

What Was the Day of the Wave Sheaf Offering?

Many are confused and assume that Pentecost should be always observed on Sunday, because they assume the day must be counted from the Sunday that falls in the week of Unleavened Bread in the spring. Have they made an erroneous assumption? Are they therefore celebrating the wrong day for Pentecost?

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QUESTION: *If the first day of Passover, Nisan 14, fell on a Friday, as in the year of the crucifixion, when Christ was crucified on Thursday, could the omer or wave sheaf offering still be offered on Nisan 16, which would then be a weekly Sabbath? Would doing that kind of “work” violate the commandment not to work on the Sabbath?*

When should the wave sheaf or omer offering be done? What is its importance?

The Word of God declares, “When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the *day after the Sabbath*” (Lev.23:9-11). God then says, “From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks” (Lev.23:15). At the end of the seven weeks, on the fiftieth day, is the Feast of Pentecost.

In Deuteronomy, God adds, “Count off seven WEEKS from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God . . .” (Deut.16:9-10).

Which Sabbath?

But what Sabbath do we count from? Many today teach that it was the weekly Sabbath day during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The modern Karaites do this, and several various Church groups, most of which came out of the old Worldwide Church of God.

Orthodox Jews, however, say it was the first annual Sabbath of Passover, that is, Nisan 15. What is the truth? Who is right?

God’s annual Holy Days are also called Sabbaths. The Feast of Trumpets is called a “Sabbath” (Lev.23:24). The Day of Atonement is also called a “Sabbath,” even a

“Sabbath of Sabbaths” Lev.23:32). And the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles is called a “Sabbath” and so is “Shemini Atzaret,” “the eighth day” (Lev.23:39).

So which “Sabbath” are we to count from to determine the day of Pentecost?

Alfred Edersheim in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, discusses this issue. He points out that the original controversy was due to the false teaching of the Sadducees. They were a Jewish sect which did not believe in angels, spirit beings, or even the resurrection (see Matt.22:23). Luke tells us, “The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits” (Acts 23:8).

Christ rebuked the Sadducees, illustrating their supreme ignorance, by saying to them, “You are in ERROR because you do NOT KNOW THE SCRIPTURES or the power of God” (Matt.22:29). This being the case, should we follow their reasoning and their thinking and their opinion on counting Pentecost, today?

The Proof of the Pudding

Says Edersheim, “The expression, ‘the morrow after the Sabbath’ (Lev.23:11), has sometimes been misunderstood as implying that the presentation of the so-called ‘first sheaf’ was to be always made on the day following the weekly Sabbath of the Passover-week. This view, adopted by the ‘Boethusians’ and the Sadducees in the time of Christ, and by the Karaite Jews and certain modern interpreters, rests on a misinterpretation of the word ‘Sabbath’ (Lev.23:24, 32, 39). As in analogous allusions to other feasts in the same chapter, it means not the weekly Sabbath, but the day of the festival. The testimony of Josephus (*Ant.*3.248-249), of Philo (*Op.* 2, 294), and of Jewish tradition, leaves no room to doubt that in this instance we are to understand by the word ‘Sabbath’ the 15th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it might fall” (Edersheim, page 203-204).

Therefore, the wave sheaf offering, or omer, was offered on Nisan 16. The command was to do it on “the morrow of the Sabbath,” That is the day after the Passover annual Sabbath which was Nisan 15. So the wave sheaf was always waved on Nisan 16. Edersheim is plain on this point. He states plainly that to perform the wave sheaf ceremony, on the evening of the first Passover day, “a noisy throng followed delegates from the Sanhedrin outside the city and across the brook Kidron.” They were there to reap the sheaf the evening before it was to be offered, in the Temple, the next morning. Says Edersheim, “it was to witness this ceremony that the crowd gathered around ‘the elders,’ who took care that all was done according to traditional ordinance.”

Notice the account of the ceremony itself. Edersheim says that when the crowd arrived at the spot selected, “on the evening of the 15th of Nisan (*even though it were a Sabbath*), just as the sun went down, three men, each with a sickle and basket, formally set to work. But in order clearly to bring out all that was distinctive in the ceremony, they first asked the bystanders three times each of these questions: ‘Has the sun gone down?’ ‘With this sickle?’ ‘Into this basket?’ ‘On this Sabbath (or the first Passover

day)?' --And lastly, 'Shall I reap?' Having each time been answered in the affirmative, they cut down barley . . ." (p.204).

Notice that this was done on the evening of the 15th of Nisan, right after the first Holy Day of Passover. Therefore it was done at the beginning of Nisan 16, on the second day of Passover week. They did not wait until after the weekly Sabbath day. How clear!

The barley was cut down, and then brought into the court of the Temple and thrashed out with canes, and 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 barley corn thus prepared was then ground in a barley mill and then sifted till the flour was very fine. Though ten omers were cut down, only one omer (5.1 pints) was offered in the Temple on the second day of Passover (Nisan 16, daylight part). The omer was mixed with very nearly three fourths of a pint of oil, and a handful of frankincense was on it, and then it was waved before the Lord.

Edersheim sums up, "This was what is popularly, though not very correctly, called 'the presentation of the first or wave-sheaf' on the second day of the Passover-feast, or the 16th of Nisan." It was always the 16th. It was never delayed for any reason. It was the Law – the Torah. It was even done on the weekly Sabbath, if that day happened to be Nisan 16.

What the Wave Sheaf Represented

In the past, many have ASSUMED – and many STILL assume – that the "wave sheaf" offering referred to Jesus Christ, who was the offering for our sins upon the stake (II Cor.5:20). But does this make any sense, when we stop to think about it? It was accompanied by the offering of a male lamb without blemish – which itself typified Christ! It was waved by the high priest before God, to be accepted of the Father – and the high priest typified Christ, our "high priest" in heaven (Heb.7:24-28; 9:24; 10:10). Furthermore, this "wave sheaf" was offered AFTER the sacrifice of Christ our Passover Lamb (I Cor.5:7-8). The Passover lambs were slain in the afternoon of Nisan 14 – the precise time when Christ the Messiah was slain for us!

Clearly, then, the wave sheaf does NOT refer to Christ at all – but rather is made possible BY the Sacrifice of Christ, which precedes it in time sequence! We have the following sequence of events:

- 1) the sacrifice of Christ on Nisan 14, late afternoon;
- 2) the holy day of Passover – Nisan 15;
- 3) the next evening, as Nisan 16 began, a sheaf (bundle) of grain is selected from the field across the Kidron valley, east of Jerusalem, and cut and bundled;
- 4) the next morning, Nisan 16, it is prepared and waved before the Lord and accepted of Him as "THE FIRSTFRUITS" of the harvest.

Let's take a careful look at the wave sheaf offering. It is an offering which is a BUNDLE OF SEPARATE BARLEY GRAINS, FROM A NUMBER OF PLANTS, AMOUNTING TO AN "OMER" – about five pints, or two and one half quarts. This offering *followed* the offering of Christ, as our Passover lamb, who paid for our sins. It was *accompanied* by the burnt offering of a lamb – Christ – who was without blemish (Lev.23:12). The wave sheaf itself, then, is NOT CHRIST Himself!

What then is it?

The Wave Sheaf Offering, composed of MANY individual grains, offered together, made possible by the sacrifice of Christ, represents US -- God's Firstfruits – TRUE CHRISTIANS -- those called of God during this age, as His "FIRSTFRUITS"!

It was offered to the Father AFTER the sacrifice of Christ, because there is NO WAY the Father could accept us BEFORE our sins were pardoned, and atoned for, and wiped away and washed away by the blood of Christ! But since Christ became our Saviour, and qualified by living a perfect life, and DIED for us on the stake, this made possible OUR acceptance before the throne of God in Heaven!

THAT WAVE SHEAF OFFERING REPRESENTS US, THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE KINGDOM!

Even as the omer is baked, "parched," cooked and sifted, we too must go through trials and tests, and be prepared to qualify to be accepted of our Maker and Creator, our Father and Master. Even as the omer must also be exposed to the "wind," we also must be "tested" to see if we will remain faithful to the truth, or follow after "various winds," "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph.4:14).

If you are called now, then YOU are typified by the "wave sheaf" as one of the "grains" which compose it. The "wave sheaf" itself typifies the entire true spiritual body of Christ, the "Church of God," those who have the Spirit of God during this dispensation or age!

God says, "For, lo, I will command, and I will *sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least GRAIN fall upon the earth*" (Amos 9:9).

The grain represents ISRAEL! This "omer" represented the firstfruits of ISRAEL -- that is, the "*Israel of God*" (Gal.6:16) – the Church of God!

In the book of James we read, "that we should be a *KIND OF FIRSTFRUITS of his creatures*" (James 1:18). We in God's Church are those who have "the *firstfruits of the Spirit*" (Rom.8:23).

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John declares: “And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and *with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. . . These are they which follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the FIRSTFRUITS unto GOD and to the Lamb*” (Rev.14:1-4).

Who are those who “follow the Lamb” of God, wherever He goes?

Who are the “REDEEMED from among men”?

Those who are truly converted, dedicated, begotten children of God, who have the “firstfruits of the Spirit” of God! How plain!

Counting Pentecost

Why is all this important? Because this tells us from what day we must count fifty days in order to arrive at the correct day for Pentecost! If we begin counting on the wrong day, then we will end up on the wrong day!

God’s commandment is simple. The wave sheaf is always offered on Nisan 16, the day after the high holy day of Passover, which represented Christ our Passover and His sacrifice (I Cor.5:7). This was true, even if Nisan 16 itself fell on a weekly Sabbath day. This was a special commanded ceremony. It represented OUR being accepted as God’s firstfruits in His Kingdom. Therefore it did not violate the Sabbath command not to do work on the Sabbath.

Similarly, in ancient Israel, if a new moon fell on a weekly Sabbath day, the injunction against “work” was lifted for the new moon observers so they could ride their horse, or donkey, and travel from the place of sighting, to report to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

Edersheim also discusses this point. He says: “For the new moon was reckoned by personal observation . . . So important was it deemed to have faithful witnesses, that they were even allowed, in order to reach Jerusalem in time, to travel on the Sabbath, and, if necessary, to make use of horse or mule (*Mish. Rosh ha Sh. i. 9; iii.2*)” (page 230, under “Determination of the New Moon”).

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