

GATES TO ZION MINISTRIES ***(SHA'ARIM L' TZION)***

Celebrating The Feasts Of YHWH
Joe Snipes (Torah Teacher) Gates To Zion Ministries

Insights Into The Feast Of HaBikkurim & The Omer Count

Before we begin our look at this Feast and the counting of the Omer, I would like to make some preliminary comments. There is a lot of confusion and contrary opinions that surrounds many of the aspects of this particular Feast and the timing of the beginning of the Omer count. This article is not an attempt to necessarily answer or even be a proponent for or against these arguments. Instead, I am simply going to outline the way we, as a ministry, have chosen to view this Feast and the subsequent command by YHWH to enact the counting of the Omer in response to the many questions we have received.

I think one of the things that we tend to lose sight of is the Hebraic idea of *diversity*. Those of us who have come out of the church of Christendom have little or no idea of what this means. We are used to building our particular camp, segregating ourselves according to our particular doctrine, and living in isolation. The Hebraic recognizes that there are differing views, and allows for that sort of *diversity*. We don't have to get our cookie cutters and force every one to conform to our views or application of those views. The truth is, in the Hebraic, one congregation may practice Torah obedience in one manner, and another congregation may do things in another way. When all is said and done, the one unifying factor is WE ARE STILL YISRAEL! So, this article is presented in an attempt to simply define how our ministry views this Feast. It will serve to inform both those within our fellowship, as well as others, what to expect when you come to worship with us. We are not saying our way is the *right way*. We are not saying that our way is the *only way*. We are simply saying *this is the way our ministry has come to view this Feast at this point in time*. In turn, our way of implementing those views is the way we have chosen to express our obedience to YHWH's directives in His Torah. We extend grace to others to see things differently. We support others to act accordingly. We only ask that you extend the same grace to us. It is neither the love nor the will of YHWH that our actions should be meant to condemn others who may see things differently. Neither is it meant to divide any expression of our blessed Mashiah's body from one another. **Any ministry, whether individual or corporate that practices such things has reduced the Torah from being the Loving Instructions of our Abba YHWH, to being LAW!** Let us remember that we can be *technically* correct and still bring death! The letter kills, it is the spirit that brings life. (11 Corinthians 3:6)

It may be that we have something to learn from our precious brother Rav Sha'ul/Paul. He gave this evaluation concerning the preaching of the Gospel in his day,

*“Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;
The latter {do it} out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;
the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives,
thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.
What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.” (Philippians 1:15-18 NASB-
emphasis mine)*

Maybe this should be our ideal when it comes to Torah obedience. However and for whatever reason the Torah is being kept and the Feasts celebrated; let us rejoice that it is at least being done. I pray that as you read, it may be that the Ruach HaKodesh may help you see this Feast from a little different perspective. Maybe it will help answer some questions in your heart and mind. Maybe you will find some disagreements. Regardless, let us agree together that when all is said and done, we praise our blessed Abba YHWH that the Feasts are being celebrated!

Basics Of The Feast Of HaBikurrim/Firstfruits

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.
He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.
Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the LORD.
Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths {of an ephah} of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the LORD {for} a soothing aroma, with its drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine.
Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.’” (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:9-14 NASB)*

The above is the passage from the Torah that gives us the words of YHWH concerning the third spring Festival known as *Firstfruits* or in Hebrew *HaBikkurim*. We are told that it was to be a *perpetual* celebration for all Yisrael. These things are the easy part. Where it gets interesting is when it comes to understanding some of the further aspects of this Feast. It seems much of the controversy is focused around the phrase *on the day/morrow after the sabbath*. This is a controversial issue that has been debated for centuries. The two main arguments that have become the *either/or* approach to this understanding are the Pharisaical or Sadducean doctrine. The Pharisees interpreted the

above mentioned *Shabbat* to be a *High Shabbat* or *Shabbaton*. It is for this reason the *Shabbat* in question is seen as not connected to the weekly seventh day *Shabbat*. In contrast, the Sadducees interpret this *Shabbat* as the *weekly seventh day Shabbat*. It is from this point that these two views continue to separate and travel upon different means of practical expression. What I am writing may or may not help the situation, but at least theoretically, if we follow some good rules of interpretation (hermeneutics), accompanied by the leadership of the Ruach HaKodesh; then we just might be able to come to a little clearer understanding of Abba YHWH's intent and possibly reduce the confusion level along the way. I will tell you up front that our approach at *Gates To Zion Ministries* probably leans more toward the Pharisaic approach. This should not be taken to mean that we are whole hearted supporters of Pharisaic doctrine. It's just in this particular case, from the perspective we are at right now, our study leans more towards this view than that of the Sadducees. There are many in the Messianic that hold to the latter. The church of Christendom also holds to the Sadducean ideal, mainly because it agrees with their concept of a Sunday resurrection for Jesus. The Sadducean ideal is continuing to be upheld by a small group within Judaism known as the Kairites.

First let's regress a bit and look at one of the opening verses of this chapter. Here we find YHWH speaking to Moshe about the Feasts which all of Yisrael were to celebrate. The very first Feast is a weekly celebration. It is known as *Shabbat*.

“For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.” Vayikra/Leviticus 23:3 NASB)

This *weekly* Feast becomes the foundation upon which all the rest of the Feasts of YHWH are built. It is a declaration by YHWH Himself that sets apart, makes holy, a particular day of the week. In their essence, all days of the week are no different than any other. However, when the Creator designates that a particular day is to be an exception, then it makes that day special in and of itself. For all Yisrael, the *weekly* *Shabbat* is to be considered a major point of convergence in our faith. It sets us apart from all the other nations. It reveals our trusting faithfulness to our Elohim. The rabbis say it is the *wedding ring* for Yisrael. It shows that all Yisrael surrenders itself to the will and purpose of YHWH our Elohim in a spirit of love and obedience to His Loving Instructions..

Then, we pick up a new train of thought with verse four. This I believe is a very important point. YHWH first explains to us what a *Shabbat* is. Then He gives to Moshe His order for the further celebration of His seven Feasts. Within the context of these instructions YHWH again sets apart certain days within those celebrations as *Shabbaton* or *High Shabbats/Sabbaths* which in essence are *annual* in nature. These rest days, because they are contained in a passage that expresses a new train of thought, should be viewed as different from the *weekly* *Shabbat*. I will give further clarification for this shortly. For the moment, simply mark the point that the *annual* *Shabbats* of these seven moedim are different than the *weekly* *Shabbat* upon which they are built. The common

thread is what makes these [Shabbats] different is that YHWH Himself has singled them out, set them apart, and therefore they are holy.

YHWH tells Moshe that Yisrael was to begin celebrating the Feast of HaBikkurim/Firstfruits - *when you enter the land (vs. 10a)*. They are further told *and reap its harvest (vs. 10b)*. So we know *when* the time to celebrate HaBikkurim was to begin for Yisrael. It was to begin at the time of the spring harvest. The crop that is harvested at the beginning of spring is barley. It was the first plant that came to fruition at this time in Yisrael. YHWH commanded that a sheaf (Omer) of the barley crop be cut down and brought to the High Priest. In turn, the High Priest would wave the sheaf before YHWH. Then a measure, an *omer*, of the barley was beaten and sifted until it was pure, and it was presented to YHWH as an offering of blessing for the barley harvest. We are now about to approach the first point of contention surrounding this whole process. When was the sheaf to be waved?

Which Shabbat Is Being Referred To?

I believe most doctrinal errors find their entrance through a very simple means: *the failure to adhere to good hermeneutics or laws of interpretation*. Hermeneutics is *the means of arriving at the proper intended meaning as put forth in all written works*. Without these principles or guidelines, then we are open to the subjective whims of any one who may want to inject their own personal biases and ideas. Somehow, when it comes to the Scriptures these guiding principles are ignored and excused simply by saying, *The Spirit led me*. However, if we want to know the Truth, then the simple use of good hermeneutics coupled with the leading of the Ruach HaKodesh is imperative.

This is exactly the difficulty, I believe, we are facing here in our study. I personally believe, much of the confusion could be avoided if we simply stay within the guidelines of good hermeneutics. If you understand that the verses containing the *weekly Shabbat* (vs.s 1-3) here in Vayikra/Leviticus chapter 23 are one thought: then a new thought begins at verse 4; it should be quite clear that it is logical to leave the previous verses behind and start focusing on the thoughts contained in this new passage. If we ignore this progression of thought, then we end up confusing the context of the passage beginning with verse 4. We fail to understand why YHWH put the *weekly Shabbat* at the head of this chapter. The *weekly Shabbat* is a day that He singles out from all the rest of the days of the week. As we have said, until YHWH does this, there is no difference between one day and another. When YHWH chooses a day and calls it a *Shabbat*, then that act sanctifies that day. It becomes holy or set apart. Why did YHWH do this?

Within the verses following YHWH's declaration of the *weekly Shabbat*, He is about to set apart some other days. These will become holy too, but there is a main difference. *The weekly Shabbat is connected to the time and space of this present world.* It is a sign that points toward YHWH's great Shabbat; *the reign of YHWH on earth in His millennial kingdom through the Mashiach*. It is a sign post placed in time to let us know

something greater is in view than just *a day* of rest. The Shabbats contained within verses 4-22 are what is called Hebraically, *Shabbatons* or *High Shabbats/Sabbaths [annual]*. These holy convocations find their origin *outside the dimension of time and space*. The rabbis say, *they come from the eternal of Adonai*. We will pick up on this a little later. Our point is that there are two different types of *Shabbats* referred to in this chapter.

How do we know which *Shabbat* is being addressed? We simply apply the laws of hermeneutics. YHWH expresses one thought in the opening of this chapter that covers three verses. It is the *weekly Shabbat*. Then in verse 4 He begins an entirely different thought. Now in applying the *laws of interpretation/hermeneutics* we must not go outside this section beginning at verses 4-22 to obtain the meaning of things spoken within this passage. We must simply let Scripture interpret Scripture. The only reason we would need to do otherwise is if there is nothing within the parameters of these verses that explains or defines the usage of words found therein. Now let us ask, “*Is there information given within these verses that will allow us to determine what kind of Shabbat is being referred to in the verse at hand?*” The answer is YES!

“Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.

But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work” (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:6-8 NASB)

All we have to do is look at verses 6-8 and we will find our answer. Most all Biblical scholars (Jewish and Christian) agree that the *holy convocations* being spoken of here are to be understood as *Shabbats*. Though not a *weekly Shabbat*, they are nonetheless *Shabbats* because YHWH set them apart as days in which common work is not to be done. By definition, this is a *Shabbat*. These *Shabbats* associated with the Feasts of YHWH are *Shabbatons* or *High Shabbats [annual]*. Every thing from verse 4-22 can be defined from within these parameters. So, the *Shabbat* referred to in verse 11 is the *Shabbaton* and not the *weekly Shabbat*. The timing of the waving of the barley sheaf is *the day AFTER* the first *Shabbaton* that began the Feast of Unleavened Bread!

Putting The Timeline Of The First Three Feasts Into Perspective

YHWH has a particular order in which the Feasts are designed to flow. First we have Pesach or Passover. It happens on Aviv 14. Immediately following the sundown of Aviv 14 starts the Feast of Unleavened Bread (HaMatzot) erev Aviv 15. This also begins the first instance of YHWH instituting a *Shabbat* separate from the *weekly 7th day Shabbat*. This *other Shabbat* is a *Shabbaton* or a *High Shabbat [annual]*. At sundown on Aviv 15 begins the eve or erev of Aviv 16. This is the start of the Feast of HaBikkurim/Firstfruits. It is the time when the barley sheaf (Omer) is brought to the High

Priest and he waves it. On that evening, which is Hebraically the start of the day of Aviv 16, *after the waving of the sheaf*, begins the 50 day (49 +1) period of *counting the Omer*. The end of this counting process will culminate in the final spring Feast, which is Shavuot or as it also known, the *Feast of Weeks*.

This is a very simple mode of progression. However, I believe the further confusion comes as a result of certain texts that are used in the translation from which most modern Bibles originate. Here is a case in point, the *Masoretic Texts*' use of *Sabbath* to point to the time when the Omer count begins. The *Masoretic Text* is the translation from which most Bibles today are based. However, the *Septuagint*, which predates the *Masoretic Text*, seems to make the understanding of the original intent of the Hebrew clearer. Upon the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are some of the oldest manuscripts of the original texts available, they too agree more with the *Septuagint* in many instances than with the *Masoretic Text*. This should not be taken to mean that YHWH's Word contains errors. The problem comes in arriving at clarity when using translations of the originals. Sometimes one translation may make things clearer than another. This point will become clearer below.

Counting The Omer: Is It The Counting of Shabbats or Weeks?

Almost all Bibles using the Masoretic Text use the same words to describe the process of *counting the Omer*. The focus is on the counting of *weekly Shabbats*.

“You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the SABBATH, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete SABBATHS.

You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh SABBATH; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD.” (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:15-16 NASB-emphasis mine)

The first *Shabbat* found here in verse 15 can be understood by using the same principle we did to understand the *Shabbat* in verse 11. It is a *Shabbaton*, not the *weekly Shabbat*. However, if we make the first *Shabbat* of verse 15 to be a *weekly Shabbat*, then you simply count seven complete *weekly Shabbats*, and then add one day and you arrive at the Feast of Shavuot. I believe this creates another issue in regards to the necessity of actually counting the days of the Omer! The immediate problem, at least contextually, is the first *Shabbat* is not a *weekly Shabbat*, as I believe has already been pointed out. The contextual intent is that the first *Shabbat* of verse 15 is to be understood as a *Shabbaton*. However, if that is true, then what about the *second Shabbat* in the verse? Are we to count *seven weekly Shabbats*? If the *second Shabbat* is a *Shabbaton*, does that mean we are to count seven of those? That's impossible because there aren't *seven Shabbatons* within that 50 day period. Is there something we are missing?

Let's take a moment and ask a question that may help clarify this issue. At the end of the fifty day period of *counting the Omer*, what is our destination? The Feast of Shavuot, right? Now, let's ask another question. What is another name of the Feast of Shavuot? It is the Feast of Weeks. Did you see that? Read it again. It is F-E-A-S-T O-F W-E-E-K-S. It is NOT the Feast of *Shabbats* or *Shabbatons*. Then why are we counting SHABBATS? (see Devarim/Deuteronomy 16:9-10- Shavuot is called *Feast of Weeks*)

Again, I believe it is because the *Masoretic Text* poorly interprets the meaning of the original Hebrew text to be *weekly Shabbats*. The fact is it should be **WEEKS** that we are counting. I will show this possibility from two sources. First I will quote from the *Septuagint*.

“And you shall number yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day on which you will offer the sheaf of the heave offering, SEVEN FULL WEEKS. Until the day after the last WEEK you shall number fifty days, and shall bring a new grain offering to the Lord.” (Leviticus 23:15-16 Septuagint-emphasis mine)

Now I will quote from The Stone Edition Tanach compiled by Irving I. Stone and edited by Rabbi Nosson Scherman. It is published by Mersorah Publications, Ltd. for the Artscroll Series.

“You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving – SEVEN WEEKS, they shall be complete. Until the morrow of the SEVENTH WEEK you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal offering to HaShem.” (Stone Edition Tanach- Leviticus 23:15-16-emphasis mine)

From the above two witnesses we can see that it is **WEEKS** not **SHABBATS** [*not weekly or annual*] that gives us a clearer contextual rendering. There are in fact seven weekly SHABBATS to be found when you count starting from the day after the Shabbaton of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, that's irrelevant, because we are counting days of **WEEKS** not weeks of *Shabbats* when we *count the Omer*. The 50th day of the *counting of the Omer*, according to the above texts, is the day immediately following the final day of the **SEVENTH** complete **WEEK**. Again, **WEEKS** seems to make more contextual sense because our destination is the Feast of Shavuot, also known as the Feast of **WEEKS**.

The Necessity Of Counting The Omer

One important problem, if we use the method of counting *weekly Shabbats*, is it actually reduces the necessity to obey YHWH's command to count the Omer daily. In reality, you wouldn't have to count days by counting *Shabbats*; you would simply count *seven weekly Shabbats*. Then you add a day and you're at Shavuot. That method would also make Shavuot fall on the same week day every time. Guess what day that is?

Sunday! It would seem to me with all that YHWH has done in this restoration to reveal the pagan practices that have been added to the worship habits of the house Ephraim; somebody would at least take a moment to consider the possibility that there is something suspect about a practice that ALWAYS has a SUNDAY emphasis.

However, unlike the first three of the spring Feasts, Shavuot, the last one, has no set date. That's because to get there it seems YHWH intends for us to COUNT! The dates NEVER change for the first three Spring Feasts. They are always Aviv 14, 15, and 16. While the date is static, the actual day of the week upon which they fall does change. Therefore you MUST count the 49 days + 1 in order to arrive at the right day for the celebration of Shavuot. To end right, you must start right.

The Meaning And Purpose Of The Feast Of HaBikkurim

Why all the confusion that surrounds this Feast? It's because it points to the promise of resurrection. hasatan (may his name be blotted out forever) made a terrible mistake when he allowed our blessed Master Yeshua to be put to death on that execution stake. He was completely clueless to the wisdom with which YHWH was working out His redemptive plan. Had he known, he would have done all that he could to keep Him off that stake. Instead, he put Him there, and made sure our blessed Master died. The moment Master Yeshua breathed His last breath the damage was done. Now hastan's only hope was to keep Yeshua in that grave. But he failed there too. Rav Sha'ul uses seven Greek words in his letter to the Ephesians to describe how much power it took to raise Yeshua from the dead. All of hell was intent on holding Him in that grave. The fact is, that Yeshua HaMashiach was raised just as Aviv 17 was about to end and Aviv 18 was about to begin. Aviv 17 day would have been on Saturday, the *weekly Shabbat* the year of these festival dates. The erev of Aviv 18 would have begun on that Saturday after sundown. So, just as the light of Aviv 17 was giving way to the darkness of erev/eve of that Saturday evening Aviv 18; just in that twinkling of the moment between the change of the Hebraic days our Master Yeshua arose from the grave...ALIVE!

Now with the above in mind, Master Yeshua was NOT raised on Sunday morning as church tradition teaches. Hebraically, the erev/eve of Aviv 18 would begin a new day, and that would have been the 1st day of a new week. The fact is, Master Yeshua arose just in time for it to still be considered Saturday or the seventh day, Aviv 17. Sunday, the way normal time is calculated did not begin until 12 mid-night. So it was actually, technically, regarding the regular secular calendar in use in that day, Saturday evening when the resurrection would have occurred. There goes that sacred cow. In true Hebraic/Scriptural context there is no such thing as a Sunday morning resurrection. If this is true, and it is, then this also takes care of the logic used by Constantine, ruler of the Universal/Catholic church in the fourth century when he changed the Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday in order to make it align with a Sunday morning resurrection!

The Feast of HaBikkurim/Firstfruits is the *promise of resurrection*. The waving of the sheaf (Omer) by the High Priest was a sign that the firstfruits of the harvest were accepted by YHWH. Now first things have a special place in YHWH's heart. The firstborn are His. The firstfruit is His sign that He will keep the promise of life out of death. Barley is the first crop that comes to fruition in Yisrael after the winter. Out of the deadness of the winter comes new life in the spring. Rav Sha'ul put this into perspective for us in his letter to the Corinthians.

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:20 NASB)

Please notice that Master Yeshua's resurrection is directly linked to those who have died in faith. This is the reason hasatan (may his name be blotted out forever) wanted so desperately to keep our blessed Master in the grave. If He, as the Second Man, could get free, then so could we! The fact that He did is proof that we will also enjoy a physical resurrection just as the Scriptures of YHWH have promised.

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive, But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming.” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23 NASB)

Master Yeshua is the stalk of barley sheaf that is cut down and brought to the High Priest to be waved before YHWH. We are the many grains in the head of that stalk. What happens to Him will happen to us! The barley grain is used mainly as an animal staple. The Feast of HaBikkurim/Firstfruits is the promise of our deliverance from the animal passions that try our souls. Those of us who have believed upon Yeshua HaMashiach as the Savior and Redeemer of Yisrael and the whole world have been born again. We have ALREADY experienced a resurrection in our spirit! Rav Sha'ul says,

“Even when we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:5 NASB)

The Feast of HaBikkurim/Firstfruits and the barley harvest points to the time of the wheat harvest at Shavuot. It is the promise that the resurrection we have experienced in our spirit will culminate in the literal physical resurrection of our bodies which will put on immortality. Even as our blessed Master's body will never know death again, so our glorified resurrected bodies will never know death again. This is why hasatan (may his name be blotted out forever) hates this Feast. It proved to be his humiliation once that stone was rolled away from Master Yeshua's grave and He came forth ALIVE. Every year he is reminded of his huge miscalculation. Every year, when we celebrate these spring Feasts, he is forced to realize not only did he lose Master Yeshua, but he is destined to lose all who believe upon Him. It must be a pretty awful thing to endure. Every year he is forced to face his failure. Over and over again he must live to regret his most humiliating defeat. So he does his best to take away the joy and power of these

Feasts, especially the Feast of HaBikkurim/Firstfruits. He does this in order to in some way try and inflict some degree of loss on the apple of YHWH's eye...the holy nation of Yisrael. He wants us to lose sight of what these Feasts truly mean by afflicting us with confusion, division, strife and separation. May YHWH help us to see the simple truth He has laid out for us in His Word.

Firstfruit A Title

It is interesting that if the Feast of HaBikkurim has to do with resurrection, why does Master Yeshua's resurrection occur the following day Aviv 17? Does He have to be raised on the day of HaBikkurim, Aviv 16?

Let us answer the above question by taking a look first at the Greek word used for HaBikkurim in the ReNewed Covenant. It is *aparchae*. We are told in Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words that this word is not plural, but singular. It is *firstfruit* not *firstfruits*. What's the difference?

Our Master Yeshua is the Firstfruit (sing.). It is meant to be a title. He is the whole sheaf (Omer) of the barley stalk. Within the heads contained on the sheaf there are many grains. The *many* grains are US! In actuality, both the Firstfruit and firstfruits are titles. The sheaf is waved by the High Priest before YHWH in order to receive His approval. What approval? YHWH's approval that The Son's redemptive work is complete. All things are a go for the final stage of our redemption...THE RESURRECTION! Master Yeshua our HaMashiach has been accepted by YHWH as the Substitutionary sacrifice for all Yisrael and mankind in general. Now, we are accepted in Him. So just as He is raised, even so when we believe upon Master Yeshua and are born again, our spirit is resurrected out of the deadness of sin into the wonder of YHWH's eternal life. This is the whole picture which water baptism is intended to portray. We are *in Mashiach*. What happened to Him has happened to us. When He died we died *in Him*. When He was buried so were we. When He was raised up, so were we. (read Romans 6) This inner taste of resurrection also gives us hope to follow through with YHWH's will so that we might come into the fullness of our hope, the resurrection of our physical bodies!

The Feast of HaBikkurim is a promise. Master Yeshua, as the Firstfruit didn't have to be literally raised on that day, Aviv 16, in order to fulfill it. HaBikkurim was a sign post that pointed to Master Yeshua's resurrection. WHEN He was resurrected, THEN He simply assumed that title. Then the Feast of HaBikkurim would be literally fulfilled. That happened in actuality the next day; on Aviv 17 at sundown when Master Yeshua came forth from the grave. [*Now for those who try and force the issue that Master Yeshua MUST be raised on Aviv 16 in order to LITERALLY fulfill this Feast, one thing needs to be kept in mind. The Feast of Yom HaKippurim, the Day of Atonement, does not occur in YHWH's timeline of Feasts until some six months later! Yet, the actual fulfillment of that event, in its redemptive aspects, is accomplished during the Feast of*

Pesach! The Day of Atonement's further judgmental aspects regarding the world it self of course is also held in a future context. So there is a Scriptural precedent that allows for a time differential in the actual event itself]

Also, in biblical numerics, 17 is a product of the number 14 which = salvation + the number 3 which = resurrection. The number 17 is the biblical number for victory! The number 16 is the product of the number 8 which is doubled. The Hebrew letter *chet* is given the numerical value of 8 in Gematria. This is the practice of assigning numerical values to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. [*This is not the same as numerology.*] The Hebrew letter *chet* is also given the meaning of *life*. When *chet* is doubled it takes on the meaning of *abundant life* or *life that has passed through death and still lives!* That's what Aviv 16 (8 x 2) points to. It is the witness of the fullness of life promised by resurrection. Aviv 17 is the fulfillment of that promise. Master Yeshua does not have to be raised on Aviv 16 in order to fulfill the Feast of HaBikkurim. He simply must be raised at some point. That point was Aviv 17. When He rose from the grave, He received the title of Firstfruit, an inclusive whole. He lives as a promise that those who have believed upon Him [the many grains of sheaf head] will indeed follow in His likeness and in their proper order as His firstfruits. The Feast of Shavuot, the wheat harvest, is the promise of that very reality.

The Witness Of The ReNewed Covenant

There is another consideration when applying the laws of hermeneutics. It is what is known as the principles of *first mention*. *This is when something in the text is initially introduced in one area. It must continue to agree with its usage in other areas of the text.* In Hebraic *understanding* both the TaNaKh and the ReNewed Covenant are vitally connected. The latter is a continuation of the former. They are not two *separate* things. They are *echad/ONE*. It is the church of Christendom's use of *systematic theology* that has divorced their intrinsic relationship. TaNaKh is the root from which the ReNewed Covenant emerges. It is also a principle of Torah that everything is established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the ReNewed Covenant to *witness* to its Older counterpart. Do we have such a *witness* on the issue of which *Shabbat* is being referred to? Let us first of all take a look at the Gospel of Yochanon/John.

“Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and {that} they might be taken away.

So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him;

but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.” (Yochanon/John 19:30-33 NASB)

Now in the year our Master was put to death, the day of Aviv 14 would have fallen on a Wednesday. The redemptive saga would have begun at 9:00 a.m. or the third hour in Hebraic time. This would coincide with the *preparation* of the offering of the Pesach lambs immediately following the first Tamid/continual offering on the Temple altar. Our blessed Master would be hung on the execution stake a little after Noon on Aviv 14. He would be dead shortly after 3:00 p.m. Albert Edersheim, who was Jewish, a believer in Yeshua HaMashiach, and a biblical historian, writes in his book *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, that the second/last Tamid offering of the day would be killed around 2:30 p.m. and offered on the altar at about 3:30 p.m. (pg. 174 updated edition). This is important because in the timeline of the day of Aviv 14 events Master Yeshua would have died just before the last Tamid offering was placed on the altar. Thus He became the Seh Elohim/Lamb of God, our Passover.

This is exactly what Yochanon/John in his Gospel wrote in the passage we quoted above. We read that the Jewish Leaders were concerned because Aviv 14 is called the *day of preparation*. The Pesach lambs were being killed in the morning after the first Tamid offering and readied to be placed on the altar just after Noon. This was the exact time that our blessed Master Yeshua was being hung on the execution stake. When that day ended, in accordance with YHWH's words to Moshe in Vayikra/Leviticus 23, the beginning or evening/erev of Aviv 15 would begin the start of the second of YHWH's Feasts, the Feast of Unleavened Bread (HaMatzot). Aviv 15 (beginning in the evening) is what Yochanon/John referred to as a *Shabbaton or High Shabbat*. Again, in keeping with what we have already discussed, this was the *annual* not the *weekly Shabbat*. The Jewish Leaders, wanted to get the bodies off the execution stakes in order that they might be prepared for burial and placed in their graves. This couldn't happen if they didn't hurry and get that done well before the sun went down on Aviv 14. If it happened after the sun went down, then they would have been in violation of the *Shabbaton or High Shabbat* which required that no regular work be done..

Please note, we have been told that Master Yeshua was put to death on a Friday and rose on Sunday morning by the theology of the church of Christendom. Historically this is not correct. As we have already stated, Aviv 14, the day when the Pesach lambs were offered in the Temple fell on a Wednesday in that year. The weekly Shabbat always falls at the end of the week on Saturday, the seventh day. Therefore, why is there such concern by the Jewish Leaders about a *Shabbat* if we're still three days away from the *weekly Shabbat*? Yochanon/John plainly tells us in the above passage. At sundown on Aviv 14 will begin a new Hebraic day. He clearly tells us, the erev of Aviv 15 was considered a *Shabbat*. Yet it was not a *weekly Shabbat*. It was a *High Shabbat* or an annual *Shabbaton*! This is just what we have been pointing out from our text in Vayikra/Leviticus 23.

“...the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (FOR THAT SABBATH WAS A HIGH DAY,)” (Yochanon/John 19:31b- emphasis mine)

Now let's take look into Luke's account of the same event.

*“And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man
(he had not consented to their plan and action), {a man} from Arimathea, a city of the
Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God;
this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into
the rock, where no one had ever lain.
It was the PREPARATION DAY, and the SABBATH was about to begin.
Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb
and how His body was laid.
Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. AND ON THE SABBATH
THEY RESTED according to the commandment.
But on the first day of the week, at EARLY DAWN, they came to the tomb bringing the
spices which they had prepared.
And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,” (Luke 23:50-24:2 NASB-
emphasis mine)*

Again we find Luke in agreement with Yochanon/John's testimony. It was the *preparation day* of Aviv 14, a Wednesday of that year. There was a Shabbat Luke tells us about to begin at sundown, which would be the erev/eve of Aviv 15. This was not the *weekly Shabbat*. It was the *Shabbaton* or *High Shabbat* that both Yochanon/John and Vayikra/Leviticus have spoken of. It was the beginning of the Feast of HaMatzot/Unleavened Bread. Just before sundown on Aviv 14 the women prepared the spices in order to finish Master Yeshua's burial process. What did the women do next? Luke clearly says they *rested*. He further states it was, *according to the commandment!* What commandment? The very one we are studying here in Vayikra/Leviticus 23:15. This Shabbaton was to be a *day of rest!*

Now pay close attention. It doesn't say the next day, which would have been Aviv 16 or Friday of that year that they came to finish Master Yeshua's burial. Why? Because according Torah if someone touches a dead body they would become ritually unclean or *tamei* for seven days. To be ritually unclean doesn't have any thing to do with sin according to the Torah. It was a ceremonial issue that had to do with approaching YHWH for worship in the Temple. The cleansing process included sprinkling with the ashes of a red heifer mixed with water. Then, the person must *mikvah*, bathe them selves in water. On the seventh day they will become *tahor*, or ritually clean again. The women, according to Luke, waited until *the first day of the week at early dawn* which would have been the erev of Aviv 18 to return to finish Master Yeshua's burial process. They didn't come on Sunday morning as we have been taught. It says they came *at early dawn* or Hebraically, after sundown on Saturday evening. Why the reason for the wait? It is because if they had gone on Aviv 16, Friday eve, they would not have been able to participate in the next Feast which was HaBikkurim or Firstfruits. They would have also

been unable to celebrate the weekly Shabbat. So they waited until all the celebrations of that week were complete to go and finish Master Yeshua's burial. However, when they got to the tomb...HE WAS RISEN!

We see from all this how seamlessly both the TaNaKh and ReNewed Covenant Scriptures flow together and witness to the Truth as YHWH has given it to us. You can also through this process see the necessity of our regaining a Hebraic perspective to the Scriptures. Without this, we run the risk of violating the plain laws of interpretation (hermeneutics) regarding the Scriptural record. We then end up lifting passages out of their immediate context, as well as out of their further contextual relation to Scripture as a whole. This leads to forcing interpretations that are both skewed and erroneous. The Ruach HaKodesh is the Spirit of Truth. When we allow YHWH to teach us by His Ruach, we will find both shalom and joy in our pursuit.

In Closing: Some Final Comments

There are some other areas that we have not even gotten into in our discussion of the Feast of HaBikkurim. One thing we must touch on is the reason for the counting of the Omer. When YHWH brought Yisrael out of Mitzraim/Egypt, they were a decimated and fragmented group of people. According to the rabbis one more level and they would have been completely unfit for redemption. They would have been worthy only of complete annihilation. Instead YHWH showed them His great mercy and sent them a deliverer in Moshe Rabbienu. From the time they left Mitzraim/Egypt He told them to count 49 days. By the 50th day Yisrael had been transformed and readied to receive YHWH's Torah. The Torah was in actuality a *ketubah* or *marriage covenant*. Yisrael had become a holy nation and was brought by YHWH to His mountain for their betrothal. Today, as the nation of Yisrael is experiencing the prophesied restoration of its Two Houses, there again is a great need for transformation. The deliverance and transformation of Yisrael of old gives hope to Redeemed/ReNewed Covenant Yisrael today that we too will fulfill YHWH's destiny...the restoration of the Whole House of Yisrael and the return of our blessed Yeshua HaMashiach.

Beloved, I cannot encourage you enough to cry out to YHWH for deliverance in any area of your life you may be struggling with during the Feast days of YHWH and the days of the counting of the Omer. It is true that you can receive deliverance any time by trusting faithfulness in YHWH's Word and power. Yet, during these Feast days and the days of counting the Omer the ability to receive deliverance can come in greater measure of His power than any other time. The heavens are opened during the Feast times of YHWH in ways they aren't during other times of the year. The time of the counting the Omer can lead to a more intense experience, both individually and corporately, when the time for celebrating the Feast of Shavuot arrives. Shavuot is traditionally seen in Judaism as the receiving of YHWH's Torah by the nation of Yisrael at Mt. Sinai. Fifty is the number of Yovel or Jubilee. It was a time of joy and release from debt and slavery. Those who are ignorant of the Torah see it only as Law. They have been deceived into believing

that Torah keeping is bondage. However, for true Yisraelite believers, receiving Torah is a time of celebration, joy, release, and the influx of heavenly power through the Ruach HaKodesh. What happened to the talmidim/disciples of Master Yeshua who obeyed His instruction to go and wait upon the promise of His Abba in Yerushalayim/Jerusalem? The Ruach HaKodesh was poured out upon them in power! What day was it that this happened? It was Shavuot! Beloved, I urge you to take this time of the counting of the Omer seriously. Take these next weeks and seek after YHWH your Elohim with all your heart and soul. Prepare your hearts, and when this next Shavuot is fully come you too will be a candidate for one of the most awesome encounters with YHWH you have ever experienced!

Now let us answer the last question. “*Why is the Feast of HaBikkurim/Firstfruits associated with a Shabbaton or High Shabbat, and not the weekly shabbat?*” We touched on this earlier. The rabbis say that it was due to the condition of Yisrael of old when they came out of Mitzraim/Egypt. As we have already said, Yisrael was in an almost hopeless state of degradation. In order for them to be transformed into a nation ready to receive YHWH’s Torah, a miracle would need to happen. The power to transform them must come out of heaven, or more precisely, out from beyond the time and space dimension associated with this earth. It was from the eternal of YHWH. The *weekly Shabbat*, while a testimony of YHWH’s coming kingdom (malchut shamayim), it is still linked to the realm of time and space. The *Shabbatons* come out of the *olam haba*, or the *world to come*. There is no limitation to their possibilities. This is the place from which the power to transform all Yisrael, both then and now must come. It is the place from which the Ruach HaKodesh must flow bringing the power of the eternal YHWH into the hearts of His people.

May YHWH use this to help bring shalom to all Yisrael and great joy as we celebrate His Feasts. I pray that it will be accepted as “a” view concerning understanding this Feast in particular. If you disagree, then we bless you to do so. If you agree, then we bless you too. The important thing is that we rejoice together that Torah and the Feasts are being celebrated. May YHWH be praised and our blessed Master Yeshua be high and lifted up in all we do.

Joe Snipes
Gates To Zion
Sha’arim L’Tzyion