

COUNTING THE OMER Sefiras HaOmer

Speak to the children of Yisra'el, and you shall say to them, 'When you come into the land which I give you, and shall reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest to the priest. And he shall wave the sheaf before YHVH, for your acceptance. On the morrow after the Sabbath the priest waves it. . . . And you do not eat bread or roasted grain or fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your Elohim – a law forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. And from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, you shall count for yourselves: seven completed Sabbaths. Until the morrow after the seventh Sabbath you count fifty days, then you shall bring a new grain offering to YHVH. . . . And on this same day you shall proclaim a set-apart gathering for yourselves, you do no servile work on it – a law forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.'

Lev. 23: 10-16, 21 The Scriptures

The 50-day period between Passover and Shavuot is known as the "days of counting the omer." This time represents when Israel journeyed from the Reed Sea to Mt. Sinai, from the time of salvation/ baptism to receiving of the Torah. Their journey was a type of a future Sefiras HaOmer, the counting of the omer.

Understanding the reasons for counting these fifty days and what we are to accomplish during them will lead to a closer and more profound relationship with our Creator. Each of these days has special significance for believers today as they represent our moving from the slavery of our former lives to experiencing the liberty in Torah through the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, a time from our baptism to the time of our full acceptance of Torah.

These first forty days also represent the time that Yahshua spent with His disciples from the time of His resurrection until he was taken up into heaven. As Yahshua spent forty days with his disciples teaching them the Torah, so this should also be a time of spiritual improvement through the study of Torah with the greatest Torah teacher of all, Yahshua.

This 50-day period also marks the passage of time from the beginning of the barley harvest to the onset of the wheat harvest and thus ties in with the "wave sheaf offering" in Leviticus 23:10, 11.

The omer is part of the weights and measures of Scripture. The Hebrew word for sheaf is "omer." It is defined as a measure of "dry things," consisting of a 10th part of an ephah (Ex. 16:36). An omer (about 2 quarts) was the amount of flour required to make daily bread. Thus, an omer is a measure of barley grain, specifically, one-tenth of an ephah. It was the measure used for the gathering of manna (Ex. 16:36). The counting of the omer illustrates the great work of the bread from heaven, the manna, and specifically Yahshua as the Bread of Life.

Passover to Shavuot: **Engagement or Betrothal Time**

Passover and Shavuot are tied together by a common thread known as Sefiras HaOmer, the counting of the omer. Shavuot (also known as Pentecost, Feast of Weeks) is the conclusion of the Passover season and does not stand alone.

Think of these festivals as the events representing a marriage ceremony (i. e. betrothal, engagement ring, actual wedding).

In the context of a marriage ceremony, Passover represents the acceptance by the bride (the 12 tribes of Israel) with the betrothal cup presented by her prospective Husband. (When Yahweh is referred to as Israel's faithful husband in the Old Testament Tanakh, we are also to understand that it is also Messiah who is referred to as the Husband. He is One.) By accepting the blood of the lamb, and placing it on the door post of their homes, Israel accepted the ketuvah, the marriage contract or covenant, the Torah. Then at Mt. Sinai the actual wedding took place, and Israel said, "I do" (Ex. 19:8). The betrothal present was the giving of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) given on Shavuot. The engagement ring was the "sign" or symbol of the Sabbath. As we celebrate this season, we are actually "renewing our marriage vows."

Israel actually acted out (as a "type" for our instruction) this difficult 50-day period from the time of its baptism at the crossing of the Reed Sea until its acceptance of the Torah fifty days later at Mt. Sinai on Shavuot. This also represents the period in each believer's life from the time of salvation/baptism to our full acceptance of the Torah (redemption to completion). The Ruach HaKodesh writes the Torah on our hearts.

The people prepared themselves for the receiving of the Torah by physical and spiritual cleansings. They were to wash their clothes and refrain from sexual relations for three days. This washing was a mikvah, also known as an immersion or baptism. It is interesting that even today a Jewish bride always immerses in a mikvah before her wedding. However, true spiritual cleansing comes only through the cleansing blood of Yahshua. We can also prepare ourselves physically as Scripture gives us this example to follow.

This period of time should also be a very important time of preparation in the life of every true believer and worshipper of Yahweh. This is a time of spiritual cleansing in anticipation of receiving the Torah on Shavuot. Intense spiritual longing and introspection should mark this period.

Therefore, the time between Passover and Shavuot represents the engagement or betrothal time between Israel and Yahweh. It was a time when Israel prepared herself in a very special way to receive the Torah and the living Torah, the bridegroom. As a bride counts the days before her wedding, so are

we to "count the omer" to the day of Shavuot (a type of marriage of the Lamb). Each day should be filled with some activity that points towards Yahshua. During this journey, preparation is necessary in order for our acceptance of the Torah and the receiving of our engagement present, the Ruach HaKodesh. It is both an annual review of past events, and a rehearsal of the very fullness which is yet to come.

The Wave Offering

In order for the wave sheaf offering to take place and thus usher in the timing of Passover, the barley has to be declared ripe, or "abib," meaning "green ears." This has to be visually done and declared in or around Jerusalem. When the barley is abib, only then can the omer be counted and waved. If the barley is not declared "abib," another month is added to the calendar at that time and the next month will be declared the head of the year—Abib (Strong's #24, Nisan is the Babylonian name). Another earlier sign of the barley being "abib" is the blossoming of the almond trees.

The cutting of the sheaf actually took place at the very end of the weekly Sabbath. The offering was not actually barley stalks but about two quarts of barley grain, first thrashed, then parched, ground into coarse meal and sifted through thirteen sieves until very clean, after which 1/10th was taken and given to the priest. The priest proceeded with the omer as any other meal offering. He poured oil and frankincense over the meal, waved it, and then burned a handful on the altar. The priests ate the remainder. As soon as the priest waved this offering, the people were permitted to eat of the new harvest, and the grain harvest could begin.

This ordinance was not carried out in the wilderness but was obeyed after Israel entered the land and actually raised crops for the wave sheaf offering.

When to Count the Omer

There are many debates on how and when to start the counting of the omer. This results in several different methods, all of which set the date for Shavuot at different times. Since the objective of this article is not to debate this timing but to bring awareness of the need to count the omer, the different views will be summarized.

The Sadduces and Pharisees had two different methods of determining the

counting of the omer and the date for Shavuot. The Pharisees interpreted the Sabbath mentioned in Leviticus 23:11 as the High Sabbath that week, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and started counting the omer on the day after or on Abib (Nisan) 16. Thus, rabbinical halacha (tradition) has established a fixed day for the offering of the omer, namely, the second day of Pesach. However, the Sadducees interpreted the Sabbath in verse 23:11 to be the weekly Sabbath during the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In light of these two different calculations, the following two points need to be made:

1. Scripture specifically gives the exact day of the month on which each of Yahweh's feasts is to be celebrated except for one—Shavuot. For example, in Leviticus 23:23 Yom Teruah (Feast of Trumpets) is the 1st day of the 7th month; in 23:26 Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is the 10th day of the 7th month; in 23:33 Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) is the 15th day of 7th month, and 11:36 also specifies the 8th day of Sukkot to also be a holy convocation. However, in 23:11 for Shavuot, it does not give a specific day and month, but just says "on the same day." This is because Shavuot is not on the same day of the month each year because of the unique way of counting the omer, which depends on when the weekly Sabbath occurs during the week of Unleavened Bread. Why count the days if there is already a set day?

2. Delving into the Hebrew word for "Sabbath" in these Scriptures also shows that the weekly Sabbath is the Sabbath intended and not the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread. Strong's word #7676 (Sabbath, root 7673) is always used for the weekly Sabbath, while #7677 (Shabbathown from 7676) is used for the seven festivals. In this case the word used in Lev. 23:11 is 7676, the weekly Sabbath. The #7677, Shabbathown or seven festivals, is correctly used in Lev. 23:23,26,33 for Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

There are yet still others who have different methods of calculation such as the Kairites, a sect of Judaism, and groups such as the Assemblies of Yahweh, the International Assembly of Yahweh, and others.

Calculation of the New Moon

However, still another important factor has to be considered when determining the

correct dates of the feast days and this is the correct calculation of the new moon. As shown in the past Desert Trumpets, it is believed that the new moon commences at the time of "conjunction" of the sun and the moon when the moon is actually "new," or dark of the moon, the "molad." The traditional Hebrew calendar does consider the molad as the time of the new moon, but changes many dates for the convenience of not having two successive days of Sabbaths. Others rely only on the physical sighting of the "crescent" to determine the date for the new month.

Although there are several ways to determine the New Moon (traditional, Karite, Molad), this newsletter will list only the traditional calendar's dates.

1. Traditional (Orthodox) Jewish

New Moon, Nisan 1 Thursday, April 3
Passover, Nisan 14 Wednesday, April 16

However, since we believe Scripture shows the counting to start the day AFTER the weekly sabbath, we depart from the traditional calendar, and:

Start counting the omer Nisan 18,

Sunday, April 20

Counting Seven (7) Sabbaths brings us to:

Shavuot

Sunday, June 8.

How to Count the Omer

The traditional Jewish practice during these days is to count each day in the evening. A blessing may be said as part of the counting ceremony, such as:

Blessed art Thou, Oh Yahweh, our Elohim, King of the universe, who has given us Your commandments and commanded us concerning the counting of the omer.

The Complete Artscroll Siddur on pages 312-318 has many specific prayers and a chart for the actual counting of the omer. As an example, the day and weeks are counted as follows:

Today is one day of the Omer.

Today is two days of the Omer.

Today is seven days, which are one week, of the Omer.

Today is eighteen days, which are two weeks and four days of the Omer.
Etc., etc., etc.

Psalm 67 is read each night after the actual counting since it consists of 7 verses and has a total of 49 words in Hebrew.

A “Counting the Omer” chart is also available to help you in counting. It includes prayers and lists portions of the psalms (especially Psalm 119) to be read each day. This chart also follows the traditional Jewish calendar.

My prayer is that you make the most of these very important days to move forward spiritually in the Torah and in your relationship with our Creator, Yahweh.

Do not let the correct starting date become a burden. The most important thing is that you become aware of the “commandment” to “count the omer” and begin to do it.

Look at the celebration of this season to be a renewal of your marriage vows to Yahweh on Shavuot. Then each day will be special, and you will feel that you have completed a very important journey when you arrive at Day 50, Shuvuot.

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