

# **The Resurrection Of Yeshua & The Festivals Of Firstfruits: Part 1**

## **Biblical Roots**

Yeshua was raised from the dead at the Festival of the Firstfruits of the Barley Harvest, not the "first day of the week" as suggested by many New Testament translations, even though it happened to be Sunday. The Church was born seven weeks later at the Festival of the Firstfruits of the Wheat Harvest, otherwise known as Pentecost.

This is the first of a two-part series. For a discussion of the Jewish Literature and the Greek New Testament, see Part II.

For a view of the censor's amendments to the Talmud, which substitutes "Sadducees" for "Jewish-Christians", see Part III.

The Festival of Passover commemorates the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Shortly afterwards, there is the Festival of the Firstfruits of the Barley Harvest, more commonly known as the "First Day of the Omer" . An omer is a measure of grain, and on the First Day of the Omer the priest would wave a sheaf of barley, equivalent to an omer, before the Lord. This festival is known as "First of Weeks" in the New Testament, although it is commonly mistranslated as "first day of the week". It is important to understand the significance of this festival, because it is the day when Yeshua rose from the dead.

Seven weeks later, when the wheat harvest is ready, there is the Festival of the Firstfruits of the Wheat Harvest, otherwise known as the "Feast of Weeks" or Pentecost. This festival is not just an agricultural festival. It also commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai because it occurs at about the same time of the year according to Exodus 19:1.

The First of Omer, the Feast of Weeks, and the interval between them are described in Leviticus 23:10-17 as follows: Speak unto the children of Israel, and say to them, When you come into the land which I give you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it....And you shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new meat offering to the Lord. You shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord.

Deut. 16:9-10 as says "weeks" rather than "sabbaths" as follows: Seven weeks shall you number unto you: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as you begin to put the sickle to the corn. And you shall keep the Feast of Weeks [Pentecost] unto the Lord your God, according as the Lord your God has blessed you.

In modern-day Judaism, the First Day of the Omer is always 16th Nisan, the day after Passover, so that Pentecost (50th Day of the Omer) is on 6th Sivan. However, at the time of Yeshua there was a debate going on between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees interpreted "the morrow after the sabbath" in Lev. 23:15 to be the day after Passover, since any non-working day is considered to be a Sabbath. The Sadducees interpreted it literally to mean the day after the first weekly Sabbath after Passover.

By comparing the New Testament accounts with the Jewish traditions as described in the Talmud, Mishnah and Midrash Rabbah, it is possible to establish the following:

- Yeshua was executed on Thursday 14th Nisan and rose again on Sunday 17th Nisan. •The "First of Weeks", described in Matt. 28:1 and various other passages, is the First Day of the Omer according to the Sadducees, not the Pharisees.

For details of this discussion, together with some notes on the Greek text of the New Testament, see Part II.

## **First of Weeks**

On a number of occasions the New Testament translates "mian sabbaton" and other similar phrases as "first day of the week" when it should be one of the following, depending on the context:

- "First of Weeks", meaning the First Day of the Omer. •"One of the Sabbaths", meaning any of the weekly Sabbaths that are counted from Passover to Pentecost. •"First of the Sabbaths", meaning the first weekly Sabbath that is counted from Passover and Pentecost, although there are no circumstances in which this translation needs to be used.

The erroneous translations of these phrases have occurred due to a lack of familiarity with Jewish customs and culture. This does not imply a lack of effort on the part of Bible translators, but rather that the long history of separation between Church and Synagogue has meant that Christian theologians have not had proper access to the large volumes of Jewish literature. This can now be corrected because of the availability of Jewish Literature on CD-ROM, and if you would like to know how to get one, send me a mail message.

The verses affected by this error, suitably corrected, are as follows: Matt. 28:1. After the sabbaths, at the dawning into the First of Weeks, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the grave.

Mark 16:2. And very early on the First of Weeks, the sun having risen, they came upon the tomb.

Luke 24:1. But on the First of Weeks, while still very early, they came on the tomb, carrying spices which they prepared; and some were with them.

John 20:1. But on the First of Weeks Mary Magdelene came early to the tomb, darkness yet being on it.

John 20:19. Then it being evening on that day, the First of Weeks, and the doors having been locked where the disciples were assembled, because of fear of the Jews, Yeshua came and stood in the midst, and said to them, Peace to you.

Acts 20:6-16. But we sailed along after the days of unleavened bread from Phillipi, and came to them at Troas in five days, where we stayed seven days. And on one of the sabbaths, the disciples having been assembled to break bread, being about to depart on the morrow, Paul reasoned to them. And he continued his speech till midnight..... For Paul had decided to sail by Ephesus, so as it might not happen to him to spend time in Asia; for he hastened if it were possible for him to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

1 Cor. 16:2-8. On the First of Weeks, let each of you put by himself, storing up whatever he is prospered, that there not be then collections when I come.....But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost.

### **Comments on the Translations**

"After the sabbaths" in Matt 28:1 means the Passover sabbath which was on a Friday, and the regular weekly Sabbath which was Saturday. Any non-working Festival day is considered to be a Sabbath.

The event described in Acts 20:6-16 is too late to be "First of Weeks", therefore the alternative translation "one of the sabbaths" is used.

1 Cor. 16:2-8 suggests that money and goods had to be "stored up" over a period of time, rather than taking a weekly collection. The period of accumulation would be from the First of Weeks until shortly after Pentecost, when Paul was expected to arrive.

### **Resurrection of Yeshua at the Firstfruits of Barley Harvest**

The "First of Weeks", when Yeshua was raised from the dead, is referenced not only in the Gospels, but also in 1 Cor. 15:20-23 using the alternative name "Firstfruits".

But the fact is that the Messiah has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died. For since death came through a man, also the resurrection of the dead has come through a man. For just as in connection with Adam all die, so in connection with the Messiah all will be made alive. But each in his own order: the Messiah is the firstfruits; then those who belong to the Messiah, at the time of his coming;

This has the clear meaning that Yeshua rose from the dead on the Festival of Firstfruits when the priest waved the sheaf of barley before the Lord on the First day of the Omer. The Church was born on next Festival of Firstfruits, at Pentecost, when the priest waved the two loaves of bread, baked from the fine flour of the wheat crop. Yeshua was the firstfruit, and then more fruit would come. He alluded to the same thing in John 12:23.

I tell you that unless a grain of wheat that falls into the ground dies, it stays just a grain; but if it dies, it produces a big harvest.

### **Shavuot (Pentecost)**

Shavuot is a double celebration, based on the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai and the gathering of the wheat harvest in the Spring. In Israel the warm climate enables them to have two harvests, one in the Spring and the other in the Autumn, each with different crops being harvested at different times.

Approximately seven weeks after the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai and were given the Ten Commandments. This was accompanied by spectacular signs, described in Exodus 19:16 - 20:22 as follows: And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice ..... and all the people saw the thunders, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not, for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that you sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near into the thick darkness where God was. And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus you shall say unto the children of Israel, You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

When the Jews were gathered together in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, shortly after the resurrection of Yeshua, they witnessed some similar signs, as described in Acts 2:1-6.

The festival of Shavuot [Pentecost] arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh [Holy Spirit] and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak. Now there were staying in Yerushalayim religious Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered; they were confused, because each one heard the believers speaking in his own language.

Peter stood up and told them this was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel: Even on my slaves, both men and women, will I pour out my Spirit in those days; and they will prophesy. I will perform miracles in the sky above and signs on the earth below - blood, fire and thick smoke. (Acts 2:18-19)

The visitors to Jerusalem were obviously astonished by this event. They must have believed that God was visiting them again at Pentecost and re-stating the Law, but on this occasion they witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit, speaking through Peter and the other Apostles in many languages, telling them about Yeshua. With signs like these, it is hardly surprising that 3,000 people believed and were immersed in a single day (Acts 2:41).

For believers in Yeshua, Shavuot is a triple celebration, commemorating all of the following: •The giving of the Law at Mount Sinai; •The outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Messianic Community; •The ingathering of the early wheat harvest in Israel.

The Jews have a tradition of staying up all night on the eve of Shavuot, discussing the Torah, as a way of remembering how the Israelites waited for the Law to be given, as it says in Exodus 19:10-11.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day: for on the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

The disciples of Yeshua also had to wait for the Holy Spirit, according to Acts 1:4-5.

At one of these gatherings, he [Yeshua] instructed them not to leave Yerushalayim but to wait for "what the Father had promised, which you heard about from me. For Yochanan [John] used to immerse people in water; but in a few days, you will be immersed in the Ruach HaKodesh [Holy Spirit]".

Many Christians today, particularly of a Charismatic persuasion, have special meetings at Pentecost where they expect to receive the Holy Spirit. These type of meetings have no Biblical foundation, because the Holy Spirit is already given, just as the Law is already given. The Jews do not expect to receive the Torah at Shavuot. They already have the Torah, and they remember how their ancestors had to wait for it in the desert. Believers in Yeshua might also want to remember how the early Apostles waited for the Holy Spirit, but we do not need to wait for the Holy Spirit ourselves, because He is already with us, and we just need to get on with the work of ministering to people about Yeshua.

### **Sabbath or Sunday?**

One of the greatest hindrances to the work of the Church has been the separation between Christians and Jews, exacerbated by the switch from Saturday to Sunday worship, causing the Church to lose touch with its Jewish roots. The switch from Saturday to Sunday worship occurred gradually during the second and third centuries and was institutionalised by the Emperor Constantine early in the fourth century. Christians usually justify Sunday worship by saying that Jesus (Yeshua) rose from the dead on Sunday, therefore it must be a special day of the week. There is, however, no Biblical basis for this. The New Testament does not say that Yeshua rose from the dead on a Sunday. It says he rose on the "First of Weeks" which was most likely a Sunday but there is no special importance attached to the day of the week. Instead, the day of the year is important. The First of Weeks is the annual Festival of Firstfruits of the Barey Harvest, when Yeshua rose as the "firstfruits of them that slept". (1 Cor. 15:20). There is not a single verse in the New Testament about meetings for worship on Sunday, although you might be able to find it in some of the mistranslations. The Early Church used to meet on Shabbat, which was from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday. (The Jewish day always begins the previous evening).

Rev. 1:10 is sometimes used as a justification for Sunday observance: I came to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying...

Instead of being translated "the Lord's day" it should be "Day of the Lord" because this was why John heard the trumpet sounding. He was seeing a vision of what would happen when the Lord returns. This verse has got nothing to do with any day of the week. The church began to designate Sunday as the "Lord's Day" during the second and third centuries, long after the book of Revelation was written.

Does the first day of the week have any significance at all? Yes, but only in the sense that all six days of Creation have a significance, because God created different things on each day. On the seventh day God rested, and that is why we are commanded to rest.

On the first day, God said "Let there be light". Not the sun and moon because these were not created until the fourth day. Instead the first act of creation was the light of God's Shekinah Glory, that would separate the righteous from the wicked, and would light up the heavenly Jerusalem in the end times as described in Revelation 21:23.

The city has no need for the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God's Shekinah gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

See also John 8:12.

Yeshua spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light which gives life".

The Roman Pagans did not want the Shekinah Light that God created on the first day of the week. Instead they wanted to worship the Sun, and they called it Sunday. The Christians accommodated the Pagans by switching their own day of worship to Sunday, at the expense of alienating themselves from the Jews.

There is one verse that likens Messiah to the Sun: But unto you that fear my name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. (Mal. 4:2).

In this case the title "Sun of Righteousness" associates Messiah with the Shekinah glory, rather than the actual Sun in the sky which is just a dim reflection of God's glory.

Unless we see the Jewish context of our faith in Yeshua, our faith will also be as dim as the Sun. We might think that it is bright, but we will never really appreciate the Light of the World that separates Day from Night.

For details of the Jewish Literature that is used in support of this article, and notes on the translation of the Greek New Testament, see Part II.

See also Passover in the New Testament

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## **The Resurrection of Yeshua and the Festivals of Firstfruits: Part 2** **Jewish Literature and the Greek New Testament.**

Yeshua was raised from the dead at the Festival of the Firstfruits of the Barley Harvest, not the "first day of the week" as suggested by many New Testament translations, even though it happened to be Sunday. The Church was born seven weeks later at the Festival of the Firstfruits of the Wheat Harvest, otherwise known as Pentecost.

This is the second of a three-part series. For a Biblical Overview, see Part I.

For a view of the censor's amendments to the Talmud, which substitutes "Sadducees" for "Jewish-Christians", see Part III.

One of my immediate interests, after buying the Soncino Classics CD-ROM containing the Talmud, Midrash Rabbah, Zohar and Bible, was to try and find out the date of the Festival of Firstfruits of the Barley Harvest, when Yeshua rose from the dead. This festival is commonly known as the "First Day of the Omer", but in New Testament Greek, for example in Matt. 28:1, it is called "mian sabbaton" which can be translated "First of Weeks". It should not be translated "first day of the week" as in many popular versions because "sabbaton" is plural, meaning "sabbaths" or "weeks" but not "week". There is no reference to any particular day of the week.

### **Passover Chronology**

The Passover Preparation Day, when the lambs were slaughtered, is 14th Nisan. If the Preparation Day fell on the Sabbath, all leaven had to be removed on 13th Nisan (Talmud Mas. Pesachim 13a), but the lambs were still slaughtered on 14th Nisan, the only restriction being that people had to wait until sunset before carrying their sacrifices home (Talmud Mas. Pesachim 64b).

Passover is on 15th Nisan. On that point everybody is agreed.

Regarding the Sheaf Offering, there was a disagreement between the Pharisees and Sadducees.

•The Pharisees interpreted "the morrow after the Sabbath", in Lev. 23:11-15 to mean the day after Passover, since any non-working day was considered to be a Sabbath, so as far as they were concerned the Sheaf Offering was always 16th Nisan.

•The Sadducees, and another similar group called the Boethusians, believed that "the morrow after the Sabbath" must be taken in its strict literal sense, so that the Sheaf Offering was on the day after the first weekly Sabbath that occurred after Passover. (Talmud Mas. Ta'anith 17b, Talmud Mas. Menachoth 65a).

If Passover fell on the weekly Sabbath, the Pharisees and Sadducees were agreed that the Sheaf offering was on Sunday (Talmud Mas. Menachoth 65b).

To work out how this affects the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua, we have to take each view in turn.

### **The Pharisees Passover**

If Yeshua and his followers took the view of the Pharisees, that the First of Omer was 16th Nisan, the story of the burial and resurrection of Yeshua looks like this:

•14th Nisan - Yeshua died at 3pm and was buried before sunset. The small amount of daytime left after the burial counts as one day. •15th Nisan - Passover. One night and one day. •16th Nisan - First of Omer. One night, on the basis that he rose before sunrise.

This does not allow enough time, by any reckoning, to fulfil Yeshua's prophecy in Matt. 12:40, that he would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth".

Also there is a problem with the phrase "after the sabbaths" in Matt. 28:1. There has to be more than one Sabbath, and the only Sabbath in this scenario is the Passover festival itself, 15th Nisan. The Preparation Day, 14th Nisan, could not have been a Sabbath because they could not have crucified Yeshua on a Sabbath.

### **The Sadducees Passover**

If Yeshua and his followers took the view of the Sadducees, that the First of Omer was the day after the first weekly Sabbath after Passover (i.e. the first Sunday), then the time between the burial and resurrection of Yeshua depends on which day of the week was Passover. The only day that fits is Friday, so it works out as follows:

•Thursday 14th Nisan - Yeshua died at 3pm and was buried before sunset. The small amount of daytime left after the burial counts as one day. •Friday 15th Nisan - Passover. One night and one day. •Saturday 16th Nisan -

Shabbat. One night and one day. •Sunday 17th Nisan - First of Omer. One night, on the basis that he rose before sunrise.

Modern-day Judaism does not allow Passover to be on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday because it would cause problems with the dates of other festivals which are fixed by the luni-solar calendar that was implemented by Hillel II early in the fourth century. Before that time, the festival dates depended on the observation of the new moon and there would be no problem having Passover on a Friday (Talmud Mas. Beitzah 4b, Midrash Rabbah - Deuteronomy II:14-16).

The result that Yeshua must have risen on a Sunday will obviously please the Christians, because they have always believed that he rose on a Sunday and have used it as an argument for making Sunday into an alternative day of rest, instead of the Sabbath. The argument is of course false, because the New Testament does not attach any importance to the day of the week when Yeshua rose from the dead. Instead, it tells us that he rose on the annual festival when the Sheaf of Firstfruits of Barley was waved before the Lord. The importance of this is explained in 1 Cor. 15:20-23.

But the fact is that the Messiah has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died. For since death came through a man, also the resurrection of the dead has come through a man. For just as in connection with Adam all die, so in connection with the Messiah all will be made alive. But each in his own order: the Messiah is the firstfruits; then those who belong to the Messiah, at the time of his coming;

The next question to consider is the influence of the Sadducees. They didn't have much influence with Yeshua, as they tried to argue with him that there was no resurrection of the dead. However, this does not necessarily mean that he disagreed with everything else that they said. He might have agreed or disagreed with them on the question of the Sheaf Offering.

The Sadducees had dominated the Sanhedrin for some time before the reign of Alexander Janneus (105-79 BCE), until Simeon B. Shetah, brother-in-law of Alexander re-instated the Pharisees (Mishna - Mas. Avoth Chapter 1, Talmud Mas. Makkoth 5b, Midrash Rabbah - Ecclesiastes VII:19). However, the Sadducees were still quite influential at the time of Yeshua and appeared alongside the Pharisees, attempting to trap him in his words. They were quite close to the High Priest, and appear to be members of the Sanhedrin at the time of the persecution of the early church, according to Acts 5:17-21.

Now the cohen hagadol [High Priest] and his associates, who were members of the party of the Tz'dukim [Sadducees], were filled with jealousy. They arrested the emissaries and put them in the public jail....Now the cohen hagadol and his associates came and called a meeting of the Sanhedrin (that is, of Israel's whole assembly of elders) and sent to the jail to have them brought.

The Sadducees fell into demise some time later, so that there were no Sadducees left after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE (Talmud Mas. Sanhedrin 100b). Modern-day Judaism is profoundly influenced by the Pharisees, and rather less so by the Sadducees. In the Talmud, the Sadducees are sometimes referred to as "minim", which literally means "species", along with other groups such as the Jewish Christians who were considered heretical.

Notes On The Greek Text

Matt. 28:1 says: This can be literally translated as:

After the sabbaths, at the dawning into the first of the sabbaths

The word "sabbaton" is plural and means "sabbaths". It has no other meaning in Classical Greek, but in the Hebraistic Greek of the New Testament it can also mean "weeks" so we have:

After the sabbaths, at the dawning into the first day of the weeks

The Hebraistic derivation is as follows:

(Shabbat or Shavat) = Sabbath or rest

(Shavua) = Week

(Shavuot) = Weeks, or the Feast of Weeks meaning Pentecost.

Each word in the Hebrew language is a variation of a root word which usually consists of three characters. In this case "shavat" is the root word, meaning "rest". If this principle is carried over to the Greek, you get the result that "sabbaton" can mean both "sabbaths" and "weeks".

To show that this is not just fanciful thinking, consider Luke 18:12.

In this case "sabbatou" is singular and the phrase can be translated:

### **I fast twice in the week**

It obviously can't be translated "I fast twice on the Sabbath" because you can't fast twice on the same day, and in any case no Jew would fast on the Sabbath.

We have the result that "mian sabbaton" and other similar phrases can be translated as one of the following, depending on the context:

- "First of Weeks", meaning the First Day of the Omer.
- "One of the Sabbaths", meaning one of the weekly Sabbaths that are counted from Passover to Pentecost.
- "First of the Sabbaths", meaning the first weekly Sabbath that is counted from Passover to Pentecost, although there are no circumstances in which this translation needs to be used.

The term "First Day of the Weeks", or "First of Weeks" does not occur in Jewish literature, as far as I can make out, and it appears to be New Testament jargon for "First Day of the Omer". The days are counted as "First of Omer", "Second of Omer", and so on up to "Fiftieth of Omer" which is Pentecost.

A list of verses where "mian sabbaton" and other similar phrases are used in the context of the Days of the Omer are given in Part 1.

### **Conclusions**

- The Jewish literature throws a lot of light on the discussion of the dates of the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua.
- The crucifixion was on Thursday 14th Nisan, and the resurrection was on Sunday 17th Nisan. I am inviting criticism of this result. If anyone can find any reason why this result might be wrong, please send me a mail message.
- The year of the crucifixion and resurrection could be any year when Passover falls on a Friday, according to the Jewish Calendar which was at the time based on the observation of the New Moon.
- The influence of the Sadducees should be taken into account in our studies of the times of Yeshua and the early church.

See also Passover in the New Testament

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