

Chapter Eleven: PENTECOST - MASORETIC VS. SEPTUAGINT

The count to Pentecost is one of the most raging controversies within groups who attempt to calculate the correct Biblical calendar. Many choose to begin the count Pentecost from the 16th of Abib (the first lunar month of the year), beginning on the morrow of what they believe is the annual Sabbath day (first day) of unleavened bread. We also know that the majority of others begin to count with the Sunday that falls within the feast of unleavened bread, the morrow after the Saturday-weekly Sabbath.¹

Those who begin counting on Abib 16 often point us to the ancient Septuagint translation of Scripture that reads at Leviticus 23:11, "...and he shall lift up the sheaf before YHWH, to be accepted for you. **On the morrow of the first day** the priest shall lift it up." Upon immediately reading this verse in the Septuagint, we may ask ourselves about the mention of *the first day*. What first day is this verse speaking of? The answer lays just a few verses before:

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the evening times is YHWH's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast of unleavened bread to YHWH; seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread. And **the first day** shall be a holy convocation to you: ye shall do no servile work. [Leviticus 23:5-7 LXX]

In the aforementioned verse from the Septuagint, we see that the first day is indeed a reference to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, also called the fifteenth day of the month/moon in the above passage. Thus, the Septuagint teaches us to lift up the sheaf on the 16th day of Abib. The question is this: should the Septuagint translation be trusted, or is it an unauthorized translation of the ancient Hebrew?

Can We Trust the Septuagint?

Many people make a drastic attempt to discredit the Septuagint's rendering of Leviticus 23:11, because they feel it disagrees with the Hebrew text, which tells us to number from the morrow *of* or *after* the Sabbath. We will deal with this point (in detail) later in the chapter. The question that needs to be asked is why would someone want to discredit the Septuagint here? Is there a legitimate reason for us to question the translation as a possible fraud? Alternatively, perhaps this translation is bogus, made-up, and doesn't belong in the serious Bible student's library? In answering these questions, we should first note what Dr. Neil R. Lightfoot has to say concerning a Bible student's interest in the Septuagint.

...the Septuagint will always hold interest among Christians. For a while, it was the only Bible for the early church. It was the text most often quoted by the apostles and inspired writers of the New Testament. Paul, for example, did not write peasant Greek or soldier Greek but wrote as a man with the Septuagint in his blood.²

¹ This Sunday can fall anywhere from Abib 15 to Abib 21. This means that for many feast-keepers the day of the wave sheaf (and thus the beginning of counting the seven Sabbaths) floats through the week of unleavened bread.

² *How We Got the Bible*, by Neil R. Lightfoot, Baker Books, 1963, 1988, 2003, pg. 149.

The above quotation poses a very serious statement made towards those who seek to discredit the Septuagint text. It is a fact that the writers of the New Testament portion of Scripture quoted from the Septuagint the majority of the time. If the Septuagint contained errors, why in the world was YHWH moving upon and/or allowing his first century apostles and prophets to pass on errors for the true assembly? In short, if the Septuagint is an erroneous translation, much of the New Testament writings would be erroneous as well. Some Anti-Messiah adherents may agree with such a statement at this point, but for those of us who are believers in Yeshua the Messiah as Master and Savior, we ought to know better and be willing to accept the authority of the Septuagint translation. Climaxing on the importance of the Septuagint, the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* writes:

The Greek version of the Old Testament, commonly known as the Septuagint, holds a unique place among translations. Its importance is many sided. Its chief value lies in the fact that it is a version of a Hebrew text earlier by about a millennium than the earliest dated Hebrew manuscript extant (916 AD), a version, in particular, prior to the formal rabbinical revision of the Hebrew, which took place early in the 2nd century AD. It supplies the materials for the reconstruction of an older form of the Hebrew than the Masoretic Text reproduced in our modern Bibles... It was the Bible of most writers of the New Testament. Not only are the majority of their express citations from Scripture borrowed from it, but their writings contain numerous reminiscences of its language...³

There is no sufficient reason for us to reject the Septuagint's rendering of Leviticus 23:11 at all. What the Septuagint translators were doing was giving a meaning for meaning translation. This translation agreed with the ancient Hebrew text, but complemented it by allowing the meaning to be explained and therefore more easily understood. A good example of a meaning for meaning translation follows:

The French have a saying that goes, "*j'ai le cafard.*" The most literal translation would be, "I have the cockroach." Why the French would have such a saying is beyond human reason, *until* one discovers that a literal translation does not always convey the real meaning of the original saying. *J'ai le cafard* is an *idiomatic expression*, on which has a special meaning that is not necessarily evident by the words themselves. Specifically this saying means, "I am depressed" or "I have the blues." If someone wanted to provide a translation from French to English that accurately reflected the *meaning* of the French, one would not have "I have the cockroach" but "I am depressed" as the translation.⁴

The point to be made here is that while the Hebrew text of Leviticus 23:11 reads literally "the morrow after the Sabbath" the understanding of that text by Judahite scholars/translators of the third century B.C. was that the Sabbath being referred to was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and thus they translated the meaning of the Hebrew into "the morrow of the first day."

³ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1998, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved.

⁴ *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* By James R. White, Bethany House Publishers, 1995, pg. 23.

Can We Trust the Hebrew Masoretic Text?

After looking at the text of Leviticus 23:11 in the Greek Septuagint we need to turn our attention to the same text in Hebrew. As we have noticed, this Hebrew literally reads that the sheaf is to be *waved* or *lifted up* by the priest on **the morrow after the Sabbath**. Is the Hebrew text true?

The first thing to point out is that while the Hebrew Masoretic text is not as old as the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew language is the original language of what is commonly referred to as the Old Testament. YHWH inspired the writers of the Old Testament to write in Hebrew and thus we should have no problem accepting the Hebrew Masoretic text manuscripts of Leviticus 23:11. For an example of how carefully this text was penned down and copied, we quote Dr. Neil R. Lightfoot again:

That few really old Hebrew manuscripts have survived does not indicate a lack of scribal activity. From earliest times, the Jewish scribes devoted themselves to the accurate transmission of the Biblical text. Thus there arose schools of professional scribes (cf. 1 Chron. 2:55), men who were trained in the art of writing, who were specialists in the law. And who were the supreme guardians of the text. Scribal activities involved a number of people and passed from generation to generation. Numerous examples can be cited to show the passion of scribes for minute details of the text. When for some reason a manuscript had a letter too large or too small, these letters of unusual size were carefully duplicated. If, for example, a scribe found an extra letter in a word, he would leave the word the same but put a dot above the letter or word that he questioned. The dots show scribal uncertainty about a word or letter, but the scribes did not alter the text because the text was regarded as unalterable.⁵

I should not have to say much concerning the Hebrew text of Scripture, but as a final complementary statement please allow me to quote scholar Bleddyn J Roberts:

...the authenticity of the Masoretic text stands higher than at any time in the history of modern textual criticism, a stand-point which is based on a better assessment of the history of the Jewish transmission.⁶

We can safely conclude that when YHWH inspired the Hebrew text of Leviticus 23:11 to read, "the morrow after the Sabbath" He really meant what He said.

The Masoretic Text and Septuagint Translation

The title to this particular portion of this chapter at hand should be easily recognized. The Hebrew text and Septuagint translation are harmonized by realizing that the first day of Unleavened Bread was the Sabbath spoken of in Leviticus 23:11. However, we now come to the crucial portion of this entire chapter (in essence book). Are we speaking of merely an annual Sabbath, or a weekly Sabbath?

Proponents of a weekly Sabbath (being spoken of in Leviticus 23:11) point out the fact that the text of Leviticus 23:11 reads literally *ha shabbath*. This reading is very technical in the fact that (1) nowhere in the entire Hebrew Bible does this word refer to

⁵ *How We Got the Bible*, by Neil R. Lightfoot, Baker Books, 1968, 1988, 2003, pg. 131.

⁶ *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Cambridge University Press, 1969. Vol. 2, 26, "The Old Testament: Manuscripts, Text, and Versions," by Bleddyn J. Roberts.

anything but a rest day, and (2) the word is only used in reference to the weekly Sabbath, Day of Atonement, and Sabbatical year (Leviticus 23:32; 25:4, 6, 8). Thus many people conclude that Leviticus 23:11 can only be speaking of the weekly Sabbath and not just the annual holy convocation day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

On the other hand, you have those who are pro-Septuagint and believe that the rendering given in the Septuagint should tell us that the Sabbath spoken of is the first day of Unleavened Bread, the 15th day of the month of Abib. Both parties provide very convincing argumentation, and when one examines both sides of the argument, it can become very difficult in deciding exactly which position you should side with. With that being said, what if I told you that you did not have to choose one side or the other, but could side with both positions?

The way in which both positions could be sided with is by first acknowledging that there is no good reason at all to reject either the literal Hebrew rendering or the Septuagint translation. Secondly, you must come to the realization that in order to harmonize the two without attempting to discredit the two, the 15th day of Abib (anciently) was indeed the weekly Sabbath day each year. In this case, the morrow after the weekly Sabbath *would be* the morrow of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, the real proof comes next.

Seven Sabbaths Complete

After reading the text of Leviticus 23:11 which commands exactly what day the wave-sheaf was lifted up by the priest, we continue to read the rest of the instructions on how to count to the day of Pentecost, known by the Hebrew name *Chag Shavuot*, translated into English as *Feast of Weeks*. We read in Leviticus 23:15-16 the following:

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto YHWH.

First off, notice how that the "A" portion of verse 15 further strengthens what verse 11 originally stated; the sheaf is to be waved on the day after the Sabbath. Incidentally, the Septuagint text reads here, "And you shall number to yourselves from the day after the Sabbath" making no qualms with its previous admission that the sheaf was to be waved on the day after the first day of Unleavened Bread. Secondly, take careful consideration of the command to count seven Sabbaths complete, even unto the next day after the seventh Sabbath. The key word here is *Sabbath(s)*. A diligent study of this word in the Hebrew Scriptures will show that **it is never used to refer to anything other than a rest or cessation from work or labor**. This is exactly how a word meaning should be reckoned in Scripture. If there is a dispute about the meaning of a word, it is imperative for us to check other instances of this particular word in the entirety of the holy writ (beginning with the uses by the same author), in order to properly discern what the actual meaning of the word is. In this case, we can *boldly* say that there is no justification *whatsoever* for us to arbitrarily count out seven periods of sevens (as is done in

Rabbinical Judaism), with no relation at all to a rest at the end of each respective period. Indeed, seven periods of sevens are counted here, but as Leviticus 23:15-16 shows, each period must end with a Sabbath (or rest day).

What are the ramifications of this? We have shown that the count to Pentecost is to begin with the morrow after the Sabbath/first day of Unleavened Bread, meaning that the count always begins on the 16th day of Abib. We have also shown from the Hebrew text of Leviticus 23:15-16 that seven Sabbaths, seven rests complete, are to be counted after beginning the count. The conclusion is that the weekly Sabbaths hit on the 15th, 22nd, and 29th days of the month of Abib *each year* on the Hebrew calendar, or better put - YHWH's "clock." **This would be impossible had the weekly Sabbaths been simply a continuous uninterrupted count.** How do we solve this dilemma?

Set Days of the Lunar Month

After one sees that the weekly Sabbaths of Abib had to have fallen on the 15th, 22nd, and 29th days of Abib every year, one may conclude that the Sabbaths of the next month fall by just continuously counting seven into the second month, the month of Zif. This position does fall short for two primary reasons. *One*, there is no way that if you continue to count 1-7 all the way through *until the next Abib* that you will always have Sabbaths throughout the ages hitting on the 15th, 22nd, and 29th days of Abib. *Two*, counting through Abib does not yield Sabbaths on the 15th, 22nd, and 29th days of the month of Zif. At first glance, you may not think this makes much difference, but further examination ought to show you why it does. If the month of Abib had only 29 days total, the Sabbaths of the month of Zif (counting consecutively with no stopping) would fall on the 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th. If the month of Abib had a full 30 days within it, the Sabbaths of the month of Zif (counting consecutively with no stopping) would fall out to be on the 6th, 13th, 20th, and 27th of Zif. Why is this not compatible with the testimony of Scripture? That is answered in the story of the manna given in the book of Exodus, chapter 16. This chapter was dealt with in detail in chapter four of this book, as a refresher course let us briefly mention it again.

From reading Exodus chapter 16, we can conclude that the weekly Sabbaths fell on the 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th of the second month. We find in Exodus 16 that the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron on the 15th day of the second month in the wilderness of Sin.

And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which *is* between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. [Exodus 16:1-2]

At this time, YHWH spoke to Moses that bread would rain down from heaven for six days, beginning the next morning, but on the seventh day (the Sabbath) there would be no bread (Exodus 16:4-5, 25-26). Beginning with the morning of the 16th, we notice the following sequence:

- 16th - first day of manna
- 17th - second day of manna
- 18th - third day of manna
- 19th - fourth day of manna
- 20th - fifth day of manna
- 21st - sixth day of manna
- 22nd - seventh day Sabbath

By acknowledging the above Scriptural sequence of manna, we can conclude that the weekly Sabbath day fell on the 22nd of Zif, and by default so did the 8th, 15th, and 29th of Zif. What this further shows is that knowing that the weekly Sabbath always hit on the 15th of Abib every year and that it hit on the 15th of the month of Zif in Exodus 16, shows us that the Sabbath was not counted without any interruptions, **but somehow synchronized to allow for the 15th of both Abib and Zif to be weekly Sabbaths.**

The only way for this sequence to work out is with a process known as a lunar-based Sabbath. This is a reformed Sabbatarian position that has been presented throughout this book that states that the weekly Sabbath falls on set days of a lunar, Biblical month. The process goes like this: you first have the day of the New Moon which is understood as being a third category of days, separate from the working days and Sabbaths (Ezekiel 46:1, 3; Isaiah 66:23; 2 Kings 4:23; 1 Samuel 20:5; Amos 8:5), and after that you have six working days and then a seventh day Sabbath which falls on the 8th day of the month/moon. This in turn causes the weekly Sabbaths to always fall on the 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th days of the moon every month. In months where there are 30 days in length, a two-day festival of the New Moon is kept (1 Samuel 20:5, 18, 24-34). With this Sabbath sequence, the 15th day of Abib and Zif could be a weekly Sabbath and the Masoretic text and Septuagint translation of Leviticus 23:11 can readily be harmonized. In getting back to the fact that seven Sabbaths are to be counted from the morrow after the 15th of Abib (the 16th) we find that these Sabbaths would be the 22nd and 29th of Abib, the 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th, of Zif, and the 8th of Sivan. A total of seven Sabbaths complete.

The Sabbaths of Abib and the Septuagint

Let us now recall the fact that the 15th day of Abib is a weekly Sabbath every year on YHWH's calendar, which in turn calls for the first two Sabbaths complete in the count to Pentecost to unarguably fall on the 22nd and 29th of Zif. However, some have attempted to combat this understanding of the word *shabbat* in the Hebrew language with the translation that we have already acknowledged as an adequate and acceptable translation of the originally inspired Hebrew Scriptures, the Greek Septuagint.

Those people who do not number seven Sabbaths or rests for the count to Pentecost fall back on the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 23:15-16 that reads as follows:

And ye shall number to yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day on which ye shall offer the sheaf of the heave offering, seven full weeks: until the morrow after the last week ye shall number fifty days, and shall bring a new meat-offering to YHWH.

The first thing we must point out here, before delving into the understanding of the Septuagint text, is the fact that the Hebrew Masoretic text of Scripture is in the same language as the inspired text of Old Testament Scripture. The more technical terminology of seven Sabbaths complete in the Hebrew text is the one to fall most heavily upon. In light of this, we can say that **seven full weeks are seven Sabbaths complete**. Considering both texts causes us to see that this is how both the text and the translation are to be harmonized.

The second thing to point out is the underlying Greek term for week(s) in Leviticus 23:15-16. It is the Greek word *hebdomada* or a variation thereof. Doing a word study on this word in the Septuagint and in the Apocryphal books give us this understanding of the word.

Lev. 23:15,16; Deut. 16:9,10,16; Ex. 34:22, Num. 28:6; II Chr. 8:13

These passages deal with *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks) and are the passages under question in this treatise.

Lev. 25:8, "And thou shalt reckon to thyself seven Sabbaths of years, seven times seven years; and they shall be to thee seven WEEKS of years, nine and forty years."

This use of *hebdomadas* is one of a week of years **ending in a Sabbatical year**, i.e. a rest year.

Dan. 9:24-27; 10:2; 9:24 Seventy WEEKS have been determined upon thy people, and upon the holy city... And thou shalt know and understand that from the going forth of the command for the answer and for the building of Jerusalem until Christ the prince there shall be seven WEEKS, and sixty-two WEEKS... And after sixty-two WEEKS, the anointed one shall be destroyed, and there is no judgment in him... And one WEEK shall establish the covenant with many: and in the midst of the WEEK my sacrifice and drink offering shall be taken away...

10:2 In those days I Daniel was mourning three full WEEKS. I ate no pleasant bread, and no flesh or wine entered into my mouth neither did I anoint myself with oil, until three whole WEEKS were accomplished.

We see here that the weeks of years are simply periods of seven years. There is nothing from the context suggesting that the last of the seven years must be a sabbatical year. The "three full weeks" can be seen either way; a period of seven or a period of seven ending with a Sabbath.

Tobit 2:1 Now when I was come home again, and my wife Anna was restored unto me, with my son Tobias, in the feast of Pentecost, which is the holy feast of seven WEEKS, there was a good dinner prepared me; and I sat down to eat.

These weeks are again associated with the holy festival and are thus under dispute as the passages under the *Shavuot* references.

II Maccabees 12:31-32, 38 They gave them thanks, desiring them to be friendly still unto them: and so they came to Jerusalem, the feast of the WEEKS approaching. And after the feast, called Pentecost, they went forth against Gorgias the governor of Idumea... So Judas gathered his host, and came into the city of Odollam. And when the SEVENTH day came, they purified themselves, as the custom was, and kept the Sabbath in the same place.

This is once again concerning the holy festival. In verse 38 the English translation of the Septuagint translates *hebdomas* seventh. When looking at the Greek it seems that it would be better translated, "when the seventh day of the WEEK came," but I am not a Greek scholar, just giving my opinion. However, verse 38 shows that *hebdomas* is used in reference to a week ending with a Sabbath.

II Maccabees 6:11 And other, that had run together into caves near by, to keep the SABBATH day secretly, being discovered to Philip, were all burnt together, because they made a conscience to help themselves for the honor of the most sacred day.

I know for sure that the word *hebdomas* (*hebdomada* - noun, feminine, plural, nominative) is used in this passage. Which word it is translated as, I am not as sure. It is most likely translated as Sabbath. There is no other word in the passage that could stem from the Greek rendering. This would show that the word *hebdomada* could have the meaning of Sabbath.

II Maccabees 15:4 And when they said, There is in heaven a living Lord, and mighty, who commanded the SEVENTH day to be kept.

Here we see that *hebdomas* (*hebdomada*) is associated with the weekly Sabbath.

IV Maccabees 2:8 A man, therefore, who regulates his course by the law, even if he be a lover of money, straightway puts force upon his own disposition; lending to the needy without interest, and canceling the debt of the incoming SABBATH.

Here the word *hebdomas* (*hebdomadon* - noun, feminine, plural, genitive) is translated as meaning the sabbatical year.

IV Maccabees 14:7-8 O holy SEVEN of harmonious brethren! for as the seven days of creation, about religion, so the youths, circling around the number SEVEN, annulled the fear of torments.

Here the word *hebdomas* (*hebdomas* 1st / *hebdomada* 2nd) is used in association with week ending with a Sabbath.

It definitely appears that the word *hebdomas* (or the like) can be used for a week not ending with a Sabbath or most predominantly, a week ending with a Sabbath. It also appears from II Maccabees 6:11 and IV Maccabees 2:8 that it can be properly translated into English as *Sabbath*. We also see that there are times it is translated as seven with direct reference to the weekly Sabbath.

For one to examine these references and say that the Greek word is not *always* used in context with the weekly Sabbath misses the entire point. The point is that it *can* be used in this context, and coupled with the fact of the Hebrew word *shabbat* in Leviticus 23:15-16 we see that *hebdomas* does indeed reference to a period of seven ending with a weekly Sabbath in the Septuagint translation of the same text.

After concluding our word study on *hebdomada* in the Septuagint and apocrypha, we can say that it definitely can have the meaning of the seventh day Sabbath, and more than likely, this is the *predominant* meaning. Therefore, we have the Hebrew Masoretic text telling us to count seven *Sabbaths* (which can *only* mean seven rests) and the Septuagint translation telling us to number seven full *hebdomada* (which can have the meaning of seven rests). The astute conclusion is that we should number from the 16th of Abib seven rests, i.e. seven weekly Sabbath days. Therefore the first two complete Sabbaths fall out to be on the 22nd and 29th of Abib **each and every year, confirming the lunar-based understanding of the weekly Sabbath reckoning.** This is how the Greek speaking Judahites and the Hebrew speaking Judahites could be at Pentecost on the same day in the book of Acts 2, where there were dwelling in Jerusalem devout Judahites out of every nation under heaven. The Greek speaking Judahites who read from the Septuagint understood the same exact thing as the Hebrew speaking Judahites seeing that both texts, although technically different, were saying the same exact thing.