

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

HAG HAMATZOT, THE WAVESHEAF OFFERING & THE RESURRECTION OF YESHUA

by Ya'acov Natan Lawrence

Hag HaMatzot (The Feast of Unleavened Bread): An Overview

Hag HaMatzot or the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the second annual festival on YHVH's biblical calendar, and occurs on the fifteenth day of the month of the *Abib*, which is the day immediately following Passover (or *Pesach*, Lev 23:5–8). Because both of these feasts (Exod 34:25; Lev 23:2,6) occur back-to-back, the Jews often refer to Passover and Unleavened Bread simply as *Passover Week* or some similar term that places the main emphasis on the Passover. But it must be noted that, though related, these two festivals are separate in meaning and purpose. Passover pictures Israel coming out of Egypt. Upon separating from Egypt, YHVH (the LORD) then commanded the Israelites to put all leavened food products out of their houses and to eat unleavened bread (flat bread) for seven days, hence the origins of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Additionally, the first and seventh days of this week-long event are Sabbaths, and YHVH commanded his people to hold a set-apart convocation (or gathering) on these Sabbaths.

What, you may ask, is the purpose of putting leavening out of one's home and eating unleavened bread products such as *matzoh* for one week? This seems like a curious request by YHVH of his people. Not surprisingly, the Creator of the universe has a reason for everything. The spiritual implications are enlightening and highly relevant to the disciples of Yeshua. In commanding his people to de-leaven their homes and lives, YHVH was/is teaching us an object lesson that applies to us as much today as to the Israelites of long ago.

Eating unleavened bread for seven days is a memorial, remembrance or reminder (Exod 13:6–9) of our coming out of our own spiritual Egypt. But how did unleavened bread enter into this picture? The Torah tells us that the Israelites left Egypt early in the morning as they were making their daily bread, and because they left in haste the bread was not able to rise (Exod 12:34). Therefore, they were forced, by circumstances, to leave their leavening or sin behind in Egypt, so to speak. Similarly, believers in Yeshua are commanded to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (1 Cor 5:6–8), which helps to remind us that we should have left our old sinful ways behind us in Egypt when we surrendered our lives to Yeshua. We are pressing onward to the Promised Land or eternal kingdom of YHVH Elohim.

Not only did YHVH command his set-apart people to leave Egypt (a picture of this world and its godless ways), but he wanted his people to separate from and leave behind in Egypt the rudiments of this world, or sin, which defiles them and separates them from a set-apart and sinless Elohim (God). Leaven is a picture of this, as we will see more clearly below.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was the next step in YHVH's plan of redemption for his people. Israel had just left Egypt and we know that Egypt is biblically a spiritual metaphor for the world and Satan. It may be easy to get out of Egypt, but now begins the arduous process of getting the sin or spiritual leaven of Egypt out of us! The old sin habits die hard and often lie hidden in our lives waiting to be exposed and cast out from the recesses of our mind, will and emotions—or one's spiritual houses. This is not an easy process, and is not unlike ridding our physical homes of leavening products, such as bread crumbs, which find their way into the nooks and crannies of our homes. Throughout Scripture, leavening usually represents sin, pride, hypocrisy, malice, bitterness and false religious doctrine (Pss 71:4; 73:21; Hos 7:4; Matt 16:6; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor 5:8–6; Gal 5:9).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread lasts seven days. Seven in YHVH's spiritual economy represents completion or perfection. YHVH has given man 7000 years on this earth to get rid of sin completely and totally in preparation for admission into his eternal kingdom as revealed in Revelation 21 and 22. For 6000 years, YHVH has left men on this earth to their own sinful devices. The seventh thousand-year time period, called the Messianic Age

or Millennium (Rev 20:2,3,4,6), will be different than the previous 6000 years, for during this time Yeshua will be ruling over the earth with a rod of iron as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15; 17:14; 19:16), Satan will be bound in the pit (Rev 20:2-3). All humans on earth will be taught the Torah-truth of YHVH Elohim without the evil influences of the devil and the world as we know it today. During the Messianic Age, the earth will be at peace and rest, men will be taught to love YHVH with all their heart, mind and strength and their neighbor as themselves. This time of relative peace and rest is the seventh thousand-year time period of man's tenure on this earth, which corresponds to the seventh day of the week—the Sabbath. It will be a Sabbath or rest and peace on this earth for 1000 years. The Days of Unleavened Bread picture this, for the first day is a Sabbath representing the first Sabbath when YHVH rested after creating a perfect, paradisiacal and sin-free world. The last day or seventh day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is also a Sabbath, which corresponds prophetically to the Messianic Age.

The children of Israel left Egypt on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in an de-leavened state. What is the spiritual lesson in this for us? On an individual level, once a person has placed their faith in Yeshua, the Lamb of Elohim, and has been spared from sin's death judgment, one then must leave spiritual Egypt and begin a trek through the wilderness of life en route to the spiritual "rest" of Yeshua's eternal and spiritual kingdom (Heb 4:1-11). At that time, a person must take on the spiritual "yoke" of Yeshua, which is light and easy (Matt 11:28-30). As a result of turning one's back on Pharaoh (a spiritual type of the devil) and Egypt (a spiritual type of this world), one must choose to follow Yeshua who is their new spiritual Master. As the children of Israel chose to follow YHVH Elohim (Exod 19:8; 24:3-7), the redeemed believer must likewise choose to follow Yeshua, which involves eradicating sin (the violation of YHVH's commandments, 1 John 3:4) from one's life, loving him and keeping his Torah-commandments (John 14:15). This process is how one de-leavens his or her life. As the sin is removed, a person will begin to experience the "joy of YHVH" (Neh 8:10; John 16:24; Rom 5:11) and the peace or shalom of YHVH that surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7) as freedom from sin and the guilt and shame it brings occurs. This step in a redeemed believer's life corresponds to the first day or Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

After day one of the Feast of Unleavened Bread comes, there are five regular work days before the final seventh day of Unleavened Bread, which is a Sabbath. These five days are a picture of the Israelites' trek through the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. For the redeemed believer, it is a picture of life in general, which is a like a spiritual wilderness that one must traverse before attaining the goal and the reward of one's spiritual inheritance or the spiritual Promised Land of YHVH's eternal kingdom. In this life, a believer must do his best to live a sin-free life, which is like eating the "bread of affliction" or unleavened bread (Deut 16:3). Yeshua instructs us that his disciples, though in the world, they are not of this world, and that the world would hate and persecute them when they follow him (John 17). Being faithful to Yeshua, keeping his commands and not sinning will bring persecution and affliction, but the rewards to follow for those who overcome the world are worth the rigors of the journey!

The Apostle Paul refers to this process when he talks about "working out one's own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12), his struggles to defeat the carnal man (Rom 7), to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, and to enter into a life dominated by the Spirit of Messiah Yeshua (Rom 8:1-2). Yeshua also talked about the persecution and tribulation that his disciples would have to endure to enter the ultimate rest of his kingdom (Matt 5:10-12). Paul said that all who live godly will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12), and that the spiritual metal of our lives must be tested and purified by the fire of trial (1 Cor 3:12-13). James says that we are to count it all joy when we are tried or proven (Jas 1:12). Will the fires of persecution separate us from the love of Yeshua, Paul asks the Romans (Rom 8:35)? During this journey, which is arduous at times, will we forget our first love as the Ephesians did (Rev 2:4), and lose faith and long for the delicacies of Egypt as the Israelites did when they fell into doubt and unbelief and perished in the wilderness (Heb 3:8-19)? Or will we persevere and overcome the world as Yeshua, the Author and Finisher of our faith, did (John 16:33) to be granted entrance into the Promised Land? For us to receive this reward, we must bring down the walls of our spiritual Jericho—the sin strongholds of our lives. Only then will we receive the rewards of the Kingdom of Elohim (Matt 5:10,12; 1 John 5:4; Rev 2:7,17; 3:5,12,21; 21:7). We are to resist sin (leavening) in our lives even to the point of paying the ultimate price, if necessary, as did Yeshua (Heb 12:1-4) and many of the biblical prophets (Heb 11).

This is the wilderness walk to which the servants of YHVH have been called. Like the Israelites, we must press on in faith for the hope that is set before us (Heb 6:18), the hope of eternal rest in the Promised Land of the kingdom of Elohim. This is what the last Sabbath or seventh day of the Days of Unleavened Bread represents.

Yes, we are saved or redeemed out of spiritual Egypt at the time of our conversion and have passed from death and condemnation to everlasting life (John 5:24), but salvation and sanctification (being set-apart from the world, flesh and the devil for service to YHVH) are also a lifelong process, which will culminate in the transforming of our mortal bodies into glorious and spiritual bodies at the resurrection. At this point in time we will have arrived at the completion or perfection of our hope the number seven epitomizes in Scripture.

Various Subjects Relating to the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Meaning of the Word *Matzoh*

It is essential to understand the meaning of words in order to grasp the concepts behind them. Here are a few Hebrew words relating to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and their definitions:

- In the Tanakh (Hebrew scriptures or OT), the word for *unleavened bread* in Hebrew is *matzoh*/מצה (*Strong's* H4682) meaning “without leaven.”
- In the Testimony of Yeshua (NT), the word for *unleavened bread* in Greek is *azumos*/αζυμος (*Strong's* G106) and means “without leaven.”
- In the Tanakh, there are two words for *leaven*:
 - *chametz*/חמץ, is a noun (*Strong's* H2557) meaning “leaven, that which is leavened.” *Chametz* is from the root H2556 *chametz*/חמץ (a verb) meaning “to be sour, to leaven.” According to *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, the root word of *chametz* designates the action and result of yeast, which ferments or sours bread dough. This idea of becoming sour is extended to a person's negative attitude. For example, in Psalms 73:21 *chametz* is translated as *cruel* [and in Ps 73:21 as *grieved*]. The Torah strongly instructs that anyone eating *chametz* during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread will be “cut off” from Israel (Exod 12:19–20). Exodus 12:39 notes that Passover bread was not leavened because the Hebrews went out quickly from Egypt and thus had no time for their bread dough to rise. Thus it had the symbolic value of teaching Israel that having been redeemed from Egypt they should leave their old life [and sinful, “sour” carnal nature] behind quickly and set out toward the Promised Land in a sin-free state. Leavened bread was also prohibited in connection with the sacrificial system (Exod 23:18; 34:25). Neither it nor honey could be burned with the meal (Lev 2:11), and it could not be baked with the fire offering (Lev 6:15). But leavened bread could be eaten with the thank offering (Lev 7:13) and with the first fruits offering on *Shavuot* or Pentecost. In later Jewish thought, leavened bread became a symbol of corruption and impurity, as also in Yeshua's teachings (Pss 71:4; 73:21; Hos 7:4; Matt 16:2; Mark 8:15) and in one remark by Paul (1 Cor.5:8) (vol. 1, page 289).
 - *se'or*/סֵאֵר (*Strong's* H7603) means “leaven.” This is the generic term for leavening or leavened bread and is found five times in Scripture (Exod 12:15, 19; 13:7; Lev 2:11; Deut 16:4). In the first four references, *se'or* is used in parallel construction with *chametz*. In all places but Leviticus 2:11, it is used in reference to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, while in the former *se'or* is used in reference to the meal offering.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread Is One of Three Pilgrimage Festivals

Three times each year the Israelites would go up (or make *aliyah*) to the place where YHVH had placed his name (Deut 16:2, 5, 11, 15, 16) to keep the feasts of Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Exod 23:14; Deut 16:1–17). These were times of great joy and festivities as Israelites from all over the land of Israel went up to Jerusalem to celebrate YHVH's feasts. The Book of Acts chronicles this occurring as faithful Jews came together from many countries to celebrate the Feast of *Shavuot* (or Pentecost, Acts 2:1, 5–11). Even Paul speaks about leaving the Greek city of Ephesus and making his way to Jerusalem in time to keep one of the biblical *aliyot* feasts (Acts 18:21).

How do we implement the Torah concept of *aliyah* in our day? Let us answer this question with a question. Where has YHVH placed his name in the 21st century? There is no longer a temple standing in Jerusalem to which the faithful can make *aliyah*, nor is there any other officially designated spot in Israel about which it can be said, “This is where YHVH has placed his name.” Even if there were, the logistics and economics of a family going to Israel three times each year from where they are scattered around the world would make it impossible for most families to be able to fulfill this command.

One thing is certain. The biblical feasts are commanded assemblies (Heb. *miqra-ee kodesh*), which means they are times when the people of YHVH were commanded to gather together (Lev 23:2,4). They just didn't stay home on these special days!

Yeshua and the apostolic writers give us clarity on this issue. Our Master teaches us that where two or more are gathered in his name, he is there in the midst of them (Matt 18:20). Paul teaches us that redeemed believers are the temple of the Set-Apart Spirit of Elohim (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5). Peter goes on to say that believers are part of YHVH's new "set-apart" and "royal priesthood" (verse 9), for the levitical priesthood of old no longer exists.

The redeemed followers of Yeshua are the temple of the Spirit of Elohim, and they are the current priesthood of YHVH who are called to offer up spiritual sacrifices to Elohim. It follows then that when the saints gather together to keep the feasts of YHVH, this is where his anointed presence is regardless of their locale.

On these three occasions, YHVH commands that all males bring with them a feast offering—they were not to appear before YHVH empty-handed, but they were to bring an offering as they were able according to how YHVH had blessed them (Deut 16:16). This was not a tithe, but a freewill offering in addition to their regular tithes. Through Malachi the prophet, YHVH accuses backslid Israel of robbing him by not giving to him their tithes and offerings (or contributions). Because of this negligence, Elohim declares that Israel has been cursed with a curse, whereupon he promises to reverse the curse, rebuke the devourer that has destroyed their prosperity, and to open the windows of heaven over them so that they will not be able to contain the prosperity of YHVH (Mal 3:8–12).

Some people may insist that this offering no longer applies to those who are "under the new covenant." However, Yeshua declares that not one jot or tittle of the Torah has been annulled (Matt 5:18), and those who follow the Torah will be blessed (Matt 5:19). Although, we may not be able now to fulfill all aspects of YHVH's feasts laws, YHVH expects us to love him and to keep all of his commandments the best we can (John 14:14; 1 John 2:3–6). To not obey his Torah-commands is sin (1 John 3:4), and on judgment day, Yeshua promises to reject those who were Torahless (workers of iniquity), despite their professed religiosity (Matt 7:21–23).

Giving financially to those who are doing the ministry of Yeshua is a spiritual principle that is immutable, universal and is part of the walk of the righteous redeemed (Prov 3:9–10; Phil 4:14–17; 1 Tim 5:17–18; 1 Cor 9:13–14; Gal 6:6).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread Commemorates Israel's Exodus From Egypt—Prophetic Implications

Exodus 13:6–9 teaches us that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a sign and memorial to the Israelites, for on the first Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Israelites left Egypt by YHVH's strong hand.

What then does day seven, which is another Sabbath, of the Feast of Unleavened Bread signify? If the first day is a memorial looking back to the momentous event when the Israelites victoriously fled the bondage and slavery of Egypt, could day seven represent when the same victorious Israelites would enter the Promised Land after defeating those who would prevent them from doing so? I believe it is.

In Joshua 5:10, at the threshold to the Promised Land, the Israelites kept Passover after which they marched around Jericho for seven days. On the final day, the walls of Jericho collapsed. It is likely that they marched around Jericho during the seven days of Unleavened Bread, and that on the final day of the feast Jericho was destroyed. If this is the case, then this may be a prophetic picture of when Yeshua at his second coming (the second Joshua, see Heb 4) will pour out his judgments upon Babylon the Great and the other enemies of Israel (Rev 18 and 19) that would prevent the lost sheep of the house of Israel from returning to their inheritance in the Promised Land of Israel.

References to the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the Testimony of Yeshua

It is interesting to note the fact that nearly all of YHVH's biblical feasts are mentioned by name in the Apostolic Scriptures, and *all* are referred to by implication, but the Christian holidays are neither mentioned, nor implied! Here are the references to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a feast that Paul urges redeemed believers to celebrate (1 Cor 5:8): Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:1; Acts 12:3; and 20:6.

A Righteous Remnant "Woman" in the End Times Will Be Keeping the Feast Days

Revelation 12:1 describes a woman clothed with the sun (a metaphor for redeemed believers) who is standing on the moon (i.e., symbolic of a lunar/solar-based biblical calendar). Verse 17 says the woman's remnant keeps the Torah-law of YHVH and has the faith or testimony of Messiah Yeshua (see also 14:12 and 22:14). This is a last-days view of a Torah-observant, feast day-keeping and gospel-oriented (remnant) believers.

Yeshua's Resurrection Occurred During the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Yeshua's death on the cross occurred on Passover. He was laid in the grave that evening, which was the first high day Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31). He then resurrected three days and nights later on the third day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matt 12:40). (For further discussion on this subject, see my teaching article entitled, "The Resurrection of Yeshua from a Hebrew Roots Perspective," available at <http://www.hoshanarabbah.org/pdfs/firstfruits.pdf>.)

The Barley Omer Offering Occurred at the Time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

YHVH instructed the priests of Israel to wave a sheaf or *omer* of spring barley as an offering before him. This ceremony occurred in the land of Israel during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In Leviticus 23:9–14 we read,

And YHVH spoke unto Moses, saying, "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 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 a male lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto YHVH. And the meat 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 roasted kernels, nor plump green kernels, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your Elohim; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.'"

We learn from this passage that the Israelites were not allowed to cut their spring barley until the priest waved the barley first fruits as an offering before YHVH (Lev 23:10–11; see also Deut 16:10). This fact is confirmed by secular Jewish historical sources as well. The first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities*, book 3, 10.5) states that the barley harvest, both public and private could not commence in Israel until the completing of the wave sheaf offering ceremony. This confirms the position of the modern Karaite Jews who search for ripening barley (*abib*) not only in Jerusalem, but also throughout the land of Israel. Since Jerusalem is approximately 2500 feet above sea level, the barley in the valleys would become ripe much earlier than in Jerusalem. So were one to wait for the barley in Jerusalem to become ripe before being permitted to harvest barley in the valleys, the lower-elevation barley will have already dropped its seed in the fields before it could be cut, making harvesting of the grain all but impossible.

To be accepted as the wave sheaf offering, the barley had to be found in the land of Israel proper—not outside of the land. *The Mishnah*, the second-century Jewish legal code and precursor to the *Talmud*, which records Jewish oral tradition purportedly descending directly from Moses, states in *Menachoth* 7.1, "Every offering, whether of the congregation or of an individual (public or private), may come from 'outside the land, be of new product (of the year) or old product, except the *omer* (the wave-sheaf at Passover) and the two loaves (at Pentecost), which may only be brought from new product (that current year), and from that (which grows) within 'the land'" (*Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, by Alfred Edersheim, p. 17).

What then is the spiritual importance of the barley wave offering that occurred in conjunction with the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

The barley is a prophetic picture of Yeshua. On the same day that the Israelite priests were waving the barley as a first fruits offering to be accepted of YHVH, Yeshua resurrected from the dead, ascended to heaven and was accepted by his Father as the perfect sin offering.

Many modern Bible teachers refer to the day the priests waved the *omer* of barley as an offering to YHVH as "the feast of first fruits." They are mistaken. Scripture never designated this day as a feast, nor as a Sabbath, nor as a commanded assembly, nor does the term "feast of first fruits" even occur in the Bible. On the day that Yeshua resurrected, the priest offered the first fruits of the barley harvest to YHVH, while for those Israelites who had barley fields, it was a harvest day—a *regular work day*!

As strange as it may seem to Christians, and as central as the resurrection of Yeshua is to the gospel message, there is no biblical festival to commemorate this momentous event. The idea emphasizing the resurrection evolved gradually in the early Christian church as Easter slowly replaced Passover as a celebratory holiday as we will discuss in more detail below.

Passover commemorates Yeshua's tortured death on the cross as the perfect Lamb of Elohim who was the offering for man's sins. The Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures man who has been spared or redeemed from the wages of his sin, which is death, by the sacrifice of Yeshua the Lamb of Elohim, now going forth and living a sin-free life.

Wave sheaf day, which is associated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and which usually occurs during this week-long festival, is a prophetic picture of Yeshua after his resurrection ascending to heaven and being accepted by the Father as that perfect sin offering. As noted, the priest performed the wave offering in the temple, while the common Israelites went to work harvesting their ripe barley crop. What can we learn from this? Perhaps this teaches us that because of Yeshua's resurrection from the grave and acceptance by the Father, we as the redeemed of YHVH need to take the good news of Yeshua's death and resurrection into the spiritual harvest field of this world! (For further discussion on this subject, see my teaching article entitled, "The Resurrection of Yeshua from a Hebrew Roots Perspective," available at <http://www.hoshanarabbah.org/pdfs/firstfruits.pdf>.)

More on Wave Sheaf Day and the Feast of Pentecost

As already noted, the day on which the barley was waved may be referred to as "wave sheaf day." There is no literal "Feast of First Fruits" mentioned in the Scriptures as some teach. The closest similar term found in Scripture is a reference to *Shavuot* or Pentecost, which occurs fifty days *after* the waving of the newly harvested sheaf of barley by the priests during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Scripture reveals that *Shavuot* or the Feast of Pentecost has several names:

- *The feast of weeks* (Lev 23:15–17; Deut. 16:10,16)
- *The feast of harvest [of the first fruits]* (Exod 23:16)
- *The feast of weeks, first fruits of the wheat harvest* (Exod 34:22)
- *Pentecost* (Acts 2:1)

The wave sheaf offering when the priest offered up or waved before Elohim the newly harvested first fruit sheaf (or *omer*) of barley occurred on the day after the Sabbath that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This ritual event is not to be confused with the Feast of the Harvest of the First Fruits (Exod 23:16), which is another name for the Feast of Pentecost or *Shavuot*.

The wave sheaf offering was a forerunner of the Feast of the Harvest of the First Fruits or the Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot* or Pentecost—meaning "to count fifty"), which comes 50 days later. These two days are linked by the counting of the *omer* (a Hebrew word referring to the bundle or sheaf of barley that was waved by the priest, and to the flour that was made from that barley and given as an offering to YHVH). An *omer* is a dry measure, but it is also the sheaf (*omer*) that was waved before YHVH (Lev 23:11,12,15). The word sheaf (as used in the KJV) means "a bundle of grain." According to my research of ancient Jewish sources as documented in my [first fruits article](#), the priests waved a bundle of barley stalks before YHVH. After that, they took some of the stalks, made flour from that grain and sifted it, and made unleavened bread, which was presented to YHVH as a *minchah* offering on the altar of sacrifice. This act of waving the barley prophetically pictured Yeshua's ascension to heaven after his resurrection, and his being accepted by the Father as the perfect sin offering. From First Fruits Day, the Israelites counted 50 days (called "the count of the *omer*"). At the end of the 50-day counting of the *omer* occurs the Feast of the Harvest of Firstfruits or Pentecost.

Prophetically, Passover is the spiritual picture of YHVH setting his people free from captivity to sin and death in Egypt by the blood of Yeshua, the Lamb of Elohim. Now redeemed and freed from spiritual enslavement, the redeemed of YHVH must start the process of leaving the world and begin the process of searching for and eradicating sin from their lives as pictured by the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is when Wave Sheaf Day occurred, which is a picture of Yeshua's resurrection and acceptance by his Father. This teaches us as that through the power of the resurrected life of Yeshua living in our spirit-man through the power of the Spirit of Elohim we can overcome sin and live a righteous life. (For further discussion on Pentecost, see my teaching article entitled, "*Shavuot*, the Feast of Weeks," available at <http://www.hoshanarabbah.org/pdfs/shavuot.pdf>.)

The larger wheat harvest that occurred in the land of Israel during Pentecost spiritually pictures the salvation of human beings as a result of the Spirit of Elohim being poured out. This was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. The wave sheaf offered during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6–11), also prophetically foreshadowed the resurrected Yeshua now serving as our heavenly High Priest (Heb 4:14). This spiritually paved

the way for the Father to call many unto repentance leading to their salvation pictured by the wheat harvest of Pentecost. The Spirit of Elohim could not come until Yeshua departed this earth (John 16:5–14). The Spirit's coming brought forth the spiritual harvest of souls on Pentecost and afterwards into our time.

In John 12:23–24, Yeshua predicted this process of redemption or the spiritual harvest of sinners as a result of his demise “And Yeshua answered them, saying, ‘The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit.’”

Amazingly, the wave sheaf offering when instituted in ancient Israel prophetically foretold 1500 years ahead of time the exact day when Yeshua, the Messiah, the perfect and sinless Lamb of Elohim, would resurrect and ascend to heaven and be accepted by the Father!

Easter Celebration in Christianity

The early Christian church continued to commemorate the death of Yeshua still calling it Passover at least until the fourth century (Eusibius, *Eccl. Hist.*, book 5, chap 23; book 7, chap 20). Little by little, the main emphasis of the Christian holiday shifted from Yeshua's death to his resurrection as the church distanced itself from its Jewish roots (*A History of Christianity*, vol. 1, p. 137, by Kenneth Scott Latourette; *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, p. 207, by Phillip Schaff).

“[The celebration of Passover] was 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.” Schaff 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 *Abib* (also known as *Nisan*) 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 the 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 that 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 [Abib] 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)

Though Easter was unofficially celebrated in the early church as a memorial to the resurrection of Yeshua from the middle of the second century, it was not officially sanctioned as a church holiday until the fourth century when the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) under the auspices of Roman emperor Constantine mandated that Passover

be kept on the first Sunday after the full moon after the spring equinox (*Encycl. Brit.*, 1911 edition, “Easter”;) as opposed to the fourteenth day after the new moon, which the Bible mandates.

Over time in the Christian church, the term *Passover* gave way to the name *Easter*, which derives from a mythological pagan Germanic deity called Eostra, who was the goddess of spring and the rising light of the day (*Encycl. Brit.*, 1911 edition, “Easter”; *The Catholic Encycl.*, “Easter”; <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05224d.htm>).

Conclusion

In light of the truth presented above, what should be our response? The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 5:7–8,

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Messiah our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the Feast [of Unleavened Bread], not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.