

Timing of Pentecost

The Question – How to Count?

One of the ongoing debates in the feast keeping community is how to calculate the timing for the feast of Firstfruits and, by extension, the feast of Shavuot (Pentecost).

There are two schools of thought on this topic¹:

- 1) that Firstfruits is always on Aviv 16, the morrow after the first day (“Sabbath”) of Unleavened Bread, and
- 2) that Firstfruits is always on the first day of the week, the morrow after the first seventh-day Sabbath following the first Day of Unleavened Bread.

As always, we want to see from the Bible, and the Bible alone, which method of calculation is correct.

Method of Study

The Biblical reference books employed in this study are:

1. The King James Bible
2. Strong’s Concordance
3. The Interlinear Bible
4. The Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament, by George Wigram
5. The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon

Some of the key words researched in this study are as follows: (the English word, followed by the Hebrew transliteration in parenthesis, followed by the Hebrew Strong’s number, followed by the definition in the Brown-Driver-Briggs, abbreviated BDB)

- Feast (chag) 2282, BDB: festival-gathering, feast, pilgrim-feast
- Feasts (moedim) 4150, BDB: appointed time, place, meeting
- Rest (sabbaton) 7677, BDB: Sabbath observance, usually the phrase “Sabbath of sabbatic observance”. Used of weekly Sabbath (in Ex 31:15, 35:2, Lev 23:3, Ex 16:23), Day of atonement, sabbatical year, Feast of Trumpets, and Feast of Tabernacles.
- Sabbath (Shabbat) 7676, BDB: Sabbath
- Seventh (shebebe) 7637, BDB: seventh (ordinal)
- Weeks (Shavuot) 7620, BDB: period of seven, heptad, week

Understanding H7676 Sabbath

Leviticus 23, verses 9 – 14 detail Firstfruits, and verses 15-22 detail the Feast of Weeks (aka Pentecost, Shavuot). In both sections, we are told that the key date is the morrow (Strong’s 4283) after the Sabbath (Strong’s 7676). **The word for Sabbath, Strong’s 7676, is never translated as any other word than Sabbath(s)**, but that still doesn’t tell us if it refers to the annual Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, or the

weekly 7th-day Sabbath. It also doesn't tell us, as some people believe, that it simply means any period of seven consecutive days.

We generally refer to all of YHVH's feasts collectively as "Sabbaths", but the terms employed in Leviticus 23:2 are feasts (Strong's 4150 "moed") and holy convocations (Strong's 6944, 4744). Leviticus 23:6-8 explains Unleavened Bread, but **never calls it a Sabbath**; rather it is referred to as a holy convocation (H6944 "qôdesh" H4744 "miqrâ"). Elsewhere it is called an ordinance (Strong's 2708, "chûqqâh" in Exodus 12:17), feast (Strong's 2282 "chag" in Exodus 13:6, 23:15, 34:18, Leviticus 23:6, and Numbers 28:17), and a solemn assembly (Strong's 6116, "ätsereth" in Deuteronomy 16:8). **There is not one single instance of the First Day of Unleavened Bread ever referred to as a "Sabbath" (Strong's 7676) anywhere in all of Torah or the Hebrew Old Testament.** In fact, "Sabbath" and "unleavened bread" only appear in the same verse one time (2 Chronicles 8:13) and it is clearly in regard to two separate times: H7676 is the seventh day of the week, and unleavened bread (H4682 matstsâh) is the feast day.

Of all the moedim, the term H7676 Sabbath, standing alone, is applied only to the 7th day of the week.

Seven times we will see the term Sabbath (H7676) of rest (H7677 sabbaton). These seven verses are:

- 1) Exodus 16:23 – referring to the weekly Sabbath
- 2) Exodus 31:15 – referring to the weekly Sabbath
- 3) Exodus 35:2 – referring to the seventh-year land Sabbath
- 4) Leviticus 16:31 – referring to the Day of Atonement
- 5) Leviticus 23:3 – referring to the weekly Sabbath
- 6) Leviticus 23:32 – referring to the Day of Atonement
- 7) Leviticus 25:4 – referring to the seventh-year land Sabbath

Two other verses apply H7677 sabbaton, but not H7676 sabbath, to the fall feasts (but never to the spring feasts): Leviticus 23:24 to the Day of Trumpets, and Leviticus 23:39 to the first day of the Feast of Trumpets and to the Eighth Great Day. Please refer to the chart of adjectives used in Leviticus 23 for more specifics on the terms applied to each of the days.

In all of this, we see that **H7676 is applied only to the weekly Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, and the seven-year land Sabbath.** H7676 Sabbath is never applied to the first or last days of Unleavened Bread. As such, **there is no precedence or hint in Scripture to lead us to that conclusion that the word Sabbath (H7676) is meant to refer to Unleavened Bread for purposes of timing Firstfruits and Shavuot.** The only precedence would be to interpret it to mean the seventh day of the week.

Mixing and Matching Interpretations to Force a Fit

7 Sabbaths + 1 Day = 50 Days

To establish the timing of Shavuot, we are told in Leviticus 23:16 that it is both 1) the morrow after the "seventh Sabbath" (H7637, H7676), and 2) that it will be 50 days. This means that **however we interpret H7676, we must count 7 of those, add one day, and land on the 50th day.** Any other count will simply not meet the requirements. We will illustrate this point shortly, but first, we must define our terms.

Which Days are Sabbath – Saturday, First and Last Day of the Festival?

To count the "morrow after the Sabbath" (H7676) as the "morrow after the first day of Unleavened Bread", we must apply H7676 to the first and last moedim of the seven-day feast of UB, even though we

just discovered above that Scripture never uses that term in this way. If we do this, we must be consistent by treating the last day of UB as a Sabbath as well. There is no justification for treating only the first day, but not the last day, of the feast of Unleavened Bread as a Sabbath (H7676). That means that we have three “Sabbaths” during this seven-day period: 1) the first day of UB, 2) the weekly Sabbath during the week-long feast, and 3) the last day of UB. (Exception: If either the first or last day of UB falls on a seventh-day Sabbath, then there would only be two “Sabbaths” during the seven-day period.)

The only two ways around calling all three of these days as Sabbaths that would be:

1. to omit the weekly Sabbath from the counting entirely during this time span, even though H7676 means only the weekly Sabbath, or
2. arbitrarily choose to call only the first day of UB a Sabbath (without Biblical support) but ignore that the last day of UB, which has the same status as a moedim as does the first day.

Both options are not Scriptural; rather they are constructs. There is no reasonable basis for treating these two annual moedim differently for the purpose of this count, or any other purpose, just as there is no Scriptural basis for treating the weekly Sabbath as though it is not a Sabbath for the purpose of this count.

For anyone who may disagree with this conclusion, please shed light on how to do those two things Scripturally, as if we are Biblically wrong, we want to know. But for now, it seems apparent that we either only count weekly 7th-day Sabbaths as H7676, or we count also the two bookends of the feast as H7676 Sabbaths. We have no basis to pick and choose to count one, but not the other, annual moedim during this feast.

Is one “Sabbath” the same as one “Week”?

If we do not use either of the above constructs, we would have to interpret the term Sabbath (7676) in this instance as referring to any set of seven days (one week), so it could be the seven days from a Monday through Sunday, Wednesday through Tuesday, etc. **Nowhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures does 7676 mean “weeks”.** (This was checked by searching the KJV+ in E-Sword for H7676 and “week”, then H7676 and “weeks”, for those who might want to verify this statement).

Rather, Hebrew has a word for “week” that does mean any seven consecutive days (Strong’s H7620, Shavuot). But that is not the term employed in Leviticus 23:16. **We are not told to count seven weeks, but rather seven Sabbaths.** Additional evidence is that when Scripture refers to Pentecost as the “Feast of Weeks”, the phrase is “chag” (feast H2282) and “shavuot” (weeks H7620). See Exodus 34:22; Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 16:9, 10, 16; and 2 Chronicles 8:13. It is never called the “Feast of Sabbaths” (H2282, H7676), a combination that never appears in the Hebrew Old Testament.

Had YHVH intended us to count weeks that could begin on any day, rather than Seventh-day Sabbaths, he would have specified it as such by saying to count seven shavuot instead of seven sabbaths. **Just as we would never agree that we can pick any day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath, we cannot do so once a year in our count to Pentecost in order to arrive at always starting Firstfruits on the 16th day of the 1st month. Don’t miss that point.** Choosing to interpret Leviticus 23:16 as weeks instead of as 7th-day (Saturday) Sabbaths, we are saying that a Sabbath can be any day of the weekly cycle. Yet we know this to be untrue.

Also, if it rightly could be interpreted as “weeks” instead of seventh-day Sabbaths, this would mean that no count was necessary. In that case, YHVH would have specified Firstfruits as the 16th day of the 1st month and Pentecost as the 6th day of the 3rd month. Otherwise, we must believe both that 1) He used confusing language 2) to put us through an unnecessary counting instruction to arrive on those dates.

Using Private Interpretations.

When we interpret the “morrow after the Sabbath (H7676)” in Leviticus 23:10, 11, 15, and 16 as the first day of UB (which we have already seen is never called H7676), and then turn H7676 into “weeks” in Leviticus 23:17 (also never done in Scripture) when commanded to count “seven Sabbaths H7676”, we are using private interpretations for the plain meaning of H7676 that is flawed on three counts:

- 1) we must insist H7676 is applied to a moedim that is never called H7676,
- 2) we must insist that this H7676 “Sabbath” can fall on any day of the week, and
- 3) we must insist that H7676 “Sabbath” be interpreted as H7620 “week” this one time even when it is never interpreted “week” any other time in Scripture.

None of these interpretations are justified. Again, we stand willing to be corrected through Scripture alone if you have Bible to refute the conclusions we have made.

Charting It Out

Let’s do this actual count, and see if we can count **both** 50 days, **and** 7 sabbaths plus one day, and land on the same date for Pentecost (PC). For the purpose of this chart, we have randomly chosen to start on the first day of the week as the 14th Passover (PO), Monday as the 15th being the first “Sabbath” of Unleavened Bread (1UB), Tuesday the “morrow after the Sabbath” (thus Firstfruits – FF, being day one in the count to Pentecost), and Sunday as the last “sabbath” of Unleavened Bread (2UB, being day 6 in the count to Pentecost). Feel free to create seven separate charts for each day of the week if you want to test this theory further. We also used red with an asterisk to indicate the weekly Sabbaths and the two annual “Sabbaths”.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT/SAB
Passover	1UB*	1/FF	2	3	4	5*
6/2UB*	7	8	9	10	11	12*
13	14	15	16	17	18	19*
20	21	22	23	24	25	26*
27	28	29	30	31	32	33*
34	35	36	37	38	39	40*
41/PC?	42	43	44	45	46	47*
48	49	50/PC?				

Method One: Starting the count on the 16th day of the 1st month (the morrow after the 1st day of UB), count seven weeks plus the morrow after the seventh week.

Start on Tuesday, the morrow after 1UB (labelled 1/FF above) and count to day 50, also a Tuesday. During this count, we have **8 Sabbaths before reaching seven weeks and day 50**: the 5th, 6th (2UB), 12th, 19th, 26th, 33rd, 40th, and 47th days. We know this is wrong, because there are 8 sabbaths when we are only allowed to count seven. But to be consistent with the definition that the two moedim beginning

and ending the feast of UB are sabbaths in this count, we have no choice but to include day 6 (2UB) in the count. **Conclusion: Does not work.**

Method Two: *Starting the count on the 16th day of the 1st month (the morrow after the 1st day of UB), count seven Sabbaths (calling the 1st and last days of UB a Sabbath, which is necessary in order to begin on the 16th).*

During this count, we land on 41 days as the morrow after the seventh Sabbath, not day 50 as required in the text. The seven Sabbaths are: 5, 6(2UB), 12, 19, 26, 33, and 40. With this example of a Sunday Passover, **counting seven “Sabbaths” by this definition would make Pentecost fall on the 41st day.** We know this is wrong, because there must be 50 days when this count only arrives at 41. (Starting with a Passover on every possible weekday will change the final count in this method, which you are welcome to chart out if you wish.) **Conclusion: Does not work.**

Method Three: *(Second chart, below.) The **only** way we can get **both 50 days and start on the morrow after the 7th Sabbath** according to the instructions in Torah, is to **correctly interpret the Sabbath as being the weekly (H7676) Sabbath, counting seven 7th-day Sabbaths, and adding the morrow after.** Starting again with a Sunday Passover day (14th of the month) and Monday (1st day of UB) we would start our count the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that falls on the 6th day of UB (which is the first weekly Sabbath after the 1st day of UB.) Again, the numbers in the chart below will change depending on what day of the week the first day of UB fell. Choosing a Sunday Passover was a random choice for this example, although we encourage you to make additional similar charts if you wish.*

The numbers for method three, below, differ from the first chart, as we are now going to use the H7676 as the weekly Sabbath to begin the count for the morrow after the sabbath, rather than using the 1st day of UB as the Sabbath to begin the count. Since the 6th day of UB in this example is a weekly Sabbath, it will be the Sabbath for the “morrow after” count that begins as Firstfruits (FF, also Day 1). From there, count 7 sabbaths (days 7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42, 49) and the morrow after the 7th Sabbath is day 50, Pentecost. You will see that it falls exactly 50 days after the morrow after the weekly Sabbath that fell during the week of UB. This way we are true to Scripture in defining H7676 as the weekly Sabbath instead of any random weeklong period, and not doing something unscriptural such as defining the first and last days of UB as Sabbaths. We are also counting as instructed, meeting all the criteria for establishing the day of both Firstfruits and Pentecost. **Conclusion: The method demonstrated below is the only way that all Scriptural criteria can be met.**

In the next chart, any number in front of UB is the number of the 7 days in the feast, and the count numbers to Pentecost begin on the morrow after the Sabbath during the festival week. The morrow after the weekly Sabbath is always a Sunday, so with Firstfruits and Pentecost both being a morrow after the Sabbath, they always fall on Sunday. In this example, Firstfruits lands on the last day of the seven-day festival, but that will change if you choose to replicate these concepts with your own charts starting on any other day of the week as Passover. The red dates are the H7676 Sabbaths as defined in Leviticus 23, the number being the day of the feast (i.e. 6UB) or the number in the 50-day count (i.e. 7, 14, etc.), and the number in parentheses is the number in the count of the seven Sabbaths.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT/SAB
Passover	1UB	2UB	3UB	4UB	5UB	6UB
7UB (FF, day 1)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (1)
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 (2)
15	16	17	18	19	20	21 (3)
22	23	24	25	26	27	28 (4)
29	30	31	32	33	34	35 (5)
36	37	38	39	40	41	42 (6)
43	44	45	46	47	48	49 (7)
50 (PC)						

What the above charts show us is that by counting the morrow as the 16th day of the 1st month instead of waiting until the next weekly Sabbath, we must make any one of three unscriptural errors:

- 1) We must count 8 Sabbaths to get 50 days,
- 2) We count 7 Sabbaths but get less than 50 days, or
- 3) We must apply a private interpretation to the term H7676 Sabbath as being a week (i.e. any set of seven days). Doing this also requires we don't count the H7676 weekly Sabbath during this process. We would never say that we can pick any day of the week as the weekly Sabbath, but suddenly when counting for Pentecost, many people do just that.

What about H7676 being years in Sabbatical yearly cycles?

We will see 7676 used in Leviticus 25:8, speaking of the Sabbath years, in the phrase “seven Sabbaths of years”. Some people point to this to say that Sabbath can refer to any unit of seven, so by extension when used in timing of Firstfruits and Shavuot the 7676 can mean any set of seven days, thus meaning “week”. But the phrase, repeated twice in Leviticus 25:8, includes the words seven and years. Sabbath does not mean weeks or sevens in this text.

Leviticus 25:8 And thou shalt number^{H5608} seven^{H7651} sabbaths^{H7676} of years^{H8141} unto thee, seven^{H7651} times^{H6471} seven^{H7651} years;^{H8141} and the space^{H3117} of the seven^{H7651} sabbaths^{H7676} of years^{H8141} shall be^{H1961} unto thee forty^{H705} and nine^{H8672} years.^{H8141}

In this text, H7676 does not translate as seven (which is H7651), nor does it translate as years (which is H8151). It only means what it does every Saturday - rest periods. We are to count seven Sabbaths (rests) of years. When this usage is expanded for timing of Shavuot, it should teach us that we are to count seven Sabbath (rests), not seven “weeks” that might start at any arbitrary given point. Similarly, these seven-year cycles always start after a Jubilee, not anywhere in a random cycle of years. There is simply no justification for applying Leviticus 25:8 as evidence that Pentecost, or Sabbath years, can have a random start date.

God, who does things with simplicity (2 Corinthians 11:3) so that even a child can understand (Matthew 18:3, et al), and who is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), would have no logical reason to make the word Sabbath mean something this one time (Unleavened Bread) than it means every other time it appears (the rest on the seventh-day). Especially when he could simply have done like he did with all the other feast days and declared that Firstfruits is always the 16th day of the first month, and Shavuot is always the 6th day of the third month, if that was what he meant. Or when he could have said to count seven “weeks” instead of seven “Sabbaths” if that is what he meant. The only logical

reason for phrasing it with the words and method he uses is if indeed, he wanted us to have to count the weeks and days to arrive at the correct date. There would be no purpose for Him giving counting instructions if He intended a set date. So our next question should be: What lesson did He have for us in the count? To watch, to wait, to prepare, perhaps? Just as we should for the Second Coming.

Conclusions:

1. There is no Biblical basis for interpreting the 7676 Sabbath in Leviticus 23:11 as anything other than the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. There is no precedence in Torah for interpreting this word to mean the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
2. There is no Biblical basis for interpreting the 7676 Sabbath(s) in Leviticus 23:15 and 16 as anything other than seven consecutive weekly seventh-day Sabbaths. There is no precedence for interpreting it to mean any random seven-day week.
3. As such, these two movable feasts (Firstfruits and Pentecost) will always fall on the first day of the week, the morrow after the weekly Sabbath.
4. There is no logical reason why God would not spell out the dates (like he did with every other feast day), and instead gave a formula to count, if no counting is necessary to arrive at the correct date. If Firstfruits was always the 16th, thus making Pentecost always the 6th day of the 3rd month, it makes the instruction to count meaningless. He is not the author of confusion. If he gave a counting formula to arrive at the correct date, then count we must.

As with all understanding of Scripture, it is up to us to study to show ourselves approved. (2 Timothy 2:15) May whoever reads this study be blessed. See you at the Feasts!

ⁱ Some people are also doing the seven-week count, and then adding another fifty days to that count. This article will not focus on that idea, as Deuteronomy 16:9 is quite plain that the Feast of Weeks is immediately after the seven-week count.