

# The Resurrection of Yeshua

## From a Hebrew Roots Perspective

## Prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures; Bedrock Doctrine in Apostolic Scriptures!

Ya'acov Natan Lawrence

Hoshana Rabbah Messianic Discipleship Resources

In our day many Messianic Believers are celebrating, or feeling a desire to celebrate, the resurrection of our Messiah. To scripturally validate the central importance of the resurrection of Yeshua as a core doctrine for Messianic Believers, we will start by presenting to you a series of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament) with commentary that foretell of a Messianic Redeemer dying and then bodily resurrecting. We will then examine evidence that shows how the waving of the *omer* or barley sheaf on Wave Sheaf Day pointed to Yeshua's resurrection. We will then look at the Gospel account of the resurrection for some new insights from a Hebrew roots perspective, and then conclude by examining historical evidence pertaining to the early Christian church's designation of a specific day to commemorate the resurrection of Yeshua. May this study strengthen the reader's faith in the accounts of Yeshua the Messiah's resurrection as recorded in the Apostolic Scriptures (or New Testament)!

### Analysis of Tanakh (Old Testament) Scriptures That Predict the Resurrection of the Messiah

- ☞ **Psalms 16:10**, For thou wilt not leave my soul [*nephesh*] in hell [*sheol*]; **neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy** [*chaseed* or *faithful, kind, pious, devout, saint, godly*] **One to see corruption** [*shakbath* or *decay of the grave* according to *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT)].  
COMMENT: To whom is this verse referring? Obviously not normal humans whose bodies and souls go into the grave at the time of death (so says this verse) (to await the resurrection) and where they decay? Who in Scripture, but Messiah Yeshua resurrected after three days before his body could corrupt (start to decay)? According to Jewish thought bodily decay starts after three days.
- ☞ **Psalms 49:15**, **But Elohim will redeem my soul from the power of the grave:** for he shall receive me. Selah.  
COMMENT: This is a generic reference to the resurrection of the righteous. Using a *kal v'khomer* or light and heavy (*a fortiori*) rule of logic (or Rabbi Hillel's first law of Biblical hermeneutics/interpretation) we can reason that if the righteous dead are resurrected how much more so the Messiah.
- ☞ **Psalms 22:26**, The meek shall eat and be satisfied. They shall praise YHVH that seek him. Your heart shall live for ever.  
COMMENT: See comment on Psalms 49:15.
- ☞ **Isaiah 26:19**, Your dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.  
COMMENT: See comment on Psalms 49:15.
- ☞ **Isaiah 53:9-10**, And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased YHVH to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, **he shall prolong** [*arak* means *to continue long, make long, lengthen, draw out*] **his days**, and the pleasure of YHVH shall prosper in his hand.  
COMMENT: Some see in this emphasized phrase either a reference to long life on the part of Messiah's

(spiritual) seed (descendants) which could be a reference to eternal life, or to the resurrection of the Messiah himself after he was “cut off from the land of the living” (verse 8) and “made his grave with the wicked” (verse 9) after which he would “prolong his days” through resurrection from the grave.

- ☞ **Isaiah 53:11**, He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

COMMENT: The *Qumran Great Isaiah Scroll* translates verse 11 as follow:

Of the suffering of his soul **he will see light** and he will find satisfaction. And through his knowledge his servant, the righteous one will make many righteous, and he will bear their iniquities” (*The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, by Abegg, Flint and Ulrich, p. 360; Harper Collins Publishers, New York, N.Y.:1999).

Note the emphasized portion that is missing in the Masoretic text from which our most common English Bibles’ “Old Testament” portions are derived. The New International Version (NIV) translates this verse as follows and notes in its footnotes that this phrase originates from the Isaiah Dead Sea Scroll and from the Septuagint (LXX):

After the suffering of his soul, **he will see the light [of life]** and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Note the Septuagint (LXX) translation of this verse:

The Lord also is pleased to take away from the travail of his soul, **to shew him light**, and to form him with understanding; to justify the just one who serves many well; and he shall bear their sins. [translated by Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton (1807-1862) originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, 1851]

The phrase, *he will see the light* etc., speaks of resurrection from the shadows of death into the light of life. What else could this mean except that Messiah will resurrect from the grave?

- ☞ **Genesis 3:15**, (compare Col. 2:15 and Rev. 1:18) And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall **bruise your head**, and thou shalt bruise his heel. / And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it [by resurrecting from the grave].
- ☞ **Hosea 5:15–6:3**, I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early. Come, and let us return unto YHVH: for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up. **After two days will he revive** [חַיָּה/ *chayah*, to live, have life] **us: in the third day he will raise us up**, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know YHVH: **his going forth** is prepared as the morning; and **he shall come unto us** as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

COMMENT: This is a clear prophecy concerning the resurrection of the righteous dead of whom Messiah Yeshua is the first to raise. Verse two contains a Hebrew parallelism, which is a Hebraic literary device where the same thought is expressed differently back-to-back. As noted above, the word *to live* is the basic Hebrew root verb *chayah* meaning *to live* or *to have life*. The word *raise up* is the Hebrew word *qum*/קוּם meaning *to rise, arise, stand, stand up* (*Strong’s* H6965; *TWOT* 1999). According to *TWOT* the basic meaning of this word “denotes rising up from a prostrate position (e.g. Josh. 3:16).” YHVH speaking here states in the broader context of this passage of his Messianic role as the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5), and that after presenting himself as such to both houses of Israel (Ephraim and Judah) in verse 14 Messiah would “go away ... and none shall rescue him”, and then in verse 15, “I [Messiah speaking] will go and return to my place till they [Ephraim and Judah] acknowledge their offense and seek my face...” What is their offense? Isaiah 8:14 states that the offense both houses of Israel stumble over “the stone of stumbling and... rock of offense.” Who is this Rock of offense? Verses 8 and 10 identifies it as *Immanuel* (El with us), one of the titles of the Messiah. After two days (2000 years) YHVH will revive us—i.e., the righteous dead of Ephraim and Judah or those grafted to the olive tree or into the commonwealth of Israel through Messiah Yeshua (see Eph. 2:11–19) who are to raise up in the resurrection at the end of the age—and the third day, or in the third

millennia from the time of Messiah's first coming, or year 6000, Messiah will raise up Ephraim and Judah. Likewise Messiah Yeshua raised from the dead on the third day, becoming the first of the first fruits to raise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20, 23) and he shall "go forth" and "shall come unto us" very much alive and leading his people in the Messianic Age (Millennium).

### ☞ Genesis 22 and the "Sacrifice" of Isaac at Mount Moriah.

COMMENT: YHVH credited to Abraham's spiritual account his willingness to sacrifice Isaac as if he had actually done so. In fact, there is an ancient rabbinical tradition that states Isaac actually died and was resurrected as the midrash states: "As the knife reached his throat, Isaac's soul flew away and left [e.g., he died]. But when a voice went forth from between the angels saying, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad' (Genesis 22:12), his soul returned to his body" (*Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* 31 as quoted in *ArtScroll Davis Edition Baal HaTurim Chumash Bamidbar*, p. 1417) (bracketed comments are in the original). The rabbis also note that Scripture states that both Abraham and Isaac ascended the mountain, but that it is recorded that only Abraham descended (22:19). Isaac's absence from the Genesis narrative until many years later (Gen. 24:62) has given rise to much speculation on the part of the rabbis as to Isaac's whereabouts in the interim (*ArtScroll Bereishis Vol. 1a*, pp. 812-813). Regardless of the rabbinic interpretations, does Scripture leave Isaac out of the narrative as if to highlight his absence, and to give the impression (albeit a prophetic allegorical one) that he was actually sacrificed? After all, what was the ram caught in the thorn bush thicket (wearing a crown of thorns) by its two horns all about? That ram was a substitute sacrifice picturing whom? And who was it that commanded Abraham to lay down the knife and slaughter the ram instead? It was the *Malak* or Messenger of YHVH (verse 11-12) who was none other than a pre-incarnate appearance of YHVH-Yeshua some 1900 years before his appearance as the Messiah in human form on earth as the Lamb of Elohim slain from the foundation of the earth.

## The Day of the Wave Sheaf Offering or First Fruits Day

In Messianic circles, a day has gained prominence as a day of celebrating the resurrection of Yeshua. It is called by many, *the Feast of First Fruits* or simply *First Fruits*. In several books published by Messianic/Hebrew roots teachers, this day has been elevated to the status as one of the "feasts" of YHVH along with Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles. In creating a special designation for this day—one as we shall see later that Scripture does not give it—these teachers omit the last of YHVH's seven "feasts" or *miqra kodesh* (commanded assemblies); namely, The Eighth Day or *Shemini Atzeret*. This festival is a Sabbath and immediately falls after the Feast of Tabernacles. It has important spiritual significance and represents the formation of the New Heaven and New Earth and the descent of the New Jerusalem *after* the end of the 1000-year long Millennium on earth. It literally represents heaven-on-earth for eternity. It is, therefore, a shame to omit this most important festival of YHVH!

## The Nature of the Omer Offering/Service

According to the *ArtScroll Tanach Series Leviticus Commentary*, the Leviticus 23:9-14 passage does not describe the service of the *Omer*<sup>1</sup> Offering. This is found in Leviticus 2:14-16 (p. 397). "Before any grain product of the new crop may be harvested, a measure of ground barley must be brought to the Temple on the second day of Pesach

<sup>1</sup> *Omer* עֹמֶר (*Strong's* H6016/TWOT 1645a, b) is translated in the KJV as *sheaf* (8 times), *omer* (6 times) and is a dry measure of 1/10 *ephah* (about 2 litres) and means *to bind sheaves, to gather, to manipulate, deal tyrannically with, to treat as a slave*. The word *omer* used 14 times Scripture:

- Exodus 16:16,18,22,32,33,36, An omer here is a reference to the amount of manna each Israelite gathered. Here it is obviously a unit of measure and not a literal sheaf of barley.
- Leviticus 23:10,11,12,15, Here are enumerated the laws pertaining to the wave sheaf offering. Whether this is a literal sheaf of barley or about two quarts of grain from a sheaf of barley is not clear.
- Deuteronomy 24:19, Here is stated the laws about leaving your fields uncleaned. If you forget a sheaf/omer in the field, you are to leave it for poor to gather.
- Ruth 2:7,15 Ruth gleaned among the sheaves/omer. This is an obvious reference to literal bundles of barley in the field.
- Job 24:10, the wicked take the sheaf/omer from the hungry. The implied meaning here is the poor's daily food ration.

Based on the evidence, we must conclude that an *omer* is a unit of measure of nearly two quarts. It can refer to a sheaf of grain, or to a dry measure of something of about 7 1/2. An *omer* seems analogous to our term *bushel*, which is a generic term for a measure of any harvested goods. It seems possible that a literal sheaf of barley would probably yield about two quarts of grain or flour when processed, hence the confusion concerning the meaning of *omer*: is it a reference to the sheaf or to the quantity of grain once extracted from the sheaf. Logically speaking, a literal bundle of barley (stalks and all) would not fit into a two quart container, unless the grain were removed and the grain placed into the jar.

as a meal-offering ... [An omer] is the amount of flour that must be brought, and is also the name by which the offering is known" (*Ibid.*, p. 397).

Does the *omer* offering on "Wave sheaf Sunday" prophetically point to and foretell the death and/or resurrection of Yeshua, and if so, how? First, let us look at the scriptural passages that speak of this day.

**Leviticus 23:10–17**, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When you be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits [*reshiyth*<sup>2</sup>] of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before YHVH, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer that day when you wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto YHVH. And the grain offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto YHVH for a sweet savor: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. And you shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that you have brought an offering unto your Elohim: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. And you shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf [*omer*] of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new meat offering unto YHVH. You shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the first fruits [*bikkurim*<sup>3</sup>] unto YHVH.

**Leviticus 23:10b–14a**, ... you are to bring the premier sheaf of your harvest to the priest. He is to elevate the sheaf before the presence of YHVH, for acceptance for you; on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest is to elevate it. You are to perform a sacrifice on the day of your elevating the sheaf: a sheep, wholly-sound, in its (first) year, as an offering-up to YHVH, and its grain-gift: two tenth-measures of flour mixed with oil, a fire-offering to YHVH, a soothing savour; and its poured-offering of wine: a fourth of a hin. Now bread, parched-grain or groats, you are not to eat, until that same day, until you have brought the near-offering of our Elohim... (*The Shocken Bible*)

**Leviticus 2:12–16**, As for the offering of the first fruits, you shall offer them to YHVH, but they shall not be burned on the altar for a sweet aroma. And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from

2 *Reshiyth*: The Hebrew word *reshiyth*/רֵאשִׁית (Strong's H7225/TWOT 2097e) means *first, beginning, best, chief, choice part*, and is translated in the KJV by the following English words: *beginning* (18 times), *first fruits* (11 times), *first* (9 times), *chief* (8 times), *misc.* (5 times). According to the TWOT it means *first, beginning, choicest, first/best of a group*. The primary meaning is *first* or *beginning* of a series. "This term may refer to the initiation of a series of historical events (Gen. 10:10; Jer. 26:1), but it also refers to a foundational or necessary condition as the reverence of fear of God (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7) and the initiation, as opposed to the results, of a life (Job 8:7; 42:12). It is used frequently in the special sense of the choicest or best of a group or class of things, particularly in reference to items to be set aside for God's service or sacrifice. The *first fruits* (Lev. 2:12; 23:10; Neh. 12:44) and *choicest* Num. 18:12) fruits are so distinguished." TWOT states that in the KJV:

In Deuteronomy 33:21, *first part* should be more accurately rendered *best of the land*

In Daniel 4:11, *chief of the children of Ammon* should be *best of the Ammonites*

Examples of Usage:

Genesis 1:1, *In the beginning ... i.e., in the very beginning*

Exodus 23:19, *The first of the first fruits* of thy land

Exodus 34:26, *The first of the first fruits* of

Deuteronomy 26:2, *the first of all the fruit* of the earth

*Reshiyth* derives from *rosh*/רֹאשׁ (Strong's H7218/TWOT 2097) meaning *head, top, summit, upper part, chief, total, sum, height, front, beginning, head (of man, animals); top, tip (of mountain); height (of stars); chief, head (of man, city, nation, place, family, priest); head, front, beginning; chief, choicest, best; head, division, company, band, or sum*.

3 *Bikkur(im)*/בִּכּוּרִים (Strong's H1061/TWOT 244e); from Strong's H1069; translated in the KJV as *firstfruit* (14 times), *firstripe* (2 times), *firstripe figs* (1 times), *basty fruit* (1 time). *Bikkur(im)* means *first-fruits, the first of the crops and fruit that ripened, was gathered, and offered to YHVH according to the ritual of Pentecost, the bread made of the new grain offered at Pentecost, the day of the first-fruits (Pentecost)*. *Bikkurim* derives from the Hebrew word *bakar* (Strong's H1069) meaning *to be born first, to bear early, new fruit, to give the right of the firstborn, to make as firstborn, to constitute as firstborn, to be born a firstling, to be made a firstling, one bearing her first child*. All occurrences of the word *bikkurim* in the Hebrew Scriptures are as follows:

Exod. 23:16,19;

Exod. 34:22, And you shall observe the feast of weeks of the first fruits (*bikkurim*) of wheat harvest ...

Exod. 34:26, "The first [*reshiyth*] of the first fruits [*bikkurim*] of your land you shall bring unto the house of YHVH your Elohim."

Lev. 2:14; 23:17; 23:20; Num. 13:20; 18:13; 28:26; 2 Kgs. 4:42; Neh. 10:35; 13:31; Isa. 28:4; Ezek. 44:30 and Nah. 3:12

your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt. And if you offer a meal offering of thy first fruits [*bikkurim*] unto YHVH, you shall offer for the meal offering of thy first fruits [*bikkurim*] green ears [*abiv*, H24, or green in the ears barley] of corn [*qalah*; H7033, roasted dried, burned, parched grain] dried by the fire, even corn beaten [*geres*; H1643, crushed grain or groats] out of full ears. And you shall put oil upon it, and lay frankincense thereon: it is a meat offering. And the priest shall burn the memorial of it, part of the beaten corn thereof, and part of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof: it is an offering made by fire unto YHVH.

The following passage is not a specific reference to First Fruits Day. According to the plain meaning of the text (verse two states, “the first of all the fruit/*bikkurim* of the earth”) and rabbinical commentary, this passage is a general reference to the gathering in of all the first fruits produced in the land of Israel from the initial barley harvest in the early spring to the final great fall harvest prior to the Feast of Tabernacles. The corollary passage to this one is Exodus 23:19. According to Rashi, the pre-eminent Jewish Torah commentator, when verse eleven speaks of rejoicing, this is a reference to the *aliyah* festivals of Pentecost and Tabernacles, since these were termed “Seasons of Our Joy” since this was when the wine and oil was brought in.

**Deuteronomy 26:1–11**, And it shall be, when you come into the land which YHVH your Elohim is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that YHVH your Elohim is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where YHVH your Elohim chooses to make His name abide. And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, I declare today to YHVH your Elohim that I have come to the country which YHVH swore to our fathers to give us. Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of YHVH your Elohim. And you shall answer and say before YHVH your Elohim: My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. Then we cried out to YHVH Elohim of our fathers, and YHVH heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. So YHVH brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land which you, O YHVH, have given me. Then you shall set it before YHVH your Elohim, and worship before YHVH your Elohim. So you shall rejoice in every good thing which YHVH your Elohim has given to you and your house, you and the Levite and the stranger who is among you.

Other Scriptures that deal with the general subject of the Israelites being commanded to present the first fruits of their crops to YHVH, and are not a specific reference to First Fruits Day include Exodus 22:28; 23:19; and Numbers 18:12–13; Deuteronomy 12:5–7. Why did YHVH require the Israelites to hand over to him the first fruits of their agricultural produce? Like the first fruits of their financial increase or tithe, the first born of their livestock and of their sons, devoting this portion to YHVH showed the Israelites that all belonged to him, and that all their labors, and their increase was by his grace. Giving him his portion was an act of thankfulness and devotion to him. It would also insure his favor and blessing upon their future labors. The first fruits offering symbolized that the prosperity of the field—despite the backbreaking labor that was required to wrest it from the soil—was a gift from YHVH and that men must thank him for it. The Israelites gave their first fruits to the priests, thus showing their readiness to devote all that they had, and all of their labors to the service of YHVH. This was also an expression of their gratitude to YHVH for the land he had given them (*ArtScroll Chumash*, pp. 684, 437 and 1068–9).

## The Order of Events Associated With the Waving of the Omer

Now that we have the scriptural passages before us pertaining to the First Fruits Day, let’s list in chronological order the events and ceremonies that occurred on this day involving both the Israelite farmer and the priest.

- ✎ The Israelite farmer had to first harvest a token portion or sheaf (*omer*) of barley from his field and take it to the priest. This was the premier or very first and best part of his barley crop. According to historical records, the Jews did this in the closing or twilight hours of the Sabbath—the day before the First

Fruits Day (*The Pentateuch–Leviticus*, by S. R. Hirsch, p. 656; *Mishnah Menahot* 10:1). At the same time, during the Second Temple period, deputies of the Temple would also go forth to cut a sheaf of barley for use in the Temple’s ceremony of waving the *omer* of barley before YHVH. *Mishnah Menahot* 10:3 states how the *omer* of barley was cut: “Agents of the court go forth on the eve of [the afternoon before] the festival [of Passover] and they make it into sheaves while it is still attached to the ground, so that it will be easy to reap. And all the villagers nearby gather together there [on the night after the first day of Passover], so it will be reaped with great pomp. Once it is dark [on the night/early portion of the sixteenth of Abiv], he says to them, ‘Has the sun set yet?’ They say, ‘Yes.’ ... ‘on the Sabbath,’ he says to them, ‘[Shall I reap on] this Sabbath?’ They say, ‘Yes.’ ... All this [pomp] for what purpose?’ Because of the Boethusians, for they maintain, ‘The reaping of the [barley for] the *omer* is not [done] at the conclusion of the festival.” According to Alfred Edersheim, agents of the Temple priests would go to a field in the Valley of the Ashes across the Kidron Valley near the Temple and put a red ribbon around the sheaf and then come back later and cut it. Edersheim says that they cut the barley on the evening of the fifteenth as the sun was going down while it was still the Sabbath (*The Temple and Its Service*, “The Sheaf of the Firstfruits,” p. 203-4).

- ☞ The priest was to then to wave it before YHVH for him to accept it.
- ☞ This was to occur on the morrow or day after the Sabbath. As we shall see later, this was the day after the weekly Sabbath (the first day of the week, or Saturday night through Sunday evening) that fell during the seven-day celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which fell in the spring of the year immediately following the Passover.
- ☞ After the waving of the barley sheaf, the priests were to sacrifice a blemish-free year-old male lamb as a burnt or sin offering.
- ☞ Some of the sheaves of grain were then taken, the grain was separated, roasted over a fire, beaten or crushed and ground into flour (Lev. 2:14). The *Mishnah* discusses how the priests reaped the barley, took it back to the Temple, parched it, flailed it, ground it and sifted the flour 13 times to achieve the finest quality of flour. The priests then offered up a handful or *omer* of flour (*Men.* 10:4-10:5A). For the Pharisees, the day of the waving of the *omer* occurred on the second day of Passover (Abiv 16, the morrow after the first High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread on Abiv 15) (*Men.* 10:5F). The waving of the *omer* occurred in the morning of the day after the Sabbath and the Israelites were permitted to harvest their crops from noon time onward of that day (*Men.* 10:5H and I). No reaping could occur prior to the waving of the *omer* (*Men.* 10:7).
- ☞ The priest then placed in the fire a grain offering of an *omer* of barely flour mixed with olive oil along with a libation of wine. This offering was burnt in the fire. In Leviticus 2:13–16, we see that salt along with frankincense was also sprinkled on the meal offering. The smell of this offering burning was a sweet aroma to YHVH.
- ☞ After the priest had performed his duties, on the same day, the Israelite farmers were then allowed to harvest the rest of their barley, and to make fresh bread therefrom.
- ☞ The First Fruits Day began the seven week, fifty day count to the Feast of Weeks of Pentecost. This was called the count of the *omer*, and YHVH commanded the Israelites to count each day down until they arrived at the Feast of Weeks.

## Yeshua In the Wave sheaf (*Omer*) Offering

Among Messianic Believers, there are probably none who fail to see the prophetic shadow pictures pointing to Yeshua’s death, resurrection and/or ascension in the ceremonies detailed above. As we shall discuss later, neither the apostolic writers nor the early church fathers discuss this connection other than in passing, that does not mean that it does not exist.

In the Apostolic writings, we find the closest allusion to this ceremony in two quick references by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians:

- ☞ But now is Messiah risen from the dead, and become the first fruits [*aparche*] of them that slept. (1 Cor. 15:20)
- ☞ But every man in his own order: Messiah the first fruits [*aparche*]; afterward they that are Messiah's at his coming. (1 Cor. 15:23)

The Greek word *aparche* here (*Strong's G536*) is used only eight times in the Apostolic Scriptures and in all cases is translated as *firstfruit/s*. The apostolic writers attach various spiritual meanings to *aparche* (as we shall see later). The word is defined as follows:

- 1) to offer firstlings or first fruits
- 2) to take away the first fruits of the productions of the earth which was offered to Elohim. The first portion of the dough, from which sacred loaves were to be prepared. Hence term used of persons consecrated of Elohim for all time.
- 3) persons superior in excellence to others of the same class

Now let's analyze the events pertaining to cutting of the barley sheaf/*omer* to see how they point to Yeshua.

- ☞ The Temple priests would go out to the barley field prior to First Fruits Day and mark the barley to be harvested with a crimson cord. The Israelites would choose a perfect Passover Lamb on the tenth day of the first month. Yeshua, the perfect Passover lamb, was chosen on the tenth day of the month or four days before his crucifixion. Crimson red is the color of blood. This speaks of sacrifice and redemption by the blood of Messiah Yeshua. We see the crimson cord elsewhere in Scripture speaking of Yeshua's redemptive work at the cross. Crimson was one of the colors used in the doors of the Tabernacle and is a picture of the Messiah shedding his blood for redeeming man from his sin penalty. Crimson thread was also woven into the garment of the High Priest, a picture of Yeshua our heavenly High Priest. One of the four roof coverings of the Tabernacle was constructed of dyed crimson wool. The Table of Showbread, when being transported, was covered with a crimson cloth (Num. 4:8). The red heifer, when sacrificed, was burnt with a piece of cedar wood and crimson cloth (Num. 19:6). One of the rituals for cleansing an Israelite with a skin disease involved a crimson cloth and a piece of cedar wood—a prophetic picture of Yeshua on the cross (Lev. 14:4). Speaking of Yeshua's blood covering his people as an atonement for their sins. Isaiah 1:18, speaking of the work of the future Messiah, says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be a red like crimson, they shall be as wool." A crimson thread runs throughout the Scriptures leading directly to another crimson thread—the stream of red, sin-free blood that flowed from the side, hands, feet, back and head of Yeshua as he hung on the cross to pay the price for the sins of mankind.
- ☞ On the early evening or twilight hours at the end of the weekly Sabbath, the Israelite farmers and priests would go into their fields and harvest the grain already marked for cutting. This speaks of Yeshua being cut off from the land of the living (Isa. 53:8) when he died on the cross for our sins and transgressions. Yeshua died at approximately 3 P.M. on Passover day and was placed into the grave between the evenings of the fourteenth and fifteenth of the first month of the Hebrew calendar.
- ☞ The next day, on the first day of the week, the priests lifted the cut barley sheaf and waved it heavenward as an offering to YHVH to be accepted. This act prophetically pointed to Yeshua's resurrecting from the grave and to his ascension to heaven where he was presented to and accepted by the Father as the perfect sin sacrifice.
- ☞ The priests then offered a blemish-free lamb as a burnt offering on the altar. This is another picture of the death of Yeshua on the cross.
- ☞ Next, the priests took some of the barley still in its sheaves and roasted it, flailed it to separate the grain from its sheath and chaff, crushed and ground the grain into flour and then sifted it numerous times until only the finest and purest flour was left. This pictures Yeshua bearing our sins, and his soul becoming a sin offering (Isa. 53:10), and being poured out to death (Isa. 53:12). This occurred while he was in the grave, as we shall see later.

- ☞ The priests then anointed the flour with olive oil, frankincense and salt, and then poured a wine libation over it, waved it heavenward before burning it up on the altar of sacrifice. This clearly pictures Yeshua being lifted up on the cross and then offered on the altar of crucifixion as the perfect sacrifice.

### Does the Barley *Omer*/Firstfruits Somehow Prophetically Foreshadow Yeshua's Death, Resurrection and/or Ascension?

Did the apostles, who were all Jewish and who had a thorough understanding of Torah and ancient Jewish customs conceptualize the first fruits of the barely *omer* as being a type of Yeshua's death, resurrection and/or ascension? Here are all the references in the Apostolic Scriptures pertaining to first fruits.

#### Every Instance Where *Firstfruit/s* Is Used in the Apostolic Scriptures

- ☞ Romans 8:23, And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits [*aparche*] of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.
- ☞ Romans 11:16, For if the firstfruit [*aparche*] be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.
- ☞ Romans 16:5, Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the first fruits [*aparche*] of Achaia unto Messiah.
- ☞ 1 Corinthians 15:20, But now is Messiah risen from the dead, and become the first fruits [*aparche*] of them that slept.
- ☞ 1 Corinthians 15:23, But every man in his own order: Messiah the first fruits [*aparche*]; afterward they that are Messiah's at his coming.
- ☞ 1 Corinthians 16:15, I beseech you, brethren, (you know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits [*aparche*] of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)
- ☞ James 1:18, Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits [*aparche*] of his creatures.
- ☞ Revelation 14:4, These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits [*aparche*] unto God and to the Lamb.

If the apostles viewed the First Fruits Day in some special light pertaining to the death, resurrection and/or ascension of Yeshua they certainly give us no indication of it except for Paul's two passing comments in First Corinthians, which give us solid reason to connect, at least theologically though not festally, the barley first-fruits with Yeshua.

This is not to say that the resurrection of Yeshua, which gave hope for and paved the way theologically for the resurrection of the righteous Believer, did not figure prominently in the teachings of the apostles. The writer of Hebrews, as evidence that it did, lists the doctrine of the resurrection as a cornerstone of Messianic faith (Heb. 6:2), and Paul highlights the importance of the hope of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:29), and he links that hope to Yeshua's death and resurrection (1 Cor. 15ff) saying that if Yeshua is not resurrected then our hope in life after death is groundless. Paul goes on to teach that the first act of obedience after one becomes a Believer in Yeshua is that of immersion in water for the remission of sins, a ritual he shows identifies one spiritually with the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua (Rom. 6:3-6).

It is an undisputed fact that the resurrection of Yeshua figures prominently at the core of Messianic theology as outlined in the Apostolic Scriptures, but there is no Scriptural evidence, as strange as it may seem to modern Christians who consider Easter the arch-holiday of Christianity, that the early Believers celebrated a day commemorating Yeshua's resurrection. Many of the early church fathers of the second century attempted to create a festal recognition of a theological truth when molding Sunday into such a day on a weekly basis, and later Easter as an annual observance. But as much as one may search, there is no solid indication from the scriptural record that the early first century Believers ever gathered on Sunday or any other day to specifically commemorate Yeshua's resurrection. As hard as it is for those coming from a Christian background who have ingrained in their religious conscience a strong predilection toward Easter, the evidence to assert that the early Believers celebrated

the resurrection on a certain day is simply lacking! They obviously knew when Yeshua's resurrection occurred, and recognized the theological importance of this fact. They just did not designate a certain day on which to celebrate this event. They had no scriptural or Jewish cultural precedence to do so. History records that celebrating Yeshua's resurrection on a certain day, whether a weekly or annual basis, as we shall discuss below, was a later development of the proto-Catholic Church. This does not mean that we should not do so or cannot do so. The historical evidence simply does not show the Messianic Believers of the first century doing so, although, theologically, the concept of Yeshua's resurrection formed part of the bedrock of their faith and doctrine, to be sure.

## The Day of First Fruits

(by Batya Wootten, used and edited with permission, from her book *Israel's Feasts and Their Fullness*; Key of David Publishing, Saint Cloud, FL.)

When Believers begin to discover the errors found in Church theology concerning Easter, very often they turn to Judaism. They turn away from anything that has to do with Easter and replace it with a celebration of some form of the Jewish Passover tradition.<sup>4</sup>

However, these worthy Jewish traditions are based on commemoration of our Passover deliverance from Egypt, and on the slaying of a lamb, but we who follow Messiah have something *more* to celebrate. He fulfills this feast, and as our "Passover Lamb," He *arose* from the grave. He came forth as a type of "First of First Fruits," and thus He is "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18).

If we look through the lens of mercy, we will see that the Christian celebration of the Resurrection, *apart from its errant traditions*, is a type of "First Fruits" celebration. We do not say this to encourage anything that has to do with the ancient pagan cult of "Ishtar," from which the word "Easter" is derived,<sup>5</sup> nor do we want to encourage a parade of bunnies with baskets of colored eggs. Rabbits and eggs are fertility symbols, and Ishtar was the ancient Assyrian/Babylonian goddess of love, fertility, and war.<sup>6</sup> We say this because Messiah's Resurrection is an event that is *worthy of celebration*. His resurrection from the dead marks a pivotal point in history.

Yeshua is the substance of the day of the sheaf. He is the essence of the first of the first fruits offering that followed Passover. In His resurrection, He was the first of the first fruits of resurrection. He "has been raised from the dead the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20,23).

As our High Priest, He was presented before the Father: "He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; for Messiah did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of [Elohim] for us" (Hebrews 9:11,24).

Yeshua's resurrection is a type of harvest. It marked the beginning of our Father's harvest season. Yeshua is "the firstborn among many brethren," and we, His brethren, "also have the first fruits of the Spirit." For this reason we "groan within ourselves"—because we are "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, [which is] the redemption of our body." Messiah Yeshua "brought us forth... that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures" (Romans 8:29,23; James 1:18).

As we return to our roots, we would do well to remember this special day that speaks of mankind's greatest hope. However, we must learn to celebrate it based on its shadow beginning, as described in Torah (Leviticus 23:10–15; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).

On the Day of First Fruits, in ancient Israel, the priest waved a sheaf of the first fruits of the barley harvest before the Almighty. Today this event is largely ignored by most of traditional Judaism. Judah does not celebrate this event, but Ephraim does, though in an errant way.

Called *Day of the First Fruits*, we have much to learn about this most important day.

The word *bikkurim* is plural for *bikkur*, and speaks of the first ripe fruits of the crop. It especially refers to the first products of grain (bread) and fruits.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The five books of Moses: Genesis to Deuteronomy.

<sup>5</sup> The *American Heritage Electronic Dictionary*, Houghton Mifflin, 1994, says the third meaning of Easter is "from Old English *astre*, Easter, from Germanic *austr*, a dawn-goddess whose holiday was celebrated at the vernal equinox."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, "Ishtar."

<sup>7</sup> *Strong's H1061*, from 1069; *bakar*; to burst the womb, i.e. bear or make early fruit (of woman or tree); also to give the birthright:—make firstborn, be firstling, bring forth first child (new fruit). *Bikkurim*: See ; Exo 23:16; 2:1; Lev 2:14; 23:17; Num 13:20; 18:12,13; 2 Ki 4:42; Nah 3:12.

Israel could not keep this feast until they entered into the Promised Land. They did not keep it in the wilderness where they ate only the manna from heaven. They ceased to eat manna after they had their first Passover, then they ate of the produce of the Land (Joshua 5:10-12).

### Fulfilled by a Single Priest...

The picture painted by this feast is that of a priest standing alone and waving a sheaf before [YHVH]. It is a picture of our Messiah, Who is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 7:17).

This single priest, who alone made the proper offering, portrays Yeshua, just as does the single sheaf being waved, for Yeshua is “Messiah the First Fruits” (1 Corinthians 15:23).

This first fruit offering was to be waved “on the day after the Sabbath,” meaning on the first day of the week, which corresponds to [Saturday night through] Sunday [evening]. This lone priest, who presented an offering to the Father on this day, depicts Yeshua, Who rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1).

### Sheaves in Scripture

The first time we read of a *sheaf* in Scripture is in Joseph’s dream. In this dream he saw eleven sheaves bow down before his sheaf.<sup>8</sup> The sheaves represented his brothers, who would ultimately bow before him (Genesis 37:5-11; 43:28).

In Scripture, sheaves (plural) can represent a person or persons. A literal sheaf speaks of a pile tied together.

The sheaf that was to be presented on First Fruits Day was called an *omer*. This word comes from *amar*, which is defined as to chastise, as if piling blows, to gather grain and bind sheaves together.<sup>9</sup> An *omer* is a unit of dry measure equal to a tenth of an ephah (Exodus 16:36), which equals about 3.5 liters, or 3.7 quarts.

Once more we see a shadow of our High Priest, Yeshua, in that “the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him” (Isaiah 53:5).

We also see a spirit of giving, for Israel was commanded to leave the occasional forgotten sheaf and the gleanings of the harvest in the corners of their fields so they could be used to feed the stranger, the fatherless, the widow and the poor. To do anything less would stop the flow of blessing from YHVH’s hand. This principle taught the children of Israel that the joy of harvest should be expressed in charity to others (Leviticus 19:9,22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Ruth 2:7,15, 2:15; Job 24:10).

### The Barley Sheaf

The sheaf waved on First Fruits Day was a barley sheaf. On the first day of the week following the regular Sabbath during Unleavened Bread, the harvest of this cereal grain began.

Sown in the winter, barley was the first grain to ripen in the spring. Because of its deep roots, it has a tremendous ability to absorb nutrients from the soil, so it gives a healthy boost to those who eat it.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, we who have received Messiah Yeshua as Lord are to be firmly rooted in Him, that we might be built up, healthy, established in our faith (Colossians 2:67).<sup>11</sup>

### We Are a First Fruits Company

“But now Messiah has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). “And not only this, but also we ourselves, **having the first fruits of the Spirit**, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23).<sup>12</sup> “But each in his own order: Messiah the first fruits, after that those who are Messiah’s at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:23). For, “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be **a kind of first fruits** among His creatures” (James 1:18).

Messiah Yeshua is the first of a first fruit company. “He is also head of the body, the *ekklesia*/congregation;

<sup>8</sup> Strong’s H485 and 481, ‘alummah, something bound; a sheaf. H481: *alam*, to tie fast; hence, to be tongue-tied: bind, be dumb, put to silence.

<sup>9</sup> *Omer*: Strong’s H 6016 and 6014.

<sup>10</sup> Barley is said to contain all the vitamins, minerals, and proteins necessary for the human diet, and it is thought to give instant access to vital nutrients. See <http://www.aimforenergy.com/barleygreen/bgrass.htm> and <http://www.aim4betterhealthnaturally.com/morabbar.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Strong’s H485: *alummah* or (masc.) *alum*.

<sup>12</sup> The Spirit of adoption is mentioned only five times in Scripture. All must receive it to become sons of God, and it belongs to “the sons of Israel” (Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5); *Who Is Israel?* chapter 14, “*More Tattered Theories.*”

and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that **He Himself will come to have first place in everything**” (Colossians 1:18). By reason of His resurrection from the dead, He was the first to proclaim light, to light the way (Acts 26:23). When we are illumined by His Spirit, we are called “to the general assembly and *ekklesia*/**congregation of the firstborn** who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23).

Our Messiah is “The first and the last,” He died (meaning His earthly flesh ceased to be inhabited by His Spirit), and He “has come to life” (Revelation 2:8). He is our resurrection hope. It is a glorious hope that must not be forgotten, for we who belong to Him will forever live in His presence. So let us rejoice in our First Fruits Priest Who made eternal life possible for us.

### The Most Choice

The first fruits were considered the choicest of all. They were consecrated, or holy unto YHVH. The firstborn of man and beast belonged to Him, as did the first fruits of the earth (Exodus 13:2; 11-13, 22:29). However, some of the first fruits were presented to the priests and Levites (Leviticus 19:23-25; Nehemiah 10:34-39). All first fruits were to be offered with thanksgiving and praise.

### A List of Firsts

Yeshua fulfills the shadow of First Fruits. He is first in every way. He is given first place in everything, because all things are being summed up in Him. He is all, and can be found in all (Ephesians 1:10-11,23).

Messiah Yeshua is—

- The firstborn of the Father (Hebrews 1:6).<sup>13</sup>
- The firstborn of every creature (Colossians 1:15).
- The firstborn of Mary/Miryam (Matthew 1:23-25).
- The firstborn from the dead (Revelation 1:5).
- The firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29).

Yeshua is the First (*Aleph*) and the Last (*Tav*), the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the *Beginning* and the *End* (Revelation 1:8,17; 21:6; 22:13; Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). “He is also head of the body, the *ekklesia/congregation*; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have **first place in everything**. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:18-20).

### The Ceremony

To fulfill the First Fruits obligation in ancient Israel, the celebrant would take the first sheaf from his barley harvest to the priest, who would then wave the sheaf before YHVH in the Temple. As it is written, “He shall wave the sheaf before YHVH for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Leviticus 23:11).

In the heavens, on the day this feast saw its fulfillment, Yeshua waved a wave sheaf in our behalf. When He offered that holy sheaf, all were accepted—all who *were* His, all who *are* His, and all who *ever will be* His. “For Messiah did not enter a holy place made with hands ... but into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us.” And He did this, “Once and for all” (Exodus 25:40; Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27; 9:12,24; 10:10).

### Counting the Omer

On this day of waving the sheaf, Israel is to begin counting off “seven complete sabbaths.” This counting process has come to be known as “counting the omer.” The count begins on the Day of First Fruits, and is culminated fifty days later on Shavuot.

For this fifty day interval a special custom arose that Jewish people celebrate to this day. On each of these fifty days a “counting benediction” is recited and days are marked off on a calendar:

*Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us the Thy commandments, and has commanded us concerning the counting of the omer.*

<sup>13</sup> Israel is the Father’s firstborn, and His “Servant,” Who is Yeshua, also is named “Israel” (Exod 4:22; Isa 49:3; Hos 11:1; Matt. 2:15,18).

This blessing is followed by saying:

“This is the \_\_\_\_ day, being \_\_\_\_ weeks and \_\_\_\_ days of the omer.”<sup>14</sup>

### The “Sabbath” Controversy And Why it Matters

There has long been a controversy over how to interpret the command to begin the count on “the day after **the Sabbath**” (Leviticus 23:11). Some people think this reference to “the Sabbath” refers to the weekly Sabbath. Others think it refers to the first day of Unleavened Bread, which is a “Feast Sabbath.” Since Shavuot has no assigned date beyond beginning the count on “the day after the Sabbath,” we need to understand which Sabbath is meant in order to know when to celebrate Shavuot.

### Sunday to Sunday

If we say the verse speaks of the weekly Sabbath, then the waving of the First Fruits will always be on a Sunday, and Shavuot will always fall on a Sunday—exactly seven Sabbaths plus one day, or fifty days later.

### *Sabbath versus Shabbaton*

The word “Sabbath,” which is used in this verse, is the word used to speak of the *weekly* Sabbath. The word used to describe feast days of rest is *Shabbaton*.<sup>15</sup> The only exception to this rule is Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. That most holy day is called a Sabbath of complete rest, a *Shabbat Shabbaton*.<sup>16</sup>

Restated, the weekly Sabbath can be, and is, sometimes called a *Shabbat Shabbaton* (Exodus 31:15), however, except for Yom Kippur. The word *Shabbat* is *not* applied to the feast days. They are days of *Shabbaton*.

Thus it would appear that “the day after **the Sabbath**” (Leviticus 23:11) would *not* refer to the first day of Unleavened Bread, for that is a *Shabbaton*, a *feast day*. Instead, it refers to the weekly Sabbath.

Moreover, if we were to begin the count on Unleavened Bread, then Shavuot would always fall on the sixth of Sivan (the third month), because the feast of Unleavened Bread begins on a fixed date—the fifteenth of Abib (Leviticus 23:6). Therefore, there would be no need to count the days; we would simply be instructed to observe Shavuot on the sixth of Sivan. (See charts this chapter.)

### What First Fruits Means to Us

We recognize First Fruits Day because, for Believers, First Fruits reminds us that our Elohim is the source of all blessings, that we are to seek first His Kingdom, and that He is always to be our first love.<sup>17</sup>

This time of counting the days between the waving of the First Fruits barley sheaf and the harvesting of the wheat is a depiction of our earthly sojourn. For we are strangers and exiles in this earth. Our time here is a time of expectation, a time of knowing that the Father will provide. We know we have a coming inheritance, and we know the final “Ingathering” is coming soon (Hebrews 11:13-14; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 1:11,14,18; Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4).

Just as we are blessed when we accept Yeshua into our hearts as the Passover Lamb, so there is something more. For Yeshua has made a way for us to enter into Eternity with the Father. We who have repented of our sins and believe in Yeshua have this hope of resurrection. We hope in the coming first fruits harvests.

### Celebrating First Fruits Day

One way we can celebrate this awesome day is to take individual sheaves of barley and tie them with colorful ribbons, then gather family and friends and joyously wave our individual barley sheaves before the Father. We can offer Him songs of thanksgiving and praise. Let us remember to be as priests before Him, and like Aaron, bear the burden of all the tribes on our breasts. On this day in particular, we can intercede in prayer for the whole house of Israel.

You also might want to have someone dress as a priest, and others dress as Israelites who are bringing in their sheaves. Someone can read all the appropriate verses while the people act out the feast. Give the children a calendar on which they can begin counting off the days until Shavuot. Pray! Sing! Rejoice! Give gifts! Worship and

<sup>14</sup> *The Everlasting Tradition*, Galen Peterson, Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1995, pp. 28-29.

<sup>15</sup> *Strong's H7677*, from 7676; special holiday, rest, sabbath

<sup>16</sup> [www.karaite-korner.org/light-of-israel/pentecost\\_classical\\_proofs.shtml](http://www.karaite-korner.org/light-of-israel/pentecost_classical_proofs.shtml)

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 6:33; 1 John 4:9; Rev. 2:4

celebrate on this day that speaks of the Resurrection work of He Who is the First of First Fruits!

(*End of Batya Wootten's teaching on First Fruits Day.*)

### **The Timing of Yeshua's Resurrection as It Relates to the Waving of the Barley Omer**

The day of Yeshua's resurrection is a hotly debated subject. Did he resurrect at the end of the day on the Sabbath (Saturday), at the beginning of the First Day (Saturday night), or early Sunday morning? Certain things we know for sure, for the Scripture record is clear. Other things the Scripture is silent on, so we have deduce the answers through circumstantial evidence and through oblique ways.

What we know for certain is this. Yeshua died about the ninth hour of the day, according to Roman time, which was approximately 3 P.M. at the time of the afternoon Temple sacrifice (Matt. 27:46). We also know that Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus hurried to place Yeshua in the grave before sundown, for at sundown began the High Sabbath, or the first day of Unleavened Bread (the fifteenth of the month of Abiv on the biblical calendar) (See Matt. 27:57–60 and John 19:31–42.). Did they get Yeshua into the grave *before* sundown, or not? That is a question that is not answered since Scripture does not say. We know that from the time Yeshua died until the time he was placed in the tomb, Joseph and Nicodemus had a lot to do. They had to go to Pilate and obtain permission to remove the body from the cross. They then had to go back to the place of the crucifixion, fetch the body, take it to a place where they could wrap it in linen and mix in 100 pounds of spices. This done, they had to take the body to the tomb—and all this before the beginning of the Sabbath approximately three hours later. Yeshua said that he would be in the grave for exactly three days and three nights, or 72 hours. He was specific about this and said that it would be a sign to the Jews and a proof of his Messiahship (Matt. 12:40). He did not say “parts of three days and nights” as is mistakenly believed by many. So did Yeshua go into the grave just prior to sundown on the preparation day before the High Sabbath, or just slightly after sundown and barely into the Sabbath? We don't know. Scripture does not say.

What else do we know for certain concerning Yeshua's resurrection? We know that Yeshua's tomb was found to be empty on the first day of the week. Scripture does not say *when* he resurrected, only that the tomb was found to be empty on the First Day. Who knows for certain when Yeshua resurrected? Only the Romans guarding the tomb knew for sure, but after reviving from fainting when Yeshua resurrected, the Jews paid them large sums of money to keep their mouths shut (Matt. 28:4). So we do not know exactly when Yeshua resurrected—late on the weekly Sabbath just prior to sundown or just past sundown at the beginning of the first day of the week.

There is circumstantial evidence that gives us a clue as to the day which Yeshua resurrected. First, the early Christian church universally believed that Yeshua resurrected on the first day. This was before Sunday became the dominant day of worship replacing the Sabbath, and years before Easter is mentioned as a holy day to Christians. We will discuss this issue in more detail below. This is an undisputed fact. There must be some credence to the early church's assertion of a Sunday resurrection as recorded in the writings of the church fathers of the early second century.

The second piece of evidence involves the waving of the sheaf or *omer* of barley on First Fruits Day. This ceremony occurred on the morrow or day after the weekly Sabbath falling within the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. As we have seen, the events leading up to this day and of the day itself pictured the death, suffering and resurrection of Yeshua. The waving of the *omer* of barley occurred on the first day, not on the Sabbath. This is not only a picture of the resurrection, but seems to point to a First Day resurrection.

Third, the first day of the week was called by several of the early church fathers “the Eighth Day” (e.g. *Epistle of Barnabas* chap. 15, written ca. A.D. 100–120). Sabbath is the biblical number signifying completion or perfection. Yeshua was placed in the grave at the beginning of the High Sabbath and rose three days later just at the end of the weekly Sabbath just as the first day was beginning. Eight is the biblical number signifying “new beginning.” When Yeshua arose from the grave and ascended to heaven to be “waved” or presented to the Father as the perfect first fruits offering and Savior and Redeemer of mankind, it indeed truly was a new beginning for the human race. All those who would place their trust in the Lamb of Elohim who was slain for man's sins, could have a new spiritual start in life, and new spiritual life that would last eternally.

First Fruits Day is a day of great rejoicing, for on this day Yeshua arose from the grave, conquered death once and for all armed with life and is willing to share life eternal with all who will follow him.

## What Does the Beating, Crushing and Grinding of the Barley Grain Into Flour Mean?

The barley sheaf was marked in the field and then cut. As we have seen, this seems to point to Yeshua first being marked for sacrifice and then being cut off or killed. Isaiah prophesied this would happen when he predicted that the right arm redeemer of YHVH (Isa. 53:1) would first grow up like a tender plant out of the dry ground (Isa. 53:2). The Jews, when seeking barley to be harvested for the wave sheaf offering insisted that it be barley that had grown naturally without the benefit of artificial watering or manuring. Isaiah refers to Yeshua as being a “tender plant” (Isa. 53:2). This is a picture of the barley in its *abiv* or green-in-the-ear state. This is why the priests had to roast the barley in fire before they could grind it. Though the barley was substantive, it still contained moisture in the ear. To grind grain that is even slightly moist will clog up the grinding stones so that they cannot function. Grain has to be completely moisture-free in order to produce flour without clogging up the stones. This is why it was roasted. Isaiah then prophesied that the Messiah would be “cut off from the land of the living” (Isa. 53:8), even as the barley was cut off with a sickle from the dry land where it had grown to fruition.

Now some may see the beating of the barley to separate it from its hull, followed by the winnowing, then the roasting, then the grinding, then the sifting of the flour to be a picture of the sufferings of Yeshua leading up to and during his crucifixion. But this does not follow logically since the barley has already been cut—a picture of Yeshua’s death. So how did Yeshua suffer after his death? This is a question that we now propose an answer for that may shock some.

## Yeshua In the Lowest *Sheol*/Hell?

The debate has raged within Christian circles for several hundred years as to what specifically happened to Yeshua the Messiah from the point he died on the cross to the time of his resurrection. All agree that his body stayed in the grave, but what happened to the rest of him; namely, his soul and spirit?

It is generally accepted among Believers that man is a three-part being: body, soul and spirit. Many scriptural references could be given, but, unless one doubts the Apostle Paul, one biblical example should suffice: that is 1 Thessalonians 5:23, where Paul states that man is comprised of a body, soul and spirit. Furthermore, it is generally accepted that the body is the physical body of man, that the soul is the rational part of him composed of his intellect or natural understanding, emotions and will or volition, and the spirit is that divine spark or essence YHVH puts in man at the time of inception without which the body and soul cannot live. The spirit separates man from the animal kingdom (Ecc. 3:21) and is the part of man that can connect with the Spirit of YHVH. Therefore, it is through the spirit that man can have a relationship with YHVH (John 4:23-24; Eph. 3:16; Job 32:8; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor.:12:11; 1 John 2:20; Prov. 20:27).

The Bible says very little about the origin or fate of man’s spirit. Several Scriptures that deal with the subject are very insightful, however. The spirit of man goes up when he dies (Ecc 3:21), and returns to YHVH who gave it (Ecc. 12:7). Likewise, in accordance with scriptural revelation, we see that upon Yeshua’s death on the cross he committed his spirit into the hands of the Father in Heaven (Luke 12:6).

With regard to the physical body of a man when he dies, is there any question as to what happens to that? It goes into the grave where it stays to await the resurrection. This is so basic and so widely accepted among Believers that we will not take the time or space here to give scriptural proof of this fact. We know that when Yeshua died, his body was laid in the tomb where it stayed until his resurrection three days and nights later.

Now what about the soul? That is the big question. In the Old Testament we find many Scriptures that show us that upon death man’s soul goes into *Sheol* or hell (the grave) waiting for YHVH to raise it up:

- Psalm 16:10, “For You [YHVH] will not leave my soul in *Sheol*, nor allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” (See also Acts 2:27.)
- Psalm 49:15, “But YHVH will redeem my soul from the power of the grave [*Sheol*], for he shall receive me.”
- Psalm 49:8, “For the redemption of their souls [from the power of *Sheol*] is costly.”
- Hosea 13:14: “I [YHVH speaking] will ransom them from the power of the grave [*Sheol*]; I will redeem them from death.”
- Psalm 86:13: “And You [YHVH] have delivered my soul from the depths of *Sheol*.”

Here we see that in Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) times man’s soul would descend into *Sheol* (the abode of the dead) at the time of his death where it would stay until YHVH would ransom these souls (later through the

death of Yeshua the Messiah).

Now let us see how Yeshua's soul had to pay the price for sin by having to die and go to *Sheol*. To see this we must turn to Isaiah 53:10 where it says Yeshua's soul was made an offering for sin. In verse 11 we read that Yeshua's soul suffered or labored and YHVH was satisfied and many were justified by it as Yeshua bore their iniquities. All the major Bible translations (KJV, NKJV, NIV and NASV) bear this rendering out. Verse 12 says that Yeshua poured His soul out unto death and that he was numbered with the transgressors and bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

Why do we see such an emphasis on the soul part of Yeshua dying, suffering, bearing man's iniquities, justifying many, and satisfying YHVH's justice? The soul (mind, will and emotions) is the part of man that sins. We cannot rightly say that the spirit part of man or the body sin, although the body does act out the sin, which is conceived in the heart and mind of man. Furthermore, Scripture makes it very clear that it is the soul that is guilty of sinning and thence must die (Num. 15:28, Ezek. 18:4; 18:20). Yeshua laid the blame for sin against the heart or soul part of man as well when he said that from it proceed all sorts of evil things such as murders, adulteries, thefts, lying, blasphemies and so on (Matt. 15:19). In Matthew 12:33-34, Yeshua shows the connection between the heart and one of the parts of the body, namely the mouth, when he said that "out of the abundance of the mouth the heart speaks." Here we see, again, that the body is servant to the soul part of man.

We not only see that Yeshua descended into *Sheol*, but Scripture makes mention in several places about him descending into the *lowest part* of hell or *Sheol*. (Ps. 88:6,3,5,7,9,15,16. Could Ephesians 4:9 be a description of this as well?)

In the Hebrew Scriptures, there is a distinction between *Sheol*-hell and the lower part of *Sheol* or the lowest hell (Deut. 32:22; Ps. 86:13 and Prov. 9:18). Are these the two compartments of hell that exist based on Yeshua's parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16? One compartment is for the unregenerate sinner who, though dead, awaits the judgement seat of YHVH (or the Great White Throne Judgement, Rev. 20:11-15) after which he will be cast into the, as yet nonexistent, Lake of Fire, while the other compartment is for the righteous dead and is called, in Hebraic poetic and euphemistic fashion *Abraham's Bosom*?

Another interesting text is 1 Peter 3:18, which says Messiah suffered for sins being put to death in the flesh (but he did not die in the spirit, for it returned to YHVH!), and the Spirit of Elohim made him alive (even as the same Spirit had impregnated him into Mary, descended upon him as a dove, led him to the wilderness and finally raised him up).

The question naturally would arise, what would Yeshua be doing in *Sheol* in either or both "compartments"? Scripture says very little about this, so where the Scripture speaks we are able to speak, but where it is silent we had best be silent, as well, and not run the risk of adding to YHVH's Word. Several Scriptures do give us a little glimpse into this time period. One is Revelation 1:18, which says that Yeshua has the keys of Hades (*Sheol*) and death. Perhaps he obtained those "keys" while his soul was there during his body's three days and nights in the tomb. First Peter 3:18-20 talks about Yeshua suffering "once [and] for [all for] sins, the just for the just, that he might bring us to YHVH, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient ..."

First Peter 3:18-20 is one of the more enigmatic passages in Scripture. We, like those before us, can only guess as to its meaning. Is this passage, coupled with Ephesians 4:8-9, a description of Messiah leading the righteous of old from "Abraham's Bosom" to an early first of the first fruits resurrection, which is pictured by the early spring barely harvest? We have already seen that the evidence seems to point to the fact that Yeshua resurrected on the first day, and that when he arose he became "the first fruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). Then Ephesians 4:8-9 says, "When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. (Now this, 'he descended'—what does it mean but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?)" Who were these captives that Yeshua led out of the graves to be first fruits along with him? In this regard, Matthew in his Gospel records something strange happening at Yeshua's resurrection:

And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. (Matt. 27:52-53)

What happened to these Saints after Yeshua's resurrection? Did they die again and return to the graves, or did they go to heaven to await Yeshua's second coming? This is a huge question. Yeshua said that no man had ascended to heaven (John 3:13), but he made this statement before his resurrection. What happened to these Saints? Did

they go to heaven, or did they return to the graves? Stephen under the inspiration of the Spirit of Elohim stated that “the patriarch David, ... is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.... For David is not ascended into the heavens ... (Acts 2:29 and 34). Revelation 19:1 speaks of “people [literal *crowds of people* according to the *TDNT*] in heaven” who will return with Yeshua at his second coming. Perhaps these people are a reference to those righteous Saints who will be resurrected at the sound of the last or seventh trumpet (*shofar*) (1 Cor. 15:51–53; cp. Rev. 11:15–18). We don’t know what became of the Saints that arose at the time of Yeshua’s resurrection, but one thing is certain: they were part of the first fruits that followed Yeshua who was the first of the first fruits of the resurrection—and all this happened on First Fruits Day—the day the evidence points to Yeshua’s resurrection and ascension to heaven.

### Is First Fruits Day a Sacred Assembly/*Miqra Kodesh*?

Leviticus 23 lays out YHVH’s annual sacred assemblies (קִיּוּב: holy convocations) or *miqra kodesh*. They are the following:

- The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is called a *miqra kodesh* (Lev. 23:7).
- The seventh or last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is called a *miqra kodesh* (Lev. 23:8).
- Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks is called a *miqra kodesh* (Lev. 23:21).
- The Day of the Trumpets/Awakening Blast is called a *miqra kodesh* (Lev. 23:24).
- The Day of Atonement is called a *miqra kodesh* (Lev. 23:27).
- The Feast of Tabernacles is called a *miqra kodesh* (Lev. 23:35).
- The Eighth Day is called a *miqra kodesh* (Lev. 23:36).

Please note that Scripture does not call the day of the waving of the barley sheaf (or *omer*) a *miqra kodesh* (Lev. 23:10–14). Let’s note, furthermore, what Leviticus 23:37 says,

These are the appointed festivals of YHVH, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto YHVH, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day.

Here Scripture shows us that each *miqra kodesh* or holy convocation is an *appointed festival* or *appointed time* (*moed*), but as we have already seen, an appointed time (*moed*) does not necessarily have to be a *miqra kodesh*, since Scripture refers to certain non-*miqra kodesh* occurrences (such as *Rosh Chodesh* or the new moon) as *appointed times*. On each *miqra kodesh*, furthermore, is an offering made by fire. On the day of the waving of the barley *omer* an offering was made by fire, but there was no *miqra kodesh* or commanded assembly/holy convocation. Therefore, this day cannot rightly be called a *miqra kodesh*. The ancient Jewish historical records never indicated that this day was a *miqra kodesh*, neither did writings of the early Messianic Believers as recorded in the Apostolic Writings (NT), nor did the early church fathers, as much emphasis as they placed on the resurrection of Yeshua, recognize it as a festival—nor do they even mention it in their writings, so far as this author has been able to determine. We can only conclude that to designate this day as a *miqra kodesh*, is totally lacking in scriptural authority and historical precedence, so far as the evidence shows that we have been able to discover.

### First Fruits Day Is a Part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

In Leviticus 23, YHVH gives instructions concerning the seven-day long Feast of Unleavened Bread (verses 6–8). Immediately following that and prior to YHVH’s instructions concerning the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (verses 15–21) are instructions concerning the “morrow after the Sabbath” otherwise known as First Fruits Day (verses 10–14). The placement of First Fruits Day between the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Weeks has led some to the conclusion that this day is one of YHVH’s annual festivals on a par with Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and the Eighth Day. Is this a correct assumption, or is First Fruits Day a special ceremony that was a subsection to the Days of Unleavened Bread? Most agree that First Fruits Day occurs within the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread. This would seem to be proof enough that it was part of that week-long festival. However, some still refer to it as a separate festival within a festival. There are those who think that it may have fallen outside of Unleavened Bread, therefore strengthening their assertion that it is a separate festival. What does Scripture say on this

matter? Was First Fruits Day a part of Unleavened Bread or its own separate festival?

Joshua 5:10–11 gives us the answer. This is the record of Israel keeping their first Passover upon entering the Promised Land. Verse 10 states that the Israelites kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, as the Torah instructs, and that on the next day, the “morrow after the Passover,” they ate the unleavened bread and roasted grain. Torah prohibits the eating of the new spring barley crop until the priests had waved the sheaf or *omer* of barley on First Fruits Day. As we have seen, Leviticus 23:10–11 clearly states that First Fruits Day falls on the day after the Sabbath. In Joshua 5, in that particular year, First Fruits Day fell on the day immediately following the Passover, which would be on the first day (a high Sabbath day) of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On this particular year, First Fruits Day and the first high Sabbath of Unleavened Bread both fell on the 15th of the month and both fell on the first day of the week.

Since First Fruits Day has to fall “on the morrow after the Sabbath” this piece of historical data shows us two things: It confirms that First Fruits Day must fall within the days of Unleavened Bread (and is therefore a part of that feast, and not a separate feast of its own), not outside of it. It was observed on the 15th day and not the 22nd day. It also confirms that the Sabbath in “the morrow after the Sabbath” (in Lev. 23:11) is a reference to the weekly Sabbath, as the ancient Jewish sects of the Sadducees and Boethusians reckoned it, and as the modern Karaite Jews reckon it, and not as the ancient Pharisees and modern rabbinic Jews reckon it. The latter group of Jews teaches that the Sabbath mentioned in Leviticus 23:11 is a reference to the first high Sabbath of Unleavened Bread (the fifteenth day of the first month) and not to the weekly 7th day Sabbath within the week-long festival of Unleavened Bread.

### Is First Fruits Day an Appointed Time (*Moed*)?

The word *moed* (*Strong's* H4150) or *moedim* (plural) has several meanings. According to *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, its primary meaning is *appointed sign, appointed time, appointed seasons, place of assembly, or set feast*. It is translated in the KJV into the following English words: congregation (150 times), feast (23 times), season (13 times), appointed (12 times), time (12 times), assembly (4 times), solemnity (4 times), solemn (2 times), days (1 time), sign (1 time) and synagogue (1 time). The *TWOT* gives us the following definition of *moed*:

It frequently designates a determined time or place without regard to the purpose of the designation. It may be the time for the birth of a child (Gen. 17:21 ...), the coming of a plague (Exod. 9:5), the season of a bird's migration (Jer. 8:7), an appointed time [for a meeting between people] (1 Sam. 13:8; 20:35), the time for which a vision is intended (Hab. 2:3), the times of the end (Dan. 8:19), or the time for the festivals (Lev. 23:2) and solemnities [i.e., the seventh year or year of release] (Deut. 31:10).

The heavenly bodies are for determining the seasons (Gen. 1:14; Ps. 104:9). Each festival is a *moed*, but collectively they are the “feasts of YHVH” (*moedi YHVH*, Lev. 23:2, etc.). Appearing at times (Hos. 9:5) with *bag* (which designates the three great annual festivals), *moed* must be thought of in a wide usage for all religious assemblies.

*Moed* also designates an “assembly” in such a phrase as “picked men of the assembly” (Num. 16:2) ... The King of Babylon dreams of a seat in the “mount of the assembly in the north (Isa. 14:13), a term similar to the Ugaritic expression for the council of the gods... *Moed* is also the worshiping assembly of God's people, hence Yahweh's foes roar in the midst of his assemblies (Ps. 74:4). It may possibly be an early designation for the synagogue (“appointed places of God” *moedi el*; Ps. 74:8). (*Ibid.* pp. 388–389)

Based on the definitions given for *moed*, it may be debated whether First Fruits Day is a *moed* or not. It certainly was something that involved the priests and people performing religious duties on a specific or appointed time each year. The people reaping a sheaf (*omer*) of barley and bringing it to the priests (Lev. 23:10) who then presented it to or waved it before YHVH along with the performance of other sacerdotal duties (Lev. 23:11–13) could be possibly considered a *moed* according to the definition above. However, a primary meaning of the word involves a meeting or assembly of people. There is no indication in Scripture, or in the historical Jewish records, that First Fruits Day was a day of special assembly or meeting for the people. As we have noted, Scripture does not call it a *miqra kodesh* since no holy convocation or commanded assembly occurred on that day, as per YHVH's instruction.

## Scripture Calls Shavuot, The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost “the Day of First Fruits”

There is some confusion in the minds of some students of Scripture about the term *first fruits* and to which day does it apply: There are two first fruits days, if you will, that the Israelites recognized in the spring.

The first one was Wave sheaf Day during the Feast of Unleavened Bread where the first fruits (*reshiyit*) of the barley was offered up to YHVH as a wave offering in the Temple. This is the festival that many Messianics incorrectly refer to as the Day of the Bikkurim. That term technically belongs to Pentecost, which occurred 50 days later. Wave sheaf Day is properly referred to as Reshiyth Day or *Reshiyt Kezirkem* (*Encyclo. Judaic.*, 1901–1906 edit., on-line edition, article entitled *First Fruits*) or the Day of the First of the First Fruits, since that is what the term *reshiyth* means, and since the barley was the first crop to come to fruition each year in the land of Israel.

Technically, the barley is a first fruit or *bikkurim*, but Scriptures usually refer to the day using the term *reshiyth*, as our footnoted word study above shows. The word *bikkurim* has a more general application and refers to all of the first-fruits offerings that YHVH required of the Israelites, not just the barley.

The Feast of Weeks also celebrated a first fruits harvest, but a different one—the later wheat harvest. It was called the Day of the Harvest of the First Fruits (*bikkurim*) (Exod. 23:16; Num. 28:26).

The barley harvest was a perfect picture of Yeshua who, as we have already seen, was the first fruits of those resurrected from the dead. The greater wheat harvest that occurred fifty days later is a spiritual picture of Believers from the first century to the present day coming to saving faith in Yeshua. As evidence of this, the Book of Acts records that 3000 were saved on the Day of Pentecost.

The day of the waving of the barley first fruits (*reshiyth*) or *omer* is directly related to the waving of the wheat first fruits (*bikkurim*) fifty days later since the count of the fifty days—called the count of the *omer*—began on the day of the waving of the barley *omer* during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Deut. 16:9).

## What the Rabbis Say Concerning the Omer Offering

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901–1906 online edition), in its article entitled “Omer Offering,” has some interesting historical information pertaining to the First Fruits Day ceremonies in Yeshua’s day.

The barley grain must be taken from a field near Jerusalem, if ripe enough; otherwise it may be gathered elsewhere (*Men.* 6.2). The reaping was done with much ceremony. Messengers, sent by the bet din to the chosen field on the day preceding the Passover Feast, drew the heads of the stalks together in sheaves and tied them in order to facilitate the work of the reapers. Then when the hour for gathering came the reapers thrice asked permission to reap; this was done in order to impress upon the Boethusians that this was the proper time for the gathering of the omer (*Men.* 6.3).

After the grain had been gathered it was brought to the courtyard of the Temple, where, according to R. Meir, it was parched while it was still in the ear; according to the other rabbis, it was first thrashed and then parched. The grain was ground into coarse meal and then sifted through thirteen sieves until it became very clean, after which the tenth part was taken, the measure of the omer, and given to the priest. The remainder, which was subject to challah, and, according to R. Akiba, to tithe also, could be redeemed and eaten even by laymen. The priest proceeded with the omer as with any other meal-offering: he poured oil and frankincense over the meal, “waved” it, and then burned a handful of it on the altar; the remainder was eaten by the priests (*Men.* vi. 4). The “waving” was done in the following way: The offering was placed on the extended hands of the priest, who moved them backward and forward (to counter-act the effects of injurious winds) and then upward and downward (to counteract the effects of injurious dews; *Pesi. R.* 18. [ed. Friedmann, p. 92a]; *Pesi.* v8. 70b; *Men.* 62a; *Lev. R.* 28.5). As soon as the *omer* ceremony was completed the people of Jerusalem were permitted to eat of the newly harvested grain; people of towns far from Jerusalem might not do so until after noon, when it was certain that the ceremony at Jerusalem had been concluded. After the destruction of the Temple, R. Johanan b. Zakkai decided that the new grain might not be eaten at all during the 16th of Abiv (*Men.* 6.5). No grain might be reaped until the barley for the *omer* had been gathered (*Men.* 6.7).

On the subject of “First Fruits, the *Jewish Encyclopedia* states,

The first-fruits (“bikkurim”) are known under three designations: (1) “reshit bikirkem” (Lev. 23:10),

“the first-fruits of your harvest”; (2) “lechem ha-bikkurim” (Lev. xxiii. 17-20), “the bread of the first-fruits”; (3) “reshit bikkure admateka” (Ex. xxiii. 19), “the first of the first-fruits of thy land,” or “reshit kol peri ha-adamah” (Deut. xxvi. 2), “the first of all the fruit of the earth.”

The “first-fruits of the harvest” were offered on the 16th day of Nisan [Abiv], from that fruit which ripened first in Palestine—barley (but see *Men.* 84a)—and with considerable ceremony, in order to emphasize dissent from the Sadducean interpretation of the Scripture text, “the morrow after the Sabbath” (Lev. 23:11), which is, according to the Sadducees always Sunday (*Men.* 65b). The ceremony occurred toward the evening of the first day of Pesach, in a field in the neighborhood of Jerusalem, sheaves of choice barley having been bound there before-hand by men deputed to this work by the authorities. In the presence of a vast throng, from the neighboring towns as well as from Jerusalem, the sheaves to the amount of three *seah* were cut by three men with three sickles and placed in three baskets. As soon as it grew dark the “harvester” addressed to the assembly the following questions, repeating each one three times, and receiving to each an affirmative reply: “Has the sun set?” “Is this the sickle?” “Is this the basket?” and on Sabbath, “Is this the Sabbath day?” He next inquired thrice: “Shall I harvest?” to which they answered: “Do harvest.” All this was to confound the Sadducean heresy. The barley was then gathered into the baskets and carried to the hall of the Temple, where it was beaten out, not, as usually, with sticks, but with soft reeds; or, according to a divergent opinion, it was first roasted in a perforated vessel over a fire, so that the heat might touch all parts evenly. Then it was spread out on the floor of the hall and winnowed in the draft. Ground in a coarse hand-mill, an *omer* of the finely sieved flour mixed with oil and incense was “swung and offered up,” and a handful was burned as incense by the priest. The rest was distributed among the priests (*Men.* 10.1-4; Maimonides, “*Yad,*” *Temidin*, 7). . . . Israelites in distant districts, in fact, were permitted to eat from the new crop from midday on, a privilege withdrawn by Johanan ben Zakkai after the destruction of the Temple (*Men.* 10. 5). The ceremony of the “reshiyt kezirkem” was considered as an act of gratitude to God for His providential care of the fields (*Lev. R.* xxviii.)

### No Ancient Sources Mention *First Fruits Day* Being a Festival

Alfred Edersheim in his book, “The Temple: Its Ministry and Service” (pp. 203-204), has a section entitled, “The Morrow After the Sabbath,” outlining how the priests cut the barley, etc., but there is no mention of a service, or sacred assembly occurring on this day. It was just another priestly duty that was part of the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread celebration. He does not designate it as a separate festival apart from Unleavened Bread.

Josephus (*Antiquities* 10) lists all the feasts of Israel, and in *Antiquities* 10.5 he lists Passover and Unleavened Bread. He mentions the wave sheaf offering as a subsection of Unleavened Bread, but not as a separate celebration.

Philo, the first century Jewish historian and philosopher does mention first fruits and calls it a festival (*Special Laws* 29). He claims that there are 10 festivals in Israel’s annual cycle of festivals. But as the evidence shows, he takes a very loose view concerning of what constitutes a festival. He includes, for example, “every day as a festival” to the sanctity of life (*Special Laws* 12), the weekly Sabbath (*Special Laws* 15), the celebration of the new moon (*Special Laws* 26).

*The Mishnah*, the record of Jewish oral tradition and rabbinical laws put into written form in the third century A.D. and its expanded Aramaic version, *The Tosefta*, make no mention of First Fruits Day being a special celebration, other than the rituals we specifically see the Torah commanding the people and priest to do.

*The Talmud* (*Eiruvin* 32a), the Jewish Oral Law, makes a brief mention of the barley first fruits stating only that the Israelites could eat of the barley first fruits from midday onward of First Fruits Day—assuming that the priests had already fulfilled their priestly duties pertaining to the wave sheaf offering. *Talmud Menachoth* 65a Soncino Edition footnote 11 states that the offering of the *omer* occurred after the Sabbath that fell within the Days of Unleavened Bread. No mention is made that Wave sheaf Day was a separate festival within the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Prominent Christian Hebrew-roots scholars make no mention of First Fruits Day being a unique festival either. “Passover–Unleavened Bread combined two feasts. Unleavened Bread was a spring agricultural feast celebrating the barley harvest and lasting seven days. It was customary to make unleavened barley loaves. A sheaf of the

first fruits of barley was brought to the temple and offered to God. At some point, Unleavened Bread was combined with Passover. Today Passover refers to the entire eight-day festival” (*Early Judaism—The Exile to the Time of Jesus*, p. 50). Murphy makes no mention in his book about the day of the wave sheaf offering being a separate observed day or festival. J. Julius Scott Jr. makes no mention of First Fruits Day when he lists and describes the festivals of ancient Israel (*Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, p. 69).

*The Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Jacob Neusner, editor) notes, “The Temple Scroll, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, adds several other first fruit festivals to the biblical legislation: perhaps the ceremonial waving of the first of the barley harvest (col. 18); the new wine festival (col. 19); and that of the new oil (col. 21).” The *Temple Scroll* col. 18 states,

They shall hold a sacred convocation on this day, and [ ... ] a male goat for a sin offering [ ... ] its grain offering and drink offering following the usual regulations: a tenth of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil, one fourth of a hin, and wine for a drink offering, one-fourth of a hin, he shall atone for the people assembled, for all their sin, and they shall be forgiven. Generation after generation, eternal statutes shall these be for them, wherever they may dwell. And that they are to sacrifice the single ram, once, on the day of waving the sheaf. (*The Dead Sea Scrolls — A New Translation*, by Wise, Abegg and Cook, Harper Collins, 1996, p. 463).

*The Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* continues,

Several New Testament authors, however, use ‘first fruits’ in the sense that certain things or people were the first part, and the remainder were to follow. Paul speaks of Jesus as the first fruits of those who have died but will rise (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Elsewhere Paul writes that believers have the first fruits of the Spirit now and eagerly await the full gift (Rom. 8:23). He also calls two groups of believers ‘first fruits’; that is, the first converts in an area (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15). James refers to those whom God has chosen as the first fruits of his creation (Jas. 1:18), and Revelation calls the 144,000 the first fruits of God and the Lamb (14:4).

Unlike in early Christianity, first fruits in rabbinic Judaism do not have a metaphorical or theological significance. Rather, within Tractate Bikkurim in the Mishnah and Jerusalem Talmud, the rabbis treat first fruits solely within the framework of the Hebrew Scriptures’ requirement that the first part of the harvest be brought to the Temple. (*Ibid.*, p. 228)

### Yeshua’s Resurrection Mentioned by Early Church Fathers

Is there evidence among the church fathers of the second-century that they linked First Fruits Day or the concept of the first-fruits with the resurrection of Yeshua? If they did not, then at what point in time did the establishment of a specific day to commemorate Yeshua’s resurrection occur?

- ✎ *Epist. Clement* chap. 24, (ca. A.D. 95) Yeshua is the first-fruits of those to be raised from the dead. No mention of which day Yeshua resurrected.
- ✎ *The Didache: Teachings of the Twelve Apostles* (ca. A.D. 90–150, though some scholars feel this work may have been written as early as ca. A.D. 60, though they admit that modifications may have taken place well in into the third century), This early writing mentions gathering together on the “Lord’s Day” to break bread and to give thanks. The Ethiopic version of this document reads differently, however. Instead of referring to the “Lord’s Day” it says, “and you therefore celebrate the remembrance of my death, i.e., the Passover.” The Coptic version of the same passage reads, “And you remember my death. If now the Passover takes place” (*From Sabbath to Sunday*, by Samuele Baccocchi, p. 81).
- ✎ *Epistle of Barnabas* chap. 15 (written ca. A.D. 100–120), The author (not the Barnabas of the Book of Acts) denigrates the seventh-day Sabbath replacing it with “the eighth day” —the day on which Yeshua rose from the dead, made himself manifest and ascended to heaven.
- ✎ *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* chap. 2, The fact of Yeshua’s resurrection affirmed. No mention of which day Yeshua resurrected.

- ✎ *Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians* chap. 9, He connects Yeshua's resurrection with the "Lord's day" or Sunday, as well as a Friday to Sunday death, burial and resurrection.
- ✎ *Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians* chap. 9, "And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep YHVH's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days of the week." He calls it the eighth day "on which our life both sprang up again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ ..."
- ✎ *Gospel of Nicodemus* chap. 15 (an apocryphal gospel written sometime between the second and fifth centuries), Yeshua resurrected at midnight after the close of the Sabbath.

In light of the fact that no mention is made in Scripture or in any pre-second century Jewish or Christian writings (except in the Temple Scroll of the Jewish Qumran community) of First Fruits Day being a special commemoration with special significance pointing toward the resurrection of Yeshua, to what are we to ascribe its importance in some areas of the modern Messianic community? Though Paul twice links Yeshua's resurrection to the idea of being a spiritual first fruit of those resurrected from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20 and 23), he does not relate it to the wave sheaf offering of the *omer*. That is not to say there is no link, but only to say that Paul neither highlighted that link nor used it as a teaching point. To say there is a direct link between Paul's teaching and First Fruits Day is, in this author's opinion, to put words in Paul's mouth. In fact, Paul uses the terms *first fruit/s* quite freely applying it to other spiritual realities that have no relationship to the resurrection of Yeshua at all. So to make a case based on Paul's use of the terms *first fruit/s* that first fruits is a commemorative festival seems to be grasping at the proverbial straw. No conclusive evidence can be found in the Scriptures or even in the writings of the early church fathers to prove that this day was significant. At present, lacking any written historical evidence, it can only be concluded that the commonly-called "Feast of First Fruits" as pertaining to day of the waving of the *omer* of barley is of modern origination based on an extra-biblical tradition of modern Messianics. It is not a bad tradition, but we believe that it just needs to be recognized as such, and that to add it to the list of YVHH's annual appointed times festivals or set-apart convocations is without scriptural basis and simply adding to the Word of Elohim—something which Scripture forbids in both the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Apostolic Scriptures.

Having made this point, do we wish to suggest that the cutting, processing and waving of the barley *omer* on the day after the Sabbath during the spring festival of Unleavened Bread had no prophetic allegorical significance speaking to the resurrection of Yeshua? Absolutely not. We have already examined evidence supporting that it does in a most glorious way.

What we do find in the writings of the early church fathers (from the early second century onward) is strong anti-Torah (anti-nomian) and anti-Jewish bias and powerful predilection to move away from everything deemed Jewish or "Old Covenant." For proof of this one needs to look no further than the Sabbath and Passover versus Easter (or Quartodecimen) controversies, which began in the second centuries and threatened to split the early church. It was not until the early fourth century at the famous Council of Nicea initiated, financed and led by the Roman Emperor Constantine that the debate over these issues was once and for all settled. Constantine summoned 300 leaders of the Christian church and placed them in a room surrounded by Roman soldiers with drawn swords with Constantine presiding, forcing them to take an anti-Jewish/Torah tack and rule in favor of Sunday and Easter. Any opposing the ruling of the clerics, which was backed by the Roman emperor and army, would be persecuted and banished from the Empire (*The Church and the Jews*, by Dan Gruber, pp. 33–41).

Examples of anti-Semitic theological biases among the early church fathers can be found early on in the *Epistle of Barnabas* (written ca. A.D. 100–120), for example. In chapters 13 and 14 the author is perhaps one of the first advocates of replacement theology when he attempts to show that Christians and not Jews are the heirs to the covenant that YHVH made with the Israelites, and that YHVH gave "to the [Christians] the testament [or, covenant] that Moses received and broke." Consequently, the Jews lost that privilege with YHVH on account of their sins, and their divine inheritance has passed on to Christians.

### When Did the Early Christians First Celebrate a Day Commemorating the Resurrection?

In *A History of Christianity*, Vol. 1, Kenneth Scott Latourette states that notice of Easter as a festival occurs in the middle of the second century, but that festivals commemorating the resurrection of Messiah were presumably observed by at least some Christians from much earlier times (p. 137). Philip Schaff also attributes the beginning

of the Easter festival to the middle of the second century (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 2, p. 207). He states that the Christian Passover naturally grew out of the Jewish Passover, as YHVH's Day (Sunday) grew out of the Sabbath. "It is based on the view that Christ crucified and risen is the centre of faith. The Jewish Christians would very naturally from the beginning continue to celebrate the legal Passover, but in the light of its fulfillment by the sacrifice of Christ, and would dwell chiefly on the aspect of the crucifixion. The Gentile Christians, for whom the Jewish Passover had no meaning except through reflection on the cross, would chiefly celebrate YHVH's resurrection as they did on every Sunday of the week." He notes that the early Christians commemorated the entire period between the death and resurrection of Yeshua with vigils, fasting, special devotions, meetings culminating in a resurrection feast celebrating the whole work of redemption. The feast of the resurrection gradually became the most prominent aspect of the Christian Passover (Easter celebration), but the crucifixion continued to be celebrated on Good Friday" (*Ibid.*, pp. 207–208).

Christians universally kept the Passover on the biblical date of *Abiv* (also known as *Nissan*) 14/15, irrespective of the day of the week until A.D. 135 according to leading Sabbath scholar Prof. Samuele Bacchiocchi quoting fourth century Christian historian Ephiphanius (*From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 81). "This conclusion," continues Bacchiocchi, "is supported indirectly by the two earliest documents mentioning the Passover celebration since both emphasize the commemoration of the death rather than the resurrection of Christ. The Ethiopic version of the apocryphal *Epistle of the Apostles* [or *Didache*] says, 'and you therefore celebrate the remembrance of my death, i.e, the Passover' (chap. 15). In the Coptic version the passage is basically the same, 'And you remember my death. If now the Passover takes place ...' (chap. 15)" (*Ibid.*, p. 82).

The second document that attests to the early church's emphasis on the death rather than the resurrection of Yeshua is the *Sermon on the Passover*, by Melito, Bishop of Sardis (died ca. A.D. 190). According to Bacchiocchi, Melito provides most extensive theological interpretations of the meaning of the Passover for early Christians. "Though Melito makes a few passing references to the resurrection, it is clear from the context that these function as the epilogue of the passion drama of the Passover. The emphasis is indeed on the suffering and death of Jesus which constitute the recurring theme of the sermon and of the celebration" (*Ibid.*, p. 83).

"The resurrection," Bacchiocchi admits, "however, did emerge in time as the dominant reason for the celebration not only of the annual Easter-Sunday, but also of the weekly Sunday. The two festivities, in fact, ... came to be regarded as one basic feast commemorating at different times the same event of the resurrection." Bacchiocchi concludes,

It would seem therefore that though the resurrection is frequently mentioned both in the New Testament and in the early patristic literature, no suggestion is given that primitive Christians commemorated the event by a weekly or yearly Sunday service. The very fact that Passover, which later become the annual commemoration of the resurrection held on Easter-Sunday, initially celebrated primarily Christ's passion [death] and was observed on the fixed date of Nisan [Abiv] 15 rather than on Sunday, makes it untenable to claim that Christ's resurrection determined the origin of Sunday worship during the lifetime of the Apostle. (*Ibid.* p. 84)

## Conclusion

We have covered much ground and not left too many stones unturned in this study pertaining to Yeshua's resurrection as prophesied or foreshadowed in the Hebrew Scriptures. What has been the aim of this study?

Specifically, we have focused on the barley wave sheaf or *omer* offering of Leviticus 23:10–14, which fell during the spring Feast of Unleavened Bread. There is some confusion and misinformation about this day in Messianic circles. For example, is it a "feast"? Is it a commanded assembly or *miqra kodesh*? Is it an appointed time or *moed*? In ancient Israel, was it a special day of celebration and festivities, or simply a work day when the barley was harvested? After the resurrection of Yeshua, how did the Apostles and early Believers view this day—or did they even recognize it? How about the second century Christian church? Are there written records of this day being observed in the writings of the church fathers? Was the later Easter celebration that gave rise in the early Christian church of the mid-second century somehow connected to this day? These are all issues we have touched on in hopes of gaining a new appreciation for the resurrection of Yeshua in light of the Scriptures aside from the non-biblical, sometimes even pagan, traditions of men.

We have attempted to show that First Fruits *is not* a feast day or one of the commanded assemblies or *miqri*

*kodesh* of YHVH. This may come as a shock to some who, as Christians, became accustomed to the prominent place Easter plays in the Christian church. Does this mean that the resurrection of Yeshua is not important? Not at all, for as we have noted, it was one of the fundamental doctrines of the early *ecclesia* (Heb. 6:2). Paul makes the point very forcefully in First Corinthians 15 that without resurrection of the Messiah we have no hope of life after death. The resurrection was prominent theologically and in the faith of the early Believers, but not festally. A festival honoring Yeshua's resurrection did not take hold in the early church until Sunday celebration honoring the day of Yeshua's resurrection, which became known as the "Lord's Day," came in along side of or in place of the seventh day Sabbath and began making slow inroads into the Christian culture of the second century. At the same time, Easter was becoming popular, was well.

What therefore is the proper place of First Fruits or Wave sheaf Day? The day itself is significant from a prophetic and allegorical standpoint in that it clearly points to the passion, resurrection and ascension of the Messiah. The importance of the resurrection cannot be underestimated! People need to be educated about it from a biblical and truth-based orientation. As many Christians are returning to the Hebrew roots of their faith they must never turn aside from the basic Gospel message of which the resurrection of Yeshua is a foundational element. For some, it may be necessary to recognize First Fruits Day as a special day of commemoration. Scripture does not prohibit that. The Jews have non-commanded holidays, such as Hanukkah and Purim, that figure very prominently into their religious culture. Whether one sets a day aside to recognize the resurrection or not, the key issue is the reality of Yeshua's resurrection must be strong and alive in the hearts and minds of each born-from-above Believer every day of their life!

It is also our hopes that we have presented the reader with a fuller, richer and deeper understanding of the resurrection by understanding the types and shadows contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and therefore have greater appreciation and faith in the Word of Elohim as recorded in the Apostolic Scriptures.