

ONE TORAH FOR ALL

Zerubbabel ben Emunah

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Counting the Omer

Vayyiqra (Leviticus) 23:15-16

15 "And you shall count for yourself from the day after the Shabbat, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven complete Shabbatot shall there be;

16 even to the day after the seventh Shabbat shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering to YHWH."

One of the questions that many of those returning to Torah struggle with today is when to begin to count the omer. There are two main positions concerning this question. There are those who teach that we are to begin the count after the first High Day of Unleavened Bread which is Aviv 15, or in other words, that the count always begins on Aviv 16. Those who teach this position generally also teach that Shavuot always falls on Sivan 6. However, as we are about to see, this understanding is not correct and will not stand up to the test of Scripture or logic.

The other position is that the count begins on the day after the weekly Shabbat which falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread. As we are about to discover, this is the correct understanding according to Scripture. The major stumbling block in this understanding for those coming out of the church system is that this is how they count the days to come to their Pentecost with one major exception. They begin the count from Easter. This puts their Pentecost upon the wrong day as well; even though they are doing the count properly, it is begun on the wrong day, thus ending on the wrong day. Therefore, their Pentecost and YHWH's Shavuot are not speaking of the same day. These two days rarely fall on the same day in any given year.

The festival which this count determines is known as Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks. There is a reason for this name. It is because there are two things being counted and both are important. One is that we are to count seven whole weeks, i.e., a whole week being from the first day of the week to the seventh day of the week, or seven days. We are to count seven weeks or seven Shabbatot. The second thing that we are to count is fifty days. We must count both of these in order to come to the correct day. It is also important to understand the counting of these two things to begin upon the correct day.

Please note this passage pertaining to the end of the count.

Vayyiqra (Leviticus) 23:16

“even to the day after the seventh Shabbat shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering to YHWH.”

According to this commandment in Scripture the count must always end on the day after a weekly Shabbat. If it lands on any other day of the week, then one did not count properly! In short, Shavuot always falls upon a first day of the week. For some reason this seems to be a stumbling block for those who used to be Sunday-keepers. However, it should not be, for since this is how YHWH commanded us to keep it, then we should simply obey His commandment and meet with Him on the day He has appointed for us to meet Him regardless of what day of the week it happens to be.

So, in order always to end the count on a first day of the week as YHWH has commanded one must always begin the count on a first day of the week. This is how seven whole weeks (49 days) plus one day, or in other words, fifty days, counts out.

Regarding all the other mo'edim (feasts) YHWH tells us on what day of the month each one falls, but He does not tell us on which day of the week. The reason that He does not tell us which day of the week all the other feasts fall on is because it is different from year to year. However, YHWH calls this festival the Feast of Weeks because it is reckoned differently than all the other feasts. It is determined by counting seven whole weeks, plus one day. This will make this feast fall upon the same day of the week from year to year. However, it will not fall upon the same day of the month from year to year. Why is this? The reason that this festival will not fall upon the same day of the month from year to year is because from the beginning of the count to the end of the count of fifty days there are two rosh chodesh or new moons. It cannot be determined ahead of time whether these months will have 29 or 30 days. This puts a variable of +/- 2 days of what day of the month Shavuot will fall upon. This makes it possible for Shavuot to fall anywhere in the third month from the 5th day to the 13th day of the month. Furthermore, the variable could be even greater if one of those months happens to be a 28 day month as occasionally happens. It is for this very reason that YHWH does not tell us what day of the month Shavuot falls upon, but He does tell us the day of the week it falls on. It always falls on the day after the weekly Shabbat or on a first day of the week.

It is also important to note that YHWH does not tell us on what day of the month to begin the count, but rather on what day of the week to begin the count. This means that the count will begin on a different day of the month from year to year. This also will make a difference as to what day of the third month Shavuot falls upon. So, with these two variables, what day of the first month the count begins on and how many days are in the first and second months, will determine on what day of the third month Shavuot falls. But these variables have no bearing on what day of the week Shavuot falls as we are to be counting complete weeks plus one day to help us come to the proper day upon which to meet with YHWH for the Feast of Weeks.

There are those who teach that we are to begin the count on the sixteenth of Aviv or the day after the first High Shabbat of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread. Let us reexamine the Scripture to see if the Scripture will give us a clue as to what Shabbat we are to begin counting from, the High Shabbat or the weekly Shabbat.

15 “And you shall count for yourself from the day after the Shabbat, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven complete Shabbatot shall there be;

It is fairly easy to recognize that we are commanded to begin counting on the day after Shabbat from the passage above. The confusion comes in as to which Shabbat this is referring. However, this passage itself clearly tells us which Shabbat we are to begin counting after. It is the weekly Shabbat. How can we know this with certainty? Please note that in this verse, from the time that we begin counting we are to count seven of the same Shabbat from which we began counting. Can we count seven complete High Shabbatot between the Day of First Fruits and Shavuot? No! There is only one possible High Day during this time, the seventh Day of Unleavened Bread. So, there is no possible way that one could count seven High Shabbatot during this time. This means that it cannot mean that we begin counting on the day after the High Shabbat, but rather we begin counting on the day after the weekly Shabbat. Only in this way can we count seven complete Shabbatot.

This brings us to the meaning of the phrase “complete Shabbatot”. What does it mean to have a complete Shabbat? This is actually an idiom which means a complete week. A complete week is not simply seven days, but rather, a complete week consists of First Day through Seventh Day and all parts of each of those seven days. This is a complete Shabbat. We are commanded to count seven of these. One can only count a complete Shabbat if he begins counting on First Day and ends that count on Seventh Day. This is why we are to count seven complete weeks plus one day as well as counting fifty days. Counting both of these counts simultaneously will ensure that one begins counting on the right day and ends the count on the right day.

This year the counting of the omer begins on April 4 putting Shavuot on May 23.

Happy counting!

Shabbat Shalom

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