Counting to Pentecost

By Larry & June Acheson

The topic of the Scripturally-sanctioned way to count to Pentecost is very divisive, even to the point of being a test of fellowship for some believers. Over the years we have read several passionate opinions outlining the proper way to count, including one that calls for us to count fifty days *twice*. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that only two views are truly worthy of consideration and those are the two that I will compare and offer my perspective in this study. Both sides present compelling arguments, but in the end each of us must choose which one is the most sound. Analyzing and compiling all the evidence proves to be a daunting challenge; in fact, I previously authored a detailed study on this topic that eventually grew to over 100 pages of pertinent information.[1] In this condensed version I hone in on the primary arguments while simultaneously weaving in my personal conclusion.

Going by "Scripture and Scripture Alone"

Before delving into the two primary arguments, I want to address the common claim of going "by Scripture and Scripture alone." Please don't get me wrong here: Ultimately, Scripture is the Word on which our foundation of faith is built. It is the Almighty's Word for His people; but let's face it: Lots of people claim to go by "Scripture and Scripture alone," yet there are still hundreds of denominations out there, even including several divisions within what is known as the Sacred Name Movement. Think about it: If we *all* go by Scripture and Scripture alone, then why don't we all share the same, exact beliefs? For example, why aren't we all lunar sabbatarians? After all, in my many discussions with lunar sabbatarians, going by "Scripture and Scripture alone" has been a common mantra offered by the opposition. Other groups make the same claim, so I don't need to dig very deep to come up with additional examples, such as the fact that many folks are persuaded that the Scriptural day begins at dawn instead of sunset and yes, they claim to go by "Scripture and Scripture alone." We can also claim to go by Scripture and Scripture alone and hold to the belief that New Moon day is the day of the conjunction. I once attended a debate between a man who advocates the sighting of the crescent moon after sunset (as we do) versus a man who claims that the Scriptural New Moon day falls on the day of the conjunction. During the Question & Answer Session that followed, I asked the conjunction proponent if he had any historical evidence to support his conviction. His response was simply to raise his Bible above his head in full view of the audience. He proudly displayed his "historical evidence." It was Scripture and Scripture alone.

Sola scriptura was one of the main theological beliefs that Martin Luther proclaimed against the Catholic Church during the Protestant Reformation

From *Wikipedia*

The claim to go by "Scripture and Scripture alone" is a Protestant cry going back at least as far as Martin Luther ("Sola Scriptura"), but Luther's cry didn't include a call to follow in the Messiah's steps of obedience to our Heavenly Father's Torah, nor did he even suggest that we go back to honoring any of Yahweh's festivals/*moedim*, such as Pentecost. To make a long story short, when we claim to go by Scripture and Scripture alone, what we are *really* claiming to go by is our interpretation of Scripture and our interpretation alone. Shouldn't we all have a unified desire to make certain our

[1] See *Facing the Pentecost Controversy*, first published in 2002, at our web site, www.ponderscripture.org.

interpretations match the practices and beliefs of the ancients? In other words, let's say we interpret a certain Scriptural instruction to be carried out a certain way, even though those around us interpret it differently. Wouldn't it be gratifying to learn that our interpretation just happens to fall in line with the way the ancients understood that same instruction? If this method makes sense to you, then you may be interested in what I'm about to present.

The Meaning of Shabbat

When it comes to thoroughly examining how the Almighty intends for His children to count to Pentecost, there are several topics that need to be addressed, but none are as important as determining the originally-intended meaning of the Hebrew word *Shabbat* (בשׁת) as it appears in Leviticus 23:11 and 15. In fact, the reason so many are persuaded that we should always count to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath is because the Hebrew word "Shabbat" is the word that appears in the priest's instructions for observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread as found in Leviticus 23:11:

> 11 And he [the priest] shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath (*ha-shabbat*, הַבּשׁת) the priest shall wave it.

Surely, if we go by "Scripture and Scripture alone," then we MUST understand that the Sabbath referred to above can be none other than the weekly Sabbath, right? Well ... not so fast. The fact of the matter is, the Hebrew word *Shabbat* can refer to *any* time period of rest. When referring to a specific year, the "Sabbatical Year," it's essentially a 365-day *Shabbat* (Lev. 25:4). The Day of Atonement is also called a *Shabbat* (Lev. 23:32), even though it can fall on any day of the week. For those of us who understand that the Messiah was not crucified on the day preceding a weekly Sabbath, we know that the Greek word *sabbato*, which is the equivalent of the Hebrew *Shabbat*, is the word the author used for the day following the Passover day in John chapter 19:

> 31 The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain on the stake on the sabbath day (σαββάτω), (for that sabbath day (σαββάτου) was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away.

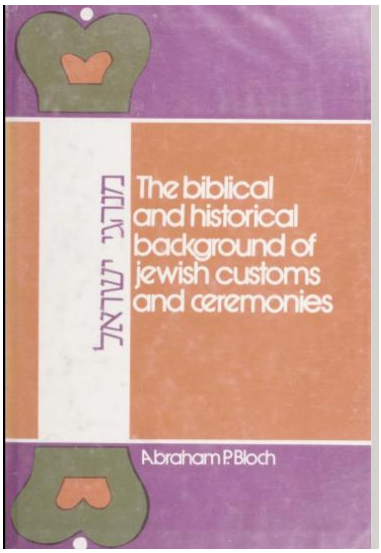
It is worthy of note that the same Greek word used for the word "Sabbath" is also rightly rendered "week." For example, we read in Luke 4:16 that the Messiah's custom was to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day (*sabbaton*, σαββάτων). We also read in John 20:1 that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where the Messiah was buried on the first day of the week (*sabbaton*, σαββάτων). The fact that this one Greek word can have a dual meaning raises the question of whether or not it is possible for the Hebrew word *Shabbat* to likewise have a dual meaning, depending on context.

Solidifying the view that the word "Shabbat" in Leviticus 23:11 refers to the weekly Sabbath instead of the "festival sabbath" is the fact that we are told in verses 15-16 to count *seven Sabbaths* (*Shabbatot*, בשׁתות) unto the morrow after the "seventh Sabbath." We are obviously not expected to count seven "festival Sabbaths," so it follows that we are to count seven *weekly Shabbatot*. By deduction, then, if we are to count seven *weekly* Sabbaths from the morrow after the Sabbath, it is reasonable to assume that "morrow after the Sabbath" *also* refers to the day following the weekly Sabbath.

> 15 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths (בשׁתות) shall be complete.

> 16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meal offering unto Yahweh.

The late Jewish author Abraham P. Bloch, in his book *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, offers specific details validating the Hebraic understanding that the word "Shabbat," as it appears in Leviticus 23:11, is not necessarily a reference to the weekly Shabbat, but then he proceeds to validate the understanding that the plural form of this word (*Shabbatot*, בשׁתות) can *only* refer to the weekly Sabbath. Here are his seven guidelines for understanding how to best translate the word *Shabbat*:



> 1. *Shabbat* and *shabbaton* are not proper nouns and therefore may apply to any day of rest, unless otherwise indicated in the text.
> 2. The phrase *bayom hashabbat* ("on the day of the Sabbath") refers to the weekly Sabbath exclusively.
> 3. Where the phrase *bayom hashabbat* appears in a passage to indicate a reference to the weekly Sabbath, all subsequent mentions of the Sabbath in the same passage omit the *bayom*.
> 4. *Shabbatot*, the plural form of *shabbat*, always refers to the weekly Sabbaths.
> 5. *Shabbaton* means a recurring period of rest.
> 6. *Shabbat shabbaton* is best translated as "a day of complete rest."
> 7. The aforementioned pentateuchal guidelines are followed by some of the texts of the Scriptures and Prophets and are ignored in others. The gradual change reflects an emerging trend to convert *shabbat* into a proper noun. The trend culminated in the Talmud and the nonrabbinic literature of the talmudic period, where *shabbat* is used exclusively as a proper noun.[2]

For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that author Abraham Bloch supported counting to Pentecost from the morrow after the Festival Sabbath, yet in point #4 above he clearly states that the plural form of *Shabbat* (*shabbatot*) can only be regarded as a reference to *weekly* Sabbaths. From the perspective of those who are persuaded that the word *Shabbat* as used in Leviticus 23:11 refers to the weekly Sabbath, it would seem that Bloch needs to explain how *shabbatot* in Lev. 23:16, in that particular instance, actually means "weeks." Regrettably, he doesn't offer the needed explanation for his apparent contradiction. Bloch goes on to write:

> The noun *shabbat*, a time of rest, is elastic in its duration. Thus the entire sabbatical year (*shemitah*) is called *shabbat* (Lev. 25:4). When *shabbat* is preceded by *bayom* ("in the day") the duration of this time of rest is narrowed to one day. The only Sabbath which comes regularly once a week is Saturday. "The day of the Sabbath" is therefore synonymous with Saturday (second conclusion).
>
> When the specific identification of the *shabbat* has been made clear in the text, the qualifying *bayom* may be dropped. Thus the *shabbat* in the incident of the manna dispensed with the *bayom* because its identification was indicated by the designations "tomorrow" (Exod. 16:23), "today" (16:25), and the "seventh day" (16:26). The same is true of the injunction "and you shall observe the sabbath" (Exod. 31:14). Its precise definition is clarified by the subsequent reference to "the seventh day" (Exod. 31:15; third conclusion).

[2] From *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, by Abraham P. Bloch, KTAV Publishing House, Inc., New York, NY, 1980, pp. 164-165.

> Significantly, the *shabbat* mentioned in connection with the ritual of the Omer (Lev. 23:11) is not qualified by hyphenation with *bayom* or by any other identifying term. Consequently one must interpret this *shabbat* as a day of rest which refers to the previously mentioned festival of Passover (Lev. 23:6).
>
> The definition of the *shabbat* in the passage of the Omer was in contention between the Sadducees and the rabbinic sages (Menachot 95b). The Sadducees erroneously assumed that *shabbat* was a proper noun, synonymous with Saturday. This is disproved by our first conclusion. Furthermore, the broad definition of *shabbat* is evidenced by the biblical description of the festivals of Rosh HaShanah and Sukkot as *shabbaton*, another form of *shabbat* (Lev. 23:34, 39).[3]

Abraham Bloch's understanding that the "Sabbath" mentioned in Leviticus 23:11 refers back to the first day of the festival was shared by ancient Judaism during the first century CE:

> 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.[4]

The rabbi from the above ancient discussion agrees with modern-day author Abraham Bloch when it comes to expressing the understanding that the word Sabbath in Leviticus 23:11 refers to the "Festival Sabbath." However, neither the ancient rabbi nor Abraham Bloch address what is the proper understanding of the plural seven Sabbaths (*shabbatot*) that we are to count to Pentecost. This is a key phrase that cannot be ignored if we are to go with the Hebrew text of Scripture. However, what some dismiss without further consideration or study is the fact that there is *another* important text of Scripture that should not be ignored: the Septuagint.

The Hebrew Text Versus the Greek Septuagint Text

When all is said and done, I am persuaded the Pentecost Controversy ultimately boils down to which version of the Bible each individual believes conveys the original intent of the Creator. Is it the extant Hebrew Torah or is it the translation made in the 3rd Century BCE – known as the Septuagint (LXX)? We have already seen that the only proper way of reconciling the various instances of the words *Shabbat* and its plural form *Shabbatot* in the Hebrew Bible is to understand that they must refer to the *weekly* Sabbath. Since even top rabbinic scholarship recognizes that the plural *shabbatot* refers to *weekly* Sabbaths, and since we are to therefore count seven *weekly* Sabbaths, then the morrow after that seventh *weekly* Sabbath is the 50th day – the Day of Pentecost. The morrow after the weekly Sabbath has always been the first day of the week, so when examined with the above reasoning, it is clear that Pentecost must fall on the first day of the week each and every year – that is, if

---

[3] Ibid, pp. 165-166.

[4] 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: I do not normally recommend reading the Talmud, except for gleaning historical information.

we agree that the extant Hebrew text conveys the original intent of the Creator. Many conclude that we need look no further than the extant Hebrew text and for them, that's where the discussion ends. Although I find it regrettable that so many are not willing to look any further, I am nevertheless compelled to respect their position.

For those who are willing to examine the Septuagint text, it doesn't take long to discover that if this were the only text available to us, we would all be counting to Pentecost from the morrow after the "Festival Sabbath" instead of the weekly Sabbath. That's because, after giving us the basic details about the timing of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the LXX version of Leviticus 23:11 enjoins the priest to wave the sheaf (*omer*) of first-fruits, *not* on the morrow after the Sabbath, but on the morrow of the *first day* – the first day of the feast:

> 9 And Yahweh spoke to Moses saying,
> 10 Speak 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;
> 11 and he shall lift up the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted for you. On the morrow of the first day the priest shall lift it up.[5]

We know that "first day" refers to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread because in verses 7-8 we are plainly told that the first and seventh days of the feast are days of holy convocation on which no servile work is to be done. Then, to make it absolutely clear that we are to count *weeks* (Gk *hebdomadas*, έβδομαδας) and not *sabbaths*, we read the following in the Septuagint's rendering of Leviticus 23:15-16:

> 15 And ye shall number to yourselves from the day after the sabbath (Gk σαββάτων), from the day on which ye shall offer the sheaf of the heave-offering, seven full weeks (Gk έβδομαδας):
> 16 until the morrow after the last week (έβδομαδος): ye shall number fifty days and shall bring a new meat-offering to Yahweh.[6]

You may recall my having pointed out that the Greek word for "Sabbath" (σαββάτων) may also be correctly translated *week*, depending on context. However, another Greek word for "week" is used in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 23:15-16: **έβδομαδας**. This is significant because the Hebrew scholars who translated the LXX *could* have used the Greek word *sabbaton* (σαββάτων), since it *can* be translated either "Sabbaths" or *weeks*. Their decision to go with a separate Greek word that can only mean *weeks* clearly demonstrates how those scholars understood the instructions for when to begin the count to Pentecost, but it also begs the question of why the extant Hebrew text uses a word that may only be understood as meaning *weeks* by *interpretation*. As I've previously pointed out, the Hebrew word used in Leviticus 23:15 is the plural of *Shabbat*, which is *shabbatot* (בשתות), which, as rabbinical scholar Abraham Bloch explained, is only used in reference to *weekly Sabbaths*. Why don't we instead see the actual Hebrew word reserved for *weeks* (*Shavuot* שבעת) in the Hebrew text of Leviticus 23:15?

We can see from the Septuagint's use of the word "sabbath" in verse 15 that it agrees with the Hebrew text in referring to the day prior to the wave sheaf offering as being the "sabbath," and as Rabbi Abraham Bloch testified, "sabbath" in that verse can technically refer to either a weekly sabbath or a

---

[5] From *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, Lev. 23:15-16, translated by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980, p. 160. 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.
[6] Ibid.

Festival Sabbath, depending on context. The Septuagint plainly regards the "sabbath" of Leviticus 23:15 as being a reference to the Festival Sabbath because the day from which the counting is reckoned is the "morrow of the first day" of the feast, which is a day of rest – a special Sabbath. Since the first day of the feast is always Abib 15, the counting is reckoned from the morrow of that day, i.e., Abib 16, at least according to the Septuagint translation. One important aspect of the Septuagint translation that needs to be considered is the fact that this translation was carried out by Hebrew scholars who were tasked with conveying the Hebraic understanding into Greek words for a Greek-speaking audience. If we can set aside the possibility that they may have mistranslated some words (which is by no means certain), we need to address the fact that these Hebrew scholars were attempting to convey the Almighty's intent, which in their view was that the count to Pentecost begins on the morrow of the *first day* of the feast. This is how those ancient Hebrew scholars understood the instructions as found in Leviticus 23:11-16.

One final note about the Septuagint: The Hebrew text of Joshua 5:10-12 is often used as evidence that the Israelites offered the Wave Sheaf Offering on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. Here's the *New Revised Standard Version* rendering of this passage:

> 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.

When reading the above passage, we need to bear in mind that, according to Leviticus 23:14, we aren't supposed to eat bread, parched corn, or green ears until the same day on which the Wave Sheaf offering (the *omer*) is brought unto the Almighty. When we do the math, we find that the only possible day of the week on which the Israelites could have eaten the produce of the land on the day after Abib 14 would have been if the Wave Sheaf Offering took place on a Sunday following an Abib 14 "Weekly Shabbat Passover." As those who begin the count to Pentecost on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath often remind us, the above scenario can never occur if the Wave Sheaf Offering takes place on the morrow after the festival sabbath of Abib 15 because the morrow after Abib 15 is Abib 16, which cannot be the day after the Passover.

So what does all this have to do with the Septuagint text? Well, the critical phrase in Joshua 5:11 is "On the day after the Passover," and that phrase is *missing* from the Septuagint text, which in turn leaves open the possibility that the produce of the land wasn't eaten until Abib 16. Here's the English translation of the pertinent Septuagint text:

> 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.[7]

As displayed above, the Septuagint text of Joshua 5:10-12 is removed from the controversy of when to begin the count to Pentecost because it makes allowance for the produce of the land to not have been eaten until Abib 16, i.e., the morrow after the Festival Sabbath in full compliance with the instruction found in Leviticus 23:14.

---

[7] From *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, op. cit., Joshua 5:10-11.

Which Version Was Recognized by 1st Century Believers?

I am accustomed to hearing and reading lots of railing against the Septuagint version by various individuals, all of whom insist that the only Scriptural way to count to Pentecost is to count from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. Thus far they haven't satisfactorily explained how or why the Septuagint is quoted by the *Brit Chadashah* (New Testament) writers over and above the Hebrew text. One of the clearest examples of this is taken from the account of Stephen's famous sermon before the Jewish Sanhedrin, wherein he 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:

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

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

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

> [5]But 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 cited by Stephen before being martyred for his faith. This is just one of many pieces of evidence supporting the fact that the early believers relied upon the Septuagint as being "Scripture." Since the NT writers had no qualms about quoting from the Septuagint, it is obvious that they did not share the antagonism of the modern-day anti-Septuagint crowd.

Hebrew Luke 4:18 Upholds Septuagint's Legitimacy

In 2022, I was engaged in a brief discussion with a "Sunday Pentecost Only" believer who insists that the Septuagint is a corrupted, and therefore unreliable, translation of the Old Testament. I mentioned that there are numerous examples in the New Testament wherein the authors quoted from the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew on which the Masoretic Text is based. He quickly brushed off such evidence, insisting that the New Testament translator simply copied from the Septuagint when quoting from what is known as the Old Testament. At that time, I was unaware of the fact that a *Hebrew Luke* had been discovered in the Vatican archives, and it turns out the *Hebrew Luke* changes the dynamics of this entire discussion.

The book of Luke offers a classic example of a quotation from the Old Testament matching the original as found in the Septuagint rather than what's in the Hebrew Masoretic Text. Here's how Luke 4:18 reads in the King James Version's translation from the Greek text:

> [18]The Spirit of Yahweh[8] is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

Luke 4:18 quotes from Isaiah 61:1, which reads as follows:

> [1]The Spirit of the Adonai Yahweh is upon me; because Yahweh hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

Please notice that, according to Luke, among other things, Yeshua was sent to restore sight to the blind (which He did). But the phrase "recovering of sight to the blind" is not found in the Hebrew Masoretic Text. It *is* found, however, in the Septuagint's rendering of Isaiah 61:1:

> [1]The spirit of Yahweh[9] is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to preach glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken in heart, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind;

As you can see, the Luke 4:18 quote from Isaiah 61:1 comes close to mirroring the Septuagint's rendering, *not* the Masoretic Text's version. This begs the question: Did the Apostles use a different Hebrew text than the one used to translate the Masoretic Text, and is *that* the text from which the Septuagint was translated in the 3rd century BCE? Or, as our "Sunday Pentecost Only" friend believes, did the man who translated Luke simply quote from the Septuagint when he supplied the text as found in Luke 4:18?

The answer is, *neither*, but please bear with my explanation. It is true the Hebrew Luke 4:18 comes closer to matching the reading found in the Septuagint's Isaiah 61:1. However, it can be demonstrated that the Hebrew Luke quotes from a version of Isaiah found in neither the Hebrew Masoretic Text *nor* the Septuagint!

A manuscript of the Hebrew Luke was found in the Vatican; in fact, the manuscript is currently available for reading online at hebrewgospels.com. An English translation of the Hebrew Luke also became available in 2026, and here's how it reads:

> [18]The Ruach of Elohim is upon me, and because of this he anointed me and sent me to the poor ones, to proclaim; and to heal those who are broken of heart; and to preach return to the captives; and to the blind ones, sight; and to set free the broken ones to forgiveness;[10]

The above rendering not only bolsters the argument that the Septuagint was translated from a different Hebrew original than that of the Hebrew Masoretic Text, but it also includes the phrase "… to set free the broken ones to forgiveness," which is missing from the Septuagint, yet present in the Masoretic Text's rendering. This presents us with two possibilities:

---

[8] I restored the Tetragrammaton in its proper place it appears in the original Hebrew text of Isaiah 61:1 and because "the Lord" is the result of substitution of the original name.
[9] The Greek text has *Kuriou*, which means "Lord."
[10] Justin J. Van Rensburg, *The Hebrew Gospel of Luke*, Version 2.1 © 2026, www.HebrewGospels.com, p. 67-69.

1) Luke had access to a Hebrew Bible that was different from both the Septuagint *and* the Hebrew Scriptures from which the Masoretic Text is derived.
2) The Hebrew scholar who translated the Septuagint reading of Isaiah 61:1 inadvertently omitted the phrase "… to set free the broken ones to forgiveness."

The fact that the New Testament authors nearly always quoted Old Testament texts whose readings are nearly verbatim with what's found in the Septuagint, and *not* the Hebrew Masoretic Text, validates believing that they most likely used the Septuagint's rendering of Leviticus 23:11 in determining how to count to Pentecost.

Who Was "Manning the Temple"?

Another question that frequently comes up in "Count to Pentecost" discussions has to do with who was in charge of the temple services during the days leading up to the Messiah's death, burial and resurrection. For the purpose of this study, I must be brief, but in my in-depth study on this topic I demonstrate that according to the historian Josephus, the Pharisees' authority was completely restored upon the death of Alexander Jannaeus in the year 76 BCE and according to modern historians, the Sadducees never again regained their previous authority.[11]

I have mentioned first-century historian Josephus, who offers valuable insights into what things were like in the first century. I have seen fellow believers' eyes light up with excitement when I share Josephus' testimony of how the priests' trumpet blasts would warn his fellow Jews that it was time to put down their work as the sixth day was about to end and the Sabbath was about to begin "in the evening twilight," which validates ancient Jewish understanding of when the weekly Sabbath begins and ends.[12] These same believers proceed to scoff at Josephus when they learn that he understood the count to Pentecost as beginning on the morrow of the *Festival* Sabbath.[13] There is a second witness testifying to the first-century Jewish understanding that the count to Pentecost begins on the morrow after the *Festival Sabbath* as outlined in the Septuagint text. Here is what Philo (c.25 B.C. - c.50 CE) wrote:

> But within the feast [of unleavened bread] there is another feast following directly after the first day. This is called the "Sheaf," a name given to it from the ceremony which consists in bringing to the altar a sheaf as a first-fruit, both of the land which has been given to the nation to dwell in and of the whole earth, so that it serves that purpose both to the nation in particular and for the whole human race in general.[14]

---

[11] *Cf.*, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XIII, ch. xv., 5, Whiston's Translation Revised by the late Rev. A. R. Shilleto, M.A., Vol. II, George Bell and Sons, London, UK, 1900, pp. 429-30.
[12] *Cf.*, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, *The Jewish War*, Book IV, ch. ix., 12, Whiston's Translation Revised by the late Rev. A. R. Shilleto, M.A., Vol. IV, George Bell and Sons, London, UK, 1890, pp. 429-30.
pp. 353-54..
[13] *Cf.*, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book III, ch. x., 5-6, Translated by William Whiston, A. M., The S. S. Scranton Co., Hartford, CT, 1905, pp. 113-14.
[14] *Cf.*, *Philo*, Volume VII, The Special Laws, II, Ch. XXIX (162), translated by F. H. Colson, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998, pp. 405-407..

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

> The festival of the Sheaf, which as all these grounds of precedence, indicated in the law, is also in fact anticipatory of another greater feast. For it is from it that the fiftieth day (*pentēkoste*) is reckoned, by counting seven sevens, which are then crowned with the sacred number by the monad, which is an incorporeal image of the Almighty (Gr. *Theou*), Whom it resembles because it also stands alone. This is the primary excellence exhibited by fifty (*pentēkostos*), but there is another which should be mentioned.[15]

It is obvious from the above that Philo understood the count to Pentecost as beginning on the morrow of the *Festival Sabbath*, precisely as presented by the Septuagint text. Just in case I haven't made it clear enough as to how first-century witnesses understood when to begin the count, nineteenth-century Biblical scholar Alfred Edersheim offers the following summary of what conclusions we can draw from both Josephus and Philo:

> The testimony of Josephus, of Philo, and of Jewish tradition, leaves no room to doubt that in this instance [Lev. 23:11] we are to understand by the "Sabbath" the 15th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it might fall.[16]

I understand that many who reckon the count to Pentecost from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath reject the testimony of Josephus and Philo, but in their defense they seem unable to produce their own ancient witnesses validating their interpretation of how this Torah command was historically practiced during the first century CE. To those individuals, I can only ask why, if the *omer* truly was presented in the temple on the day after a *weekly* Sabbath each year, then why did first-century Jews such as Philo and Josephus write otherwise? And why didn't any first-century scholars either contradict them or refute their testimony? Why did we have to wait nearly 2,000 years for anyone to attempt to refute their matter-of-fact comments on how it was done?

If Philo and Josephus' testimony is true that the *omer* was indeed offered on the morrow after the *Festival* Sabbath during the New Testament period, then why do we not read of any condemnation of this practice by Yeshua the Messiah or any of His disciples? Certainly, if the topic was half as controversial then as it is today, we would have read about it having been one of the factors separating the Sadducees from the Pharisees. But we do not read any such thing. Given how Paul proudly lauded his heritage as a Pharisee (Acts 26:5), with the only apparent change being that he now recognized Yeshua as the Son of Yahweh and our High Priest, why didn't he reveal that he now understood a "better way" of counting to Pentecost? These are looming questions to which I have not read satisfactory answers from the "Sunday-only" Pentecost folks. Historically, the only ancient witnesses to how Judaism understood the count to Pentecost tell us that they began the count from the morrow after the *Festival* Sabbath instead of the morrow after the *weekly* Sabbath. They followed the steps as outlined by the Septuagint text, counting seven *weeks*; the morrow after the seventh *week* was day #50 – the day of Pentecost.

---

[15] *Cf.*, *Philo*, Op. cit., chapter XXX (176), pp. 417.
[16] *Cf.*, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, Chapter XIII, by Alfred Edersheim, D.D., Ph. D., Ira Bradley and Co., Boston, MA, 1881, p. 223 (originally published in 1874).

Was there <u>Really</u> a Controversy?

I generally put a lot of stock in the information supplied by scholarly references, but I try to temper that trust with a healthy balance of skepticism. Since all the scholarly references I have consulted over the years affirm that the Pentecost controversy dates back to centuries before the Messiah, why should I question their findings? Nevertheless, they never seem to present irrefutable historical evidence validating such an understanding, which should certainly leave their conclusion open to questioning. According to these scholarly sources, the Sadducees have *always* maintained that the count to Pentecost begins on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Pharisees have always contended that it begins on the morrow after the festival "high day" Sabbath. Curiously, the only two historical sources I'm aware of that so much as *hint* at an ancient controversy between the Pharisees and Sadducees are rabbinical sources. The rabbis are essentially the surviving remnants of the Pharisees, so I find it surprising that the "antagonists" of the Sadducees are the only ones who recorded even the *semblance* of an ancient controversy. I say "semblance of a controversy" because it's difficult to ascertain from the rabbinical record that there truly was one at that time. At worst, it was a disagreement that didn't get very far. Here's the first reference of a disagreement–an excerpt from Tractate Menahoth 65b:

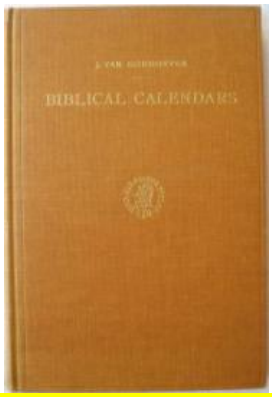
Our Rabbis taught: *And ye shall count unto you*; that is, the counting is a duty upon every one. *On the morrow after the Sabbath*, that is, on the morrow after the Festival. Perhaps it is not so but rather on the morrow after the Sabbath of Creation. R. Jose b. Judah says, Scripture says, *Ye shall 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.[17]

When I read the above, I perceive that the questions being asked were internal inquiries posed within the ranks of the rabbis. The questions were not challenges fueled by an ongoing debate; they were asked and they were answered, apparently to the satisfaction of the enquirer because that's where the discussion ended. Why should we believe, based on the above testimony of "hostile witnesses," that there was a "heated debate" going on between the Pharisees and Sadducees over when to begin the count to Pentecost?

---

[17] 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: I do not normally recommend reading the Talmud, except for gleaning historical information..

The other ancient record that historians often turn to in pointing out proof of an age-old debate concerning when to begin counting to Pentecost is the Mishnah. In his book *Biblical Calendars*, author J. Van Goudoever highlights the Mishnaic hint of a rift between the Pharisees and Sadducees over when to start counting:

> In the Mishnah we get a lively picture of the reaping of the *omer*, with a ceremony directed against the Boethusians (a group within the Sadducean priests). 'The messenger of the court used to call out on the eve of the festival [i.e. 15 Nisan] and tie the corn in bunches while it was yet unreaped to make it easier to reap; and the towns near by all assembled there together that it might be reaped with pomp. When it grew dark he called out "Is the sun set?" and they answered "Yea!" "Is the sun set?" and they answered "Yea!" "Is this a sickle?" and they answered "Yea!" "Is this a sickle?" and they answered "Yea!" "Is this a basket?" and they answered "Yea!" "Is this a basket?" "Yea!" On the Sabbath he called out "On this Sabbath?" and they answered "Yea!" "On this Sabbath?" and they answered "Yea!" "Shall I reap?" and they answered "Reap!" "Shall I reap?" and they answered "Reap!" He used to call out three times for every matter and they answered "Yea, yea, yea!" Wherefore all this? Because of the Boethusians who used to say "The omer may not be reaped at the close of a festival day."
>
> 
>
>
> The last sentence is the clue to the ceremony. The question was how to count the 50 days. Leviticus xxiii. 15 prescribes, 'From the morrow after the "Sabbath" you shall count.' What is the meaning of 'Sabbath' here? Seventh day of the week or festival day? The Boethusians apparently interpreted, 'You shall count from the day after the seventh day of the week', so from the Sunday (to Sunday). The Pharisaic (first century rabbinic) standpoint was, 'You shall count from the day after the festival day', i.e. Passover, so from 16 Nisan. The Boethusians reaped at the going out of the Sabbath, the Pharisees at the close of the Festival day (Passover).[18]

Author J. Van Goudoever reached the same conclusion shared by modern-day scholarship. In summary, he believed that the Pharisees repeated their ritualistic reaping questions and answers three times in order to shame the Boethusians because of an apparent disagreement over which *day* to begin the count to Pentecost. I would like to propose that this "Boethusian-shaming ceremony" had nothing to do with the *day* on which to begin the count, but rather which *time of day* to begin it. Notice that the reason stated in the Mishnah is, "…the Boethusians who used to say "The omer may not be reaped at the close of a festival day." This disagreement had nothing to do with the day on which to begin the count, but rather the *time of day* on which to begin it. The Pharisees believed it should begin at the close of the festival day; the Boethusians were apparently persuaded that it should begin at a different time of day, whether it be at the beginning portion or at midday. Please notice there is nothing in this Mishnaic account suggesting that the argument was over whether to begin the count on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath versus the morrow after the festival Sabbath. The disagreement was over the *time of day*, not over one day versus another day.

A skeptic informed me that I failed to address an additional piece of historical evidence. His source? A Talmudic reference dating to–*at the earliest*–the third century CE, i.e., some 300 years after Yeshua's resurrection! I address this "evidence" in my larger study on this topic as follows:

---

[18] From *Biblical Calendars*, by J. Van Goudoever, E. J. Brill Publisher, Leiden, Netherlands, 1961, pp. 17-18. Note: The author's quote from the Mishnah is taken from *The Mishnah*, The Fifth Division: Holy Things, *Menahot* 10:3.

A very scholarly and well-respected man who supports the validity of the Sadducean method of counting to Pentecost introduced June and me 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 prohibited. 2. And from the 8th to the end of the Feast (the 27th) the Feast of Weeks was reestablished, mourning is interdicted.[19]

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 had previously labeled Josephus a "liar," I realized 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!*** The photocopy he supplied 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

[19] From *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 2, by Alfred Edersheim, Longmans, Green, and Co., New York, NY, 1907, p. 698.

> 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.[20]

According to the above commentary, the historic events mentioned in the *Megillath Ta'anith* cover the period of the Maccabeans, 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.[21] 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, i.e., that the Pharisees "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 reestablished 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.

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. But what if there **was** no Pentecost controversy prior to the 1st century? Where in any ancient **historical writings** do we ever read that being in charge of Temple service regulations 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 a popular 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, or "**reestablished**." 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

---

[20] *Cf.*, *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, edited by Geoffrey Wigoder, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1989, p. 473. Note: Wigoder published a revised work titled *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism* in 2002 (New York University Press), and his article titled "Megillat Ta'anit" (pp. 513-514) is nearly word-for-word with the original one.

[21] According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 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.

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, our 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 following excerpt is from Tractate Menahoth 65a, a Jewish commentary penned at least 300 years after the *Megillath Ta'anith* was written. Please notice the author first quotes the pertinent portion of the *Megillath Ta'anith* (in quotes), then he supplies the Rabbinical interpretation:

> '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 reestablished, fasting is forbidden'. For the Boethusians held that the Feast of Weeks must always be on the day after the Sabbath.[22]

Does the above excerpt prove there was an ongoing "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 at least three hundred years after the event took place–with no supportive evidence to validate the statement? Indeed, I surmise that the above Talmudic commentary reflects a *misinterpretation* of the source from which the author quotes.

From the 1st century BCE through at least the 3rd century CE, we read *nothing* from authors who lived during that time period indicating 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 at least three hundred years later? Seriously? And are we supposed to accept an explanation 300 years later that "reestablishing the Feast of Weeks" means they corrected the method of counting?

To give you an idea of how preposterous the above notion is, I called a different "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

---

[22] *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.

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 three hundred years after the fact.

As outlined above, unless I can be shown otherwise, I am persuaded that there is no historical support for an ancient debate between the Pharisees and Boethusians (Sadducees) over the *day* on which to begin the count to Pentecost. Adding to the odd nature of this question is the fact that the only historical evidence offered in support of the claim that there *was* such a controversy is taken from the Sadducees' adversaries, i.e., *hostile witnesses*. But please do not take my word for it; if you can find an actual ironclad ancient historical record of a disagreement between the Pharisees and Sadducees over the *day* on which to begin the count to Pentecost, please let me know! Moreover, if you can locate an historical record validating that the alleged Sadducean understanding was actually practiced and observed in the temple, please let me know. I would also like to know the approximate years during which such a practice can be validated.

Room for Speculation

As mentioned previously, the Septuagint (the LXX version) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew that was carried out in the 3rd century B.C.E. I also mentioned that it is the Septuagint version that the first-century believers used and quoted from most frequently, as evidenced by the Scripture quotations found in the *Brit Chadashah* (the New Testament). Many scholars are open to the possibility that the Septuagint, although it was obviously translated from a Hebrew text, was not necessarily translated from the same text as the Masoretic Text.[23] The Hebrew Text of Luke 4:18, as previously addressed, offers strong supportive evidence of this understanding. Many possibilities exist, all of which are theories, as the parent text from which the LXX was translated is certainly lost at this time. June and I often do Torah readings while comparing the Masoretic Text with the Septuagint, and in many cases, when there is a translation discrepancy, the Septuagint reading makes the most sense and in some instances it even *corrects* the Masoretic Text's reading. I would like to cite one example to illustrate this point. In Leviticus chapter 13, we read about the skin discolorations the priest was to look for in determining whether or not his patient was leprous. In verses 29-30, the priest was instructed to examine the individual to see if the sore is deeper than the skin, plus if it had *yellowish* hair. If so, then the person was to be declared "unclean." The concern has to do with the color and *yellowish* is not a positive sign. *Blackish* hair, on the other hand, is considered an encouraging sign of healing. Both the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text readings agree on this point. However, the discrepancy occurs in verse 31.

In verse 31 of the Masoretic Text (MT), we are told that if the priest examined the patient and the sore was not beneath the skin, plus the hair in it had not turned <u>*black*</u>, he was to shut him up for seven days as a precaution. We then learn in verse 32 that if, after those seven days, the sore had not spread, plus the hair was not *yellow*, he

[23] Cf., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, published by Doubleday, New York, 1992, article "Septuagint," section F, p. 1102.

was to be shaven, then shut up for an additional seven days. If, after that period of time, it still had not spread, he was to be pronounced "clean."

In view of the above instructions, one might legitimately ask, "Why the abrupt concern about the *black* hair in verse 31, then readdressing the concern about *yellow* hair in verse 32?" We have already learned from verse 30 that it is the *yellowish* hair that was a deciding factor in determining whether or not a man is unclean. But according to Leviticus 13:31-34 of the MT, the man is considered clean so long as the hair in his sore has not turned *yellowish* or *black*.

According to the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 13:31, the concern is not over *black* hair at all. We read that so long as the sore is not beneath the skin, plus there is no *yellowish* hair in it, the patient is shut up for seven days, then reexamined. If nothing has changed, i.e., the sore has not spread, he is shaved and shut up for an additional seven days as a precaution. If there is still no change, he is then pronounced "clean." As we can see, the Septuagint only addresses the concern over whether or not the hair in the sore has turned *yellow*.

For comparison purposes, I'm displaying a side-by-side English translation from both the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint reading of Leviticus 13:31:

Masoretic Text (*King James Version*)	Septuagint (*translated by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton*)
31 And if the priest look on the plague of the scall, and, behold, it *be* not in sight deeper than the skin, and *that there is* no black hair in it; then the priest shall shut up *him that hath* the plague of the scall seven days.	31 And if the priest should see the plague of the scurf, and behold, the appearance of it be not beneath the skin, and there is no yellowish hair in it, then the priest shall set apart *him that has* the plague of the scurf seven days.

Sealing the matter that *black* hair was not the original concern of the author of Lev. 13:31 lies in the fact that, according to verse 37, black hair is the sign that the sore has healed. I suggest reading Leviticus 13:1-37 in its full context, paying special attention to the "color discrepancy" that exists between the MT and the Septuagint in verse 31. When the word translated "black" in verse 31 of the MT is changed to "yellow," the reading makes more sense. C. F. Keil, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, recognized the problem posed by the reading of the Masoretic Text:

> In וּבוֹ אֵין שְׂחֹר (v. 31) there is certainly an error of the text: either שְׂחֹר [the Hebrew word for "black"] must be retained and אֵין [the Hebrew expression translated "there is no"] dropped, or שְׂחֹר must be altered into צָהֹב [the Hebrew word for "yellow"], according to verse 37. The latter is probably the better of the two.[24]

In other words, C. F. Keil states that he believes a better translation of Lev. 13:31 would have the word "yellow" instead of the word "black." I'm not sure if he was even aware of the fact that this is precisely how the Septuagint translation renders this verse, as he made no mention of the Septuagint's translation.

I would rather not make this into a Septuagint vs. Hebrew debate, but ultimately, the factors presented in this study are what I was faced with when making my decision of which translation of Leviticus 23:11-16 best represents the will of the Father. If there is a glaring error in the Hebrew text of Leviticus 13:31, did other errors creep in as well — such as Leviticus 23:15? How can we know for sure? In the scribe's translation of Leviticus 23:15, did he unintentionally (or purposefully) render the original

[24] From *Commentary on the Old Testament*, by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Vol. 1, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2001, p. 574. Originally published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1866-91.

word *Shavuot* (שׁבעת) as *Shabbatot* (שׁבתות)? We may never know. In the above scenario, the Greek text of the LXX clearly corrects the Hebrew text of Lev. 13:31. But how is this possible if the Hebrew text pre-dates the Greek text? Answering that question requires considerable research into the history of Judaism dating back to the destruction of the first temple. Please bear in mind that, unlike today, there was not a "Bible in every home" and according to the apocryphal book of 2 Esdras 14:21, the few books of the law in existence at that time had been burned. According to this same passage in 2 Esdras, the Almighty gave Esdras (Ezra) understanding and he dictated the words of the law to five scribes. If we fast-forward approximately 350 years to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes' reign of terror on Judaism, at which time 80,000 Jews were massacred within the space of three days (II Maccabees 5:14), we learn that those who survived were forbidden to study Torah. Were any copies of the Hebrew Torah preserved? Yes, but the oldest Hebrew manuscripts are those found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and regrettably, none of the Dead Sea Scrolls that we are aware of include the text of Leviticus 23:11-16. Even if a pre-first-century text should be found that agrees with the Masoretic Text, this still would not prove or validate what was in the original text; all we would have is the same dilemma we are faced with today: Why did Judaism count seven *weeks* from the morrow after the *Festival* Sabbath when the Hebrew text says to count seven *sabbaths*? Why did they go with the instruction found in the Greek Septuagint text over and above the apparent instruction found in the Hebrew text?

I'm not saying the copies of the Septuagint available to us today are perfect. One of the most glaring concerns involves dating errors.[25] Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, during our Torah readings I occasionally read from the Septuagint version while other participants read from various translations of the Hebrew Masoretic text, including the King James Version. It is amazing the number of times in which the LXX corrects the Hebrew Masoretic text. The above-cited example from Leviticus chapter 13 is just one of the more noteworthy instances.

When I consider all the instances in which the LXX corrects the extant Hebrew text, I am compelled to consider the possibility that the Hebrew text currently available to us may actually be a translation from a Greek text that was itself a translation from a more original Hebrew text, which in turn was actually more in line with the Septuagint when it comes to counting to Pentecost. Speculation? Of course. But is it possible? Let's just say that scholarship recognizes the possibility and it is certainly something worthy of our consideration. In the meantime, the research I have done to this point validates believing that the early believers, Pharisees and Sadducees alike, used the instructions from the LXX to influence how they counted to Pentecost. Their practice and belief, in stark contrast to some articles we have read on this subject, was to begin the count on the morrow after the *Festival Sabbath* – a method that certainly did not meet any rejection from the Messiah, nor from the Apostle Paul, whose only rejection of his former Pharisaic lifestyle was that of recognizing Yeshua as the Son of Yahweh – the promised Messiah.

The "Gardener With a Sheaf" Argument

A common argument supportive of the belief that the wave sheaf offering was always carried out on the first day of the week comes from the resurrection account found in John chapter 20. In John's account, Miriam Magdalena initially mistook the risen Yeshua as being the gardener. Building on this mistaken identity, Sunday-only Pentecost advocates rationalize that the reason she thought He was the **gardener**

[25] Update as of 11/07/2020: Although I'm still not about to claim the Septuagint is perfect, the dating concerns I had when I originally composed this study in 2017 have since been resolved. In fact, a claim made against the Masoretic Text is that if you base the timing of world events on its chronology, the pyramids would have been built *before* the Flood, an impossibility with the cataclysmic Flood as described in Scripture. This dating concern is resolved by the Septuagint text. I cover this more extensively in an online article titled "When Were the Pyramids Built?"

can only be because He was "obviously" holding a sheaf of barley, which in turn means He surely "must" have been performing the Wave Sheaf offering ritual. Then, when she approached Him, Yeshua forbade her, stipulating that He had not yet ascended to the Father. Obviously, then, since He was in "pre-ascension untouchable mode" at that time (something I had never heard of before, nor is such a thing described by any NT authors), but eight days *later* He invited the doubting Thomas to feel His wounded hands and His pierced side, this can only mean that during the intervening time, He had ascended to the Father, and having been "accepted" by Him, He then returned to earth, where He could now be "touched." Thus, Yeshua, as the Wave Sheaf offering which He offered on the first day of the week, passed the "acceptable sacrifice test" and it was at that time permissible for humanity to touch Him. Here's the pertinent passage of John's account:

> 11 But Miriam [Magdelena] stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,
> 12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Yeshua had lain.
> 13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Master, and I know not where they have laid him.
> 14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Yeshua standing, and knew not that it was Yeshua.
> 15 Yeshua saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.
> 16 Yeshua saith unto her, Miriam. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.
> 17 Yeshua saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my Eloah, and your Eloah.

Sunday-only Pentecost advocates, as we are about to see, expect us to believe the reason Miriam initially thought Yeshua was the gardener is because He was carrying a sheaf of barley for the Wave Sheaf Offering ritual. That's reading quite a bit into the text, which is bad enough, but they then convert their "what if" scenario into a "that's what it really was" scenario, outright teaching that this understanding of theirs "proves" that the day on which Yeshua allegedly waved the barley sheaf was the "correct" day to do it, i.e., the first day of the week. Hence, their conclusion in the matter "proves" that the count to Pentecost absolutely must begin and end on the first day of the week.

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, and is now available for reading online. It goes into some detail about the reason Miriam Magdalene mistook Yeshua for the gardener being that He must have been carrying a sheaf of barley. That sheaf represented His being the firstfruit, which was waved and accepted on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. When Miriam approached Yeshua, He told her, "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father." Later, as it is taught, He ascended to the "heavenly court," where He presented Himself alive to the Father, and was accepted. Then, eight days later, Yeshua returned to earth and presented Himself to Thomas, who was *then* able to touch Him and thrust his hand into Yeshua's side. However, that is *our* summary of the "Gardener With a Sheaf" 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)?[26] 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.[27]

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 interpretation worthy of consideration. Since then, however, I have found that most, if not all, Sunday-Only Pentecost advocates agree with the Assemblies of Yahweh's interpretation, which may or may not have originated with them.[28]

A Key Mistranslation Debunks the "Gardener With a Sheaf" Argument

In this, our 2024 update, I exhibit proof that the "Gardener With a Sheaf" argument is simply **false**. The Hebrew *Gospel According to John*, translated into English from a medieval Hebrew manuscript found in the Vatican Library (Vat. Ebr. 100), reveals that the word "gardener," as found in the Greek translation, is a *mistranslation* of the original Hebrew text. It's an understandable mistranslation, yet a mistranslation nonetheless. In summary, Miriam Magdalena didn't mistake Yeshua as a *gardener*; rather, she mistook Him as a *thief*. It turns out the Hebrew word for *thief* (*ganab*) is very, very close to the Hebrew word for *gardener* (*ganah*). With the two Hebrew words having such similar spellings, one can see how the translator could have mistaken the one translation for the other. In view of the fact that Miriam expressed

---

[26] Again, the Hebrew version of John 20:14-15 indicates that Mary Magdalene initially mistook Yeshua for a **thief** who had stolen Yeshua's body. It makes more sense to believe Mary mistook such a one for a *thief* instead of a gardener. This is a classic example of how a mistranslation can lead to a premature conjecture of what "must have" been, which in turn leads to the development of an otherwise bizarre interpretation.

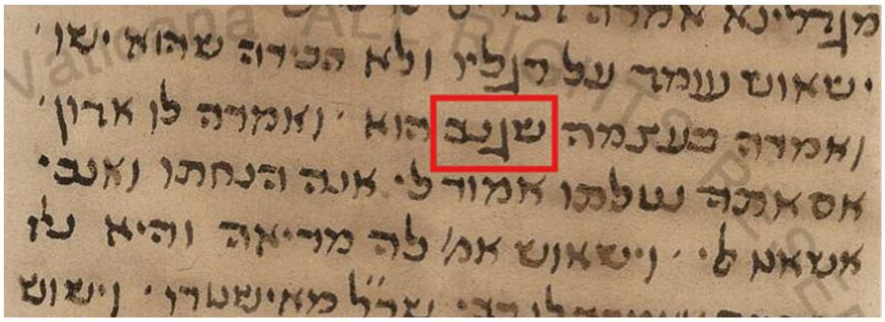
[27] Excerpt from "The Wave Sheaf Ordinance," by James Bird and Jacob O. Meyer, ©1979 Assemblies of Yahweh, Bethel, PA19507, All Rights Reserved, p. 4.

[28] **2024 update**: Indeed, I have noticed that "Sunday-only Pentecost" proponents tend to lean on the "Yeshua ascended in John 20" interpretation as a primary defense of their doctrinal belief. In 2024, a Sabbath guest who attended our home Bible study expressed alarm that, with our method of counting to Pentecost, it doesn't usually fall on a Sunday. She didn't express interest in hearing my explanation, and the *only* reason she could come up with to defend her view is her staunch belief that the reason Mary mistook Yeshua for a gardener is because He waved the Wave Sheaf offering on that first day of the week.

concern that "they have taken away my Master," it makes more sense that she would have mistaken Him for a *thief* rather than a *gardener*. Here's the translation from Hebrew John 20:13-15:

> 13 And they [the messengers clothed in white] said to that woman, "Why are you weeping?" So she said, "Because they have taken away my Adon from here, and I do not know where they have placed him."
> 14 And when Miryam Magdalit had spoken these words, she turned about and saw Yeshua standing on his feet. And she did not realize that it was Yeshua,
> 15 but she said in herself that he was *the* thief. So she said to him, "Adon, if you took him away, tell me where you have placed him that I may carry him away unto me."[29]

Let's put the above translation into the proper perspective: It's a given that whoever determined Miriam mistook Yeshua for the gardener because He was carrying a sheaf of grain–that individual used his own imagination to greatly embellish circumstances, inventing a "wishful thinking" scenario to help advance and bolster his "Sunday-only Pentecost" position. Without a "gardener" to serve as evidence that Yeshua was carrying a sheaf of barley, there is absolutely no reason to interpret such a thing, especially if Miriam thought He was the *thief*! Even with our wildest imagination, no one in his or her right mind would expect a thief to have been carrying a sheaf of barley. *This completely takes the "wave sheaf offering on the first day of the week" contention out of the equation!*



The Hebrew word translated "kepouros"(gardener) in the Greek text of John 20:15 is "ganav" (גנב), which means "thief." The Hebrew word for "gardener" is very similar (ganan). It is much more likely that Miriam would have suspected a thief of having taken Yeshua's body instead of a gardener.

Thus, we can proceed with the perspective that the Wave Sheaf offering ritual could very well have been performed on Abib 16. Now that we know Miriam initially thought Yeshua was a *thief* instead of a gardener, "Sunday-only Pentecost" proponents can no longer use John chapter 20 to support their "gardener with a sheaf" interpretation. Their original attempt to do so was unreasonable, but to continue doing so in light of this new evidence makes such an attempt *ludicrous*. In my original response to the "Gardener With a Sheaf" doctrine, I went into additional detail debunking the belief that it was somehow "wrong" to touch Yeshua while He was in "pre-ascension mode," not only because the Apostle John didn't explain such a never-before-heard-of state, but *also* because the Greek translator of the book of Matthew describes the women, in this same post-resurrection narrative, as "holding Him by the feet"–and instead of reproving them, Yeshua said, "**Be not afraid**" (Matt 28:9-10). Finally, the "Gardener With a Sheaf" teaching requires believing that Yeshua's sacrifice was not "accepted" until more than three days following His crucifixion.[30] It should be plain that Yahweh accepted Yeshua well *before* His crucifixion.

---

[29] From *The Hebrew Gospels from Sepharad, The Gospel according to John*, translated by the Van Rensburg family, Version 1.1, "A literal translation of an amazing Medieval Hebrew manuscript in the Vatican Library, Vat. Ebr. 100," April 2021, p. 76.
[30] *Cf.*, Leviticus 23:9-11, where the priest was instructed to wave the sheaf before Yahweh to be accepted.

The true Lamb was unquestionably without blemish–no need for His sacrifice to be “accepted.” The “Sunday-only Pentecost” believers’ attempt to explain Yeshua’s entire pre- and post-ascension activities requires considerable mental gymnastics. Granted, it was sufficient to persuade many of their persuasion, but the entire argument collapses when we remove the foundational “gardener was carrying a sheaf” contingency.

10/23/2017 (Updated 11/07/2020 and 08/15/2024)