

# The Feast of Weeks

## The Correct Date for Pentecost / Shavuot

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The “Feast of Weeks” is the fourth of eight holidays in the Biblical calendar.<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew name for this holiday is ‘Shavuot’ which literally translates as ‘Weeks’. This refers to the seven weeks from the holiday of First-Fruits to the Feast of Weeks. The Greek name for this holiday is ‘Pentecoste’ which literally means ‘50th’. This refers to the 50 days from First-Fruits to the Feast of Weeks, inclusive of the first day. Henceforth I will use the Hebrew name ‘Shavuot’ to refer to the Feast of Weeks/ Pentecost.

There are two different methods for setting the day on which we celebrate Shavuot (Pentecost). Only one method is correct and it will be shown below.

The scriptures referring to the holiday of Shavuot are: Exodus 23:16, Exodus 34:22, Leviticus 23:15-16, Numbers 28:26, Deuteronomy 16:10. However only Leviticus 23:15-16 is really helpful to understanding the correct date to celebrate Shavuot.

According to the Scriptures, Shavuot was to happen seven weeks after the holiday of “First-Fruits” (Leviticus 23:15-16). Thus to determine the proper day to celebrate Shavuot, one needs to know which day First-Fruits lands on. The scriptures show that First-Fruits was on the day after the Sabbath after the Passover (Lev. 23:10-14). Passover was on the night of Nisan 14 (Lev.23:5). The following day, Nisan 15, was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8) and was a special Sabbath. Rabbinical Jews believe this special Sabbath is the one referred to in the scriptures. However, Karaite Jews and Followers of Jesus believe that the regular weekly Sabbath is the one referred to in Leviticus 23:15-16.

Thus, Christians and Karaite Jews, believe the counting of the seven weeks to Shavuot (Pentecost) starts on the day after the weekly sabbath, after Passover (i.e. Sunday after Passover) and thus Pentecost will always land on a Sunday.

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<sup>1</sup> The eight are: Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Feast of Weeks (Shavuot/Pentecost), Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles and Purim. Purim was not of the original seven but was added in the book of Esther. Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, but came about during the inter-testamental period and is first mentioned by name and as a holiday in the Gospel of John.

However since rabbinical Jews begin counting the seven weeks from the 16th of the Month of Nisan (the day after the special sabbath) Shavuot will land on a different *day* of the week each year but always on the same *date* (Sivan 6).<sup>2</sup>

So who is correct? The Rabbis? The Christians? The answer to this question is in the very next verse - Leviticus 23:16:

“Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD”

Here is the logic: Even if the the rabbis try to claim that Lev. 23:15 refers to the special sabbath after Passover and not the weekly Sabbath, they cannot claim that the seventh Sabbath is a special sabbath, for it can only be one of seven weekly Sabbaths. Thus Shavuot is always on Sunday.

### **Additional Evidence**

Additional evidence that Shavuot (Pentecost) is always on the same *day* of the week, but on a different *date* is shown in this: Shavuot and First-Fruits are the only biblical holidays without a monthly date given - this indicates that the date of First-Fruits and Shavuot would change every year.

Another interesting piece of evidence for the timing of the holiday of First-Fruits comes from the Apostle Paul. He calls Jesus the “first fruits” (1st Corinthians 15:20) for Jesus rose from the dead on the holiday of First-fruits (the Sunday after Passover). Paul probably noticed Leviticus 23:10-14. Especially Lev 23:12 which requires a male lamb as an offering on the holiday of First Fruits - Jesus is known as ‘the Lamb of God’ throughout the New Testament. He was literally offered to God as a “firstfruit” from the dead on the same day it was commanded to offer a male Lamb for the First-Fruit offering. Since the Apostle Paul was a Pharisee in his education, and since the Pharisees were the dominant force for setting doctrine, Paul’s view of the timing of the holiday of First-Fruits was very likely the mainline view during the first temple period.

Zola Levitt pointed out another example of First-Fruits in the New Testament: Matthew 27:53 records many dead saints appearing alive in Jerusalem after Jesus’ resurrection. These resurrected saints represent an offering of “first fruits” to God in expectation by Jesus of a plentiful future ‘harvest’ of souls at the resurrection at the last day.<sup>3</sup> This verse points to Sunday being the day of celebration of First-Fruits, since this event happened on Sunday. It is possible that First-Fruits would have fallen on a Sunday that

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<sup>2</sup> The Jewish Religious Calendar is based on lunar months. But both lunar and solar calendars result in a given date landing on a different day of the week each year. Thus, Passover will always be on the *date* Nisan 14, but would land on a different *day* each year. Thus one year Passover might be on a Sunday and the next year it might be on a Thursday and the next year on a Monday...

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.levitt.com/essays/first-fruits>

year anyway, if the Passover of Jesus crucifixion was on Friday. However the crucifixion Passover was most likely on Thursday.<sup>4</sup>

These pieces of circumstantial evidence from the New Testament lend support to the main evidence mentioned above: It is impossible to say that the 'seventh sabbath' mentioned in Lev. 23:16 is anything but a weekly sabbath and thus Shavuot (Pentecost) would always be on a Sunday.

So why did the rabbis deliberately choose to ignore this?

It is possible that sometime after the destruction of the temple in 70AD, the rabbis tried to separate themselves from the believers by moving the holidays of First-Fruits and Shavuot (Pentecost) away from always landing on a Sunday. Especially since these two holidays represent the Resurrection of Jesus and the Giving of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' Followers.<sup>5</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Shavuot, also known as the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, always falls on the first day of the week, according to the Scriptures.

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<sup>4</sup> Jesus died on Nisan 14 - probably around 30AD. I have seen different people attempt to show what day of the week Nisan 14 would fall on for the years around 30AD but they don't seem to agree, even using the same Naval Observational data. However, we do have the record in Matthew 12:40 that specifically shows that Jesus would be in the grave three days and three nights. In this verse Jesus refers back to Jonah being three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. It seems a real stretch of the text to attempt to turn a period of less than 40 hours (3pm Friday to before sunrise on Sunday) into three days and three nights. Thus it is my view that the crucifixion happened on a Thursday. Therefore, Matt. 27:53 is evidence that First-Fruits was celebrated on Sunday after the regular weekly sabbath and not on Saturday after the special Unleavened Bread sabbath. Again the Rabbinical method is apparently both late of origin and incorrect.

<sup>5</sup> 70AD is the date of the destruction of the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. Before this date, followers of Jesus were considered a sect of Judaism. After the destruction of the temple, a new form of Judaism was invented to replace temple worship. This became known as 'rabbinical judaism' because it was invented by the rabbis. At the same time Christians began to no longer be viewed as a sect of Judaism, partly because the original form of Judaism was destroyed with the temple and partly due to the large number of gentiles that joined the jewish believers. Before 70AD believers in Jesus considered Saturday to be the Sabbath, along with the rest of the Jews. But after 70AD, especially among Greek believers, Sunday became more important. These Greek believers had no sabbath day in the culture they came from. Sunday was significant because the resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit both happened on a Sunday. Sunday was not considered a sabbath until on March 7, 321 Roman Emperor Constantine declared Sunday as a day of rest as part of his creation of a new religion based on the Christian faith, which came to be called 'Roman Catholicism'.