

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL  
SESSION 6 | THE FEAST OF WEEKS

THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION FOR THE FEAST

LEVITICUS 23:15-16

The counting of weeks was to begin **from the morrow after the sabbath** (v. 15) and was to be until **seven sabbaths shall be complete** (v. 15), which would be **fifty days** (v. 16).

On the fiftieth day (Pentecost) **ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord** (v. 16).

The Sunday after the Sabbath, the Feast of Firstfruits, is “day 1,” and the 50<sup>th</sup> day is Pentecost, always on a Sunday.

Other than the counting, no Biblical instruction is given as to what to do during these days.

DEUTERONOMY 16:9-12

This passage instructs the seven-week count to begin **from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn** (v. 9). Jewish sage *Rashi* interprets this as “from the time the omer is harvested [on the sixteenth of Nissan], which is the beginning of the harvest.” Note that the KJV translation of **corn** is often mocked by non-KJV users because *corn*, as we know it, was not introduced until the settlement of North America. However, such mockers should recognize that the word *corn* was used prior to its modern use to refer to *grain of all types*.

This passage adds that the feast should include **a tribute of a freewill offering** which should be given **according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee** (v. 10).

The feast was specified as one to be observed **in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place his name there** (v. 11). This is a reference to the Promised Land.

MODERN JEWISH UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE

The Hebrew people use the term *counting of the omer* to refer to the feast of weeks. Orthodox Jews will verbally announce the count, to fulfill the command of Leviticus 23:15. They will either count by days and weeks (*this is the first day of the second week*) or by days (*this is the fourteenth day*). Often, they will put the two together, in this manner: “Today is the 1st day of the 2nd week of seven weeks. Today is the 8th day of the counting of fifty days from the day of the waving of the Omer on the morrow after the Sabbath.”<sup>1</sup>

A MODERN TIMING ISSUE

There is a difference between *Rabbinical* and *Kairaites* views on the timing of the count. Rabbinical Judaism has set the date to begin the count at the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nissan while *Kairaites* Jews always start **from the morrow after the sabbath** (Lev. 23:15), interpreting **sabbath** to be the weekly Sabbath and not the first day of Unleavened Bread.

After the destruction of the Temple Judaism there were three factions of Jews: *Pharisees*, *Essenes*, and *Sadducees*. The Essenes wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls and mostly died out in the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66-70. The Sadducees made up the Temple priesthood and were killed between A.D. 70 and 135. The Pharisees remained and wrote the Talmud and the Mishna, which became the basis for Rabbinical Judaism, and thus modern Judaism is “pharisaical.” In A.D. 369 the Pharisaical faction established the modern Jewish calendar which set the dates for all Jewish feasts. The Essenes always started the count from the Sunday (as we would call it) after

<sup>1</sup> *Counting the Omer*. <https://www.nehemiaswall.com/counting-omer>. Accessed June 29, 2022.

the Feast of Unleavened Bread concluded. The Sadducees began the count after the Sabbath *during* the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as do Kairite Jews today.<sup>2</sup>

In summary, both traditions of the Essenes start the count on a Sunday, while the tradition of the Pharisees (and thus modern Judaism) starts the tradition on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nissan.

## WHERE THIS TIMING ISSUE MATTERS

This timing issue matters for Christians because it helps to interpret John 19:31, which totally resolves the debate about which day Jesus was crucified.

John 19:31 says that **the bodies should not remain on the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day)**. Christians who believe that our Lord was crucified on Wednesday or Thursday argue that a *high Sabbath* was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan) and not the weekly Saturday Sabbath. Because of John 19:31, any scenario outside of a Friday crucifixion requires a week with two “sabbaths.”

And now it gets interesting. While the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was certainly a day in which **ye shall do no servile work** (Lev. 23:7), no place in the Hebrew Scriptures calls it a “Sabbath.” Rather, it is called a **holy convocation** (Lev. 23:7). Were Jews calling the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan a **high day** (Jn. 19:31) by the time of Jesus, and using the term Sabbath for this day? One could argue that this was the case. In fact, one *must make this argument for a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion*. The modern Rabbinical (Pharisaical) interpretation of *the Feast of Firstfruits* is that it *always begins on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, regardless of day of the week*.

The problem is not whether Jews in the first Century might have called the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan (which could have been a Wednesday or Thursday) a Sabbath. The problem with the “non-Friday” view of Crucifixion happens on the back end. The *counting of the omer* begins **from the morrow after the sabbath** (Lev. 23:15), and it ends **the morrow after the seventh sabbath** (Lev. 23:16). Why is this important? Because the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan could *theoretically* be called a Sabbath (though it is never called such in Hebrew Scripture), the Scripture clearly says that 50 days later will land **the morrow after the seventh sabbath**. But while the first day of Unleavened Bread is a day of rest, the last day of *the counting of the Omer* is not a day of rest, not a holy convocation, not a Sabbath. This *working from the end to the beginning* forces the literal interpretation of Leviticus 23:15 to be a *weekly Sabbath*, and forces John 19:31 to refer to this same Sabbath. The reason John 19:31 was called **an high day** is because the **holy convocation** (Lev. 23:7) of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan aligned with the *weekly convocation* called the Sabbath.

Could it be that the post-Temple Pharisaical interpretation of the Feast of Firstfruits, which makes the feast on rotating days of the week rather than *always a Sunday* was because they recognized there was too much connection with Jesus of Nazareth and His death, burial, and resurrection? Could they have been so consumed with a “coverup” of signs that pointed to Jesus as Messiah that they were willing to disregard Leviticus 23:16, which says that Pentecost (Shavuot) will always begin **the morrow after the sabbath** and thus *must be on a Sunday*?

## THE FEAST OF WEEKS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, there are 12 times when the Greek word for Sabbath occurs in the *plural*. These are most often translated into the singular, but in Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, and John 20:1 (each of which report the resurrection of Jesus), they are translated **first day of the week**. Literally, *the first of the Sabbaths*. This is undoubtedly a reference to *the first of the counting of the omer*, and also confirms that Jesus was raised on the Feast of Firstfruits which was the *day after the weekly Sabbath*.

But this term is also used in an interesting way in 1 Corinthians 16:2, when Paul requests that **upon the first day of the week** the Corinthians should store up a gift **as God hath prospered**. Could it be that Paul was calling the Corinthians, who were largely (if not exclusively) Jewish, to *take an annual Feast of Weeks offering*? It is uncanny how closely this aligns to the instructions on the Feast of Weeks found in Deuteronomy 16:10, “**And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God, according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee.**”

<sup>2</sup> *The Truth About Shavuot*. <https://www.nehemiaswall.com/truth-shavuot>. Accessed June 29, 2022.