the history of the Second Temple period, since it predates the redaction of the MISHNAH.³⁶

According to the above commentary, the historic events mentioned in the *Megillath Ta'anith* reference the period of the Maccabeans, a time period occurring before the first century – before the birth of Yeshua the Messiah. In fact, only *one* historical event falls outside of that timeline, i.e., Gaius Caligula's cancellation of the decree ordering Jews to worship the emperor.³⁷ Furthermore, notice that authorship of the *Megillath Ta'anith* is attributed to a man who lived prior to the destruction of the Temple. Quite frankly, I'm not really certain why our friend included the above photocopied document with his presentation. It contradicts his conclusion while supporting the testimony of Josephus – that the Pharisees “re-established” the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) during the time of the Hasmoneans, which was well before the birth of the Messiah.

The *Megillath Ta'anith*, then cannot properly be cited as evidence supporting a post-70 CE Pharisaical triumph over the Sadducees. If anything, it offers compelling evidence that the Pharisees re-established their method of counting to Pentecost during the regency of Alexandra Salome around the year 70 BCE. If the *Megillath Ta'anith* is correct, this method continued all the way forward to the days of Yeshua the Messiah, the Apostle Paul and Josephus.

³⁶ From *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, edited by Geoffrey Wigoder, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1989, p. 473.

³⁷ According to the *Encyclopedia International*, Gaius Caligula was assassinated in 41 CE, a fact which offers compelling evidence that the author of the *Megillath Ta'anith* wrote his work prior to the destruction of the Temple, as no historical records postdating that historical event, such as the destruction of the Temple, are mentioned.

The Encyclopedia of Judaism

ed. Geoffrey Wigoder

New York: Macmillan Publishing Company 1989

MEGILLAT TA'ANIT (Fast Scroll). Ancient Aramaic text that with extreme brevity lists the days on which fasting is not permitted, since on these days joyful historical events took place. It follows the CALENDAR beginning with Nisan and ending with Adar. The Talmud ascribes the work to Hananiah ben Hezekiah ben Goren, who lived in the first part of the first century. Some scholars date its composition to the early stages of the war against Rome; others view it as having been composed at the time of the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132 CE). In either event, its purpose seems to have been to inspire Jewish soldiers in their struggle by holding up to them the example of Jewish victories over the Seleucids in the period of the HASMONEANS. Of the historic events recorded, 33 fall in the Maccabean period and only one in the Roman period — namely, the cancellation of the decree by Gaius Caligula ordering the Jews to worship the emperor. There is a commentary on the work written in tannaitic and amoraic times. This interprets most of the days recorded in the scroll as marking the victories of the PHARISEES over the SADDUCEES in their halakhic disputes. In the course of time, the significance of the dates recorded was no longer relevant, and the days listed became indistinguishable from normal days. The Scroll is an important source for the history of the Second Temple period, since it precedes the redaction of the MISHNAH.

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10. What the Messiah Had to Say About the Sadducees and Pharisees

The Hasmonean dynasty's rule came to an end when Pompey conquered Palestine in 63 BCE. Hasmonean descendants continued to remain as figureheads of the Roman government, however, and the Pharisees continued their authority over Temple rituals. This brings us to the time period of the Messiah. The question becomes, "Whose authority did the Messiah recognize — the Sadducees' or the Pharisees'?"

This question has been the driving force behind many hot debates. For me personally, it has been difficult finding truly objective individuals with whom to discuss the above question. Those who believe He recognized the authority of the Sadducees point out that the high priests were Sadducees, and since *they* were the high priests, this can only mean that the Messiah recognized *their authority* over the authority of the Pharisees. Those who believe the Messiah only recognized the authority of the Pharisees are quick to point out what He said in Matthew 23:1-2:

¹Then spake Yeshua to the multitude, and to His disciples,
²Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

Since the Messiah recognized that the "scribes and Pharisees" sat in Moses' seat (of authority), this could only mean that He *excluded* the Sadducees, according to those who believe the above verse establishes the Messiah's validation of the Pharisees' authority.

In addressing this issue, both parties (the pro-Sadducees and the pro-Pharisees) admit that Yeshua had scathing words of rebuke for both sects. This fact is indisputable. He made His feelings for both parties very well known in such verses as Matthew 16:6, where He says, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." At times the center of controversy seems to be more over which party received the most rebuke and scorn from Yeshua instead of delving into which sect was actually recognized as being in authority! The idea seems to be this: Whichever party received the "least rebuke" must be the one that counted to Pentecost correctly.

Since both parties received a healthy dose of chiding from Yeshua, we have to be careful to make certain we don't base our conclusion on which party received the "least rebuke." Frank Brown, in his article "The Count to Pentecost," underscored the importance of recognizing this fact:

Yahshua told the religious leaders of His day that they preferred keeping their own traditions to keeping the Commandments of Yahweh. Mark 7:9, 'And He said unto them, full well ye reject the commandment of Yahweh, that ye may keep your own tradition.' He also told the Sadducees that they 'do err, not knowing the Scriptures' (Mat. 22:29). He called the Scribes and Pharisees 'hypocrites,' and said they 'say and do not.' In fact, one of the purposes of His coming was to restore what the religious hierarchy had corrupted. So we see that to put too much weight on Jewish tradition, whatever it may be, could lead to grievous error. Unless it squares with the Torah (the books of the Law), then it should not be used to establish doctrine and religious practice today.³⁸

³⁸ From *Search the Scriptures* newsletter, Clarksville, AR, Issue #39, June 1999, p. 6.

While it is clear that we should not base our final judgment on which group received the least or the highest praise from Yeshua, we must nevertheless address His statement issued in Matthew 23:1-2. He stated that the “Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.” To “sit in Moses’ seat” means “to occupy Moses’ position of authority.” Thus, if we are to take Yeshua’s own word for it, it was the “Scribes and Pharisees” who sat in Moses’ position of authority during that period of history. Since the Sadducees are not mentioned here, it is implied that they did *not* have the authority to make judgment calls pertaining to Temple rituals and the like. Therefore, we can discern that it was the *Pharisees*, not the Sadducees, who were in control. Furthermore, Yeshua agrees with Josephus’ observation that “they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them.”

However, those who maintain that it was the Sadducees who were in charge cry, “Wait a minute! Yeshua didn’t limit the authority to only the Pharisees, but He *also* mentioned the *scribes!*” They then go to great lengths to prove that the scribes consisted of *both* Pharisees and Sadducees.

Please pardon me for once more referencing the meeting we had with our anonymous friend, but I believe this is a perfect opportunity for us to present his commentary on the *scribes* in order to make a point. He went to great lengths and spent considerable time demonstrating that the scribes consisted not only of *Pharisees*, but also of *Sadducees*. He was careful to not go out on a limb and insist that *all* scribes were Sadducees, yet when he finished making his point, he concluded, “Therefore, when Yeshua attributed authority to those who sit in Moses’ seat, He was *also* referring to the *Sadducees!*”

At that point, June astutely asked our friend, “Then why did Yeshua even *mention* the Pharisees, since the ‘scribes’ consisted of both parties?” She couldn’t understand why Yeshua saw the need to mention one of the two sects while leaving out the other sect — if *both sects* were understood as being in charge by virtue of their mutual relationship with the “scribes.”

Her point is a valid one, and one that our friend could not answer. If Yeshua’s intent was to present an understanding of *both* Pharisees and Sadducees “sitting in Moses’ seat,” *and* if we are to understand the term “scribes” as being a reference to both Sadducees and Pharisees, then why didn’t He simply say, “The scribes sit in Moses’ seat”? Or why didn’t He say, “The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes sit in Moses’ seat”?

Instead, by mentioning the Pharisees while leaving out the Sadducees, Yeshua affirmed that the Pharisees had *at least* a greater amount of power and authority. This same understanding is recognized by such scholarly references as Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*, where we read the following:

In the Gospels the Pharisees and the scribes are constantly mentioned in the same connexion, and in such a way as to imply that they practically formed the same party.³⁹

We are not about to claim that there were no Sadducean scribes. We believe there were indeed Sadducean scribes, but to concentrate on this fact simultaneously directs our attention away from the clear fact that Yeshua Himself attributed greater authority to the Pharisees simply because He made specific reference to them and *not* to the Sadducees in Matthew 23:1-2.

The Pharisees, despite their problems, were termed “the strictest sect of the Jews” by the Apostle Paul (Acts 26:5). Paul boldly admitted that he was a Pharisee, while in virtually the same stroke of the pen he declared that he had blamelessly obeyed Yahweh’s law (Philippians 3:5-6).

³⁹ From *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. III, edited by James Hastings, M.A., D.D., Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1911, p. 825.

Those who promote a Sunday-only Pentecost maintain that Paul “blamelessly kept the law” as a Pharisee only because the Pharisees submitted to the Sadducean method of counting to Pentecost. As we have already read from the *Works of Josephus*, however, Josephus claims it was the other way around. In spite of the Pharisees’ hypocritical problems, Yeshua attributed greater authority to them than He did to the Sadducees, and the Apostle Paul offered no apologies for having been born and raised a Pharisee.

11. Misinterpreting Josephus

According to a tract published by a group promoting a “Sunday-only Pentecost,” it is agreed that Josephus himself did indeed count to Pentecost in accordance with the Pharisaical reckoning; however, they maintain that Josephus was only able to count this way because he wrote his books *after* the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE. Those who promote a “Sunday-only Pentecost” teach that the Pharisees were not free to practice their method of counting to Pentecost until the destruction of the temple, at which time the Sadducean party ceased to exist. Therefore, by the time Josephus wrote his works, most Jews were counting to Pentecost in such a way that it could fall on any day of the week. Before the destruction of the temple, they claim, the Sadducees controlled how the Jews reckoned the count. Notice the commentary found in the tract:

As long as the temple stood, the public worship was regulated by the Sadducees, who counted from the day after the weekly Sabbath during Passover or *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Yahshua and the Apostles participated in the normative public worship. It was only later, after 70 C.E., that the Pharisees were able to change the time for the observance of Pentecost.

This, of course, was after the time of the Apostle Paul, who was executed about 67 C.E., three years before the temple fell. Paul evidently observed Pentecost in the normative public worship as did most, if not all, of the Jews of his day; that is, counting from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. That there was at that time a unity of observance among both the believing and unbelieving Jews is evident from reading the account in Acts chapter 2.

Josephus, a Pharisee, gave an account of the customs of the Pharisees regarding the timing of the Feast of Pentecost (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 3, chapter 10, verses five and six). In this same history Josephus also wrote of a time when the Jews observed Pentecost by a different reckoning (*Book 13, chapter 8, verse 4*). The time of which he wrote was between 134 and 104 B.C.E.

Josephus quotes another historian, Nicolaus of Damascus, “Antiochus ... stayed there two days. It was at the desire of Hyrcanus the Jew, because it was such a festival derived to them from their forefathers, wheron the law of the Jews did not allow them to travel ... for that festival which we call Pentecost, did THEN fall out to be the NEXT DAY TO THE SABBATH” (*emphasis added*).⁴⁰

The author of the above commentary builds his argument on the premise that, prior to the destruction of the temple, Judaism began the count to Pentecost on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath because, as he maintains, it was the Sadducees who controlled when to begin and end the count at that time. However, as we have already established, Josephus maintained that, beginning with the reign of Alexandra Salome (76 – 67 BCE), it was the *Pharisees* who were given authority, not the Sadducees.

It is interesting that the references cited in support of the Sadducees being in charge do not offer the historical evidence necessary to validate their claim. The references affirming the authority of the Pharisees, however, base their claim on the testimony of someone who lived within a generation of the time frame in question. If anyone can produce the testimony of someone else living during that time period who bore witness to the *Sadducees* being in charge, we would like to review it. Until that testimony can be furnished, we are inclined to believe Josephus.

In the commentary quoted from (above), the author makes two additional mistakes that we believe should be addressed:

⁴⁰ From the tract “How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day.”

1) He claims that Josephus “wrote of a time when the Jews observed Pentecost by a different reckoning.” Notice, however, that Josephus did not specify that there was ever a time when anyone counted to Pentecost by a “different reckoning,” nor did Josephus even *use* the words “different reckoning.” Instead, it appears that perhaps the author of the commentary quoted above *misunderstood what Josephus meant*. You see, Josephus wrote, “... for that festival which we call Pentecost, did then fall out to be the next day to the Sabbath.”

Could it be that what Josephus meant by his wording was, “Pentecost that year happened to fall on the next day to the Sabbath”? Yes. Since the Pharisaic reckoning of the count to Pentecost can cause it to fall on any day of the week, including Sunday, it is indeed possible that Pentecost that particular year happened to fall on a Sunday. Thus, as Josephus worded it, Pentecost did indeed “then fall out to be the next day to the Sabbath.” The following year, it may well have “fallen out” to be on a Monday.

2) Next, the author of the above quoted commentary establishes the time frame mentioned by Josephus in the account from which he quoted (*Antiquities* XIII, viii., 4). As the author of the tract informs us, that time frame falls between 134 and 104 BCE. However, we have already established that the Pharisees weren’t given authority over temple rituals until the reign of Queen Salome (76 – 67 BCE), who reigned some 25 years *after* the time frame that Josephus was writing about! Thus, even if the Sadducees *did* control when to begin and end the count to Pentecost during the time frame mentioned by Josephus in *Antiquities* XIII, viii, 4, that control was taken away from them during Salome’s reign and it was never restored to them!

12. The Testimony of Philo

The author of the tract from which we just quoted attempts to explain the reason for Josephus' method of reckoning the count to Pentecost. He insists that Josephus counted as he did only because the Sadducees — along with their authority in determining how to count to Pentecost — were wiped out with the destruction of the temple. This is the author's claim, as evidenced by statements such as the following:

As long as the temple stood, the public worship was regulated by the Sadducees, who counted from the day after the weekly Sabbath during Passover or *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Yahshua and the Apostles participated in the normative public worship. It was only later, after 70 C.E., that the Pharisees were able to change the time for the observance of Pentecost.⁴¹

We quoted the above paragraph earlier, but we're quoting it again because it brings us to the next point we want to make. Again, the author establishes his claim that the only reason Josephus counted to Pentecost by using the Pharisaic method is because he happened to live during the time period after the Sadducees *lost their authority*. In other words, if Josephus' adult life had spanned the time prior to the destruction of the temple, he would have counted to Pentecost in accordance with the Sadducean method.

What the author left out of his tract is the fact that there is another well-known Jew who lived before the destruction of the temple, and this well-known Jew *also wrote* that he counted to Pentecost by means of the Pharisaic method. Thus, we have a Jew living *prior to* the destruction of the temple and a Jew living *after* the destruction of the temple — and both Jews recorded the count to Pentecost as having been done in accordance with the Pharisaic method of reckoning.

The Jew to whom we are referring is Philo. Many people don't know who Philo was. For those people, we are providing the following excerpt from the *Encyclopedia International*:

PHILO JUDAEUS (c.25 B.C.-c.50 A.D.), Jewish religious thinker of Alexandria, Egypt. A member of a wealthy and influential family, he devoted himself, except for brief intervals of public activity, to religious contemplation, in which he sought to relate Biblical tradition to Greek philosophy. His main work was an exegesis of the Bible, in which he used allegory to move from literal to symbolic meanings; but he opposed those who attempted to reduce Biblical precepts to allegory alone. He was the forerunner of an important movement in Judaism and Christianity to reconcile philosophy and religion.⁴²

I know that a lot of people will read the brief biographical sketch above and they will focus on the fact that Philo was into *Greek philosophy*. For a lot of people, even the word *Greek* signifies and defines "heathen worship," so if Philo had anything to do with *Greek philosophy*, then this can only mean that he was a heathen, and this, they conclude, eliminates him as being a plausible reference.

We're not about to suggest that we all begin studying Greek philosophy, and we're not about to profess agreement with everything that Philo wrote, nor do we even *understand* some of the things he wrote — nevertheless, there was at least one thing he was very clear about, and that was about how his people, the Jews of his day, counted to Pentecost. Here is what Philo wrote:

⁴¹ From the tract "How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day."

⁴² From *Encyclopedia International*, Vol. 14, Grolier, Incorporated, New York, NY, 1972, p.286.

There is also a festival on the day of the paschal feast, which succeeds the first day, and this is named the sheaf, from what takes place on it; for the sheaf is brought to the altar as a first fruit both of the country which the nation has received for its own, and also of the whole land; ...⁴³

What Philo was describing in the above discourse is the Wave Sheaf Offering. The Pentecost issue has to do with whether the Wave Sheaf Offering was offered on the “morrow after the weekly Sabbath” or on the “morrow after the first high day Sabbath.” If it was offered on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath, then Pentecost would have always fallen on a Sunday. However, as Philo describes the way his people began the count, it began on the day “which succeeds the first day” of the feast. Since the first day of the feast is Abib 15, this means that Philo explained that his people began the count on Abib 16, the same day on which the Pharisees began the count. The same day that was indicated by Josephus.

Philo goes on to explain that from the day of the “sheaf offering” the count to Pentecost is reckoned:

The solemn assembly on the occasion of the festival of the sheaf having such great privileges, is the prelude to another festival of still greater importance; for from this day the fiftieth day is reckoned, making up the sacred number of seven sevens, with the addition of a unity as a seal to the whole; and this festival, being that of the first fruits of the corn, has derived its name from the number fifty, (*pentēkostos*).⁴⁴

I personally think Philo had a bizarre way of expressing himself, but nevertheless he made it very clear that Jewish practice during his lifetime was to begin the count to Pentecost on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which always falls on the sixteenth of Abib. That is simply the way it was done. Philo made no attempt to defend the method he presented against the Sadducean method, or against any other method. He simply wrote what he did in such a way as to convey “how it was done.”

Please allow me to digress a little. I once attended a debate between two individuals, with the topic being that of when to begin the Scriptural month. The one man claims the Scriptural month begins with the “astronomical new moon,” i.e., the conjunction. The other man claims it begins with the first visible sighting of the crescent moon after sunset. In this “conjunction vs. crescent” debate, I felt the “crescent man” had the most compelling arguments, and one of them included a commentary on Philo, who wrote that the new month begins with the appearance of the new moon. I believe the “crescent man’s” citing the example of Philo provides an equally compelling argument for beginning the count to Pentecost on the sixteenth of Abib. I hope you don’t mind my borrowing and paraphrasing his illustration:

As we know, Philo was contemporary with Yeshua, which means they were alive on this earth as flesh and blood men at the same time. Whether they ever met is something we have no way of knowing, but we do know that Philo was born *before* Yeshua, and he died nearly twenty years *after* Yeshua’s ascension. As we are about to see, it can be demonstrated that Philo’s practice and belief reflected normative Jewish practice and belief of his day. This means that the Jews with whom Yeshua came into contact during His earthly ministry practiced the same beliefs expressed by Philo, and as we know, Yeshua is not recorded as having ever criticized the Jews for looking for the new moon crescent to begin the new month, nor is He recorded as having ever criticized their method of counting to Pentecost. This is significant, especially when we take into consideration the fact that both Philo and Josephus agreed on how their people counted to Pentecost. I have to regard the agreement of Philo and Josephus as being

⁴³ From *The Works of Philo*, “The Special Laws, II,” translated by C. D. Yonge, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1993, p. 583.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 584-585.

indicative of a smooth transition between the two generations represented by those two men. Philo died while Josephus was but a youth, yet this youth grew up to record the same, exact method of counting to Pentecost as did his Jewish counterpart living over three hundred miles away.

Some may present the argument that Philo was a confused man who dabbled a little too much into Greek philosophy and had a bizarre way of expressing himself. I can see why someone might think that way. I have personally found that Philo's writings are a "bumpy read." However, there is much about the life of Philo that many people don't know. Philo was more than just a Jew living in Alexandria, Egypt. He was *the most prominent Jew* living in Alexandria, Egypt. His fellow Jews chose him over all other Jews to represent their people in protesting an officially instigated massacre of Jews in Alexandria. This was a very serious issue — a matter of life and death for the Jews of Alexandria. In order to plead their case before the Roman emperor, they had to select the man who could best represent them. The question arises, "Would the Jews of Alexandria have chosen Philo had he not properly represented normative Jewish practice and belief?"

Indeed, they would only have chosen a man whose beliefs reflected their own beliefs, whether that be Sabbath observance, new moon observance, and yes, even Pentecost observance. This is indeed a significant fact, as echoed by *The Cambridge History of Judaism*:

It is significant that his co-religionists chose him as ambassador to Caligula in 39-40. In such circumstances only a man who was important in the city would be appointed.⁴⁵

For those who question the credibility and reliability of Philo, we are providing the following excerpt from *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*:

Philo was a prominent member of the Jewish community of Alexandria⁴⁶, the largest Jewish settlement outside Palestine. The only certain date known from his life comes from his account of the great pogrom⁴⁷ in Alexandria which started in A.D. 38 under the prefect Flaccus, during the reign of the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula. Philo was then chosen to head a delegation (*Gaium* 370) sent in A.D. 39/40 by the Jewish community to Gaius Caligula in Rome.⁴⁸

Philo clearly had the respect of his fellow Jews in Alexandria, but did his practice and belief reflect that of all of normative Judaism? Again, let us turn to *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* for the answer:

Was Philo then fundamentally Greek or Jewish? His loyalty to the Jewish institutions, the laws of Moses, the role of Israel as the priesthood of the world, and his harshness against renegades (even to the point of advocating lynching) shows that he was fundamentally a Jew.⁴⁹

Philo represented the beliefs of normative Judaism, and Philo began the count to Pentecost on Abib 16, i.e., the morrow after the *high day Sabbath*. It is more than mere coincidence that both he and

⁴⁵ From *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 3, by William Horbury, W.D. Davies and John Sturdy, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 879.

⁴⁶ According to this same reference, article "Alexandria," p. 152, we learn, "By the 1st century C.E. the Jewish population in Alexandria numbered in the hundreds of thousands." The majority of these Jews were descendants of prisoners of war who were forcibly settled there by Alexander when the city was founded.

⁴⁷ "Pogrom" is defined as "An organized and often officially instigated local massacre, especially one directed against the Jews. [<Russian, destruction>]" — From *The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*.

⁴⁸ From *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, article "Philo of Alexandria," by Peder Borgen, Doubleday, 1992, p. 333.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 341.

Josephus agreed on how to count to the Feast of Weeks. As Edersheim concludes in his commentary on Leviticus 23:11,

The testimony of Josephus, of Philo, and of Jewish tradition, leaves no room to doubt that in this instance we are to understand by the “Sabbath” the 15th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it might fall.⁵⁰

Certainly, then, both Josephus and Philo understood that “morrow after the Sabbath” in Leviticus 23:11 is a reference to the morrow after the first *high day Sabbath* of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. How and why did they come away with this interpretation? Did they use a different Bible than we do? If so, would such a Bible offer us any clues or insight into how Judaism of that day believed?

⁵⁰ From *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, by Alfred Edersheim, D.D., Ph. D., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, p. 257 (originally published in 1874).

13. The Bible Used by Philo and Josephus

Philo was a Greek-speaking Jew, and he referred to a Greek translation of Scripture throughout his writings. The translation he used is known as *The Septuagint*, which is the famous Greek translation of the original Hebrew text. According to legend, this translation was completed by 72 of the most scholarly Jews of the day, and it was completed in 72 days. It is commonly referred to as “the LXX” because of the Roman numeral designation for the number seventy, an approximation of 72. As legends go, the legend of the Septuagint’s origin may be more fable than fact, but since we only have a few sources to rely on for answers, it is difficult sorting out fact from fiction. We do know that the Septuagint was translated in Philo’s hometown of Alexandria in about the year 250 BCE. What is so significant about the Bible that Philo used?

The primary significance of the Septuagint is the fact that it was the version used by Greek-speaking Jews. Notice what *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* points out regarding its significance:

From the place of its origin in Egypt, the LXX spread to all parts of the Hellenistic-Jewish world. Centers such as Antioch, Alexandria, and Caesarea developed different textual traditions. Since the LXX became the OT of the Christians, who employed it in their arguments with the Jews, a need arose for a new rendering of the OT in Gk. that would be true to the Heb. This was accomplished in Aquila’s rival Jewish version made around A.D. 130. The work is a slavishly literal Gk. translation of the early second-century Heb. text.⁵¹

Not only does *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* reveal how widely used the Septuagint was, but it also points out that it was used by Messianic believers in their arguments with the Jews. Both of these facts are important for our study. First of all, as we are about to demonstrate, the writers of the New Testament freely quoted from the Septuagint much more often than they did from what we consider the standard Hebrew text. Secondly, since the Messianic believers were so successful in proving Yeshua to be the promised Messiah, their rival Jews found it necessary to put out *another* Greek translation that would make things more difficult for those who believed and professed faith in Yeshua to win their arguments.

A primary example of this involves the translation of Isaiah 7:14. In the Septuagint version we read, “Behold, a virgin [*parthenos*] shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel.” The Greek word “parthenos” is the word meaning “virgin,” and this is the word that is found in the Septuagint. However, when Messianic believers began using Isaiah 7:14 to prove that Yeshua is the son of the Almighty, ***born of a virgin***, the Jews decided that it was time for a new version, and that is where Aquila comes in. Aquila did not consider Yeshua to be the Messiah, nor did he believe that He was born of a virgin. Therefore, in his version, when he came to the word “parthenos,” he simply rendered it *neanis*, which simply means “young woman.” The Greek word “parthenos” clearly refers to a virgin, whereas *neanis* doesn’t necessarily convey the concept of virginity.

We find it fascinating that the translators of the Greek Septuagint chose to translate the Hebrew word *almah* of **Isaiah 7:14** into the Greek *parthenos*. This is the same word, *Strong’s* #3933, that Matthew and other New Testament writers used in reference to the virgin birth. *Parthenos* means chaste virgin, not merely a young woman. **II Corinthians 11:2** shows that believers are espoused to the Savior as Mary was to Joseph, and we are to be presented as chaste virgins (*parthenon*) unto Him.

⁵¹ From *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, by Merrill F. Unger, article “Versions of the Scriptures,” Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1988, p. 1,343.

What is equally fascinating is the recent discovery of evidence that the early versions of the Septuagint retained Yahweh's name [the Tetragrammaton]. Today's extant versions, which only date as far back as the 2nd or 3rd century CE, represent the substitution of the Tetragrammaton with the Greek term *kyrios*. However, archaeological evidence has proven that the earliest versions did *not* substitute the Tetragrammaton. Notice the commentary offered by Paul Kahle in his book *The Cairo Geniza*:

We now know that the Greek Bible text as far as it was written by Jews for Jews did not translate the Divine name by *kyrios*, but the Tetragrammaton written with Hebrew or Greek letters was retained in such MSS. It was the Christians who replaced the Tetragrammaton by *kyrios*, when the divine name written in Hebrew letters was not understood any more.⁵²

We have demonstrated that the Septuagint played a significant role, both among the Greek-speaking Jews leading up to the birth of Yeshua, as well as to the early Messianic believers, and we have shown that the early versions retained Yahweh's name. Clearly, the Septuagint is a very important translation of Scripture. It was the only Bible known by Greek-speaking believers. Notice the importance attributed to the Septuagint by *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*:

That the LXX is an important document in biblical studies has long been recognized, but the reasons why have not always been uniformly or clearly expressed. Mainline biblical scholars have therefore tended to use it primarily as a means to correct the MT where the latter is perceived to be corrupt. The foregoing discussions should make clear that the Greek version, although translated from Hebrew, was not necessarily translated from a text accessible to us. The most important reason for studying the LXX then is to read and understand the thought of Jews in the pre-Christian centuries. In the process we may obtain insights into the textual history of the Hebrew Bible. On the purely formal level, any Hebrew text retroverted from the Greek Bible will in fact predate by several hundred years the complete ms on which our Hebrew Bible is based. Septuagint studies are thus important for textual, canonical, and exegetical purposes.

A second reason western scholars, especially specialists in Christianity, should consider the LXX, is that it was the Bible of the early Christian Church. It was not secondary to any other scripture; it was Scripture. When a NT writer allegedly urged his audience to consider that all scripture given by divine 'inspiration' is also profitable for doctrine, it was to the LXX not the Hebrew that attention was being called. The LXX also provides the context in which many of the lexical and theological concepts in the NT can best be explained. Excellent syntheses of the relationships between LXX and NT have been made. Summaries and evaluations of these discussions and issues appear in Smith (1972 and 1988).

Before and after the adoption of the LXX by Christians—most of whom were former Jews—it was an important document in Hellenistic circles. Early Jewish writers in Greek, such as Philo (ca. 30 C.E.), Paul (ca. 50 C.E.), and Josephus (ca. 80 C.E.) allegorized, expanded and quoted it extensively. The sermons and commentaries of Greek and Latin Church Fathers show evidence that they were using a Greek not a Hebrew Bible; serious study of the early Christian writers cannot proceed without a secure Greek text.

A third reason the LXX is important is that it explains the way the Hebrew Bible was understood and interpreted in antiquity. To the degree that every translation is a commentary, the LXX, as the first translation of the Hebrew Bible, provides insight into the art of translation of a sacred text and the subtle (and at times blatant) way in which it was re-interpreted in the process.⁵³

⁵² From *The Cairo Geniza*, by Paul E. Kahle, D., D.Litt., D.D., D.H.L., F.B.A., 2nd ed., Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1959, p. 222.

⁵³ From *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, article "Septuagint," by Melvin K. H. Peters, Doubleday, 1992, p. 1,102.

There is no question that Philo used the Septuagint Bible in his studies, but as pointed out above by *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, it was also used by Josephus. Louis H. Feldman and Gōhei Hata, in their book *Josephus, the Bible and History*, wrote the following regarding Josephus' association with the Septuagint translation:

Josephus, who was so intent upon his work of translating the Hebrew Bible in his *Antiquities*, dwells upon the Greek translation of the Torah as on no other event in the long drawn out period that his work encompasses. Nor should it be overlooked that in the *Letter of Aristeas* he had at his disposal a document truly worth of receiving favorable treatment. But even more than that, I believe that the perspective of three centuries enabled him to assess the decisive importance for Judaism of Ptolemy's initiative in taking under his patronage, if not his actual responsibility, the translation of the Jewish "law" into the vernacular of the day. Under these circumstances we can better appreciate the satisfaction Josephus derives from it: "Such were the honors and the glory that the Jews received from Ptolemy Philadelphus" (A XII, 118). This is not mere rhetoric. Josephus was well aware of the success this translation had obtained in the very heart of the most traditional Judaism. He could have realized that this same success had prompted the translation of other holy books and the composition in Greek of still other works, such as the *Book of Wisdom* (attributed to Solomon) and, in any event, the history of the Jews by Jason of Cyrene. **In sum he utilized the Greek Bible that was in existence in his day.**⁵⁴

We are aware that various individuals and groups attempt to portray Josephus as not having supported or upholding the Septuagint translation. However, the fact that both Josephus and Philo used the Septuagint version is readily available at the most basic of sources. For example, the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* offers the following comment for those who are not yet persuaded:

The Septuagint was held in great respect in ancient times; Philo and Josephus ascribed divine inspiration to its authors.⁵⁵

For a study that is supposed to be dealing with the count to Pentecost, we have spent quite a bit of time treating the importance of the Septuagint to early believers. The question could well be asked, **“What does all of this hullabaloo have to do with the count to Pentecost?”** The answer: Plenty.

Early on in this study, we addressed Leviticus 23. You may recall that we expressed understanding for how and why people read the instructions for how to count to Pentecost and conclude that the count must begin from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. This is simply the way our Bibles render this important chapter, so how can we rebuke anyone for doing what the Bible says to do? However, as we are about to see, the Septuagint offers a vastly different reading with regard to Yahweh's instructions on how to count to Pentecost. Let's examine how the Septuagint renders Leviticus 23:9-16:

⁹And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰Speak to the children of Israel, and thou shalt say to them, When ye shall enter into the land which I give you, and reap the harvest of it, then shall ye bring a sheaf, the first-fruits of your harvest, to the priest; ¹¹and he shall lift up the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted for you. On the morrow of the first day the priest shall lift it up. ¹²And ye shall offer on the day on which ye bring the sheaf, a lamb without blemish of a year old for a whole-burnt

⁵⁴ Josephus, the Bible and History, by Louis H. Feldman and Gōhei Hata, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989, chapter 4, "Josephus, the Letter of Aristeas, and the Septuagint," by Andre Pelletier, p. 99.

⁵⁵ *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, article "Septuagint," citation from *The Septuagint*, by Jennifer M. Dines; Michael A. Knibb, Ed., London: T&T Clark, 2004. This article may be read in its entirety by accessing the following URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint>.

offering to Yahweh. ¹³And its meat-offering two tenth portions of fine flour mingled with oil: it is a sacrifice to Yahweh, a smell of sweet savour to Yahweh, and its drink-offering the fourth part of a hin of wine. ¹⁴And ye shall not eat bread, or the new parched corn, until this same day, until ye offer the sacrifices to your Mighty One: *it is* a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

¹⁵And ye shall number to yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day on which ye shall offer the sheaf of the heave-offering, seven full weeks: ¹⁶until the morrow after the last week ye shall number fifty days, and shall bring a new meat-offering to Yahweh.⁵⁶

These, then, are the instructions for counting to Pentecost as recorded in the Bible that Philo and Josephus used. Not only that, but the instructions above were found in the Bibles used by nearly all the early believers. Again, as we read from *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, the Septuagint “was not secondary to any other scripture; it *was* Scripture.” The instructions for counting to Pentecost, as found in the Bible used by Philo, dictated that the wave sheaf offering be made “on the morrow of the first day” instead of “the morrow after the Sabbath.”

One might ask, “What is ‘the morrow of the *first day*? What day is being referred to here?”

For the answer to that question, all we need to do is refer back to verses six and seven:

⁶And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast of unleavened bread to Yahweh; seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread. ⁷And the first day shall be a holy convocation to you: ye shall do no servile work.

The **first day**, then, is plainly a reference to the first day (Abib 15) of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On the “morrow” of that first day (Abib 16) was the day of the wave sheaf offering, and from that day began the count to Pentecost, at least from the perspective of such early believers as Philo and Josephus, not to mention the perspective of the Jewish sect called the Pharisees.

A few years ago we were given a study on the count to Pentecost in which the author attempted to reconcile the wording of the Septuagint with the wording that is found in the Hebrew Masoretic text. According to him, the expression “first day” was simply a reference to the first day of the week, i.e., *Sunday*, and “morrow of the first day” was also a reference to Sunday. Here is what the anonymous author wrote:

In the preceding presentation [that the author is responding to] it alleges that some Scriptures and Assemblies use the terminology and wording, ‘the morrow of the Sabbath.’ This is a misrepresentation of what the Scriptures do say. The *Septuagint*, for example, says, ‘on the morrow of the FIRST DAY.’ There are no groups that I know of that begin their count to Pentecost using the terminology, ‘the morrow OF the Sabbath.’ *The morrow after the Sabbath*, translated from the Masoretic text and *the morrow of the first day* from the

⁵⁶ From *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, translated by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995. Note: As we have established that the earliest versions of the Septuagint contained the Tetragrammaton, we feel justified in correcting Brenton’s translation so as to read “Yahweh” instead of “The Lord.” Brenton’s translation was originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, in 1851.

Septuagint are both referring to what we know as the first day of the week or ‘Sunday.’ There is no confusion, except when the words are misapplied.⁵⁷ (Emphasis his)

The author of the above quote attempts to make a distinction between “morrow *after*” and “morrow *of*.” In his estimation, “morrow *of* the first day” can only mean “*morning of* the first day.” This presents an impossible enigma, which he doesn’t attempt to resolve. To begin with, we have already identified “the first day” as being a reference to the first day of the feast, i.e., Abib 15. Secondly, the anonymous author’s interpretation was apparently not recognized by such early believers as Philo and Josephus. They clearly understood “morrow of the first day” as being a reference to the “morrow *after* the first day,” even though the word “after” is not found in the Greek text. It is true that the English word “morrow,” in its original sense, could indeed be used to indicate “morning,” as in the Old English expression “Good morrow.” However, it is also true that “morrow” can be used to mean “next day,” as shown below in *The Reader’s Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary’s* listing for this word:

mor·row (môr’ō, mor’ō) *n.* Archaic & Poetic **1.** The next succeeding day. **2.** A time immediately following a specified event. **3.** Formerly, morning; good *morrow*. [ME *morwen*. See MORNING.]⁵⁸

The Hebrew word translated “morrow” in the Masoretic text is *mochorath*, which is word #4283 in *Strong’s Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, as shown below:

4283. מחרת *mochōrāth*, *mokh-or-awth’*; or
מחרתם *mochōrāthām* (1 Sam. 30 : 17),
mokh-or-aw-thawm’; fem. from the
 same as 4279; the *morrow* or (adv.) *tomorrow*:—
 morrow, next day.

As *Strong’s* reveals, the intent behind the Hebrew word translated “morrow” is *not* that of “morning,” but that of “next day.” *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* is even more resolute with the meaning it offers: “The day following a *past* day.”⁵⁹ The same can be said regarding the Greek word translated “morrow” in the Septuagint. This Greek word is *epaurion* (ἐπαύριον). *Epaurion* is also found in the New Testament, where it is also translated “morrow,” and it is word #1887 in *Strong’s Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*, as shown below:

1887. ἐπαύριον *ēpauriōn*, *ep-ow’-ree-on*; from
 1909 and 839; occurring on the *succeeding* day, i.e. (2250
 being implied) *to-morrow*:—day following, morrow, next
 day (after).

The Hebrew word *mochorath* and the Greek word *epaurion*, as already shown, clearly mean “next day,” and *not* “morning.” Thus, even though the Old English word “morrow” was occasionally used to mean “morning” in its original sense, such usage did not ever convey a proper translation of either *mochorath* or *epaurion*.

To carry this thought out even further, we need to point out that in actual fact the wording we find in our modern translations of the Hebrew Masoretic text, including the *King James Version*, is not quite

⁵⁷ From a booklet entitled “The Count to Pentecost,” p. 16. As stated above, the author of the study apparently chose to remain anonymous, as no name, address, or other information referencing the origin of the booklet was included within its pages.

⁵⁸ From *The Reader’s Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville, New York, 1977.

⁵⁹ From *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1979, p. 564.

correct. *The Interlinear Bible* shows us the Hebrew text, as well as the literal English translation, and as we see (below), the actual wording found in Leviticus 23:11 reveals that instead of the phrase “the morrow *after* the Sabbath,” we find the phrase “the morrow *of* the Sabbath”⁶⁰:

5130	3117	6213	3548	5130	7676	4283
וַעֲשִׂיתֶם	בַּיּוֹם	הַנִּיפְכֶם	יִנִּיפְנוּ	הַכֹּהֵן	מִמָּחֳרַת	הַשַּׁבָּת
you wave	in the day	And you prepare shall	the priest	shall wave it	the sabbath	on the morrow ←

As we read earlier, the anonymous author of the study from which we quoted wrote that the wording “the morrow of the Sabbath” is a misrepresentation of what is found in Scripture. As shown by Green’s *Interlinear Bible*, however, the anonymous author is greatly mistaken. The actual phrase found in the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, translated literally, is “on the morrow of the sabbath.”

If, as the anonymous author concludes, “morrow of the first day” means “on the first day of the week,” then “morrow of the Sabbath” *must in like manner mean* “on the Sabbath,” which would require beginning the count to Pentecost on *the weekly Sabbath*.

Just as all scholars past and present have understood “morrow of the Sabbath” to be a reference to the day succeeding the Sabbath, so it is with the understanding as conveyed by the Septuagint. “Morrow of the first day” simply means “the day succeeding, or following, the first day (of the feast).” This is the understanding shared by Philo, Josephus, and the Pharisaic party, and this is why they began the count to Pentecost on the sixteenth of Abib.

⁶⁰ This line of Hebrew text was transcribed from *The Interlinear Bible*, 2nd Edition, Jay P. Green, Sr., General Editor and Translator, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1986, p. 108.

14. The Reliability of the Septuagint

Back in 2002, as previously mentioned, June and I visited the home of a man who was kind enough to take us through a Pentecost presentation that he has given on various occasions. His personal conviction is that Pentecost should always fall on a Sunday. Our visit was not a brief one, as we left to go home after having spent eight hours pouring through his material. It was a learning experience, and we believe we should all regard such meetings as being opportunities to learn new things and broaden our horizons.

One thing that stands out as I reflect on that meeting is the fact that he spent well over an hour doing a “slam job” on the Septuagint. The obvious intent was to discredit its authenticity, and to then sway us towards putting our complete trust in the Masoretic text. What he most likely didn’t know was that June and I had already been aware that the Septuagint version is not a “perfect translation.” As translations go, the Septuagint has its share of errors. Yet, we have already read the conclusion of the matter as expressed in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. We read the following: “A third reason the LXX is important is that it explains the way the Hebrew Bible was understood and interpreted in antiquity. To the degree that every translation is a commentary, the LXX, as the first translation of the Hebrew Bible, provides insight into the art of translation of a sacred text and the subtle (and at times blatant) way in which it was re-interpreted in the process.” It may not be a “perfect translation,” but the Septuagint was certainly sufficient for believers before, during and after the time Yeshua walked among us.

As glowing a review as *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* gave the Septuagint, you really ought to read the entire article on the Septuagint as found in that reference. The article is eleven pages in length, and the author gives a very balanced review of the Greek translation, even mentioning the fact that it contains some errors. However, he is just as quick to point out that the Masoretic text *also* contains errors! Notice this comment offered by author Melvin K. H. Peters:

In point of fact, as any one who has worked with LXX mss will attest, and as Lagarde himself pointed out long ago, all extant LXX mss (including the great uncials) are corrupt, in view of the complicated history of LXX. (Equally corrupt, for that matter, is the so-called MT.)⁶¹

With all its errors, and even with the later substitution of the Creator’s name with *kyrios*, we know that this is the version that was used by the Greek-speaking world of the Messiah’s day. It can be demonstrated that it was the Septuagint, not the Masoretic text, that New Testament writers quoted from most frequently. Even our “Sunday Pentecost Only” friend admitted this truth. In fact, he gave us a photocopy from a work entitled *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* substantiating the fact that New Testament writers quoted from the Septuagint more often than they did from the Masoretic text. Here’s an excerpt from that photocopy:

It is calculated by one writer on the subject that, while the N. T. differs from the Masoretic text in 212 citations, it departs from the LXX. in 185; and by another that ‘not more than fifty’ of the citations ‘materially differ from the LXX.’ On either estimate the LXX. is the principal source from which the writers of the N. T. derived their O. T. quotations.⁶²

⁶¹ From *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, article “Septuagint,” by Melvin K. H. Peters, Doubleday, 1992, p. 1,100.

⁶² From *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* by Henry Barclay Swete and Richard Rusdan Ottley, KTAV, New York, 1968, p. 392 (orig. published in 1902). The authors derived their information from the following two sources: 1) Turpie, *O. T. in the N.*, p. 267, and 2) Grinfield, *Apology for the LXX.*, p. 37.

In other words, if we're keeping score, the New Testament quotes from the Septuagint outscore the Masoretic text 212 to 185. No matter how hard we try to discredit the Septuagint, we cannot escape the fact that this was without doubt the Bible that was predominantly used by the early believers. Thus, even though our friend spent over an hour of our eight-hour session knocking the Septuagint, he was at least willing to concede that it was the version from which the New Testament writers most frequently quoted.

It turns out that our friend is the same man who presented such a brilliant argument regarding Philo in his defense of setting the Scriptural month by the observance of the crescent moon (as opposed to the conjunction). Philo, whom he established as having been representative of normative Jewish practice and belief of that particular time period, set the Scriptural month by observing the crescent new moon, and he wrote of this practice in his treatise entitled "The Special Laws, II."⁶³ Well, this same Philo began the count to Pentecost on the sixteenth of Abib. For some reason, our friend does not see the inconsistency of **accepting** Philo's testimony regarding when to begin the new month while simultaneously **rejecting** his testimony with regard to the count to Pentecost. For me personally, it doesn't make any sense to say, "One of my reasons for believing the first visible crescent new moon should begin each month is the fact that Philo believed this way, and he represented normative Jewish practice and belief ..." while in the next breath saying, "... Philo was mistaken about when to begin the count to Pentecost, however."

In fact, as our friend worded it, "In this instance, I have to excuse Philo."

He "excuses" Philo because, in his estimation, Philo "couldn't help it" that he was raised with the Septuagint as his Bible. Thus, in our friend's estimation, Philo and his fellow Greek-speaking Jews "missed out" on the proper way to count to Pentecost because they were victims of a poorly translated Bible.

We would like to propose another possibility. We propose that Philo, who represented "normative Jewish practice and belief" of his day, was well aware of how the Jews in Jerusalem reckoned the count to Pentecost. In fact, since Philo visited Jerusalem at least once in his lifetime,⁶⁴ we would say this adds weight to our proposal, as we have a difficult time understanding how this leading man among Jews would spend all of his life in ignorance of an apparent "different" method of counting to Pentecost that would have been going on in Israel, especially if he made at least one visit to Jerusalem. It seems rather far-fetched to believe that he would have remained "in the dark" about such a huge discrepancy. Indeed, it is far more **likely** that he was aware of the controversy, but since his method of counting coincided with the standard method employed in Jerusalem, he saw no need to even bring up the argument in any of his writings. Instead, he, like Josephus, wrote from the perspective of a news reporter, simply recording things "as they were done."

In order to better understand and more fully appreciate the fact that New Testament writers quoted from the Septuagint more often than they did from the Hebrew text, it is helpful to simply compare the actual quotations. We are providing a chart on the following page to enable you to do spot comparisons for yourself.

⁶³ C.f., *The Works of Philo*, "The Special Laws, II," chapter XXVI, section 141, translated by C. D. Yonge, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1993. The exact quote reads, "... for, at the time of the new moon, the sun begins to illuminate the moon with a light which is visible to the outward senses, and then she displays her own beauty to the beholders."

⁶⁴ C.f., *The Works of Philo*, "On Providence," Fragment 2, section 64, translated by C. D. Yonge, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1993.

THE SEPTUAGINT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament authors show a clear preference for the Septuagint over Hebrew text readings. The following table provides a selection of fifteen of the more significant New Testament deviations toward the Septuagint. The second column shows the New Testament wording, and the rightmost column has the wording from the Hebrew Old Testament. In each case, the New Testament author is true to the Septuagint. ***Bold italics*** are used to highlight differences between Hebrew and Greek. All quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.⁶⁵

New/Old Testament Reference	New Testament/Septuagint	Old Testament/Masoretic Text
Matthew 1.23/ <u>Isaiah 7.14</u>	"Behold, a <i>virgin</i> shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, Elohim with us).	Behold, a <i>young woman</i> shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
Matthew 12.21/ <u>Isaiah 42.4</u>	"and <i>in his name will the Gentiles hope.</i> "	and <i>the coastlands wait for his law.</i>
Matthew 13.14-15/ <u>Isaiah 6.9-10</u>	"For this people's heart <i>has grown</i> dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed"	<i>Make</i> the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes
Matthew 15.8-9/ <u>Isaiah 29.13</u>	" <i>in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts</i> of men."	<i>and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote</i>
Matthew 21.16/ <u>Psalms 8.2</u>	"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast brought <i>perfect praise</i> "	by the mouths of babes and infants thou hast <i>founded a bulwark</i>
Luke 3.4-6/ <u>Isaiah 40.3-5</u>	"and all flesh shall see <i>the salvation of the Almighty.</i> "	and all flesh shall see <i>it together</i>
Luke 4.18-19/ <u>Isaiah 61.1-2</u>	"to proclaim release to the captives and <i>recovering of sight to the blind</i> "	to proclaim liberty to the captives, and <i>the opening of the prison to those who are bound</i>
Acts 7.42-43/ <u>Amos 5.25-27</u>	"And you took up <i>the tent of Moloch, and the star of the god Rephan</i> , the figures which you made to worship"	You shall take up <i>Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god</i> , your images, which you made for yourselves
Acts 8.32-33/ <u>Isaiah 53.7-8</u>	"In his humiliation <i>justice was denied him</i> , Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth."	By oppression and judgment <i>he was taken away</i> ; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living
Acts 13.41/ <u>Habakkuk 1.5</u>	"Behold, <i>you scoffers</i> , and wonder, <i>and perish</i> "	Look <i>among the nations, and see</i> ; wonder and <i>be astounded</i>
Acts 15.16-17/ <u>Amos 9.11-12</u>	"that the <i>rest of men</i> may <i>seek Yahweh</i> , and all the Gentiles who are called by my name"	that they may <i>possess the remnant of Edom</i> and all the nations who are called by my name
Romans 2.24/ <u>Isaiah 52.5</u>	"The name of the Almighty is blasphemed <i>among the Gentiles because of you.</i> "	<i>Their rulers wail, says Yahweh, and continually all the day</i> my name is despised
Romans 9.27-28/ <u>Isaiah 10.22-23</u>	Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them <i>shall be saved</i> "	For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them <i>will return</i>
Romans 10.20/ <u>Isaiah 65.1</u>	"I have <i>shown myself</i> to those who did not ask for me"	I was <i>ready to be sought</i> by those who did not ask for me

As noted in the footnote provided for the chart on the previous page, it was borrowed from an article written by Rick Jones. Mr. Jones makes no scholarly claims for himself; he simply put together a Web

⁶⁵ This table can be found online, and is borrowed from the Web article "The Septuagint in the New Testament," by Rick Jones. It can be accessed at the following URL: <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Pines/7224/Rick/Septuagint/spexecsum.htm>

site on which he promotes his own religious beliefs, many of which we disagree with. Nevertheless, his chart is accurate, and some comments he made are “right on the money,” so to speak. Note the following:

Jerome mentioned with embarrassment certain passages in the Septuagint which he believed to be incorrectly translated from the Hebrew. But before we can convict the Septuagint of translation error, we have to produce, at a minimum, the Hebrew text upon which the Septuagint is based. Since that text no longer exists, accusations of mistranslation remain unproven conjectures. And even if the Septuagint is thick with mistranslation, its errors are frequently sanctioned by the New Testament. For instance, if the word ‘virgin’ (*parthenos* in Greek) in Isaiah 7.14 is a mistranslation of the Hebrew word *almah*, Matthew has given his assent to this error. In fact, those of us who believe the New Testament to be inspired by God are required to believe that many ‘errors’ of the Septuagint are inspired also, because they are incorporated into the New Testament directly. If the errors that are quoted have Divine sanction, on what basis can we reject the errors that are not quoted? Or, consider what we imply if we say that the Masoretic text *alone* can lay claim to being the genuine Old Testament. The clear implication is that the authors of the New Testament were benighted [unenlightened] and, ignorant of the truth, used an inferior text. The theological implications they drew when they quoted from ‘mistranslations’ in the Septuagint should be rejected. Thus, the logical corollaries to the proposition that the Masoretic text *alone* is worthy to be considered the Old Testament include: Christ was not born of a virgin, the angels do not worship the Son, Christ did not come to restore sight to the blind, the behavior of the Jews was not cause for God’s name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles, etc. In short, we are forced to conclude that the New Testament is not inspired.

We believe Mr. Jones’ commentary should be taken seriously. We don’t believe his insights were considered by our “Sunday Pentecost Only” friend, or, if they *were* considered by him, they weren’t taken seriously. If, indeed, the Septuagint is such a gross mistranslation, and our friend spent well over an hour seeking to convince me of that very premise, then if a New Testament writer quoted from it, this can only serve to discredit the inspiration and validity of the New Testament, for how could Yahweh inspire His servants to quote from such a “corrupt” source?

There is one more text supporting the validity of the Septuagint that we believe merits our attention. In his famous sermon before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Stephen recounted the history of Israel, saying, “Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, ***seventy-five souls***” (Acts 7:14).

The question is, Where did Stephen come up with the number ***seventy-five***? According to Exodus 1:5, there were only ***seventy souls***, not seventy-five, that joined Joseph in Egypt. Note what it says in that verse:

⁵And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt *already*.

Did Stephen have a memory lapse when he mentioned there being ***seventy-five souls*** instead of the ***seventy souls*** as recorded in Exodus 1:5?

The answer is no. Stephen came up with the same “number of souls” that is recorded in the Septuagint. Notice how Exodus 1:5 reads in the Septuagint version:

⁵But Joseph was in Egypt. And all the souls *born* of Jacob were seventy-five.

When Stephen mentioned *seventy-five* souls, he was not misquoting Scripture. He was merely backing up the Septuagint account. This same discrepancy can be found when comparing Genesis 46:27. According to the Hebrew text of Genesis 46:27, the number was *seventy*. According to the Septuagint, it was *seventy-five*, which, again, is the number quoted by Stephen before being martyred for his faith. This is yet one more indication that the early believers relied upon the Septuagint as being “Scripture.”

15. The Septuagint and the Joshua 5 Controversy

Back in chapter 5, we demonstrated that the only valid way of interpreting the Hebrew text of Joshua 5:10-11 involves recognizing that Passover must have occurred on the weekly Sabbath that year. The following day, i.e., the “morrow after the Passover,” they offered up the wave sheaf offering, which subsequently made it lawful for them to eat the produce from the new harvest. If it can be proven that this is indeed the date on which the wave offering was performed, then certainly Josephus and Philo were mistaken in their notion that the wave sheaf offering took place on Abib 16.

On the other hand, perhaps there are *other factors* that need to be considered before reaching a final conclusion.

The reading of the Hebrew Masoretic text, in our opinion, leaves no room to doubt that Joshua and his fellow Israelites could only have begun the count to Pentecost on Sunday, Abib 15, which, of course, brought them to a Sunday Pentecost fifty days later. We believe that those who accept this passage as justification for counting to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath do so based upon sound logic.

However, as we are about to see, the Hebrew text of Joshua 5:10-11 does not match the reading found in the Septuagint.

We have gone to fairly great lengths to demonstrate that New Testament writers quoted more from the Greek Septuagint than they did from what is considered the standard Hebrew text. While we’re not about to suggest this means we should abandon the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, we do believe it sends a strong signal that those who go to such great lengths to discredit the Septuagint do so unjustifiably. We have to wonder how writers of the New Testament would regard their attempts to slam the Septuagint.

Some folks, who tend to jump to conclusions, will invariably consider our favorable review of the Septuagint as signifying our *rejection* of the Hebrew text. In response to such claims, we can only state that we are hopefully *all* searching for what is called the *Vorlagen*, or the original Hebrew manuscript from which other Hebrew manuscripts were copied and from which the Septuagint was translated. This text has not been found. They have found pre-Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts, but they haven’t found anything pre-dating the Septuagint. Interestingly, the pre-Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts seem to agree more with the Septuagint than they do with the Masoretic text. However, with regard to the controversial passage found in Leviticus 23, both Hebrew versions seem to agree. Nevertheless, this does not invalidate any of the information we have already shared, as the testimony of two well-known Jews (Philo and Josephus), coupled with the fact that New Testament writers quoted from the Septuagint, goes a long way towards conveying the understanding that Jewish practice and belief was based upon the rendering found in the Septuagint.

That having been said, we need to turn our attention back to the story of Joshua and the first Passover celebrated by the Israelites in the Promised Land. According to the Hebrew text, “on the morrow after the Passover” they ate unleavened cakes and parched corn, something they weren’t supposed to do until the wave offering had been performed. Presuming that the priest waved the grain offering before Yahweh earlier that day, it was indeed lawful for those Israelites to eat the produce of the land from that point

onward. And since “morrow after the Passover” must have also been the “morrow after the Sabbath,” this means that Abib 14 fell on a Saturday that year.

We understand and respect that logic.

This brings us to the reading found in the Septuagint. As it turns out, the Septuagint is completely removed from the controversy, as the crucial phrase “morrow after the Passover” is not found within its text. Notice Joshua 5:10-12, as found in the Septuagint:

¹⁰And the children of Israel kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, to the westward of Jericho on the opposite side of the Jordan in the plain.
¹¹And they ate of the grain of the earth unleavened and new *corn*. ¹²In this day the manna failed, after they had eaten of the corn of the land, and the children of Israel no longer had manna; and they took the fruits of the land of the Phoenicians in that year.

Unlike the Hebrew text of Joshua 5:11, the Septuagint does not tell us *when* they ate of the grain of the earth. Was it on the “morrow after the Passover”? Or could it have been some other day? All we know is the manna ceased after they had eaten from the produce of the land. Not being given a specific date or time reference, any implications offered in this passage can only be subject to conjecture.

One thing is certain: Neither Philo nor Josephus interpreted this passage as even remotely implying that the children of Israel ate the produce of the land on Abib 15.

This brings us to the Pentecost study session that June and I had with our “Sunday Pentecost only” friend. He strongly insisted that this very passage is evidence that the Septuagint is a sham, as “apparently” the translator intentionally removed the words “on the morrow after the Passover.” However, we can certainly recognize the possibility of the reverse being true as well! How does one know whether or not the words “on the morrow after the Passover” were *added* to the original text? We know that both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint text contain errors, so without an original template to look at, this particular passage simply boils down to being a matter of which possibility one considers as being the *greater possibility*.

One could just as easily accuse the scribes of removing words from the original Hebrew text – words that were retained in the Septuagint. Take, for example, Amos 6:3. The Hebrew text of this passage reads as follows:

³Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; ⁴that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;

In this passage, the prophet Amos denounces those who are unwilling to hear of the “evil day,” the day of their impending demise. In this same chapter we read that these apparently wealthy people were indifferent towards the plight of the needy. What *really* adds punch to the above verse, however, is the reading found in the *Septuagint version*:

³Ye who are approaching the evil day, who are drawing near and adopting false sabbaths; ⁴who sleep upon beds of ivory, and live delicately on their couches, and eat kids out of the flocks, and suckling calves out of the midst of the stalls

While this passage is a clear reference to the lackadaisical, complacent attitude that the northern kingdom of Israel had prior to their captivity, it eerily parallels the attitude so prevalent in *our own nation* right now. Greed is the order of the day, scandals abound, corporate executives build multi-million dollar mansions for themselves while staggering numbers of their own employees are forced out of work, and the United States as a nation embraces a false day of worship, at least among those who still believe in a Creator. According to *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* on this passage, "The prophet proclaimed woe to those who felt secure in the strength of their nation. His parroting of their affirmations of self-assurance and national pride underscored their complacency and placed their false pride in stark contrast to the doom he predicted in the subsequent context."⁶⁶

According to the Septuagint version, the people of Israel had adopted a false day of worship. Insofar as that nation had been nearly 100% converted to Baal worship, this should not be surprising. In our nation, the day sanctioned by Yahweh has been snubbed in favor of a day of man's own choosing, as if to be a fulfillment of Amos' prophecy — a prophecy that is curiously *left out* of the Hebrew text.

Either Amos made mention of Israel adopting *false sabbaths* or he didn't. Either the Septuagint added those words or else those who copied from the Hebrew original left them out. We have no way of knowing for sure ... at least not at this time. Until then, we are left to do the best we can and go with what seems to be the most accurate transmission of Yahweh's Word.

Regardless of which text one feels is the "most corrupted," the fact remains that the Septuagint was apparently sufficient enough for the writers of the New Testament; it was sufficient for Philo and Josephus, two very prominent Jews who lived in the first century CE. Yeshua never spoke against it; in fact, He quoted from it. This fact alone attests to the validity of the Septuagint, in spite of men's attempts to discredit it.

⁶⁶ From *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, Frank E. Gæbelein, General Editor, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985, p.318.

16. Does Counting 50 Days From Abib 16 Always Result in a Sivan 6 Pentecost?

Many individuals who are opposed to beginning the count to Pentecost on Abib 16 express the mistaken notion that this method will always result in Pentecost falling on the sixth day of the third month of Yahweh's calendar year. The third month is commonly referred to as *Sivan*. Those who adopt this notion criticize those who count from the morrow after the high day Sabbath, saying, "Why even *bother counting* to Pentecost if you always end up observing it on the sixth day of Sivan?!"

As one man put it, "The Pharisees chose to start the count on the 16th of Abib instead of the day after the weekly Sabbath. This means that Pentecost always falls on the same day of the month, the sixth of Sivan, and the 50th day is only occasionally on Sunday."⁶⁷

For those recognize this logic as being valid, we need to point out that when the instructions for counting to Pentecost were given, Israel did not abide by a fixed calendar, as normative Judaism does today. Instead, they began their months in accordance with the visual sighting of the new moon. Depending on whether there were 29 or 30 days in the first and second months, Pentecost could fall on Sivan 5, Sivan 6 or Sivan 7.

Back in 1987, when June and I first began observing the feasts, I wrote a letter to a man who believes that Pentecost can only fall on a Sunday. He had authored a booklet in which he made light of those who "bother" counting to Pentecost when it falls on the same day of the month each year. In response, I wrote, "Are you absolutely certain that by this reckoning Pentecost will or has always fallen on the sixth of Sivan? How do we know that once in a while there isn't a change in the moon or something that throws it off a day? Just wondering."

He replied, "Check out any Jewish calendar for the last 500 yrs: Sivan 6!"

Of course, his response identifies the central problem: Checking out a "Jewish calendar" means examining modern Judaism's fixed calendar that has been in place since Hillel II instituted it back in 358 CE. As we all hopefully know, ancient Judaism ascertained the first day of the month by visually sighting the crescent new moon,⁶⁸ and that is the method of calendar reckoning that June and I use, at least when it comes to observing Yahweh's feasts. Certainly, if we examine the fixed Jewish calendar, tracing it backwards 500 years, we will find that Pentecost always occurred on Sivan 6. Therefore, we need to *avoid* the modern Jewish calendar, focusing our attention instead on Yahweh's calendar based upon new moon observance.

While it is true that in most years Pentecost will fall on Sivan 6 (when counting from Abib 16), even though one begins each new month based on the observance of the new moon, such is not *always* the case. As it turns out, in the year 2000 June and I observed Pentecost on Sivan 7. When I reported the news of this fact, one individual responded that I must have calculated incorrectly. Here's what he wrote:

⁶⁷ From the tract "How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day," page 6.

⁶⁸ Cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky & Geoffrey Wigoder, Editors in Chief, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 145, where we read, "Until Hillel II instituted a permanent calendar based on astronomical calculations (in 358), the fixing of Ro'sh Hodesh (the new moon) was determined by observation and the evidence of witnesses."

Dear Larry:

Greetings in Yahweh Most High.

This year turns out not to be the exception. The new moon day was a day later than the calendars all said it would be, so again we have the 6th of Nisan. I have calendars that go back 20 years. I have checked each one of them and for the 20 years we have put out a calendar when counting from the high day Pentecost comes on the 6th of Nisan. They say the calendar follows a 19 year cycle. If that is so, then there won't be any changes to look for in the future.

Yahweh's blessings to you and yours.

Shalom in Messiah

Brother Pete Vacca⁶⁹

I replied to Pete, outlining exactly when the new moon was sighted, when we began the count to Pentecost, and finally demonstrated that day 50 of our count culminated on June 10, 2000, which coincided with Sivan 7. Suffice it to say that Pete Vacca and I resolved our disagreement amicably.

However, through the course of time ... nine years, to be exact ... Mr. Vacca apparently forgot about the above e-mail exchange. By the year 2009, Pete was serving as the editor of a newsletter entitled *Beginning Anew*. When we received the June/July 2009 issue of this newsletter, I had to do a "double-take" because, to my surprise, Pete had composed an editorial that was virtually identical to the one cited above. Here is what he wrote:

I have had many letters and e-mails about the way we are supposed to count to the Feast of Pentecost. A lot of them tell me that we are to begin the count on the day after the first high day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. I have found one flaw with that idea. I have assembly calendars that go back to 1981, and from the first day after the first high day, Pentecost always falls on the 6th day of the third month. Pentecost is the only Annual Feast that we are not given a specific day to celebrate, but we must count to get to that feast. So if we begin on the day after the high day, there is no need to count because we know that it will always fall on the 6th day of the third month.⁷⁰

I am persuaded that the above commentary is a primary example of the proverbial "a mind changed against its will is of the same opinion still." Certainly, in view of his memory lapse since the year 2000, I do not expect Mr. Vacca to retain the understanding that he is simply mistaken in his presumption that counting to Pentecost from the first day after the high day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread will always result in a Sivan 6 Pentecost.


What makes this particular discussion all the more interesting is the fact that not only have we observed yet *another* Sivan 7 Pentecost since the one in 2000, but we observed *two Sivan 7 Pentecosts in a row!* That's right, for two consecutive years (2007 and 2008), counting from the morrow after the *high day Sabbath* (Abib 16), we ended up observing Pentecost on the seventh day of the third month. For anyone who would like to see the calendars that we used, please feel free to check out the calendar page of our website.⁷¹ Shown below are three greatly reduced screen shots of the pertinent calendar pages, illustrating that, indeed, our fifty-day count from Abib 16 ended on Sivan 7 for two consecutive years:

⁶⁹ From an e-mail I received from Pete Vacca on June 7, 2000 at 12:31 PM Eastern Daylight Time.

⁷⁰ From *Beginning Anew*, editorial by Elder S.J. Vacca, published by Yahweh's Assembly in Messiah, Rocheport, MO, June/July 2009, Vol. 30, No. 4, p. 1. Note: I am uncertain as to how or why Pete Vacca identifies himself as "S.J. Vacca," but I am reasonably certain it is the same person.

⁷¹ This page is located at <http://www.ponderscripture.org/calendar.html>, where we offer calendars beginning with the year 2006.

**The new moon was sighted over Israel on March 20, 2007, making March 21 “New Year’s Day.”
Passover thus fell on April 3rd, with the Feast of Unleavened Bread beginning on April 4th. We thus
began the count to Pentecost on April 5th:**



ABIB FIRST MOON 2007

FIRST DAY	SECOND DAY	THIRD DAY	FOURTH DAY	FIFTH DAY	PREPARATION	SABBATH
	Feast Days 1, 2, 3 ... High Days = Clear Count to Pentecost		1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29			

1st Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 7:47 pm
Moon Set: 8:29 pm

2nd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 7:57 pm
Moon Set: 8:39 pm

3rd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:07 pm
Moon Set: 8:49 pm

4th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:17 pm
Moon Set: 8:59 pm

5th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:27 pm
Moon Set: 9:09 pm

6th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:37 pm
Moon Set: 9:19 pm

7th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:47 pm
Moon Set: 9:29 pm

8th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:57 pm
Moon Set: 9:39 pm

9th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:07 pm
Moon Set: 9:49 pm

10th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:17 pm
Moon Set: 9:59 pm

11th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:27 pm
Moon Set: 10:09 pm

12th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:37 pm
Moon Set: 10:19 pm

13th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:47 pm
Moon Set: 10:29 pm

14th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:57 pm
Moon Set: 10:39 pm

15th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:07 pm
Moon Set: 10:49 pm

16th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:17 pm
Moon Set: 10:59 pm

17th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:27 pm
Moon Set: 11:09 pm

18th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:37 pm
Moon Set: 11:19 pm

19th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:47 pm
Moon Set: 11:29 pm

20th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:57 pm
Moon Set: 11:39 pm

21st Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:07 pm
Moon Set: 11:49 pm

22nd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:17 pm
Moon Set: 11:59 pm

23rd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:27 pm
Moon Set: 12:09 pm

24th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:37 pm
Moon Set: 12:19 pm

25th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:47 pm
Moon Set: 12:29 pm

26th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:57 pm
Moon Set: 12:39 pm

27th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:07 pm
Moon Set: 12:49 pm

28th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:17 pm
Moon Set: 12:59 pm

29th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:27 pm
Moon Set: 1:09 pm

30th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:37 pm
Moon Set: 1:19 pm

31st Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:47 pm
Moon Set: 1:29 pm

Smart times based upon local time in Plano, Texas, USA



ZIV SECOND MOON 2007

FIRST DAY	SECOND DAY	THIRD DAY	FOURTH DAY	FIFTH DAY	PREPARATION	SABBATH
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

1st Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 7:58 pm
Moon Set: 8:06 pm

2nd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:08 pm
Moon Set: 8:16 pm

3rd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:18 pm
Moon Set: 8:26 pm

4th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:28 pm
Moon Set: 8:36 pm

5th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:38 pm
Moon Set: 8:46 pm

6th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:48 pm
Moon Set: 8:56 pm

7th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:58 pm
Moon Set: 9:06 pm

8th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:08 pm
Moon Set: 9:16 pm

9th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:18 pm
Moon Set: 9:26 pm

10th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:28 pm
Moon Set: 9:36 pm

11th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:38 pm
Moon Set: 9:46 pm

12th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:48 pm
Moon Set: 9:56 pm

13th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:58 pm
Moon Set: 10:06 pm

14th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:08 pm
Moon Set: 10:16 pm

15th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:18 pm
Moon Set: 10:26 pm

16th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:28 pm
Moon Set: 10:36 pm

17th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:38 pm
Moon Set: 10:46 pm

18th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:48 pm
Moon Set: 10:56 pm

19th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:58 pm
Moon Set: 11:06 pm

20th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:08 pm
Moon Set: 11:16 pm

21st Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:18 pm
Moon Set: 11:26 pm

22nd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:28 pm
Moon Set: 11:36 pm

23rd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:38 pm
Moon Set: 11:46 pm

24th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:48 pm
Moon Set: 11:56 pm

25th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:58 pm
Moon Set: 12:06 pm

26th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:08 pm
Moon Set: 12:16 pm

27th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:18 pm
Moon Set: 12:26 pm

28th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:28 pm
Moon Set: 12:36 pm

29th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:38 pm
Moon Set: 12:46 pm

30th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:48 pm
Moon Set: 12:56 pm

31st Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:58 pm
Moon Set: 1:06 pm

Smart times based upon local time in Plano, Texas, USA

They Said it Couldn't Happen!

This is an excerpt from a letter I sent to a well-known Christian Magazine on May 25, 2007. The usual method of answering letters was to reduce the letter to a photograph so as to allow readers to type answers in the margins. In the response to my inquiry as to whether or not Pentecost must always fall on the sixth of Sivan, his answer was: "Check out any Jewish calendar for the last 5000 yr. You'd find I think that he's right."

Thirteen years after having received the above response, to my surprise, I found out first-hand that Mr. Magazine was mistaken in his answer, as Pentecost fell on Sivan 7 for so that year. When I pointed this fact out to a gentleman named Pete Vasola, he didn't believe me... at first, there was no response.

Check out any Jewish calendar for the last 5000 yr. You'd find I think that he's right.

13 years after having received the above response, to my surprise, I found out first-hand that Mr. Magazine was mistaken in his answer, as Pentecost fell on Sivan 7 for so that year. When I pointed this fact out to a gentleman named Pete Vasola, he didn't believe me... at first, there was no response.

If Pentecost were to always fall on Sivan 6, there would only be one time to count off the 50 days each year. However, there are years when it falls on Sivan 7, such as the year 2000, and now, in the year 2007, it's occurring again! As you can see by following the 1st three calendars of this year, Pentecost falls on Sivan 7 in 2007.

SIVAN THIRD MOON 2007

FIRST DAY	SECOND DAY	THIRD DAY	FOURTH DAY	FIFTH DAY	PREPARATION	SABBATH
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

1st Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:20 pm
Moon Set: 8:21 pm

2nd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:30 pm
Moon Set: 8:31 pm

3rd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:40 pm
Moon Set: 8:41 pm

4th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 8:50 pm
Moon Set: 8:51 pm

5th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:00 pm
Moon Set: 9:01 pm

6th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:10 pm
Moon Set: 9:11 pm

7th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:20 pm
Moon Set: 9:21 pm

8th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:30 pm
Moon Set: 9:31 pm

9th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:40 pm
Moon Set: 9:41 pm

10th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 9:50 pm
Moon Set: 9:51 pm

11th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:00 pm
Moon Set: 10:01 pm

12th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:10 pm
Moon Set: 10:11 pm

13th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:20 pm
Moon Set: 10:21 pm

14th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:30 pm
Moon Set: 10:31 pm

15th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:40 pm
Moon Set: 10:41 pm

16th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 10:50 pm
Moon Set: 10:51 pm

17th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:00 pm
Moon Set: 11:01 pm

18th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:10 pm
Moon Set: 11:11 pm

19th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:20 pm
Moon Set: 11:21 pm

20th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:30 pm
Moon Set: 11:31 pm

21st Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:40 pm
Moon Set: 11:41 pm

22nd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 11:50 pm
Moon Set: 11:51 pm

23rd Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:00 pm
Moon Set: 12:01 pm

24th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:10 pm
Moon Set: 12:11 pm

25th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:20 pm
Moon Set: 12:21 pm

26th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:30 pm
Moon Set: 12:31 pm

27th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:40 pm
Moon Set: 12:41 pm

28th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 12:50 pm
Moon Set: 12:51 pm


29th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 1:00 pm
Moon Set: 1:01 pm

30th Day of Unleavened Bread
Sun Set: 1:10 pm
Moon Set: 1:11 pm

Smart times based upon local time in Plano, Texas, USA


As you can see from the above three calendar pages, “day 50” fell on May 24, 2007, which happened to be the seventh day of the third moon.

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, not only did Pentecost fall out on Sivan 7 in 2007, but the same sequence occurred again in 2008. Here are screen shots of the calendar pages from our website:



ABIB FIRST MOON 2008

FIRST DAY	SECOND DAY	THIRD DAY	FOURTH DAY	FIFTH DAY	PREPARATION	SABBATH
		1	2	3	4	5
		April 8	April 9	April 10	Sun Set: 7:53 pm April 11	Sun Set: 7:54 pm April 12
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
April 13	April 14	April 15	April 16	April 17	Sun Set: 7:59 pm April 18	Sun Set: 7:59 pm April 19
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
April 20	PASSOVER April 21	Unleavened Bread April 22	Unleavened Bread April 23	Unleavened Bread April 24	Unleavened Bread April 25	Unleavened Bread April 26
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Unleavened Bread April 27	Unleavened Bread April 28	Unleavened Bread April 29	Unleavened Bread April 30	Unleavened Bread May 1	Sun Set: 8:09 pm May 2	Sun Set: 8:10 pm May 3
27	28	29				
May 4	May 5	May 6	May 7	May 8	May 9	May 10



ZIV SECOND MOON 2008

FIRST DAY	SECOND DAY	THIRD DAY	FOURTH DAY	FIFTH DAY	PREPARATION	SABBATH
			1	2	3	4
			May 7	May 8	Sun Set: 8:14 pm May 9	Sun Set: 8:15 pm May 10
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
May 11	May 12	May 13	May 14	May 15	Sun Set: 8:19 pm May 16	Sun Set: 8:20 pm May 17
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
May 18	May 19	May 20	May 21	May 22	Sun Set: 8:24 pm May 23	Sun Set: 8:25 pm May 24
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
May 25	May 26	May 27	May 28	May 29	Sun Set: 8:29 pm May 30	Sun Set: 8:29 pm May 31
26	27	28	29			
June 1	June 2	June 3	June 4	June 5	June 6	June 7

Groups Still Promoting False Propaganda Regarding the Way We Count to Pentecost

We respect the views of those who believe the Scriptural way to count to Pentecost is to count from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, even though we do disagree on this subject. However, we do not respect promoting a doctrine while disseminating untrue comments designed to persuade others that the opposing view is false. Shown below is a screen shot excerpt from yet another study in which the author claims that Pentecost will always fall on Sivan 6 for those who, like us, count from Abib [sometimes referred to as "Nisan"] 16. The article is entitled "How to Count to Pentecost" by an anonymous author representing The Restored Church of God, Wadsworth, Ohio.

One obvious inconsistency is that by always counting from Nisan 16 (the day after the first High Day) the target date should always be Sivan 6, regardless of the day of the week. If the day God determined for Pentecost had been a set date on the sacred calendar, it would NOT be necessary to count in the first place!

For a detailed explanation of how Pentecost can indeed fall on a date other than Sivan 6 when counting the way we do, we invite you to read our study entitled "Facing the Pentecost Controversy": <http://www.ponderscripture.org/PDF%20Files/Facing%20Pentecost2.pdf>

SIVAN THIRD MOON 2008

FIRST DAY	SECOND DAY	THIRD DAY	FOURTH DAY	FIFTH DAY	PREPARATION	SABBATH
				1	2	3
				June 5	Sun Set: 8:32 pm June 6	Sun Set: 8:33 pm June 7
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
June 8	June 9	June 10	PENTECOST June 11	June 12	Sun Set: 8:36 pm June 13	Sun Set: 8:36 pm June 14
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
June 15	June 16	June 17	June 18	June 19	Sun Set: 8:38 pm June 20	Sun Set: 8:38 pm June 21
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
June 22	June 23	June 24	June 25	June 26	Sun Set: 8:39 pm June 27	Sun Set: 8:39 pm June 28
25	26	27	28	29	30	
June 29	June 30	July 1	July 2	July 3	July 4	July 5

As you can see from the above three calendar pages, "day 50" fell on the seventh day of the third moon.

After all these years, June and I have come to accept that some folks just will not see the truth of a matter, even if you lay it out in front of them. Thus, even with the above calendars that June and I observed in 2007 and 2008, some individuals will not believe that we counted fifty days from Abib 16 to Sivan 7 for two consecutive years, even though that is what we (and others) did. Others, like Mr. Vacca, may actually see and understand for a short time, but then forget what they learned.

If you are fall into either of the above categories, then we understand that you will not accept the validity of our findings. If you are willing to throw out your preconceived biases, and in some cases, any perceptions you might have that June and I are following the modern Jewish calendar, then we are persuaded that you will at least see and understand that the “always on Sivan 6” argument does not apply to June and me.

Therefore, please understand that when anyone tells you that counting to Pentecost from Abib 16 will always result in Pentecost falling on Sivan 6, they are mistaken, unless you choose to abide by modern Judaism’s fixed calendar. June and I have never used the modern Jewish calendar for determining Yahweh’s feasts, nor do we ever plan on using it.

17. Seven Full Weeks

We have already seen that, according to the Septuagint version, we are to count off “seven full weeks.” June and I have been told by several people that the only proper way one can count off seven “full” or “complete” weeks is to begin counting on the first day of the first week of that count. Seven “full” weeks later would thus end on a Sabbath, with the “morrow after the seventh week” falling on a Sunday.

Since Abib 16 can fall on any day of the week, say a Wednesday, if we begin counting from that day, we couldn’t possibly have seven “full” weeks, as we would begin counting in the middle of one week and then end our count in the middle of another. At least this is what we have been told by various individuals. This view is also expressed in the tract entitled “How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day,” where we read the following:

Another indication that the count is to begin on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath is the statement in *Leviticus 23:15*: ‘Seven full weeks shall they be.’ Some versions say ‘seven complete weeks.’ By using the term ‘full,’ or ‘complete,’ the meaning seems to be a week of seven days beginning with Sunday. Any time period of seven days is a week, but this calls for a complete week. We often use a similar statement by saying, ‘Was it this week, or last week, that John was here?’ The full week begins on Sunday.⁷²

Again, the intended point is this: The only way to come up with seven “full” weeks is to begin the count on a Sunday.

In response to this claim, please allow me to give an illustration involving my wife, June, and me. June and I were married on November 18, 1978. We will celebrate our 31st wedding anniversary in the fall of 2009. However, based upon the logic expressed above, we will not have been married for 31 “*full*” years until the actual *end* of 2009. In fact, for those of us who officially recognize Yahweh’s calendar as being the valid one (as opposed to the *Gregorian Calendar*), we will not have been married for 31 “full” years until the following spring, most likely in March 2010.

I hope we all know better. Come November 18, 2009, June and I will have officially been married for 31 “full” years.

As it is with years, so it is with weeks. A week is simply a period of seven consecutive days. If we report to a new job on a Wednesday, then one week later (i.e., the following Wednesday) we can say that we have been on the job for a “full” week, i.e., a period of seven days.

The logic as expressed to me by those who believe Pentecost can only fall on a Sunday implies that if someone were to start a new job on, say, a Thursday, then such a person couldn’t *truthfully* go around telling others, *seven Thursdays later*, that he had been on the job for “seven full weeks.” This argument is lacking in substance when examined in the light of reality and historical understanding.

⁷² From “How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day,” page 4.

18. Did the Messiah Ascend to the Father on the Day of Firstfruits?

Shortly after returning home from the 2003 Unity Conference in Rocheport, Missouri, we received a very encouraging e-mail from a man named Scott, whom we met there. Scott felt that I pretty much covered everything having to do with the Pentecost Controversy, except for one item. It was an aspect of the controversy that I had actually *deliberately* chosen to leave out of the presentation (and our study) because I really did not feel it would be of that much interest to anyone, nor would it have any bearing on which way they leaned.

Well, I was apparently mistaken, for not only did our new friend inquire of my rationale on that particular topic, but a few months later someone else who had read our study asked virtually the same question, informing me that the only thing “holding him back” from accepting the “Any Day Pentecost” view was the question of whether or not Yeshua ascended to the Father on what he felt was the day of the Wave Sheaf offering, otherwise known as the “Day of Firstfruits.” I’m not quite sure of what designation to give those who adhere to this belief, which has apparently evolved into a doctrinal position. Referring to such individuals as “People who believe Yeshua fulfilled the Wave Sheaf Offering by ascending to the Father on the first day of the week” is a little long, so I think I will just go with referring to them as proponents of the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” doctrine. This doctrine, then, serves as the backdrop for the question that Scott asked me upon our return home from the conference:

One issue that many of us Sunday [Pentecost] people raise in defending our position is the idea that Messiah being our firstfruits, was likely raised [i.e., ascended to the Father] on the day of firstfruits. I'm sure you are familiar with the various scriptural texts used to support this position. It all seems to make everything fit so cleanly in harmonizing the OT with the NT, especially in the Wed afternoon death to end of Sabbath resurrection scenario. If indeed the floating Pentecost is correct, Yahshua could not have been raised [ascended to the Father] on the day of firstfruits.

Since this wasn't addressed in your article, I'm wondering about your view on this.⁷³

Note: I intentionally incorporated the words “ascended to the Father” into the above quotation so as to accommodate those who believe the Messiah was actually raised before the Sabbath had ended, but who still insist that, as the “Firstfruits,” He ascended to heaven between the time that He appeared to Miriam Magdalene (Jn. 20:11-18) and the time He appeared to His disciples (Jn. 20:19-30). Since many are persuaded that the Sunday following Passover is the “day of firstfruits,” they believe that after appearing to Miriam, Yeshua ascended to heaven, where He was presented to the Father and “accepted.” Presuming that this is what happened, those who believe Yeshua ascended to the Father between His visit with Miriam Magdalene and His appearance before His disciples are also persuaded that this proves the first day of the week “must” be the day upon which the wave sheaf was offered, and consequently, “day one” of the count to Pentecost.

If I were unaware of any logic supporting the "Any Day Pentecost" position, I would definitely embrace at least a portion of the reasoning that Scott expressed in support of a "Sunday-only Pentecost." I have read the logic supporting this view, and I do understand an individual's decision to employ this rationale as forming a part of his or her decision to count to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. Nevertheless, embracing the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” doctrine raises more questions than

⁷³ Scott sent this e-mail on August 6, 2003.

it answers and, in the end, we have found that it amounts to nothing more than an esoteric interpretation of what *may* have happened based upon the Apostle John's account of Yeshua's resurrection.

Incredibly, June and I had never heard of this particular teaching until we began receiving literature from the Assemblies of Yahweh (Bethel, PA) back in 1986. One of the studies we received from them is entitled "The Wave Sheaf Ordinance," which was originally written in 1979. It goes into some detail about Yeshua being the firstfruits, which was waved and accepted on the morrow after the Sabbath, and towards the end it mentions Miriam Magdalene's visit to the tomb, when she mistook Yeshua for the gardener, and this is also when Yeshua told her, "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father." Later that morning, as it is taught, He ascended to the "heavenly court," where He presented Himself alive to the Father, and was accepted. Then, later in the day, He returned to earth and presented Himself to Thomas, who was able to touch Him and thrust his hand into Yeshua's side. However, that is our summary of the "Yeshua Ascended in John 20" position. It's always best to let them put it in their own words, so here is an excerpt from the Assemblies of Yahweh article, authored by James Bird and Jacob O. Meyer:

The wave sheaf ordinance actually sheds light on understanding the New Testament sequence of days in Yahshua's last week. We are therefore enlightened about when His last supper, death, and resurrection occurred. Yahshua the Messiah was Yahweh's true Passover Lamb. He also became our wave sheaf offering when He ascended and was accepted by the Heavenly Father. He was without blemish. Therefore, He could not be touched (partaken of), like the ripe grain has been prohibited until the thanksgiving sheaf was offered, John 20:17.

Miriam mistook Yahshua the Messiah to be the gardener. Could the reason for this mistaken identity have been that Yahshua the Messiah was carrying a sheaf of grain (the last one to be cut under the sacrificial law)? As we read John chapter 20 again, it becomes obvious that Yahshua the Messiah carried out this mission as our High Priest. He fulfilled the last wave sheaf offering and then presented Himself to Almighty Yahweh in heaven on the first day of the week, known as the time the wave sheaf was offered. It is on this day that we must begin our count toward the completion of seven full weeks and our observance of Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks—Shavuoth), occurring on the fiftieth day after the resurrection. Actually, it is Yahshua's resurrection, ascension into the heavens, and His acceptance by Yahweh that paved the way for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost of Acts chapter 2.⁷⁴

When I first read the above commentary on the events that occurred after Yeshua's resurrection, I immediately came away with the impression that the authors were taking some undue interpretational liberties, resulting in a peculiar interpretation that doesn't fit the context. At the time, for some reason, I didn't really believe anyone would seriously consider their commentary as being an ironclad interpretation, but over the years I have come to realize that I was mistaken in that assessment. In fact, in view of what I discovered after delivering my Unity Conference presentation in 2003, I wouldn't be surprised if the majority of believers associated with what is known as the "Sacred Name Movement" agree with the Assemblies of Yahweh's interpretation, which may or may not have originated with them.

In considering the logic that Yeshua, as the Firstfruits of the resurrection, was raised on the day of the wave sheaf offering, there are several items to consider, all of which contribute towards making the "Yeshua Ascended in John 20" view very dubious:

⁷⁴ Excerpt from "The Wave Sheaf Ordinance," by James Bird and Jacob O. Meyer, ©1979 Assemblies of Yahweh, Bethel, PA 19507, All Rights Reserved, p. 4.

1) **IF** the first day of the week represents the day of the wave sheaf offering each year, then I certainly do not believe Yeshua was raised on that day. I believe He was raised prior to the onset of the first day of the week.

2) **IF** the reason Miriam mistook Yeshua for the gardener is because He was carrying a sheaf of barley, why didn't the Apostle John incorporate such a significant piece of information into his account? Why did he leave it up to his reading audience to "read between the lines"?

3) **IF** Yeshua ascended to heaven shortly after His encounter with Miriam Magdalene, why did John omit this very important detail from his account? Why did he leave it up to his readers to "just figure out" that this is what happened?

4) This, then, leads to the other teaching, wherein He was "accepted" as the firstfruits offering on the first day of the week. Nowhere in the text of John chapter 20 does it ever state that Yeshua was "accepted by Yahweh" on that day.

As you can (hopefully) see, adopting the belief that Yeshua ascended to heaven in John 20 raises more questions than it answers, and when it becomes evident that this doctrine actually exists for the primary, if not the sole, purpose of validating the "Sunday Only Pentecost" position, it becomes all too clear that this teaching is simply an example of what is known as *eisegesis*.⁷⁵

Needless to say, June and I are persuaded that the teaching promoted by the Assemblies of Yahweh reflects a premature conclusion based on insufficient information that can be interpreted in more than one way. To get a better perspective of our viewpoint, please imagine yourself as the author of the book of John, and let's say that, indeed, Yeshua ascended to the Father shortly after His encounter with Miriam Magdalene, where He was "accepted" as the firstfruits offering. In writing of this *very significant* event, wouldn't *you* have recorded that, after His visit with Miriam, Yeshua ascended to the Father and was accepted? Wouldn't *you* have gone to the trouble of pointing out to your readers that He was thus the fulfillment of the firstfruits offering, and that until His official acceptance by Yahweh, He could not be "touched" by humanity?

Please understand that I am not trying to undermine or otherwise nitpick at the Apostle John's method of communicating with his reading audience. On the contrary, I believe John was an excellent communicator who took pains to ensure that his reading audience understood instances in which Yeshua fulfilled prophecy, either by His words or His actions. Consider, for example, the instance in which John recorded Yeshua's discourse with the Jews wherein He told them that if they destroyed "this temple," He would raise it up in three days. This account is found in John, chapter 2:

¹⁸ ¶ Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

¹⁹ Yeshua answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

²⁰ Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?

²¹ **But He spake of the temple of his body.**

²² **When therefore He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Yeshua had said.**

⁷⁵ *Eisegesis* is defined as "the interpretation of a text (as of the Bible) by reading into it one's own ideas." "Eisegesis," Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2009. Merriam-Webster Online. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eisegesis>>.

Why did John take the time to inform us that Yeshua was speaking of the temple of His body? Shouldn't John have presumed that we would just "figure it out"? No, John wrote in such a way as to not keep us guessing at the significance of important events.

Another example of John's tendency to keep his readers "in the loop" on things can be found in John 8:25-27:

²⁵Then said they unto Him, Who art thou? And Yeshua saith unto them, Even *the same* that I said unto you from the beginning.

²⁶I have many things to say and to judge of you: but He that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him.

²⁷They understood not that he spake to them of the Father.

John informs us that the Pharisees didn't understand that when Yeshua spoke of the One who sent him, He was referring to the Father. As we can see, although the Pharisees may have been "in the dark" as to who Yeshua was, the Apostle John made certain that his readers knew!

Still *another* example of the Apostle John's commitment to not keep his reading audience guessing at what Yeshua meant by some of the things He said (or did) can be found in John 12:12-16:

¹²¶ On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Yeshua was coming to Jerusalem,

¹³Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of YHWH.

¹⁴And Yeshua, when He had found a young donkey, sat thereon; as it is written,

¹⁵Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on a donkey's colt.

¹⁶These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Yeshua was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him.

Once again, we see that the Apostle John, in his account, took measures to ensure that his readers grasped the significance of not only the things Yeshua *said*, but also the things He *did*.

Although I know there are those who take issue with the approach June and I use in interpreting Scripture, nevertheless, I maintain that June and I try to be reasonable and balanced in our method to Scriptural exegesis. As such, we find it necessary to ask those who agree that Yeshua ascended to heaven after visiting with Miriam Magdalene, "Why is it that we have to *interpret* that Yeshua ascended to the Father on that day?" Why did John go to such lengths to ensure that we understand *other* prophetic fulfillments of Yeshua's life, yet require us to extrapolate by interpretational deduction that He fulfilled the Wave Sheaf Offering on the first day of the week, including an apparently unnoticed, unheralded ascension to heaven?

In spite of the Apostle John's tendency to keep his readers informed with regard to the implications of the prophetic fulfillments exemplified by Yeshua, some folks remain persuaded that he expected us to "read between the lines" when it came to figuring out that when Miriam mistook Yeshua for the gardener, this must have meant that He was carrying the Wave Sheaf offering. Not only that, but when He said, "Touch Me not," this is because He was without blemish! If touching an offering that is "without blemish" defiles it, then John should have explained *why* it was so important for no one to touch Yeshua until He had ascended to the Father.

The question that June and I have often asked proponents of the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” belief is, “If Yeshua ascended to the Father after His visit with Miriam that day, then why did John leave the details of such an important matter out of his account?” Why do we have to *interpret* such an important event? Could this be a *forced* interpretation? We have yet to read a satisfactory answer to that question.

I believe we have successfully demonstrated that the Apostle John was committed to keeping his reading audience informed with regard to the fulfillment of important prophetic events. On that basis, we are persuaded that those who deduce that Yeshua had an apparently unnoticed, unheralded ascension in John 20 are simply reading too much into the account. Conversely, if their conclusion is correct, I would have to say that I am disappointed in the Apostle John’s treatment of this very important event. I would ask John why he was so careful to expound on *other* prophetic fulfillments, yet he left us guessing in his 20th chapter. If Yeshua truly *did* ascend to the Father in John 20, and I was the one penning this account, I would have gone to *great lengths* to describe the significance of what happened, including how the disciples later understood that Yeshua's ascension to the Father for acceptance fulfilled the wave sheaf offering. I would have written of how Yeshua ascended to Yahweh that very morning, fulfilling the offering of the firstfruits, of how He was subsequently accepted, and of His return to earth to be with His disciples later in the day.

Yet John did not mention these significant details in his account. Nor did *any* of the authors of the Messianic Accounts. This, in and of itself, is very telling. Not only are we left to *interpret* what happened from John’s account, but we are also left to wonder why *none* of the other authors of what is known as the New Testament so much as left us with a *hint* that Yeshua fulfilled the Wave Sheaf Offering on the first day of the week following His resurrection. As important as this glaring absence of corroborating information is, those who promote the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” belief seem all too willing to ignore it. We have yet to read any persuasive arguments from the proponents of this doctrine in which they so much as *mention* any concern that their interpretation is based on only one account, since the other authors didn’t expound on it.

Such is the case with a brief editorial that we read shortly before Pentecost 2009. The editor of a newsletter entitled *Beginning Anew* offered a brief summary of what he feels are the most compelling reasons for believing that Pentecost *must* fall on a Sunday each year. One of them, of course, is his belief that the Hebrew word “Sabbath” as used in Leviticus 23:11; 15-16 can mean none other than the weekly Sabbath. However, he lists the most important factor validating his belief as being his interpretation of John 20. Here are some excerpts from his commentary:

I have some so-called history books and commentaries and other books that have different opinions. Let us go to the honest true source, that very first, First Fruit, Yahshua Messiah. He died on Wednesday late afternoon, was taken down before sunset and placed in the tomb. He was there from Wednesday night to Thursday night, from Thursday night to Friday night, and from Friday night until Saturday night when he was resurrected at sundown after the weekly Sabbath. He spent three days and three nights in the bosom of the earth as He said He would. What did Yahshua do on the day after the weekly Sabbath on that day that He was resurrected? He presented Himself to His Father Yahweh as the wave sheaf, the first fruit of the resurrection of the dead, and He did it on the first day of the week after the weekly Sabbath.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ From *Beginning Anew*, editorial by Elder S.J. Vacca, published by Yahweh’s Assembly in Messiah, Rocheport, MO, June/July 2009, Vol. 30, No. 4, p. 1.

The author proceeded to elaborate on how this event (or his interpretation thereof) is “the most important point that harmonizes the doctrine the way we see it”:

I believe the most important point that harmonizes the doctrine the way we see it and makes us believe we are correct in our calculations, is the fact that Yahshua the Messiah Himself gave us that key ingredient that makes the recipe perfect.⁷⁷

As we can see, then, even though the Apostle John never expounds upon the alleged “fact” that Yeshua ascended to heaven on the first day of the week following His resurrection ... even though none of the other New Testament authors so much as *hinted* at such a thing ... the interpretation of what the above author *thinks* John meant is the most important point that validates the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” doctrine as they see it. Should we be concerned when a group chooses to make an interpretation of an account that may be understood in more than one way one of their foundational arguments?

Only One Ascension Mentioned by New Testament Authors

In John 20:17, Yeshua told Miriam Magdalene that He had not yet ascended to His Father. So when *did* He ascend? The only “ascension” mentioned is the account recorded by Luke in Acts chapter one. We are thus left to believe that Yeshua’s *only* ascension was the one witnessed by the apostles in the book of Acts:

⁹And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

¹⁰And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

¹¹Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Yeshua, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.

Clearly, Yeshua’s ascension was a miraculous event, one that anyone witnessing would not ever forget. Luke was not an eyewitness to Yeshua’s ascension, yet it was something that had been passed along to him as he learned more about the Savior, and it was something that he felt was important enough to share with his reading audience. Luke didn’t record the Ascension as “Yeshua’s second ascension,” nor did he offer any clues that such might have been the case. The impression we are left by the authors of the Messianic accounts is that this *recorded* ascension was the *only* ascension.

Is Yeshua the Fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering?

While there is no question that Yeshua is the “first of the firstfruits” in fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering (I Corinthians 15:20; 23), this does not mean that He “waved Himself” or that He had to ascend to heaven on the first day of the week to be “accepted.” Again, if such had been the case, we can be fairly certain that the authors of the Messianic Accounts would have expounded on such important details of prophetic fulfillment. The only connection that the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” proponents can use in promoting a “Sunday-Only Pentecost” lies in their belief that the Yeshua’s fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering occurred on the first day of the week. However, as we have seen, it is only by forced interpretation (*eisegesis*) that anyone can believe that the Apostle John

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

recorded a fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering in chapter 20. In other words, if indeed He was "accepted" as the firstfruits offering on the exact same day that the priest waved the wave sheaf offering each year, I would expect to see such a connection recognized as such by either the Apostle John or the other authors of the New Testament. Instead, however, we are left to *interpret* such a possibility, which leads me to wonder if such an interpretation might be a forced one that was never intended.

Was Yeshua "Untouchable"?

We have seen that the reasoning used to sustain the interpretation that Yeshua fulfilled the wave sheaf offering on the first day of the week is based upon the belief that Yeshua ascended to the Father on the first day of the week, following His resurrection. This belief in turn rests upon the notion that Yeshua told Mary not to "touch" Him, as He was apparently "untouchable" until He first ascended to the Father. However, the Greek authorities, so far as I can tell, all agree that He didn't *really* say "Touch Me not." Notice what *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9, has to say about this subject:

In reply to her action, Jesus said, "Do not hold onto me." He was not refusing to be touched but was making clear that she did not need to detain him, for he had not yet ascended to the Father. He planned to remain with the disciples for a little while; she need not fear that he would vanish immediately. Ultimately he would return to God, and he urged her to tell the disciples that he would do so.⁷⁸

In a separate note, the author adds the following details:

The NIV translation "Do not hold on to me" is accurate. The verb ἅπτω (*haptō*) does not mean to touch with the tip of a finger to test whether or not an object is real or not but to "clutch" or "grip." Jesus was not protesting that Mary should not touch him lest he be defiled, but he was admonishing her not to detain him because he would see her and the disciples again. The use of the particle μή (*mē*, "not") with the present imperative means to stop an action already begun rather than to avoid starting it.⁷⁹

I believe we can accurately summarize the above commentary by stating that Yeshua was *not* telling Miriam Magdalene to not touch Him because He didn't want to be "defiled" before His ascension to the Father. Rather, we believe He was in essence saying, "Hey, come on! No need to dote on Me ... I haven't ascended to My Father yet!"

This is the same general understanding expressed by Adam Clarke, in his *Commentary on the Holy Bible*:

17. *Touch me not.* "Cling not to Me." *Aptomai* has this sense in Job xxxi. 7, where the Septuagint uses it for the Hebrew *dabak*, which signifies to "cleave, cling, stick, or be glued to." From Matt. xxviii. 9, it appears that some of the women "held him by the feet, and worshipped him." This probably Mary did; and our Lord seems to have spoken to her to this effect: "Spend no longer time with Me now. I am not going immediately to heaven—you will have several opportunities of seeing Me again. But go and tell My disciples that I am, by and

⁷⁸ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9, Frank E. Gæbelein, General Editor, "The Gospel of John," by Merrill C. Tenney, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984, p. 191.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 192.

by, to ascend to My Father and God, who is your Father and God also. Therefore, let them take courage.”⁸⁰

It thus appears that the interpretation held by the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” proponents is one based upon a questionable foundation: They hold on to the notion that Yeshua told Miriam not to touch Him because He was "untouchable" until having first ascended to the Father, whereas the text actually indicates that He was telling her to not "cling to Him," as she would have other opportunities to see Him. If the Apostle John was indeed recording Yeshua's concern about being touched before ascending to heaven, I find it very bizarre that he did not clarify this remark by Yeshua. If indeed Yeshua intended for Miriam to understand that He was "untouchable" until He first ascended to the Father, I would expect John to have then written something like this: "Then, behold, Yeshua ascended to the Father, where He was accepted as the firstfruit offering. Thus was fulfilled the wave sheaf offering as written in the Law."

Since John did not provide any such clarification, I believe it takes some rather pretentious treatment of the overall text to arrive at such a conclusion - a conclusion that is important enough to be taught as doctrinal truth, yet *never* expounded upon by the NT authors.

Thus, as neat as it may seem to believe that Yeshua fulfilled the Wave Sheaf Offering by being mistaken for a gardener ... which “must” mean that He was carrying a sheaf of grain ... and that He cautioned Miriam Magdalene to not touch Him out of concern for being defiled prior to His imminent, soon-to-occur ascension to heaven ... such a significant and certainly *noteworthy* fulfillment was not important enough for New Testament authors to even provide us with so much as a side note. Quite frankly, we do not believe such a monumental truth would have been left unmentioned by the NT authors, and we certainly don't believe they would have neglected mentioning Yeshua's "two ascensions," one of which was apparently done in secret. Moreover, we also find it strange that, if Yeshua was indeed "untouchable" from His resurrection until His (first) ascension to the Father, only *one* NT author (John) even so much as *hinted* at it. Shall we allow such a spurious interpretation to affect the way we count to Pentecost? Based upon all the evidence that June and I have found in our research, our answer is, "No."

Over the years we have run into some other folks' explanations as to why they do not believe Yeshua fulfilled the wave sheaf offering on the first day of the week. One of the better explanations involves the belief that Yeshua's sacrifice was accepted at the very moment of His death ... not three and a half days later, and I will state right now that I fully agree with that assessment. This explanation comes from a man named William Dankenbring. Although Dankenbring agrees with the way June and I count to Pentecost, he is much more dogmatic in his approach than we are. Nevertheless, he occasionally comes up with some interesting explanations, and his perspective on Yeshua's “acceptance” produces some logic that I believe merits our attention. Here is what he wrote in an article entitled "How Do You ‘Count’ Pentecost?":

Some claim the wave sheaf typifies Christ as the “firstfruits from the grave,” being “accepted” of God the Father on Sunday, the first day of the week. They will refer to Jesus' words to Mary, the Sunday morning after He arose from the grave, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father . . .” (John 20:17).

⁸⁰ Adam Clarke's *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Abridged by Ralph Earle, Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, Kansas City, MO, 1985, pp. 952-53.

Some assume that since Jesus had not yet ascended to the Father, that means He was not yet “accepted” by the Father! His ascending to the Father, they claim, is the fulfillment of the “wave sheaf” offering!

But is that assumption or idea really true? Was the sacrifice of Jesus NOT ACCEPTED of the Father until AFTER THE RESURRECTION and ASCENSION?

There are several problems with this interpretation. First, there is no proof Jesus “ascended” to God the Father on that Sunday. Rather, the Scriptures show He did not “ascend to heaven” until some forty days later (Acts 1:3, 11), in the sight of all the apostles. In the original Greek language, Jesus' words to Mary, “Touch me not,” did not refer to simple touching, but clinging to Him, hanging on to Him, embracing Him. He was telling her not to hold on to Him. Later, however, Thomas even felt His hands, where the nails had been driven (John 20:27).

The truth is, Jesus' sacrifice for our sins was accepted the moment He died for our sins -- not several days “later.” His “acceptance” had nothing to do with His “ascension,” which did not occur until forty days later! The sacrifice of Jesus for our sins was accepted by Almighty God, our Father, immediately. Therefore, since Jesus was crucified on Passover day, and the following day was an annual high Sabbath, the wave sheaf offering was performed THE VERY NEXT WORK DAY -- the day after the annual Sabbath -- the 16th of Nisan, symbolizing His being “the first fruits” of the resurrection.

Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday. Thursday of that week was the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an annual Sabbath. Therefore, the wave sheaf offering, typifying the ACCEPTED CHRIST -- occurred on Friday of that week -- not two days later, on Sunday!

It is a false assumption that the acceptance of the offering of Christ, the “firstfruits” of God's plan, did not occur until FOUR DAYS after the death of Christ. God accepted His death as payment for our sins as soon as He died. The wave sheaf offering had to do with the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, NOT THE RESURRECTION!

The plain truth is that the wave sheaf offering occurred right after the first annual holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It represented Jesus Christ who was the “sheaf of the firstfruits” (Lev. 23:10). The priest waved it before the Lord “TO BE ACCEPTED FOR YOU” (v.11). This ritual had nothing to do with Christ's ascending to the throne of God after the resurrection, but rather with His SACRIFICE being accepted FOR US! Notice again, the wave sheaf was to be accepted “FOR YOU” the people! Christ's sacrifice was accepted immediately by God-- not four days later!

We were reconciled to God by the DEATH of His Son. As Paul wrote, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them . . . For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:19-21).⁸¹

Although June and I certainly have our differences with William Dankenbring, in this instance we believe he is on target. As he points out, the reality is that Yeshua's sacrifice for our sins was accepted at the very moment that He died, not three or four days later.

⁸¹ Dankenbring, William F., "How Do You 'Count' Pentecost?", Triumph Prophetic Ministries (Church of God); although this article is not dated, we accessed it online in 2002 at http://triumphpro.com/how_do_you_count_pentecost.htm. Curiously, this article has since been modified and relocated to the following URL: <http://triumphpro.com/pen-count.htm>. The most noticeable modification involves the author's current belief that Yeshua was crucified on a Thursday.

Legitimate Analogies or Forced Interpretations?

In defense of their position, some “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” proponents have emphasized the “waving” of the sheaf on the morrow after the Sabbath. The New Revised Standard Version translates this word as “raise,” which some might understand as being a connection to Yeshua being “raised” from the dead. Thus, as they point out, it doesn’t make sense to wave the sheaf on the morrow after the *high day Sabbath*, since Yeshua was still in the tomb at that time. However, if we are to use that analogy, we might well ask why the wave sheaf wasn’t offered as the weekly Sabbath was about to *end*, since that is when he rose from the dead. For those who understand that Yeshua was crucified on a Wednesday and buried before sunset, by the time the weekly Sabbath was about to end, Yeshua had been in the tomb for precisely three days and three nights. If He was raised as the Sabbath was about to end ... *and* we operate under the presumption that the wave sheaf offering could only be offered in conjunction with the timing of Yeshua’s resurrection, then shouldn’t it have been waved as the Sabbath was about to end?

Many individuals, in their attempts to conform Scripture to their interpretation, come up with some very interesting analogies, and this includes their interpretations of the significance of the Wave Sheaf Offering. I am reminded of the famous quote by Henry Louis Mencken: “There is always an easy solution to every human problem: neat, plausible, and wrong.”⁸² On the surface, it might seem that when we view a certain text in a certain way, we have an epiphany, and maybe we even go so far as to conclude that it was the Almighty who revealed it to us. However, we need to be careful.

In the case of the fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering – namely, the day of the week on which it was fulfilled, it would be prudent to not reach any premature conclusions based on our assessment of how things “must” have happened during the year of Yeshua’s crucifixion, especially since none of the New Testament authors, who wrote under the inspiration of Yahweh, exhibited the need for us to understand the specific day of the week ... or month ... on which this ceremony was performed.

For those who choose to ignore the warning signs and proceed with establishing their interpretations as “doctrine,” we can only wonder where this form of exegesis will lead. Will some conclude that Yeshua’s body was actually burned? They might if they choose to assign a very literal application of the sacrificial law. For example, Hebrews 13:11-12 expounds on how the bodies of animals offered as sacrifices for sin were burned outside the camp, and then gives the analogy that “Wherefore, Yeshua ALSO, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without [outside] the gate.” This analogy might lend credence to the belief that Yeshua’s body was actually *burned*, not buried! Others might argue, “If He were *truly* the Passover lamb, He would have been killed on an altar, not on a cross!”

Someone else might argue that if Yeshua were truly the Messiah, He would have been arrested on Abib 10, the day when the Passover lamb is supposed to be confined (Ex. 12:2), instead of the night before His crucifixion. In fact, after composing this potential argument, I decided to check the Internet to see if anyone has produced such an argument. The answer is yes. The following question was posed by a visitor to the *Yahoo! Answers* website:

⁸² Henry Louis Mencken, quoted from “The Divine Afflatus,” *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, chapter 25, p. 443 (1949). This essay was originally published in the *New York Evening Mail*, November 16, 1917, and reprinted in *Prejudices: Second Series* (1920).

If Jesus was the lamb of God, why wasn't he taken to a Jewish temple and sacrificed on the altar by having his throat cut and his blood thrown [against] the wall? or did they change their method of sacrificing to include crucifixion? because crucifixion doesn't actually involve blood or burning.⁸³

While I believe the above commentary is an extreme example of the lengths people will go to in order to reconcile their understanding of Scriptural fulfillment or other implications of Scriptural types, nevertheless, it goes without saying that we need to be careful in not infusing our understanding of how things *should* have been fulfilled into our interpretations of texts. When we do this, we practice *eisegesis*, which essentially means “reading a meaning into the text that isn't really there.” This is what I typically refer to as “forcing an interpretation that isn't really there.”

⁸³ From the *Yahoo! Answers* website. This question, along with the various answers submitted, may be found by accessing the following URL: <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090802081533AAsq3jx>.

19. Objection: Do as "they" say ... or do as "he" says?

Upon giving my *Facing the Pentecost Controversy* at the Unity Conference, the only objection I encountered came from a gentleman who took issue with my commentary of Matthew 23, wherein Yeshua presented the "scribes and Pharisees" as sitting in Moses' seat in conjunction with His admonition to "observe and do" whatsoever they bid us to observe. Those who remain opposed to counting to Pentecost the way the Pharisees do it will obviously not be enamored with Yeshua's words here, and a gentleman named Jerry objected to the translation I used in quoting Yeshua's words. He pointed out the "correct translation" of Matthew 23:3 can be found in the *Shem Tob* Hebrew Matthew. Here is how the text from Matthew 23:1-3 really reads, even though George Howard didn't translate it that way in his *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*:

¹ Then **Yeshua** spoke to the people and to His disciples

² saying: Upon the seat of Moses the Pharisees and sages sit.

³ Now all which **he** says to you keep and do; but (according to) their ordinances and deeds do not do because they say and do not.

In the above translation, I bold-face typed the words that I changed from Professor Howard's rendering. Of course, I give the proper transliteration of the Messiah's name from the Hebrew text, but for our present concern, I want to focus on the pronoun "**he**." In virtually all available translations, the pronoun "they" is employed. This very subtle difference can result in a very different interpretation of the above passage. Certainly, if Yeshua told His disciples to do all **they** say to "keep and do," He is telling them to obey the directives given by the Pharisees. On the other hand, if the actual pronoun He used in verse 3 was the pronoun "**he**," then Yeshua was obviously referring to *Moses*, apart from and *as opposed to* the Pharisees!

The man issuing the above objection maintains that Yeshua obviously intended for His followers to obey *Moses*, and not necessarily the Pharisees, even though He acknowledged that they sat in Moses' seat. His point, though very well taken, does nothing to resolve the Pentecost controversy, for that in itself is the very purpose in our composing this study! Was it the will of Moses that we begin the count to Pentecost from the morrow after the "*high day* Sabbath" or was it his will that we begin the count on the morrow after the *weekly* Sabbath?

The fact that the Pharisees began the count from the morrow after the high day Sabbath does not in any way infer that this means Yeshua was telling His followers to begin the count to Pentecost differently from the Pharisees. This point is accentuated by the fact that, upon issuing this directive, the worst charge Yeshua chose to bring up against the Pharisees was the fact that they would put burdens upon others while themselves "not lifting a finger." Certainly, if the Pharisaical leadership was guilty of teaching an incorrect method of counting to Pentecost, Yeshua would not have hesitated to have mentioned such an infraction instead of drumming up such a far less significant charge against them.

On a curious side note to Jerry's objection, I find it interesting that he should bring up the fact that Yeshua taught His followers to obey Moses. One of the laws given by Yahweh through Moses involves the wearing of fringes on our garments. If Yeshua taught His followers to obey Moses, then this law would have to be *included*, not excluded from what Yeshua taught. Nevertheless, the man raising the objection is on record as teaching that the law pertaining to wearing fringes has been "done away." We appreciate his outward zeal in believing the Messiah taught obedience to Moses. However, we do not appreciate the obvious double standard created when "picking and choosing" which of those laws to obey.

20. Answering a Critic's Response to our Study

On May 22, 2004 we received a response to our original study entitled "Brief Comments on the Book *Facing the Pentecost Controversy*." The author of the review, Voy Wilks, is a gentleman whom we have known for several years, and is a man whose sincerity and integrity is respected by all who are privileged to have made his acquaintance. Nevertheless, Mr. Wilks is not in agreement with our view on how the ancients counted to Pentecost. In his review, Voy attempted to:

- 1) Disprove our claim that the Pharisees controlled the temple services during the first century CE.
- 2) Discredit the translation known as the *Septuagint*.

The entire text of his response is displayed below, transcribed from his original commentary. In addition to the review, we were sent additional literature designed to disprove the position that June and I hold. Nevertheless, instead of providing us with new information that might serve to disprove any of our findings, we found that what Mr. Wilks sent us consisted of the same arguments we've already seen before, only reworded.

Again, as we have stated before, we do respect the logic of those who believe the count to Pentecost should begin on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Nevertheless, when individuals who promote this view send out incorrect and even distorted information, I do feel the errors need to be exposed. With this in mind, I will respond to Mr. Wilks' comments.

BRIEF COMMENTS ON THE BOOK

FACING THE PENTECOST CONTROVERSY

The last scholar, F. F. Bruce, is cited as being unreliable perhaps, because his name is associated with two different opinions;

Page 24. The Sadducees set the date for Pentecost as long as the temple stood; always counting 50 days from the first Sunday after Passover.

The Pharisees set the date for Pentecost; always counting 50 days from the 16th of Abib.

Page 25. According to the more usual method of reckoning, First Fruits fell on Nisan 16.

Please notice: In the first instance, Mr. Bruce, in his own book gave his scholarly opinion. In the second instance, Mr Bruce was "the general editor" of a Bible Commentary written by others. Perhaps it was unseemly for Mr. Bruce to have changed another scholars copy. I would think it is not a general editor's duty to rewrite the commentary, but to see that all contributed articles conform to a certain standard of presentation, appearance, etc.

It is true that Queen Alexandra Salome (a Pharisee) bestowed upon her eldest son John Hyrcanus (a Pharisee) the high priesthood. Some scholars have written that the

Sadducees never again regained power over the Pharisees. This is incorrect. In later life, after his mother's death, King John Hyrcanus became angry with the party of the Pharisees* and joined the party of the Sadducees. Evidently from this time onward, the Sadducees set the dates for the festivals and ruled the temple worship as long as the temple stood, as Mr. Bruce and others have indicated. The N. T. indicates the same."

* *Ant. 13:10.5-7*

When the Apostles walked the earth, the domain of the Pharisees was the synagogue (Mt. 23:2). They were more numerous and more popular. The temple service was the domain of the Sadducees. Although there were some Pharisees in the Sanhedrin the majority of its members were of the party of the Sadducees (Acts 5:17-28). Obviously, the Sadducees had the majority of power. In addition, the very mention that a Pharisee was a member of the council (the Senate of Israel) indicates the majority were Sadducees (Acts 5:34).

The Septuagint Version is polluted to some extent, for example:

Scriptures indicate it is a good thing to bless Yahweh (Ps. 34:1; 66:8). The Septuagint text, however, indicates it is a crime to bless Yahweh (1 Kings 21:9, 13). The Hebrew text in this verse uses the word curse, instead of bless Yahweh. A similar report is in Lev. 24:11, 16; he supposedly "named the name" (Yahweh) and was killed for doing so.

Appearing about 108 times, it is significant that, except for Isaiah 66:23, the only Scripture in which the word Sabbath (#7676) is translated week(s) in the Jewish Bible (in English) is in the timing for Pentecost (Lev. 23:15 and 16). Even in verse 10 the correct translation is given; Sabbath, not week (#7676).

It is now evident that the Jewish translators changed the text from "seven Sabbaths" and "seventh sabbath" (verses 15 and 16) to read "seven weeks" and "seventh week." The reason? To make the Scriptures agree with the custom of the Pharisees, both ancient and modern. Why be misled?

Voy Wilks

The first half of Mr. Wilks' commentary essentially consists of his response to the portion of our Unity Conference presentation as covered in chapter 9 of our study. In that chapter we displayed two excerpts from **a)** a book authored by F.F. Bruce and **b)** a commentary for which F.F. Bruce was the General Editor. In the one book, support is offered for counting from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. In the other, support is offered for counting from the morrow after the "high day" Sabbath. As General Editor of the commentary, Mr. Bruce had every opportunity to "edit out" any information that he deemed as false. While it is possible that someone else wrote that the count to Pentecost always began on Nisan 16, Mr. Bruce chose not to correct it.

All this having been said, whatever position held by F.F. Bruce will not decide the truth. All it does is illustrate the fact that some very well-known scholars are themselves befuddled with regard to “which” position is really correct. Mr. Wilks, in his attempt to excuse the obvious blunder on the part of F.F. Bruce, expressed the notion that “it is not a general editor’s duty to rewrite the commentary, but to see that all contributed articles conform to a certain standard of presentation, appearance, etc.”

In other words, appearance is more important than distorted facts? On the contrary, as General Editor of the commentary, it was F.F. Bruce’s duty to see to it that all information offered conformed to the truth. Mr. Bruce may have committed an oversight by missing the explanation offered by the contributing commentator. On the other hand, maybe Mr. Bruce didn’t mind allowing someone to present a position that he himself doesn’t support. The other possibility is that Mr. Bruce changed positions between the publishing of the two books. Either way, Mr. Bruce’s position, one way or the other, does not resolve the Pentecost controversy.

Pharisees vs. Sadducees Revisited

Mr. Wilks also expressed disagreement with the information we provide in chapter eight of this study. He wrote:

It is true that Queen Alexandra Salome (a Pharisee) bestowed upon her eldest son John Hyrcanus (a Pharisee) the high priesthood. Some scholars have written that the Sadducees never again regained power over the Pharisees. This is incorrect. In later life, after his mother’s death, King John Hyrcanus became angry with the party of the Pharisees* and joined the party of the Sadducees. Evidently from this time onward, the Sadducees set the dates for the festivals and ruled the temple worship as long as the temple stood, as Mr. Bruce and others have indicated. The N. T. indicates the same.”

* Ant. 13:10:5-7

I would recommend that the serious student examine the time frame offered above. The king referred to above as John Hyrcanus, who did indeed become angry with the Pharisees, is **John Hyrcanus I**, and as Mr. Wilks indicates, this account may be read in *Antiquities of the Jews*, chapter 13.⁸⁴ Unlike the scenario presented by Mr. Wilks, however, this event occurred *prior to* the death of John Hyrcanus’ son, Alexander Jannaeus. It was John Hyrcanus I’s son who, upon his deathbed, counseled his wife (Alexandra Salome) to restore the power to the Pharisees, and this is precisely what she did.

According to such scholars as Emil Schürer, in his book *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, as well as Alfred Edersheim, the Sadducees never again regained power. For those who have not already read chapter 8 of this study, we recommend doing so before allowing Mr. Wilks’ comments to be your final arbiter of truth.

To fully illustrate that Mr. Wilks has the timetable turned around, please notice that the event he mentions wherein the Pharisees lost their power “for good” is found in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, **chapter 10**. Five chapters later (i.e., in the *future*), Alexander Jannaeus counseled his wife to restore power to the **Pharisees**. This can be found in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, **chapter 15**. If Mr. Wilks

⁸⁴ We cover the details of this account in [chapter 8](#) of this study.

seeks to locate a time frame *after* the point in time wherein Alexander Jannaeus counseled his wife to restore power to the Pharisees, he needs to look beyond *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, chapter 15.

There is no record that John Hyrcanus II ever took away the power that his mother gave to the Pharisees.

Mr. Wilks makes it clear that he believes the Sadducees were in charge. He writes, “Obviously, the Sadducees had the majority of power.” Even though neither Josephus, nor such scholars as Emil Schürer and Alfred Edersheim, would agree with him, this is certainly his right. Also noticeably absent from Mr. Wilks’ commentary is his take on what the Messiah meant when He stated, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.” He did *not* say, “The scribes and *Sadducees* sit in Moses’ seat.” Nor did He simply state, “The *scribes* sit in Moses’ seat.” Perhaps Mr. Wilks does not believe Yeshua meant what He said in Matthew 23:2? If he *does* believe the Messiah meant what He said, we would like to know why Yeshua focused on the authority of the *Pharisees* (by name) instead of the Sadducees. And if, as some maintain, the scribes consisted of both Pharisees *and* Sadducees, then why did Yeshua even bother mentioning the Pharisees? Why didn’t He just state, “The *scribes* sit in Moses’ seat?”

The Septuagint

A primary target of those who are opposed to beginning the count to Pentecost from the morrow after the “high day” Sabbath is the Septuagint. To be sure, as we have addressed in this study, the Septuagint has its share of errors. However, the same can be said of the Hebrew text. Of course, Mr. Wilks points out two of the more serious errors, as if this should settle the matter that the Septuagint cannot be trusted on doctrinal matters. Here is what he wrote:

The Septuagint Version is polluted to some extent, for example:

Scriptures indicate it is a good thing to bless Yahweh (Ps. 34:1; 66:8). The Septuagint text, however, indicates it is a crime to bless Yahweh (1 Kings 21:9, 13). The Hebrew text in this verse uses the word curse, instead of bless Yahweh. A similar report is in Lev. 24:11, 16; he supposedly “named the name” (Yahweh) and was killed for doing so.

Appearing about 108 times, it is significant that, except for Isaiah 66:23, the only Scripture in which the word Sabbath (#7676) is translated week(s) in the Jewish Bible (in English) is in the timing for Pentecost (Lev. 23:15 and 16). Even in verse 10 the correct translation is given; Sabbath, not week (#7676).

Both critical errors mentioned by Mr. Wilks, on the surface, seem inexcusable, and indeed we do not support the translation errors pointed out by our friend.

This having been said, I believe it is at least understandable how such a grave error as forbidding the mentioning of the Creator’s name made its way into the Septuagint. To begin with, please remember that the Septuagint originally contained the Tetragrammaton. No copies of this original text exist today, only fragments that have been discovered containing the four Hebrew characters comprising the name YHWH (יהוה). I believe it is quite possible that when the Tetragrammaton was replaced with *kyrios*, at the same time the wording of some key verses was changed so as to encourage the reader to not speak the Tetragrammaton. And why would they have encouraged the reader to not speak the Tetragrammaton?

There may be several reasons for this, none of which can be considered as excusable, yet I believe we might better understand how it happened if we could somehow imagine ourselves living in their time and culture. Please remember that in 168 BCE, Antiochus Epiphanes slew some 80,000 Jews for various reasons, mainly for practicing their religion. This is recorded in the books of *Maccabees*. It is also recorded in the Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashanah 18b, that one of Antiochus Epiphanes' decrees was one forbidding the mentioning of Yahweh's name. Certainly, then, we know that Jews who refused to comply with his decree were slaughtered. Those who survived went along with his decree.

In the end, however, Judah Maccabees and his men gained the victory over Antiochus Epiphanes and his vast army, and when the victory was won, Judah Maccabees and his men repealed the decree outlawing the mentioning of Yahweh's name. However, the damage had been done. Many of those who defied the decree had perished; those who obeyed survived.

Imagine yourself as a parent, raising your children in a society where, if one of them is caught mentioning Yahweh's name, your entire family is in danger of being massacred. Imagine soldiers calling everyone out of their homes, ordering everyone outside to witness a gruesome event. It turns out your next door neighbor's son spoke the Creator's name. Upon announcing the charge, the general forces everyone to watch as the entire family is slaughtered before their eyes. Their bodies are then hung for all to see, and as a warning for what fate awaits those who defy the command of Antiochus Epiphanes.

For those who believe the above is too far-fetched to be true, we suggest reading the story of the mother and her seven sons in II Maccabees chapter 7.

It might be possible that, in order to survive while simultaneously preserving the text of Scripture, the Jews were compelled to remove the Creator's name, which would have been very visible, as it occurs nearly 7,000 times. Not only may they have chosen to remove His name out of fear of death, but they may also have changed the wording in a few places so as to make it appear that we should not speak the Creator's name. In our present society, we often consider it "unthinkable" to do such a thing, as it is adding and taking away from Scripture. Indeed, we do not support changing Scripture; yet, if we watched our next door neighbors or other loved ones die for speaking the Creator's name, it is *possible* that we might view things from a different perspective.

We do not support the changes made to the Septuagint. However, we do not believe those changes should be grounds for summarily dismissing the reliability of the text as a whole. This is what many, including Mr. Wilks have chosen to do. In spite of all the criticisms directed at the Septuagint translation, one thing Mr. Wilks did not address is the fact that this is the translation used by Philo, a prominent first-century Jew who was chosen by his people to represent the Jews from Alexandria, Egypt before the Roman emperor. Philo's views represented those of normative Judaism, and as we have already seen, he counted to Pentecost from the morrow after the "high day" Sabbath. So did Josephus.

If the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 23:11-16 caused Jews to begin counting to Pentecost incorrectly, this flaw was never pointed out to them by the Messiah.

Mr. Wilks writes, "It is now evident that the Jewish translators changed the text from 'seven Sabbaths' and 'seventh sabbath' (verses 15 and 16) to read 'seven weeks' and 'seventh week.' The reason? To make the Scriptures agree with the custom of the Pharisees, both ancient and modern. Why be misled?"

I would counter his remark by stating that *if* the Jewish translators “changed the text” as Mr. Wilks claims, it reflected Jewish understanding of that text ... a Jewish understanding that Philo, Josephus and a multitude of Jews accepted and Yeshua evidently never corrected.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Mr. Wilks also sent us a copy of a study he authored entitled “Pentecost Studies – Confirmation from Qumran.” He apparently feels that if the pre-Masoretic text of Leviticus 23:11-16 agrees with the Masoretic text, this proves that Jews of the Messiah’s day counted to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath (as opposed to the morrow after the “high day” sabbath). However, since we have shown that this debate has existed since *before* the days of the Messiah, it is evident that the translation of “sabbath” as opposed to “first day” in Leviticus 23:11 had no bearing in settling that dispute, just as it has no bearing today. The question as to whether the word “sabbath” refers to the “high day sabbath” or the “weekly sabbath” existed in pre-Masoretic times. In translating the Septuagint, the seventy scholars put forth their understanding of which “sabbath” Yahweh meant. As expressed above, this translation reflected the understanding of those seventy scholars, as well as such Jews as Philo and Josephus. When Philo and Josephus described the count to Pentecost, they never presented it in debate fashion, so as to persuade the reader that their view was “the correct view” as opposed to an alternate position. They simply presented it as an explanation for how their people did it. Counting from the morrow after the “high day” sabbath is simply how it was done during their days (between 20 BCE and 100 CE), a time frame encompassing the days of Yeshua.

Thus, the Dead Sea Scrolls do *nothing* towards resolving the Pentecost controversy, nor should we expect them to do so. Indeed, if the Hebrew text of the Dead Sea Scrolls indicated that the count was to begin on the morrow after the “first day” of the feast and that they were to count “seven weeks (*Shavuot*),” we would all be scratching our heads wondering why there was ever a controversy in the first place!

How the Pentecost Controversy Began

Some people have asked me exactly how I believe the Pentecost controversy got started. I doubt if anyone can answer this question with certainty. Nevertheless, I have on occasion given my own personal view, and I believe it has some merit, based upon the information we are given in Scripture. At the time of the return from the Captivity, there was a group of people known as the Samaritans (Ezra chapter 4) who did their best to subvert things for the people of Yahweh. These are the same people who would later set up false fires so as to confuse the Jews regarding the signal that the new moon had been spotted. These same people stopped at nothing to distort Yahweh’s ways, and I believe the count to Pentecost may well have been one such issue. Interestingly, the Samaritans to this day count to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath.

I believe it is quite likely that some of their numbers infiltrated the Jews. Later, when the Septuagint was translated, the faithful Jews wanted to make a clear distinction that the “morrow after the sabbath” means “morrow after the first day” of the feast, and that the “seven sabbaths” refers to “seven weeks.” This is why they translated the Septuagint as they did ... not because they were intent upon subverting the Word, but because they wanted to clarify the proper understanding so as to combat the attempts of the Samaritans, who insisted that “morrow after the Sabbath” can only mean “morrow after the weekly Sabbath.”

The understanding that “morrow after the ‘high day’ sabbath” was the original intent was reflected in the writings of both Philo and Josephus, who were very obviously not Samaritans.

For a period of time, the Samaritan view prevailed, but as the *Megillath Ta’anith* reveals, the Pharisaic method later took over (during the days of Queen Alexandra Salome), and continued on up through the days of the Messiah’s earthly visit and even beyond.

The Samaritans have had numerous skirmishes with the Jews, and I believe they succeeded in persuading some of them to abandon the understanding once held by their ancestors, and this may well have played a role in the hostilities that existed between the Pharisees and the Sadducean party.

Of course, I cannot prove my theory, although some parts of it are documented facts. There is no question that the Samaritans worked at undermining the Jewish faith, and it all started in Ezra chapter four. I believe it is quite possible that the ramifications of their attempts have permeated Jewish history to the point that many prefer the Samaritans’ interpretations over the Pharisees’ interpretations. I am persuaded that Philo’s writings reflect the Pharisaical perspective, and Josephus even wrote that he was a member of the Pharisee party.

What is missing from the above is the fact that I am not aware of any writing wherein any ancient Jews wrote something to the effect of, “The Samaritans will stop at nothing to subvert the faith of our fathers; yea, they even work at changing the way we count to Pentecost.” In the absence of such an historical record, all I can do is speculate. I realize that those of the opposing view will not appreciate this perspective, and that is certainly their prerogative. If anyone has an alternate theory, I am willing to examine it.

21. Conclusion

We are thankful to have been given this opportunity to “explain ourselves” with regard to why we count to Pentecost as we do. At the same time, it is only because we are reacting to unkind and unfair remarks directed at those of our persuasion that we have chosen to express ourselves as we have in this study. We believe we have shown that there is sound logic on the part of both sides of this issue, and yet we believe we have demonstrated why we personally believe the weight of the evidence favors counting to Pentecost from Abib 16.

Others will remain convinced that we should count from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We respect their logic, even if we are not inclined to agree with it, as we are thankful whenever we see men and women humbly pursuing the will of the Father. We believe this entire issue boils down to whether one chooses to follow the instructions as found in the Hebrew text as opposed to the instructions as found in the Septuagint. Those who prefer the Hebrew text have their reasons, as do those who prefer the Septuagint reading.

We all have our reasons for believing as we do, and if we want to be dogmatically assertive about our position, we are free to do so, but that doesn't necessarily mean our position is the correct one. There are simply some areas of controversy that are so complex that we believe it calls for us to be understanding of those who choose to interpret Scripture differently than we do, and Pentecost is one of those issues. Therefore, although we believe it is healthy and even educational for us to discuss our differences, we believe it is *unhealthy*, not to mention inappropriate, to approach each other with the smug, “I'm right and you're deceived” attitude that surfaces so often in controversies of this nature. Therefore, we are directing this study more against a *mentality* than against a doctrine. We believe if both sides could at least look at each other and say, “I respect the logic of your position,” we could all advance much more quickly towards being the children that Yahweh wants us to be.