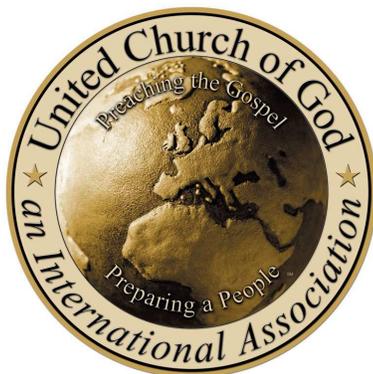


United Church of God, *an International Association*

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## **Pentecost and Its Observance**

*Doctrinal Paper*

*Approved by the Council of Elders*  
*September 1997*

All scriptures are quoted from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee) unless otherwise noted.

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# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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**P**entecost holds a special place in the history of the Church of God, since it was on this day that the New Testament Church was founded (*Acts 2:1-3*). The name of the Festival is derived from the Greek word for fiftieth, *pentekoste*,<sup>1</sup> meaning fiftieth with the word day implied.<sup>2</sup> The Greek term is a translation of the Hebrew expression “Festival of Fifty Days.” The Septuagint does not use this term when referring to this festival, instead we find the Greek equivalent of the “Feast of Weeks” in *Exodus 34:22*. Nevertheless, *pentekoste* is used in Hellenistic Judaism (180 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.) for the Feast of Pentecost. Both Philo and Josephus used this term (Philo *Decal.*, 160; Josephus, *Antiquities* book III, 10, 6; book XIII, 8, 4; book XIV, 13, 4; book XVII, 10, 2).

The expression refers to the fact that Pentecost was the fiftieth day in a specific counting commanded in the Old Testament. The festival is one of the seven annual Holy Days listed in Leviticus 23.

And you shall proclaim on the same day *that* it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work *on it*. *It shall be* a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations (*Leviticus 23:21*).

This same Festival is referred to as “the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labor” (*Exodus 23:16*). Elsewhere it is called the Feast of Weeks (*Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10, 16*). The frequent use of the term “Feast of Weeks” makes reference to the time period between the Days of Unleavened Bread and this particular Festival. The implication of counting a number of days (or weeks) is clear in the very name of the Festival.

Throughout the years, a number of questions have arisen about this Festival and its observance. The United Church of God, *an International Association* accepts the Holy Days, including the Festival called Pentecost, as being commanded for Christians. The controversies which surround Pentecost arise from the *proper* day of observance and not generally *whether* the day should be observed.

The Festival of Pentecost lasts one day and, in accordance with the practice in the United Church of God, it always immediately follows a weekly Sabbath. In the recent history of the Church of God, controversies have arisen concerning the proper understanding of how to determine the day on which Pentecost should be observed from year to year. Let us notice the instruction concerning this Festival in *Leviticus 23:15-16*:

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<sup>1</sup>Kittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gerhard, Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Erdman’s Publishing Company) 1985. Pages 44-45. The Greek word *pentekoste* means “fiftieth.”

<sup>2</sup>Vine, W. E., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981. “An adjective denoting fiftieth, is used as a noun, with ‘day’ understood, i.e., the fiftieth day. . . Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8. . .”

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

---

And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.

The day on which the count began was the day of the offering which began the barley harvest in the ancient land of Israel. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* has this to say under the article *Barley*: "Seven weeks elapsed from the beginning of the barley harvest in late April until the completion of the wheat harvest at the beginning of June (*Deut. 16:9-12; Ruth 2:23*). The harvest culminated at the feast of Pentecost."<sup>3</sup> The command to keep this festival is found in *Deuteronomy 16:9-10*:

You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin to put the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you.

The count was to conclude on the fiftieth day, on which an offering was presented of two loaves of bread baked from the firstfruits of the wheat harvest (*Leviticus 23:17-21*). This fiftieth day is thus identified as the Feast of Pentecost.

In studying this topic to determine the proper day for the observance of Pentecost, the following questions need to be asked:

- Should one begin the count after the first annual Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Is this the Sabbath being referenced in *Leviticus 23*? If so, does the count begin with the second day of Unleavened Bread?
- Should the count begin after the seventh day of Unleavened Bread? Is this the Sabbath being referenced in *Leviticus 23*?
- Does the count begin on a Sunday during the days of Unleavened Bread? If so, what is the appropriate procedure for determining Pentecost in a year when the first day of Unleavened Bread falls on a Sunday?

Depending on the perspective that an individual takes, there are at least four possible options for Pentecost (or a fifth if you include the common practice in churches today of observing Whitsunday<sup>4</sup>):

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<sup>3</sup> Achtemier, Paul J., Th.D., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Sunday counted from Easter. Often called Whitsuntide or Whitsunday, this was the first annual festival adopted in the Catholic and Protestant world, as a successor or a form of Pentecost. For Roman Catholicism the counting of this day depends on the date for Easter Sunday. The eastern churches insist on observing it only after the Jews have observed the first day of Unleavened Bread.

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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- 1). **Sivan 6** or fixed date for Pentecost. The actual day of Pentecost can fall on virtually any day of the week according to this scenario. Sivan 6 is 50 days after Nisan 16. The necessity for counting is eliminated by this approach. By beginning the count on a fixed date of the month, you will arrive at a fixed date for the festival.
- 2). **Sivan 12** or fixed date for Pentecost. Sivan 12 is the fiftieth day, if you begin counting on Nisan 22, the day immediately following the last day of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 21). The same statement can be made here as was made earlier. The necessity for counting is eliminated by beginning the count on a fixed date.
- 3). **Monday Pentecost**, 50 days from the Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. There are two methods employed for obtaining a Monday Pentecost: (a) *exclusive* counting, beginning the count on Monday as day one, *excluding* the Sunday of the wavesheaf; (b) *inclusive* counting, beginning the count on the Sunday of the wavesheaf, but observing Pentecost on the Monday *after* the fiftieth day.
- 4). **Sunday Pentecost**, 50 days from the Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 50 days are counted, and Pentecost is celebrated on the fiftieth day, which will always be on a Sunday.

With these options available, we should examine the biblical evidence to see which is the most appropriate one. Which one best fits the biblical evidence?

## Analysis of the Various Options

We should begin our study with an analysis of the various options which have been applied to this particular Holy Day. We address these options without passing judgment on those who would accept any one of these as being valid. In recent years, the various groups which observe the Holy Days have differed with one another regarding which option is most appropriate. Let's briefly analyze the four possible options presented above for the observance of Pentecost.

**Option # 1:** Sivan 6 Pentecost (or Feast of Weeks; Heb. for weeks-- *shabuoth*). This is the date which is observed by the Jewish community. Although, we must recognize that this is not the only date that has been observed in Judaism. The historical record shows that during the first century there was a dispute as to when the day was to be observed. There are those in some of the Church of God groups who follow the teaching of the Jewish faith and observe Pentecost on Sivan 6. Normative Judaism teaches that the count toward Pentecost should begin on the day after the First Day of Unleavened Bread, or Nisan 16, therefore, the Feast of Pentecost will always fall on Sivan 6. Although this approach seems to obviate the need for counting, it rests on three basic principles:

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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- The Sabbath referenced in Leviticus 23:15 (“from the morrow after the Sabbath”) is the First Day of Unleavened Bread. Thus, Nisan 16 is day one, and Sivan 6 is day fifty.
- During the time of Christ, the Pharisees observed this festival on Sivan 6. Since the Pharisees sat in “Moses seat” (*Matthew 23:2*), our practice should mirror theirs. We must point out that not all the Jews of the first century followed this practice. The Sadducees did not observe Pentecost on Sivan 6, but on what we call in this paper option # 4, Sunday Pentecost.
- The Jews observe Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks on Sivan 6.

References to the disagreement between the Pharisees and Sadducees on the observance of Pentecost can be found in several sources. Below are three such examples from two sources:

*The New Bible Dictionary, article Calendar:* In general, the Jewish calendar in NT times (at least before AD 70) followed the Sadducean reckoning, since it was by that reckoning that the Temple services were regulated. Thus the day of Pentecost was reckoned as the fiftieth day after the presentation of the first harvested sheaf of barley, *i.e.* the fiftieth day (inclusive) from the first Sunday after Passover (*cf.* Lv. 23:15f.); hence it always fell on a Sunday, as it does in the Christian calendar. The Pharisaic reckoning, which became standard after AD 70, interpreted ‘sabbath’ in Lv. 23:15 as the festival day of Unleavened Bread and not the weekly sabbath; in that case Pentecost always fell on the same day of the month (an important consideration for those in whose eyes it marked the anniversary of the law-giving) but not on the same day of the week.<sup>5</sup>

*The New Bible Dictionary, article Pentecost:* The Sadducees celebrated it on the 50th day (inclusive reckoning) from the first Sunday after Passover (taking the ‘sabbath’ of Lv. 23:15 to be the weekly sabbath); their reckoning regulated the public observance so long as the Temple stood, and the church is therefore justified in commemorating the first Christian Pentecost on a Sunday (Whit Sunday). The Pharisees, however, interpreted the ‘sabbath’ of Lv. 23:15 as the Festival of Unleavened Bread (*cf.* Lv. 23:7), and their reckoning became normative in Judaism after AD 70, so that in the Jewish calendar Pentecost now falls on various days of the week.<sup>6</sup>

*Harper’s Bible Dictionary, article Pentecost:* The dating of this festival also suggests its original agricultural context. Deut. 16:9 says that it is to be dated seven weeks ‘from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain.’ Lev. 23:15-16 directs: ‘And you shall count from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven full weeks shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after the seventh sabbath.’ Josephus calculated the date of Pentecost as the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover, and, in time, this manner of calculation became standard.<sup>7</sup> (**Note: Josephus was a Pharisee and primarily promoted their perspective.**)

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<sup>5</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Achtemier, Paul J., Th.D., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1985.

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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**Option # 2:** Sivan 12 Pentecost. This is the traditional date for the Festival of Weeks among the Jews of Ethiopia. It is based on beginning the count on the day immediately after the entire seven day Festival of Unleavened Bread has concluded. The Ethiopian Jewish community has recently relocated to the state of Israel. Perhaps over time they will come to adopt the standard Jewish date of Sivan 6, but traditionally, they observed Sivan 12.

**Option # 3:** Monday Pentecost. The Church of God under the leadership of Herbert Armstrong took the approach that the counting described in Leviticus 23:15 did not include the day mentioned as ‘the morrow after the sabbath.’ The count begins with Sunday, but does not include Sunday. This method is referred to as ‘exclusive reckoning’ because it *excludes* Sunday. The weekly cycle for the purpose of counting the weeks to Pentecost runs from Monday through Sunday. And after the seventh weekly cycle was counted, the very next day, Monday was the day of Pentecost.

The difficulty seems to have arisen in the interpretation of the word ‘from.’ When counting days, a person will say, ‘Seven days from today, I will visit with you.’ If you state this on Sunday, there is no problem in knowing that you mean the following Sunday, seven days later. This count would not include the day you made the statement. It was this sort of logic that led to the observance of a Monday Pentecost. This position can be summed up in two principles:

- The English word ‘from,’ as the KJV translation reads in Leviticus 23:15, cannot include the day on which you start your count. This is an ‘exclusive count.’ (There are some who observe Pentecost on Monday who use an ‘inclusive count.’ This approach calls for Pentecost to be observed on the 51<sup>st</sup> day, or the day after the 50<sup>th</sup> day.)
- Monday was the teaching of the Church during much of Mr. Armstrong’s lifetime and there was no reason to make a change.

Many contemporary followers of a Monday Pentecost, while rejecting exclusive counting, continue to observe the festival on Monday because it was the acceptable day in the Worldwide Church of God for many years prior to 1974.

A more recently introduced argument for a Monday Pentecost is found in an alternate interpretation of Acts 2:1. In the King James Version (KJV) this verse reads:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

The implication that is gained from this verse is that the fiftieth day had come to an end, and that the disciples had assembled together on the fifth-first day, which is now a Monday. This is a relatively new explanation, but it is based on an old source.

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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Apparently, English Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556 C.E.)<sup>8</sup> had translated this verse in 1539 C.E. as follows: “When the fifty days had *come to an end*, they were all with one accord together in one place.” In the marginal notes for Acts 2:1, Bullinger makes a similar statement in *The Companion Bible*.<sup>9</sup> This was interpreted to mean that the events in chapter two of the book of Acts took place *after* the fiftieth day was over. If Christ was crucified on Wednesday of that year then the Pharisee Pentecost, Sivan 6, would have fallen on a Friday and would have been over by the time the events of Acts 2 were taking place. However, this interpretation does not disprove the possibility that Archbishop Cranmer still believed that the events of Acts 2 occurred on a Sunday, the Sunday observed that year as Pentecost by the Sadducees. More than likely, Archbishop Cranmer observed Whitsunday and not Pentecost. Since he believed that Sunday was the day of Christian worship, he might have assumed that the Church began designating the seventh Sunday after Easter as Whitsunday by Church tradition, using the Old Testament Feast of Weeks as a guide rather than as a blueprint for the Church observance. In that way, a Sunday that was related to the birth of the Church was being given special focus.

Whatever the reasoning of the Archbishop might have been, this alternate translation is problematic. The difficulty results from the use of an unusual Greek construction known as an *articular infinitive*. This type of grammatical construction indicates a contemporaneous action that is taking place—so that Acts 2:1 is saying that the activities of this day were taking place on the *fiftieth* day, not the fifty-first day. The author of Acts, Luke, used the grammatical construct in *Luke 8:23*, translated as “they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy.” That is to say that the boat was in the process of being filled with water and, obviously, it had not yet sunk.

**Option # 4:** Sunday Pentecost. This date is arrived at by counting 50 days beginning with the Sunday, which follows the *weekly* Sabbath (“the morrow after the Sabbath”) during the Days of Unleavened Bread. This option is also called “inclusive” reckoning since Sunday is the first day of the count. The primary focus comes from Leviticus 23:15 and the meaning of the Hebrew word translated into the English “from.” It can be demonstrated that a better translation of this Hebrew word into English would be “beginning with.” This position interprets the reference to the “morrow after the Sabbath” as being the morrow after the weekly Sabbath during Unleavened Bread and not the First Day of Unleavened Bread.

## Published Statements by Herbert Armstrong in 1974

During Mr. Armstrong’s lifetime, various dates were used for the observance of Pentecost. We have evidence that Mr. Armstrong may have kept a Sivan 6 Pentecost when he first began observing the Holy Days in 1927. The evidence for this is very sketchy, but shortly

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<sup>8</sup>*The Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition*, (New York: The Encyclopedia Britannica Company) 1910. Volume VII, Article “Cranmer, Thomas.”

<sup>9</sup>*The Companion Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishers) 1974. “. . .the day being completed. . .”

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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after he began observing the Holy Days, he began observing Pentecost on a Monday, based on the counting of the 50 days “away from” Sunday as he interpreted Leviticus 23.

Mr. Armstrong later made a change, admitting that an error had taken place with an “exclusive” count instead of an “inclusive” count. This was a fundamental change in the teachings of the Worldwide Church of God in 1974. Also in 1974, Mr. Herbert Armstrong, in introducing the change from a Monday Pentecost to a Sunday Pentecost, made the following statement:

The Pentecost question is one that can be made very complex and complicated. Also it can, and I feel should . . . be made quite simple. To simplify it, I do not like to say the issue is whether we count 50 days from a Sunday inclusively or exclusively. In English, 50 days from a Sunday can be counted no other way than that one day from Sunday is Monday, and 50 days from Sunday always falls on a Monday. The crux of the matter is in the statement. . . ‘But when it (the Hebrew ‘*mi*’ or ‘*min*’) is translated as ‘*from*’ (instead of on) and is used in conjunction with the element of time, it is always used inclusively, and never exclusively.’ This being true—that is, in the Hebrew, when in relation to time, it should never be translated into the English ‘from,’ but ‘beginning on.’ It is the fact that one of the translators of the RSV, who is Chairman of the Revision Committee now revising the RSV, said not only that, but that he will strongly recommend the revision will so translate it, that caused me to change the Pentecost from Monday to Sunday. It is just that simple. In English, 50 days from a Sunday is always a Monday. But when I learned that two of the actual translators confirmed this as above, and I found the English ‘from’ to be misleading, I changed it immediately. One other point: in Deuteronomy 16:9 the Hebrew word for ‘weeks’ is *shabbua*, meaning primarily ‘weeks,’ but also ‘seven,’ ‘sevened,’ or ‘Sabbath,’ but in Leviticus 23:15-16, the word is ‘shabbat’ meaning ‘Sabbath,’ or a week always ending on a Sabbath, and not on any other day. With these two points made clear, all problems and complications are avoided.<sup>10</sup>

In studying the observance of Pentecost, it is important to understand the historical context. It was in 1974 that the Worldwide Church of God began observing Pentecost on Sunday (the 50<sup>th</sup> day after the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread). Mr. Armstrong’s position was that the issue should not be complicated with a number of technicalities. There was no attempt to ignore these technicalities and the subsequent study paper addressed most of them. To arrive at the correct biblical position in this matter, we need to study the relevant passages of scripture. After all, our position must rest on scripture and not necessarily on what has been practiced historically.

## Leviticus 23

In dealing with Leviticus 23, we must address the term “Sabbath” and what it means in this context. There are three references to the word Sabbath (or Sabbaths) in verses 15-16.

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<sup>10</sup> A Simplified Note from Herbert W. Armstrong introducing *Pentecost Study Material* © 1974 Ambassador College

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the **Sabbath**, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven **Sabbaths** shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh **Sabbath**; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

The English word ‘Sabbath’ or its plural ‘Sabbaths’ is translated from the Hebrew *shabbath* or its plural form *shabbathoth*. Although there are some translations that use the word ‘weeks,’ this is not the most common translation. In fact, in the *King James Version (KJV)* the word *shabbath* (or its plural *shabbathoth*) is only translated Sabbath and is *never* translated weeks. There is another word in Hebrew which is translated weeks. This can be found in *Deuteronomy 16:9* and also in *Exodus 34:22*. The word used in these verses for weeks is *shabuoth*. The singular form of this word is *shabua*. In the *King James Version*, and the *New King James Version* this Hebrew word is never translated as Sabbath. In twenty occurrences in the *KJV*, this word is translated as ‘week’ (or weeks) nineteen times and on one occasion it is translated ‘seven.’ *The Englishman’s Hebrew-Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament* makes this point quite clearly. The word *shabbath* can be found 108 times and in every instance it is translated Sabbath or Sabbaths and never weeks.<sup>11</sup> According to this same source, the Hebrew word *shabuoth* is never translated as Sabbath, but is in every instance but one translated as weeks.<sup>12</sup>

The significance of the term Sabbath becomes clear when one endeavors to determine the beginning point of the 50-day count. Does this term refer to the weekly Sabbath or does it refer to the annual Sabbath, the First Day of Unleavened Bread? It is interesting that in Leviticus 23, the discussion begins with a reference to the weekly Sabbath in verses 1-3. The term ‘Sabbath’ is not used again until we arrive at the discussion of the wavesheaf in verse 11 and then again in verses 15-16 referencing the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). The logical conclusion is that since there has been no reference to festivals being annual Sabbaths, but only to a weekly Sabbath, we are still dealing with the weekly Sabbath in verse 11 and again in verses 15-16. There is no precedent for concluding this to be a reference to the annual Sabbath. The first clear reference to a festival being an annual Sabbath in this chapter doesn’t occur until verse 24 when we discuss the Feast of Trumpets. Here the Hebrew word is not *shabbath* as used previously, but rather another related word, *shabbathon*. The Day of Atonement is referred to in a phrase in verse 32 as “*shabbath shabbathon*,” but at the end of the verse Israel is commanded to “celebrate your sabbath.” The Hebrew word for Sabbath in this phrase, referring to the Day of Atonement is “*shabbath*.” In verse 39, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Holy Day immediately following the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles are referred to by the term “*shabbathon*.” So, with the exception of the Day of Atonement reference, the word *shabbath* is arguably used only for the weekly Sabbath in this chapter. The difficulty is to determine with certainty which is being referenced in verse 15—is the term for the Sabbath here a reference to the weekly Sabbath

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<sup>11</sup>*The Englishman’s Hebrew-Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament*, (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited) 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1890; page 1235.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, page 1224

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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or the annual Sabbath? The Hebrew term used in all four instances is *shabbath* (verse 3, verse 11, verse 15, and verse 16).

In Leviticus 23 we must be consistent in our understanding of these verses. If we conclude that verse 3 is referring to the weekly Sabbath, then we have no reason to conclude that verses 11, 15, and 16 aren't referencing the same weekly Sabbath. The phrase used in these verses in the Hebrew is identical with the exception of the word "seventh" that appears in verse 16, but does not appear in verse 15 or verse 11. Here are the three verses as written in the *King James Version*:

Verse 11—" . . . **on** the morrow after the Sabbath. . ."

Verse 15—" . . . **from** the morrow after the Sabbath. . ."

Verse 16—" . . . **even unto** the morrow after the **seventh** Sabbath. . ."

We must be consistent and either all three verses refer to the weekly Sabbath or none refers to the weekly Sabbath. The three statements are identical in the word usage, with the exceptions noted in bold. We should also be consistent in our interpretation. The word "Sabbath" is used three times prior to verse 15 in this chapter. In verse 3, the reference is clearly to the weekly Sabbath. In verse 11, we have a similar construction as verse 15. We can logically conclude that *the only* other clear mention of the Sabbath in Leviticus 23, prior to verse 15 is in reference to the weekly Sabbath. Where is the transition to explain that the First Day of Unleavened Bread is also called a Sabbath? There is no location in the Old Testament where the First or Last Day of Unleavened Bread is called a Sabbath. Only in the New Testament do we find a reference to the First Day of Unleavened Bread as a Sabbath. Note John 19:31.

Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away.

This is not meant to imply that the First and Last Days of Unleavened Bread are not *Sabbaths*! We simply make the point that such terminology is not used in the OT to refer to these days. Therefore, consistency would require acceptance of Leviticus 23:11, 15-16 as being references to the weekly Sabbath and not the annual Sabbath.

The other term that must be clearly understood from Leviticus 23 is found in verse 15. We find here the expression: ". . . **from** the day after the Sabbath, **from** the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. . . **to** the day after the seventh Sabbath. . ." In the *King James Version*, we read: ". . . **from the morrow** after the sabbath, **from the day** that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. . . Even **unto the morrow** after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days. . ." Other translations are quite similar in their rendering of these two verses. The *American Standard Version* translates the verse: ". . . **from** the day after the sabbath, **from** the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering. . . **to** the day after the seventh sabbath."

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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The count was to be *‘from’* a specific date *‘to’* another specific date, with a set period of time in between. An analysis of the Hebrew expression *‘from the morrow’* will provide a better understanding of how the count was to proceed. The *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* has this to say:

4283 mochorath or mochoratham (1 Sam 30:17) from the same as 4279; TWOT - 1185b; n f ; AV - morrow 29, next day 2, next 1; 32 GK - 4740 {מָחָרָה} 1) the morrow, the day after<sup>13</sup>

According to *Strongs* this word is used 32 times in the *King James Version* of the Old Testament. 29 times it is translated “morrow,” 2 times it is translated “next day,” and 1 time it is translated as simply “next.” Of these 32 references, 28 of them contain the preposition “mi” in front of the word. This can be verified in the *Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament*. In 25 of these instances it is translated as “on the morrow” in the *King James Version* and once “and the morrow.” Following is a listing of the 28 references that include the preposition “mi,” along with the translation in the *King James Version* as taken from the *Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament*:<sup>14</sup>

Genesis 19:34 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Exodus 9:6 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Exodus 18:13 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Exodus 32:6 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Exodus 32:30 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Leviticus 7:16 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Leviticus 19:6 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Leviticus 23:11 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
**Leviticus 23:15 “. . . from the morrow. . .”**  
**Leviticus 23:16 “. . . unto the morrow. . .”**<sup>15</sup>  
Numbers 16:41 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Numbers 17:8 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Numbers 33:3 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Joshua 5:11 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Joshua 5:12 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Judges 6:38 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Judges 9:42 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Judges 21:4 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
1 Samuel 5:3 “. . . on the morrow. . .”

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<sup>13</sup> *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

<sup>14</sup> *Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament*, (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, Limited) 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1890.

<sup>15</sup> It is actually misleading to use the word “unto” here without explanation. The Hebrew expression translated “on the morrow” immediately follows the preposition which is translated “unto.” Therefore, Leviticus 23:16 would more accurately read “unto on the morrow. . .” Such a phrase is awkward in English so the preposition “on” is left untranslated in the NKJV. The NKJV says “Count fifty days to the day after. . .” The KJV renders the phrase “even unto the morrow after. . .”

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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1 Samuel 5:4 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
1 Samuel 11:11 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
1 Samuel 18:10 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
1 Samuel 20:27 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
1 Samuel 31:8 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
2 Samuel 11:12 “. . .and the morrow. . .”  
2 Kings 8:15 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
1 Chronicles 10:8 “. . . on the morrow. . .”  
Jeremiah 20:3 “. . . on the morrow. . .”

The overwhelming evidence is in favor of beginning the count “on the morrow after the Sabbath.” This would be *inclusive* and not *exclusive* reckoning. Therefore, day one is the Sunday after the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread and day fifty is a Sunday. This would be a consistent understanding of the Hebrew expression ‘*mi-mohorat*.’

As has already been shown, *Deuteronomy 16:9-10* tells us to count seven weeks in determining Pentecost. *Leviticus 23:15* tells us to count seven Sabbaths (“*seven Sabbaths shall be completed*”). The only way that these instructions can be correlated is if the week we are told to count begins on the *first* day and ends on the *seventh* day. In this case when we count the Sabbath we are counting a complete week. This is the only way to reconcile the two sets of instructions found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

## A Partial Week?

Are the weeks (*shabuoth*) referenced in Deuteronomy 16 truly full weeks, each ending with a Sabbath? Can there be partial weeks in this count? A partial week will result when a day other than the first day of the week is used as day one. If the count were intended to start on any other day of the week, say, a Wednesday, seven weekly cycles would be completed on a Tuesday. In this case we would have a *partial* week, Wednesday to Sabbath, six complete weeks from Sunday to Sabbath, and another *partial* week from Sunday to Tuesday. Notice how this would look if you began your count on a Wednesday:

Wednesday to Sabbath = one partial week, 4 days  
6 full weeks (Sunday to Sabbath) = 42 days  
Sunday to Tuesday = one partial week, 3 days  
Total of 49 days, followed by the 50<sup>th</sup> day on Wednesday (morrow after the 49<sup>th</sup> day)

We could also count seven Sabbaths, and not have 49 days. In the hypothetical example above we count the seven Sabbaths, and then we still have to count the remaining days of Sunday through Tuesday to complete the seven weekly cycles. It should be noted here that the *NRSV* (*New Revised Standard Version*), *Moffat*, *NIV*, and the *JPS* (*Jewish Publication Society*) all translate Leviticus 23: 15 ‘seven Sabbaths shall be complete’ as ‘seven weeks’ or ‘seven full

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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weeks.” The *King James Version* and the *New King James Version* are both faithful to the original Hebrew text where the word *shabbath* is used. If weeks were the intended meaning in these verses, then a different Hebrew word should have been used-- *shabuoth*.

It is certainly true that seven full weeks could be satisfied by seven weekly cycles, independent of when the weekly cycle started. Thus, it would be permissible to have two fragments of a week and six complete weeks (from the first day through the seventh day or Sabbath) according to this explanation. But is this what is intended by the scriptures?

An argument could be made here that God starts the week on the first day and ends it on the seventh day, the creation week being an example (*Genesis 1*). This argument, however is not necessary in the determination of how to count to the day of Pentecost. It is to be noted here that Deuteronomy was written after Leviticus. The instructions from Leviticus have to be taken into account, as Deuteronomy *supplements* Leviticus. There is no contradiction between the two.

Deuteronomy 16:9 tells us that seven weeks are to be numbered; Leviticus 23:15 tells us that seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Starting the count towards Pentecost on any other day of the week except Sunday would not meet both requirements. Since the day after the First Day of Unleavened Bread could fall on any day of the week, including Sunday, we don't believe it is correct to start the count towards Pentecost on Nisan 16. Only one time in seven would the count be correct, and in that case Sivan 6 would also fall on a Sunday.

## What About the Wave Sheaf Offering?

The next set of instructions in Leviticus 23 pertains directly to determining the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. The children of Israel are instructed to bring a sheaf of the first grain harvest to the priest before they completed the rest of the harvest they had sown. In the Middle East this grain would be the barley harvest that began to ripen during the month of Abib. The word translated “sheaf” is the Hebrew word *omer*. It refers to what a harvester would have in his hand after cutting a swath of grain. Bible references will show that it measured about 2 quarts. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* has this to say about the *omer*:

The omer (Heb. 'omer) was one-tenth of an ephah (Exod. 16:36), or a little more than 2 dry quarts. According to Exod. 16:16-18, the omer was a day's ration of grain.<sup>16</sup>

The priest was to take the omer brought to him and wave it in the air to be accepted “on their behalf” on the day after the Sabbath. The word is *shabbath* in Hebrew and is the same word used for the seventh day weekly Sabbath in the first part of *Leviticus 23*. Logic would imply that this Sabbath after which the sheaf of grain was waived is a weekly Sabbath associated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Thus the Wavesheaf day was not on a fixed date.

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<sup>16</sup> Achtemier, Paul J., Th.D., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1985.

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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A problem arises when the fourteenth of Nisan (Abib) falls on a weekly Sabbath. In this case the First Day of Unleavened Bread would be observed on Sunday (Nisan 15). Under the Old Covenant, sacrifices were offered every Sabbath. Jews circumcised their sons on the eighth day even when the eighth day was a Sabbath. There is no reason to suppose that the Passover sacrifice would not have been offered on the fourteenth of Nisan even when that date fell on a weekly Sabbath. The question has arisen whether or not in a year in which the first Holy Day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread occurs on Sunday, if the Wavesheaf would be offered on that day. This would be the only Sunday *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. The Sadducees waited until the next Sunday, which means the omer would have been waved on Nisan 22, thus outside the Days of Unleavened Bread. Is this really proper given all we see in the scriptures?

If the Passover falls on the weekly Sabbath then the people would have already removed the leavening from their homes, since removing the leavening would constitute work. In this case, they are actually keeping eight days of Unleavened Bread instead of seven. This actual possibility indicates the season for counting Pentecost rightly begins with the fourteenth of Nisan, the day of the paschal sacrifice. Neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees acknowledged this principle. The Sadducees objected to the fact that the Pharisees believed that the Wavesheaf offering could occur on a day other than Sunday (the morrow after the Sabbath). The Pharisees objected to the fact that, on occasion, the Sadducees would offer the Wavesheaf outside of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Beginning the season on Passover day best harmonizes the scriptures. This approach assures that the Wavesheaf is always offered on Sunday and that it is always offered within the Days of Unleavened Bread. This understanding requires that if the first Holy Day of Unleavened bread is a Sunday, it will also be the day of the Wavesheaf offering. Nothing in scripture prohibits this from occurring.

We have biblical evidence to support this practice of counting for Pentecost. Leviticus 23:14 prohibits eating any of the spring harvest until the offering of the Wavesheaf. In Joshua 5:11-12 we find that the Israelites did eat of the spring harvest on the day after the Passover. The original King James translation added the word ‘old’ before the word ‘corn.’ The word ‘old’ is not in the original Hebrew. However, according to the Sadducees, it would be forbidden to eat of the spring harvest on the first Holy Day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread since the Wavesheaf offering could never take place on that day according to their system of counting Pentecost. There is no need to add a word which isn’t in the original Hebrew. The scenario in Joshua 5:11-12 can be understood as taking place in a year when the fourteenth of Abib was a weekly Sabbath. Thus, the First Day of Unleavened Bread fell on Sunday, and the omer was waved on that day, allowing the Israelites to eat of the new produce of the land. The Pharisees are required to interpret Joshua 5:11-12 as telling the reader that the Israelites ate of the new grain on the sixteenth of Abib. They understood the word Passover in verse 11 to be referring to the first Holy Day. If we read the previous scripture we note that the only explicit date given is the fourteenth day of the month. That was the date of the Passover sacrifice. Verses 11 and 12 are discussing the very next day.

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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We have New Testament evidence that there was a difference of practice between the Christians and the Sadducees on the counting of Pentecost when the Passover (Nisan 14) fell on a Sabbath, even though both groups agreed that Pentecost must occur on a Sunday. Luke 6:1 in the traditional Greek text speaks of the “*second-first Sabbath*.” This expression is understandable if that Sabbath were the twenty-eighth of Nisan in a year in which the fourteenth had occurred on a weekly Sabbath. The twenty-eighth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar would have been the second Sabbath counting towards Pentecost for Christ’s disciples, but only the first Sabbath counting towards Pentecost according to the system of the Sadducees (in this case the Sadducees would have begun the count on Nisan 22, the Sunday after the Last Day of Unleavened Bread).

The above is not the only explanation of Luke 6:1, but it provides an interesting possibility and is consistent with what we know about the Sadducees. In his commentary on Luke 6:1, Matthew Henry offers another explanation:

Christ justifies his disciples in a *work of necessity* for themselves on that day, and that was *plucking the ears of corn*, when they were hungry on that day. This story here has a date, which we had not in the other evangelists; it was *on the second sabbath after the first* (v. 1), that is, as Dr. Whitby thinks is pretty clear, the *first sabbath after the second day of unleavened bread*, from which day they reckoned the *seven weeks* to the feast of pentecost; the first of which they called *Sabbaton deuteroprōton*, the second *deuterodeuteron*, and so on.<sup>17</sup>

Matthew Henry supports the counting method of the Pharisees (beginning the count on Nisan 16), but he interestingly interprets Luke 6:1 as referring to the Sabbaths that were to be counted. This would seem to be inconsistent. It is true that the Greek word found in Luke 6:1 is *deuteroprōtos*. This is the only occurrence in the New Testament of this word. Without something to compare, the actual meaning is difficult to determine. In the margin of the *New American Standard Version* for Luke 6:1 we read: ‘Many mss. read the second-first Sabbath; i.e. the second Sabbath after the first.’<sup>18</sup> Liddell & Scott in their *Greek Lexicon* support the view taken by Matthew Henry by declaring that this word means “. . . the 1<sup>st</sup> Sabbath after the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread”<sup>19</sup>

## Differences Between the Pharisees and the Sadducees

In the ‘*Pentecost Study Material*’ published in 1974 under the Ambassador College copyright supporting the change from a Monday to a Sunday Pentecost, on page 61, we read:

After learning of God’s Sabbaths from the Bible, Mr. Armstrong turned to the Jews for basic knowledge of the Sacred Calendar. . . Using the Bible as his guide, Mr. Armstrong studied the

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<sup>17</sup> Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1991.

<sup>18</sup> *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

<sup>19</sup> Liddell & Scott, *Greek Lexicon*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1929

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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*Jewish Encyclopedia*—accepting the laws of the calendar but rejecting traditions which did not seem to square with the Bible. . . Jews now keep it [Pentecost] on a fixed calendar date, Sivan 6. Studying further, Mr. Armstrong found the priestly Sadducees had counted from the weekly Sabbath (which usually falls within the two annual Sabbaths) and had observed a Sunday.<sup>20</sup>

The Pharisees and Sadducees were both sects of the Jews in the first century. The two groups had numerous differences, one of them being the method of counting Pentecost. It is acknowledged that during the first century C.E. and up until the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the Sadducees controlled worship at the temple. Notice these comments from *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* in the article on the Pharisees:

From Herod to the Destruction of the Temple. Herod accepts and even favors the Pharisees, taking care not to wound their religious scruples. In line with their anti-Hasmonean policy, they never champion nationalistic resistance movements aiming at eschatological salvation. They become enmeshed in various palace intrigues, however, and after Herod's death and the banishment of Archelaus, when the Sadducees regain control, they no longer play a normative role. Yet their scribes remain popular as they legalize popular customs and beliefs, and the aristocracy does not attempt any forceful measures against them.<sup>21</sup>

It is only after the destruction of the Temple that the Pharisees gain control and the Sadducees, for the most part, disappear:

Except under Salome Alexandra the Pharisees have the role of a minority up to A.D. 70. Their great period comes only with the fall of the hierarchy. When the capture of Jerusalem shatters the Sadducean ideal, Pharisaism provides the direction needed for reconstruction. Politically independent, it nurtures community life in the synagogue. The failure of the Zealots clears the way for more moderate leaders such as Jochanan ben Zakkai. Jabneh with its chakamim [sages], which plays no part in the revolt, forms a center for reorganization.<sup>22</sup>

Other sources point out the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the matter of counting Pentecost. F.F. Bruce in his commentary on Acts 2:1 concludes that the Sadducees controlled the worship at the temple during the time of Christ.

This was the reckoning of the Sadducean party in the first century A.D. In the phrase "the morrow after the sabbath" (Lev. 23:15) they interpreted the sabbath as the weekly sabbath. While the temple stood, their interpretation would be normative for the public celebration of the festival; Christian tradition is therefore right in fixing the anniversary of the descent of the Spirit on a Sunday. (The "fifty days" of Lev. 23:15 are reckoned inclusively.) The Pharisees, however, interpreted the "sabbath" of Lev. 23:15 as the festival day of unleavened bread itself (on which,

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<sup>20</sup> *Pentecost Study Material* © 1974 Ambassador College

<sup>21</sup> Kittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gerhard, Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Erdman's Publishing Company) 1985.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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according to Lev. 23:7, no servile work was to be done); in that case Pentecost would always fall on the same day of the month (an important matter in the eyes of those to whom it marked the anniversary of the law-giving), but not on the same day of the week. The Pharisees could appeal to Joshua 5:11 (“the morrow after the passover”), read in the light of Lev. 23:10-14. It was the Pharisaic reckoning that became normative in Judaism after A.D. 70. . .”<sup>23</sup>

*Unger’s Bible Dictionary* in its article on *Festivals* confirms the position of the Sadducees regarding the timing of Pentecost:

The precise meaning of the word Sabbath [in Leviticus 23:15] in this connection, which determines the date for celebrating this festival [Pentecost], has been from time immemorial a matter of dispute. The Boethusians and the Sadducees in the time of the second temple, and the Karaites since the 8<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian era, have taken “Sabbath” in the sense of the *seventh day of the week*, and have maintained that the omer was offered on the day following that weekly Sabbath which might happen to fall within the seven days of the Passover. This would make Pentecost always come on the first day of the week.<sup>24</sup>

In the book *Faith in the Future*, we find a chapter which discusses this subject in some detail. The chapter is entitled “Shavuot/Pentecost, Israel’s Wedding” and the book was written by Jonathan Sacks, who is currently Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth:

In Judaism, mysteries have a habit of becoming controversies, none more so than in the case of Shavuot, otherwise known as Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks. Shavuot generated one of the great arguments in Jewish history. . . The argument became acute in the days of the second Temple when Jews were divided into several groups, most notably the Sadducees and Pharisees. We know all too little about this period, but we can say this. Of the two groups, the Sadducees were the more affluent and influential. They were closely connected to the Temple hierarchy and to the political elite. They were as near as Jewry came to a governing class. . . The Torah had specified that the counting of seven weeks should begin on the “day after the Sabbath.” The Sadducees took this literally. The counting should begin on Sunday, so that Shavuot would always fall on Sunday seven weeks later. The Pharisees invoked tradition and argued instead that in this case “sabbath” meant “festival,” specifically the first day of Pesach.”<sup>25</sup>

From the above quotes, it may be deduced that the Pharisees were unable to convince the Sadducees that the Feast of Weeks always falls on a fixed date of Sivan 6. The two groups were clearly divided over this issue.

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<sup>23</sup> *The International Commentary of the New Testament—The Book of Acts* (William B. Erdman’s Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan) 1974. Page 53, footnote.

<sup>24</sup> *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1975.

<sup>25</sup> Sacks, Jonathan, *Faith in the Future*, (Darton, Longman and Todd, : London), 1995. Pages 145-146, “Shavuot/Pentecost, Israel’s Wedding”

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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## Answers to Arguments for Sivan 6

We still must deal with the arguments supporting a Sivan 6 date each year. The basic points of these arguments are as follows:

- 1). The Jews have always kept it on this day.
- 2). 50 days from the Wavesheaf offering, calculated from Nisan 16, is Sivan 6.
- 3). The Pharisees kept this day on Sivan 6, and we ought to follow them. The Pharisees sit in Moses seat (Matthew 23:2).

The answer to argument 1) above is that while the Temple was in operation the ‘Jews’ were divided on how to interpret the scriptures regarding the counting of Pentecost. The Sadducees, a community of priests, disagreed with the Pharisees. In other words, in biblical times, Judaism did not hold a unanimous opinion on this point. Incidentally, much later on, the Karaites adopted the Sadducean position. As we have already stated, the Jews of Ethiopia adopted a third option.

The answer to argument 2) above is that, yes, there are 50 days from Nisan 16 till Sivan 6, inclusively counted. The main point is that Nisan 16 is the incorrect starting day of the Pentecost count. If the Pharisees could have proved to the Sadducees using only the text of the written Law (the *Torah*) there would be no contention about this day. Josephus and other Jewish commentators of the Talmud (the *Oral Law*) reported on the practice, but not the origin of the practice.

The answer to argument 3) above is similar to the first point. There is considerable evidence that the Sadducees controlled the temple worship. While they were certainly influenced by the Pharisees, there is no evidence that they compromised on this issue. We can also find clear biblical evidence as to the serious deficiencies of the Pharisees (and, in fairness, the Sadducees do not escape either). Notice the references to the Pharisees in Matthew 16:12; Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 7:1-13; Luke 7:30-35; Luke 16:14-15; and John 12:42-43. We must remember that the view of the Pharisees was not consistent with that of the Sadducees. It is also clear from reading the entire chapter of Matthew 23 that Christ was not instructing His disciples to follow the works or actions of the Pharisees. He referred to them as ‘woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!’

Those who quote Matthew 23:2 as authority to observe Pentecost on Sivan 6 fail to define what it means to ‘sit in Moses’ seat.’ They also fail to acknowledge the position of the ‘*scribes*’ in the statement that the ‘*scribes* and Pharisees’ sit in Moses’ seat. The precise meaning of this term has been and remains a topic of controversy among scholars. *The Journal of Biblical Literature* in its Fall 1995 issue confirms the diversity of opinion that exists:

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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No other text in Matthew's Gospel has resisted assimilation into proposed interpretive frameworks for the book as a whole as stubbornly as 23:2-7. These few verses appear to present ideas that flagrantly contradict what is said elsewhere in the Gospel, and, despite numerous attempts at resolution, many scholars have come to regard this passage as a vagrant pericope that simply cannot be reconciled with the theology of the overall work.<sup>26</sup>

This article clearly points up the difficulty of interpretation if you accept that Christ was promoting the Pharisees as the ultimate spiritual leaders. The context of Matthew 23 clearly contradicts this idea.

Matthew 23:2-3 states that the scribes and the Pharisees occupied a position of authority in the Jewish religious society of the first century. It doesn't confer on them some sort of doctrinal infallibility. In fact, the remainder of the chapter condemns their lack of judgment. Because of the context of verse 2, the implication is that as long as they taught specifically what the law (the written law) said, they were to be obeyed. It would not be logical to assume that Christ gave complete approval to the teachings of the Pharisees when you read the entire chapter. Mark 7 also makes it clear that Christ did not advocate following all the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. In this example the disciples ate with "unwashed hands" which was contrary to the teaching of the Pharisees. Christ addressed the Pharisees by showing the clear difference between their teachings and those of the Bible when He said "For Moses said. . .But you say. . ." He clearly condemns the teaching of the Pharisees in this situation. Notice the context of this statement. Mark 7:6-13:

He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with *their* lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men.' 'For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.'" He said to them, "*All too* well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. 'For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' 'But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me *is* Corban"—<sup>2</sup> (that is, a gift *to God*), 'then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

The *Journal of Biblical Literature* in the same article from 1995, proposes the following interpretation:

Our conclusion, then, is that Jesus' statement that the scribes and the Pharisees "sit on Moses' seat" is not intended as an endorsement of their authority to teach or interpret the law. Indeed, Jesus does not say that the scribes and Pharisees ought to sit on Moses' seat or imply that their

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<sup>26</sup> *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume 114, No. 3, Fall 1995, Pages 419-435, "Do And Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7)" by Mark Allan Powell

# Pentecost and Its Observance

*Doctrinal Paper*

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occupation of this position is a good thing. Rather, His statement merely acknowledges the verity of the situation in which His disciples must live and conduct their ministry. If they are to “do” (ποιέω) and “teach” (διδάσκω) the commandments they must obviously know what Moses says. Since the scribes and Pharisees are currently the keepers of the Torah in the social and religious environment where these disciples live, Jesus’ followers must be careful to do (ποιέω) and keep (τηρέω) all the words of Moses that they hear these leaders speak. But in no case are they to copy what the scribes and Pharisees do with Moses, for what the scribes and Pharisees do and teach does not produce a righteousness that qualifies one for entrance to the kingdom of heaven (5:19-20). Why not? Because in spite of the power of controlling accessibility to Torah that the scribes and Pharisees now exercise, they do not in fact have the authority to teach (7:29).<sup>27</sup>

Based on the information available and, most importantly, the context of Matthew 23, there is no need to view the Pharisaic position as being the final word on the calculation of Pentecost. Even though the Jews today do observe Pentecost based on the Pharisaic interpretation, this is not the view of the United Church of God, *an International Association*.

The proper manner for counting Pentecost required an authoritative explanation and administrative decision by duly constituted religious authorities who were responsible for temple worship. Under the New Covenant such a decision is properly a matter to be decided within the Church of God as Acts 15 illustrates. Frankly, even in His human ministry, Christ at times confronted the Pharisees and opposed their interpretation of the scriptures. Mark 7 is a good example.

The approach that we in the United Church of God, *an International Association* have taken to the counting of Pentecost harmonizes all of the Old and New Testament scriptures relating to the subject. The observance of Pentecost on the 50<sup>th</sup> day, based on counting from the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread, is the teaching and practice of the United Church of God, *an International Association*.

If we are diligent to respond to God’s commandments, we can claim the promise of *Psalms 111:10*

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*. His praise endures forever.

With God’s help we can grow in our understanding of the significance of His commandments for all of us. Our observance of Pentecost on the fiftieth day is based upon the firm foundation of the scriptures.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*