

# FAQ

**FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES (2000-2018)**

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**MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS**  
messianicapologetics.net

# Frequently Asked Questions

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# Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*  
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*  
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)  
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament  
Ara: Aramaic  
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)  
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)  
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)  
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.  
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)  
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*  
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.  
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)  
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)  
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)  
CJB: *Complete Jewish Bible* (1998)  
CJSB: *Complete Jewish Study Bible* (2016)  
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition  
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls  
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*  
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*  
ESV: *English Standard Version* (2001)  
Ger: German  
GNT: *Greek New Testament*  
Grk: Greek  
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)  
HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2004)  
Heb: Hebrew  
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible  
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*  
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*  
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*  
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*  
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)  
JBK: *New Jerusalem Bible-Koren* (2000)  
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*  
KJV: *King James Version*  
Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)  
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)  
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)  
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)  
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)  
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)  
LXX: *Septuagint*  
m. Mishnah  
MT: *Masoretic Text*  
NASB: *New American Standard Bible* (1977)  
NASU: *New American Standard Update* (1995)  
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*  
NEB: *New English Bible* (1970)  
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*  
NETS: *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (2007)  
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*  
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*  
NIV: *New International Version* (1984)  
NJB: *New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic* (1985)  
NJSB: *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1999)  
NKJV: *New King James Version* (1982)  
NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version* (1989)  
NLT: *New Living Translation* (1996)  
NT: *New Testament*  
OT: *Old Testament*  
REB: *Revised English Bible* (1989)  
RSV: *Revised Standard Version* (1952)  
t. Tosefta  
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament  
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*  
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*  
TLV: *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (2014)  
TNIV: *Today's New International Version* (2005)  
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*  
UBSHNT: *United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition*  
v(s). *verse(s)*  
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*  
Vul: *Latin Vulgate*  
YLT: *Young's Literal Translation* (1862/1898)  
WMB: *World Messianic Bible* (2020)

# Omer Count

**Do you follow the method of the Pharisees or Sadducees for the counting of the *omer* to determine *Shavuot*? It seems that most in the Hebrew Roots movement follow the counting method of the Sadducees.**

The counting of the *omer* is commanded in Leviticus 23:11, “He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it” (NASU). There were three distinct ways which this passage was interpreted in Second Temple Judaism:

1. The Sadducees interpreted “the day after the Sabbath” to be the weekly Sabbath which occurs during the week of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The counting of the *omer* was thus to begin on a Sunday, and end on a Sunday fifty days later.
2. The Pharisees interpreted “the day after the Sabbath” to be the High Sabbath which occurred immediately after the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, 16 Nisan. The counting of the *omer* would begin on any day of the week, and the day of the week which *Shavuot* would be commemorated would likewise fluctuate. Later Jewish tradition would set the 06 Sivan as the specific day for *Shavuot*.
3. The Essenes (of which the Qumran community was a part) interpreted “the day after the Sabbath” to be the weekly Sabbath which occurred after the week of the Festival of Unleavened Bread was over. Thus, the Essenic community would observe *Shavuot* a week after the Sadducees.<sup>1</sup>

Many in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, outside of Messianic Judaism, prefer to follow the Saddusaical method for counting the *omer* (the same method followed by the Karaites), always remembering *Shavuot* or Pentecost on a Sunday. While some of these people do so because they are following a calendar different than the standard Rabbinical Jewish calendar used today, many others continue to follow the dates for the appointed times on the standard Jewish calendar, with this being a notable exception.

There are likewise those in the independent Torah movement (One Law/One Torah or Pronomian), who believe that *Shavuot* should be observed on the traditional Jewish date of the 06 Sivan, originally determined by the Pharisees, and that the Bible supports this viewpoint. It is also true that there are some in Messianic Judaism, who while following the mainstream Jewish calendar for all of the dates of the appointed times, are seen to follow the Saddusaical method of counting the *omer*.

Making this disagreement about when to start counting the *omer*, into some kind of an issue about “Sunday,” entirely misses the point. As you will see below, the issue about when to count the *omer* is really about whether or not today’s Messianic Bible teachers have joined, or are at least beginning to join, into an interpretational conversation which involves more than just a single English version of the Scriptures and a Strong’s Concordance. There are many people who get into a debate over this issue, and may argue quite strongly, but they are often working from incomplete information.

The following has been compiled to present you both sides of the issue of how to count the *omer*, and thus when to commemorate *Shavuot*. The points presented for the Saddusaical view have been listed first, with a

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<sup>1</sup> For another summation of all three views, consult Baruch J. Schwartz, “Leviticus,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp 263-264.

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## Omer Count

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counterpoint response by the Pharisaical view. We would encourage you to make an informed decision for yourself based on what is provided below, should you have ever made any hasty conclusions about this in the past. We would also encourage you to not be unnecessarily divided with others who may share a different opinion at present.

### Messianics who favor a Saddusaical determination of Shavuot:

#### 1. Leviticus 23:11 states that the counting of the *omer* is to begin on a weekly Sabbath:

“He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it” (NASU).

The day after the *Shabbat*, the weekly Sabbath during the Festival of Unleavened Bread (not the High Sabbath), is the day when the counting of the *omer* or sheaf offering is to begin. After this, one is to count *sheva Shabbatot temimot* or “seven complete sabbaths” (Leviticus 23:15, NASU). This means that *Shavuot* will always occur on the first day of the week or a Sunday. Its date is not fixed by a number date on the calendar, and can vary from year to year.

#### 2. If the “Sabbath” referred to in Leviticus 23:11 were the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, then the Hebrew word *Shabaton* would have been used:

In Leviticus 16:31 *Yom Kippur* is referred to as a *Shabbat Shabaton* or “a sabbath of solemn rest” (NASU), in other words, a High Sabbath. *Yom Teruah* (*Rosh HaShanah*) is referred to as a special “rest” or *Shabaton* in Leviticus 23:24, a High Sabbath. *Yom Kippur* is again referred to as a *Shabbat Shabaton* in Leviticus 23:32, “a sabbath of complete rest” (NASU). *Shabaton* is used twice in Leviticus 23:39 to refer to the first and last “rest” days of *Sukkot*.

*Shabaton* means “a **sabbath** that is markedly different from the usual [*Shabbat*] inasmuch as it is to be observed strictly and to be celebrated in a special way” (*HALOT*),<sup>2</sup> hence “a High Sabbath.” If the counting of the *omer* were to begin after the High Sabbath of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, then this term should have been used in Leviticus 23:15, rather than the more normal *Shabbat*, which clearly designates the weekly Sabbath.

#### 3. Yeshua the Messiah is the firstfruits of the resurrection, thus we must always remember His Sunday resurrection in the counting of the *omer*:

Yeshua the Messiah, according to the Apostle Paul, is the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). The *omer* counting begins on the weekly Sabbath during the Festival of Unleavened Bread and allows us to commemorate Yeshua’s Sunday morning resurrection when the firstfruits would have been offered. The command in Leviticus 23:10-11 is, “**you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest** to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it” (NASU). As the Marys left to go to the tomb, “after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (Matthew 28:1, NASU), it is clear that this took place after the weekly Sabbath on the Day of First Fruits.

It is interesting that now in the Jewish community, the counting of the *omer* begins after the High Sabbath or the first day of Unleavened Bread, which does not occur on a Sunday. Why is this the case?

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<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1412.

Was this started to downplay Yeshua's prophetic fulfillment of the firstfruits and His resurrection?  
Did this happen so that His resurrection would be denied?

#### **4. The Messianic community should observe *Shavuot* in a way which appeals to Christians' understanding of Pentecost:**

The Christian Church recognizes what Pentecost Sunday is—fifty days after Resurrection Sunday—and has actually gotten this correct, in spite of centuries of Jewish misinterpretation of Leviticus 23. Following the Saddusaical determination of counting the *omer*—from the Hebrew of Leviticus 23 alone—we can educate our Christian brothers and sisters on the prophetic fulfillment of Yeshua's firstfruits resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at *Shavuot* without any major complications.

### **Messianics who favor a Pharisaical determination of *Shavuot*:**

#### **1. *Shavuot* is the “Feast of Weeks,” and not the “Feast of Sabbaths”:**

It is quite significant that the name of the holiday in question is *Shavuot*, the plural of the Hebrew *shavua*, meaning “week.” Before examining any Scripture passages, why would the designation of this festival be *Shavuot*, meaning “Weeks”—rather than *Shabbatot*, meaning “Sabbaths”? Is this not an indication that the date of *Shavuot* is to be determined using the *week*, and not the Sabbath? What constitutes what one would consider to be an “incomplete Sabbath”? This can only be the case if the Hebrew term *Shabbat* can be used to represent “week.”

There is strong evidence in favor of the fact that the Hebrew term *Shabbat* need not always refer to the Sabbath day. While the primary usage of *Shabbat* is undoubtedly “the day of rest, the sabbath” (*HALOT*),<sup>3</sup> this does not disallow other possible usages—including “week” (*Jastrow*)<sup>4</sup> as seen in other Scripture passages and certainly throughout Rabbinical literature. This is why most Bibles actually render Leviticus 23:15 with the counting of the *omer* being determined by “seven weeks” (RSV, NIV, NRSV, ATS, NJPS, ESV, HCSB, CJSB, et. al.). The only major versions which leave it as “sabbaths” are the KJV, NKJV, and NASU.

Shortly after the listing of the *moedim* in Leviticus 23, instruction about the Sabbatical year and year of jubilee are given in Leviticus 25, notably including the command, “You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years” (Leviticus 25:8, NASU). Here, it is undeniable that *sheva shabbatot shanim* means “seven weeks of years” (RSV, NRSV, NJPS, ESV), and that the term “sabbath” is flexible enough to regard more than just the weekly Sabbath day.

Rabbinic literature itself indicates this flexibility. The Mishnah includes a usage of *Shabbat* used to represent “week”:

“[He who says,] ‘Qonam if I taste wine today,’ is prohibited only to nightfall. [If he referred to] ‘this week [*shabbat zo*],’ he is prohibited the entire week [*b’kol ha’shabbat*], and the Sabbath [which is coming is included] in that past week” (m.*Nedarim* 18:1).<sup>5</sup>

Even the Greek equivalent of *Shabbat*, the carryover term *sabbaton* present in the Apostolic Scriptures, has a variance of usages. “The plural *tá sábbata* may mean one sabbath, several sabbaths,

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:1411.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Treasury, 2004), 1520.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 421.

or the whole week (like the Hebrew term)” (TDNT).<sup>6</sup> In the *Didache*, from the late First Century C.E., it is said that the Jews “fast on the second and the fifth day of the week” (8:1), *deutera sabbatōn kai pemptē*, meaning twice a week.<sup>7</sup> Here, the plural *sabbatōn* or “sabbaths” is used. It has to represent the “week,” as it would make no sense for one to fast two times on the Sabbath day or Saturday.

The term “sabbath,” having some variance of usages should not be that disturbing to Biblical examiners. Consider that in a similar vein, the Hebrew term *yom* primarily means “**day** of twenty-four hours” (HALOT),<sup>8</sup> but there are most certainly instances when *yom* means “a period of time” such as a “**year**” (HALOT),<sup>9</sup> or simply a “division of time” (BDB)<sup>10</sup> which may or may not be specified. Numerous times throughout the Hebrew Bible, the clause *b’yom*, literally “on the/that day,” is simply translated into English as the conjunction “when.” Will we allow God some variance in the vocabulary which He uses in His Word?

### **2. Responsible Bible readers cannot ignore the witness of Deuteronomy 16:9 and the Septuagint rendering of Leviticus 23:11:**

Deuteronomy 16:9 gives further clarification of how *Shavuot* is to be determined, stating, “You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain” (NASU). The command here is not to count using “Sabbaths,” but rather to count *sheva shavuot* or “seven weeks.” Are Bible readers to ignore this instruction to count via “weeks,” and *only follow* what Leviticus 23:15 may be stating?

Liberal theologians would actually conclude that there is a noticeable difference between the command delivered in Leviticus 23:15, to count “seven complete sabbaths” (NASU), and the command in Deuteronomy 16:9 to count “seven weeks” (NASU). Attributing these differences to the JEDP documentary hypothesis, they may claim that the command seen in Leviticus 23 is from P or the Priestly writer, and that the command seen in Deuteronomy 16 is from D or the Deuteronomist. Those who believe in unified authorship of the Mosaic Torah have the responsibility to *reconcile* these seeming “differences,” lest any of us be accused of following “P” or “D.” When we reconcile these differences and synthesize the two passages, the Pharisaical view of starting the *omer* count on the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread is validated.

The Hebrew of Leviticus 23:11 is vague, indicating that the counting of the *omer* is to begin *m’mochorat ha’Shabbat*, literally “from the morrow the Sabbath,” understood to be “the day after the sabbath.” With the Sabbath not specified, the Sadducees interpreted this as the weekly Sabbath, whereas the Pharisees interpreted this as the High Sabbath during the first day of Unleavened Bread (also based on similar language seen in Joshua 5:10-12). This is where a great deal of division took place, with the Hebrew unclear on this point. The exegesis of Messianics who advocate that the Saddusaical method is correct often stops here.

We should not be consigned to make a decision solely on the basis of what the Hebrew Masoretic Text of Leviticus 23:15 might say about “the day after the sabbath” (NASU). Around three centuries before the coming of Yeshua, the Hebrew Tanach was translated into Greek resulting in what we now call the Septuagint. The LXX is the most significant complete textual witness to the Hebrew MT, and was frequently used by the Apostles in their quotations of the Tanach. **The Apostles’ usage alone requires Bible readers to at least consider how the LXX renders Leviticus 23:11.**

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<sup>6</sup> E. Lohse, “*sábbaton*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 989.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 910.

<sup>8</sup> HALOT, 1:399.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1:400.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 398.

The Greek LXX rendered the Hebrew *m'mochorat ha'Shabbat*, "the day after the sabbath," with *tē epaurion tēs prōtēs*, "On the morrow of the first day" (LXE), "the day after the first" (NETS), "the next day after the first" (LES). Is this "day after the first" the weekly Sabbath? Obviously not. It is the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. If we follow the Saddusaical argument using the LXX, then the counting of the *omer* would actually begin on a Monday, the day after the first day. But this is an improper conclusion based on what "first" actually translates. Instead, this "day after the first" would be the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, a High Sabbath, a clear support for the Pharisaic method of counting the *omer*.

Furthermore, in Leviticus 23:15, the LXX rendered the Hebrew *sheva shabatot temimot*, "seven complete Sabbaths" (NASU), with *hepta hebdomadas holoklērous*, meaning "seven full weeks" (LXE).<sup>11</sup> This is more confirmation of how *shabbat* can be understood in a greater context beyond that of just the "Sabbath day," and can also include "week."

If one considers the Greek Septuagint to have any kind of relevance in their theological exegesis, then it supports the counting of the *omer* beginning immediately after the first day of Unleavened Bread on the 16 Nisan, in conjunction with the Pharisaic method which is observed in mainline Judaism today. Furthermore, this is a textual indicator that the debate over determining *Shavuot* goes back several centuries before the time of Yeshua, and thus one cannot claim that there was a later "conspiracy" to downplay His resurrection by having the *omer* count begin on a day other than Sunday. This issue was present long before Yeshua's arrival onto the scene of history.

In today's Messianic movement, the Greek Septuagint can be casually dismissed among teachers as a valid resource to use for exegetical analysis. Its rendering of Leviticus 23:11 gives strong support for the Pharisaic reckoning of *Shavuot*. But in all honesty this is a rather minor issue on which to ignore the LXX. There are many more substantial issues pertaining to the Septuagint such as the quotation of Tanach Scriptures in the Apostolic Writings where the LXX differs from the Hebrew MT. If one gets into the habit of ignoring the Septuagint on minor issues such as the determination of *Shavuot*, **then it may be ignored in more significant issues** such as the quotation of various Messianic prophecies used by the Apostles.

### **3. *Shabaton* can refer to the weekly Sabbath equally as much as a High Sabbath in the Torah:**

Advocates of the Saddusaical view often claim that if the High Sabbath were being referred to in Leviticus 23:11, "on the day after the sabbath" (NASU), then the Hebrew word *Shabaton* would be used instead of *Shabbat* or in conjunction with it. It is asserted that *Shabaton* is only used in the Torah to refer to High Sabbaths, and likewise that *Shabbat* is only used to refer to weekly Sabbaths, thus the beginning of the *omer* count starts after a weekly Sabbath.

What Saddusaical advocates have conveniently avoided is that *Shabaton* can be used in reference to the weekly Sabbath every bit as much as a High Sabbath:

"[T]hen he said to them, "This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance [*Shabaton*], a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning" (Exodus 16:23, NASU).

"Then Moses assembled all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and said to them, "These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do: For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a sabbath of complete rest [*Shabbat Shabaton*] to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death" (Exodus 35:1-2, NASU).

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<sup>11</sup> The LXX was obviously compiled before the New Testament term *sabbaton*, a carryover from Hebrew and Aramaic, was used by Greek-speaking Jews. Leviticus 23:15 employs the more classical term *hebdomas*, used by Aristotle to represent "a period of seven days" (H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 220).

“For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest [*Shabbat Shabaton*], a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:3, NASU).

When one sees that *Shabaton* is used equally to refer to the weekly Sabbath as well as High Sabbaths in the Hebrew Torah, no one can insist that the *Shabbat* for beginning the *omer* count must be a weekly Sabbath. No one would insist that the Sabbath mentioned in Leviticus 23:3—which occurs every week—all of a sudden becomes a High Sabbath. The type or manner of Sabbath is simply not specified in the imprecise Hebrew of Leviticus 23:11, and readers are forced to examine other Scripture passages (i.e., Deuteronomy 16:9; Joshua 5:10-12) to formulate a more well-rounded interpretation of what is being referred to.

#### **4. The Apostle Paul said that Yeshua the Messiah was the firstfruits of the resurrection—and he was a Pharisee:**

The Apostle Paul was the one who wrote the Corinthians, “Messiah has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20, NASU). Paul was the one who associated some level of prophetic fulfillment to the firstfruits offering, the ceremony which begins the counting of the *omer* during the Festival of Unleavened Bread, with the resurrection of Yeshua.

One needs to temper Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians with his own testimony before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:6: “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!” (NASU). The Greek *egō Pharisaios eimi*, appearing in the present active indicative tense, makes it abundantly clear that Paul *actively considered himself* a Pharisee the day when he made these remarks. *Halachically* the observance of *Shavuot* counting from after the High Sabbath of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, was a major division between the Pharisees and Sadducees of Second Temple Judaism. If one can accept Paul’s testimony before the Sanhedrin as being accurate, then one can safely conclude that he observed *Shavuot* with the Pharisaic party (cf. Acts 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8). He had no problem writing that Yeshua fulfilled the prophetic typology of firstfruits, while at the same time being a Pharisee and recognizing that the firstfruits offering would be made on the 16 Nisan.

Likewise, readers also have to remember Yeshua’s own words in Matthew 23:2-3: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*” (NASU). While Yeshua did issue some imperatives against the hypocrisy of the Pharisaic leaders in Matthew 23, He nevertheless instructed His followers to take their *halachic* lead from (many of) the Pharisaic rulings. Messianic Believers have justified course, then, to observe *Shavuot* with the remainder of the worldwide Jewish community on 06 Sivan—and not a date of our own choosing—along with the rest of the appointed times.

#### **5. Following the Pharisaic method of determining *Shavuot* does not subtract from Yeshua’s prophetic fulfillment of the firstfruits offering:**

It is commonly asserted among advocates of the Saddusaical reckoning for *Shavuot* that beginning the *omer* count immediately after Passover, after the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, subtracts from Yeshua’s prophetic fulfillment of the firstfruits offering. Specifically, because the counting of the *omer* can occur on any day of the week via the Pharisaical reckoning for *Shavuot*, it is believed among some to take away from Yeshua’s apparent “Sunday morning resurrection.”

First of all, it should be noted that one can legitimately challenge the concept of a “Sunday morning resurrection” as Matthew 28:1 indicates that the Marys left to visit Yeshua’s tomb *opse de sabbatōn* or “late on the Sabbath day” (American Standard Version), meaning Saturday evening.

Secondly, recognize that Yeshua's resurrection was three days and nights (Matthew 12:40) after His death. Counting back from Saturday evening, this places Yeshua's death on Thursday afternoon. Following this would seemingly have been the first day of Unleavened Bread (Friday), and then the first day of the *omer* count (Saturday) to be immediately followed by Yeshua's resurrection that evening. Yeshua would have been dead three days and nights: Thursday day/night, Friday day/night, and Saturday day/night. Yeshua would have been resurrected as the first day of the Pharisaical *omer* count was closing (Saturday evening), and then as the first day of the Saddusaical *omer* count was just beginning (toward Sunday). Yet, this would have been the year of Yeshua's death, and debates were surely present in early Christian history regarding how Yeshua's death and resurrection were to be honored.

It is notable that a sect known as the Quartodecimans, from the Eastern Christian Church of the Second-Fourth Centuries, followed a tradition of celebrating Easter three days after the Jewish Passover, and they saw no problem with commemorating the resurrection on *any day of the week*.<sup>12</sup> Once the Jewish community set the date for Passover, then claiming to follow a tradition from the Apostle John via Polycarp, the Quartodecimans would then count three days and that would be their date to celebrate Easter. However, in 325 C.E. the Council of Nicea decreed that a different date, the first Sunday after the first Full Moon following the vernal equinox, should be used to commemorate Easter.

Messianic people holding to a staunch view of a Saddusaical *Shavuot*—one which always occurs on a Sunday—have perhaps unknowingly fallen into following a Church ruling designed to keep Christians away from the “Jewish Passover.” Instead of counting three days from 14 Nisan, the day of Passover, commemorating Yeshua's resurrection shortly after the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread—some, insistent that Yeshua's resurrection be remembered on a Sunday, may have to count as many as five or six days between a Monday or Tuesday Passover and then a Sunday First Fruits. Sometimes they have been known to remember Yeshua's Last Seder at their Passover on Sunday, and then actually wait an entire week until the following Sunday, to remember His resurrection!

## **6. Following the Saddusaical method does not necessarily mean an emphasis on the resurrection:**

Even though advocates of the Saddusaical determination for *Shavuot* may insist that they do not lose focus of Yeshua's resurrection—as they count the *omer* from Sunday (the supposed day of the week of Yeshua's resurrection when it originally took place)—it should be noted that the actual theology of the Sadducees is often not considered. The testimony of the Gospels and Acts is unanimous on the fact that the Sadducees **did not believe** in any kind of resurrection:

“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all” (Acts 23:8, NASU; cf. Mark 12:18; Matthew 22:23; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:6).

Also consider that in Acts 4, immediately following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, it was the chief priests or Sadducees who harassed and detained the Apostles.

Theologically speaking, if we were to emphasize the resurrection as a definite teaching of Scripture—then why would one ever follow the *halachic* ruling of a First Century Jewish sect **which categorically denied the resurrection?** The doctrine of resurrection was Pharisaical. Unfortunately, many Messianic people who insist that the Saddusaical determination for *Shavuot* is proper often fall prey to the long-standing and inaccurate Christian belief that the Pharisees are the “bad guys,” not

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<sup>12</sup> “Quartodecimans,” in David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 547.

realizing that Yeshua *never criticized* the Pharisees for their basic theology, but instead their hypocritical attitudes. Furthermore, the Pharisaism of the Apostle Paul is often glossed over.

Between the two major Jewish sects of the Second Temple era, following the Pharisaical (and consequently the traditional, modern Jewish) way of observing *Shavuot*, actually affirms the reality of Yeshua's resurrection—as we place ourselves within a viable Jewish tradition which adhered to many of the spiritual ideas and concepts which evangelical Protestants and Messianics today hold dear.

### **7. The Believers in Jerusalem are seen keeping *Shavuot* with the majority of the population, all of whom followed the Pharisaic method according to history:**

The testimony of Acts is clear that the Apostles observed *Shavuot* with the majority of those Jewish people who had traveled from afar to attend:

“Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven...Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:5, 9-11, NASU).

Were these Jewish people assembled observing *Shavuot* according to the method of the Sadducees—or the Pharisees? Aside from the calendar debates which ensued in Second Temple Judaism, it is notable that the majority of Diaspora Jews were Pharisaical in their theology—often with their Diaspora synagogues planted by Pharisees. The historical record indicates that the Temple priesthood, in spite of their favoring the Saddusaical view, had to conform to the majority view and offer the sheaf offering on 16 Nisan, two days after Passover. The First Century historian Josephus attested,

“**But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month**, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them... They take a handful of the ears, and dry them, then beat them small, and purge the barley from the bran; they then bring one tenth deal to the altar, to God; and, casting one handful of it upon the fire, they leave the rest for the use of the priest; and after this it is that they may publicly or privately reap their harvest. They also at this participation of the firstfruits of the earth, sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt offering to God” (*Antiquities of the Jews* 3.250-251).<sup>13</sup>

The Jewish philosopher Philo also would state,

“There is also a festival on the day of the paschal feast, **which succeeds the first day**, and this is named the sheaf, from what takes place on it; for the sheaf is brought to the altar as a first fruit both of the country which the nation has received for its own, and also of the whole land; so as to be an offering both for the nation separately, and also a common one for the whole race of mankind; and so that the people by it worship the living God, both for themselves and for all the rest of mankind, because they have received the fertile earth for their inheritance; for in the country there is no barren soil but even all those parts which appear to be stony and rugged are surrounded with soft veins of great depth, which, by reason of their richness, are very well suited for the production of living things” (*Special Laws* 2.162).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 96.

<sup>14</sup> Philo Judaeus: *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 583.

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The historical record attests that the Pharisaic method for beginning the *omer* count was followed in the Jerusalem Temple in the First Century.

In response to this, many might argue that since the Saddusaical priesthood operated the Temple, only they would have the authority to control when and how *Shavuot* was commemorated. However, there are examples throughout Rabbinical literature of the contempt which the common people had for the Sadducees, as they were largely collaborators with the Roman occupiers of Judea, and how concessions did have to be made for those who favored Pharisaic traditions.

Consider that during the Second Temple period, a special water libation ceremony called *Simchat Beit ha-Sho'evah* (rejoicing of the house of water drawing) was practiced during the Feast of Tabernacles. This ceremony, referred to by Yeshua in the Gospels (John 7), was based on a Pharisaic interpretation of Isaiah 12:3, "Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation" (NASU), and was codified in the Mishnah:

*"The water libation: How so? A golden flask, holding three logs in volume, did one fill with water from Siloam. [When] they reached the Water Gate, they blow a sustained, a quavering, and a sustained blast on the shofar. [The priest] went up on the ramp [at the south] and turned to his left [southwest]....R. Judah says, 'A log [of water] would one pour out as the water libation all eight days'"* (m.*Sukkah* 4:9).<sup>15</sup>

Josephus noted that this custom was rejected by the Sadducees, and the violent reaction on one year, of the people who sided with the Pharisees:

*"As to Alexander, his own people were seditious against him; for at a festival which was then celebrated, when he stood upon the altar, and was going to sacrifice, the nation rose upon him, and pelted him with citrons [which they then had in their hands, because] the law of the Jews, required that at the feast of tabernacles, everyone should have branches of the palm tree and citron tree; which thing we have elsewhere related. They also reviled him, as derived from a captive, and so unworthy of his dignity and of sacrificing" (Antiquities of the Jews 13.372; cf. b.*Sukkah* 48b).*<sup>16</sup>

Hebrew Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim held the view that the Saddusaical priesthood, while adamant about their method of counting the *omer*, actually did have to offer up the sheaf of firstfruits in the Temple on 16 Nisan because the Pharisees had the masses on their side:

*"The Pharisees held, that the time between Easter and Pentecost should be counted from the second day of the feast; the Sadducees insisted that it should commence with the literal 'Sabbath' after the festive day. But despite argument, the Sadducees had to join when the solemn procession went on the afternoon of the feast to cut down the 'first sheaf,' and to reckon Pentecost as did their opponents."*<sup>17</sup>

The Jewish people who had come to Jerusalem to observe *Shavuot* in Acts—and hence hear the good news or gospel message proclaimed—followed the Pharisaic lead. Notably, those from the Diaspora probably used the Greek Septuagint as their main Scriptures, which likewise instructed them to follow the Pharisaic method.

## **8. What do you do with the method of the Essenes?**

Even though the exegetical, theological, and historical evidence favors the counting of the *omer* and observance of *Shavuot* according to the Pharisaic method, it is interesting that the method of the Essenes is often never considered by Messianic people. While the theology of the early Messianic

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<sup>15</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 288.

<sup>16</sup> *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 360.

<sup>17</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 220.

See Edersheim's further remarks in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), pp 203-204.

community had far, far more in common with the Pharisees than the Sadducees (in fact no Sadducee is ever recorded as having come to faith in Yeshua), there are strands of commonality with the Essenes who gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Essenes did not deny the resurrection.

The Essenes interpreted “the day after the sabbath” (NASU) in Leviticus 23:11 to actually be the weekly Sabbath following the week of Unleavened Bread, not the Sabbath during the week of Unleavened Bread like the Sadducees. If one is basing their observance of *Shavuot* on theological commonality, while there is more evidence in favor of following the Pharisaic method than any other—why is the Essenic method often not mentioned or even considered? There is at least limited theological commonality between the early Messianic Believers and the Essenes—when compared to no theological commonality at all with the Sadducees.

### Discussing this Issue with Fairness

The debate over whether the method of counting the *omer* via the Sadducees or Pharisees—and which one is correct—is a debate going back 2,300 years, and it is doubtful that the Messianic community will reach a solution in the short term. We should not consider it a salvation issue, though. **One day Yeshua the Messiah will return to sort it all out.** Brothers and sisters need to focus on the bigger issues which unite us during the Spring holiday season, and not divide over what are ultimately minor details.

The debate over counting the *omer* is probably a little more complicated than you originally thought, however. There is a great deal of information which is often left out of the deliberations by Saddusaical advocates, and there is often not a great deal of patience and forbearance which Pharisaical advocates have. How do we encourage a better way to investigate and analyze this issue in the future? How do we not leave important factors out of the conversation on how to count the *omer*? The burden of proof is actually more on the side of the Pharisaical advocates than the Saddusaical advocates—not because of the data which supports their view—but because of how they will treat those who fail to consider such data, should they defiantly reject and brand it as “traditions of men.”

Most who hold to the Saddusaical view have not examined the additional factors which play into one’s examination of this issue—factors which have a more significant impact on other, and far more important aspects of our theology. In the Messianic community, **we must have the proper attitude which allows for some variance and respects others whether they celebrate *Shavuot* in concurrence with or in modification of the standard Rabbinical calendar.** We have to be able to be constructive with those who hold to the Saddusaical point of view, and wish them God’s blessings, even if they do observe *Shavuot* on a date different from the Jewish Synagogue.

As today’s Messianic movement grows and matures—and most especially as its hermeneutics improve—most in the future will be celebrating *Shavuot* in tandem with the worldwide Jewish community.

We should not favor the side of the Sadducees **not** out of any animosity toward the Christian Church or Sunday as a day of the week, because God can clearly perform miracles on *any day of the week He wants to.* (And be reminded, *Shavuot* will occur on a Sunday sooner or later according to the Pharisaical method.) We should not favor the Saddusaical method for counting the *omer* because it really does not employ a responsible hermeneutical approach. We have to be honest with the broad scale of data which supports the traditional method of observance, no different than how we would consider the same factors for issues which are far, far more important to our Messianic faith and the salvation we possess in Yeshua. If these interpretational factors are forgotten for a small issue like the counting of the *omer*, we will get into the habit of forgetting them when presented with **real salvation issues** like Yeshua’s Messiahship.

Also for the long term, we should encourage a Quartodeciman style of remembering Yeshua’s resurrection to emerge, as the traditional method of counting the *omer* for observing *Shavuot* wins out. This would likely be some kind of an intimate prayer service, where we reflect on His rising from the dead, immediately following the start of the *omer* count.

As we wait for more cohesion to come forth, in the meantime, each of us **must be united around the fact that He did resurrect**, even though some fail to recognize that the belief in resurrection is Pharisaical. Likewise,

the primacy of loving one's neighbor above all other commandments is Pharisaical (b.*Shabbat* 31a). If we can love one another and be reasonable, then we can work out the debate of counting the *omer* in an appropriate manner which brings glory to God, and will accomplish His tasks in the Earth.