

Chapter XVI

Counting Shabuath (Pentecost)

As found with the celebration of Phasekh, there existed a great debate among the various Jewish factions, beginning in about the second century B.C.E., with regard to just how and when one was to count to the Khag of Shabuath (Weeks), also called Pentecost. This debate was sparked by the fact that there is no direct statement found in Scriptures telling us exactly on which date one is to keep the Festival of Weeks. Instead, the dating of the festival is dependent upon the timing of the עֶמֶר (*omer*) wave offering, as it relates to the seven days of unleavened bread, the interpretation of key words, and the inferences provided from context and statements made in Scriptures. The result of this method was several varying views and the entire subject became a matter of much controversy. Our next effort, therefore, is to examine important scriptural statements that must be used to determine the original practice of Pentecost and to investigate the approaches used by the various Jewish religious schools.

Four Approaches

The calculations for keeping the Festival of Weeks was yet one more area where those holding to the Aristocratic view sharply opposed those advocating the Hasidic construct. Their dispute centered upon the interpretation applied to Leviticus, 23:11, which commands that the *omer* offering should be waved “on the day after the Sabbath.” The meaning of the word Sabbath as found in this verse became the source of much contention. As a result, post-Biblical Jewish traditions soon varied concerning the day on which the sickle was to be put into the first corn of a year’s harvest. Four different interpretations arose: two with a majority following and two with a minority following.

- Aristocratic (majority) view: the Sabbath referred to is the weekly Sabbath. The *omer* wave offering always occurs on the first day of the week falling just after the festival day of Phasekh.
- Quasi-Aristocratic (minority) view: the Sabbath referred to is the weekly Sabbath. The *omer* wave offering occurs on the first day of the week falling just after the end of the seven days of unleavened bread.
- Hasidic (majority) view: the Sabbath referred to is the high Sabbath festival day of Phasekh, which for the Hasidim is Abib 15. The *omer* wave offering, therefore, always occurs on the 16th

of Abib (Nisan), the day after Phasekh, no matter which day of the week that might be.

- Quasi-Hasidic (minority) view: the Sabbath referred to is the high Sabbath festival occurring on the last day of the seven days of unleavened bread. For these quasi-Hasidic advocates this date is always Abib 21. The *omer* wave offering, therefore, always occurs on Abib 22, no matter which day of the week that might be.

To begin with, we shall quickly dispense with the two minority constructs. These two views were originally advocated by some of the smaller Hasidic groups and a few others strongly influenced by them, such as the Essenes, the Qumran Covenanters, the Ethiopian Falashas Jews, the Mishawayhs, and at least one Syrian group. As we shall demonstrate, they are clearly aberrant and do not reflect the original meaning of the Levitical text.

One minority view is a quasi-Aristocratic system found in use among those at Qumran and in the book of Jubilees. The advocates of this view used the Phasekh system of the Hasidim but, most likely due to their support of the Zadok line of priests, retained some Aristocratic leanings. This Pentecost system always counted the 50 days from the Sunday which follows the seven days of unleavened bread.¹ Like the Aristocratic groups and those that followed them on the Phasekh issue, the advocates of the quasi-Aristocratic Pentecost system understood the instruction found in Leviticus, 23:15, that the *Khag* of Weeks was to be kept on “the day after the Sabbath,” as referring to the weekly Sabbath. Therefore, the *khag* of the 50th day must always fall on the first day of the week.

Nevertheless, the advocates of this view failed in that they did not consider the important evidence from Joshua, 5:10–12, which, as we have already demonstrated in an earlier chapter, clearly allows for the *omer* offering to be waved within the seven days of unleavened bread.² The tenet that it must always be waved after the seven days of unleavened bread, therefore, is manifestly wrong.

A second minority view, the quasi-Hasidic Pentecost system, was used by a Syrian Jewish group and is continued to this day by the Falashas of Ethiopia. It always counts from the day after the last day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread.³ In this interpretation, the Sabbath of Leviticus, 23:11, is not perceived as a weekly Sabbath but, as the Pharisees claimed, as a high Sabbath and festival day. Yet it too fails to consider Joshua, 5:10–12, by also always placing the first day of the seven weeks beyond the seven days of unleavened bread.

¹ The Qumran community had a fixed solar calendar whereby this Sabbath always fell on the 26th of Nisan and the Festival of Weeks always came on Sunday the 15th of Siwan (THP, pp. 41, 235, 247–251; EJ, 14, p. 1319; DSSE, pp. 43f; BCal, pp. 25–28; EEC, pp. 119f, 1b. n. a). Also see Jub., 1:1–4, 6:17–22, 15:1f, 16:13, 44:1–5, where 29 days appears to have been used for the second month, placing the festival on the 16th day of the third month (?).

² See above Chap. X, pp. 165ff. Josh., 5:10–12, notes that the Israelites ate from the new crop on Abib 16, which makes the *omer* wave offering occur on that date, well within the seven days of unleavened bread.

³ THP, p. 255; EEC, pp. 119f, 1b. n. a; BCal, pp. 24f; JE, 5, p. 328.

We are now left with the two majority systems: one advocated by the Aristocratic groups—the Sadducees (and their Boethusian brothers), the Samaritans, and the Karaites—and a second practiced by the Hasidic Pharisees. Once again we find ourselves entangled in the debate between the two leading factions of first century Judaism. J. Van Goudoever summarizes these two majority interpretations, stating:

Around the beginning of our era there were at least two rival systems for the counting of the 50 days; one from the Sunday after Passover to the Sunday 50 days later, and one from 16 Nisan to 6 Sivan [Siwan]. It appears that this was not only a question of difference of counting. It was also a difference in the theological conception of Revelation. According to the Pharisees, the Torah (i.e. the five Books of Moses) was revealed to Moses, and the Rabbis were to explain the Torah. According to the Zadokites every law was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai and other regulations were rejected by them.⁴

Aristocratic Pentecost System

The Sadducees, Boethusians, Samaritans, and the Karaites, all representatives of the Aristocratic view, understood the term “Sabbath” in Leviticus, 23:11, literally, hence, as the weekly Sabbath.⁵ This view was quite opposite that of the Pharisees, who interpreted this “Sabbath” as the “יום טוב” (*yom tob*),” also Aramaic “יֻמָּא טֹבָא” (*yoma toba*),” or “festive day”⁶ of Passover (which for them was the 15th of Abib).⁷ Therefore, in accordance with Joshua, 5:10–12, for those following the Aristocratic view, the *omer* wave offering came on that first day of the week which followed Phasekh.⁸

In addition, the passage in Leviticus, 23:15f, became an important formula in the Aristocratic construct:

And you shall number for yourself from the day after the Sabbath, from the day you bring in the *omer* wave offering, they shall be seven complete Sabbaths, until the day after the seventh Sabbath. You shall number 50 days.

“The day after the seventh Sabbath” can only mean the day after the seventh weekly Sabbath day, for there was no other Sabbath or high Sabbath day

⁴ BCal, pp. 143f.

⁵ E.g., Hag., 2:4.

⁶ The term יֹם (*yom*) means “day” (HEL, p. 105); טוב (*tob*) means, “happy, prosperous . . . valuable . . . goodness . . . wealth . . . prosperity . . . beauty” (HEL, p. 99), “joyous, glad . . . pleasing, desirable” and “(morally) good” (CHAL, p. 122). Therefore, יֹם טוֹב (*yom tob*), being a morally good day, came to be applied to a “feast-day” (CHAL, p. 122), cf., 1 Sam., 25:8. This expression was used by the Talmudists and in the Aramaic writings for a joyous and morally good day, i.e., for the high Sabbaths.

⁷ See our discussion below pp. 250ff.

⁸ THP, pp. 248f; Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 506, n. 1; NBD, p. 179.

occurring at this time. This detail is further supported by the expression, “they shall be seven complete Sabbaths.” The words “complete Sabbath” is a reference to a complete week ending with a Sabbath day. Seven complete Sabbaths, in turn, equal 49 days. The next day after the seventh weekly Sabbath is the 50th day. Therefore, for the advocates of the Aristocratic Pentecost view, the Festival of Weeks always fell on the first day of the week, on the 50th day from the presentation of the *omer* wave offering.⁹

A demonstration of the Aristocratic view was supplied by their antagonists, the Pharisees, in the Mishnah. In the section entitled the Hagigah, while discussing the issue of Pentecost and the slaughtering of animals on the Sabbath, this text reports:

The High Priest may not put on his high-priestly vestments, and mourning and fasting are permitted, to lend no support to the words of them (the Sadducees) that say, “The *עצרת* (Atsarth; Closing Assembly) falls on the day after the Sabbath.”¹⁰

The Babylonian Talmud similarly states:

For the Boethusians held that the Closing Assembly must always be on the day after the Sabbath.¹¹

These statements demonstrate the belief of the Sadducees that the Festival of Weeks, contrary to the practice of the Pharisees, always came on the day after the weekly Sabbath.¹² The first day of the 50 days, accordingly, must also fall on the day after the weekly Sabbath.

The differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees were also expressed by the Menahoth portion of the Mishnah. While discussing the procedure used by the Pharisees to reap the barley corn for the *omer* wave offering, the author expresses the Pharisaic sensitivity to specific charges made by the Boethusian Sadducees (who were the priests). The passage reads:

How did they make (the *omer*) ready. The messengers of the court used to go out from the *arab* (= late afternoon) of the *יום טוב* (*yom tob*; festive day = Phasekh) and tie the corn in bunches while it was yet unreaped to make it easier to reap; and the towns nearby all assembled there together that it might be reaped with

⁹ EJ, 14, p. 1319; JE, 9, p. 593; Danby, *Mishnah*, pp. 213, n. 12, 506, n. 1; BCal, pp. 12, 18, 19–24; EEC, pp. 119f, 1b. n. a; NBD, p. 179.

¹⁰ Hag., 2:4.

¹¹ B. Men., 65a.

¹² The Karaites, who followed System C—which held the hybrid view combining many of the Aristocratic concepts with those of the Hasidim—argued that the “day after the Sabbath” could include the festive day of the 15th (KAEEL, pp. 215–217). This allowance may well stem from the more ancient Aristocratic view that the 14th was the true high Sabbath of the Phasekh. This earlier concept was then merged with the Pharisaic view that the seven days of unleavened bread extended from the 15th to the 21st of Abib. As a result, the 15th was allowed as a day of the *omer* wave offering among the Karaites though disallowed by the traditions built up by the Pharisees.

much pomp. When it grew dark he called out, Is the sun set? and they answered, Yes! Is the sun set? and they answered, Yes! Is this a sickle? and they answered, Yes! Is this a sickle? and they answered, Yes! Is this a basket? and they answered, Yes! Is this a basket? and they answered, Yes! On the Sabbath (day) he called out, On this Sabbath, and they answered, Yes! On this Sabbath, and they answered, Yes! 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, Yes! Yes! Yes! Wherefore was all this? Because of the Boethusians who used to say: The *omer* may not be reaped at the close of the *יום טוב* (*yom tob*; festive day) (= Phasekh).¹³

This statement is important because it reflects the early Sadducean (Boethusian) position that the *omer* of barley could not be reaped on the festive day of Phasekh. Yet the Pharisees allowed that it could be reaped on the weekly Sabbath day. This point is also indicated by the fact that the *omer* wave offering is mentioned as a separate item after the discussion of the rituals of Phasekh.¹⁴ The Pharisees could not deny this regulation and were careful that the sun had already set on their festive day of Phasekh before they reaped their *omer* of barley. Otherwise the Sadducees would have charged the Pharisees with error regarding their own Hasidic interpretation of which day was the festive day of Phasekh.

The Karaites also followed the Aristocratic system for Pentecost. The Karaite writer Jacob Al-Kirkisani (10th century C.E.) directly tells us from whom they received their practice. He writes:

As for Boethus he was of the opinion that Pentecost can only fall on a Sunday which is also the view of the Ananites and all the Karaites.¹⁵

In the same way, the Samaritans “maintain that the offering of the Sheaf is to be performed on the Sunday within the Passover week.”¹⁶ They also speak of the *khag* of the 50th day as the “Sabbath of the seven Sabbaths.”¹⁷

The Aristocratic interpretation of the seven Sabbaths is also basic to understanding their view. They define the “seven weeks” of Deuteronomy, 16:9, by the “seven complete Sabbaths” of Leviticus, 23:16. The Karaite writer Samuel al-Magribi, for example, writes:

The expression “seven complete Sabbaths” means that each Sabbath is to serve as the concluding day of

¹³ Men., 10:3, cf., 10:1.

¹⁴ Lev., 23:5–8, and Deut., 16:1–8, deal with the Phasekh and its requirements, followed by Lev., 23:9–15, and Deut., 16:9, which relate to the *omer* wave offering and the count of 50 days.

¹⁵ Al-Kirkisani, 1:7; KAEEL, p. 50.

¹⁶ THP, p. 254; STE, 2, p. 20; DJS, 1, p. xxiii.

¹⁷ TSL, p. 285.

the week, by way of distinction from a Sabbath which falls in the middle of a different period of seven days, such a week not being regarded as “complete” since it is not uniform with the sequence of the seven days of Creation. The meaning of “complete” is thus that the week is to conclude with a Sabbath, which conforms with the ordinance, “Seven weeks you shall count for yourself” (Deut., 16:9), each week ending with a Sabbath. This is decisive proof in the hands of the Karaites, seekers of the truth, against the dissidents, who hold different opinions on this subject. The reason Scriptures mentions “Sabbaths” before “days” (Lev., 23:16) is because the Sabbaths are meant to be directly connected with the Sabbath quoted before, namely, the one mentioned in “on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Lev., 23:11).¹⁸

The important features of the Aristocratic view for counting the 50 days of Pentecost are, as a result, well-established. The *omer* wave offering could only take place “after” Phasekh and never on that festival day; it can only take place on the first day of the week (Sunday); and it must follow a weekly Sabbath day that falls during one of the seven days of unleavened bread. Counting seven complete Sabbath weeks from the day of the *omer* wave offering one arrives at the day after the seventh Sabbath. This day is the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost).

Pharisaic Pentecost System

The Pharisees held quite a contrary opinion. They insisted that the statement, “the day after the Sabbath,” as found in Leviticus, 23:11, refers not to the weekly Sabbath but to the high Sabbath day of Phasekh, which is a *יום טוב* (*yom tob*; festive day). Tobias, for example, writes:

“The day after the Sabbath” simply means “the day after the *יום טוב* (*yom tob*; festive day).”¹⁹

Their festival day for Phasekh was Abib 15. The day of the *omer* wave offering, accordingly, was always Abib 16, no matter which day of the week that might be.²⁰ Under this system, the Festival of Weeks came on the 50th day, counted inclusively from the 16th of Abib, regardless of which day of the week it fell on. Evidence for this view is also thought to come from Joshua, 5:10–12, where they define the statement about the day (the 16th) after the Phasekh (which they make to be the 15th), when the Israelites began to eat from the stored grain, to mean, “they ate from the produce of the land of Kanaan in that year.”²¹

¹⁸ Al-Magribi, 12:7–8; KAEEL, p. 217.

¹⁹ Lek. Tob, *Lev.*, 128f; KBFY, p. 277.

²⁰ EJ, 14, p. 1319; JE, 9, p. 593; BCal, pp. 18f; EEC, pp. 119f, 1b. n. a; Danby, *Mishnah*, pp. 213, n. 12, 506, n. 1.

²¹ See the LXX of Josh., 5:10–12. J. Van Goudoever points out that the Pharisees read Josh., 5:11, so that the grain mentioned there is not stored grain but the grain of that year’s crop, i.e.,

The Pharisaic view is demonstrated in several sources. In the Mishnah, as shown above, for instance, it plainly states that the messengers of the court used to go out during the *arab* (= Pharisaic late afternoon) of the festive day (Phasekh) and tie the corn in bunches while it was yet unreaped to make it easier to reap for the *omer*. The barley corn was then cut just after the sun had set and the festive day had ended.²² The Babylonian Talmud states:

Our Rabbis taught: And you shall count unto you—that is, the counting is the duty of every one—from the day after the Sabbath, that is, from the day after the יום טוב (*yom tob*; festive day).²³

The first century C.E. Pharisaic priest named Josephus, as another example, dates the offering of the firstfruits of the barley by stating:

On the second day of unleavened bread, that is to say the 16th, our people partake of the crops which they have reaped and which have not been touched until then.²⁴

Another Pharisaic priest from that century, named Philo, similarly writes:

But within the festival (of Phasekh) there is another ἑορτή (*heorte*; festival) FOLLOWING DIRECTLY AFTER THE FIRST DAY.²⁵

Since the 16th could fall on any day of the week, this meant that the 50th day could also come on any day of the week and not just after a Sabbath day.

What then of the issue of the “seven complete Sabbaths”? The Pharisees held the exact opposite opinion to that of the Aristocrats. The Pharisees defined the “seven complete Sabbaths” of Leviticus, 23:16, by the “seven weeks” of Deuteronomy, 16:9. That is, each of the seven Sabbaths represent a “week” as a period of seven days—not as a scriptural week extending from Sunday to the Sabbath. For them, this Sabbath meant a random period of seven days. Under this interpretation, each of these seven-day periods could begin and end on any day of the scriptural week.

Therefore, one does not really count Sabbaths but days. The rabbis followed the instruction from Leviticus, 23:16, which commands, “you shall number 50 days.” Rabbi Joshua, for example, argued that, from the day of the *omer*, one must “count days and sanctify the עֲצָרָתָהּ (Atsarath; Closing Assembly).”²⁶ Rabbi Jose ben Judah, likewise states, “Scripture says, You shall

“On the morrow after the Passover they ate from the produce of the land.” This view, though, as he admits, is not probable. He writes, “However, in Joshua the morrow after Passover seems to be 15 Nisan and not 16 Nisan; and in the Greek version the words ‘on the morrow after Passover’ are missing” (BCal, p. 19). Also see our discussion in FSDY, 2.

²² Men., 10:3. We have quoted this passage above on pp. 248f.

²³ B. Men., 65b.

²⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:5.

²⁵ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:29 §162.

²⁶ B. Men., 65b.

number 50 days.”²⁷ Some did recognize a contradiction in their logic but interpreted it to their own advantage. To demonstrate, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkari, with a little sleight of hand, breached the contradiction with the following argument:

Now one verse says, You shall number 50 days, while the other verse says, Seven complete Sabbaths there shall be. How are they to be reconciled? The latter verse refers to the time when the *yom tob* (festive day = Phasekh) falls on the Sabbath, while the former to the time when the *yom tob* (festive day = Phasekh) falls on a weekday.²⁸

Therefore, the command of “seven complete Sabbaths” only refers to those times when Phasekh fell on a weekly Sabbath. On those occasions, the 16th would be a Sunday and, as a result, the 50th day of the count would also fall on a Sunday. When the Phasekh did not fall on a weekly Sabbath, then the 50-day count was used, disregarding the issue of counting Sabbaths.

The Oldest System

The oldest of the four Pentecost systems is the Aristocratic, which counted the 50 days from the day after the weekly Sabbath following Phasekh, Sunday to Sunday. Its antiquity is demonstrated by the fact that both the ancient conservative Samaritan and Sadducean (Boethusian) priesthoods practiced the identical Pentecost system—this despite their loathing for each other. This common approach among competing branches of the Zadokite priests reflects a common history, indicating that this system was used by the Zadokite priests prior to the fourth century B.C.E. (the time when the Samaritan schism took place).²⁹ These Aristocratic priests were “heirs to the old Zadokite tradition in Jerusalem.”³⁰ This Aristocratic system was later followed by the early Christian assemblies,³¹ demonstrating their belief in its antiquity as well.

Josephus, though himself a Pharisee, retains a relevant record from an earlier Jewish writer, Nicolas of Damascus, further demonstrating the antiquity of the Aristocratic method. This record refers to the days of the Hasmonaean leader Hyrcanus, when the Sadducean (Aristocratic) system for Pentecost was dominant in Judaism. While the Jewish king was on an expedition, his troops remained at rest for two straight days due to this Jewish festival. Josephus comments, “for the Festival of Pentecost had come around, following the Sabbath (day), and we are not permitted to march either on the Sabbath (day) or on a festival (day).”³² Therefore, the Festival of Pentecost was the day immediately following the weekly Sabbath.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See above Chap. XIV, pp. 228ff.

³⁰ E.g., BCal, pp. 20–22, 29.

³¹ ACC, 2, pp. 1157–1161; BCal, pp. 19–24, 175, 225f.

³² Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:8:4.

We must understand these words by their historical context. Hyrcanus of Judaea made this campaign as an ally of Antiochus VII (Antiochus Sidetes), when the latter marched against Parthia.³³ Antiochus VII died at the end of this eastern campaign.³⁴ Antiochus VII ruled only nine years (138/137–130/129 B.C.E., Oct. reckoning)³⁵ and died in the early spring 129 B.C.E., just when the snow began to melt, as the crops began to appear, and while his troops were still in their winter quarters.³⁶ Nevertheless, Antiochus VII did not bring Hyrcanus under his authority until the fall of his fifth year, being the 179th Babylonian Seleucid year (133/132 B.C.E., Nisan or spring reckoning).³⁷

Placed into historical context, which demands a double Sabbath for Pentecost after Antiochus VII conquered Hyrcanus yet before the former's death, the Pentecost season (late May to early June) of 133 B.C.E. is too early while that of 129 B.C.E., which followed Antiochus VII's death, is too late. The double Sabbath in question could only have taken place in the spring of 132 to 130 B.C.E. Under Pharisaic calculations, none of these three years would have resulted in a Sabbath day followed by a high Sabbath day of Pentecost.³⁸ Therefore, only the Aristocratic system would have worked, reflecting its use during this period.

The second oldest Pentecost system is the quasi-Aristocratic. This point is reflected by the book of Jubilees (late second century B.C.E.).³⁹ At that time, they still regarded only the first day of the week for both the *omer* wave offering and the day of Pentecost. Yet they differed from the Aristocratic groups in that they began to count from the first day of the week that followed the entire seven days of unleavened bread. They failed to listen to the instruction provided by Joshua, 5:10–12. In effect, this system, despite its error with regard to Joshua, 5:10–12, is further proof of the antiquity of the original Sunday to Sunday format.

Shortly after the appearance of the quasi-Aristocratic Pentecost system came the Hasidic or Pharisaic version. J. B. Segal writes:

And, indeed, the insistence of the Pharisees upon their forced interpretation of the term 'Sabbath' shows that the usage was of no great antiquity.⁴⁰

Segal dates the appearance of the Pharisaic Pentecost system to the "second-first century B.C."⁴¹ J. Van Goudoever notes that the "influence" of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Diodorus, 34:15–17; Justin, 38:10; Livy, *Sum.*, 59; Appian, *Syr.*, 68.

³⁵ Syncellus, 1, p. 552, 2, p. 271; Eusebius, *Chron.*, 1, pp. 255, 263, app. 1, pp. 16, 56, 91f; Jerome, *Euseb.*, 226F–228F; HJP, 1, pp. 131f.

³⁶ Diodorus, 34/35:15–17; Justin, 38:10, 39:1.

³⁷ SJC, chap. xiv.

³⁸ The computer program Voyager II, version 2.06, by Carina Software, shows that the Pharisaic calculation for Pentecost would have fallen on May 29/30, Sun. nighttime/Mon. daytime, in the year 134 B.C.E.; May 18/19, Fri./Sat., for 133 B.C.E.; June 5/6, Wed./Thurs., for 132 B.C.E.; May 25/26, Sun./Mon., or possibly May 26/27, Mon./Tues., for 131 B.C.E.; May 14/15, Thurs./Fri., or possibly May 15/16, Fri./Sat. for 130 B.C.E.; June 1/2, Wed./Thurs., for 129 B.C.E.

³⁹ OTP, 2, p. 43–45; DSST, pp. 238–245; THS, p. 283.

⁴⁰ THP, p. 250.

⁴¹ Ibid.

this newer system “was increasing in the beginning of our era.”⁴² As we shall show below, the Pharisaic Pentecost system did not replace the Aristocratic Pentecost system in the Temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem until 68 C.E.

The last Jewish Pentecost system to make an appearance was the quasi-Hasidic view. This system mixes the Pharisaic view (that the Sabbath day mentioned in Leviticus, 23:11, is a festive day) with the quasi-Aristocratic view (that the *omer* wave offering should follow the entire seven days of unleavened bread). As with the quasi-Aristocratic construct, they failed to heed the instruction provided by Joshua, 5:10–12, which allows for the *omer* wave offering within the seven days of unleavened bread. As a result, their 50-day count begins after the high Sabbath on the last day of unleavened bread.

There is some evidence of this quasi-Hasidic view in an old Syriac translation of Leviticus, 23:11 and 15,⁴³ and it was followed by the Ethiopian Falashas Jews.⁴⁴ The Falashas were established shortly before the Mishnah (c.200 C.E.) and the Talmud (c.500 C.E.) were compiled.⁴⁵ In either case, because of this evidence one cannot place a valid date of origin any sooner than the early second century C.E., although some would suggest a reason to begin it just before the beginning of our common era.⁴⁶

The Triumph of the Pharisees

The priestly Aristocratic system for the *omer* wave offering and the Festival of Weeks was overthrown during the second half of the first century C.E.⁴⁷ In the Megillath Taanith (composed about 68 C.E.),⁴⁸ for instance, we read that the period from the 8th of Nisan until the 14th was attached to the seven days of the Khag of Unleavened Bread as a period wherein, “it is forbidden to mourn.”⁴⁹ According to the Scholiast on the Megillath Taanith, these additional days marked the triumph of the Pharisees over the Sadducees in their famous controversy regarding the date of the Festival of Weeks.⁵⁰

No such claim of doctrinal victory was actually made in the Megillath Taanith, which leads scholars like Solomon Zeitlin and J. B. Segal to interpret this claim as a later gloss.⁵¹ It seems rather designed to guise a more sinister episode that accompanied this so-called victory. Nevertheless, the association of the victory of the Pharisees with a specific time of the year mentioned in the

⁴² BCal, p. 29.

⁴³ APOT, 2, pp. 34f, n. XV.I; BCal., p. 25. The Syriac translation of Lev., 23:11 and 15 reads, “After the latter of the two festival days or after the last day (*bathar yawma’ charna*).”

⁴⁴ JE, 5, p. 328.

⁴⁵ FA, p. xlii.

⁴⁶ E.g., BCal, pp. 25, 27, 60, 89.

⁴⁷ BCal, p. 29, “The priestly system in Jerusalem was defeated, probably in the second part of the first century (together with the fall of Jerusalem and its Temple).”

⁴⁸ The last event chronicled in the text took place on Adar 17, 66 C.E. Meanwhile, the Talmud places its composition a few years before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. (MTS, pp. 3f, 112–115; B. R.Sh., 18b). The Pharisee Zealots overthrew the Sadducee high priest in Nov. of 67 C.E., allowing for the first *omer* wave offering to be made according to the Pharisee method in the spring of 68 C.E. The year 68 C.E. for the composition of the Megillath Taanith, therefore, is in full accord with these events.

⁴⁹ Meg. Taan., 1.

⁵⁰ MTS, p. 75; THP, p. 32.

⁵¹ MTS, p. 75; THP, p. 32, and n. 15.

Megillath Taanith lends itself to defining the episode and period of this change. Unlike the Phasekh, which was a people's festival, the *omer* wave offering at the Temple was solely a function of the high priest. Therefore, the Pharisees were not able to force the conservative Sadducees to submit in this practice unless they had first obtained control over the Temple.

The most auspicious time for this doctrinal victory over the Sadducean priests would have been during the Jewish revolt against Rome, which began in 66 C.E. It would come after the Hasidic Zealots, an extremist group of Pharisees, took control of Jerusalem in November of 67 C.E. Not long after seizing the city, an insurrection of the populace was instigated against them by Ananus, the senior high priest. The Zealots murdered him and many of the Aristocratic families and then converted the Temple of Yahweh into their fortress, making the sacred place of the Temple the headquarters of their tyranny.⁵² Having seized the Temple they also seized control of the priesthood. Josephus tells us:

To these horrors was added a spice of mockery more galling than their actions. For, to test the abject submission of the populace and make trial of their own strength, they essayed to appoint the high priests by lot, although, as we have stated, the succession was hereditary.⁵³

They chose from the priestly clan of Eniachin, and cast lots for a high priest. Josephus continues:

By chance the lot fell to one who proved a signal illustration of their depravity; he was an individual named Phanni, son of Samuel, of the village of Aphthia, a man who not only was not descended from high priests, but was such a clown that he scarcely knew what the high priesthood meant. At any rate they dragged their reluctant victim out of the country and, dressing him up for his assumed part, as on the stage, put the sacred vestments upon him and instructed him how to act in keeping with the occasion.⁵⁴

Since the radical Pharisees called Zealots instructed Phanni, it is clear that it was at this moment that the Pharisaic practice for Pentecost was instituted at the Temple. As these events were unfolding, the Roman leader Vespasian heard of them from deserters and is said to have entered the city of Gadara on the fourth of the month of Dystrus (i.e., about March 21 of 68 C.E.).⁵⁵ Therefore, the first occasion for this new high priest to perform functions at the Temple was during the Passover season in the spring of 68 C.E.,

⁵² Jos., *Wars*, 4:3:7, 4:5:1–4:6:2; cf., HJP, 2, pp. 496–499.

⁵³ Jos., *Wars*, 4:3:7.

⁵⁴ Jos., *Wars*, 4:3:8.

⁵⁵ Jos., *Wars*, 4:7:3f.

with preliminary celebrations beginning on the eighth of Nisan.⁵⁶ On Nisan 16, the first Pharisee-style *omer* wave offering would have been made by this priest. This moment was later interpreted as a victory for the Pharisaic view.

Phanni was also the last high priest to serve in the Temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem,⁵⁷ which was destroyed in September of 70 C.E.⁵⁸ With the destruction of the Temple, Sadducean power was utterly destroyed.⁵⁹ As D. Freeman points out, the Pharisaic “reckoning became the normative in Judaism after A.D. 70, so that in the Jewish calendar Pentecost now falls on various days of the week.”⁶⁰

Day of the Sinai Covenant

Another important point of reference for the Khag of Weeks (Pentecost) was the ancient assertion, held by both Jews and Christians alike, that on the day of this festival, during the year of the Exodus (i.e., in 1439 B.C.E.),⁶¹ the Old Covenant Torah with its Ten Commandments were given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.⁶² The widespread belief that Pentecost was the birthday of the Torah demands our attention, for it will later help us set the counting for the Festival of Weeks. Proof of this old assertion shall be offered in our next volume. For now we need only to demonstrate just how well-established this concept was among both Jews and Christians.

We find the claim that the Torah was given to the Israelites on the Festival of Weeks asserted as early as the Maccabean period in the late second century B.C.E.⁶³ The earliest known connection was made by the book of Jubilees (about 135 B.C.E.),⁶⁴ whose author, as we have previously noted, followed the quasi-Aristocratic Pentecost system. The Jubilees text demonstrates the historical background for this belief. The Jewish Falashas of Abyssinia, who follow a quasi-Hasidic Pentecost system, believe that Pentecost is “the day of the giving of the Law.”⁶⁵ Those adhering to the Aristocratic view of Pentecost also retained this interpretation. It was advocated by the Samaritans,⁶⁶ and suspected as true by the Karaites.⁶⁷

Though not directly stated by Josephus and Philo, those holding to the Hasidic Pentecost view also believed in the connection of this festival with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. For example, this claim is made by the mid-second century C.E. Pharisaic work called the *Seder Olam*, which reports, “In the third moon, on the sixth day of the moon,” i.e., the day marked by the

⁵⁶ Meg. Taan., 1.

⁵⁷ Jos., *Wars*, 6:8:4–5, 6:10:1.

⁵⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 20:10:1.

⁵⁹ HJP, 2, pp. 402, 414; EJ, 14, p. 622; BCal, p. 29; EBD, p. 902; NBD, p. 1124; CBTEL, 9, p. 241; DB, p. 579.

⁶⁰ NBD, p. 964; MTS, p. 75.

⁶¹ For confirmation of this date see IC and the related study in SJC.

⁶² NBD, p. 964; NCE, 11, p. 109; BCal, pp. 131, 139–144, 186–190; ACC, 2, p. 1160; JE, 9, p. 592.

⁶³ PCB, p. 232.

⁶⁴ Jub., 1:1, cf., 6:17.

⁶⁵ JE, 5, p. 328.

⁶⁶ TSL, 1, pp. 335ff.

⁶⁷ Al-Magribi, 15:2f; KAEEL, pp. 224f; ERE, 5, p. 880. The Karaites claimed, “we do not know for certain the precise day when it happened” because the exact day was not directly stated in Scriptures. Their hesitancy seems more from a willingness to criticize the rabbis who claimed this event as a historical fact.

Pharisees as the Festival of Weeks, "the Ten Commandments were given to them."⁶⁸ Still later, this view is given in the Babylonian Talmud,⁶⁹ in the Exodus Rabbah,⁷⁰ by Maimonides,⁷¹ and in the Midrash entitled *Tankhuma*.⁷² In one passage from the Talmud, for example, we read, "On the sixth day of the moon (of Siwan) the Ten Commandments were given to Israel."⁷³ Rabbi Eleazar (c.270 C.E.) argues that Pentecost was "the day on which the Torah was given."⁷⁴ This belief eventually led to the custom of studying the Torah all night on Pentecost.⁷⁵

The Old Covenant made at Mount Sinai was a marriage contract between Yahweh and the Israelites.⁷⁶ The Qumran Covenanters saw a renewal of this covenant every year on the Khag of Weeks.⁷⁷ The Zohar even calls the time between Passover and Pentecost the "courting of the bridegroom Israel with the bride Torah."⁷⁸

Christian writers followed the Aristocratic view of Pentecost.⁷⁹ They also declared their belief that Yahweh gave the Torah on Pentecost day. For them, this was a type of the giving of the sacred *ruach* on the day of Pentecost in the year of the messiah's resurrection.⁸⁰ A fragment of Severian of Gabala (c.400 C.E.), for example, states that, "the Torah was given on the day of Pentecost."⁸¹ Augustine (writing between 396–430 C.E.), as another example, speaks of "the 50th day" as "when they received the Torah written by the finger of the deity."⁸² In another place, he notes that Pentecost was "the day on which the Torah was given on Mount Sinai to Moses."⁸³ He likewise writes that the Torah was written with the finger of the deity and was given to Moses on this day, adding that this was a type of the sacred *ruach*, called the finger of the deity in the New Testament, which the messiah promised to his disciples as a Comforter and sent to them on the 50th day after his suffering and resurrection.⁸⁴ Again Augustine argues:

Why do the Jews celebrate Pentecost? This is a great mystery, brethren, and quite wondrous. Consider this: on the day of Pentecost they (the Jews) received the Torah written by the finger of the deity, and on the day of Pentecost the sacred *ruach* came (to the disciples of the messiah).⁸⁵

⁶⁸ S.O., 5.

⁶⁹ B. Pes., 68b; B. Shab., 86b.

⁷⁰ Exod. Rab., 31.

⁷¹ Maimonides, *Moreh*, 3:43, "The (Festival of) Weeks is the day of the giving of the Torah."

⁷² Mid. Tankh., 26c.

⁷³ B. Shab., 86b.

⁷⁴ B. Pes., 68b.

⁷⁵ Zoh., *Emor*, 98a.

⁷⁶ See Jer., 31:31–32; cf., Hos., 2:18–20.

⁷⁷ Jub., 6:17; DJS, 1, pp. 86ff, 19:1–8, 20:1–3; MLDSS, pp. 377f; BASOR, 123, p. 32; BCal, p. 140.

⁷⁸ JE, 9, p. 593.

⁷⁹ See our Chaps. XXII–XXIII.

⁸⁰ As recorded in Acts, 2:1–13.

⁸¹ Severian, frag. (EEC, p. 80, text 80; CGPNT, p. 16).

⁸² Augustine, *Cat. Rud.*, 23.

⁸³ Augustine, *Epist.*, 55:16 §29.

⁸⁴ Augustine, *Faust.*, 32:12.

⁸⁵ Augustine, *Serm. Mai*, 158:4. Cf., Acts, 2:1–4.

Leo the Great (c.440–461 C.E.), in one of his homilies about the day of Pentecost, reports that on that day, “the Torah was given on Mount Sinai.”⁸⁶ Chrysostom similarly writes, “On that day the Torah was given according to the Old Covenant.”⁸⁷

All of this evidence indicates a strong belief among various sects of Judaism and early Christianity that the Torah marriage covenant was made on the high Sabbath of the Khag of Weeks.

Conclusion

Ancient records have provided us with four models used for counting the 50 days to the Festival of Weeks. Only two are viable—the Aristocratic and Hasidic (Pharisaic) models—for only these two conform with the example provided by Joshua, 5:10–12, that the *omer* wave offering can occur during the days of unleavened bread. The heart of the difference between all of these various systems, nonetheless, is their differing interpretations about what exactly is meant by the phrase, “on the day after the Sabbath,” as found in Leviticus, 23:11. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that the oldest of these known systems was the Aristocratic Pentecost, and this was also the system deemed correct by all of the ancient Christian assemblies.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Leo, *Serm.*, 75.

⁸⁷ PG, 63, p. 933.

⁸⁸ See below Chap. XXII, pp. 344–347.