
The First Day of the Week

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The Feast of Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks in the Bible, although it is never called that in the New Testament. In the New Testament it is the Day of Pentecost which literally translated means the fiftieth day. For example, in Acts 2:1 where it says, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come", you would read that "when the fiftieth day had fully come they were all together with one accord in one place." This is derived from Leviticus 23:15 which says: "You shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: {16} Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new grain offering unto the LORD."

The Feast of Weeks

Now this is called the Feast of Weeks, as we go along the idea of it is that when Israel came into the land and planted their crop, and was ready to harvest them in the spring, they were not allowed to eat of the new grain of the land, until after the first fruits of spring, until the first of the first fruits had been offered to God. This was a presentation to God, to honor Him, you are the one who gave us this crop, and You deserve the very first part of the harvest.

The custom was, that they would 'on the morrow after the Sabbath' when the harvest was ripe, they would go down, they would cut the first sheaf of the grain, they would then process it overnight and then the next morning they would take it into the Temple and would wave it before God, it was an omer of grain that was waved, it was called and translated as the wave sheaf in the Bible, but it wasn't really a sheaf, that they were waving, it was really a bowl, an omer of grain that they waved before God in the Temple, saying "Here is this, we are thankful for what you have given us in the course of the harvest." That is simple enough to understand that in the spring the harvest comes around and when the harvest comes around we do this. Now he says, from that day, 'from the morrow after the Sabbath', there is a reason why this day that they do this is not the Sabbath, the reason is that there is a lot of work connected to it.

You are not supposed to be harvesting grain in the first place on the Sabbath Day, so it is on the 'morrow after the Sabbath' that the grain is cut, actually they cut it in the evening, just after the sun went down, the day before, and all through that night they worked at separating the grain from the stalk, the threshing process, the roasting of the grain, was done that night. There was a lot of work in preparing it; they brought it into the Temple the next morning, which would always be a Sunday morning, to actually present it before God on the first work day of the seven-week cycle of harvest.

It is the Feast of Weeks, the Hebrew word that is commonly translated "week" is the passive participle of the verb that means "to be complete". This is really interesting, when I looked this up the first time, I was struck by the fact that I had never heard anybody really explain why, the number seven in the Old Testament is so symbolic, and why it is symbolic of completion or fullness or totality. The reason is that the past participle of this verb means "to be complete"; it is also the root of the number seven, so that even in the language, linguistically they are connected and symbolically, connected as well, seven and completion.

When he says: the Hebrew word is 'week' - seven weeks, seven Sabbaths shall be complete, and that meaning is all tied up together. The completion of that, the Sabbath is the Seventh Day, the number seven, and it completes the week.

A Week

Now, it is not clear to me in the Old Testament that Wednesday to Wednesday would ever be called a week, in fact if you would take your concordance and look it up, you will find, look up the occurrences of 'seven days' and you will find dozens of them in the Old Testament, we will do this seven days from today, or there was seven days in this or seven days in that and repeatedly, it is in the Hebrew: 'seven' - the cardinal number - 'days'. It's not translated 'week'.

The idea of a 'week', I will meet you a week from today, they would say, I will meet you in seven days from today, when they spoke of a 'week', this is the period of time, generally speaking, that ran from Sabbath to Sabbath so that it was complete, in the Sabbath Day, that is the reason why this particular Hebrew word 'shabuwa' means literally 'sevens', a kind of past participle, a past participle, is used in this context.

First Day of the Week

My interest is in the New Testament, and it is in that peculiar phrase, that crops up several times in the New Testament: 'The First Day of the Week'.

I think most of us are familiar with the importance of that phrase, because it is commonly understood to mean Sunday, but what many people don't realize is that the expression is a little more specific than that in the New Testament. Technically, there is no word in the Greek New Testament for 'week'. No word at all! When the New Testament writers wanted to refer to a period of seven days, they call it 'seven days'. Once again, all you have to do is to take your concordance and look it up. I think there are five different references in the New Testament where they refer to 'seven days' and for one reason or another, in which case, we would normally, if you were speaking in English you would normally say a 'week' as opposed to seven days. They didn't, they said 'seven', the cardinal number seven, and the word 'days'.

Sabbaton

When it says, 'the first day of the week', it does not use that expression. The word translated 'week' in the New Testament is invariably the Greek word 'sabbaton'. If your ear is attuned, you

already know what that means. It is everywhere else translated 'Sabbath'. Pure and simple. 'Sabbath, Sabbath, Sabbath, Sabbath, Sabbath, then the same Greek word is translated 'week'.

For what reason, we will have to discuss that as we go along.

Imagine if you will, a Greek living in Corinth, not acquainted with Israelite culture at all, using the word 'Sabbath' to refer to a seven-day period of time. Not a chance, because that is a Hebrew expression and we find it in the Greek New Testament because all of these men who are writing out of a Hebrew culture, and these days were Hebrew days, they come from the festivals of the Old Testament and they all were given to Israel, the Sabbath Day, was still observed among the New Testament church, which is why they continued to use the Greek word 'sabbaton' for 'week'.

What the translators called 'week' they were still calling it 'sabbaton' or 'Sabbath' that is what the word means.

Now 'sabbaton' for 'week' is essentially a New Testament peculiarity. In the Old Testament the word 'sevens' is translated 'week' (Genesis 29:27-28), but as I have already pointed out to you, a seven-day period is usually called 'seven days'.

Now I would like for you to go to the first instance in the New Testament where we find the usage of the expression 'the first day of the week'. You should know that this expression is only used in the New Testament eight times (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, Mark 16:9, Luke 24:1, John 20:1, John 20:19, Acts 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 16:2).

On the Morrow After the Sabbath

Let's look at Matthew 28:1 "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher."

Now normally a Hebrew person writing Greek, a Jew writing Greek, when he came to an expression like this, would normally say: "on the morrow after the Sabbath", as the Sabbath was ending, as it began to dawn toward the morrow after the Sabbath, he would not use the expression, in fact, you would never find it in the New Testament used this way as I will point out to you as we go along. He would never say: 'the first day of the week'. He would say: 'the morrow after the Sabbath' or two days after the Sabbath or three days after the Sabbath, because in the Jewish mind everything revolved around the Sabbath Day.

What's going on here in Matthew 28:1? Out of this particular passage comes the idea that the resurrection took place on Sunday morning, and hence the justification for Sunday worship, as opposed to Sabbath observance, but what the passage really says, literally is: "After the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the Sabbaths." The word is Sabbath again and it is plural.

Now there is a curious thing in the lexicons, that I did a study on some years ago, I did a comprehensive word study of this in the New Testament because the lexicons tell you that the

disciples were a rather indiscriminate in their use of the plural for the term 'Sabbaths', that often times they just referred to the Sabbath Day and sometimes it referred to a week and generally the use of the term in the plural, you could translate it as 'week'.

The problem is, that it really isn't done that way anywhere else other than this particular event that we are talking about here. Whenever they would talk about it and as the disciples used the term 'Sabbath' throughout all four gospel accounts and throughout the entirety of the New Testament I saw a very clear delineation in their use of the word, that whenever they spoke of the Sabbath, as we did this three Sabbaths in a row, they would use the plural, naturally, three Sabbaths in a row.

When they were speaking of something that took place in a single given Sabbath Day, they would say it was the Sabbath Day, singular. When they said that Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath Day, that one was plural. The reason simply being is, that when they spoke of the Sabbath Day as being an institution they used the plural and they said "when Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath Days as His custom was", they are now speaking of a custom He had of going in on the Sabbath Days, so what I concluded as a result of my study, I believe, that there is a distinct and purposeful use of the singular and the plural of the word 'Sabbath Day' throughout the gospel accounts and throughout the book of Acts and so consequently when we come to this expression, and it is in the plural, it ought to be in the plural, and the word in question is not 'week', the word in question is 'Sabbaths'.

Now I will grant you, when you are going into English and you are trying to convey an idea into English, and you say to people in English, and say we are going to do this "seven Sabbaths from today", the natural expression would be "seven weeks from today", and so consequently we would understand what we were doing there, but, if you say "seven Sabbaths from today" you are really being pretty explicit, especially if today is a Sabbath. What you are defining is the fact that we are going to do this on the seventh Sabbath after today. This is a peculiarity of the language, but it is important as I am going to show you as we go along.

Wave Sheaf Sunday

There is not much question that this was Sunday, but it is a very special Sunday, and I mean special apart from the resurrection and first appearances of Jesus Christ. This is a very special day, it was a day that was known, and it was Wave Sheaf Sunday. It is the morrow after the Sabbath where the wave sheaf was cut and offered up to God on this day.

There were two schools of thought on this, probably more knowing human beings. The Pharisees at this time believed that the wave sheaf should be offered on the morrow after the annual Sabbath that started the 'Days of Unleavened Bread', in other words, the first day of Unleavened Bread is the fifteenth of Nisan and they thought it should be offered on the sixteenth of Nisan. The Sadducees, on the other hand, said "no", looking at the actual translation of the words of Leviticus 23, they found no way to do that, that it always had to start the count on a Sunday and it ended on a Sunday, regardless. They somehow connected it to the Days of Unleavened Bread.

If you read Leviticus 23 carefully you will find, no firm connection to the day of the wave sheaf offering to the days of Unleavened Bread. It is mentioned after that but there is nothing whatsoever that tells you that the wave sheaf offering had to be offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread, by custom it came to be, but that is a subject for another time.

What the passage literally says is 'after the Sabbath as it began to dawn toward the first of the Sabbaths'. This almost sounds like that He is saying that as the Sabbath ended, and it began to dawn on the first of another series of Sabbaths and that can't possibly be what that means. I think the sense of it going into the plural is weeks, so on the first day, the first work day of the seven weeks that lead up to the feast of Pentecost and it is a very specific day.

Now the eight times this expression 'the first day of the week' is used in the New Testament, six of those have to do with this one event (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, Mark 16:9, Luke 24:1, John 20:1 and John 20:19). There are just different people describing in different terms what happened on this particular singular occasion when Jesus first appeared to His disciples was on the 'first day of the Sabbaths' and basically they are talking about the first day of the weeks of harvest leading up to the final seventh day, the day before Pentecost which comes later.

There are two others, though, in this context that I find of singular interest where this term 'the first day of the week' is used.

Collection for the Saints

One of them is found in first Corinthians 16. Let's begin in verse 1: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do you. {2} Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. {3} And when I come, whomsoever you shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem."

Now there are a couple things about this that you should realize, I have seen this little singular second verse quoted on the back of offering envelopes in church after church after church and the whole idea is that every Sunday morning when you come to church, you should bring an offering with you. This is NOT what this is about; this is about the collection for the saints. In a moment I will explain what the collection for the saints was. The point is that on 'the first day of the week' "every one of you" is to "lay by him in store" (verse 2), not bring to the church, and put it in a collection basket, not to give it to somebody else, but to lay by yourself in store. What is this talking about? What Paul is saying is, we are coming down to the time of year when this wave sheaf would normally be offered in Jerusalem on the 'first day of the weeks' when the grain harvest is ready, we want each of you to go out on the first day and lay aside a collection of grain for the poor saints in Jerusalem. That's what this is about. It has nothing whatsoever to do with church offerings and it is emphatically 'the first day of the week', because this is the first day they could work! You don't harvest on a Sabbath Day, this 'first day of the week' was the first working day, and oddly enough it confirms the fact that the church was still observing, not merely the feast of weeks, nor the wave sheaf but the Sabbath Day, because it was on the first working day that they were to be out there collecting grain which they were to store up, each of them was to lay by himself in store, so that when Paul got there, they could bring it straight into a

gathering point and go away with it. No need to bring it in early, where they would have a storage problem. Do you follow me? So, you "lay it by yourself in store" so there won't have to be any going out into the fields and getting the grain, harvesting it and preparing it, when Paul came. Paul wanted it all done, all prepared and all stored before he got there.

What is this Collection?

What is this Collection? The roots of it go back to the eleventh chapter of the book of Acts. If you take a look at it, it is rather interesting. The events that are described here took place a long time before the events of 1 Corinthians 16.

Let's look at Acts 11:25-26: "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: {26} And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught many people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

We basically know the theme of the story; this is the first time Paul moves back into the ministry after his exile to Tarsus.

Continuing in verse 27: "And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. {28} And there stood up one of them named Agabus and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. {29} Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: {30} Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

Now here is what is interesting about this. The way that this reads you would think that there was a famine immediately on the heels of this and indeed there might have been. This may have been the first occasion when a collection was made and sent down to Jerusalem for the saints, but what is fascinating about this is that it was triggered by a prophet in the church who said that this was coming, and we need to make some kind of preparation for it. They believed the man.

Now the Corinthian letters are salted with references to an offering just like this. I think that there are some scholars that think that there is a little confusion of the time involved with it, that Agabus' prophecy (Acts 11:28) is the prophecy that was fulfilled later when Paul and the others prepared their offering and took it down to Jerusalem. It only sounds like it was an immediate thing in the book of Acts, but that is not extremely important at this time.

Let's turn back to 2 Corinthians 8. There are numerous references and allusions to this particular offering. I think it is important to establish the fact that we are not talking about taking up a collection in church. That is not what this is about. This is talking about taking up and collecting and preparing grain which is going to be shipped to Jerusalem under supervision for famine relief in a difficult time.

2 Corinthians 8:1: "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: {2} that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality."

In other words, their gift abounded in the riches of their liberality.

Verses 3: "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, {4} imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

What is Paul talking about? He is talking about the fact that the churches in Macedonia, Corinth is in Achaia, which is in Greece, Macedonia is to the north where churches like Philippi were located. These people up there were not well-to-do, they were really poor people, but when the prophecy came around, saying that there was going to be a terrible famine in Jerusalem, all of these people, I mean, they just pulled out all the stops and did everything they possibly could to put together a really good package of aid, while they didn't have any money, they were able to put together grain that could be shipped off to Jerusalem with safety.

Paul continues in verse 4: "Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. {5} And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. {6} So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well."

In other words, we assigned Titus to get himself down to you people and to make preparation for precisely the same offering that was done up in Philippi.

Verse 7: "Therefore, as you abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that you abound in this grace also. {8} I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. {9} For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich. {10} And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago."

In other words, you people started last harvest on this. This is interesting all by itself. Isn't it? The harvest was a year ago, that's why it was a year ago, that's when the grain was coming out of the ground, so a year ago on the prophecy, you people started getting ready for this and began to store up grain for this shipment, now we are coming down to the time where we are going to put it together and get it on a boat and send it off to Jerusalem with Titus.

Verse 11: "Now therefore perform the doing of it." Just do it! "That as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which you have. {12} For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. {13} For I mean not that other men be eased, and you burdened: {14} But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality:"

In other words, we are going to help them now, the time may come when they will be helping us, or they have already helped us and so it is that we are able by the movement of grains and supplies back and forth to keep through these very hard and difficult times.

Verse 15: "As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack. {16} But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you."

Paul is saying: "I am so thankful that I have a man who has that same kind of care for you, he will come down there and he will take care of this for you and you can depend on him to actually get this from Corinth to Jerusalem."

Verse 17: "For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you."

He didn't have to be told, he went by himself.

Verses 18: "And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; {19} And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace".

In other words, this guy was selected by the churches up here, to travel with us with this "grace" as he calls it, by that he means the total collection of grain from all that area that they were shipping back to Jerusalem at that time.

He was doing it "to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind: {20} Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us:"

We don't want any accusations of graft in this, so we have reputable people, people who you know, people approved by the church who are going to carry this grain down to Jerusalem and they are not going to be selling it off on the black market at the docks when they get there, do you understand that, that is what Paul is saying.

Verse 21: "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men."

Paul is saying: God knows that we are not going to cheat with this thing, but we've got to be seen to be doing it, not to be cheating in the eyes of men as well. Paul says that that is important and you all know that.

Verse 22: "And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you. {23} Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow helper concerning you; or our brethren be inquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ. {24} Wherefore show you to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf."

Paul is saying: "Titus is my man in Corinth. We have told all these people up here, we have told them what kind of people you are, now don't let us down."

Good Old-Fashioned Fund Raising

Now you can hear the echoes down through all these generations of just good old-fashioned fund raising, whenever you are trying together, you say, this church over there, they came up with \$100,000, now surely, we are a bigger church that they are, you are not going to come up with a mere \$50,000. We don't want to be embarrassed in the sight of our brothers over there, do we?

You hear these same overtones of Paul saying, look I have told these people what kind of people you are, you don't want to embarrass me with this do you? It is exactly the same old benevolent competition that people often engage in now-a-days in fund raising.

Now, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:1: "For as touching the ministering to the saints", which is what this whole thing is all about, all the way back to 1 Corinthians 16 when he wanted them to get busy and get out there on the first day of the harvest and get the grain put away. That's what he means when he says, 'the first day of the weeks'. A better translation would be: 'the first day of the harvest' and I will show you why that would be better before I am through.

As the touching and "ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you", well he did too, because if he hadn't needed to, he wouldn't have written to them.

Paul continues "For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago". I told them, well look, the people down in Achaia was ready a year ago, so I have used you to pump these people up here and I don't want you to let me down. Your zeal hath provoked a lot of people.

So, I have "sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, you may be ready:" Paul is saying, we don't want any embarrassments, do we?

"Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me." When they get down there and you are not ready and there is a lot of chasing around, that you get everything ready when I get there, I am embarrassed, and you are embarrassed, and these guys say I wonder what Paul is talking about?

So "I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty" (Vs. 5.)

What he wanted to do was to show up in town, have it ready, and get the guys in the boat and get on the way to Jerusalem, he didn't want any fooling around, and he wanted to be efficient, just like that.

"Whereof you had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness". In other words, your generosity, not because we are coming down here coveting or trying to get something out of you.

"This I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. {7} So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."

We only want you to show up when we get down there on the docks with the grain, we want you to show up with a smile on your face, glad to be doing it, aggressive, let's get this done, all like a bunch of cheerleaders for the sake of getting the saints in Jerusalem helped.

Paul continues in verse 8: "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: {9} (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth forever. {10} Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)"

In other words, he who creates and gives us everything, here's the blessing, may He make your crops, so rich you can hardly stand it, in the years to come because of what you are doing right now.

"Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God {12} For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God."

In other words, not only are we going to feed these people in Jerusalem, but prayers of thanksgiving are going up to God in greater abundance than ever before, because of a ship load of grain that arrives on the docks in Judah, from you people in Corinth. You are not mercy feeding people, you are actually praising and glorifying God by the gift that you give.

Verse 13: "Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; {14} And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you."

That's another little thing that is going to happen as a result of this. Not only are thanksgivings going up to God, but all of those people down there are going to God and saying "Father, bless those people who sent us this grain, bless those people for the things that they did."

"By their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. {15} Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

That's quite a sales job, isn't it? He gives them the whole treatment of why they should do this; he uses the old carnal part about it. Let's don't be embarrassed, I want you to come from behind because you people ought to be ahead of them, you started a year ago, then he comes around to the spiritual side of things, he realized that in the mere act of giving food, maybe clothing, whatever it is that you have to give, that you actually cause thanksgiving to go up to God and God is worshiped because of the work you did in giving a physical thing from one man to

another man. You not only have that, but then their prayers turn around and bless you back as the person who gave them this gift. I think that is a marvelous thing.

Puzzling Passage

Now comes the one puzzling passage in all of this. What I have established for you is that the expression the 'first day of the week' really is not a term for Sunday even though it happens to be a Sunday in this case, but it is not the term for Sunday, it is the term for the 'first day of the seven weeks of harvest', the seven Sabbaths of harvest going up to the feast of Pentecost. It is a one day in the year, not one day in the week, follow me? O.K. Now here is the one curious passage of scripture, it is found in Acts 20 beginning in verse 1.

I did a study on this several years ago, and I had not resolved this particular question at that time. I could see very clearly from a careful word study, of the word 'Sabbath' in the New Testament, a careful study of the usage of the term here that it is talking specifically of the 'first day of the weeks', the first day of the Sabbaths, is Wave Sheaf Sunday.

Now my problem was this passage in Acts 20:1: "And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia."

Now before I go on, I want to remind you that the wave sheaf offering that was done on the first Sunday of the Days of Unleavened Bread, it was on the morrow after the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. There are a lot of technical arguments that have gone on around that, with a lot of discussions, but just hold that thought in your mind for right now.

"And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, {3} And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia."

Paul, himself was not carrying all this stuff, he actually had other ships going with other men, "he proposed to return," but the Jews were waiting for him on the docks, throughout Macedonia.

Verse 4: "And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. {5} These going before tarried for us at Troas."

Paul had quite a gang going with him. Then comes verse 6: "And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. {7} And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

Now the problem with this is, it places the 'first day of the week' expression, or 'first day of the Sabbaths', five days and seven days, twelve days as it were, either after the Days of Unleavened Day or after the season of Days of Unleavened Days, because when Paul says: "We sailed away after the Days of Unleavened Bread", the preposition could also mean "with the Days of

Unleavened Bread", but in either case, we have got the first day of the weeks, leading up to Pentecost, falling well outside of, and well after the Days of Unleavened Bread, when in Judea it always was a day that fell either within the Days of Unleavened Bread, or on one day after the Days of Unleavened Bread if the Last Day of the Days of Unleavened Bread were on a weekly Sabbath. Depending upon your reckoning with that.

(Editorial note: The Days of Unleavened Bread last for seven days and occasionally the last Day of Unleavened Bread will fall on the weekly Sabbath, which means that the wave sheaf offering would be outside the Days of Unleavened Bread.)

Latitudes and Degrees

Now how could one account for that? I thought about it for a while, and all of a sudden something dawned on me, and I pulled out my atlas. Jerusalem is located in latitude 31 degrees 47 minutes north. Now that doesn't mean a lot to you by not having a map but let me illustrate what I am talking about. Corinth is 37 degrees 56 minutes north. It is something a little over 6 degrees of latitude further north than Jerusalem, and Troas is another 2 degrees beyond that at 39 degrees 57 minutes north.

The difference between Jerusalem and Corinth is like the difference between a point of about 60 miles south of Dallas all the way to the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri.

Now, are you going to harvest the first grain, the same time in the Lake of the Ozarks, that you would 60 miles south of Dallas? There are some of you who are probably shaking your heads no.

Most people have probably at different times in the spring or the fall have started out from here (Tyler, Texas) and driven north and you realize how far behind the ripening of the grain is, and how quickly you drop behind, in the time when going north.

Now if you think about this, you would have to make some compensation for the fact that the grain would ripen more quickly in Tel Aviv, than it would in Jerusalem, because of altitude. It's higher, and it is cooler up there, therefore the germination is slower.

Now when you put all of these things together, it is not inconceivable, that you would have, because Corinth is down on the coast and at the sea, that they might, even though they are 6 degrees further north, that's a large difference of ripening of the grain, like from Tyler to Dallas.

By the way, the difference between Corinth and Troas, Troas is where the scripture is talking about, is like the difference between Dallas and Tulsa, that is a pretty good distance, even so, even there.

Troas is also on the coast, so it is not hard to imagine that with all of the goings on, and the time coming for the first day that you can actually harvest grain and start getting it ready could be well after the Days of Unleavened Bread in Troas.

Now I have no idea how the Jews of that area followed this, I have no idea what they did relative to Pentecost, it seems highly unlikely that they would have delayed their Feast of Pentecost in those latitudes in their churches until later than Pentecost would have been in Jerusalem, but they had no choice in this one thing, they could not get out and harvest the grain until it was ripe and the grain would not be ripe in those latitudes by the Days of Unleavened Bread, maybe in Corinth, certainly not in Troas.

So 'the first day of the week' in this case, it happens to be a Sunday, it always is a Sunday because it is the day after the Sabbath, but it is a singular Sunday in the year, not in the week.

Sunday Worship

Technically speaking this particular expression 'the first day of the week' that you find in the New Testament is of no value, whatsoever, in relation to Sunday worship on a weekly basis, in fact, it might rather point strongly to an observance of Pentecost. The possibility of the observance of 'Wave Sheaf' Sunday, which is the time in which Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, ascended and was presented to the Father and that is a momentous event in Christian history but of course, the problem is, there is no specific instruction for worship of anything special on that day. What is odd about it is that Paul and these people were worshipping especially on that first day of harvest at that time.

The 'first day of the week' then is not merely a Sunday but an annual observance connected with the harvest. What the church observed today, as Easter Sunday, when they are on the right Sunday, is actually 'Wave Sheaf Sunday'. They call it, in Latin terms, 'Passover Sunday' which doesn't make any sense at all, except that it may fall within the Passover season.

Christ is First of the First fruits

Now in 1 Corinthians 15:20, we find this section about the resurrection: "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept. {21} For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. {22} For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. {23} But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

Do you realize that Jesus is the first of the first fruits, which is symbolized by the first cutting of grain on the morrow after the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread, then the next morning He ascended and was presented to God the Father as the first of the first fruits from the ground.

As the harvest went on it is all called first fruits, it is the first harvest of the year and so the whole harvest is first fruits, but Jesus is the first of the first fruits. Seven weeks of harvest, seven Sabbaths go by, six days to work, one day to rest, seven times, until the morrow after the seventh Sabbath is the fiftieth day, which is the feast of first fruits, that's the name of it: the feast of first fruits. This feast is known as Pentecost in the New Testament.

Sixth of Sivan

Now there is an interesting divergence on this, that Jews observe this festival, for the most part, on the sixth of Sivan, but the first meaning of the festival for the Jews is not the first fruits, the first meaning to the Jews is the giving of the commandments which did take place on the sixth of Sivan. Do you follow me? It is a day of great importance in their history. It was on that day that the Ten Commandments were given on Mount Sinai. Sivan sixth in a lot of years is on Pentecost or the Feast of First Fruits because of the way the calendar goes back and forth, but all of forty years of wandering the Jews never could keep the Feast of First fruits because they never planted any crops. It was only when they entered the land that the Feast of First fruit could even be kept at all, and at that point the instructions say, "on the morrow after the Sabbath, to the morrow after the Sabbath, you shall number seven Sabbaths complete even till the fiftieth day". And the way it's worded it is inescapable on the Feast of First fruits because the terminology is identical on both ends of this. It is from the morrow after the Sabbath to the morrow after the Sabbath, in other words you have a day after the Sabbath on both ends, which is not possible by any other reckoning than the fact that you do it and start the counting of the festival of Pentecost on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It is the only way it will work and so it is that those seven weeks of harvest takes place.

True Christians to be the First fruits

Let's notice what James said in chapter 1 verse 17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. {18} Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

It is almost as though Jesus Christ who was the first one raised from the dead, to ascend to God the Father as the first of the first fruits, opened up the era in which the harvest of first fruits began to take place, which means that us, we are the first fruits of God that are being developed in all of the passage of the time between the ascension of Christ into heaven and the return of Christ which symbolizes the presentation of all of the first fruits to the Father.

Now I know that the Feast of Pentecost symbolizes the giving of the Holy Spirit, that's the big thing that took place on Pentecost for the church, but the fact is, that was the beginning, not the end of the harvest in question. Whenever you read in Acts 2 Peter's description of the Feast of Pentecost, and all of the things it was fulfilling, he points to the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is that period of time that culminates in the return of Jesus Christ and so Pentecost is connected at both ends, one end is connected to the receiving of the Holy Spirit and the opening up of the age of harvest of the first fruits which is us, and the other end is with the presentation of the first fruits to God.

It's odd in a way that on the Feast of Pentecost, the priests would go in with two leavened loaves of bread and wave them before God. What he waved on First fruits was not bread, it was just grain. What he offers in the end is two loaves of bread, not unleavened, but specifically leavened and that represents us! Sinners, throughout our lives, very much leavened who finally in the end, we get presented before God, as the first fruits of His time. Now if we are the first fruits, we are not all of the fruits, right? And God is not finished, He has more to do, but that's a subject for another time.

Let's notice what the apostle John says about the first fruits in Revelation 14:1: "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him a hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. {2} And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: {3} And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. {4} These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. {5} And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

This is talking about the 144,000 and Jesus said: "These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb."

The Morning of Jesus' Ascension

Finally, turn back to John chapter 20. This is on the morning after Jesus' resurrection.

"Mary stood outside the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, {12} And saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. {13} And they said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

She doesn't have a clue about the resurrection. She thinks that Jesus was dead, that's it, He's gone, it's over, and she loved Him and cared about where His body would finally be disposed of. "And when she had said this, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. {15} Jesus said unto her, Woman, why are you weeping? whom do you seek? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. {16} Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. {17} Jesus saith unto her, touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

Later on, that same day, Jesus allowed Himself to be touched (Matthew 28:9-10.) This implies that Jesus, between the time He spoke to Mary and the time He spoke to His disciples later, He ascended and was presented before the Father in heaven, then returned to finish off the things that He had to do before He left. He was presented to the Father in heaven early that morning at about the time that the wave omer of grain was waved before God in the Temple as the first of the first fruits presented from the ground.

It is a marvelous thing to really read these things and understand how intricately the plan of God is woven into the history, the ceremony, the rituals, the rites of Israel, all the things that they did are just shot through with meaning about God, about what He is doing, and how He is actually going to do it.

Thus, the connection between the first fruits being presented to the Father on the morrow after the Sabbath and the beginning of the harvest.

You kind of wonder looking back over history, I think its vain to try to look around for, let's say, the seven cycles of the work of God in the history of man, but it is tempting in many ways to do that, and say where is the periods of time, when the harvesting ceased, when men rested in times and history.

I am not a good enough historian to do that, and I am not sure that that's what is symbolized by this, but I am quite clear in my own mind, frankly that 'the first day of the week', as mentioned in the Bible is actually, the 'first day of the weeks' because it is in the plural and it is talking about those seven weeks leading up to harvest and that first day is a unique day in the year which symbolizes a unique day in the history of the plan of God.

God has no commanded observance of Wave Sheaf Sunday for the Christian Church and so it kind of gets by us without all of the kind of attention that we might otherwise give it, but nevertheless it is an important day in history and an important day for the church, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with the weekly worship or observance of God on Sunday.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Did you know that there was a link between seven and completion?
2. Have you ever noticed that the word 'week' is not in the Greek New Testament?
3. Do you find it interesting that the Greek word that gets translated as 'week' in English is 'sabbaton'?
4. Have you ever did a study on all the references of 'the first day of the week'? If you have what conclusions did you come up with?
5. Did you already know that this collection mentioned in Corinthians was not money but grain?
6. Have you ever witnessed that "you can't out give God"?
7. Have you ever considered that the reference for the 'first day of the week' in the 1st Corinthians' passage could be referring to the "first day of the seven weeks of harvest"?

8. Have you ever considered the possibility that people observed Pentecost at different times because they couldn't do the wave sheaf offering at the same time due to different climates?
9. Why do you think it became tradition to start our Pentecost count after a Sabbath in the middle of Unleavened Bread?
10. Did you already know that Jesus was our wave sheaf offering?