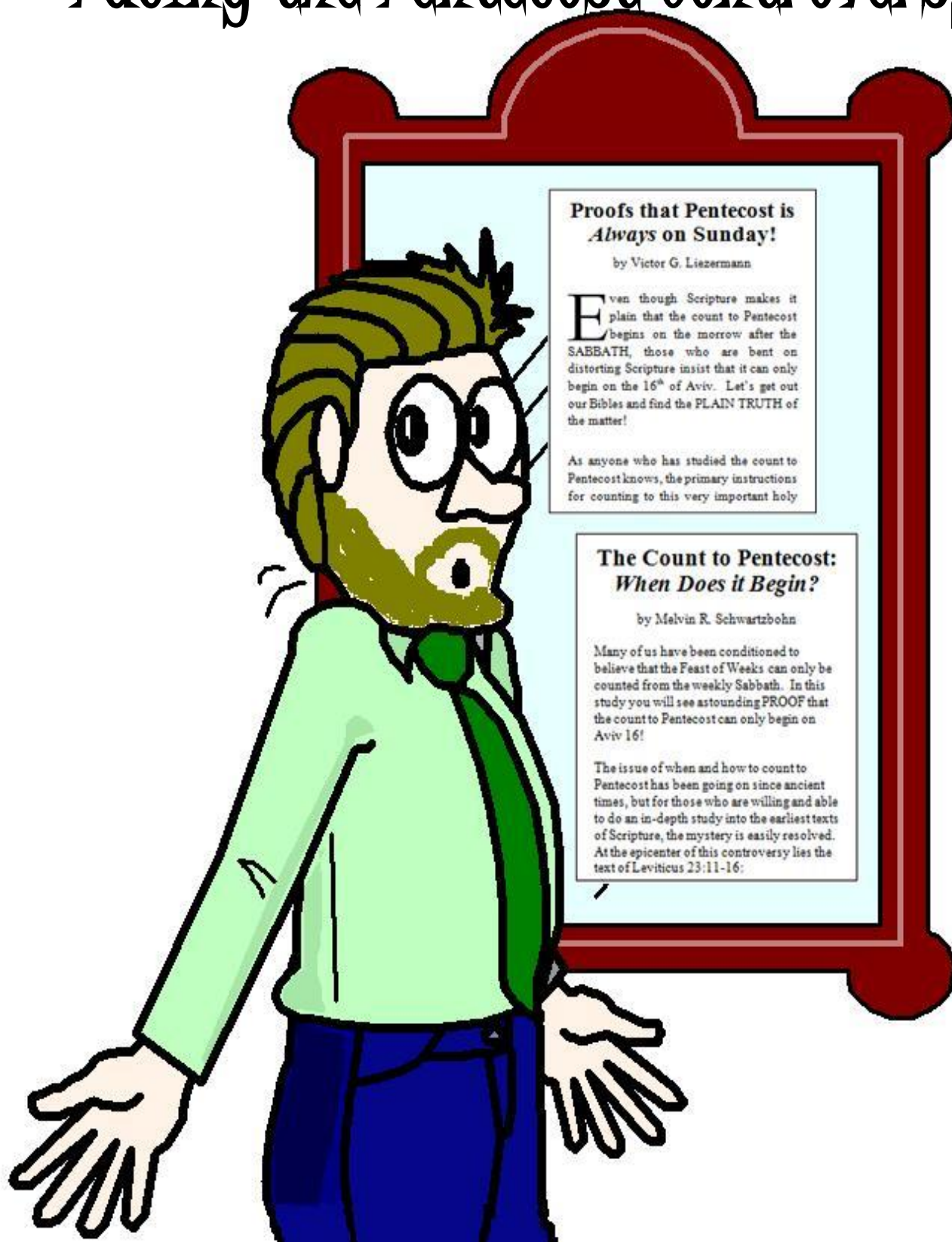


Facing the Pentecost Controversy



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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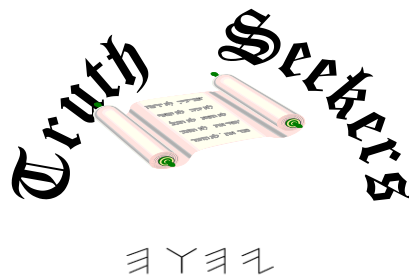
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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| <u>Introduction</u> | 1 |
| 1. <u>Let's Try to Be a Little More Understanding Towards Each Other</u> | 5 |
| 2. <u>Examining Leviticus 23</u> | 8 |
| 3. <u>The Meaning of the Word "Sabbath"</u> | 10 |
| 4. <u>A "Fatal Flaw": Counting Eight Sabbaths?</u> | 11 |
| 5. <u>No Eating Until the Offering is Brought to Yahweh</u> | 17 |
| 6. <u>"My Reference is More Reliable than Your Reference!"</u> | 24 |
| 7. <u>The Testimony of Josephus</u> | 27 |
| 8. <u>What Josephus Had to Say About the Sadducees and Pharisees</u> | 31 |
| 9. <u>The Megillath Ta'anith</u> | 35 |
| 10. <u>What the Messiah Had to Say About the Sadducees and Pharisees</u> ... | 42 |
| 11. <u>Misinterpreting Josephus</u> | 45 |
| 12. <u>The Testimony of Philo</u> | 47 |
| 13. <u>The Bible Used by Philo and Josephus</u> | 51 |
| 14. <u>The Reliability of the Septuagint</u> | 60 |
| 15. <u>The Septuagint and the Joshua 5 Controversy</u> | 66 |
| 16. <u>Does Counting 50 Days From Abib 16 Always Result in a Sivan 6 Pentecost?</u> | 70 |
| 17. <u>Seven Full Weeks</u> | 79 |
| 18. <u>Did Yeshua Ascend to the Father on the Day of Firstfruits?</u> | 80 |
| 19. <u>Objection: Do as "they" say ... or do as "he" says?</u> | 93 |
| 20. <u>Answering a Critic's Response to Our Study</u> | 102 |
| <u>Conclusion</u> | 110 |



Facing the Pentecost Controversy

by Larry and June Acheson

Introduction

We shouldn't have to explain to you that the issue of how to properly count to Pentecost is a controversial one. Most any commentary or Bible dictionary will forthrightly introduce their presentation of *Pentecost* as one involving often heated debate. June and I have been on the receiving end of uninvited debate to the extent that we finally decided it was time to put our views in writing. We initially had no intention of addressing the Pentecost controversy, 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 in the year 2002, 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" 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 that same year who was much more understanding with regard to the position that June and I hold. He expressed the 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 wonderful 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 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 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 the method most likely traced to Mt. Sinai when the Torah was given to Israel.

You might think that the individual who informed me that I cannot have Yahweh's Spirit and count to Pentecost the way I do has already made up his mind about what he's going to believe and that no progress was made with regard to at least getting him to be more understanding of our reasons for believing as we do. You would be wrong. We have since attended multiple Pentecost observances with this man ... on day that *we* reckon as Pentecost. He currently sees the logic of both positions – to the extent that he now observes Pentecost both on Sunday *and* on the day we observe it.

As dogmatic as this man tends to be, June and I would prefer to spend our time with folks like *him* than with those who come across as being so pious and docile, even in disagreement, yet will not take the time to actually study the reasoning behind the opposing view. Count June and me among those who appreciate an impassioned approach to addressing our reasons for believing as we do; at the same time, we must be among those who, when we carry that passion a bit too far, are willing to humble ourselves and admit that we were mistaken. Too often we have experienced the reactions from those who, without so much as even glancing at our study, dismiss us as being "just plain wrong" with the way we count to Pentecost. Too often we have either heard or read, "*I don't need to read your study!*" from folks who are nevertheless all too willing to classify us as "deceived."¹

Here, in the year 2020, June and I still see the same non-acceptance of our position that we saw back in 2002 (and earlier), and we have found that none of those who belittle the way we count to Pentecost have read this study (if they have, they've kept it a secret). What would they have to say if they *did* read

¹ An example of this approach occurred in December 2009. A believer named Tamar's response to my offer to review our perspective by reading this study was, "Pentecost...you are confused on this issue....scriptures are plain on this....you may want to re-think this one...." This was the last we ever heard from Tamar regarding the count to Pentecost. It would appear that she felt she had already fully investigated this topic without any need for additional research.

it? We welcome scholarly inquiry and the respectful sharing of ideas, so if anyone would be so open as to carefully examine another perspective, we invite his or her feedback.

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 reasoning, 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).²

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"

²Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, Random House, New York, 1985, p. 87.

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 plain and literal meaning, with ‘sabbath’ signifying simply “the sabbath day,” namely the sabbath after Passover.³

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.⁴

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 wanted 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.⁵

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 having been 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

³ Ibid, p. 88.

⁴Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History*; Part I “The Spring Festivals,” Biblical Perspectives, Berrien Springs, MI, 1995, p. 169.

⁵ Ibid, p. 233.

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. 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 ephah⁶ 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 hin⁷. 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 this 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!

⁶ An ephah is a Hebrew unit of measure equal to a little over a bushel.

⁷ 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, also known as the “festival sabbath.” In fact, this was 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 ‘festival 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.’”

Hopefully we all agree 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.

Later in our study, we will see that ancient Judaism in the 3rd century BCE specifically understood the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as being a “sabbath.”

4. A “Fatal Flaw”: Counting Eight Sabbaths?

We have thus far seen that the Hebrew word translated “Sabbath” (שַׁבָּת) can be understood as being a reference to either the weekly Sabbath or a “sabbath” such as the special sabbath observance reserved for the Day of Atonement. This Hebrew word, then, can indeed be used to refer to the “festival sabbaths” – the special holy days that fall during the festivals of Yahweh. In fact, the Talmud makes reference to an ancient Jewish debate as to whether or not the “morrow after the Sabbath” from which we are commanded to count to Pentecost is a reference to the “Sabbath of creation” (i.e., the weekly Sabbath) or the “festival Sabbath.” While we are not about to recommend the Talmud as a reliable source of information insofar as validating a doctrinal belief, it nevertheless offers valuable historical insight into ancient Jewish practice and belief. Here is an excerpt from the discussion as found in Tractate Menahoth 65b:

Our Rabbis taught: *And ye shall count unto you*; that is, the counting is a duty upon every one. *On the morrow after the Sabbath*, that is, on the morrow after the Festival. Perhaps it is not so but rather on the morrow after the Sabbath of Creation. R. Jose b. Judah says, Scripture says, *Ye shall number fifty days*, that is, every time that you number it shall not be more than fifty days. But should you say that the verse refers to the morrow after the Sabbath of Creation, then it might sometimes come to fifty-one and sometimes fifty-two and fifty-three and fifty-four and fifty-five and fifty-six. R. Judah b. Bathyra says, This is not necessary, for Scripture says, *Thou shalt number unto thee*, that is, the numbering depends on [the decision of] the Beth-din; accordingly the Sabbath of Creation cannot be intended as the numbering would then be in the hands of all men. R. Jose says, *On the morrow of the Sabbath* means on the morrow after the Festival, but perhaps it is not so, but rather on the morrow after the Sabbath of Creation! I will prove it to you. Does Scripture say, ‘On the morrow after the Sabbath that is in the Passover week’? It merely says, ‘*On the morrow after the Sabbath*’; and as the year is full of Sabbaths, then go and find out which Sabbath is meant. Moreover, ‘*Sabbath*’ is written below, and ‘*Sabbath*’ is written above; just as the former case it refers to the Festival, and indeed to the beginning of the Festival, so in the latter case, too, it refers to the Festival, and indeed to the beginning of the Festival.⁸

Not only does the above writing prove that the debate about when to begin the count to Pentecost has been going on for nearly two thousand years (if not longer), but it also demonstrates that ancient Judaism understood that the command to begin counting on the “morrow after the Sabbath” could either be a reference to the “Sabbath of Creation” or the “Festival Sabbath.”⁹ Proponents of the “Sunday-Only

⁸ Quoted from Tractate Menahoth 65b, as found on pages 387-388 of *The Babylonian Talmud*, Vol. 1, Seder Kodashim, published by The Soncino Press, London, 1948. Note: We do not normally recommend reading the Talmud, except for gleaning historical information.

⁹ Having re-read the rabbinic response as recorded in Tractate Menahoth 65b, I must say that I find the rabbi’s reference to “Sabbath is written below” and “Sabbath is written above” to be very interesting. It appears that the first-century rabbis may have had access to a text that no longer exists because in the extant Masoretic Text version, the only “Sabbath written above” is found in verse three, and the “Sabbath” in verse three is clearly a reference to the *weekly* Sabbath, not the “Festival.” Is it possible that another “Sabbath” was specified in the original text, possibly in verse seven? If the reference to the “first day” in

Pentecost” maintain that those who believe the reference is to the “Festival Sabbath” are faced with an unsolvable conundrum. In fact, it has been referred to as a “fatal flaw.”

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 festival “high day” sabbaths, we are presented with the dilemma of having to count *eight* sabbaths in the 50-day count to Pentecost. Or, as one author puts it, if we adhere to the command to count seven sabbaths, we end up with a six-week count. Here is his commentary:

There is a fatal flaw in the Pharisaic system. If you are counting seven Sabbaths, and you are counting from the 15th of Nissan as an annual sabbath, then would you not also have to have counted the 21st of Nissan as a Sabbath? But then you would be counting seven Sabbaths, but six weeks...so the text can only be referring to the WEEKLY sabbath. If you start counting from the day after the WEEKLY Sabbath and are NOT counting annual Sabbaths, then and only then do you count seven sabbaths and seven weeks and then you would always end your count on a "Sunday."¹⁰

The above author, in addition to explaining what he terms “a fatal flaw,” goes on to provide his reading audience with a calendar depicting the fact that those who regard the “sabbath” as both the weekly sabbath and the festival sabbath must either stop short of the 50-day count if they obey the mandate to count seven sabbaths or else count eight sabbaths in order to arrive at “day 50”:

| April 2011 | | | | | | | May 2011 | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|---------|--------------|--------------------------|--------|----------|----------|--------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|----|----|---|
| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | | | |
| | | | | | | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | | | | X | | |
| | | | | | | | | 8 | | 9 | | | | X | | |
| | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | | Mother's Day | | 10 | | 11 | 12 | | 13 | X |
| | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | | 20 | X | |
| | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | | 27 | X | |
| | | | Day 1 ULB | Pharisale Firstfruits | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 24 | X | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | | | | |
| Easter Sunday Nazarene First Fruits | 21st Nissan | | | | | | | Memorial Day | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

verse seven originally designated that day as a “Sabbath,” this would make it the “Sabbath above,” providing a contextual clarification of which “Sabbath” is referred to in verse 11.

¹⁰ James Trimm, “Why Shavuot is Always on a Sunday,” posted on his *Nazarene Space* blog on 05/22/2011. For those who subscribe to *Nazarene Space*, the article may be accessed at the following URL:

http://nazarenespace.com/profiles/blog/show?id=2182335%3ABlogPost%3A113431&xgs=1&xg_source=msg_share_post

| June 2011 | | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------|---------------------------------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|
| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | | | | | | X |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| | | Sivan 6 Pharisaic Shavuot | | | | X |
| 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| Nazarene Shavuot | | | | | | |
| 19 Father's Day | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

For those of you who would like to count the 50 days on the above calendar, you will find that the above author erred in dating Shavuot on June 7th, which is day 49 of the count. Remember, those who follow what he terms “the Pharisaic System” begin the count on the day following the festival Sabbath. Thus, “day 1” of the count to Pentecost began on April 20th. If you inclusively count 50 days from April 20th, you arrive at June 8th, *not* June 7th.¹¹

Nevertheless, the author’s point is clear: If you begin counting to Pentecost from the morrow after the festival “high day” sabbath, then you have an apparent dilemma. You must either disregard the command to count seven sabbaths *or* you must stop short of counting the entire fifty days. This is what the author terms “a fatal flaw.”

In our original study, we titled this chapter a more generic “Consistency Dilemma” because *consistency* (or the lack thereof) is the typical charge levied against those who begin counting to Pentecost from the morrow after the festival Sabbath. When, in 2011, we found that the charge has been upgraded to “a fatal flaw,” we decided to rename this chapter and insert the author’s commentary, not only because of the more colorful picture he paints of what he feels is the quandary, but also to add another “Sunday-only Pentecost” perspective of the apparent dilemma. What follows is the commentary that we included in our original study, which is taken from a study that was distributed at the 1987 Unity Conference:

*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,¹² 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 16¹³. Therefore, “Sabbath” and “Sabbaths” in Lev. 23:15 & 16 certainly appear to refer to the weekly Sabbath.*

¹¹ As we will see later in this study, the author of “Why Shavuot is Always on a Sunday” also erred in listing Shavuot as falling on “Sivan 6” in the year 2011. For those who count to Shavuot (Pentecost) from the morrow after the festival sabbath, Shavuot fell on the *fifth* day of the Scriptural Hebrew month *Sivan*.

¹² True in all years except when Abib 15th falls on the first day of the week.

¹³ True in all years except when Abib 15th falls on 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.¹⁴

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” festival sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Or to put it another way, if we are to insist that “morrow after the sabbath” means “morrow after the festival sabbath,” then when we count “seven sabbaths” to Pentecost, we must include that last “festival sabbath” of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Abib 21) as one of the “seven sabbaths.” As the author’s chart (shown below) reveals, the “morrow after the seventh sabbath,” if we are 100% consistent with our interpretation of the word “sabbath,” falls on day 39 of the count to Pentecost. The dilemma thus posed to those who count from the morrow after the high day festival sabbath is that of counting *eight sabbaths* to Pentecost instead of seven sabbaths as mandated by the Almighty. 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.

¹⁴ 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 | | 1st Sabbath |
| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 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.¹⁴

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 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 explanation found in *Keil & Delitzsch's Commentary on the Old Testament*:

¹⁵ 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.

That שבתות (v. 15) signifies weeks, like שבועות in Deut. 16:9, and τα 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.¹⁶

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 the 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” which 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. However, before we reach any premature conclusions about the “fatal flaw” argument, we need to conduct additional research because there is most certainly more to be considered. We will revisit the “fatal flaw” argument in chapter 17.¹⁷

¹⁶ 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).

¹⁷ See chapter 17, “Seven Full Weeks.”

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 prohibited eating “bread, parched grain or fresh ears” until the day on which the firstfruits offering had been brought in, which is understood as meaning that no food from the new crop was allowed to be eaten during the Feast of Unleavened Bread until the high priest waved the wave sheaf offering before Yahweh. Since “Sunday-Only Pentecosters” present this view in combination with the example of the Israelites’ first Passover in the Promised Land, we need to address their reasoning.

In Leviticus 23:10, we are told that when the children of Israel entered the Promised Land and 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 learn 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 then instructed, in verse 14, to not eat bread, parched corn, or green ears until that same day that the offering is “brought” unto the Almighty. 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 proper handle on this situation. Because the *King James Version* does a less-than-stellar job of translating this passage, the following text is taken 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: The Sunday-Only Pentecost camp contends that no one was supposed to eat from the new crop until the wave sheaf offering was made, and the wave offering wasn’t offered until “the morrow after the Sabbath” (Lev. 23:11). As they point out, if the “Sabbath” of verse 11 is the “high day Sabbath” of Abib 15, then the morrow after this high day Sabbath must be Abib 16. If the Israelites were not permitted to eat from the new crop until this offering was waved on the 16th, then how could they have lawfully done such a thing on the morrow of the Passover (Abib 15), since that was a full day *prior* to the Wave Sheaf or *Omer* offering? 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 | 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, we can see how and why the Sunday-Only Pentecost camp would charge that Joshua and his fellow Israelites disobeyed Yahweh’s orders as found in Leviticus 23:14.

“Sunday-Only Pentecosters” are persuaded that they have come up with the only way to make the account in Joshua 5:11 square with the commandment to not eat from the new crop until the wave sheaf offering is “waved.” Their solution requires believing that the Wave Sheaf Offering was offered on the morrow after a *weekly Sabbath* day that coincided with the day of Passover. Shown below is another version of a potential calendar, which they believe 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 Sabbath WAVE OFFERING | | | | | | Last High Day Sabbath |

We all hopefully understand that 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, apparently resolving the dilemma posed for those who believe the count to Pentecost should be reckoned from the morrow after the regular weekly Sabbath that falls within the Passover week.

Karaite Jew Nehemia Gordon, in his online article “The Truth About Shavuot,” explains why, in his estimation, Joshua 5:11 validates the above calendar scenario as the only possible means of reconciling that verse with Leviticus 23:14:

When Joshua 5:11 describes the eating of “unleavened bread and parched grain... on this very day” it is using almost the precise wording of Leviticus 23:14 “and bread and parched grain... you will not eat until this very day.” The new produce of the land was forbidden until the Omer offering was brought. Joshua 5:11 is saying that when the Israelites entered the Land for the first time, they observed this commandment and waited until the terms of Leviticus 23:14 were fulfilled. In other words, they waited for the Omer offering before eating the grain of Israel. This has been widely recognized by Jewish Bible commentators throughout history, such as the 11th Century rabbi Rashi who explains on Joshua 5:11, “morrow of the Passover is the day of the waving of the omer.” Joshua 5:11 is saying that the first Omer offering in the Land of Israel was brought on the “morrow of the Passover.” Immediately after this, the Children of Israel were permitted to eat of the new crops of the Land. For the first time, the Israelites pulled out their sickles and ate of the good bounty of their new homeland.¹⁸

In his study, Mr. Gordon proceeds to confirm that “morrow after the Passover” can only be a reference to Abib 15. He then puts it all together for his readers:

What all this means is that the first Omer offering in Israel took place on the 15th day of the First Hebrew Month. The first year that the Israelites entered Canaan, the 14th of the First Hebrew Month must have fallen out on a Sabbath so that the 15th of that month was a Sunday. In that year, the “morrow of the Passover” happened to also be the “morrow of the Sabbath,” what we call “Sunday morning.” This proves the Pharisee interpretation of Leviticus 23:15 to be wrong. According to the Pharisees, the Omer offering could only be brought on the morning of the 16th of the First Hebrew Month, but in the year that the Israelites entered Canaan, they brought the sacrifice one day earlier.¹⁹

We thus see that, in the estimation of “Sunday-Only Pentecoster” Nehemia Gordon, the above potential calendar scenario/illustration represents the only workable method for harmonizing the text of Joshua 5:10-12 with Leviticus 23:14, and we respect his reasoning. In a nutshell, if Joshua and the Israelites waited until Abib 16 to offer the wave sheaf offering, then they violated the command of Leviticus 23:14 when they ate the produce of the land on Abib 14. Nevertheless, we will see later in our study that the ancient Hebrew scholars who translated the book of Joshua from Hebrew into the Greek language (the *Septuagint* translation) did not convey any hint of a controversy about *when* the Israelites ate of the produce of the land. First, though, let’s take a look at how “Any-Day Pentecost” adherents answer the above claim that Joshua and the Israelites could only have eaten the produce of the land on the

¹⁸Nehemia Gordon, “The Truth About Shavuot,” posted June 3, 2014 at the following web address: http://www.nehemiaswall.com/truth-shavuot?utm_source=Karaite+Korner+Newsletter&utm_campaign=4c9fc54bda-shavuot2014special&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_349b8032ee-4c9fc54bda-155489469.

¹⁹Ibid.

morrow of the Passover *if* Passover that year fell on a weekly Sabbath day ... *and* they understood “morrow after the sabbath” to be a reference to the weekly Sabbath instead of the high day Sabbath.

As we just mentioned, the Septuagint translation of the book of Joshua doesn’t involve Joshua and the Israelites in the Pentecost controversy. Notwithstanding, since some “Any-Day Pentecosters” reject the Septuagint translation, they are compelled to come up with a solution to the Joshua 5 dilemma as presented by “Sunday-Only Pentecosters.” What is the “Any-Day Pentecoster” response to the above potential calendar scenario that has the wave sheaf offering coinciding with both “morrow of the Passover” *and* “morrow of the Sabbath”? As can be expected, 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 are at odds with the scenario as illustrated on the previous page. However, in offering their objection, we have found that some of these believers resort to redefining the date that Yahweh assigns to the Passover. Here is how one such individual attempts to resolve 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!²⁰

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.” Please understand that if his reasoning is correct, then Abib 15 is both “the Passover” *and* “the first High Day Sabbath” of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. If this is true, then Abib 14 can no longer be considered “the Passover.” Here, then, would be a potential calendar scenario that the above author would endorse:

²⁰Dankenbring, 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.

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

Produce
Eaten
↓

We must emphasize here that, in spite of the author's bold assertion that "the Passover" and "the First Holy Day of Unleavened Bread" fall on the same day, he offers no 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," the day on which the lambs were killed, 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 (*i.e.*, 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 (Abib 14) and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Abib 15). 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 accurately demonstrated why those who support believing that the Wave Sheaf Offering was made on the morrow after the *weekly Sabbath* are persuaded that the scales are tipped in their favor, especially in view of the fact that the opposition is apparently forced to redefine the date of the Passover in order for their model to square with their interpretation of Scripture. Speaking of "redefining," another question raised is the correct meaning of the Hebrew word translated "old corn" in the King James Version and "produce" in other versions. This translation makes a big difference because the concern with eating the bread, parched corn and green ears pertained to the eating from the *new crop*. Thus, if Joshua and the Israelites ate "old corn," which is generally regarded as having been stored grain from the lands they had conquered, this wouldn't have been a violation of the command found in Leviticus 23:14.

The Hebrew word translated “old corn” in the King James Version’s rendering of Joshua 5:10-12 and “produce” in the *New Revised Standard Version* is the word *âbûwr*. Some Sunday-Only Pentecost adherents maintain that “produce” is the only correct translation of *âbûwr*. Translating *âbûwr* as “produce” creates the impression that it was fresh produce that the Israelites consumed that day, and if it is true that Joshua and the Israelites ate *fresh produce* on the morrow after the passover, the only way they could have eaten *âbûwr* without violating Leviticus 23:14 would have been if Passover that year fell on the day of the weekly Sabbath – and the count to Pentecost would have had to have begun on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. At least this is the claim promoted by the “Sunday-Only Pentecost” camp. They insist that this “lawful” scenario could not have worked if Joshua and the Israelites counted from the morrow after the “high day” Sabbath because the morrow after the “high day” Sabbath (Abib 16) is always two days after Passover, in which case Joshua and his fellow Israelites could not have lawfully eaten *âbûwr* until two days *after* the day on which they ate it!

John V. Cordaro, in his study “Quelling the Controversy of Counting the Feast of Weeks,” expresses his belief that “old corn” is actually the *correct* translation of the Hebrew word “*âbûwr*”:

What was it they ate on Abib 15? Josh 5:11 says they ate "old corn," "unleavened cakes," and "parched corn." The word "corn" in "parched corn" appears in italics in the KJV, which means it is not found in the Hebrew. "Unleavened cakes" is a translation of the Hebrew word "matstsah." "Old corn" is a translation of the Hebrew word "*âbûwr*." The only use of *âbûwr* in the scriptures is found in Josh.5:11,12. It is #5669 in *Strong's Concordance* and means, "passed, i.e., kept over; used only of stored grain." *Âbûwr* comes from "*âbar*" meaning, "to cross over;" It is also translated as, "carry over, bring, pass over, send over." This seems to refer to old grain that lasted into a new season or “crossed over” into a new season. The Israelites also had "victuals" that Joshua commanded them to prepare for their journey across the Jordan in Jos.1:10-11. "Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals ; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which Yahweh your Elohim gives you to possess it." The Israelites were not eating any produce from the promised land on Abib 15. They were eating provisions that were carried over the Jordan from land that was not part of their inheritance as well as stored grain from the land itself.²¹

As Mr. Cordaro explains, the original Hebrew text of Joshua 5:10-11 presents the Israelites eating “victuals” that they carried with them across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land (Josh. 1:10-11).²² Certainly, these provisions weren’t fresh. According to John Cordaro, then, what the Israelites ate

²¹John V. Cordaro, “Quelling the Controversy of Counting the Feast of Weeks.” John’s study may be accessed online at the following link: http://www.intergate.com/~jcordaro/counting_Pentecost.htm.

²² Some may reason that the Israelites didn’t bring any food other than manna across the Jordan because manna was the only food they had to eat. However, in Joshua 1:11, Joshua commands the Israelites to “prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which Yahweh your Almighty giveth you to possess it.” According to *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1961, p. 167, these victuals were “not manna, which, though it still fell, would not keep; but corn, sheep, and articles of food procurable in the conquered countries.”

on the morrow of the Passover, was indeed “old.” If his reasoning is correct, the Hebrew word “*âbûwr*” is a reference, not to fresh produce, but to the provisions that the Israelites carried with them as they crossed over into the Promised Land, thus making Joshua 5:10-12 an irrelevant text for validating whether it was the morrow after the weekly Sabbath or the morrow after the festival Sabbath on which the Wave Sheaf Offering was waved before Yahweh.

In the remainder of our study, we cover everything from delving deeper into the proper understanding of “morrow after the Sabbath” to examining the view that Yeshua the Messiah ascended to the Father on the Sunday following His crucifixion. One of the first hurdles that we need to clear, however, involves sorting out facts from fiction when seeking out references to validate our conclusions. As we face the Pentecost Controversy head-on, this will be our next topic to consider.

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 primarily arises 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 be reasonably understood 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 produce evidence supporting their belief that the *Sadducees* as having been in charge. And of course those who push the other view offer evidence supporting their view that the *Pharisees* were in charge. Is it possible to know which view is correct?

Well, let’s briefly examine this dimension of the Pentecost Controversy 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 2.²³

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 Eerdmans 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.²⁴

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

Lawrence H. Schiffman²⁵ 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.²⁶

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.

²³ From the tract “How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day,” p. 7.

²⁴ *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, article “Sadducees,” published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987, p. 902.

²⁵ 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).

²⁶ 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.

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 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.

Some folks have belittled the fact that June and I give such a high regard to historical evidence; in their reproof, they often declare that they, unlike us, direct their complete focus on *Scripture*. We have heard, on more than one occasion, things such as, “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. Can we find historical evidence to uphold our understanding of the Scriptural directive?

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.²⁷

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 explains 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 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 Essenes²⁸, 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 sinister 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. Employing such *ad hominem* attacks, wherein the focus is

²⁷ From *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, Vol. II, translated by William Whiston, A.M., *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book III, ch. 10, 5-6, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, p. 218.

²⁸ 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.

shifted from the actual issue to the character of the witness or author, 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 Heaven's Gate cult, who authored the book *How and When "Heaven's Gate" May Be Entered*.²⁹ No serious truth seeker would dare quote from his writings, at least not in an 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 cited 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 that he reported in his works. However, we don't believe we know of *any* historian who got the facts exactly right. One of our acquaintances 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 would not have had the luxury of having a Bible, much less a concordance, 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 his people count to Pentecost! I was in Jerusalem a few years ago, and it so happens that 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 Yodefath to win a war. He fortified the Galilee and believed that God would be

²⁹Marshall Herff Applewhite, Jr. (May 17, 1931 - March 26, 1997), was the leader and self-proclaimed messiah of the Heaven's Gate religious cult. He and 38 followers died in the group's mass suicide pact in Rancho Santa Fe, California.

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.³⁰

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.”³¹ Magen Broshi of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, wrote an article titled “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.³²

Broshi doesn’t heap words of praise on the writings of Josephus, yet he realistically and forthrightly 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. Magen Broshi’s balanced review of Josephus’ writings is in stark contrast to the biased approach taken by many “Sunday-only Pentecost” believers.

A gentleman who attempted to dissuade us from attaching any level of credibility to Josephus’ writings gave us a photocopy of the conclusion to a book titled *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 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

³⁰ 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>.

³¹ From *Encyclopedia International*, Vol. 10, Grolier Incorporated, New York, 1972, p. 59.

³² This article can be read its entirety at the following Web address: <http://www.centuryone.com/josephus.html>.

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.³³

We could expend a great deal of time debating the credibility of Josephus, but the fact remains that there are top scholars who 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.

³³ 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 we have established that there is no good reason for anyone to outright reject the writings of Josephus; in fact, there are legitimate reasons 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 commemorating this monumental event.

These pivotal events occurred in the year 165 BCE, and beginning with Judas the “Maccabee,” a dynasty known as the *Hasmonean Dynasty*³⁴ 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.³⁵

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.³⁶ 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**

³⁴ According to Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews*, XII, vi., 1, the term “Hasmonean” is derived from Judas “the Maccabee’s” great-grandfather, Asamoneus.

³⁵ 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.”

³⁶ Cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, xiii., 6.

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. "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.³⁷

We thus see that Alexander Jannaeus, on his deathbed, instructed his wife to give some of her authority, not to the Sadducees, but to the *Pharisees*. Alexandra Salome succeeded her husband to the throne 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.³⁸

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 (this is important). 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

³⁷ Cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, xv., 5.

³⁸ From *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, xvi., 2.

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 Pontificate. 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 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).³⁹

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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹

Please notice that Josephus expounds on the differences that the Sadducees had with the Pharisees, such as what happens to our souls when we pass away; however, he makes no mention of a "heated controversy" over when to begin the count to Pentecost! (This is important!).

Emil Schürer, 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:

³⁹ From *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, by Alfred Edersheim, Vol. 2, Appendix IV, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1953, originally published in 1883.

⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ From *Antiquities of the Jews* xviii. I. 4.

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.⁴²

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”:

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.⁴³

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.

On another note, however, we need to point out that Edersheim throws in a “Pentecost controversy” without citing any historical reference to such a controversy. If there *truly* was a dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over when to begin the count to Pentecost during what is known as the *Hasmonean Dynasty*, why didn’t Alfred Edersheim cite the historical source of this alleged fact? Could it be that he, like other modern scholars, *assumed* there was a controversy when in actual fact there wasn’t one?

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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.

Nevertheless, as we stated earlier, we have received 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. The literature we are given often contains quotations from scholarly resources that would, without further investigation, 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 late well-known author and commentator F. F. Bruce. Several years ago, we were given a photocopy of a page from *The New International Commentary of the New Testament, The Book of the Acts*. In his commentary on Acts 2:1, Bruce wrote 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.).⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵

⁴⁴F. F. Bruce, *The International Commentary of the New Testament—The Book of the Acts*, William B. Erdman's Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1974, p. 53.

⁴⁵*Ibid*, footnote 3.

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. We should point out that Bruce cited no historical references supporting his claim. In fact, the historical references he offered 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 titled *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).⁴⁶

While we're not about to label F. F. Bruce as having been an incompetent scholar, it is nevertheless interesting that on the one hand he mentioned 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 stated 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* believed was employed! It would appear that F. F. Bruce, like the eminent scholar Samuele Bacchiocchi, really didn't have a firm handle on the Pentecost controversy, at least not firm enough to have reached an unwavering conclusion about which is or was the correct method.

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 ignored 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 introduced us to the 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*. Let's carefully review the very first portion of this 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

⁴⁶ From *The International Bible Commentary*, F. F. Bruce, General Editor, Marshall Pickering/Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986, p. 208.

prohibited. 2. And from the 8th to the end of the Feast (the 27th) the Feast of Weeks was re-established, mourning is interdicted.⁴⁷

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 that it probably wouldn’t do me any good to explain that, according to Josephus, Pharisaic power to “reestablish” the Feast of Weeks was granted 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 in an attempt to “prove” that the *Megillath Ta'anith* refers to the time period following the destruction of the Temple. 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 final page of this chapter). 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.⁴⁸

According to the above commentary, the historic events mentioned in the *Megillath Ta'anith* cover the period of the Maccabees, a time period that occurred *before* the first century – before the birth of Yeshua the Messiah. In fact, only *one* historical event falls outside of that timeline, i.e., the cancellation of Gaius Caligula’s decree ordering Jews to worship the emperor.⁴⁹ 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

⁴⁷ From *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 2, by Alfred Edersheim, Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1959, p.698.

⁴⁸ From *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, edited by Geoffrey Wigoder, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1989, p. 473.

⁴⁹ 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.

“reestablished” 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 this understanding of the *Megillath Ta’anith* is correct, that method continued all the way forward to the days of Yeshua the Messiah, the Apostle Paul and Josephus.

A Challenging Twist

As a corollary to the above, I will end this chapter with a new twist that, frankly, had not crossed my mind when I originally composed this study. I have hinted at it in previous chapters, but now is the time to address it head-on. Those involved in this particular discussion about “when” the Pharisees gained control of the temple services *assume* that gaining control of necessity included enforcing their method of counting to the Feast of Weeks. However, what if there was no Pentecost controversy prior to the 1st century? Where in any historical writings do we ever read that being in charge of how the Temple services were carried out included implementing a different method of counting to Pentecost? Based on modern-day scholars’ testimony to this effect, we have *assumed* that there must have been a controversy. But where’s the *ancient* testimony to this effect? To coin an 80’s expression, *Where’s the beef?*

And what does my questioning the absence of ancient testimony of a Pentecost controversy have to do with the *Megillath Ta’anith*? Simply this: I now maintain that the “reestablishment” of the Feast of Weeks means precisely what it says: It was the *feast* that was reestablished, *not* the method of counting to it! When you consider all the struggles, the battles, and yes, the horrors inflicted upon Judaism during the time of the 2nd century BCE Maccabean revolt, you know that once a more peaceful period was later restored, many freedoms that had been taken from them were reinstated. One of the more famous “reestablishments” was the very Temple itself, which had been desecrated by the sacrifices of swine on its altar. Once the Jews finished cleansing it from its desecration, it was rededicated to the worship of Yahweh. You read that right: the worship of *Yahweh*. The wicked Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes had even forbidden speaking the name *Yahweh*; upon their victory, the Jews reinstated the freedom to call on the name *Yahweh* as their ancestors had done. Prior to gaining the victory over Antiochus Epiphanes’ regime, the Jews had been unable to celebrate such feasts as the Feast of Tabernacles. Not only was this feast *reestablished*, but according to II Maccabees 10:6, at the time of the restored Temple’s dedication they observed eight days of gladness in remembrance of how they had previously been relegated to observing the eight-day feast of Tabernacles “as they wandered in the mountains and dens like beasts.” This eight-day celebration developed into a Jewish tradition known as *Hanukkah*.

Suffice it to say many things were “reestablished” when Judaism gained their freedom from the oppressing Seleucid regime. I am persuaded that one of those things was the observance of the Feast of Weeks. Just because we don’t have specific details outlining *how* the Feast of Weeks was reestablished doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. But the question is, “*What does reestablishing the Feast of Weeks have to do with a ‘Pharisees versus Sadducees’ dispute?*” My answer: NOTHING. The *Megillath Ta’anith* doesn’t mention such a dispute over how to count to the Feast of Weeks, so why are we *assuming* that’s what the author meant? Why not reach the conclusion that prior to reestablishing the Feast of Weeks, it wasn’t being kept at all?

In response to the above, a well-intentioned “Sunday-only Pentecost” friend offered an excerpt from the Babylonian Talmud in an attempt to affirm that, indeed, there was a dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees (aka the “Boethusians”) over when to begin the count to Pentecost. The excerpt is from the Tractate Menahoth 65a. In the excerpt below, the author first quotes the pertinent portion of the Megillath Ta'anith, then he supplies the Rabbinical discussion:

‘From the eighth of the same until the close of the Festival [of Passover], during which time the date for the Feast of Weeks was re-established, fasting is forbidden’. For the Boethusians held that the Feast of Weeks must always be on the day after the Sabbath.⁵⁰

I’m providing a screen capture of a larger portion of this excerpt at the end of this chapter. However, the above is sufficient for the purposes of this study. Does the above excerpt prove that there was a “Pentecost controversy” between the Pharisees and the Sadducees? Well, think of it like this: Would you accept *carte blanche* a remark made about a group of people five hundred years after the event took place – with no supportive evidence to validate the statement?

From the 1st century BCE through at least the 2nd century CE, we read *nothing* from authors who lived during this time period indicating that there was so much as a *hint* of a Pentecost controversy. Instead, witnesses such as Philo and Josephus matter-of-factly describe the reckoning as being from the morrow of the *first day* of the festival, not the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. For “proof” confirming that there truly *was* a controversy, must we turn to a document written five hundred years later? Seriously?

To give you an idea of how preposterous the above notion is, I called a “Sunday-only Pentecost” believer and asked him what he would think if I told him I found a 6th century document authored by a man claiming to be a descendant of the Sadducees, and in his writing the man mentions that his ancestors always reckoned the count to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath, but then, around the year 70 BCE, his ancestors were forced to start reckoning the count from the morrow after the festival Sabbath. Keep in mind that my friend is persuaded that Jews only began reckoning the count from the morrow after the festival Sabbath after the temple was destroyed 100 years later. My friend, who is one of the more open-minded believers we know, indicated that he would definitely be interested in looking at such a document, but he also admitted that he would be skeptical because without further supportive evidence, the man’s testimony would only be hearsay. And I would agree.

Again, if there truly *was* a Pentecost dispute between the Sadducees and Pharisees during and preceding the first century, we should be able to read about it either in the Bible or from contemporary authors testifying about the controversy. We shouldn’t expect silence and we shouldn’t expect to read about it five hundred years after the fact.

⁵⁰ *The Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Menahoth 65a, Eli Cashdan, Translator; Isidore Epstein, Editor; London: The Soncino Press, 1948. Note: The Talmud was compiled from the 3rd – 6th centuries.

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**.

page 473

M E N A H O T H

65a-65b

'From the first until the eighth day of the month of Nisan, during which time the Daily Offering was established, mourning is forbidden'. For the Sadducees used to say that an individual may of his own free will defray the cost¹ of the Daily Offering. What was their argument?—It is written, [said they], *The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning and the other lamb shalt thou offer at dusk.*² And what was the reply [of the Rabbis]?—It is written, *My food which is presented unto Me for offerings made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Me, shall ye observe.*³ Hence all sacrifices were to be taken out of the Temple fund.⁴

'From the eighth of the same until the close of the Festival [of Passover], during which time the date for the Feast of Weeks was re-established, fasting is forbidden'. **For the Boethusians held that the Feast of Weeks⁵ must always be on the day after the Sabbath.**⁶ But R. Johanan b. Zakkai entered into discussion with them saying, 'Fools that you are! whence do you derive it'? Not one of them was able to answer him, save one old man who commenced to babble and said, 'Moses our teacher was a great lover of Israel, and knowing full well that the Feast of Weeks lasted only one day he therefore fixed it on the day after the Sabbath so that Israel might enjoy themselves for two successive days'. [R. Johanan b. Zakkai] then quoted to him the following verse, *'It is eleven days' journey from Horeb unto Kadesh-Barnea by the way of mount Seir.*⁷ [65b] If Moses was a great lover of Israel, why then did he detain them in the wilderness for forty years?' 'Master', said the other, 'is it thus that you would dismiss me?' 'Fool', he answered, 'should not our perfect Torah be as convincing as your idle talk! Now one verse says, *Ye shall number fifty days.*⁸ while the other verse says, *Seven weeks shall there be complete.*⁹

(1) Lit., 'may offer and bring'. (2) Num. XXVIII, 4. The precept is stated in the singular, directed to the individual. (3) Ibid. 2. The use of the pronoun 'ye' clearly imposes the obligation upon the community. (4) Lit., 'the offering of the Chamber'. (5) *Azereth*, lit., 'the closing'; the Feast of Weeks being regarded as the closing festival to Passover. (6) I.e., on a Sunday, at the completion of seven full weeks from the offering of the 'Omer which, according to them, was offered on a Sunday. (7) Deut. I, 2. (8) Lev. XXIII, 16. (9) Ibid. 15.

The Babylonian Talmud - Menahoth
editor: Isidore Epstein
London: The Soncino Press 1948
transl. Eli Cashdan

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 that Yeshua the Messiah 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 He 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, at least 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, who supports observing a Sunday-only Pentecost, underscored the importance of recognizing this fact in his article "The Count to Pentecost":

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.⁵¹

⁵¹ 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 [the general populace] addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them.”⁵²

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*!” These adherents 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.⁵³

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.

⁵² From *Antiquities of the Jews* xviii. I. 4, op. cit., p. 28.

⁵³ From *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. III, edited by James Hastings, M.A., D.D., Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1911, p. 825.

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 his pen, he declared that he had blamelessly obeyed Yahweh’s law (Philippians 3:5-6).

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.

Once we establish the fact that Yeshua recognized that it was the Pharisees who occupied “the seat of Moses,” another “Sunday Pentecost Only” contingency emerges, pointing out that, yes, Yeshua recognized that the Pharisees were in charge; however, this group asserts that Yeshua didn’t *really* tell His followers to do as “they” (the scribes and Pharisees) say. Rather, they produce a text from the Hebrew Matthew, which has Yeshua directing His followers to do as *he*, i.e., *Moses*, said. We address this claim in chapter 19 of our study.

Finally, it bears repeating that in this discussion of “Who was in charge?” the “Sunday-Only Pentecost” believers have not presented any evidence of a dispute over how to count to the Feast of Weeks. The testimony of ancient writers such as Josephus lends credence towards believing that *however* the believers counted to this holy day, it was *status quo*. Of course, Josephus goes on to point out that the manner employed by Judaism was to count from the morrow of the high day Sabbath, not from the weekly Sabbath. It’s as if he was not even aware of a dispute in this area.

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, whereon 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*).⁵⁴

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, during that time period, controlled when to begin and end the count. 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.

⁵⁴ From the tract “How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day.”

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

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 the Pentecost observance of 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-cited 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 removed from them during Salome’s reign and it was never restored!

12. The Testimony of Philo

The author of the tract that we addressed in our previous chapter 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 effectively 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.⁵⁵

We cited the above paragraph in our previous chapter, but we're displaying it again because it brings us to the next point that we need to make. Again, the author presents 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 who lived *prior to* the destruction of the temple and a Jew whose lifetime spanned the *post-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.⁵⁶

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

⁵⁵ From the tract "How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day."

⁵⁶ From *Encyclopedia International*, Vol. 14, Grolier, Incorporated, New York, NY, 1972, p.286.

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:

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;⁵⁷

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 is from the day of the “sheaf offering” that 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*).⁵⁸

I personally think Philo often had a rather peculiar 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

⁵⁷ From *The Works of Philo*, “The Special Laws, II,” translated by C. D. Yonge, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1993, p. 583.

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 584-585.

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 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 which, combined with his bizarre way of expressing himself, undermines any level of credibility that one may wish to attribute to his writings. 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.⁵⁹

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 Alexandria⁶⁰, the largest Jewish settlement outside Palestine. The only certain date known from his life comes from his account of the great pogrom⁶¹ 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.⁶²

⁵⁹ From *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 3, by William Horbury, W.D. Davies and John Sturdy, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 879.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ "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*.

⁶² From *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, article "Philo of Alexandria," by Peder Borgen, Doubleday, 1992, p. 333.

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.⁶³

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 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.⁶⁴

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?

⁶³ Ibid, p. 341.

⁶⁴ 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 produced 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 the tremendous impact the Septuagint version had on early believers:

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.⁶⁵

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

⁶⁵ From *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, by Merrill F. Unger, article “Versions of the Scriptures,” Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1988, p. 1,343.

merely a young woman. **II Corinthians 11:2** shows that believers are espoused to the Savior in the same way that Mary was espoused to Joseph, and we are to be presented as chaste virgins (*parthenon*) unto Him.

What is equally fascinating about the Septuagint text is the recent discovery of evidence that the earliest versions 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.⁶⁶

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

⁶⁶ 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.

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.⁶⁷

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 worthy 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.**⁶⁸

We are aware that various individuals and groups attempt to portray Josephus as not having supported or having upheld the Septuagint translation. However, the fact that both Josephus and Philo exclusively 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.⁶⁹

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. Someone might ask, **"What does all of this nonsense have to do with the count to Pentecost?"** The answer: Plenty.

⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ *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>.

Early on in this study, we addressed Leviticus 23 and what day is meant by “morrow after the Sabbath.” You may recall that we expressed our heartfelt understanding of 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 instead of morrow after the festival or “high day” Sabbath. This is simply the way our Bibles seem to render the instructions for how to count to Pentecost in this important chapter, so how can we rebuke anyone for doing what the Bible, on the surface at least, seems to instruct us 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. The following is a scanned copy of this text as found in *The Septuagint With Apocrypha*, which was translated into English by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton:⁷⁰

LEVITICUS XXIII. 9—27.

160

ΛΕΥΙΤΙΚΟΝ.

seven days; and the seventh day shall be ^βa holy convocation to you: ye shall do no servile work. ⁹And the Lord 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 the Lord, 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-offering to the Lord. ¹³And its meat-offering two tenth portions of fine flour mingled with oil: it is a sacrifice to the Lord, a smell of sweet savour to the Lord, 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 God: *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 the Lord. ¹⁷Ye shall bring from your dwell-

τῷ Κυρίῳ ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας· καὶ ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ἑβδόμη κλητὴ ἁγία ἔσται ὑμῖν· πᾶν ἔργον λατρευτὸν οὐ ποιήσετε. Καὶ ἐλάλησε 9
Κύριος πρὸς Μωυσήν, λέγων, εἶπον τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ 10
ἐρεῖς πρὸς αὐτοὺς, ὅταν εἰσέλθῃτε εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἣν ἐγὼ δίδωμι
ὑμῖν, καὶ θερίζετε τὸν θερισμὸν αὐτῆς, καὶ οἴσετε τὸ δράγμα
ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ θερισμοῦ ὑμῶν πρὸς τὸν ἱερέα. Καὶ ἀνοίσει 11
τὸ δράγμα ἐναντὶ Κυρίου δεκτὸν ὑμῖν· τῇ ἐπαύριον τῆς πρώτης
ἀνοίσει αὐτὸ ὁ ἱερεὺς. Καὶ ποιήσετε ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐν ᾗ ἂν 12
φέρητε τὸ δράγμα, πρόβατον ἄμωμον ἐνιαύσιον εἰς ὀλοκαύ-
τωμα τῷ Κυρίῳ. Καὶ τὴν θυσίαν αὐτοῦ δύο δέκατα σεμιδά- 13
λεως ἀναπεποιημένης ἐν ἐλαίῳ· θυσία τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὁσμὴ εὐωδίας
Κυρίῳ· καὶ σπονδὴν αὐτοῦ τὸ τέταρτον τοῦ ἴν οἴνου. Καὶ 14
ἄρτον, καὶ πεφρυγμένα χίδρα νέα οὐ φάγεσθε ἕως εἰς αὐτὴν
τὴν ἡμέραν ταύτην, ἕως ἂν προσενέγκητε ὑμεῖς τὰ δῶρα
τῷ Θεῷ ὑμῶν· νόμιμον αἰώνιον εἰς τὰς γενεὰς ὑμῶν ἐν πάσῃ
κατοικίᾳ ὑμῶν.

Καὶ ἀριθμήσετε ὑμῖν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπαύριον τῶν σαββάτων, 15
ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἂν προσενέγκητε τὸ δράγμα τοῦ ἐπιθέματος,
ἑπτὰ ἑβδομάδας ὀλοκλήρους, ἕως τῆς ἐπαύριον τῆς ἐσχάτης 16
ἑβδομάδος ἀριθμήσετε πενήκοντα ἡμέρας, καὶ προσοίσετε
θυσίαν νέαν τῷ Κυρίῳ. Ἀπὸ τῆς κατοικίας ὑμῶν προσοίσετε 17

Notice that, according to the *Septuagint* translation, the priest is to perform the wave sheaf offering, *not* on the morrow after the *weekly Sabbath*, but on the morrow of the *first day* (*te epaurion tes protes*). This, then, is the instruction for counting to Pentecost as recorded in the Bible that Philo and Josephus used. Not only that, but this directive was found in the Bibles used by nearly all the early believers before and during the first century CE. Again, as we previously 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, dictate 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?”

⁷⁰ From *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, translated by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995. Brenton’s translation was originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, in 1851.

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** (Gr. πρωτης, *protes*), 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 *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.⁷¹ (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, and *not* a reference to the first day of the week. 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.

Another Look at the Septuagint Text Confirms the Proper Understanding

We have already presented the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 23:9-16, which demonstrates that the ancient Hebrew scholars who produced this translation understood that “morrow after the Sabbath” is a reference to the morrow (Gr. επαύριον, *epaurion*) ***after*** the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The translation from Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton that we cited, of course, is an English translation of the Greek text. Since the English is translated from the Greek, which is in turn a translation from a Hebrew original, you might say that we were looking at the translation of a translation. How do we know of a certainty that our English translation properly represents the understanding of the Greek text? And how do we know that “morrow *after* the first day” is the correct understanding of Leviticus 23:11?

⁷¹ 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.

When we originally composed this study, we did not have access to anything other than the 19th century translation produced by Brenton. Although his translation displays the Greek text in the right margin (see above), unless the reader already knows Greek, he or she will not readily know which Greek word in the right margin is translated in the left margin. Brenton's work serves as an excellent tool for those willing to look up specific Greek words in a lexicon, but for those who really aren't up to this task, there is no other recourse than to trust that Brenton properly translated the Greek text into English. In 2006, however, that inconvenience changed for lay folks such as June and me when we were introduced to *The Apostolic Bible Polyglot*, which is a Greek-English interlinear of the Septuagint text. This version provides the Greek text with the English translation directly beneath the Greek words, and for those who like to do additional research, the Greek words are coded to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

For those who might remain persuaded that "morrow of the first day" is a reference to "Sunday morning," *The Apostolic Bible Polyglot* translation affirms the understanding that "morrow (*epaurion*) of the first (day)" is a clear reference to "the next day after the first (day)":⁷²

| | | | | | |
|-------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------|----------|
| 3588 2409 | 23:11 | 2532 399 | 3588 1403.1 | 1725 | 2962 |
| τον ιερέα | | και ανοίσει | το δράγμα | έναντι | κυρίου |
| the priest. | | And he shall offer | the sheaf | before | the LORD |
| 1184 | 1473 | 3588 | 1887 | 3588 | 4413 |
| δεκτόν | υμῖν | τη | επαύριον | της | πρώτης |
| accepted | for you. | On the | next day | of the | first |
| 1473 | 3588 | 2409 | 23:12 | 2532 | 4160 |
| αυτό ο | ιερεύς | | και ποιήσετε | εν | τη ημέρα |
| 4it | 1the 2priest]. | | And you shall offer | on | the day |

There should be no question that "next day of the first" is a reference to the day following the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Abib 15) is a day on which no servile work is to be done. As a reminder, many refer to such days as "high day sabbaths" or "festival sabbaths" so as to distinguish such days that do not necessarily fall on the day of the weekly Sabbath from the weekly Sabbath day itself. In fact, as we previously read in chapter 3, the Day of Atonement, which can fall on any given day of the week, is referred to as a "sabbath" in Leviticus 23:32.

In spite of the general understanding that "sabbath" can be a reference to a "festival sabbath," many "Sunday-only" Pentecost believers insist that the "Sabbath" referred to in Leviticus 23:11 of the Hebrew text can *only* be a reference to the weekly Sabbath. However, this was clearly not an understanding that was shared by the Hebrew scholars who translated the Septuagint text of Leviticus 23:11-16. This is because those scholars, when referring back to the "first day" of verse 11, referred to it as "the Sabbaths" (Gr. *sabbaton*) in verse 15:⁷³

⁷² From Leviticus 23:11 as found in *The Apostolic Bible Polyglot* © ISBN 0-9632301-1-5 Rev. 1.2, www.apostolicbible.com, p. 38, January 2006.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 39.

| Holiday of Pentecost | | | | | | |
|----------------------|------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------|
| 23:15 | 2532 | 705 | 1473 | 575 | 3588 | |
| | καὶ | αριθμήσετε | υμῖν | ἀπὸ | τῆς | |
| | And | you shall count | to yourselves | from | the | |
| 1887 | 3588 | 4521 | 575 | 3588 | 2250 | 3739 |
| ἐπαύριον | τῶν | σαββάτων | ἀπὸ | τῆς | ἡμέρας | ἧς |
| next day | of the | Sabbaths, | from | the | day | which |
| 4374 | | 3588 | 1403.1 | 3588 | 1935.1 | 2033 |
| προσενέγκητε | τὸ | δράγμα | τοῦ | ἐπιθέματος | ἑπτὰ | |
| you should bring | the | sheaf | of the | increase offering, | seven | |
| 1439.1 | | 3648 | | 2193 | 3588 | 1887 |
| ἐβδομάδας | ολοκλήρους | 23:16 | ἕως | τῆς | ἐπαύριον | |
| [2periods of seven | lentire]; | | until | the | next day | |
| 3588 | 2078 | 1439.1 | 705 | 4004 | | |
| τῆς | ἐσχάτης | ἐβδομάδος | αριθμήσετε | πεντήκοντα | | |
| of the | last | periods of seven | you shall count | fifty | | |
| 2250 | 2532 | 4374 | 2378 | 3501 | 3588 | |
| ἡμέρας | καὶ | προσποιήσετε | θυσίαν | νέαν | τῷ | |
| days, | and | you shall bring | [2sacrifice offering | 1a new] | to the | |
| 2962 | | 575 | 3588 | 2733—1473 | 4374 | |
| κυρίῳ | 23:17 | ἀπὸ | τῆς | κατοικίας υμῶν | προσποιήσετε | |
| LORD. | | From | | your houses | you shall bring | |

Not only does the Septuagint text affirm that the Hebrew scholars who translated the Septuagint understood that “sabbaths,” in this instance, is a reference to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, but it also demonstrates that they understood “morrow of the first day” to be a reference to the *next day* after the first day. This understanding is even further cemented when we review the Septuagint rendering of Leviticus 23:16, which uses this same Greek word, *epaurion* (ἐπαύριον) in conveying that the actual day of Pentecost is to fall on “the next day (*epaurion*) of the last periods of seven.” If *epaurion* actually means “the day of,” then we would have to understand Pentecost as occurring on the “day of the last periods of seven,” i.e., the day of the seventh “Sabbath.”

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.]⁷⁴

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

⁷⁴ From *The Reader’s Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville, New York, 1977.

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.”⁷⁵ 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 ἑπauriōn, *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 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 is “the morrow **of** the Sabbath” instead of the phrase “the morrow **after** the Sabbath”⁷⁶:



As we noted 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. Green’s *Interlinear Bible*, however, demonstrates that 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 day of *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

⁷⁵ From *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1979, p. 564.

⁷⁶ 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.

understanding shared by Philo, Josephus, and the Pharisaic party, and this is why they began the count to Pentecost on the sixteenth of Abib, which is the morrow of the first day (Abib 15), a “festival sabbath.”

Do We Count “Seven Complete Sabbaths” or “Seven Complete Weeks”?

Back in chapter 4, we presented what a Sunday-only Pentecost proponent describes as a “fatal flaw” in counting to Pentecost from the morrow after the high day festival sabbath. The “fatal flaw” involves his impression that we are obligated to either count eight “sabbaths” before arriving at “day 50” or else count seven sabbaths and observe Pentecost earlier than “day 50.” That author’s study was one of the briefest Pentecost studies that I have ever read, and noticeably missing from his article was any mention of the Septuagint translation of Torah. The Septuagint not only enjoins believers to begin counting to Pentecost on the morrow of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Abib 16) as opposed to the morrow of the Sabbath, but it also directs believers to count “seven full weeks” instead of “seven complete sabbaths.” Certainly, counting seven complete weeks negates the “fatal flaw” argument as presented by the “Sunday Pentecost Only” author. Let’s take another look at the Septuagint rendering of Leviticus 23:15, where we are told to number seven weeks instead of seven sabbaths:

LEVITICUS XXIII. 9—27.

160

ΛΕΥΙΤΙΚΟΝ.

seven days; and the seventh day shall be ^βa holy convocation to you: ye shall do no servile work. ⁹And the Lord 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 the Lord, 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-offering to the Lord. ¹³And its meat-offering two tenth portions of fine flour mingled with oil: it is a sacrifice to the Lord, a smell of sweet savour to the Lord, 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 God: 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 the Lord. ¹⁷Ye shall bring from your dwell-

τῷ Κυρίῳ ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας· καὶ ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ἑβδόμη κλητὴ ἁγία ἔσται ὑμῖν· πᾶν ἔργον λατρευτὸν οὐ ποιήσετε. Καὶ ἐλάλησε 9 Κύριος πρὸς Μωυσήν, λέγων, εἰπὼν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ 10 ἐρεῖς πρὸς αὐτοὺς, ὅταν εἰσέλθῃτε εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἣν ἐγὼ δίδωμι ὑμῖν, καὶ θερίζετε τὸν θερισμὸν αὐτῆς, καὶ οἴσετε τὸ δράγμα ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ θερισμοῦ ὑμῶν πρὸς τὸν ἱερέα. Καὶ ἀνοίσει 11 τὸ δράγμα ἐναντὶ Κυρίου δεκτὸν ὑμῖν· τῇ ἐπαύριον τῆς πρώτης ἀνοίσει αὐτὸ ὁ ἱερεὺς. Καὶ ποιήσετε ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐν ᾗ ἂν 12 φέρετε τὸ δράγμα, πρόβατον ἄμωμον ἐνιαύσιον εἰς ὀλοκαύτωμα τῷ Κυρίῳ. Καὶ τὴν θυσίαν αὐτοῦ δύο δέκατα σεμιδά- 13 λεως ἀναπεποιημένης ἐν ἐλαίῳ· θυσία τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὁσμὴ εὐωδίας Κυρίῳ· καὶ σπονδὴν αὐτοῦ τὸ τέταρτον τοῦ ἴν οἴνου. Καὶ 14 ἄρτον, καὶ πεφρυγμένα χίδρα νέα οὐ φάγεσθε ἕως εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν ἡμέραν ταύτην, ἕως ἂν προσενέγκῃτε ὑμεῖς τὰ δῶρα τῷ Θεῷ ὑμῶν· νόμιμον αἰώνιον εἰς τὰς γενεὰς ὑμῶν ἐν πάσῃ κατοικίᾳ ὑμῶν.

Καὶ ἀριθμήσετε ὑμῖν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπαύριον τῶν σαββάτων, 15 ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἂν προσενέγκῃτε τὸ δράγμα τοῦ ἐπιθέματος, ἑπτὰ ἑβδομάδας ὀλοκλήρους, ἕως τῆς ἐπαύριον τῆς ἐσχάτης 16 ἑβδομάδος ἀριθμήσετε πενήκοντα ἡμέρας, καὶ προσοίσετε θυσίαν νέαν τῷ Κυρίῳ. Ἀπὸ τῆς κατοικίας ὑμῶν προσοίσετε 17

If we are commanded to count seven weeks instead of seven sabbaths, we eliminate the suggested embarrassment of having to count eight sabbaths. If the 3rd century BCE Hebrew scholars who translated the Torah into Greek were certain that the Hebrew word "Shabbat" can be understood to mean "week," who are we to say they didn't understand the meaning of the word? Of course, another question that remains unresolved is whether or not the underlying Hebrew text from which the Septuagint was translated represents a better foundation than the Hebrew text from which the Masoretic Text is derived. Either way, those who used the Septuagint reading could not have been aware of the "fatal flaw" argument because it didn't exist for them.

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 poring through his material. It was certainly a learning experience, and we believe we should all regard such meetings as being opportunities to learn new things and broaden our horizons.

One memory that especially stands out as I reflect on that meeting is the fact that he spent well over an hour doing what we would deem 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 (see our previous chapter) 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.⁷⁷

The Septuagint may not be a “perfect translation,” but it 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 what we believe to be a very balanced review of this 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.)⁷⁸

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

⁷⁷ 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.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 1,100.

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 Massoretic 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.⁷⁹

In other words, if we're keeping score, the New Testament quotes from the Septuagint outnumber 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 from this version that 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 our friend 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."⁸⁰ 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,⁸¹ 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

⁷⁹ 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.

⁸⁰ 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."

⁸¹ C.f., *The Works of Philo*, "On Providence," Fragment 2, section 64, translated by C. D. Yonge, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1993.

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.

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.⁸²

| 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</i> of men <i>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 |

⁸² 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.ws/r_grant_jones/Rick/Septuagint/spexecsum.htm.

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 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.**⁸³

We believe Mr. Jones’ commentary should be taken seriously. We are not persuaded that 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?

⁸³ Ibid, see “Conclusions.”

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

In chapter 5, we demonstrated that the only valid way of reconciling the Hebrew text of Joshua 5:10-11 with the Leviticus 23:14 mandate to not eat “bread, parched grain or fresh ears” until the day on which the firstfruits offering had been brought in requires recognizing that Passover must have coincided with the weekly Sabbath that year. On 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. Continuing with this scenario, since the Passover fell on the weekly Sabbath, then the “morrow after the Passover” (Abib 15) obviously coincided with the first day of the week (Sunday). 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 instead of taking the time to carefully examine our reasoning, 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 (yet) 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), combined 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.

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.⁸⁴

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? We aren’t told. 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. In view of the fact that the Septuagint translation actually pre-dates the Hebrew text, we recognize the possibility that the translators and copyists of the Hebrew TaNaKh, and the English taken from it, may have added the phrase “morrow after the Passover” to Joshua 5:11. Again the phrase “morrow after the Passover” is not found in Joshua 5:11 in the Septuagint (LXX) text.

One thing is certain: Since first-century Jewish believers Philo and Josephus both used and respected the Septuagint translation, neither of them would have interpreted Joshua 5:11 as even remotely implying that the children of Israel ate the produce of the land on Abib 15. We should also add that Joshua 5:11 is completely absent from the scrolls of the book of Joshua that have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, leaving plenty of room to speculate as to whether or not “morrow after the Passover” was *ever* in the original text of Joshua 5:11.⁸⁵

In spite of the fact that the *Vorlagen* of Torah has yet to be found, it is nevertheless noteworthy that two first-century Targums (or *Targumim*)⁸⁶ translate Leviticus 23:11 in agreement with the Septuagint model. The Targums were early translations and explanations of the Torah from Hebrew to Aramaic, the common language of that time period. The authorship of *Targum Onkelos* is attributed to Onkelos, a famous convert to Judaism in Tannaic times (c.35–120 CE). Here’s the English translation of how Leviticus 23:9-14 is presented in *Targum Onkelos*:

And the Lord spake with Mosheh, saving: Speak with the sons of Israel, and say to them: When you have entered into the land that I will give unto you, and you reap its harvest, you shall bring an *omera* of the first of your harvest unto the priest, and he shall uplift the *omera* before the Lord to be accepted for you: **after the day of the festivity (yoma taba) shall the priest uplift it.** And you shall perform on the day of your elevation of the *omera*

⁸⁴ From *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, translated by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995. Brenton’s translation was originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, in 1851. The Greek text in Brenton’s edition is based on Vaticanus, an early fourth-century manuscript, with some reliance on other texts, particularly Alexandrinus, a fifth-century manuscript.

⁸⁵ Only two manuscripts of the Book of Joshua (4QJosh^a and 4QJosh^b) have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, neither of which contain any portion of Joshua chapter five beyond the 7th verse. Cf., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, translated and with commentary by Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich, HarperSanFrancisco, 1999, p. 201. Emmanuel Tov, in his commentary on the Qumran findings of the Book of Joshua, wrote, “If the number of copies of a manuscript found at Qumran is an indication of their popularity within the Qumran community, Joshua was not a popular book, represented merely by two copies in Cave 4.” (Cf., *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, “Joshua, Book of,” eds. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam; 2 vols.; New York: OUP, 2000, 1: 431).

⁸⁶ There are various suggested etymologies for the word “targum.” One that we believe is a very likely origin carries the sense of “interpreter.” The word *turgamanu* is found in the Tell el-Amarna Letters (Berlin edition, 21, 1. 25, Knudtzon, 154) with the meaning “interpreter.” It may, none the less, be of Aramaic origin.

(the sacrifice of) an unblemished lamb of the year, as a burnt offering before the Lord. And the *mincha*⁸⁷ thereof shall be two-tenths of flour mingled with oil, an oblation to be accepted before the Lord; and its libation, wine, the fourth of a *hin*. Neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears shall you eat until this day when you bring the oblation of your God; an everlasting statute unto your generations in all your dwellings.⁸⁸

The other Targum is attributed to first-century Mishnaic sage Jonathan Ben Uzziel. Here is his translation of Leviticus 23:9-14 (which is in turn translated from Aramaic into English):

And the Lord spake with Mosheh, saving: Speak with the sons of Israel, and say to them: When you have entered into the land which I give you, and you reap the harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest unto the priest; and he shall uplift the sheaf before the Lord to be accepted for you. **After the first festal day of Pascha (or, the day after the feast-day of Pascha) on the day on which you elevate the sheaf,** you shall make (the sacrifice of) a lamb of the year, unblemished, a burnt offering unto the Name of the Lord; and its mincha, two-tenths of flour, mingled with olive oil, for an oblation to the Name of the Lord, to be received with acceptance; and its libation, wine of grapes, the fourth of a *hin*. But neither bread nor parched corn (of the ripe harvest) nor new ears may you eat until this day, until the time of your bringing the oblation of your God: an everlasting statute unto your generations in all your dwellings.⁸⁹

The Targums' support of the Septuagint's "morrow of the first day" rendering of Leviticus 23:11 is significant and the fact that the Targums are traced to the first century certainly lends credence to the understanding that normative Judaism recognized that the "sabbath" of verse 11 identifies the "high day Sabbath" instead of the weekly Sabbath.

This brings us to the Pentecost study session that June and I had with our "Sunday Pentecost only" friend. He strongly insists that the missing text of "morrow after the Passover" from the Septuagint reading of Joshua 5:11 proves that it 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 scenario 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 omitting 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:

⁸⁷ A *mincha* is a bloodless oblation.

⁸⁸ This reading of Leviticus 23:9-14 is taken from the Targum Onkelos, [*The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*](#), by J. W. Etheridge, M.A., "The Targum of Onkelos on The Book of Vaiyikra or Leviticus" London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865, pp. 132-133. This translation, which is ascribed by tradition to the proselyte Onkelos, covers the Torah or Pentateuch and is considered to be the oldest and it is the most widely used of all the Jewish targums. It most likely originated in Palestine in the first few centuries CE, but was transmitted and edited in the East, among the Jews of Babylonia.

⁸⁹ Ibid, "The Targum of Palestine Commonly Entitled The Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel, on the Book of Leviticus," p. 218.

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.”⁹⁰

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. The authors of the books comprising the New Testament never spoke against it; in fact, they quoted from it more than they did the Hebrew text. This fact alone attests to the validity of the Septuagint, in spite of men's attempts to discredit it.

⁹⁰ 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 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."⁹¹

For those who recognize the above 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,⁹² 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

⁹¹ From the tract "How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day," page 6.

⁹² 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."

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:

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 Nisan⁹³. 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 Vacca⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵

It would appear that Pete forgot that he had already conceded, nine years earlier, that the "one flaw" described above is only a flaw in his own research methods. His reverting back to the old argument serves as a somber reminder of the adage "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. The same article cited above, with only minor changes, was again published in the June/July 2010 issue of

⁹³ Pete here obviously meant to write "6th of Sivan," which is the name given for the 3rd month of the Scriptural calendar (Esther 8:9). *Nisan* is the Babylonian equivalent to the Hebrew name of the first month, which is *Abib* (Ex. 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Dt. 16:1). After the Jews' return from the Babylonian Captivity, *Nisan* became known as the "post-exilic name" for the first month of the year (Esther 3:7, Nehemiah 2:1).

⁹⁴ From an e-mail I received from Pete Vacca on June 7, 2000 at 12:31 PM Eastern Daylight Time.

⁹⁵ From *Beginning Anew*, editorial by Elder S. J. Vacca, published by Yahweh's Assembly in Messiah, Rochepoint, 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 that it is the same person.

Beginning Anew, and we suspect that this same false teaching will persist and find itself manifested in that and other newsletters and publications for many years to come.

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. Then, in consecutive years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 Pentecost fell on *Sivan 5*. That's right, for four consecutive years, Pentecost fell on *Sivan 5*. For anyone who would like to review the calendars that we used, please feel free to check out the calendar page of our website.⁹⁶ Shown on the following pages 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:

⁹⁶ This page is located at <http://www.ponderscripture.org/calendar.html>, where we offer calendars beginning with the year 2006.





ABIB FIRST MOON 2007

| FIRST DAY | SECOND DAY | THIRD DAY | FOURTH DAY | FIFTH DAY | PREPARATION | SABSEAT |
|---|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> <div style="background-color: yellow; width: 20px; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div style="background-color: orange; width: 20px; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div> Feast Days High Days = Outer Court to </div> </div> <div> Passover March 21 </div> <div> March 22 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:39 pm March 20 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:40 pm March 21 </div> </div> | | | | | | |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> March 25 </div> <div> March 26 </div> <div> March 27 </div> <div> March 28 </div> <div> March 29 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:44 pm March 30 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:45 pm March 31 </div> </div> | | | | | | |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> PASSOVER Sun Set: 7:47 pm April 3 </div> <div> 1st Day of Unleavened Bread April 4 </div> <div> April 5 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:49 pm April 6 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:50 pm April 7 </div> </div> | | | | | | |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> 2nd Day of Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 7:54 pm April 10 </div> <div> April 11 </div> <div> April 12 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:54 pm April 13 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:55 pm April 14 </div> </div> | | | | | | |
| 29 | 30 | 31 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> Sun Set: 7:57 pm April 17 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:58 pm April 18 </div> <div> Darkest Times based upon local time in Plano, Texas, USA </div> </div> | | | | | | |

ZIV SECOND MOON 2007

| FIRST DAY | SECOND DAY | THIRD DAY | FOURTH DAY | FIFTH DAY | PREPARATION | SABSEAT |
|---|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> April 19 </div> <div> Sun Set: 7:59 pm April 20 </div> <div> Sun Set: 8:00 pm April 21 </div> </div> | | | | | | |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> April 22 </div> <div> Sun Set: 8:00 pm April 27 </div> <div> Sun Set: 8:00 pm April 28 </div> </div> | | | | | | |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> April 29 </div> <div> Sun Set: 8:10 pm May 4 </div> <div> Sun Set: 8:10 pm May 5 </div> </div> | | | | | | |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> May 6 </div> <div> Sun Set: 8:15 pm May 11 </div> <div> Sun Set: 8:16 pm May 12 </div> </div> | | | | | | |
| 29 | 30 | 31 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> May 13 </div> <div> Midnight = 12:00 AM May 17 </div> <div> Sun Set: 8:20 pm May 18 </div> </div> | | | | | | |

[illegible]

Facing the Pentecost Controversy

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: 7:55 pm April 18 | Sun Set: 7:56 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 Sun Set: 8:04 pm April 25 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:04 pm April 26 |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| Unleavened Bread April 27 | Sun Set: 8:13 PM Unleavened Bread April 28 | April 29 | April 30 | 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 |
| | | May 11 | May 12 | May 13 | May 14 | May 15 |
| | | May 16 | May 17 | May 18 | May 19 | May 20 |
| | | May 21 | May 22 | May 23 | May 24 | May 25 |
| | | May 26 | May 27 | May 28 | May 29 | May 30 |
| | | May 31 | June 1 | June 2 | June 3 | June 4 |

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 |

We previously mentioned that Pentecost can also fall on Sivan 5. June and I celebrated our first Sivan 5 Pentecost in 2011. Shown below are three greatly reduced screen shots of the pertinent calendar pages that record our countdown, illustrating that, indeed, our fifty-day count from Abib 16 ended on Sivan 5:



ABIB FIRST MOON 2011

| FIRST DAY | SECOND DAY | THIRD DAY | FOURTH DAY | FIFTH DAY | PREPARATION | SABBATH |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | April 5 | April 6 | April 7 | Sun Set: 7:51 pm April 8 | Sun Set: 7:52 pm April 9 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| April 10 | April 11 | April 12 | April 13 | April 14 | Sun Set: 7:56 pm April 15 | Sun Set: 7:57 pm April 16 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| April 17 | PASSOVER April 18 | Unleavened Bread April 19 | Unleavened Bread April 20 | Unleavened Bread April 21 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:02 pm April 22 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:03 pm April 23 |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:07 pm April 24 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:08 pm April 25 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:09 pm April 26 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:10 pm April 27 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:11 pm April 28 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:12 pm April 29 | Unleavened Bread Sun Set: 8:13 pm April 30 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | | | |
| May 1 | May 2 | May 3 | May 4 | | | |



ZIV SECOND MOON 2011

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

A Sivan 5 Pentecost This Year!

The new moon sighting over Israel on 06/03/2011 confirmed that Pentecost this year falls on Sivan 5, refuting the notion that for those who count the 50 days from Abib 16 it must fall on Sivan 6 each and every year. Here is the new moon report from Israel:

Subject: New Moon Sighting Report for 2011-06-03
Date: 06/03/2011 17:00:00
Place: Jerusalem, Israel
Contact: David H. Allen, dallen@jewish.org

The Moon was seen Friday evening, 2011-06-03 in Israel and in Europe and North America. It was seen by telescope in America on Thursday evening, 2011-06-02.

הירח נראה בארץ ישראל 03-06-2011 וכן באירופה ואמריקה. הירח נראה באמריקה על ידי טלסקופ 02-06-2011.

| Place | Observer | Date | Time |
|-----------------|----------------|--------|-----------------|
| Garby, Sweden | Andi Arar | June 3 | 21:53 Naked Eye |
| Curwasm, Sweden | Agel Holmer | June 3 | 22:09 Naked Eye |
| May ale Adammim | Roy Hoffman | June 3 | 19:52 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 19:52 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 19:53 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 19:54 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 19:55 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 19:56 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 19:57 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 19:58 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 19:59 Naked Eye |
| Charmouth | David H. Allen | June 3 | 20:00 Naked Eye |

SIVAN THIRD MOON 2011

| FIRST DAY | SECOND DAY | THIRD DAY | FOURTH DAY | FIFTH DAY | PREPARATION | SABBATH |
|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | | | | 1 |
| | | | | | | Sun Set: 8:32 pm June 4 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| June 5 | June 6 | June 7 | June 8 | June 9 | Sun Set: 8:35 pm June 10 | Sun Set: 8:36 pm June 11 |
| 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| June 12 | June 13 | June 14 | June 15 | June 16 | Sun Set: 8:38 pm June 17 | Sun Set: 8:39 pm June 18 |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| June 19 | June 20 | June 21 | June 22 | June 23 | Sun Set: 8:39 pm June 24 | Sun Set: 8:39 pm June 25 |
| 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| June 26 | June 27 | June 28 | June 29 | June 30 | Sun Set: 8:40 pm July 1 | Sun Set: 8:40 pm July 2 |

As you can see from the above three calendar pages, “day 50” fell on the fifth day of the third moon.

As it turns out, during the ten-year period from the years 2007 – 2016, Pentecost, the way we count to it, fell on a day other than *Sivan 6* seven out of those ten years. To illustrate this fact, here is a chart illustrating the dates on which Pentecost fell during this ten-year period:

| YEAR | DATE OF PENTECOST |
|------|----------------------|
| 2007 | Sivan 7 |
| 2008 | Sivan 7 |
| 2009 | Sivan 6 |
| 2010 | Sivan 6 |
| 2011 | Sivan 5 |
| 2012 | Sivan 5 |
| 2013 | Sivan 5 |
| 2014 | Sivan 5 |
| 2015 | Sivan 6 |
| 2016 | Sivan 7 |

We ask you, presuming you are an unbiased reader, if Pentecost, the way we count to it, fell on the same calendar date each of the above-listed years. We hope you are able to see that in six out of the above 10 years, Pentecost fell on days other than Sivan 6. In addition to Pentecost falling on a date other than Sivan 6 in the above-listed years, this same scenario very nearly repeated itself in 2017 when we received a report of only one “certain” new moon sighting over Israel. There was another “uncertain” sighting reported, as well as sightings reported by those who used binoculars. Had there been two “certain” sightings with the naked eye – from two witnesses --, this would have resulted in a Sivan 7 Pentecost in 2017. That is how close we came to observing yet *another* Sivan 7 Pentecost in the year 2017!

After all these years, June and I have come to accept the fact that some folks will just not see the truth of a matter, even if you lay it out in front of them. Thus, even with the above calendars June and I observed in 2007, 2008, 2011-14 and 2016, some individuals will refuse to believe that we counted fifty days from Abib 16 to Sivan 7 for two consecutive years, even though this is what we (and others) did, nor will they accept the fact that we counted fifty days from Abib 16 to Sivan 5 in the years 2011 through 2014, even though this is precisely what we did. Others, like Mr. Vacca, may actually see and understand for a short time, but then forget what they learned.

If you 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 may be following the modern-day calculated Jewish calendar, then we are persuaded that you will at least see and understand that the “always on Sivan 6” argument simply 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.

We understand that in most years, Pentecost will indeed fall on Sivan 6 (even though such wasn’t the case from 2005 – 2016), and we agree that Pentecost very likely fell on Sivan 6 the year the Israelites were delivered from Egypt. In fact, Jewish tradition maintains that on this date the Ten Commandments were given to Israel. Many are quick to automatically reject anything labeled “Jewish tradition,” and we agree

that we need to be careful about accepting “traditions” as supportive evidence. Conversely, however, we need to also recognize that some traditions are indeed rooted in historical fact. Did the original Pentecost observed by Israel fall on Sivan 6 – and were the Ten Commandments given on that same date? Let’s take a closer look. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* provides a summary of this Jewish tradition:

6. Change in celebration. After the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, Weeks was celebrated, but now as a feast commemorating the giving of the law at Sinai. The joy of the feast was transferred to joy over the law. Since Passover and Tabernacles were linked with the Exodus and wilderness experiences, later Judaism sought to connect the Feast of Weeks with the Mosaic era. They indicated that Weeks commemorated the giving of the law at Sinai. This change was all the more necessary in view of the loss of the Temple in A.D. 70. The first certain evidence that the rabbis considered the giving of the law took place on Pentecost is the statement of Rabbi Jose ben Chalaphtha (c. 150): “In the third month (Sivan), on the sixth day of the month, the ten commandments were given to them (the Israelites), and it was a sabbath day” (Seder ‘Olam Rabba, 5). In the 3rd cent. Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedath (c. A.D. 270) spoke of the common belief of his time: “Pentecost is the day on which Torah was given” (Pes. 68b). Philo, Josephus, and the earlier Talmud know nothing of this new significance attached in later Jewish history. However, it is too late to credit Maimonides as the origin of the change, a view adopted by Christian writers.⁹⁷

The above reference offers the third century CE as a likely time period during which the tradition of the Ten Commandments having been given on the sixth of Sivan originated. Though insightful, this information does not address another ancient writing, which some scholars claim dates to at least the first century CE, and also asserts that the Ten Commandments were given to Moses and the Israelites on the sixth day of the third month. This writing is known as *The Book of Jasher* (*Sefer haYashar*). It is true that the origin of *The Book of Jasher* cannot be verified, as explained in the following excerpt from *Wikipedia*:

Those who believe in the authenticity of this book point to the preface to the 1625 version which says its original source book came from the ruins of Jerusalem in AD 70. A Roman officer named Sidrus discovered a Hebrew scholar hiding in a hidden library. The officer reportedly took the scholar and all the books safely back to his estates in Seville, Spain, which in Roman times was known as Hispalis, the provincial capital of Hispalensis (cf. Hispania Baetica). At some uncertain point in history (presumably after the Islamic conquest of Iberia (cf. Al-Andalus)), the manuscript was transferred or sold to the Jewish college in Cordova, Spain. Scholars apparently had preserved the book until its printings in Naples in 1552 and in Venice in 1625. Outside of the preface to the 1625 work, there is no evidence to support any of this story.⁹⁸

⁹⁷From *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 4, Merrill C. Tenney, General Editor, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1978, p. 693.

⁹⁸*Wikipedia*, “Seferha Yashar (midrash),” cited 06/18/2011. The article may be read in its entirety by accessing the following URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sefer_haYashar_\(midrash\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sefer_haYashar_(midrash)).

Although we are unable to verify the authenticity of *The Book of Jasher*, and we certainly are not suggesting that it is an inspired work, one aspect of interest to many serious Bible students is the fact that it was originally written in Hebrew and makes extensive use of the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of the Creator (יהוה). We personally find it unlikely that such a voluminous account would have been penned in the Hebrew language by a gentile believer, and no medieval Jewish authors would have considered incorporating the Creator's name into their writings because the ineffable name doctrine had certainly been in effect since at least the 2nd century CE.⁹⁹ It does not seem likely for any Jewish author during or after this time period to have voluntarily gone to all the trouble of producing such a lengthy forgery, nor would he be expected to laboriously incorporate the Tetragrammaton into such a monumental work, knowing his fellow Jews would likely reject it on that basis alone. These factors, then, lead us to believe that regardless of the authenticity of *The Book of Jasher*, it was most likely composed at least prior to the second century CE and therefore reflects an ancient Jewish understanding that the Ten Commandments were given to Israel on the sixth day of the third month (Sivan).

If this ancient Jewish understanding is based on fact and the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments as provided in *The Book of Jasher* is true, they were indeed given on Sivan 6. The following written account of this testimony is taken from Jasher 72:6:

6 And in the third month from the children of Israel's departure from Egypt, on the sixth day thereof, Yahweh gave to Israel the ten commandments on Mount Sinai.
7 And all Israel heard all these commandments, and all Israel rejoiced exceedingly in Yahweh on that day.

As a side note, the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments as found in Jasher does not provide any clues as to whether or not Sivan 6 coincided with the Feast of Weeks. It provides an interesting corollary to our discussion, but nothing more.

⁹⁹ Cf., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6, "Tetragrammaton in the New Testament," David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, Doubleday, New York, NY, 1992, p. 393-94, where we read, "The Christian copies of the Greek OT employ the words *Kyrios* ('Lord') and *Theos* ('God') as substitutes or surrogates for the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. The evidence suggests that this had become the practice of Christian scribes perhaps as early as the beginning of the 2nd century." The author further suggests that until this time, the Tetragrammaton had been preserved in Jewish writings.

17. Seven Full Weeks

As we have already seen, according to the Septuagint version, we are to count off “seven full weeks” before arriving at the 50th day. 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 numbering the 50 days on the first day of the first week. 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 cannot 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.¹⁰⁰

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 43rd wedding anniversary in the fall of 2021. However, based upon the reasoning as expressed above, we will not have been married for 43 “**full**” years until the actual **end** of 2021. 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 43 “full” years until the following spring, most likely in March 2022.

I hope we all know better. Come November 18, 2021, June and I will have officially been married for 43 “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 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** tell others **seven Thursdays later** 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.

¹⁰⁰ From “How to Count to Pentecost: An Important Biblical Holy Day,” page 4.

18. Did Yeshua 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 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 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.¹⁰¹

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 He ascended to heaven as the “Firstfruits between the time when 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 June and I were unaware of any other logic supporting the “Any Day Pentecost” position, we would definitely embrace at least a portion of the reasoning that Scott expressed in support of a “Sunday-only Pentecost.” We have read the reasoning offered by those who support this view, so we do understand an individual's decision to employ this rationale as forming a part of his or her decision to count to Pentecost

¹⁰¹ Scott sent this e-mail on August 6, 2003.

from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. Nevertheless, embracing the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” doctrine raises more questions than 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 a group called the Assemblies of Yahweh (Bethel, PA) back in 1986. One of the studies we received from them is titled “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 the author mentions Miriam Magdalene’s visit to the tomb, when she mistook Yeshua for the gardener; 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, Yeshua 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 the proponents of a teaching 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 2.¹⁰²

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 does not 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.

¹⁰² Excerpt from “The Wave Sheaf Ordinance,” by James Bird and Jacob O. Meyer, ©1979 Assemblies of Yahweh, Bethel, PA19507, All Rights Reserved, p. 4.

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:

- 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*.¹⁰³

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?

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

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

¹⁰³*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>>.

²¹But He spake of the temple of his body.

²²When 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.

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 titled *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.¹⁰⁴

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.¹⁰⁵

We can see, then, that 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 validating 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” we read of is the one recorded by Luke in Luke 23:49-52:

^{49¶} And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

^{50¶} And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.

⁵¹ And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

⁵² And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy:

⁵³ And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing the Almighty. Amen.

Luke repeats this same ascension account in Acts chapter one:

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.

This same ascension account is also briefly mentioned by Mark.¹⁰⁶ These should not be mistaken as two (or three) separate ascensions. We are thus persuaded that Yeshua’s *only* ascension is the one witnessed by the apostles as described by Mark in his Messianic account as well as Luke in the book of Luke and the book of Acts. Clearly, Yeshua’s ascension was a miraculous event, one that anyone

¹⁰⁴ From *Beginning Anew*, editorial by Elder S.J. Vacca, published by Yahweh’s Assembly in Messiah, Rochepoint, MO, June/July 2009, Vol. 30, No. 4, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Cf., Mark 16:19.

witnessing would not ever forget. Neither Mark nor Luke were eyewitnesses to Yeshua's ascension, yet it was something that had been passed along to them as they learned more about the Savior, and it was something that they felt was important enough to share with their reading audience. Neither author recorded the Ascension as "Yeshua's second ascension," nor did they 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 one *recorded* ascension was the *only* ascension.

Is Yeshua the Fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering?

On the surface, the claim that Yeshua is the fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering seems both reasonable and noble, but as it is with the claim that Yeshua ascended to heaven, such a doctrine raises more questions than can be satisfactorily answered. Many within the Sacred Name Movement insist that Yeshua is the fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering and that, as such, the fact that He appeared as a gardener to the women in John chapter 20 validates this understanding. Yet, as we previously read, although the Apostle John frequently clarifies various prophecies that Yeshua fulfilled, not once does he associate Yeshua as being the fulfillment of the wave sheaf offering. In spite of this missing testimony and lack of ironclad evidence, those who might dare to challenge this doctrinal view are often lumped into the same group as those who willfully distort Yahweh's Word.

One believer who dared to challenge the notion that Yeshua is the fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering was the late William Dankenbring. I should point out that June and I had several doctrinal differences with Mr. Dankenbring, one of which is our view that we dishonor the Almighty by referring to Him as "God." Notwithstanding, Dankenbring forcefully drove home some key problems with the belief that Yeshua is the fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering. What follows is an excerpt from his study titled "The SECRET of the 'Wave Sheaf'":

However, there is an even more devastating problem with the theory. The proponents of this theory all assume without any "proof" that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the "wave sheaf offering" of Leviticus 23. They assume that He was the "firstfruits" from the dead, and therefore is comparable to the "firstfruits" of the harvest.

But the fact is, the literal translation of I Corinthians 15:20 is, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the FIRST FRUIT [singular noun, not plural!] of them that slept." Christ is ONE PERSON -- not two, three, four, 500, 1,000, or 3,000, or 100,000 -- just one person!

Just what is the "wave sheaf" offering, anyway? Notice! The original Hebrew word translated "sheaf" is omer. This word means "a heap" -- or "sheaf" -- a dry measure. Says *Gesenius Hebrew Chaldee Lexicon*, it means "a measure of dry things, containing the tenth part of an ephah." An omer, according to Unger's Bible Dictionary, held about 5.1 pints.

According to Alfred Edersheim, the greatest Jewish-Christian scholar of the 19th century, during Temple times a noisy throng of Jews would converge at a field across the Kidron Valley, at the base of the Mount of Olives, following delegates from the Sanhedrin. They were to reap this Passover-sheaf in public the evening before it was offered. So they gathered on the evening following Nisan 15 (or at the beginning of Nisan 16, after sunset of the 15th), and cut down the barley which had been previously marked off.

Says Edersheim, three appointed men cut down "the amount of one ephah, or ten omers, or three seahs, which is equal to about three pecks and three pints of our English measure. The ears were brought into the Court of the Temple, and thrashed out with canes or stalks, so as not to injure the corn; then 'parched' on a pan perforated with holes, so that each grain might be touched by the fire, and finally exposed to the wind. The corn thus prepared was ground in a barley-mill, which left the hulls whole. According to some, the flour was always successfully passed through thirteen sieves, each closer than the other" (The Temple: Its Ministry and Services p.204-205).

Edersheim continues, "Though one ephah, or ten omers, of barley was cut down, only one omer of flour, or about 5.1 pints of our measure, was offered in the Temple on the second Paschal, or 16th day of Nisan" (p.205).

Now notice! This is a **WHOLE SHEAF** of barley -- consisting of 5.1 pints, or a little over two quarts, at least! How many individual "grains" of barley would that be? There are multiple thousands of barley grains in one omer. The "omer" then was not one grain, or the grain from one plant, but many barley plants -- many grains! What does a "grain" symbolize?¹⁰⁷

Author William Dankenbring presented the Greek word translated "firstfruits" (ἀπαρχή, *aparche*) as a singular noun when used in reference to the Messiah in I Corinthians 15:20, and he was correct; however, this word is also singular when used in reference to *all* true believers in such passages as Revelation 14:4. Nevertheless, Dankenbring's point is valid: the Wave Sheaf Offering clearly represents, not one, but *many* grains, which in turn means that this offering will be fulfilled in the resurrection, not by Yeshua, but by others. Yeshua is the Lamb; we are the grain offering that can only be accepted *after* the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb.

If we are to believe that Yeshua is the fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering, then we must believe that His sacrifice was not actually accepted until three days following the crucifixion. Dankenbring also addressed this point:

Christ's sacrifice for our sins, therefore, was accepted immediately upon His death -- not three days later, after some "ceremony" in heaven! When Christ died, an earthquake shook the ground, the lintel above the curtain of the Temple broke, the vail itself was ripped in two parts from top to bottom, and the bodies of many dead saints arose from the grave (recently deceased saints), to live out their natural lives (Matt.27:50-54). Such awesome events indicate that Christ's greatest Sacrifice of all time was accepted IMMEDIATELY when He died! But to fulfill prophecy, He had to remain 3 days and 3 nights in the grave, as a "sign" He is the Messiah (Matt.12:40).

To believe that Jesus' sacrifice was not "accepted" till over 12 hours or more after His resurrection, which occurred late in the evening on the weekly Sabbath, before sunset, borders on spiritual lunacy. It makes no sense whatsoever.¹⁰⁸

While there is no question that Yeshua is the "first of the firstfruits," 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

¹⁰⁷ Dankenbring, William F., "The SECRET of the 'Wave Sheaf,'" Triumph Prophetic Ministries (Church of God); the article can be read in its entirety at the following link: <http://www.triumphpro.com/wave-sheaf-secret.htm>.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

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 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 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 by the Apostle John.

Was Yeshua “Untouchable”?

As we have seen, 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 we 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.¹⁰⁹

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.¹¹⁰

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

¹⁰⁹*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.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 192.

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 by, to ascend to My Father and God, who is your Father and God also. Therefore, let them take courage.”¹¹¹

It thus appears that the interpretation held by the “Yeshua Ascended in John 20” proponents is one based upon a highly questionable foundation: They hold 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 various explanations as to why some authors 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 the same individual whom we just cited, William Dankenbring. Although Dankenbring agreed with the way June and I count to Pentecost, he was much more dogmatic in his approach than we are. Nevertheless, he occasionally came 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

¹¹¹Adam Clarke’s *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Abridged by Ralph Earle, Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, Kansas City, MO, 1985, pp. 952-53.

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).

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).¹¹²

¹¹² 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.

Although June and I certainly had our differences with William Dankenbring, in this instance we believe he was on target. As he pointed 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.

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."¹¹³ 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 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 folks, in their misplaced zeal, conclude that Yeshua's body was actually *burned*? They might pursue this route 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

¹¹³ 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).

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:

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.¹¹⁴

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.”

¹¹⁴ 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 delivering my *Facing the Pentecost Controversy* presentation 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.¹¹⁵ 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, in fact, a gentleman named Jerry *vehemently* objected. Of course, he didn’t actually object to Yeshua’s words; rather, he objected to the *translation* I used in quoting what Yeshua said in Matthew 23:3. He pointed out that the “correct translation” of Matthew 23:3 can be found in the *Shem Tob Hebrew Matthew*. Before we examine the reading of Matthew 23:3 in the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*, let’s take a look at the traditional reading, as found in the King James Version:

¹ Then spake Yeshua to the multitude, and to His disciples,

² Saying, The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat:

³ All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

We highlighted the key word in the above translation, which is the word “they.” In virtually all available translations, the pronoun “they” is employed in Matthew 23:3. Certainly, if Yeshua told the multitude and His disciples to “observe and do” all they say, He is telling them to obey the directives given by the scribes and Pharisees.

Jerry, however, emphasized that, according to the *Shem Tob Hebrew Matthew*, Yeshua didn’t instruct His followers to “observe and do” what they (i.e., the scribes and Pharisees) say; rather, the Hebrew text of Matthew has Yeshua instructing his followers to do all *he says*, in obvious reference to the man after whom the “seat of Moses” is named. Thus, instead of instructing us to do what the *scribes and Pharisees* say, Jerry insisted that Yeshua charged His followers to do what *Moses* said.

Jerry’s point was clear: There is a big difference between what the scribes and Pharisees taught and what Moses taught, and there is a big difference between what the Hebrew Matthew says and what the conventional translations say. This, then, was my first-ever exposure to what we’ll refer to as the “**Do as he, i.e., Moses, says**” approach to interpreting Matthew 23:3. But did Jerry, in citing the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*, properly represent the original intent of the biblical author Matthew when this writing was composed?

In order to best understand what the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* rendering of Matthew 23:3 is, let’s take a look at the actual pages from George Howard’s translation, found in his book, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*. What follows is a scanned copy from Professor Howard’s translation. The Hebrew text is displayed on the left page and the English translation is on the right:¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ See chapter 10, “What the Messiah Had to Say About the Sadducees and Pharisees.”

¹¹⁶ George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1995, pp. 112-113. The *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* is also catalogued as Ms. Add. no. 26964 by the library where it is housed, the British Library of London.

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| <p>112 [MT 22:34-23:4]</p> <p><u>פרק צ"ה</u></p> <p>וכאשר ראו הפירושנים כי אין מענה לצדוקים התחברו עבדיו.³⁴ וישאלוהו חכם א' לנסותו.³⁵ ר' אמר איזה היא מצוה גדולה שכתורה.³⁶ אמר לו ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך וכו'.³⁷ זו היא הראשונה.³⁸ שנית דומה אליה ואהבת לרעך כמוך.³⁹ ועל שתי המצוות האלה התורה כולה תלויה והנביאים.⁴⁰ ויאספו הפרושים וישאלו יש"י.⁴¹ לאמר מה יראה לכם מן המשיח וכן מי יהיה. ויאמרו לו בן דוד.⁴² ויאמר להם איך קראו אותו דוד ברוח הקדש לאמר אדון.⁴³ דכתיב גאם ה' לאדוני שב לימיני עד אשית אויביך הדם.⁴⁴ לרגליך. אם דוד קראו אדון איך יהיה בנו?⁴⁵ ולא יכלו להשיבו דבר מכאן ואילך פתחו לשאול ממנו דבר.⁴⁶</p> <p><u>פרק צ"ו</u></p> <p>ואז דבר יש"י אל העם ואל תלמידיו.¹ לאמר על כסא משה ישבו הפירושנים והחכמים.² ועתה כל אשר יאמר לכם שמרו ועשו ובתקנותיהם ומעשיהם אל.³ תעשו שהם אומרים והם אינם עושים.⁴ ודורשים ונותנים משאות גדולות לא יוכלו לסובלם והם.⁵ אפי' באצבעם אינם רוצים לנוע.</p> <p><small>34 אחריו EF, יחדו ABDEG, יחדיו ועבדיו EF 35 מהם + א' G ואמר EF, וישאלוהו וישאלוהו EF 36 בתורה [שכתורה] 2 I A [מצוה גדולה] CEFG איזו [איוה] A רבי נר- 37 וכל נפשך בכל מאד: omit G [וכו] omit G [אלהיך] A [אלקיך] ABDEG 38 הנדולה הראשונה DEF, הנדולה C, הנדולה שבמצוות + [הראשונה] A 39 שנית ABDEFG, השנית B 40 תורה [התורה] A, האלו [האלה] B 41 ויאספו EF, ויאספו G 42 לאמר A, ויאמר G [ואמר] EF 43 ברוח הקדש לאמר אדון ABDEFG, קראו אדון A, ואיך אדון BEF, אליהם [להם] G 44 דכתיב EF, דכתיב G 45 אם דוד קראו אדון ABDEFG, קראו אדון A, ואיך אדון BEF, אליהם [להם] G 46 ולא יכלו להשיבו דבר מכאן ואילך פתחו לשאול ממנו דבר ABDEFG, פתחו לשאול ממנו דבר A, ואיך אדון BEF, אליהם [להם] G</small></p> | <p>113 [MT 22:34-23:4]</p> <p>34 When the Pharisees saw that the Sadducees had no answer, they joined his servants. 35 Then a sage asked him tempting him: 36 Rabbi, tell [us] which is the greatest commandment in the Torah. 37 He said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart (and with all your soul and all your strength). 38 This is the first. 39 The second is like it: Thou shalt love your neighbor as yourself. 40 Upon these two commandments the whole law hangs and the prophets. 41 The Pharisees assembled and Jesus asked them saying: What is your opinion concerning the Messiah, whose son will he be? They said to him: The son of David. 42 He said to them: How is it that David by the Holy Spirit called him saying: Lord, 43 as it is written: The Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet. 44 If David called him Lord, how is he his son? 45 They were not able to answer him a word (and) from then on they feared to ask him anything.</p> <p><u>Chapter 23</u> 1 Then Jesus spoke to the people and to his disciples saying: Upon the seat of Moses the Pharisees and the sages sit. 2 Now all which (they) say to you keep and do; but (according to) their ordinances and deeds do not do because they say and do not. 4 They demand and set forth great burdens [which] (the shoulders of men) are not able to bear; but they themselves even with their finger are unwilling to move.</p> <p>1 RSV has "This is the great and first commandment." 2 This word is actually 3rd person singular (masculine). See <i>The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon</i>, p. 288.</p> |
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For our examination of Jerry's claim, the key Hebrew word in Matthew 23:3 is the word **יאמר** (*yomer*), which is a form of the Hebrew verb *amar* (אמר). The root of this verb, אמר, is word #559 in *Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, and means "to say." Please keep in mind that in Hebrew, the form of the verb, as used in a sentence, not only determines whether it is present, past or future, but it can also denote whether the object is (a) masculine or feminine and (b) singular or plural. This is important because, as we will see, the verb form found in the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* is *singular*, not plural. If it were plural, then it would need to be translated *they*. However, since it is singular and masculine, it *must* be rendered *he*. Hopefully, you can now better grasp the reasoning behind the "Do as he, i.e., Moses, says" approach to interpreting Matthew 23:3.

This, then, is why Jerry insists that Yeshua did not instruct His followers to do as *they* (the scribes and Pharisees) said to do. Yes, the scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat (i.e., the seat of authority with regard to religious matters), and Jerry agrees that Yeshua acknowledged this as fact; however, according to Jerry, the Messiah stipulated that His followers were to do as *he* (i.e., Moses), not *they* (i.e., the scribes and Pharisees), said. Jerry made it clear that there is a big difference, and we agree.

We summarize Jerry's point as follows: Although he agrees that Yeshua recognized the scribes and Pharisees as the "ranking authorities," he did *not* agree that Yeshua instructed His followers to do as those scribes and Pharisees said to do. Instead, His followers were instructed to do as *he* (i.e., Moses) said.

As I mentioned in our opening paragraph, Jerry raised this particular objection during the "question/answer" session following my "Facing the Pentecost Controversy" presentation. Regrettably, some folks will turn a "question/answer" session into a grilling session, and this is how Jerry presented his objection. My not ever having heard of this particular objection prior to his bringing it up was apparently no excuse, and he had just demonstrated, to his satisfaction as well as to all the "Sunday Pentecost Only" adherents, that Yeshua (in so many words) charged His followers to *not* count to Pentecost the way the Pharisees count!

My not having ever heard of this argument, combined with my inability to process the divergent contingencies that I would have needed to weigh in order to respond to Jerry's argument, left me without a proper answer. Being left without a response, in the eyes of many, simultaneously meant I had lost the argument. It was only later, when I had the opportunity to properly reflect and weigh the merits of his new argument, that I was able to see how I *should* have answered his protest.

I need to emphasize that I had never heard this argument until hearing it raised by Jerry. I am not certain where he came up with this teaching; however, I later learned that this same argument is being used by others to this day, and I know that Moshe Koniuchowsky, General-Secretary of the Messianic Israel Alliance, expressed this same understanding in an address that he delivered in 2000. Here is an excerpt from that address:

The Hebrew Shem Tov in Matthew 23:3 contrasts what he (Moses) said, versus what the Pharisees and Sages say. They are NOT SAYING THE SAME THING. THIS VERSE IS A VERSE OF GREAT CONTRAST, not an admonition to follow blasphemy and evil pernicious errors. King Yahshua is making it clear that Moses and rabbinical Judaism both claim to be saying the same thing but in no way, shape or form, are they doing and teaching the same things.

Therefore the Hebrew rendering of Matthew 23:3: "veatah kol asher YOMER lachem shomru veasu; uvtachnotahem umaasehem al tasu shhemem omrim vhem anah osim, is a warning of the fact that their collective deeds do not match the individual sayings of Moses. When referring to the collective anti-Torah deeds of the Pharisees and Sages, Yahshua uses the plural in the words uvtachnotahem uma-asehem, (ending in the hem plural suffix) their ordinances and their deeds. Had Messiah truly wanted us to be the blind following the blind, He would have told us to follow kol shehem OMRIM using the plural form of yomer, just like He did when referring to their collective manmade ordinances and deeds, where Yahshua does use the collective present plural.

Matthew 23:3 then is a call to Torah and a call to distance ourselves from the corruption of Moses Seat for all of King Yahshua's disciples! Only in this Hebraic understanding can verse 3 of Matthew 23 take its rightful logical place in a chapter full of sharp contrasts between Moses's Torah and the ordinances and behaviors of the Pharisees. If Matthew 23:1-39 are verses designed to contrast right from wrong, good from evil, Torah from Oral Torah, then by definition of syntax so must verse 3! When verse 3 is understood as the table setter to the rest of the chapter, then we have perfectly fitting textual syntax. Then verses 4-39 of Matthew 23, become the details of Yahshua's initial verse 3 proclamation to avoid their sayings ("omrim") and choose Moses's sayings that were "yomer"ed. King Yahshua illuminates the reason that He has requested for His

talmidim to refuse and reject the leadership of the Seat of Moses, in light of their rejection of the pure sayings of Moses the lawgiver.¹¹⁷

Moshe Koniuchowsky, in his summary of Matthew 23, presents verse 3 as the key to grasping the “Hebraic understanding” of Yeshua’s message to His disciples in that chapter. This teaching, on the surface, appears sound. However, it is not as “rock-solid” as the “**Do as he, i.e., Moses, says**” supporters have led us to believe. Before we begin our response to their claim, though, please consider the fact that we should *always* put what Moses said above what other men say. No one will deny such an understanding, whether presented as “Hebraic,” “Greek,” “English” or any other language. The bottom-line question is, “Did the scribes and Pharisees’ method of counting to Pentecost clash with the way Moses’ taught it to be done?” This is what the “Sunday Pentecost Only” adherents must prove, and to this point, they have not been successful. From the way June and I see things, the scribes and Pharisees may well have been just as accurate with the way they counted to Pentecost as they were in counting to the weekly Sabbath each week. In other words, unless someone can produce a record in which Yeshua criticized the way the Pharisees counted to Pentecost, we should not presume that He did, which consequently means they may very well have counted to Pentecost the same way that Moses did.

An acquaintance named Chuck Henry expressed what we feel is an insightful understanding of the above point during an e-mail exchange that we had on this topic:

I suppose it would just be one less thing to have to deal with if it [Matt. 23:3] really said “they” and not “he.” I can see how people would take that and run with it, thinking that, “Oh! We shouldn’t do as the Pharisees did, and they began their count to Pentecost on the morrow after the first High Day Sabbath of Unleavened Bread!” However, I think just a minimal amount of further consideration invalidates that type of thinking. For that type of statement to be true, that is, if the intended meaning is for us *not* to do one single thing that the Pharisees did, it would have to apply across the board, such that the Pharisees could have *not done one single thing* in accordance with Moses. I think we know better than that. Yahshua acknowledged that the Pharisees were indeed keeping some of the law, but He rebuked them for neglecting “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Mat 23:23). Yahshua further commented that they should indeed be doing the things that they were doing correctly, without leaving the weightier matters: justice, mercy, and faith, undone.¹¹⁸

As Chuck points out, the flaw in attempting to discredit the Pharisees’ method of counting to Pentecost – based on a presumption that their actions were at variance with what Moses said – lies in the fact that these folks *assume* that Yeshua disagreed with the Pharisees’ method of counting to Pentecost. Unless the “Sunday Pentecost Only” folks can provide a direct statement from Yeshua supporting His rejection of the Pharisees’ method of counting to Pentecost, we should not presume that He *did*. Those who proceed with this unreasonable presumption do not seem to exhibit a willingness to take their reasoning to its logical conclusion. Their logic would require systematically invalidating *everything* the Pharisees taught that involves an interpretation of the law of Moses, including such beliefs as the resurrection or the existence of angels.

¹¹⁷ Rabbi Moshe Koniuchowsky, “Who Sits in Moses Seat?” This presentation was delivered at the Orlando, Florida Messianic Israel Alliance in September 2000. You may read the presentation in its entirety by accessing the following URL: http://www.hebroots.org/hebrootsarchive/0011/1111/001111_i.html.

¹¹⁸ From an e-mail received from Chuck Henry on 5/13/2010 at 4:25:22 P.M. CST.

In answering the claims of those who, like Mr. Koniuchowsky and Jerry, are so critical of *anything* practiced or taught by the Pharisees, this would be a suitable place to remind them, as we pointed out in chapter 10, that the Pharisees, in spite of their problems, were termed “the strictest sect of the Jews” by the Apostle Paul (Acts 26:5). Moreover, 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). We’re not about to say that the Pharisees didn’t have any false teachings; however, it is more than reasonable to expect at least *one* mention of a clash involving something as significant as the count to Pentecost – *if* they didn’t do it correctly.

Is the Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew the Only Hebrew Matthew?

The above question is a rhetorical one for those who have studied this matter extensively. However, we have met individuals who, although they were keenly aware of the now-famous *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*, had not been informed that there are other lesser-known Hebrew Matthew manuscripts out there as well. There are actually *several* surviving Hebrew texts of the book of Matthew. George Howard, in his *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, covers these additional manuscripts, such as the *DuTillet Hebrew Matthew*, the *Münster Hebrew Matthew*, the *Nestor Hebrew Matthew*, the *Ben Reuben Hebrew Matthew* and the *Nizzahon Vetus #162 Hebrew Matthew*. The reason it is so important to remember that there are other Hebrew Matthews out there is because they all differ with the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* when it comes to the wording of Matthew 23:3. This is not something that Jerry, Mr. Koniuchowsky or any other “**Do as he, i.e., Moses, says**” proponents have ever mentioned, at least not to our knowledge. As we’re about to see, this omission (or oversight) is significant.

If you refer to the page we displayed from George Howard’s translation of the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*, you will see some obscure footnotes at the bottom of the page containing Hebrew text. I had never paid much attention to those footnotes, primarily because I found them to be confusing. Scholars do not tend to put things in “layman’s terms” for their reading audience, which has always made me wonder exactly who they are writing for, but that’s another subject for another time. Anyway, it was June who decided to investigate George Howard’s footnote for Matthew 23:3. We have highlighted that footnote for easy identification, but we’re enlarging it here to make things even easier for you:

23:3 ועתה | מעתה | ועתה EF | **יאמר | יאמר ABDEFG** | שמרו ועשו | חששו ושמרו G | ובתקנותיהם | ובתקנותיהם
 ABDEG, ובתקנותיהם F | ומעשיהם | ומעשיהם E, וכמעשיכם F | והם | omit ABDEFG

In the above footnote, we highlighted and circled the only portion that is pertinent to this discussion. The average reader, in reviewing the above footnote, probably doesn’t have any idea what George Howard was trying to convey to his reading audience. In fact, I think I may have glanced at that footnote a time or two, but upon immediately experiencing confusion, my eyes darted elsewhere on the page. June, however, tends to be more analytical than I am, so she followed up on that initial sensation of confusion by turning to the Introduction of Howard’s book in search of an explanation. The Introduction is that special place where authors sometimes offer what is known as their “method to the madness.” So what did George Howard mean by placing another (similar) Hebrew word next to the Hebrew word **יאמר** (*yomer*)? And why in the world did he follow that Hebrew word with the letters “ABDEFG”?

June’s review of Professor Howard’s Introduction notes turned out to be very enlightening. There was a purpose to Howard’s cryptic “madness” after all, and when she explained it to me in layman’s

terms, I realized that apparently I wasn’t the *only* one who hadn’t properly examined his footnote: The “**Do as he, i.e., Moses, says**” proponents do not seem to have studied Howard’s footnote, either.

Here is what George Howard intended to convey in the portion of his footnote that we circled for you: First, he displayed the Hebrew word found in the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* (יֹאמֵר); next to that Hebrew word (separated by a]), Mr. Howard placed the Hebrew word which is found in *other* Hebrew Matthews (יֹאמְרוּ). As we will see shortly, this particular Hebrew word does *not* mean “he says.”

What about the letters “ABDEFG”? This was perhaps the most confusing part of Howard’s footnote. However, as June found out, he provides a “key to understanding” those letters in the Introduction of his book. Each of those letters, as displayed on page xii of George Howard’s book, represents a different manuscript of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew¹¹⁹:

| | |
|---|--|
| xii | Hebrew Gospel |
| Witnesses Used in This Edition² | |
| | Ms. Add. no. 26964. British Library, London. (Serves as the printed text for 1:1–23:22.) → This is a reference to the <i>Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew</i> . |
| A | Ms. Heb. 28. Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden. |
| B | Ms. Mich. 119. Bodleian Library, Oxford. |
| C | Ms. Opp. Add. 4° 72. Bodleian Library, Oxford. |
| D | Ms. 2426 (Marx 16). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, (Serves as the printed text for 23:23–end.) |
| E | Ms. 2279 (Marx 18). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York. |
| F | Ms. 2209 (Marx 19). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York. |
| G | Ms. 2234 (Marx 15). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York. |
| H | Ms. Mich. 137. Bodleian Library, Oxford. |

In the above listing, the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* is referred to as “Ms. Add. no. 26964,” and is housed at the British Library in London. According to George Howard’s cross-referencing system, the letters “ABDEFG,” as referenced in his Matthew 23:3 footnote, represent the variant Hebrew Matthew manuscript readings in which the Hebrew verb יֹאמְרוּ is used instead of יֹאמֵר. Does the slightly different spelling make much of a difference? Yes, it certainly does.

We have already agreed that the verb form used in Matt. 23:3 of the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* (יֹאמֵר) means “he says” instead of “they say.” However, as revealed by George Howard’s footnote, the verb form used in the majority of Hebrew Matthew manuscripts (Manuscripts A, B, D, E, F and G) is

¹¹⁹ George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1995, Introduction, p. xii. The *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* is also catalogued as Ms. Add. no. 26964 by the library where it is housed, the British Library of London.

spelled **יאמר**, which means “they say.” If we go by the numbers, then, the Hebrew manuscripts containing the text “they say” outnumber the texts with “he says” 6 to 1.

Actually, it’s more like 6 to 2. This is because Manuscript C apparently also has Yeshua making reference to “they say.” According to George Howard’s explanation of each of the above manuscripts, Manuscript C is “an almost exact replica” of the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*:

Manuscript C is an almost exact replica of the British Library ms., including breaking off at 23:22. It is written, however, in very small letters and is sometimes difficult to read.¹²⁰

Those who rely on the weight of manuscript evidence to determine validity of a variant reading will immediately dismiss the reading “he says” because it is only found in a maximum of two manuscripts, whereas the overwhelming majority of manuscripts support “they say.”

Of course, June and I do not generally “go by the numbers,” which means we are not going to jump on the bandwagon driven by folks who determine “reliability” based on the number of manuscripts containing a certain reading. Conversely, however, just as majority doesn’t determine truth, neither does minority.¹²¹ Thus, when we objectively examine all the above evidence, we can only conclude that two of eight Hebrew manuscripts support the reading “he says.” The other six manuscripts support “they say.”

You may wonder why we have not commented on Manuscript H, which is the last of the Hebrew Matthew manuscripts cited above by George Howard. Briefly, Manuscript H does not contain the text of Matthew 23:3. It is thus eliminated from consideration.

For those who would like to compare the Hebrew words **יאמר** and **יאמר**, here is the listing found in *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*:¹²²

| | | |
|-------------|--|------------|
| יאמר | Kh. יאמר or יאמר 2 Sa. 1. 8, & Ne. 7. 3, | |
| יאמר | or יאמר Ne. 5. 9, & Zec. 4. 2, Kal or | |
| יאמר | Niph. fut. 3 pers. sing. masc. (§ 19. rem. 2, | |
| יאמר | & § 9. rem. 4 & 5); Keri. יאמר Kal fut. | |
| יאמר | 1 pers. s. with י, for י, conv. (§ 19. rem. 2b) | |
| יאמר | Niph. fut. 3 pers. sing. m. (§ 9. rem. 4 & 3) | אמר |
| יאמר | | אמר |
| יאמר | Chald. Peal fut. 3 pers. sing. masc. (§ 53) | אמר |
| יאמר | Kal fut. 3 pers. sing. m. (§ 19. rem. 1 & 2) | אמר |
| יאמר | | אמר |
| יאמר | Kh. for יאמר (q. v.) | אמר |
| יאמר | Kal fut. 3 pers. pl. masc. (§ 19. rem. 1); י, conv. | אמר |
| יאמר | | אמר |
| יאמר | Kh. יאמר q. v., K. יאמר (q. v.) | אמר |

This is the Hebrew spelling found in Matthew 23:3 of the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*.

This is the Hebrew spelling found in Hebrew Matthew manuscripts catalogued as A, B, D, E, F & G.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Later in this chapter we provide an example of a translator who prefers to go with the minority reading.

¹²² Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1986; originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London in 1848, p. 288.

A point worthy of our consideration is the fact that George Howard, in his translation of the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*, chose to translate the Hebrew **אָמַר** as “they” and inserted this translation in parentheses. Why didn’t he translate **אָמַר** as “he”? Why did he put “they” in parentheses? Professor Howard’s decision to translate the text as he did is semi-explained in his Introduction:

In some instances, a variant reading has been translated rather than the translated text. This occurs where it is necessary for the sense of the text. These renderings are placed within parentheses.¹²³

Clearly, George Howard felt that the rendering found in the majority of the available Hebrew Matthew manuscripts made more sense than the rendering found in the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*. Of course, the “**Do as he, i.e., Moses, says**” proponents disagree with his decision, but on the other hand, the majority of Hebrew manuscripts favor the rendering supplied by George Howard. As previously stated, June and I do not necessarily “go by the numbers”; we are willing to recognize the *possibility* that the *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* is based on a copy from the original manuscript and that the other Hebrew Matthews contain the incorrect rendering (**אָמַר**). Nevertheless, our point is this: It is not wise to base a doctrinal belief on a word that cannot be positively established as stemming from the original text.

An example of a translator who disagrees with George Howard’s decision to insert a translation from the majority manuscript readings is James Scott Trimm. In his *Hebraic-Roots Version Scriptures*, Mr. Trimm inserts the translation “*he says*” into the translation of an Aramaic text that actually reads “*they say*” in that language. Mr. Trimm offers the following explanation of his decision:

“he says.” Here I have followed the reading **אָמַר** “he says” found in two Shem Tob manuscripts (Ms. Add. no. 26964. British Library, London. & Ms. Opp. Add. 4- 72. Bodleian Library, Oxford). This reading seems to fit best with the overall theology of the rest of the book of Matthew (*see The Seat of Moses; A Note on Matthew 23:2-3 According to Shem Tob’s Hebrew Matthew* by Ross K. Nichols; Ancient Paths 1997; <http://www.ancientpaths.org/APRNnote1.html>; *Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7)* by Mark Allan Powell, JBL 114/3 (1995) 419-435.) The other Shem Tob manuscripts, as well as the DuTillet and Munster Hebrew, have **אָמַר** “they say”, which would agree with the Aramaic and Greek texts.¹²⁴

Of course, as we previously established, even *if* it could be determined that Yeshua’s actual words to His followers were, “Now all which he (Moses) says to you, keep and do,” this would *still* not settle the debate as to whether Moses “said” to begin the count to Pentecost on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath or the festival Sabbath.

We need to reinforce the fact that just because the Pharisees began the count to Pentecost from the morrow after the festival “high day” Sabbath, this does not in any way infer that 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 that Yeshua chose to raise against the Pharisees was

¹²³ George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1995, Introduction, p. xiv. The *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* is also catalogued as Ms. Add. no. 26964 by the library where it is housed, the British Library of London.

¹²⁴ James Scott Trimm, *The Hebraic-Roots Version Scriptures*, published by The Society for the Advancement of Nazarene Judaism, Hurst, TX, 2004, p. 1,223.

placing burdens on 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.

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, the late Voy Wilks, was a gentleman whom we had known for several years, and is a man whose sincerity and integrity was respected by all who were privileged to have made his acquaintance. Nevertheless, Mr. Wilks was 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, we feel the errors need to be exposed. With this in mind, I will respond to Mr. Wilks' comments. Here is what he wrote:

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

Hyrchanus (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 members 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 he deemed as being false. While it is possible for someone else to have written that the count to Pentecost always began on Nisan 16, Mr. Bruce chose to not correct it.

All this having been said, whatever position is 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 indicated, this account may be read in *Antiquities of the Jews*, chapter 13.¹²⁵ 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.

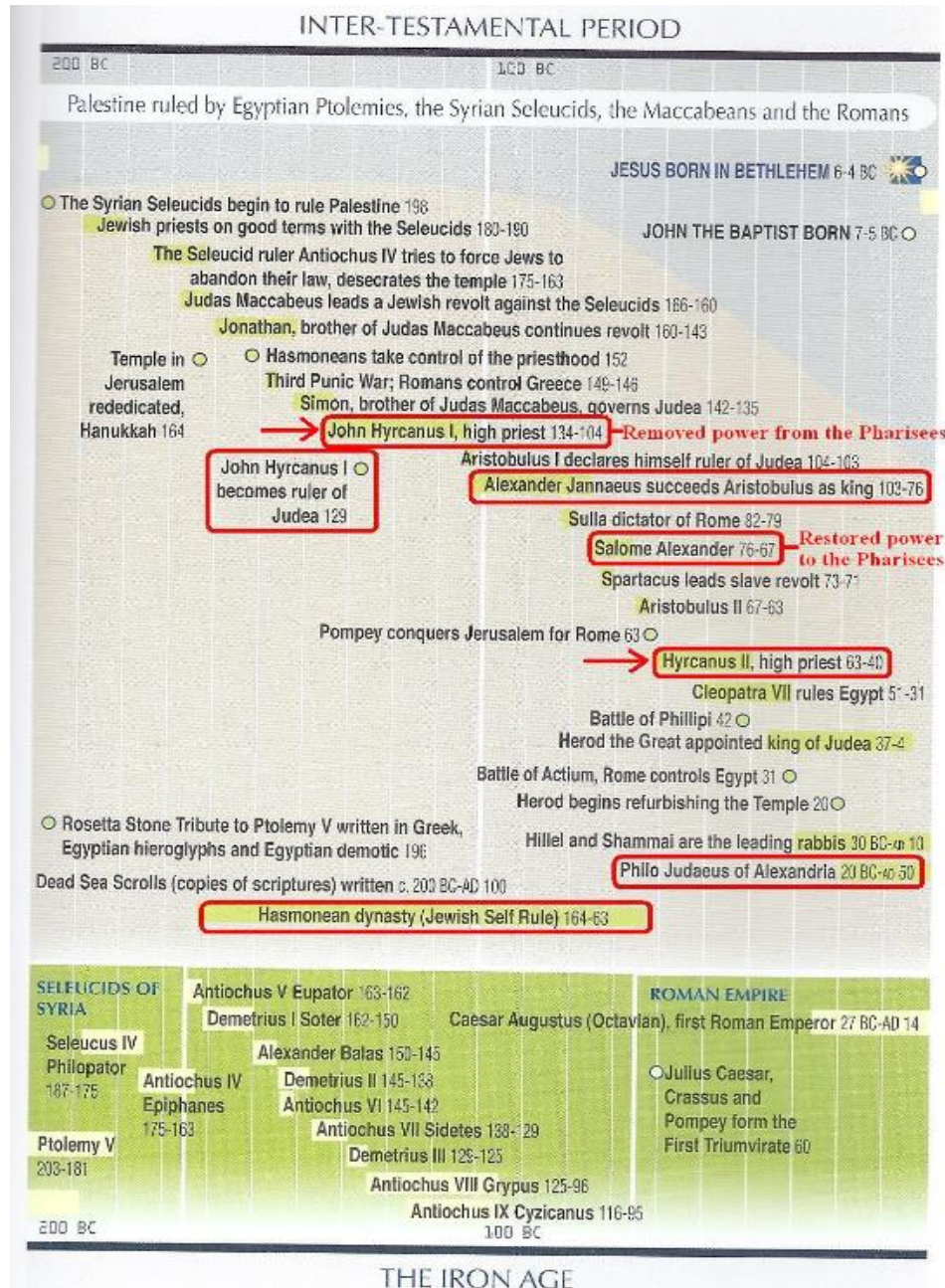
To fully illustrate that Mr. Wilks had the timetable turned around, please notice that the event he mentioned wherein the Pharisees lost their power “for good” is found in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, **chapter 10**. Five chapters later (i.e., in the *future*), Alexander Jannaeus counseled his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

¹²⁵ We cover the details of this account in [chapter 8](#) of this study.

15. If Mr. Wilks sought to locate a time frame *after* the point in time wherein Alexander Jannaeus counseled his wife to restore power to the Pharisees, he needed 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.

What follows is a timetable to help those of you who, like me, are better to able to visually grasp the sequence of the Hasmonean dynasty¹²⁶:



¹²⁶From *The Bible at a Glance*, "Bible Time Line," © 2001, 2005 RW Research, Inc., Contributor Timothy Paul Jones, EdD, Rose Publishing, Inc., Torrance, CA, 2008, p. 29.

Mr. Wilks made it clear that he believed the Sadducees were in charge. He wrote, “Obviously, the Sadducees had the majority of power.” Even though neither first-century historian Josephus, nor such modern-day era scholars as Emil Schürer and Alfred Edersheim, agreed with him, this was certainly his right. Also noticeably absent from Mr. Wilks’ commentary was 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 did not believe Yeshua meant what He said in Matthew 23:2? If he *did* 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

As covered in chapter 14 (“The Reliability of 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 text. To be sure, as we have also 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 pointed 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 also 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 executed. 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 neighbors' eyes. Their bodies are then hung for all to see, and as a warning for the fate that 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 wrote, "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 claimed, 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 felt 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 “festival 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 reflects 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 contribute *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; those who listened to and accepted their method of counting to Pentecost became known as *Sadducees*. Later, when the Septuagint was translated, the Jews who would eventually become known as *Pharisees* 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 or agree with my perspective, and that is certainly their prerogative. If anyone has an alternate theory, I am willing to examine it.

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 sufficiently explained why we personally believe the weight of the evidence favors counting to Pentecost from Abib 16.

In this study, we have demonstrated that there is sound reasoning from both camps regarding how our Creator ordained the count to Pentecost, but, of course, we believe the preponderance of evidence supports beginning the count from the morrow after the “festival Sabbath” – Abib 16. While the Hebrew text handed down to us certainly instructs us to count “... from the morrow after the Sabbath,” understanding “Sabbath” as the weekly Sabbath is *not* the way mainstream Judaism of Yeshua’s day understood this instruction, and the Messiah is not recorded as having admonished His fellow Jews for misapplying the instructions of Leviticus 23.

As we pointed out in our Introduction, we have found that many folks are not really interested in reading our reasons for believing as we do, opting to immediately slap the “rejection” stamp on our study without reviewing it first. The few who have actually read it and offered us their feedback were either persuaded that we’re “on to something” or else their minds were changed. It appears that those who have already made up their minds are the ones who are not willing to read our study. Although our purpose in composing it was to explain our own reasoning instead of changing anyone’s minds, nevertheless, if changed minds are the end result based on the truth of the matter, then all praise goes to Yahweh, for He is the One Who opens our hearts and our minds to see truth.

Those who aren’t willing to “hear us out” will certainly remain persuaded that we should count from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We respect their reasoning, 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, regardless of whether or not we see “eye to eye.”

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 discussions of this nature. Therefore, we are directing this study more against a *mentality* than against a doctrine. We believe that 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.

On the other hand, if you have read this study and do not agree with our reasoning, we encourage you to respectfully bring any errors to our attention. Our e-mail address is seekutruth at aol dot com.