

4-27-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – Passover – fifth day
Torah: Exod 33:12 – 34:26
Haftarah: Ezek 37:1-14
Recommended Brit Hadashah: Luke 23:50-24:6

Under the Law – Part 8 – First Fruits

Central question of this message: Will this important festival be resurrected in the normative synagogue, and normative church?

Today there is no normal Torah reading in the standard sequence, that is because of the way the lunar calendar (which governs the festivals of Leviticus 23) interacts with the weekly calendar established upon the seven-day cycle. Today we are on the fourth day following Passover, if you follow the current rendering of the Orthodox Jewish calendar. If you follow the way I believe G-d ordained the calendar, we are in the fourth day of Unleavened Bread, and tomorrow is the fifth day, a Sunday, Yom Habikkurim. First Fruits.

Today's Torah portion is read in synagogues on this day of unleavened bread, as the current Jewish calendar is rendered. It is found at Ex 33:12 - 34:26.

Ex 33:12

12 Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.'

אָמַר	אַתָּה	רְאֵה	יְהוָה	אֶל-	מֹשֶׁה	וַיֹּאמֶר	12
sayest	thou	See,	the Lord,	unto	Moses	And said	
<u>559</u>	<u>859</u>	<u>7200</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>4872</u>	<u>559</u>	
לֹא	וְאַתָּה	הַזֶּה	הָעָם	אֶת-	הָעֵל	אֵלַי	
not	and thou	this	people:		Bring up	unto me,	
<u>3808</u>	<u>859</u>	<u>2088</u>	<u>5971</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>5927</u>	<u>413</u>	
וְאַתָּה	עִמִּי	תִּשְׁלַח	אֶת אֲשֶׁר-	הוֹדַעְתָּנִי			
Yet thou	with me.	thou wilt send	whom	hast let me know			
<u>859</u>	<u>5973</u>	<u>7971</u>	<u>834</u> <u>853</u>	<u>3045</u>			
חֵן	מֵצָאתָ	וְגַם-	בְּשֵׁם	יָדַעְתִּיךָ	אָמַרְתָּ		
grace	thou hast found	and also	by name,	I know thee	hast said,		
<u>2580</u>	<u>4672</u>	<u>1571</u>	<u>8034</u>	<u>3045</u>	<u>559</u>		
					בְּעֵינַי:		
					in my sight.		
					<u>5869</u>		

This particular passage is remarkable because it is where Moses asked G-d to show him “Your glory.” It is this passage where Moses

is placed within the “cleft of the rock”, as it is normally rendered in English bibles.

I have already taught how this phrase is poorly rendered in English, and leads to an unfortunate theological conclusion.

הַצֹּר	בְּקֶרֶת
the rock,	in a clift of
<u>6697</u>	<u>5366</u>

In reality, the *nikrat hatzur*, was not a natural break in a natural rock which just happened to be in the area. It was an intentionally-created excavation within “The Rock”, which was Yeshua. In the interest of time, I will not repeat that teaching today.

I wish to continue in our series Under the Law, where I deal with issues that seem to trouble the body of faith, or which are subject to considerable misunderstanding or misapplication. Today I wish to discuss the fact that the normative church does not recognize, nor celebrate, the biblical festival of Yom ha Bikkurim, or First Fruits.

Let me be quick to point out that the normative synagogue of today fares no better. It also has abandoned the festival of Yom ha Bikkurim. You will search in vain for any liturgy in orthodoxy to celebrate this time, nor will you find it listed on the festival

calendars. I can explain how this happened in the synagogue, but first we need to look at the commandment.

Lev 23:9-11

9 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 'And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted; **on the day after the sabbath** the priest shall wave it.

Lev 23:15-18

15 'You shall also count for yourselves **from the day after the sabbath**, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 'You shall count fifty days to the day after **the seventh sabbath**; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. 17 'You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they

shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits
to the Lord.

Because we are commanded to count, our people have a counting calendar to use as a convenient tool to count the omer. In our congregation we have 50 individual stalks of dried wheat which we transfer from one tall glass vase to another. Each day that goes by one vase is emptied and the other becomes more full. On the actual day of Shavuot (Pentecost), then the last stalk is moved and the source vase is empty as the other vase becomes full.

The counting of the omer is to begin on “the day after the Sabbath.” That seems clear enough. But maybe it’s not. Because the weekly Sabbath is one of the Sabbaths of the week of Unleavened Bread, and because Passover is also considered to be a Sabbath. Which will we use as “the Sabbath” to begin the counting?

Let’s look at the Torah passage immediately preceding the one for the Passover, which talks about the weekly Sabbath.

Lev 23:1-3

23 The Lord spoke again to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'The Lord's appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations — My appointed times are these: 3 'For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings.

We see that the L-rd is listing now His holy convocations, as His “appointed times.”¹ And the first of these is the weekly Sabbath. I think that it was the first one on the list because G-d wanted it to have a level of prominence. And He does so with a phrase of introduction, which is important for us to consider.

Lev 23:4-8

4 'These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. 5 'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's

¹ Some have popularized the phrases “Jewish Sabbath” and “Jewish festivals” to describe these appointed times. But they are not truly only “Jewish.” By the word of His own mouth, He declared these to be His. So, if one associates these important holy appointments with the Jewish people only, it is first of all a tacit admission that others don’t observe them, and also a high compliment to the Jews who have kept them.

Passover. 6 'Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. 8 'But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.'"

I think the separation found in verse 4 between the weekly Sabbath and the festivals of the year is important, because it signifies a special status for the weekly Sabbath that the other festivals lack.

The Passover meal is sacrificed around noon, and prepared to be eaten as the sun sets on the 14th day of Nisan. So, the “day of preparation” is the same day as the Passover meal is eaten – under a full moon. ²

Then the next night begins what is called “Unleavened Bread.” Today, the orthodox have folded the seven days of Unleavened

² Some Christian teachers have insisted that Yeshua did not conduct what they call “the Last Supper” on Passover. This position is inconsistent with Scripture, since it is clear that Yeshua and His followers were celebrating the Passover in that upper room. These teachers have seized on the description of the day as the “day of preparation” but don’t have sufficient understanding to know that the Passover meal begins just at the end of that day, and continues into the night, on Nisan 15.

Bread into Passover, so that Passover plus six more days then constitutes the entire festival of Unleavened Bread.

So, this year, Passover is on the 14th of Nisan (last Monday evening/night in the Gregorian calendar), and Unleavened Bread begins even during the Passover meal as it continued into the 15th of Nisan (last Tuesday in the Gregorian calendar). Then the days of unleavened bread continue until sunset on the 21st of Nisan (next Monday in the Gregorian calendar).

I will not assume the duty of being the “chametz³ police” for our congregation, and I leave it up to you to follow the Spirit’s guidance for your life as to what days you observe this festival, and precisely how you choose to define “chametz” during this time.

Recall that the Passover meal is begun during the early evening of the 14th and continues into the 15th. So, as the sun sets, and the 15th begins, we are already eating unleavened bread for Passover. Our celebration of Passover on the 14th flows seamlessly into the

³ “Chametz” is that which is leavened. There are a number of differing opinions regarding what is, and what is not, chametz. Although the core beliefs across Judaism are consistent on what is chametz, the edges of the definition have become a bit fuzzy due to the laudable efforts of people to be certain to avoid chametz during these days.

celebration of Unleavened Bread which begins on the 15th (which begins as the light of the 14th is gone).

Regardless, since there is a separate instruction to celebrate Unleavened Bread as a distinct appointed time, it should also be a day of celebration.⁴

During the time of Yeshua's walk among us as a man, there were a number of disputes regarding how the biblical calendar was to be rendered and enforced. The Parushim⁵ had one opinion which they enforced among their followers. The Tzadikim⁶ had a different rendering which they enforced among their followers. And the Essenes, it seems, grew weary of all the calendar-fights, and they moved into the desert to establish their own halacha⁷, and just be left alone by the other sects.

What we can see from Torah is that “the day after the Sabbath” is the important trigger for the counting of the omer. And if we get the first date right, then we will get the last date right, and First Fruits will be observed on the correct day.

⁴ In our congregation we conduct a second Seder (Passover celebration) on the evening of the first day of Unleavened Bread.

⁵ The Parushim are more often called Pharisees today. A parush is a “separated one,” signifying sanctification.

⁶ The Tzadikim are more often called Sadducees today. A Tzadik is a “holy one,” signifying a life of exemplary observance of Torah.

⁷ “Halacha” means “manner of walking” which is an idiom meaning how those in a particular group are choosing to walk-out the instructions of G-d in their lives.

The Parushim began the counting the omer the evening of the “second night of Passover” which this year was last Tuesday night. They do so because they considered the Passover a Sabbath, and so the counting begins the next day.

The Tzadikim began counting the omer the evening of the weekly Sabbath, after dark, which then made the day Sunday in G-d’s way of reckoning days.

This dispute continued unabated until after the destruction of the Second Temple, and the Jewish leadership was trying to decide how to go forward. They met at a city called Yavneh, near the coast of the Mediterranean, north of Ashdod.

Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai convened a council in the city of Yavneh. He established a yeshiva,⁸ and reconstituted the Sanhedrin. All sects of Judaism, including the Tzadikim, Herodians, Hellenists, Zealots, and even the Messianics, were declared to be banned.

⁸ A school of Torah study, the rough equivalent to what is called a “seminary” in Christian denominations.

The reconstituted Sanhedrin (composed entirely of the followers of Hillel) considered the long-standing disputes of how to walk-out Torah between the schools of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Not surprisingly, the final rulings of the Sanhedrin were nearly uniform in approving the manners of walking-out Torah as established by the “House of Hillel.” Those rulings then not only settled the disputes, but re-wrote Jewish law on those topics.

They also made several modifications to the prayer liturgies. One of which was to add a 19th benediction which condemned all other sects (including specifically the Messianics).

And since the rulers of the Jews at that time were composed of Parushim, they decided that their way of counting the omer would be forever more the correct way. And that ruling has persisted to this day.

And so now, with this background information, we should compare the two dominant ideas regarding when First Fruits is to be celebrated. Is the Parushim’s method of counting the omer correct? Or is the Tzadikim’s method of counting the omer more Scriptural?

I do not make this inquiry as a way to condemn the Parushim for their actions. But because I strongly believe that when G-d's commands differ from the traditions of our faith – even the longest-standing traditions which have now escaped any further questioning – the traditions must yield to G-d and His word.

So, this matter can be easily resolved by the answer to one question only, “Which Sabbath is the one which kicks-off the counting of the omer?” It is either Passover, or the weekly Sabbath.

Let's review the instructions for counting the days to the festival of First Fruits.

Lev 23:9-12

9 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 'And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted; **on the day after the sabbath** the priest shall wave it.

Let's see how the rendering of the Parushim fits with Scripture:

Passover is a Sabbath, so the next day could be the “day after the Sabbath.” But if so, why didn't G-d simply say “the next day” as He does in a number of other locations. I will not list them, but I find 10 instances in Torah where that phrase is used to describe the next day.

Further, it seems far more common in Torah that when the phrase “the Sabbath” is used, it refers exclusively to the weekly Sabbath – Saturday. Nobody seemed confused regarding “which Sabbath?”

But there is another, much larger problem, with the Parush method of counting, and it is found in the instructions for the determination of the day as presented in Scripture.

We know that the waving of the offering is to be done on the “day after the Sabbath.” And we know that Passover always occurs on the 14th of Nisan – governed by the phase of the moon, and not by a certain day of the week on the calendar. Passover can fall on *any* day of the week. Consequently, the next day also can fall on *any*

day of the week. Knowing that, we must still count the omer for 49 days consistent with the Scripture, which says:

So, let's apply this passage, using the Parushim's reckoning of the calendar, to see if it works.

Passover began on Monday night April 22. If the "day following the Sabbath" is Tuesday night April 23, then we need to go seven complete sabbaths after that date.

Since Tuesday is not a Sabbath, it seems we must still find seven following Sabbaths in our counting. Here they are: April 27; May 4, 11, 18, 25; June 1, and 8. June 8th is the 7th Sabbath. So, the day "after the seventh Sabbath" should be the fiftieth day, just as the Scripture requires, right?

The day following June 8 is June 9. June 9 is not 50 days after Tuesday, April 23. It's 48 days. June 12th is 50 days. The only way June 12 works for Shavuot is if we ignore the counting beginning on Tuesday. And these numbers would change in every year when Passover falls on yet another different day of the week.

Let's look at the reckoning of the Tzadikim.

They say that “the Sabbath” is the weekly Sabbath. So, we can do some calculations using this year’s calendar to see how that works out.

Passover began on Monday night April 22. The next weekly Sabbath is today, April 27. They would begin counting the omer tonight after sunset (as Sunday begins). Seven complete Sabbaths from today would take us to June 15. And “fifty days to the day” after that seventh Sabbath would be Sunday June 16.

With this counting, there will *always* be exactly 50 days between First Fruits (day after the Sabbath – Sunday) and another Sunday 50 days later.

There is another way we can have a degree of certainty as to which counting method is correct. And that is by seeing what Yeshua did.

Each important kingdom event has so far fallen on a festival date as set out in Leviticus 23.

After Passover – Yeshua killed

On Unleavened Bread – Yeshua buried

On First Fruits (three days and three nights later) – resurrection.

On Shavuot (40 days after resurrection) – a miracle of the Holy Spirit

Let's look at the Scriptural account of the resurrection, since that will show us clearly when He rose. Although each of the gospel accounts has the same description of the day of the week, I like the one related by Luke best, for my purposes here because it makes it clear that it was on a Sunday, when the women went to the tomb.

Luke 23:50-24:6

50 And behold, a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man 51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; 52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. 54 And it was the preparation day, **and the Sabbath was about to begin.** 55 Now the women who had come with Him

out of Galilee followed after, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 And they returned and prepared spices and perfumes.

And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 And it happened that while they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling apparel; 5 and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6 "He is not here, but He has risen.

This account makes it clear, that it was at dawn on Sunday, and it was “after the Sabbath.” We know that Yeshua was put into the grave “before the Sabbath” and after the Passover meal.

This timing is in my mind verification by Yeshua's death and resurrection – three days later – that the festival of First Fruits was then (and remains now) on a Sunday. The ruling of the Tzadikim was right on this issue.

How did Yeshua celebrate First Fruits? He waved before the Father some of His first fruits, and showed that there would be a greater harvest yet to come, as the prophets have said.⁹

Matt 27:52-54

52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep¹⁰ were raised; 53 and **coming out of the tombs after His resurrection** they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

Sadly, there is no room in the theology of today's church nor of the traditional synagogue of today, for First Fruits.

And it is clear that First Fruits is worthy of being remembered and celebrated because upon that day our Savior rose, and demonstrated

⁹ See Isaiah 66:18-20

¹⁰ This is a Hebrew idiom for "died."

to us that His victory over sin and over the grave was real – and not merely an unrealized hope.

It is my prayer that the faith of the Apostles be likewise resurrected among those in the Church as they come to see in these days just how far they have strayed from the intentions of G-d.

As the sun sets today, and the festival of First Fruits begins, we will celebrate the amazing fulfillment of G-d's plan of salvation, as we anxiously anticipate His appearance as our Savior and King.