

For most believers, determining the day to observe the various Biblical festivals is something they do not concern themselves with - they simply follow the church's or fellowship's calendar. But for those who like to determine those things for themselves, there are questions that sometimes come up. If you are one who follows the traditional Jewish calendar, but believes that Shavuot (Pentecost) always falls on Sunday, the question this year (2021) is which Sunday is Shavuot. Is it Sunday, May 16 or Sunday, May 23? Since Shavuot is based on the timing of the Wave Sheaf Offering, the answer, of course, will be based on determining the timing of that very important offering.

Because I have already written an article addressing why the Wave Sheaf was offered on Sunday¹, I will not address that in this article, but focus on showing how to determine the timing of the Wave Sheaf Offering when the Feast of Unleavened Bread (hag haMatza) begins on Sunday. This, of course, requires us to take an unbiased look at Joshua 5, which some claim gives guidance on the Wave Sheaf.

Before getting into the details, it is important to understand that the key to understanding scripture, and therefore understanding the timing of the "moed" (appointed time) is to believe with your whole heart that:

1. God's word is truth – The basis of truth is the word of God, and the fundamentals of God's truth are found in the Torah, the words spoken by God directly to Moses. The following scriptures substantiate that point:

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 31:9** So Moses wrote this law (torah) and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel

^{NKJ} **Psalms 119:142** Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And Your law (torah) is truth.

^{NKJ} **John 17:17** "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Because God's word spoken to Moses is so valuable, the prophets, as well as Jesus and His disciples, continually referred to "Moses" when trying to make a point. Therefore TRUTH is established in the Torah.

2. The Torah ends with Moses. He wrote all that God spoke to him and made it into a book –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 31:24** So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished,

This verse in itself proves that there is no "oral law" – laws presumably given by God to Moses that were not written down. The Jews will oftentimes use "oral law" to explain why they deviate from the written law of Moses.

3. No one may add to or take away from God's word, the Torah. God's TRUTH is complete. No one – not Paul, not Peter, not even Jesus can add to or take away from God's TRUTH – the Torah.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 4:2** "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 12:32** "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

¹ see my article "Why I Observe Shavuot – on Sunday" - <https://www.amiyisrael.org/articles.php/#ShavuotSunday-title>



^{NKJ} **Matthew 5:18** "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

4. We are to follow God's Torah explicitly – not deviating to the right or to the left – whenever conditions or circumstances permit.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 28:14** "So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

5. God does not change, and therefore TRUTH does not change –

^{NKJ} **Malachi 3:6** "For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

With these five points engraved in our minds, the Bible becomes much more clear. The Torah – God's word spoken to Moses and written in the Book is the TRUTH and the FOUNDATION from which everything else in the Bible revolves. We should never attempt to make the Torah fit other parts of the Bible, we simply see how they fit into the Torah. So if the Torah shows us how to do something, but later we find in the gospels or in Paul something that appears to show us an alternate way of doing it, we must always follow the Torah.

This principle is the basis for understanding not only the wave sheaf, but also the other festivals including Passover. We simply accept the TRUTH that the timing is established in the Torah, not in Joshua, and not in the gospels.

So how should we determine when to offer the wave sheaf? We should first go to the Torah and see what it says. So let's do that.

In the Torah, the first thing we find is that the context indicates that the offering was made in the first month of the year –

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:5** 'On the fourteenth *day* of the **first month** at twilight *is* the LORD's Passover.

We also see that the name of that month is "Aviv" –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 16:1** "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night.

The Hebrew word "aviv" (אֲבִיב – 24) means "fresh" and "green ears". So the month began when the ears of barley were fully exposed but still green.

Next we find the instructions concerning the Passover season and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This festival starts on the 15th day of the month – fifteen days since the barley ears were green. At this point in a normal year, the barley would have turned golden brown and would now be ready to be harvested, but God said to wait ... wait until the grain is deemed "acceptable", then you can begin the harvest.

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:10-11** "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. ¹¹ 'He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be **accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath** the priest shall wave it.

Though it is not relevant to our purpose, it is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for "sheaf" is "omer" (עֹמֶר – 6016). An "omer" is a measure of volume equal to about 2 quarts. So when the priest "waves the sheaf", he is not waving stalks of grain; he is instead waving back and forth over his head a bowl containing about two quarts of finely sifted flour.



What is relevant to our purpose is that this entire process shows that the “omer” – or more importantly – what the omer represents – should be acceptable to God. We’ll discuss that some more later on in this article.

So what Sabbath is being spoken of here? It would certainly be a Sabbath that falls in the context of the Feast of Unleavened Bread passages, but which? Would it be the Sabbath that falls within those days, the Sabbath before the festival, or the Sabbath after? It would be the Sabbath within those days for three reasons:

1. The Sabbath before causes you to have to harvest grain for the offering on an annual sabbath²
2. The Sabbath after takes you out of the context of the festival
3. The Sabbath after also makes you wait until after the festival to begin to harvest the grain, you may have to wait up to the 29th day of Aviv to begin the harvest – a point when the barley would be past the point of peak maturity.

Based on these three reasons, most Sabbath / Festival observing groups that believe the Wave Sheaf Offering should be performed on Sunday, teach that the Sabbath mentioned must be the one within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In most cases, both the Sabbath and the Wave Sheaf Offering will fall within the Festival, but on years where Aviv 15 (the first day of the festival) falls on Sunday, the only “weekly” Sabbath during the festival falls on the last day of the festival. In that case, the Wave Sheaf Offering would fall outside (just after) the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Is there a problem with the Wave Sheaf Offering being after the Festival of Unleavened Bread? Apparently not since God – who certainly knew that this would occasionally happen – provided no remedy for this situation. He did provide in the Torah a remedy when asked about a person who could not sacrifice the Passover lamb because he was unclean (Numbers 9). He also provided in the Torah a remedy when Zelophehad’s daughters questioned Moses in regards to their father’s inheritance (Numbers 27). But the Wave Sheaf falling outside the Festival of Unleavened Bread was apparently not a problem since we see nothing in the Torah to remedy it.

Therefore, in this one passage (Lev. 23:10-11), we have ALL of God’s instructions pertaining to the timing of the Wave Sheaf Offering. There are no additional instructions found in the Torah and - not that it makes any difference - there are no additional instructions anywhere else in the scriptures. Since these are the only instructions provided in the Torah, the matter is settled – God has said it, and now it is TRUTH. If any individual were to add to, take away from, or change this one instruction that pertains to the timing of the offering, that person would be committing a sin.

So what about Joshua 5? Since Joshua had just led the Hebrew people into the Promised Land, did he not instruct the priests to perform the Wave Sheaf Offering before allowing the people to harvest the grain? Many believe that he did, and because of the timing indicated in the passage – they believe Joshua’s “example” provides an alternate way to time the festival. Here’s the pertinent text -

^{NKJ} **Joshua 5:10-12** Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and **kept the Passover** on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ And **they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover**, unleavened bread and parched grain, **on the very same day**. ¹² Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

² though normal work, i.e. – your occupation – could not be performed on the festival Sabbaths, they were able to cook food for the festival (Ex. 12:16). Harvesting would have been considered an occupation.



The theory is that the Hebrews “kept” (i.e. – “killed”³) the Passover on the Sabbath and the next day (Sunday morning – Aviv 15 - the First Day of Unleavened Bread) performed the service of the wave sheaf, therefore allowing them to harvest enough grain to have something to eat.

In this scenario, the priests performed the service of the wave sheaf on the day after a Sabbath, but not on the day after the Sabbath. In other words, the Sabbath from which the offering was to follow was not during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

So what gives? Did Joshua have the priests perform the wave sheaf that year? The most clear and simple answer is that **he did not!** Though Joshua and the Hebrew people did kill and eat the Passover that year in accordance to the Torah, they did not offer the wave sheaf. How do we know? We know because if He did instruct the priest to offer the wave sheaf in the timing depicted in the Joshua 5 passage, He would have been violating the Torah – something I believe Joshua would not have done.

Why then, did He not wait until the following Sabbath and perform the service within the context of the Torah? The answer is that there was no eligible barley from which they could make the offering.

Joshua 4:19 indicates that the Israelites crossed the Jordan on the 10th day of the first month. This is the day the Hebrews had been commanded to take a lamb for the Passover (Ex. 12:3). Therefore, they had to cross the Jordan that day, set up camp, and then separate a lamb from the flock to use for the sacrifice. They also circumcised themselves that day. Therefore, it appears that Joshua and the Hebrews were trying to be very precise in their observance of Passover – trying to avoid the errors of their fathers.

Though they had all they needed in order to keep the Passover, they did not have all they needed to perform the Wave Sheaf Offering. To understand where I’m going, let’s look a little deeper into the offering.

Like I mentioned earlier, the Wave Sheaf Offering is really an offering of very finely ground barley that is waved back and forth by the priest along with a prescribed drink offering. Continuing in the text concerning the wave sheaf, Leviticus 23 says –

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:12-13** 'And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹³ 'Its grain offering *shall be* two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering *shall be* of wine, one-fourth of a hin.

From this passage we see that the wave “omer” offering (as the Hebrew indicates) is a special offering, but it shares many of the attributes of some of the other offerings. Along with the waving of the finely ground grain, there is a burnt offering that has its own grain offering, . All these together make the “Wave Sheaf Offering”, and without any of the parts, you cannot offer the offering. For instance, without the one year old unblemished male lamb, you cannot offer the offering.

So there is a problem. In the Joshua 5 account, the Hebrews had only been in the land five days before they began to eat from the fields of Jericho. They had obviously not arrived early enough to plant their own crops in the land, so they were getting ready to eat from the pagan Canaanites produce – which in itself is not a problem. The problem comes with finding the grain from which to do the offering. Here’s the problem – the Torah says that the grain must come from “your harvest” which implies that the field must be planted by the Hebrews. Let’s read it again –

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:10-11** "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of

³ Heb. “asah” – Strong’s 6213 – to make, fashion, etc.



your harvest to the priest. ¹¹ 'He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, **to be accepted** on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

Why is it important that the grain be planted by Hebrews? It is important because the grain of the offering represents the people whom God was going to “accept” – the grain represents the Hebrew people. In an article entitled “the Role of the Firstfruits” ⁴ I explain that the “omer” that was waived by the priest was filled with grain that had been beaten fine and repeatedly sifted to the point that it was finally acceptable to God. That grain could never represent the Canaanite people, especially those from Jericho who were so vile that God forbid anything of theirs that could not endure refining by fire (gold, silver, bronze and iron) from being taken during the siege. It all had to be destroyed.

The grain for the Wave Sheaf Offering would have to be grain that both God and the Hebrews worked together to produce. God would provide the land ⁵, the sun, and the water, and the Hebrews would provide the seed and the manpower. Together, they would produce godly fruit – acceptable to YHVH, the god of Israel. In a nutshell, the Wave Sheaf Offering was symbolic of the Hebrew people doing the job for which they had been called.

The importance of having grain that is raised by the Hebrews in the Promised Land is illustrated in this often overlooked instruction and blessing. It goes like this –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 26:5-10** “... 'My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. ⁶ 'But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. ⁷ 'Then we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. ⁸ 'So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. ⁹ 'He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, "a land flowing with milk and honey"; ¹⁰ 'and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, O LORD, have given me.'...”

This blessing of thanks was to accompany an individual's firstfruits offering year by year. The instructions were given by Moses just weeks before the Hebrews crossed the Jordan, and it is very specific –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 26:1** "And it shall be, **when you come into the land** which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, **and you possess it and dwell in it**, ² "that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, **which you shall bring from your land that the LORD your God is giving you**, and put *it* in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. ³ "And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the country which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.'

Notice that the person was to bring a token of the blessings God had bestowed upon them after they had come into the Promised Land, taken possession of the land, and were able to raise their own crops on that land. Crops taken from the Canaanites would not do.

When one really understands the Wave Sheaf Offering, he sees God's plan for the salvation of His people - those who will play a huge role in bringing salvation to all who will follow Him. What's more, he will see that – just as there is no Wave Sheaf Offering without a one year old unblemished male lamb - God's people could not do their work without first recognizing and accepting the blood of that lamb.

⁴ see my article “the Role of the Firstfruits” - <https://www.amiyisrael.org/articles.php/#FirstFruitsWhoAreThey-title>

⁵ Leviticus 25:23



Joshua leading the Hebrew people into the Promised Land at Jericho was a turning point in the history of God's people. In so doing, God fulfilled the promise He made to them just over 40 years earlier – to take them as His people and bring them into the land He had promised Abraham⁶. Therefore, the manna stopped because the people could now begin to raise their own crops. But coming into the land was just the start - there was still much to do, and as they made progress year by year, that progress was commemorated by the Wave Sheaf Offering.

So did the Hebrews offer the Wave Sheaf in Joshua 5, and by doing so show us an alternative timing for it? No, he did not. To do so would violate the Torah's prohibition on harvesting on an annual Sabbath, would have violated the Torah by adding to it, and would have violated the purpose of the wave sheaf by using unacceptable grain..

So how do you count Pentecost when Aviv 15 falls on a Sunday? You simply follow the Truth – the Torah. You count 50 days from the day after the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. There is no need for an alternative method in order to keep the offering within the Days of Unleavened Bread, and therefore God does not provide one.

Shalom Alecheim

⁶ Exodus 6:6-8