

New Testament Proof on How to Count Pentecost!

The controversy still rages on how to count Pentecost! Is it counted from a weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread? Or should it be counted from the day after the Passover Holy Day, the First Day of Unleavened Bread? Here is amazing *New Testament evidence* on this continuing dispute!

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For over twenty years, I have been trying to show the churches that came out of Worldwide Church of God, Messianic groups, and others, the plain truth on the matter of how to “count Pentecost.” For some reason, many people just don’t want to seriously check into this matter, or they simply accept the word of their minister or some self-anointed “scholar” on the subject. Opinions sometimes get heated, there has been much name-calling, and yet the battle for the truth rages on.

What is the truth? If I could show you plain evidence in the *New Testament* that has been overlooked for the last fifty years, would you believe?

Well, here it is!

We read a very mysterious passage in the gospel of Luke which has confounded ministers and laymen alike. Various opinions have been offered to explain this passage. But let’s just take a careful look ourselves, and see if we can understand it!

Luke writes, “Now it happened on the *second Sabbath after the first* that He went through the grain fields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands. And some of the Pharisees said to them, ‘Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?’” (Luke 6:1-2, NKJV).

Believe it or not, hidden in this passage is the KEY that unlocks the truth about from what day to count to Pentecost! What is this mysterious expression, “the second Sabbath after the first”? It has perplexed scholars for generations.

Notice first of all that this event occurred at the time of the harvest of grain. This would place the time as early to late spring. In Israel, the two major grain harvests are at the beginning of spring, or Passover, and the festival of “first fruits” – that is, Pentecost. Passover occurs March-April, and Pentecost falls in May or June. Passover begins the barley harvest, and Pentecost begins the wheat harvest.

Which harvest is this? Matthew records this same event in chapter 12. In Matthew's account, we simply read, "At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat" (Matt.12:1). In this passage, the simple word "Sabbath" is used, showing that this would be a normal weekly Sabbath day – not an annual holy day. That same day, He entered their local synagogue (Matt.12:9), and healed a man on the Sabbath (verses 10-11). He thus showed it is all right to heal and do good on the Sabbath, thus showing that some of the Jewish Sabbath traditions and rules were in grievous error. The whole emphasis here was that it was the *weekly Sabbath day* that was involved!

Yet Luke adds that this particular weekly Sabbath day was also "the second Sabbath after the first." How are we to understand that significant statement? What could he mean by such an expression?

Deuteroproton

The Greek-English Interlinear has it this way: "And it happened on the second chief Sabbath." Literally, "And it was on a Sabbath, the second chief." The Greek expression here is *sabbaton dueteroproton* and means, literally, "Sabbath, the second chief," or "sabbath the second first," that is, "the second first (or chief) Sabbath."

Now notice two vital elements to this puzzle. First, it was during the grain harvest. Secondly, this was a weekly Sabbath, and yet it was unique – a "second" "chief" Sabbath. This could not be during the fall Feast of Tabernacles – that festival occurs AFTER the harvest has been completed! There is only one "chief Sabbath" at Pentecost, since it is a one-day festival. The only other time when there would be two "chief Sabbaths" in a row would be during the spring Passover/Days of Unleavened Bread.

During the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, we actually have THREE CHIEF SABBATHS. That is, the first day of Unleavened Bread, the weekly Sabbath which occurs DURING the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and the FINAL day of Unleavened Bread. Both the first and last days of Unleavened Bread are "annual festivals" or "Sabbaths." God says: "On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight [evening] is the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the *first day* you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it" (Leviticus 23:5-8). Between these first and last annual Sabbaths is the weekly Sabbath during the Festival (Lev.23:3) – sanctified by being the seventh day of the week, and also because it occurs during the seven-day festival, it is very special.

When we look at this passage in Luke closely, therefore, we see that we have *three unique Sabbaths during the days of Unleavened Bread*, in all years except where the first or last day of the Feast falls on the weekly Sabbath.

It is clear that the Sabbath in Luke 6 must have been a Sabbath during the week of Passover. At no other festival are there two chief Sabbaths, or three. And at no other festival is the harvest of grain occurring, except Pentecost, which is a one day festival.

Therefore this passage must be discussing the Sabbath which occurred during PASSOVER and the Feast of Unleavened Bread! The passage says this was the “second chief Sabbath,” not the third – therefore it was the second Sabbath of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The account in Matthew simply refers to it as a weekly Sabbath, giving no indication it was an annual holy day. Therefore, this Sabbath must have been the WEEKLY SABBATH!

What, you may ask, does this have to do with determining from what day we are to count the days (counting the “omer”) until Pentecost?

The Leviticus Legislation

Let’s notice how this would relate to the counting of the omer until Pentecost. Again, we read in Leviticus 23:

“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. 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*” (vs.10-11).

Notice! This is the famous “wave sheaf offering.” It was commanded to be waved on the first day AFTER “the Sabbath.” But which Sabbath? Was it the weekly Sabbath which occurred during the days of Unleavened Bread, as the Sadducees taught, and as many end-time remnant churches teach, which came out from the Worldwide Church of God, as well as some Messianic groups? Or is this Sabbath the Passover Sabbath, Abib 15, the First Day of Unleavened Bread?

Orthodox Jews and mainstream Judaism teaches that this refers to the First Day of Unleavened Bread. That is also what the ancient Pharisees taught. The ancient Sadducees claimed it refers to the weekly Sabbath. Which is correct?

Before showing you how the New Testament passage in Luke is involved in this great controversy, let’s notice three very important things:

1. As to the beliefs and teachings of the Sadducees, Jesus Christ declared in no uncertain words, “You are mistaken, *not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God*” (Matt.22:29). These people did not even believe in a spirit world, the existence of angels, or the resurrection from the dead! (see also Acts 23:6-8). They were teaching error and were in great ignorance of the Scriptures. Should we base our beliefs on their vain and foolish teachings?

2. As to the practice of the apostle Paul, he said, “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6). He declared, further, before king Agrippa: “According to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee” (Acts 26:5). Paul also declared, “I am indeed a Jew . . . brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law*” (Acts 22:3). Paul clearly told the Philippians that he was “concerning the law, a Pharisee” – not a Sadducee (Phil.3:5). In so saying, he added, “concerning the righteousness which is in the law, *blameless*” (verse 6). What do all these candid admissions prove? Simply this: As a Pharisee, Paul must have observed Pentecost on the day observed by the Pharisees – *and that day was arrived at by counting from the day after the First Day of Unleavened Bread!*

3. Jesus Christ Himself declared that it was not the Sadducees but the Pharisees who sat in Moses’ seat. That is, they had authority to teach the people, as the representatives of Moses, as it were. He said, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. *Therefore whatsoever they tell you to observe, that observe and do*, but do not according to their works; for they say, and do not” (Matt.23:2-3). In other words, we are to follow their teachings so long as they are in accord with the Word of God, and the teachings of Moses. *Jesus never once found fault or criticized the Pharisees on how they counted Pentecost, or regarding what day on which they observed it!*

How then does this relate to the point at issue here?

When Was the Wave Sheaf Offering?

Back in Leviticus we read the following key piece of divine legislation relating to the wave sheaf offering, which was offered on the day after a “Sabbath”:

“You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain *nor fresh grain UNTIL THE SAME DAY* that you have brought an offering to your God. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. And you shall count for yourselves *FROM the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering . . .*” (Lev.23:14-15).

Now let’s get this straight. The people of Israel were not to partake of ANY grain from the new grain harvest in Israel *until after the omer was offered*. And the omer was to be waved before the LORD on the day following the “Sabbath.” It had to be either the Sabbath known as the First Day of Unleavened Bread, or the weekly Sabbath during the Feast. Which was it?

Luke 6:1 provides the clear, unambiguous answer! Notice clearly! It was the second Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread – “the second chief Sabbath.” It was a weekly Sabbath (Matt.12:1-2; Mark 2:23-24). And here we find the very disciples of Christ **PLUCKING HEADS OF GRAIN AND EATING THEM!** *Obviously, the “wave*

sheaf offering” had to have already been offered! Here it was the weekly Sabbath, and THEY WERE ALREADY “HARVESTING THE GRAIN”! But such an act was strictly FORBIDDEN until AFTER the Wave Sheaf Offering!

This is PROOF POSITIVE that the Omer had already been offered – on the day after the First Day of Unleavened Bread.

According to the Sadducees, and those churches which follow them, the “wave sheaf” would not be offered until the day FOLLOWING this weekly Sabbath. Therefore, according to their reasoning, the apostles were SINNING AGAINST GOD’S LAW – in violation of a strict commandment in the Torah!

Now I ask you – candidly. If this had been the case, why did the Pharisees not jump all over the disciples of Christ, and find fault with them for violating this strict injunction of God’s Law? Why did they ignore such a gross offence, for which one could be cut off from Israel, and not mention it at all – and simply regard their offence as being one of plucking grain on a weekly Sabbath, violating their tradition?

The situation we find in Luke 6 plainly shows us that on this “second Sabbath” during the Feast of Unleavened Bread the wave sheaf offering had already been performed by the High Priest, on the day of Abib 16, the second day of the Festival, and therefore the disciples were free to eat the “new grain” from the harvest!

What Do You Mean, “Sabbath”?

Some, however, insist that since the Biblical command is that we are to “count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath” (Lev.23:16), that these must be seven regular weeks, each one ending with a weekly Sabbath. But this is simply not correct, as every Jew knows. The term “Sabbath” can also refer to a “week.” It is interpreted thus by Deuteronomy 16:9. There we read, “You shall count seven *weeks* for yourself; begin to count the seven *weeks* from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God.”

Here there is no argument – the word “WEEKS” is clearly used, showing we are to count periods of seven days each. Why then is “Sabbath” used in Leviticus 23:16? There is a vital spiritual lesson God is imparting here. The word for “Sabbath” is *shabat*. Most people assume it simply means the “Sabbath day,” and let it go at that. But that is not the case at all! The Day derives its name from the meaning of the word – not vice versa. “Sabbath” in Hebrew simply means “intermission” (Strong’s #7676), from the word *shebeth*, meaning “*rest, interruption, cessation.*” The reference is not to the weekly Sabbath at all, but to the counting off of seven periods of seven days each, each of the periods ending with an “intermission,” “rest,” “interruption.”

Adds *Commentary on the Old Testament*, by C. F. Keil and F Delitzsch, “*Hashabaat maacharat* (the morrow after the Sabbath) signifies the next day after the

first day of the feast of Mazzoth, i.e., the 16th Abib (Nisan), not the day of the Sabbath which fell in the seven days' feast of Mazzoth, as the Baethoseans supposed

“The ‘Sabbath’ does not mean the seventh day of the week, but the day of rest, although the weekly Sabbath was always the seventh or last day of the week; hence not only the seventh day of the week (Exodus 31:15, etc.), but the day of atonement (the tenth of the seventh month) is called ‘Sabbath’ and ‘Shabbat shabbathon’ (verse 32, Lev.16:31). As a day of rest, on which no laborious work was to be performed (v.8), the first day of the feast of Mazzoth is called ‘Sabbath,’ irrespectively of the day of the week upon which it fell; and ‘the morrow after the Sabbath’ is equivalent to ‘the morrow after the Passover’ mentioned in Joshua 5:11, where ‘Passover’ signifies the day at the beginning of which the paschal meal was held, i.e., the first day of unleavened bread, which commenced on the evening of the 14th, in other words, the 15th Abib. By offering the sheaf of firstfruits of the harvest, the Israelites were to consecrate their daily bread to the Lord their God, and practically to acknowledge that they owed the blessing of the harvest to the grace of God. They were not to eat any bread or roasted grains of the new corn till they had presented the offering to their God (v.14).

“This offering was fixed for the second day of the feast of the Passover, that the connection between the harvest and the Passover might be kept in subordination to the leading idea of the Passover itself (see at Exodus 12:15ff.)” (p.891).

Amen to that! The theme of the Passover is intimately tied in to the theme of the harvests – but the Passover is the principle – the beginning point – and the harvest follows after!

Says *Barnes Notes on the Bible*, volume 1, regarding Leviticus 23:15 – “seven Sabbaths,” “More properly seven weeks (compare Deuteronomy 16:9). The word Sabbath in the language of the New Testament as well as the Old, is used for ‘week’ (Lev.25:8; Matthew 28:1; Luke 18:12, etc.)” (page 223).

Barnes Notes continues regarding Leviticus 23:16 – “The morrow after the seventh week was the 50th day after the conclusion of a week of weeks. The day is called in the Old Testament, ‘the feast of harvest’ (Exodus 23:16), ‘the feast of weeks,’ ‘the feast of the firstfruits of wheat harvest’ (Exo.34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10), and ‘the day of the firstfruits’ (Numbers 28:26)” (p.223).

A Careful Exegesis of Luke 6

What do Commentaries have to say about the account in Luke 6, and the expression used only there regarding the Sabbath day?

The *Matthew Henry Commentary* says regarding the account in Luke, chapter 6: “This story here has a date, which we had not in the other evangelists; it was *on the second Sabbath after the first* (v.1), that is, as Dr. Whitby thinks is pretty clear, the *first Sabbath after the second day of unleavened bread*, from which day they reckoned the

seven weeks to the feast of Pentecost; the first of which they called *Sabbaton deuteroproton*, the second *deuterodeuteron*, and so on” (p.1418).

Dake’s Annotated Bible explains this passage as follows: “These six words (the second Sabbath after the first) are from only one Greek word *deuteroprotos*, the second-first Sabbath, the ordinary weekly Sabbath following the special Sabbath that began the feast regardless of what day of the week it fell on. That is the feast of unleavened bread of 7 days always started on the 15th day of Nisan or April, regardless of what day of the week it was (Lev.23:6-8). If it happened to be on Wednesday the regular weekly Sabbath or the second Sabbath of the feast would be 3 days later. The last day of the feast, being also a Sabbath, or the third Sabbath of the feast, would be on Tuesday or three days after the weekly Sabbath. The 1st and 7th days of the seven-day feast were special Sabbaths and the regular weekly Sabbath was between the two, being the second Sabbath of the feast. That this was a weekly Sabbath is clear from Matthew 12:1-8.”

The *Adam Clarke Commentary* declares as to this passage: “The Vulgate Latin renders *deuteroproton*, *secundo-primum*, which is literal and right. We [in English] translate it the *second Sabbath after the first*, which is directly wrong; for it should have been the *first Sabbath after the second* day of Passover. On the 14th of *Nisan*, the Passover was killed; the next day (the 15th) was the first day of the feast of unleavened bread; the day following (the 16th) the *wave sheaf* was offered, pursuant to the law, *on the morrow after the Sabbath: Lev.23:11*. The *Sabbath*, here, is not the seventh day of the week, but the *first day of the feast of unleavened bread*, let it fall on what day of the week it would. . . .

“This *Sabbath*, then, on which the disciples plucked the ears of corn , was the *first Sabbath* after that *second day*. Dr. Lightfoot has demonstrably proved this to be the meaning of this *sabbaton deuteroproton*, and from him F. Lamy and Dr. Whitby have so explained it. *This Sabbath could not fall BEFORE the Passover because, till the second day of that feast, no Jew might eat either bread or parched corn, or green ears (Lev.23:14).*”

Now let’s really understand this point! Notice very carefully! Adam Clarke goes on to explain the problem many expositors have completely overlooked:

“Had the disciples then gathered these ears of corn on any Sabbath before the Passover [or, before the wave sheaf offering!!!], *they would have broken TWO LAWS INSTEAD OF ONE: and for the breach of these TWO LAWS they would infallibly have been accused; whereas now they broke only one . . . which was that of the Sabbath*” (volume 3, page 404).

How plain it is! Here it has been, lying right beneath our feet, as it were, all these years. The mystery of counting Pentecost has been completely solved, if we accept the New Testament evidence!

But that is not all!

Evidence from 250 B.C.

The dispute over Pentecost and the date of the wave sheaf offering was between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Both of these religious parties sprang up out of the strife in Judea which arose during the time of the Maccabees and the Syrian conquest of Judea by Antiochus Epiphanes, from 167-164 B.C. The Jews who followed the Torah strictly became known as “separatists,” or “separated ones,” from whence we obtain the term “Pharisee.” The priestly group, who entertained the ideas of Hellenism, and compromised the religious teachings of Torah to ingratiate themselves with Antiochus Ephiphanes, became known as “Sadducees.”

In the struggle to dominate the religious life of the Jews, following the Maccabean wars, the Sadducees sometimes acceded to office, as priestly kings; but as time went by, the Pharisees became more and more powerful, until about 100 B.C. they became the dominant religious party. Josephus tells us that the Sadducees could do nothing without the approval and agreement of the Pharisees. He wrote in *Antiquities of the Jews*, “the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side” (Bk.12,10,6). Josephus says further, “Moreover the Pharisees are friendly to one another, and are for the exercise of concord and regard for the public. But the behavior of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wild; and their conversations with those that are of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them” (*Wars of the Jews*, Bk.2,10,14).

The Pharisees were dominant during the time of Christ. Therefore it was with them that most of His disputes occurred, and they were among His chief critics. Nevertheless, He never rebuked or took them to task for changing the method of counting to Pentecost!

Yet, interestingly, some 250 years before the time of Christ, before the sects of the Pharisees or Sadducees were even formed, in the wake of the Maccabean wars, we discover that king Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt desired the Jewish nation to provide him a translation of the Scriptures into the Greek language for his world renowned library in Alexandria, Egypt. The Jewish nation, about 250 years before Christ, acceded to his wishes – the whole account is given in the letter of one Aristeas. Suffice it to say, the result was the Septuagint Version of the Scriptures, the first authorized translation of the Holy Scriptures into a foreign language. For more information about this amazing translation, read my articles “A New Look at the Septuagint” and “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint.”

What does this authorized translation, used in all the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire, tell us about the counting of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks?

We read: “These are the festivals for the Lord – holy, set days, which you shall proclaim in their set times. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the two evenings, is the Passover for the Lord. And on the fifteenth day of this month beginneth the festival of unleavened bread for the Lord. Seven days you shall eat

unleavened bread. Now the FIRST DAY shall be a holy, set day for you. You shall do no sacrificial service, but offer whole burnt offerings to the Lord seven days, and the SEVENTH DAY shall be a holy set day for you. You shall do no sacrificial service.

“Moreover the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and thou shalt say unto them, When you are come into the land which I give you, and are about to reap the harvest thereof, you shall bring a sheaf, as the first fruits of your harvest, to the priest, and he shall offer up the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you ON THE MORROW AFTER THE FIRST DAY, the priest shall offer this up” (Lev. 23:4-11).

How interesting and plain this makes this controversial verse of Leviticus 23:11, which some claim tells us to offer the wave sheaf on the day after the *weekly* Sabbath. *NOT SO!*

The Septuagint very plainly says, “on the morrow after the FIRST DAY,” and there is no way you can interpret the “first day” to ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE FIRST DAY OF THE FEAST! It clearly does not refer to the weekly Sabbath – the weekly Sabbath is the “SEVENTH DAY,” *by its own definition!*

To be sure you understand this point clearly, notice that verse 7 of this chapter identifies the “first day” for us and plainly tells us “THE FIRST DAY” IS THE FIRST DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD!!!

This passage in the LXX, therefore, makes the truth incredibly plain and clear as crystal. It ought to END the controversy over Pentecost, and PUT TO SILENCE the obstinate voices of shrill critics. But will it? Let each individual look deep down into his or her own heart, and examine their own personal motives. Will we recognize and admit the truth? What does it take? How much “PROOF” is required?

Was This “Honest”?

In his 1974 booklet entitled “God’s Festivals and Holy Days,” Herbert Armstrong attempted to “prove” that the count to Pentecost should begin from the weekly Sabbath during the days of Unleavened Bread. A subsequent edition published in 1986 (the year of his death) used the same language. Prior to that time, he taught the count should begin from *Monday*, the day following the day after the weekly Sabbath!

In his booklet, Armstrong quoted from the Mishnah, saying, “The Boethusians say: ‘The cutting of the sheaf does not take place at the end of the day of the feast [Passover day, Abib 15] but only at the end of the next regular Sabbath” (Menahoth 10,3).

But wait a minute! Who were the Boethusians? Is the Mishnah citing them as an authority we should follow? Not at all! Let’s read this in its actual context! Talking about the waving of the Omer, the passage says:

“How was it made ready? The messengers of the court used to go out on the eve of the Festival-day [just after sunset, following the Passover celebration on the First Day of Unleavened Bread] and tie the corn in bunches while it was yet unreaped to make it easier to reap; and the town nearby all assembled there together that it might be reaped with much 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?’ and they answered, ‘Yea!’ On the Sabbath [if this was on a weekly 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!’ *Wherefor was all this? Because of the Boethusians who used to say: The Omer may not be reaped at the close of a Festival day.*”

In other words, the Boethusians, who were a family of Sadducees, taught that the Omer should be reaped after the weekly Sabbath, not the day after the Passover Sabbath, which was the Festival-day of the First Day of Unleavened Bread! They were considered as heretics! The Mishnah was certainly *not endorsing their point of view!* Rather, in this passage the Mishnah explains why the Jews went to these elaborate steps to show the people that the Omer should be reaped according to the teaching of the Pharisees. Says a footnote in my copy of the Mishnah regarding the “Boethusians,” it declares, “In rabbinical terminology synonymous with Sadducees.”

Says Alfred Edersheim in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, on this matter:

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

Why Herbert Armstrong lifted a short passage out of the Mishnah, which referred to the doctrine of Boethusian heretics, and quoted it *as if* the Mishnah itself was endorsing the teaching, is a question he will have to answer for in the resurrection when

he will have to appear before the Messiah to be judged. Many thousands have looked to him as their teacher and spiritual leader and followed him, trusting him to get it right. But he failed to do so.

In his booklet, Herbert Armstrong, using the Boethusians as his authority, goes on to say: “Starting then to count from the offering of the wave sheaf, with that Sunday as day number one, we will always come out on another Sunday – but not on the same day of the month. It is something that must be counted each and every year. Quoting again from the Mishnah, and speaking about the traditional practice that had been followed in Jerusalem before the Pharisees took complete control, [The Boethusians say:] Pentecost always falls on the day after the Sabbath” (Chagigah, 2,4).”

Is that right?

Once again, let’s explore this section of the Mishnah, and prove this matter for ourselves – lest we be misled on a very important point of Biblical truth and obedience to the laws of God! The Mishnah actually says:

“If the Feast of Pentecost fell on the eve of a Sabbath, the School of Shammai say: ‘the day for slaughtering’ is after the Sabbath. And the School of Hillel say: It needs no other day for slaughtering. But they agree that if [the Feast] fell on a Sabbath, then the day of slaughtering is after the Sabbath. The High Priest may not put on his high-priestly vestments, and mourning and fasting are permitted, *To lend NO SUPPORT TO THOSE THAT SAY, ‘PENTECOST FALLS ON THE DAY AFTER THE SABBATH’*” (Mishnah, Chagigah 2:4).

Again, I must wonder why Herbert Armstrong took this passage out of the Mishnah and quoted it totally out of context! Such carelessness is so dangerous and leads to many serious, egregious mistakes and false conclusions!

I suggest that those who believe the teachings of Herbert Armstrong, particularly on his doctrine regarding the counting of Pentecost, ought to reconsider the evidence with an open, objective mind. Whom do you trust? God, and His plain word? Or a mere man, who apparently was either very confused, or too hasty, or careless in his research – too ready to jump to conclusions and then overly authoritative while lacking in true, diligent and honest scholarship!

“Touch Me Not”

Many believe that a Sunday Pentecost and Sunday waving of the wave sheaf offering are supported by Jesus’ statement to Mary Magdalene, after His resurrection, when He said to her, “Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father” (John 20:17). They claim that Jesus was the “wave sheaf” offering, and He had not yet been accepted by the Father, and therefore this supports the Sunday wave sheaf theory.

But wait a minute or two or three! What was really going on here? The New

King James Version has this verse: “Do not *CLING* to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father.”

The *Phillips Translation* has Jesus saying, “No! do not *hold* me now.” According to Moffatt, “Jesus said, Cease *CLINGING* to me.” “Do not hold on to me,” says the *Good News Bible*. Obviously, there was more involved here than mere “touching.” The *Amplified Bible* says, “Do not *CLING* to me [do not hold me].”

The Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Commentary points out, “Not knowing the change which had passed upon Him, she hastens to express by her actions what words failed to clothe: but she is checked. . . Old familiarities must now give place to new and more awful, yet sweeter approaches; but for these the time has not come yet. This seems the spirit, at least, of these mysterious words, on which much difference of opinion has obtained, and not much that is satisfactory been said.”

Adam Clarke's Commentary explains: “Verse 17. Touch me not. Cling not to me. *Apramai* has this sense in Job 31:7, where the Septuagint use it for the Hebrew *dabak*, which signifies to *CLEAVE, CLING, STICK, OR BE GLUED TO*. From Matthew 28:9, it appears that some of the women held him by the feet and worshipped him. This probably Mary did; and our Lord seems to have spoken to her to this effect: ‘Spend no longer time with me now: I am not going immediately to heaven -- you will have several opportunities of seeing me again: but go and tell my disciples, that I am, by and by, to ascend to my Father and God, who is your Father and God also. Therefore, let them take courage.’”

The Greek word for “touch” in this passage is *haptomai*, and literally means “to cling, or attach oneself to.” Says *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, the definition is “to fasten to, make adhere to, spec. to fasten fire to a thing, to kindle, set on fire.” Thayer says of the passage in John 20:17, the meaning is, “Do not handle me to see if I am still clothed with a body; there is no need of such an examination.”

Jesus did not want to be hugged, groped, or clung to, in this manner. It was enough! He had things to do, work to perform, and could not be delayed. So He said to her, “But go to My brethren, and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God” (John 20:17, last part).

The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains: “In reply to her action, Jesus said, ‘Do not hold me.’ He was not refusing to be touched, but was making it clear that she did not need to detain Him, for He had not yet ascended to the Father. He planned to remain with the disciples for a little while [forty days!], she need not fear that He would vanish immediately. Ultimately He would return to God, and He urged her to tell the disciples that He would do so.”

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words tells us about this word “touch”:

“1. *hapto* (681), primarily ‘to fasten to,’ hence of fire, ‘to kindle’ . . . ‘to cling to, lay hold of,’ John 20:17; here the Lord’s prohibition as to clinging to Him was indicative of the fact that communication with Him would, after His ascension, be by faith, through the Spirit” (p.638).

The True Ascension of Christ

Did Jesus “ascend” to God the Father in heaven, THAT VERY DAY, SECRETLY, and then RETURN? There is no evidence anywhere in the Bible that such is the case. Rather, Luke informs us, “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, UNTIL THE DAY IN WHICH HE WAS TAKEN UP, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being SEEN BY THEM during FORTY DAYS and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And, being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me” (Acts 1:1-4).

Luke continues, “And when He had spoken these things, while they watched, HE WAS TAKEN UP, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven AS HE WENT UP, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, WILL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER as you SAW HIM GO INTO HEAVEN”” (Acts 1:9-11, NKJV).

This was the ascension of Jesus into heaven! From the point of His resurrection early Sunday morning till forty days later, He had NOT ascended to heaven and returned. Rather, He stayed on earth, and continued to show Himself alive from the dead, for a period of FORTY DAYS, with numerous “infallible proofs.” THEN He ascended into heaven, in the sight of all His disciples! There was nothing secretive about it.

Therefore, the apostle Paul could write with great plainness of speech, “So Christ was ONCE OFFERED to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall HE APPEAR THE SECOND TIME without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). The next coming of Christ will be HIS SECOND COMING -- not His “third” coming, which it would be if He had gone to Heaven and returned to earth that “Sunday morning”!

Jesus was OFFERED ONCE, not on the Sunday morning following His resurrection, but when He “Himself BORE OUR SINS in His own body on the tree” (I Pet.2:24), New King James Version). While on the cross, He was “offered.” His sacrifice for our sins was accepted by God the Father *when it was completed*. Not three days later, after His resurrection when He supposedly zipped up to heaven for a brief encounter with the Father.

The “wave sheaf” offering had nothing directly to do with Christ’s sacrifice. It

was accepted immediately, when He died on the stake. Rather, the wave sheaf offering, was symbolical of the entire barley harvest, sanctifying the whole of the harvest to follow. It was not a “first fruit” – singular. It consisted, as Edersheim points out, of MANY grains of barley – not just one!

Says Edersheim on this point: “Though one ephah, or ten omers, of barley was cut down, only one omer of flour, or about 5.1 pints of our measure, was offered in the Temple on the second Paschal, or 16th day of Nisan” (*The Temple*, p. 205). Edersheim goes on, “The ears were brought into the Court of the Temple, and thrashed out with canes or stalks, so as not to injure the corn; then ‘parched’ on a pan perforated with holes, so that each grain might be touched by the fire, and finally exposed to the wind. The corn thus prepared was ground in a barley-mill, which left the hulls whole. According to some, the flour was always successfully passed through thirteen sieves, each closer than the other” (p.204-205).

What does this represent? The omer was the “FIRSTFRUITS” of the harvest! It represents TRUE BELIEVERS in Christ – TRUE CHRISTIANS who follow Him – the “firstfruits” of God’s spiritual harvest! We are “a kind of firstfruits,” James writes (James 1:18). As Paul wrote, we are those who “have the firstfruits of the Spirit” (Rom.8:23). I Corinthians 15:23 does not say, in the original Greek, that Christ is the “firstfruits,” but rather, “firstfruit” – singular!

John, in the book of Revelation, clearly explains who the “firstfruits” are. He says, “Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads. . . . These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were REDEEMED from among men, *BEING FIRSTFRUITS to God and to the Lamb*” (Rev.14:1-4).

As Christians, we are undergoing our “test” and qualifying period for “salvation” NOW! We are undergoing trials and tests, and being prepared to be the TRUE “FIRSTFRUITS” of God’s harvest! We are being “parched,” touched by the fire of testing and tribulation, we are being winnowed, sifted, corrected by being “thrashed” on occasion, yet not so as to be injured spiritually, but for our own good; we are also being exposed to the “wind” of false teachings, heresies, and doctrines, that we might be proved to be faithful to the end (Eph.4:14). Read my article entitled, “The Amazing Truth about the Wave Sheaf Offering!”

Even as ten Omers are reaped from the harvest, but only ONE Omer (5.1 pints of grain) is used, even so, Jesus Christ tells us, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt.22:14).

The End of the Matter

When all is said and done, it becomes perfectly clear that Pentecost should be observed fifty days after the First day of Unleavened Bread. It is directly tied to the Passover. The count begins the second day of the Passover festival. The disciples of

Christ ate of the new grain harvest on the Sabbath during Unleavened Bread because it was perfectly all right to do so as the Omer offering sanctifying the new crop had already been waved before the Lord and accepted.

On this subject of counting Pentecost, Herbert Armstrong seemed to have a blind spot. But in general, he taught that we should all “prove all things,” and have an “open mind” to new truth. He declared in an article in the *Good News* magazine, “We are all human. We are all fallible. I have been wrong. I have made mistakes. The same is true of all those God is using in HIS WORK.” He goes on,

“God says, ‘PROVE all things.’ That means *you* are fallible. This means all the ‘great’ men are fallible! ALL are human. ALL can be wrong – and nearly all are. The *whole world* is DECEIVED (Rev.12:9). . . .

“The very recognition of that fact is the *beginning of* right knowledge. We do recognize it – that we ourselves could be wrong. That is the *first step* toward coming out of the fog of error and deception, starting toward truth.”

Wouldn’t it have been wonderful if he had applied this principle to his study of Pentecost? Herbert Armstrong went on,

“The second step, if you would know TRUTH, is to be ready to admit being deceived or in error, and to reject it and accept truth new to me – when proved even though unpopular . . . To find and live the TRUTH requires a HUMBLED mind”

He added candidly, “I had to be willing, *continuously*, to confess being wrong, and to embrace truths constantly NEW to me” (January 1985, *Good News*).

In another article, Herbert Armstrong wrote 39 years ago in the December 1976 *Good News* magazine, another salient truth. He declared, “Wouldn’t it be all right to compromise, ‘just a little,’ on some ‘unimportant minor point’”? He continued,

“Nevertheless, if we begin to compromise with God’s TRUTH, even in the smallest, slightest manner, we have allowed Satan to get a foot into the door of the Church, and soon he will push open the door (he is stronger than we) AND TAKE OVER THE WHOLE CHURCH.”

Herbert Armstrong added,

“A little leaven leavens the WHOLE LUMP! I have been charged with the commission of KEEPING GOD’S WORD. Keeping it inviolate – NO COMPROMISE! I have never

compromised with God's TRUTH – regardless of the cost or the circumstances. *I never shall!*”

Whether he lived up to these principles is for God to judge. But his errors in counting Pentecost are no excuse for us, today. God has now revealed His truth in spades – with incontrovertible evidence.

What will you do about it? Will YOU compromise, even a “little bit,” with the truth of Almighty God? A little leaven – SIN – soon leavens the whole lump of dough.

Herbert Armstrong said, adamantly, when he saw new truth or correction, from God:

“I will CHANGE whenever proved wrong. I will accept NEW TRUTH as often as PROVED to be new truth to me or to the Church.

“But I will not compromise with the truth! I never have! I won't compromise – not even ‘just a little.’”

Herbert Armstrong asked the question, many years ago –

“[Am I] willing to admit being deceived or in error, and to reject it and accept truth new to me – when proved even though unpopular – even though it cuts me off from my family, friends, associates or club members – even though everything in my selfish and vain nature rebels against it? Am I willing to ACT *ON IT* – *OBEY the truth* no matter what the cost?”

What about YOU?

The apostle Paul told the Athenians, in Greece, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but *now* commands all men everywhere to *repent*” – to stop sinning and to confess the truth! (Acts 17:30).

Will you “CHANGE WHEN PROVED WRONG”? Will you ACCEPT NEW PROVEN TRUTH, even if others refuse to agree with it? Will you boldly go counter to the opinions of others, including old friends, ministers, and brethren who are still unwilling to change and have been blinded to the truth and continue to dwell in deception?

God really wants to know the answer! “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (II Chron.16:9).