

Chapter X

The Festival of Shabuath (Pentecost)

An important part of the celebration of Phasekh and the seven days of unleavened bread was the day on which the high priest waved the עמר (*omer*) of freshly cut grain in front of the alter of Yahweh as an offering. This event occurred on the first day of the 50-day count to the חג שבועות (*Khag Shabuath*; Festival of Weeks). As a result, for the Jews, and after them the Christians, the events associated with the 50 days of the Festival of Weeks (also called Pentecost) were regarded as an important facet of the Phasekh celebration.

The divergent opinions over exactly which day the *omer* wave offering took place proved to be the source of much debate among the various Jewish religious factions. For this reason, no discussion of the Phasekh and seven days of unleavened bread can be complete without addressing the issues surrounding the day of the *omer* wave offering, the 50-day period, and celebration of the *Khag* of Shabuath (Festival of Weeks; Pentecost). In our present chapter we shall examine the scriptural commands and statutes regarding Pentecost. This investigation will allow us later on to examine the different interpretations used by the various Jewish and Christian schools and, in our following volume, analyze their merits.

Pentecost

This 50-day period is in Hebrew called חמשים יום (*ha-massim yom*; the 50 days),¹ a phrase translated into Greek as πεντήκοντα ἡμέρας (*pentekonta hemeras*; the 50 days).² The thanksgiving harvest festival of the 50th day, meanwhile, is referred to as the חג השבועות (*Khag ha-Shabuath*; Festival of the Weeks),³ Aramaic חגא דשבועאי (*Khagga di-Shebuaya*), because one must count seven full weeks (49 days) from waving the *omer* offering.⁴ The next day after the seventh week (i.e., the 50th day) is a sacred convocation, a high Sabbath, and a festival.⁵ It is also called the Festival of Harvest and the Festival of Firstfruits.⁶ The *khag* of the 50th day, accordingly, is in Greek named πεντηκοστή (*pentecoste*), meaning “50th,”⁷

¹ Lev., 23:16.

² LXX Lev., 23:16.

³ Deut., 16:16; 2 Chron., 8:13; cf., Exod., 34:22, חג שבועת; Deut., 16:10, חג שבועות.

⁴ B. Men., 65a.

⁵ Lev., 23:15–21; Num., 28:6; Deut., 16:9.

⁶ Exod., 23:16; Num., 28:26.

⁷ The Greek word πεντηκοστός (*pentecostos*) means “fiftieth” and in the NT it is used to refer to “the fiftieth day” of the Festival of Weeks (GEL, p. 620; SEC, Gk. #4005).

“Pentecost” in English, taking “its name from the number of the intervening days.”⁸ The Jewish priest Josephus, for example, on several occasions calls this festival “Pentecost (πεντηκοστή; *pentecoste*),”⁹ as does Philo,¹⁰ Tobit,¹¹ and 2 Maccabees.¹²

The Khag of Weeks is listed as one of Yahweh’s three *moadim* (appointed times) to be celebrated during the year.¹³ It is specifically referred to in the Torah as a “חַג הַקֹּחַת עֹלָם” (*khoquth olam*; world-age lasting statute).¹⁴ The first written command to observe the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost) is found in the marriage covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai.¹⁵ The fact that it is mentioned with no explanation as to how one was to celebrate it points to the fact that its tenets were already well-established.

As we have already demonstrated with our previous discussion of the seven days of unleavened bread, the original covenant at Mount Sinai was a written codification of the commandments and age-lasting statutes already required in the verbal agreement of the Abrahamic Covenants.¹⁶ In support of this pre-Exodus requirement, the ancient Jewish book of Jubilees claims that not only did Isaak, Ishmael, and their father Abraham celebrate this festival but so did Noah and his sons before them and Jacob after them.¹⁷ Even present-day scholars acknowledge that the Festival of Weeks bears the signs of a pre-Exodus agricultural festival.¹⁸

Three Aspects

Under the handwritten Torah there are three aspects to this important scriptural festival:

- The waving of an *omer* offering on the first day.
- The festal period lasting 50 days.
- The high Sabbath, sacred convocation, and wave offering on the 50th and last day.

Both the first and last day of these 50 days are marked by a תְּנוּפָה (*tenuphah*; consecrated wave offering).¹⁹ The difference between the two wave offerings is that the first consisted of an *omer* of freshly cut grain while the last

⁸ Jos., *Wars*, 2:3:1.

⁹ Jos., *Wars*, 1:13:3, 6:5:3, *Antiq.*, 3:10:6, 13:8:4, 14:13:4, 17:10:2.

¹⁰ Philo, *Cont.*, 8 §21, *Decal.*, 30 §160, *Spec.*, 2:30 §176.

¹¹ Tob., 2:1.

¹² 2 Macc., 12:31f.

¹³ 2 Chron., 8:13; Lev., 23:1–4, 9–21.

¹⁴ Lev., 23:21; cf., Deut., 4:12–14; Mal., 4:4. Jer., 5:24, also indicates that this period is by statute. Jeremiah tells us that Yahweh keeps for us “the חַקֹּחַת (khoquth; statute) of the weeks of the harvest.”

¹⁵ Exod., 23:14–17, being part of the covenant found in Exod., 20:1–23:32.

¹⁶ See above Chaps. IV, VI, VIII.

¹⁷ Jub., 6:17–22, 16:13, 22:1–4, 44:1–4.

¹⁸ E.g. NCE, 2, p. 105.

¹⁹ Lev., 23:15, 17. The Hebrew word תְּנוּפָה (*tenuphah*) means, “a brandishing (in threat); by impl. *tumult*; spec. the official *undulation* of sacrificial offerings:—offering, shaking, wave (offering)” (SEC, Heb. #8573); “waving, shaking . . . bread for consecration (in wave-offering)” (CHAL, p. 392).

was represented by two loaves of freshly baked bread, each loaf made with two-tenth parts of an *ephah* of leavened flour.²⁰

Day of the *Omer* Wave Offering

Under the Torah, on the first day of the 50 days an עֲוֶמֶר (*omer*), or “sheaf,” wave offering is required. An עֲוֶמֶר (*omer*) is a dry measure or gathering of “newly cut grain,”²¹ as in “a *heap*.”²² An *omer* equals about four pints and is calculated as one-tenth of a Hebrew *ephah*.²³ This wave offering of newly cut grain is a gift to Yahweh of the firstfruits of the land from each year’s harvest. The offering occurs in the spring and is directly connected with the Promised Land. This offering is described in detail by the book of Leviticus.

When you come into the land (of Promise) which I am giving to you, and have reaped its harvest, and have brought in this *omer*, the beginning of your harvest, to the priest, then he shall wave this *omer* before Yahweh for your acceptance. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.²⁴

As we shall see, what is meant by the phrase “on the day after the Sabbath” proves to be a point of serious contention among the various sects of Judaism. Connected with the *omer* wave offering was also a burnt offering of a perfect lamb as well as a food and drink offering.²⁵ Under the guidance of this statute, no one could harvest or eat any of the new year’s crop until the offering had been made by the high priest at the altar.

And you shall not eat bread, and roasted grain, and new grain until the self-same day; this until you have brought the offering of your *eloahi*. It is an *olam* statute for your generations in all your dwellings.²⁶

Philo, the first century C.E. Alexandrian Jewish priest who belonged to the Pharisee sect, had a great deal to say about the *omer* wave offering. To begin with, he uses the Greek term ἐορτήν (*heorten*; festival) to describe the type of day for this offering. We must keep in mind that the Greek term ἐορτήν (*heorten*) has a much broader connotation than the Hebrew term *khag* (festival).²⁷ It

²⁰ Lev., 23:10, 15, 17; Deut., 16:9. Also see below n. 23.

²¹ CHAL, p. 277, “(newly) cut **ears of grain** (not sheaves; the stalks were cut off right under the ears.”

²² SEC, Heb. #6014, 6016.

²³ That an *omer* is about four pints, see NBD, p. 1323. One *omer* equals one-tenth of an *ephah* (Exod., 16:36). One-tenth portion of flour also equals one-tenth of an *ephah* (Num., 28:5). Therefore, one-tenth portion of flour equals one-tenth of an *ephah*. The two-tenths portion of flour in Lev., 23:17, as a result, equals two *omer* portions.

²⁴ Lev., 23:9–11.

²⁵ Lev., 23:12f.

²⁶ Lev., 23:14.

²⁷ Scriptures deal with three *khag* periods (Exod., 23:14–17, 34:18–23; Deut., 16:16; 2 Chron., 8:13): First, “the Phasekh shall be to you a *khag* of seven days” (Ezek., 45:21); the same period is at other times defined as keeping “the *Khag* of Unleavened Bread seven days” (2 Chron., 30:21; Ezra, 6:22). Second, there is the 50th day called the “*Khag* of Weeks” (Pentecost) (Deut., 16:9f, cf., 2 Chron., 8:13, and Lev., 23:15–21), though the entire 50-day period is often treated as an observance.

includes any celebration, banquet, sacrifice, or time of offering.²⁸ Yet Scriptures never specifically refer to the day of the *omer* wave offering as a *khag*, sacred convocation, or high Sabbath. Philo, on the other hand, includes under his definition of an *heorten* every day, the Sabbath day, and the day of the new moon.²⁹ Therefore, for Philo's purpose, a "ἑορτὴν (*heorten*; festival)" simply means a special observance.

Philo continues by noting that the fifth of the ten Jewish ἑορταί (*heortai*; festivals) or special observations "is the offering of the first ears, the sacred δράγμα (*dragma*; handful),"³⁰ *dragma* being his Greek translation of the Hebrew word *omer*.³¹ In another place, he refers to this day as a special *heorten* for the "hand-grip of corn."³² Philo adds definition for dating this event when he writes that, "within the festival (of Unleavened Bread)," which he calls a "springtime festival,"³³ there is "another ἑορτῆ (*heorte*; festival)." He then describes the *omer* wave offering in the following way:

This (festival) is called the δράγμα (*dragma*; Handful),
a name given to it from the ceremony which consists

And third, "the Khag of Tabernacles, seven days" (Lev., 23:34, 39, 41; Num., 29:12; Deut., 16:13, 31:10, cf., Neh., 7:73-8:18; 1 Kings, 8:2, 65, cf., 2 Chron., 5:3, 87:8f; Neh., 8:18).

The only festival period that is specifically subdivided into individual *khagi* by the Torah is the seven-day Khag of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread. On these occasions, the Phasekh of the 14th is called "a *khag*" (Exod., 12:14, 34:6) and the 15th, the first day of the remaining seven days, is made to be "a *khag*" (Num., 28:17; Lev., 23:6). The seventh and last day of the seven days of eating unleavened bread is also individually called "a *khag* to Yahweh" (Exod., 13:6). By implication, these details show that every day of that seven-day festival is a *khag*. We must also be careful to notice that in the often disputed verses found in Num., 28:17, and Lev., 23:6, it does not reference the 15th as the beginning of "a *khag* of seven days," as often assumed and as we find, for example, with the Khag of Tabernacles (e.g. Lev., 23:34, 39, 41; Num., 29:12; Deut., 16:13). The phrasing used in these passages is importantly different. What they actually provide is a mere closing statement about the entire period of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread, i.e., "you shall eat unleavened bread seven days." This phrasing was deliberate, for both passages begin with the statement that Phasekh was on the 14th (Lev., 23:5; Num., 28:16), and on the 14th one was required to eat unleavened bread (Exod., 12:18).

The late Samaritans give as the seven *moadim* the Phasekh, the seventh day of unleavened bread, the Festival of Weeks, the Memorial of blowing Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Festival of Tabernacles, and the eighth day following the seven-day Festival of Tabernacles (SHDL, pp. 165-168, 178; BCal, p. 6). Philo, meanwhile, gives ten ἑορταί (*heortai*; festivals): each day, each Sabbath, each new moon, Phasekh, the Handful wave offering, the Festival of Weeks, the sacred first day of the seventh moon, the fast of the tenth day of the seventh moon, and the Festival of Booths (Philo, *Spec.*, 2:11). The inclusion of every day, the Sabbath day, and day of the new moons by Philo's use of the term ἑορτὴν (*heorten*) proves that he goes well beyond the idea of a *khag*.

²⁸ The Greek word ἑορτὴν (*heorten*) means "a feast or festival, holiday" but in general is used to mean "holiday-making, amusement, pastime" (GEL, p. 277). For example, the "family זבאך (*zebakh*; slaughter or sacrifice)" used by Jonathan as an excuse for David's absence at King Saul's dinner on the second day of the month (1 Sam., 20:24-29, esp. v. 29) is in the Greek text of the LXX also literally translated as the "family θυσία (*thusia*; sacrifice)." Yet in the Greek works of Josephus, more oriented toward a Greek speaking, pagan audience, the same thought is referred to as an ἑορτὴν (*heorten*; festival) (Jos., *Antiq.*, 6:11:9).

²⁹ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:11. For his discussion of each of these celebrations see Philo, *Spec.*, 2:12-14, every day, 2:15-16, the weekly Sabbath day, 2:26, the new moons.

³⁰ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:11 §41.

³¹ The Greek term δράγμα (*dragma*) means, "as much as one can grasp, a handful, truss of corn . . . uncut corn" (GEL, p. 211). The LXX also uses δράγμα (*dragma*) as a translation of the Hebrew term *omer* (e.g. LXX Lev., 23:12, 15).

³² Philo, *Som.*, 2:11 §75.

³³ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:28 §160.

in bringing it to the altar as a firstfruit, both of the land which has been given to the nation to dwell in and of the whole earth, so that it serves that purpose both to the nation in particular and for the whole human family in general.³⁴

Philo remarks that in the first century C.E. the “handful (= *omer*) thus offered was of barley.” He continues:

The Torah ordained that the firstfruit offerings should be made of barley, a species of grain regarded as holding the second place in value as food. For wheat holds the first place and as the firstfruit of this has greater distinction, the Torah postponed it to a more suitable season in the future.³⁵

As we shall see below, wheat, holding the first place in value as food, was the primary firstfruit offering for the last day of the 50-day festival; wheat being a New Testament symbol for the righteous who will be harvested by Yahweh.³⁶

Philo further notes that this *omer* cereal offering can only come from the sacred land (i.e., the Promised Land), and must be a gift fit for the deity alone.³⁷ He then adds what he believed to be the higher meaning of this offering. While defining the symbolism of these “firstfruits of your reaping,” he writes that they are “not of the land but of ourselves, that we may mow and reap ourselves, by consecrating every nourishing, excellent and worthy growth.”³⁸

The first century Pharisee and Jewish priest Josephus also describes the grain used in his day as barley and the time of this offering as during the days of unleavened bread. At that time, he writes:

. . . our people partake of the crops which they have reaped and which have not been touched until then, and esteeming it right first to do homage to the deity, to whom they owe the abundance of these gifts, they offer to him the firstfruits of the barley in the following wise. After parching and crushing the little sheaf of ears and purifying the barley for grinding, they bring to the altar an *assarona* (= *omer*)³⁹ for the deity, and, having flung a handful thereof on the altar they

³⁴ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:29 §162. Philo further argues that this sacrifice was required only from the Israelites living on the sacred land because “the nation of Judah is to the whole inhabited world what a priest is to the State” (Philo, *Spec.*, 2:29 §163).

³⁵ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:29 §175.

³⁶ Matt., 3:11–22; Luke, 3:15–17. Also see Matt., 13:24–30, 36–41, esp. v. 25, 29, 30; and Luke, 22:31f.

³⁷ Philo, *Som.*, 2:11 §76.

³⁸ Philo, *Som.*, 2:11 §77.

³⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:1:6, with MT Exod., 16:16; and Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:9:4, with MT Num., 15:4, and MT Exod., 16:36. An *assarona* = an *omer* = one-tenth part of an *ephah*.

leave the rest for the use of the priests. Thereafter all are permitted, publicly or individually, to begin to harvest.⁴⁰

The 50 Days

Scriptures provide a specific method for counting the 50 days for the Festival of Weeks. We find this method first mentioned in the book of Leviticus.

And you shall number for yourself from the day after the Sabbath, from the day you bring in the *omer* of the wave offering, they shall be seven complete Sabbaths, until the day after the seventh Sabbath. You shall number 50 days.⁴¹

Similarly, the book of Deuteronomy states:

You shall number for yourself seven weeks. From the sickle beginning to cut on the *qamah* (growing stalks of grain)⁴² you shall begin to number seven weeks.⁴³

Josephus comments on these instructions:

When the seventh week following this sacrifice has elapsed—these are the 49 days of the “Weeks” . . .⁴⁴

Philo, meanwhile, writes:

The Festival of the Handful, which has all these grounds of precedence (privileges), indicated in the Torah, is also in fact anticipatory of another greater festival. For it is from it that the day of Pentecost is reckoned, by counting seven sevens, which are then crowned with the sacred number by the monad, which is an incorporeal image of the deity, who it resembles because it also stands alone.⁴⁵

Philo considered seven the number of completion and full perfection.⁴⁶ Seven sevens, accordingly, were an expression of complete perfection, crowned with the 50th day.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:5.

⁴¹ Lev., 23:15–16.

⁴² The Hebrew term *qamah* means, “something that rises, i.e. a stalk of grain” (SEC, Heb. #7054); “standing grain” (CHAL, p. 319).

⁴³ Deut., 16:9.

⁴⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:6.

⁴⁵ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:30 §176f.

⁴⁶ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:15 §58.

⁴⁷ For example, Philo writes of these 50 days, “by counting seven sevens, which are then CROWNED with the sacred number by the monad” (Philo, *Spec.*, 2:30 §176f). Similarly, he sees the eighth day after the seven days of the Festival of Tabernacles as a day that crowns (Philo, *Spec.*, 2:33 §211).

Just how one is to utilize the count of seven complete Sabbaths became a matter of much dispute among the various Jewish factions. We shall examine their different approaches in detail in a later chapter.

The 50th Day

The 50th and last day of the celebration was the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost). It was the greatest day of the 50-day period, being designated a high Sabbath and sacred convocation. Leviticus, for example, states:

And you shall make a proclamation on this same day, a sacred מִקְרָאִים (*miqrai*; gatherings for reading, convocation) it is to you. You shall not do any laborious work. It is a *olam* statute in all your dwellings in your generations.⁴⁸

Similarly, Numbers states:

And on the day of the firstfruits, as you offer a new food offering to Yahweh, in your weeks a sacred מִקְרָאִים (*miqrai*; gatherings for reading, convocation) shall be for you, you shall not do any laborious work.⁴⁹

The 50th day was also a *khag*. In Exodus the command was given to observe it as the “Khag of the harvest, the firstfruits of your labor of what you sow in the field.”⁵⁰ Likewise, Deuteronomy states:

And you shall perform the Khag of Weeks to Yahweh your *eloahi*, according to the measure of the free-will offering of your hand, which you shall give, accordingly as Yahweh your *eloahi* has blessed you.⁵¹

Under the Torah, another type of תְּנוּפָה (*tenuphah*; consecrated wave offering) of food, along with other sacrifices, was made. The book of Exodus specifically names wheat as the firstfruits.

And you shall observe for yourself the Khag of Weeks, the firstfruits of the wheat harvest.⁵²

The ceremony is described in Leviticus:

And you shall bring near a new food offering to Yahweh; you shall bring in bread out of your dwellings for a wave offering, two (loaves); they shall be of two-tenth parts of flour; they shall be baked with leavening, firstfruits to Yahweh.⁵³

⁴⁸ Lev., 23:21.

⁴⁹ Num., 28:26.

⁵⁰ Exod., 23:16.

⁵¹ Deut., 16:10.

⁵² Exod., 34:22.

⁵³ Lev., 23:16f.

Along with these two loaves were provided seven perfect year-old lambs, one bullock, and two rams for burnt offerings, with a food offering, a drink offering, and a fire offering of sweet fragrances to Yahweh.⁵⁴ Besides these, there was one he-goat for a sin offering and two one-year-old lambs for a peace offering.⁵⁵ The priest was also required to wave these offerings.⁵⁶

The Pharisee priest named Philo labels “the Festival of Sevens or Weeks” as the seventh of his ten ἑορταί (*heortai*; festivals) or observances of the Jews, seven for him being the perfect number.⁵⁷ He describes this festival as follows:

The festival which is held when the number 50 is reached has acquired the title of “first-products.” On it is the custom to bring two leavened loaves of wheaten bread for a sample offering of that kind of grain as the best form of food. One explanation of the name, “Festival of First-products,” is that the first produce of the young wheat and the earliest fruit to appear is brought as a sample offering before the year’s harvest comes to be used by men.⁵⁸

Philo notes that the offering takes the form of loaves instead of wheaten meal.⁵⁹ Wheat is used because all other crops are second in ranking as food.⁶⁰ The offering itself was given as a thanksgiving.⁶¹

Josephus, meanwhile, writes:

Pentecost—thus the Jews call a festival which occurs seven weeks after (Phasekh), and takes its name from the number of intervening days.⁶²

He describes the festival as follows:

When the seventh week following this sacrifice has elapsed—these are the 49 days of the “Weeks”—on the Pentecost day, which the Hebrews call “Asartha, (Closing Assembly),”⁶³ the word denoting “50th,” they present to the deity bread of two *assarons* (*omer*

⁵⁴ Lev., 23:18.

⁵⁵ Lev., 23:19.

⁵⁶ Lev., 23:20.

⁵⁷ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:11 §41.

⁵⁸ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:30 §179.

⁵⁹ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:30 §186.

⁶⁰ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:30 §181.

⁶¹ Philo, *Spec.*, 2:30 §182.

⁶² Jos., *Wars*, 2:3:1.

⁶³ The Greek name ἀσαρθά (Asartha) is from the Aramaic form אַסַּרְתָּא (Atsartha) (B. Pes., 42b) a form of the Hebrew name אַסַּרְתָּא (Atsartha) (Hag., 2:4) meaning, “an assembly, espec. on a festival or holiday” (SEC, Heb. #6116), “festive assembly” (CHAL, pp. 281f). It is derived from the word אַסַּר (atsar), “to inclose; by anal. to hold back; also to maintain, rule, assemble” (SEC, Heb. #6113). J. J. B. Segal argues that an *atsarth* is “a formal reunion at the shrine,” serving as a *tempus clausum* or ending assembly that closes or places a seal on the festival period (THP, pp. 208–213). Thackeray refers to it as “closing (festival)” (Thackeray, *Jos.*, iv, p. 439, n. d), as does JE, 9, p. 592. This concept also agrees with Philo’s interpretation that the eighth day of the Festival of Tabernacles and the 50th day of the Festival of Weeks act as a “crown” on those festivals (Philo,

portions)⁶⁴ of flour of wheat made with leaven and, as a sacrifice, two lambs. These are by ordinance to be offered to the deity, but are made up into a repast for the priests, and it is not permitted to leave any portion of them over for the next day.⁶⁵

The name ἀσάρθᾱ (Asartha), Hebrew עֲצָרָה (Atsarth; Closing Assembly), is used to describe the day ending a festival period. For example, the last day of the seven days of unleavened bread as well as the last day of the Festival of Tabernacles are both referred to as an Atsarth.⁶⁶

Other Requirements

There were three other requirements attached to the Festival of Weeks: (1) appearing and being worthy, (2) rejoicing, and (3) remembering.

- The first requirement was that all males should appear before Yahweh at the festival.⁶⁷ The Festival of Weeks, therefore, was under the Torah of Moses an annual pilgrimage festival to the Tabernacle (Temple) of Yahweh. When the males appeared they were not to be “רַקָּמָה (ryqam; unworthy).”⁶⁸ Each was to provide a gift from his own hand, “according to the blessing of Yahweh your *eloahi* which he has given to you.”⁶⁹
- The second requirement was to make the Festival of Weeks a time of rejoicing for everyone:

And you shall REJOICE before Yahweh your *eloahi*, you and your son, and your daughter, and your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is inside your gates, and the resident alien, and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place which Yahweh your *eloahi* shall choose to cause his name there to dwell.⁷⁰

- Third, the Israelites were to “remember” during this festival that their families had once been slaves in Egypt.⁷¹ The connection with their

Spec., 2:30 §176f, 2:33 §211). The Hebrew name עֲצָרָה (Atsarth) is often utilized as a substitute for “Weeks” by the Talmudists in reference to this festival (JE, 9, pp. 592, 593).

⁶⁴ One *assarona* = one *omer* = one-tenth part of an *ephah*, see above ns. 23 & 39. Therefore, two *assarons* of flour equal two *omer* portions.

⁶⁵ Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:6.

⁶⁶ Deut., 16:8; Lev., 23:36.

⁶⁷ Deut., 16:16f. A requirement for all three festivals (cf., Exod., 23:14–17, 34:20, 23).

⁶⁸ The Hebrew term רַקָּמָה (*ryqam*) means, “*emptily*; fig. (obj.) *ineffectually*, (subj.) *undeservedly*” (SEC, Heb. #7387). With this understanding in mind for all three festivals (Deut., 16:16; Exod., 23:14–17, 34:20–23), Saul warns Christians not to drink the cup or eat the bread of Phasekh “unworthily,” and those that did shall be “guilty of the body and blood of the sovereign” and a cause of “judgment to himself” (1 Cor., 11:26–29).

⁶⁹ Herein is established the principle that the more Yahweh gives to you the more that is required from you (Luke, 12:48).

⁷⁰ Deut., 16:11.

⁷¹ Deut., 16:12. In Scriptures, Egypt is used as a parable for our present world. The ultimate slavery is being a bondman to sin (John, 8:34–36) and being in bondage to fear (Rom., 8:15), especially the fear of death (Heb., 2:15), and being in bondage of corruption (Rom., 8:21) and to

former status as slaves in Egypt, and the accompanying knowledge that Yahweh had subsequently gained their freedom for them, once more speaks of the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread and couples the Festival of Weeks to it. The 50 days, as we shall demonstrate in a later chapter,⁷² represent the period during which the Israelites were led out of Egypt by Yahu Yahweh until they had reached Mount Sinai, at which time they were given the Torah of Moses and agreed to the Old Covenant.⁷³

Dependent on Phasekh

The date for the Festival of Weeks is totally dependent upon the date for the *omer* wave offering. At the same time, the *omer* wave offering is totally dependent upon the timing of Phasekh and the seven days of unleavened bread. This circumstance makes the 50 days of the Festival of Weeks an integral and inseparable part of the week of Phasekh. What is revealed, as J. B. Segal stresses, is that Pentecost is “subordinate to” and an “appendage of” the Festival of Phasekh.⁷⁴ J. Van Goudoever similarly comments, “the Feast of Weeks is not an independent festival, but depends upon the Passover season.”⁷⁵ In the Jewish work entitled *Pesikta*, Pentecost is referred to as the “עֲצָרָה (Atsarh; Closing Assembly) of Phasekh.”⁷⁶ The connection between Phasekh and Pentecost is demonstrated in the following ways:

- First, these two festivals and their high Sabbaths are joined together as part of the celebrations coming after “the return of the year,” i.e., beginning with the first moon, the month of Abib, in the first half of the year.⁷⁷ The Festival of Tabernacles and the remaining high Sabbaths, on the other hand, all come in the seventh moon, being the month of Tishri, at the “going out of the year”—i.e., in the second half of the year.⁷⁸
- Second, in the various lists of the festivals, the Festival of Weeks is rendered second in time after the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread.⁷⁹ One passage in Exodus, to demonstrate, follows a regulation

the elements of the world (Gal., 4:3). According to Scriptures, the truth from Yahweh’s word will set you free (John, 8:31f). Freedom is to be a part of the New Covenant (Gal., 5:1, cf., 4:21–30) and being set free from sin, becoming righteous (justified), and receiving eternal life (Rom., 6:18–23, cf., 6:6–12). The parable of finding freedom from slavery in Egypt, therefore, is the escape from the present world with its sin, corruption, fear, and death and, in turn, the finding of freedom by attaining eternal life without sin.

⁷² See below Chap. XVI, pp. 256ff.

⁷³ NBD, p. 964; NCE, 11, p. 109; BCal, pp. 131, 139–144, 186–190; ACC, 2, p. 1160; JE, 9, p. 592.

⁷⁴ THP, p. 129, “it [the Festival of Weeks] occurs at a fixed interval of time after the Passover and it is subordinate to it”; pp. 180, 235, “it is an appendage to the Passover”; p. 198, “no more than an appendage of the Passover; and so it remained throughout its history in normative Israelite religion.”

⁷⁵ BCal, p. 4.

⁷⁶ *Pesik.*, 30:193.

⁷⁷ 1 Kings, 20:26; 2 Chron., 36:10; cf., Exod., 12:2, 13:4, 23:15, 34:18; Deut., 16:1. And see NBD, p. 178. The Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread and the Festival of Weeks properly fall between the vernal equinox and the summer solstice in the first quarter of the year.

⁷⁸ E.g., Exod., 23:16. These festivals are the Day of Trumpets on Tishri 1, the Day of Atone-ment on Tishri 10, the Festival of Tabernacles from Tishri 15 to 21, and the Last Great Day on Tishri 22 (see Lev., 23:23–43).

⁷⁹ Exod., 23:14–17, 34:18–22; Lev., 23:1–44; Num., 28:11–29:39; Deut., 16:1–15; 2 Chron., 8:13.

dealing with the Phasekh meal with a command to bring the first of the firstfruits to the house of Yahweh.⁸⁰ Yet in the detailed explanation found in Leviticus 23, after describing Phasekh and the seven days of eating unleavened bread, and unlike the method used for all of the other *khagi* and high Sabbath days mentioned in that same chapter, there is no statement pinpointing exactly when to begin the seven weeks to Pentecost. All that is said is that the *omer* wave offering shall be provided from "the beginning of your harvest" and waved by the priest "on the day after the Sabbath."⁸¹ When one adds to this report the statement that no one was to eat from the new year's crop until after the *omer* was waved before the altar of Yahweh,⁸² there can be little doubt that the beginning crop of the year that was indicated was the spring barley corn.⁸³ The Sabbath used as a basis for this counting, on the other hand, is not specifically identified or dated.

- Third, definition is added to our problem from the story found in the book of Joshua, which tells of the Israelite invasion of the land of Kanaan by Joshua the son of Nun. The *omer* wave offering was not commanded to begin until the Israelites entered the land of Kanaan (the Promised Land).⁸⁴ Up until that time they had for 40 years been dwelling in the wilderness and consuming manna, a "bread from heaven" provided to them by Yahweh.⁸⁵ The passage in question from Joshua reports the conversion from manna to grain breads just after the Israelites crossed the Jordan river and invaded the land of Kanaan. These events occurred over the first three days of the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread. Joshua reports:

Abib 14. "And the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal and they prepared the Phasekh on the 14th day of the moon at *arab* (twilight), on the plains of Jericho."⁸⁶

Abib 15. "And they ate from the עֲבוֹר (abur; stored grain)⁸⁷ of the land מִבְּחֹרֶת (ma-mokhorath; from the

⁸⁰ Exod., 34:25f.

⁸¹ Lev., 23:10f.

⁸² Lev., 23:14. Exod., 34:26, similarly states, "You shall bring the first of the firstfruits of your ground to the house of Yahweh your *eloahi*."

⁸³ As stated by Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:10:5; Philo, *Spec.*, 2:29 §175.

⁸⁴ Lev., 23:9f.

⁸⁵ Exod., 16:4–35; Num., 11:4–9; Deut., 8:1–18; Josh., 5:10–12; Neh., 9:20f; Ps., 78:21–25; John, 6:31–58.

⁸⁶ Josh., 5:10.

⁸⁷ The early Hebrew word עֲבוֹר (*abur*), when used for grain, is only found in Scriptures at Josh., 5:11 and 12. It has been popular in recent decades to dismiss the early rendering of עֲבוֹר (*abur*) as "old corn" and to interpret it by the much later usage found among the Pharisees and in the Aramaic language as "produce" in general (e.g. ADB, 3, p. 740). This has been a mistake. The word was correctly understood by earlier translators to mean, "passed, i.e. kept over; used only of stored grain:—old corn." (SEC, Heb. #5669), "Old corn or produce" (YAC, p. 203); SRB and KJV, "old corn." The term עֲבוֹר (*abur*) is a form of עָבַר (*abar*), meaning, "passed on . . . passed away . . . passed a limit . . . passed away, disappeared" (HEL, pp. 185f), "prop. crossed, i.e. (abstr.) transit . . . to cross over" (SEC, Heb., #5668, 5674), and many times expresses the idea to "pass through or by"

day after)⁸⁸ the Phasekh, unleavened bread and roasted grain on this same day.”⁸⁹

Abib 16. “And the manna ceased בַּמִּחְרָת (*ma-mokhorath*; from the day after) they had eaten from עֲבוּר (*abur*; stored grain) of the land; and there was no more manna to the sons of Israel, but they ate from the תְּבוּאֹת (*tebuath*; produce)⁹⁰ of the land of Kanaan in that year.”⁹¹

The above evidence proves that the “stored grain,” that is, grain stored over from the previous year’s crop,⁹² was consumed by the Israelites on Abib 14 and 15. On the other hand, since the sons of Israel began to eat “from the תְּבוּאֹת (*tebuath*; produce) of the land” grown “in that year” on the 16th of Abib, it demonstrates that the *omer* wave offering had been made on that same date. The very fact that the manna, symbolic of the old bread, ceased on the

(cf., Num., 22:26; Josh., 4:1, 11; 2 Sam., 15:24, 17:16; Prov., 10:25; Lam., 3:44; Amos, 7:8, 8:2; Nah., 1:15). It is clear, therefore, that the two references in Josh., 5:11f, were to the previous year’s crop that had passed over into the next year. That this grain was from the previous year’s crop is further indicated by the statement in Josh., 5:12, which states that, after the manna had ceased, “they ate תְּבוּאֹת (*ma-tebuath*; from the produce) of the land of Kanaan in that year.” Josephus notes that, at the time they overthrew the city of Jericho, “they reaped the corn of the Kanaanites, now at its prime, and took any other booty they could. For it was also at that time that the supply of manna ceased which had served them for 40 years” (Jos., *Antiq.*, 5:1:4).

Those who accept the Pharisaic view, on the other hand, translate and understand the term עֲבוּר (*abur*) from Josh., 5:11f, by the much later Aramaic sense of their form עֲבוּרָא (*abura*). In this form it generally means the “*produce of the ground*” or “*grain*,” including grain coming directly out of the field (HEL, p. 186; CHAL, p. 262). The LXX, for example, uses the rather innocuous term σίτου (*sitou*), meaning “*corn, grain*, comprehending both wheat (σπρόγ) and barley (κριθή),” either “at its ripening” or “*public distribution of corn in Rome*” (GEL, p. 730; GEL, 1968, p. 1602). Only in the latter sense does it imply that it came from storage. The Greek term σίτου (*sitou*), meanwhile, is also used to translate such sundry terms as דָּגָן (*dagan*; grain) (Gen., 27:28, 37; Num., 18:12, 27; Deut., 7:13, 12:17, 14:23, 18:4; שֶׁבֶר (*sheber*; kernels of grain) (Gen., 42:26, 43:2, 44:2); and חִטָּה (*khitah*; wheat) (Judg., 6:11; 1 Chron., 21:23; 2 Chron., 2:10), thereby diluting the meaning behind עֲבוּר (*abur*). This broader understanding is inappropriate. If the reference in Joshua had been to grain standing in the field, the word קָמַה (*qamah*; standing grain) would have been used. קָמַה (*qamah*) means, “*standing corn, especially in the ear*” (HEL, p. 229); “something that rises, i.e. a stalk of grain:—(standing) corn, grownup, stalk” (SEC, Heb. #7054); “**standing grain**” (CHAL, p. 319). In fact, the word קָמַה (*qamah*) is used in Deut., 16:9, as a direct reference to the cutting of the *omer* wave offering. Also the term דָּגָן (*dagan*; grain) could have been used. But the ancient word עֲבוּר (*abur*) holds a much more specific meaning, one that goes beyond the idea of grain in general. Rather, it refers to grain that has “passed by” the year in which it was grown, therefore “stored or old grain.”

⁸⁸ The Hebrew term בַּמִּחְרָת (*ma-mokhorath*), the initial בַּ (*ma*), a form of מִן (*min*), meaning, “*from . . . from out of . . . of . . . by . . . because of . . . besides . . . among*” (HEL, pp. 137, 147), and מִחְרָת (*mokhorath*) meaning, “*the morrow or (adv.) tomorrow:—morrow, next day*” (SEC, Heb. #4283); “**the following day . . . adv. on the next day**” (CHAL, p. 191); “*to-morrow . . . מִמְחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת the day after the sabbath*” (HEL, p. 143). מִחְרָת (*mokhorath*) is translated in the LXX as ἐπαύριον (*epaurion*) (CS, 1, p. 508), which also means, “*on the next day*” (ILT, *Lex.*, p. 38), “*occurring on the succeeding day, i.e. . . . to-morrow:—day following, morrow, next day (after)*” (SEC, Gk. #1887), “*on the morrow*” (GEL, 1968, p. 612). That בַּמִּחְרָת (*ma-mokhorath*) means “the day after” is proven beyond any doubt by the parallelism found in 2 Sam., 11:12f, and by the context of Lev., 7:15–18, 19:5–7.

⁸⁹ Josh., 5:11

⁹⁰ The term תְּבוּאֹת (*tebuath*) means, “*income, i.e. produce (lit. or fig.):—fruit, gain, increase, revenue*” (SEC, Heb. #8393); “**produce, yield**” (CHAL, p. 386).

⁹¹ Josh., 5:12.

⁹² See above n. 87.

16th verifies that it was on this day in that particular year that the *omer* wave offering took place and the new grain from the field began to be harvested and eaten.

Yet even if one were to translate עֲבוּר (*abur*) as “produce” in general, as has been popular,⁹³ thereby placing the *omer* wave offering on the 15th, one important piece of evidence is created: the *omer* wave offering was made after the Phasekh of the 14th and within the seven days of unleavened bread. The Sabbath after which the *omer* of the firstfruits of the beginning harvest was to be waved, therefore, cannot be the first Sabbath day of a new year, for by the 14th of Abib there had already been at least two weekly Sabbaths since the new year began.

Whether one uses the Aristocratic method, which counts the 14th as the Phasekh high Sabbath, or the Hasidic method, which makes the 15th the Phasekh high Sabbath, we can be sure of one more thing: the 50-day count to Pentecost must begin sometime after the Phasekh of the 14th and after a Sabbath ending within the seven days of unleavened bread. As a result, as J. Van Goudoever notes, “in Israelite tradition there is a close relation between the keeping of the Sabbath and the counting of the 50 days.”⁹⁴

Conclusion

From the evidence we have gleaned so far, several important facts about the Festival of Weeks have emerged. To begin with, it is an appendage to Phasekh, coming 50 days after a Sabbath day falling within the week of unleavened bread. Next, there are three aspects to this festival under the handwritten Torah: (1) the *omer* wave offering of the first day, falling after the Sabbath that occurs within the seven days of unleavened bread, (2) the count of 49 days (seven complete Sabbaths), and (3) the Festival of Weeks and the pilgrimage coming on the 50th day, itself falling after a Sabbath day. All males were commanded to appear before Yahweh during the festival of the 50th day. They were to appear worthy, to have a rejoicing attitude, and to hold in remembrance the history that their families had once been slaves in Egypt.

⁹³ See above n. 87.

⁹⁴ BCal, p. 17.