

The Wave Sheaf (Firstfruits)

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Israel would cut the first sheaf of ripe barley, and the priest would wave it as an offering to the Lord, which marked the start of the barley harvest:

Lev 23:9 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 'He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 'Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the LORD. 13 'Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the LORD for a soothing aroma, with its drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine. 14 'Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.

This ceremony also symbolized the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ to the Father where His sacrifice for our sins was accepted (1Cor 15:20, 23, Heb 9:10-12).

Counting the Omer

Starting with the day of the wave sheaf, Israel had to count 50 days to determine the date of the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot), which marked the start of the wheat harvest:

Lev 23:15 '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.

The Jews have two different methods for counting the omer. The Sadducean method starts counting on the day after the weekly Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread; thus, Pentecost always falls on the first day of the week. The Pharisaic method starts counting on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 16); thus Pentecost always falls on Sivan 6.

The Bible clearly supports the Sadducean method for determining Pentecost. First, according to Leviticus 23:16, Israel was to count up to the day after the seventh Sabbath (literally, the first day of the week). The Pharisaic method allows Pentecost to fall on almost any day of the week.

Second, the Sadducean method requires counting to determine Pentecost, while the Pharisaic method does not. Since the Pharisees start their count on Nisan 16, Pentecost always falls on Sivan 6; a fixed date on a calendar does not require counting.

Third, the pattern of Pentecost exactly matches the pattern of the Jubilee Year, which occurs every 50 years after the seventh annual agricultural Sabbath (Lev 25:1-12). Although Moses does not explicitly equate these two observances, the similarity is hard to miss.

Fourth, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ matches the Sadducean method, not the Pharisaic method. Jesus clearly predicted that He would die and rise from the grave 72 hours later (Matt 12:39-40). Based on the chronology of the Passion Week, Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday afternoon, buried shortly before sunset, and resurrected at the end of the weekly Sabbath; thus, He ascended to the Father on Sunday morning, at the moment the Sadducees offered the first fruits, and not on Friday morning, according to the Pharisaic method.

The following table helps to illustrate the events of Passion Week. Remember that according to the Bible, a new day begins at sunset (Lev 23:26-32), so the calendar does not follow Roman chronology.

Nisan 14 Passover		Nisan 15 Feast Day		Nisan 16		Nisan 17 Weekly Sabbath	
Night Note 1	Day Note 2	Night 1 Note 3	Day 1 Note 4	Night 2 Note 5	Day 2 Note 6	Night 3 Note 7	Day 3 Note 8

1. On the night of Nisan 14, Jesus ate the last supper with his disciples (Luke 22:7-8).
2. During the daylight hours of Nisan 14, Jesus was crucified and buried; this was the preparation day for the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:14, 31, 42).
3. At sunset on Nisan 15, the 72 hour clock starts; this is the first night in the tomb.
4. During the daylight hours of Nisan 15, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pilate and the chief priests sealed the tomb to prevent the disciples from having access to the body until after the third day (Matt 27:62-66). This is the first day in the tomb.
5. The evening of Nisan 16 is the second night in the tomb.
6. During the daylight hours of Nisan 16, when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so they could anoint His body (Mark 16:1), but they could not enter the tomb on this day because it was still being guarded.
7. The evening of Nisan 17 is the third night in the tomb.
8. During the daylight hours of Nisan 17, the women rest on the Sabbath (Luke 23:55-56). This is the third day in the tomb; the resurrection occurred at sunset when the wave sheaf was cut.

When the women came to the tomb on Sunday morning, Jesus had already risen as He said He would (Matt 28:1-6). At this point, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, but He told her not to touch Him because He had not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:11-17). However, later that evening, He appeared to His disciples and insisted that they touch Him to prove to them that He was flesh and bone, not a spirit (Luke 24:36-39).

Thus, Jesus ascended to the Father when the priest offered the wave sheaf according to the Sadducean method, not the Pharisaic method. This is consistent with the fact that God is fulfilling each step of His plan of salvation according to the feast days that He gave to Israel. Christ, our Passover, died exactly when the Passover lambs were slain (1 Cor 5:7-8), and God poured out the Holy Spirit when the day of Pentecost had fully come (Acts 2:1-4). Logically, the wave sheaf fits the pattern of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the first fruits of the resurrection from the dead.