

Nearly 3500 years ago, God revealed His plan for the redemption of all mankind and the subsequent Kingdom of God to a number of former slaves who had just been thrust out of the nation of Egypt. Unfortunately, for most who subscribe to the teachings found in the book we call the “Bible”, that plan has been hidden until the past 80 or so years, primarily because the Jewish people missed the coming of the The Messiah – the major player in that plan, and Christians, for the most part, have forsaken the blueprint of the plan – the Festivals of Leviticus 23.

Things are now beginning to change. Many of the observant Jewish people are beginning to grab hold of The Messiah and Christians are beginning to forsake the idolatrous ‘holidays’ the observed in their childhood and are taking a second look at the Biblical festivals.

God’s festivals reveal what He is going to do in a couple of ways. One way is by their close resemblance to ancient Hebrew wedding customs where each festival represents a stage in that custom including the courtship, betrothal, wedding supper, and even the newly married couple setting up their new home.

The festivals also show God’s intent by the fact that they are all tied to a particular harvest season. God often speaks to His people in agricultural terms, and thus it’s appropriate that they understand His doings in regards to the yearly cycle of Israel’s three harvest seasons – the early spring ‘barley’ harvest, the latter spring ‘wheat’ harvest, and the fall harvest of fruits and vegetables.

In this study, I’m going to focus on the spring festival season of Passover – the time of the barley harvest in Israel, and more specifically on one specific point in that harvest and show how it might tie into God’s overall plan for the salvation of His people. That point is what is commonly referred to as the ‘wave sheaf offering’ – a very special event that is embedded into this Passover season.

In this study, I will:

1. Take a brief look at the harvest cycle and its associated festivals
2. Learn the mechanics of the wave sheaf offering
3. Identify the ‘firstfruits’
4. Determine what the offering represents
5. See the purpose of the firstfruits in God’s plan

Let’s start by learning a little about the Biblical festivals.

The Biblical Festivals –

God’s festivals are spelled out in Leviticus 23 as well as various other places in scripture.

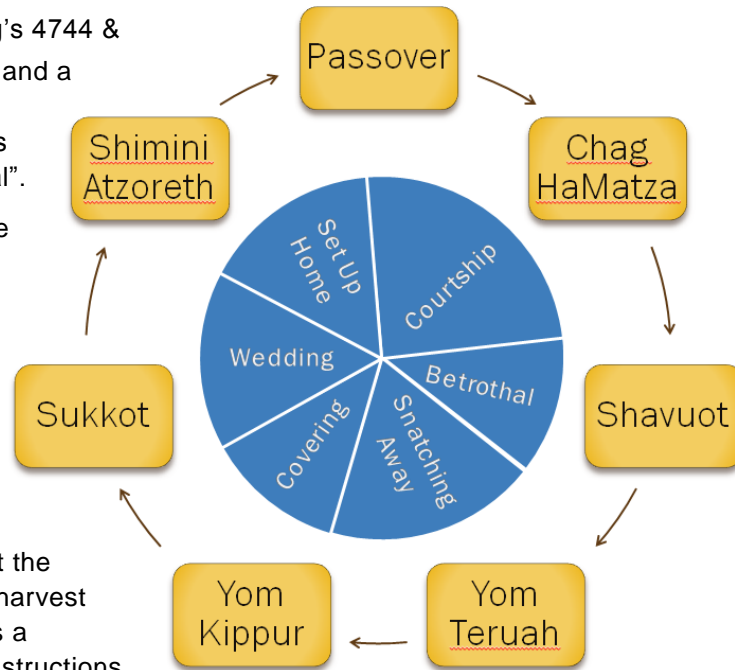
^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:1** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these *are* My feasts. ³ ' Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day *is* a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work *on it*; *it is* the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. ⁴ ' These *are* the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.

From this passage we can deduce a number of important concepts.

- First, we can see that the festivals are not ‘Jewish festivals’ but are rather ‘the feasts of the LORD’. They belong to Him, and are given to His people. They are festivals that God shares with His people for their own good.

- Second, we see that (from this and subsequent verses) that the first festival mentioned is the weekly Sabbath. This would indicate that if you don't understand and observe the first festival – the Sabbath – you will probably not understand the rest of the festivals.
- Thirdly, we see that the festivals are literally “appointments with God”. In verse 2 and 4, the Hebrew word for “feasts” is “moed” (מוֹעֵד – Strong’s 4150). A moed is an appointed time, a specific time when God is going to do something of which He wants us to be a part. “Moed” is rooted in the Hebrew word “ya’ad” (יָאָד – Strong’s 3259) which means to “fix, appoint, or assemble”. The first time we see “ya’ad” in scripture it is translated “betroth”¹. Thus we have the connection of God’s festivals to a wedding.
- Fourth, we see that the festivals are called “holy convocations”. The Hebrew term is “miqra qodesh” (מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ - Strong’s 4744 & 6944). “Qodesh” means “holy” and a “miqra” is a reading or calling together for a reading. Strong’s also describes it as a “rehearsal”.

Thus we might say that the festivals are where we rehearse our part in the wedding of all time – the wedding of YHVH to His people. Because it is important to God that we join Him at the festivals, He made it to where the festivals are also ‘sabbaths’, and thus gave us “days off” from work so that we can join Him.



Reading on in Leviticus 23, we see that the festivals are associated with the three harvest seasons², thus each festival represents a particular harvest. There are specific instructions for each harvest, especially in regards to what we’re to do with the fruit of the harvest. In the first and second harvest, we are instructed to bring the “firstfruits” of that harvest to the priests³, but in the third harvest we are not. Instead, in that third harvest it appears we are to rejoice with as much of the harvest as we wish.

Let us start by learning the ‘mechanics’ of the wave-sheaf offering.

The Wave Sheaf Offering -

This special offering is described in Leviticus 23, beginning in verse 10 immediately after those pertaining to the seven days of unleavened bread. Therefore, one might think that it takes place after that festival season, but most believe it took place during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Following are the instructions for the offering -

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:10-14** . . . 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. ¹¹ 'He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the

¹ Ex. 21:8
² vs. 10 (barley), vs. 17 (wheat), vs. 39 (fruit, produce)
³ vs. 10, 17, 20

Sabbath the priest shall wave it. ¹² 'And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹³ 'Its grain offering *shall be* two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering *shall be* of wine, one-fourth of a hin. ¹⁴ 'You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God

This seems pretty straightforward. The first harvest of each year may not be consumed until this offering is made, but there are a few points that need to be clarified.

- First, the offering is not really the “wave-sheaf” offering; it’s more correctly the “wave – omer” offering. A sheaf is a bundle of grain stalks laid parallel together and tied into a bundle. Though sheaves are very much a part of the offering, what is actually waved is a bowl of flour. The word translated “sheaf” in verse 10 is the Hebrew word “omer” (עֹמֶר – Strong’s 6016) which means “a dry measure of grain of about 2 litres.” So an “omer” of flour was brought to the priests and that is what was waved.
- Secondly, the omer of flour is “waved” before YHVH to be accepted on behalf of the people. The phrase “to be accepted on your behalf” is translated from the Hebrew word “li-r’zonchem” which is the combination of the Hebrew preposition “li” which means “to” and the 2nd person masculine plural form of the noun “ratson” (רַצוֹן – Strong’s 7522) which means “pleasure, delight, and acceptance”. The thought is that God is looking down from Heaven at what the priest is waving back and forth and God is pleased with what He sees.
- The third point is that the wave offering is not offered alone. It is always accompanied by a burnt offering of a one year old male lamb without blemish as well as an associated grain and drink offering. What that means is that the waving of the omer of flour is dependent upon having the unblemished one year old lamb. Without the lamb, you cannot make the offering.
- One other point to consider is that this offering had to be made before any of that year’s harvest could be eaten. This is generally understood to mean that the rest of the fields could not be harvested until the offering had been made.

In his book “the Temple and its Ministry and Services, Alfred Edersheim describes the wave-omer offerings of the second Temple period⁴.

“ . . . Already, on the 14th of Nisan, the spot whence the first sheaf was to be reaped had been marked out by delegates from the Sanhedrim, by tying together in bundles, while still standing, the barley that was to be cut down. Though, for obvious reasons, it was customary to choose for this purpose the sheltered Ashes-valley across Kedron, there was no restriction on that point, provided the barley had grown in an ordinary field—of course in Palestine itself—and not in garden or orchard land, and that the soil had not been manured nor yet artificially watered (Mishnah, Menach. viii. 1, 2).

When the time for cutting the sheaf had arrived, that is, on the evening of the 15th of Nisan (even though it were a Sabbath, just as the sun went down, three men, each with a sickle and basket, formally set to work.

But in order clearly to bring out all that was distinctive in the ceremony, they first asked of the bystanders three times each of these questions: ‘Has the sun gone down?’ ‘With this sickle?’ ‘Into this basket?’ ‘On this Sabbath (or first Passover-day)?’—and, lastly, ‘Shall I

⁴ The Temple, Its Ministry and Services; Alfred Edersheim; Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA; copyright 1994; 4th printing (1998); pg.204

reap?’ Having each time been answered in the affirmative, they cut down barley to the amount of one ephah, or ten omers, or three seahs, which is equal to about three pecks⁵ and three pints of our English measure. The ears were brought into the Court of the Temple, and thrashed out with canes or stalks, so as not to injure the corn; then ‘parched’ on a pan perforated with holes, so that each grain might be touched by the fire, and finally exposed to the wind. The corn thus prepared was ground in a barley-mill, which left the hulls whole. According to some, the flour was always successfully passed through thirteen sieves, each closer than the other. The statement of a rival authority, however, seems more rational—that it was only done till the flour was sufficiently fine (Men. vi. 6, 7), which was ascertained by one of the ‘Gizbarim’ (treasurers) plunging his hands into it, the sifting process being continued so long as any of the flour adhered to the hands (Men. viii. 2). Though one ephah, or ten omers, of barley was cut down, only one omer of flour, or about 5 1 pints of our measure, was offered in the Temple on the second Paschal, or 16th day of Nisan. The rest of the flour might be redeemed, and used for any purpose. The omer of flour was mixed with a ‘log,’ or very nearly three-fourths of a pint of oil, and a handful of frankincense put upon it, then waved before the Lord, and a handful taken out and burned on the altar.

The remainder belonged to the priest. This was what is popularly, though not very correctly, called ‘the presentation of the first or wave-sheaf’ on the second day of the Passover-feast, of the 16th of Nisan.⁶”

From Edersheim’s account we see a number of additional points. We see that there was nothing special about the grain that was used in the offering. It did not come from a special field, but could be selected from anywhere within the boundaries of Israel. It was selected before the Passover, but was not cut until after the Passover lambs were slain and eaten. The individual “corns” (grains) were separated from the head, then parched in a pan specially designed so that each corn would be touched by fire. Then the corns were subjected to the wind, presumably to remove the husks that were now detached from the grain. The grain was then ground and sifted until it was deemed pure enough for the offering, and though three sheaves of barley were cut, only one omer of fine flour was actually used for the offering.

Let’s now summarize what we’ve seen so far:

- God has given us his festivals to learn about how He intends to build his kingdom.
 - The festivals parallel the Hebrew wedding
 - The festivals parallel the three annual harvests
- The sheaves of barley grain that ultimately become the wave-omer offering come from anywhere in the land. There is nothing special about them
- The refining of the grain did not begin until after the Passover meal was eaten
- The grain goes through a refining process that includes being blown by the wind
- More grain was chosen than was actually used.
- The offering must be accompanied by a one-year-old male lamb without blemish

Before moving on, let’s add a little more information about the wave-omer offering, information that’s not necessarily specific to this offering, but to other grain offerings as well. We find this information at the beginning of the book of Leviticus where all the offerings are described.

⁵ a peck is about 2 gallons

⁶ There remains a debate as to whether the offering took place on the morning after the first day of unleavened bread, or if it took place on the morning after the weekly Sabbath during the festival of unleavened bread. Apparently, Yeshua chose not to clear up the debate.

According to Leviticus 2 all grain offerings were eaten by the priests except for a small portion called the “memorial portion”.

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 2:1** 'When anyone offers a grain offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. ² 'He shall bring it to Aaron's sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn *it* as a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD. ³ 'The rest of the grain offering *shall be* Aaron's and his sons'. *It is* most holy of the offerings to the LORD made by fire.

When a person brought a grain offering, it was already processed into fine flour. When it was given to the priests, he took a small handful of the flour, mixed it with oil and frankincense, and burned it on the altar as “a memorial”. The remainder was given to the priests to be eaten (Lev. 2.3).

Such was true for the firstfruits grain offerings as well -

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 2:14 & 16** If you offer a grain offering of your firstfruits to the LORD, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits green heads of grain roasted on the fire, grain beaten from full heads . . . ¹⁶ then the priest shall burn the memorial portion: *part* of its beaten grain and *part* of its oil, with all the frankincense, as an offering made by fire to the LORD.

Based on the passage above, we now know that from the omer of highly refined barley flour used in the ‘wave-sheaf offering’, a small portion called the “memorial portion” - “azkarah” in Hebrew - is separated from the whole and burned on the altar. As for what happens to the rest of the omer of flour after it is waved, the scripture is silent. It’s assumed that it was eaten by the priests just as the other grain offerings ⁷.

So what does this offering represent? Many conclude it represents Yeshua (Jesus) who was offered as a sacrifice for the sins of His people, and the wave offering symbolized His acceptance by The Father. But is that a satisfactory conclusion? Let’s look a little deeper in the scriptures to see if we can find more information, and the place we’ll start is with the identity of the ‘firstfruits’ ... after all, this is an offering of ‘firstfruits’.

Who are the Firstfruits?

Human beings are oftentimes identified in agricultural terms. One of the first places we see that is where Rachael blames her barrenness on her husband Jacob.

^{KJ} **Genesis 30:1** Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" ² And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

Here Jacob likened children to fruit. In this passage, the Hebrew word for “fruit” is “periy” (פֵּרִי) – Strong’s 6529) which according to Dr. Frank Seekins means “to the mouth goes the person’s hand”⁸. This is an interesting concept since the scripture shows that at one time in Israel’s history; salvation was in a way dependant on those who put their hand to their mouth⁹. Let’s take a look at that passage.

In Judges chapter 7, God had called Gideon to wage war with the Midianites, but told him that he had too many warriors. He told Gideon to announce that those who were fearful could return to

⁷ Lev. 2:10

⁸ Hebrew Word Pictures, Seekins, Living Word Pictures, Inc, Phoenix, AZ, 1994, pg. 141

⁹ Judges 7:5-7

their homes, but there were still too many warriors. God then told Gideon to lead the men to the water where he would “refine” them. At the water’s edge, Gideon was to observe the men, specifically how they drank water from the pool. Three hundred drank the water by drawing it to his mouth with his hand, and here is what YHVH had to say about them -

^{ESV} **Judges 7:7** And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand ..."

Apparently those three hundred showed a characteristic that was pleasing, and possibly more useful to God.

Another case of people or persons being identified in agricultural terms is that of Joseph who in his dream identifies himself as a sheaf of grain.¹⁰ The Psalms also speak of the godly person as a tree that brings forth fruit in its season –

^{NKJ} **Psalms 1:1** Blessed *is* the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly . . . ² But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD . . . ³ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season,

According to the psalmist, the man who walks after God is like a tree that produces fruit. As the metaphor suggests, the godly man is a godly tree that will produce godly fruit, and Godly fruit is what God expects His people to be. In his charge against Israel and Judah, YHVH reminded them that they were at one time a “good fruit” –

^{NKJ} **Jeremiah 11:16** The LORD called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely *and* of Good Fruit.

Israel is rooted in good fruit. The patriarchs of old walked after God, but Israel turned from God and was broken off of the olive tree of Israel. Yeshua was later sent to begin gathering up those broken sticks, but the actual work of the gathering was to be performed by His disciples, as well as those who became disciples after them.

^{NKJ} **John 15:5** "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing ... ⁸ "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

So we can see that God’s people are often defined in the scriptures as “fruit”. But God also calls His people by a more specific term. Not only are they fruit, they are his “firstfruits”.

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 2:3** Israel was¹¹ holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt; disaster came upon them, declares the LORD."

In this passage, the Hebrew word for “firstfruits” is “reshiyt” (רֵאשִׁיטָה – Strong’s 7225). “Reshiyt” means “first, beginning, best”. It comes from the Hebrew word “rosh” which means “head”. So the firstfruits are the first, the beginning, the ‘head’ of the harvest. Being that the firstfruits are the first of the harvest, by implication there is more to be harvested after the firstfruits. In other words, the firstfruits are not the entire harvest.

The term “firstfruits” is applied to Israel in another passage as well, but this time translated from a different word –

¹⁰ Gen. 37:7

¹¹ “is” or “was”? This is rendered or implied both ways based on the translation. Example KJV vs. YLT

^{NKJ} **Hosea 9:10** " I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. *But* they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves *to that* shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved.

In that passage, the word ‘firstfruits’ is translated from the Hebrew word “bikkowrah” (בִּכּוֹרָה) – Strong’s 1061). Bikkowrah comes from the root word “bakar” (בָּכַר) – Strong’s 1069) which means “firstborn”. Thus Israel is God’s firstborn, which YHVH clearly states in the Passover story –

^{NKJ} **Exodus 4:22** "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel *is* My son, My firstborn.

So Israel is God’s firstborn¹² as well as God’s firstfruits. In the Bible, there are no other peoples who are referred to by that term.

Now that we have the firstfruits defined, let delve into the meaning of the Wave Sheaf Offering.

What Does the Offering Represent?

Other than stating that it must be performed before the rest of the harvests can begin, Leviticus 23 is somewhat silent in regards to what the wave-omer offering represents. Never-the-less, the Torah does give us a significant clue.

In Numbers chapter 8, God gave Moses instructions for the inauguration of the Levites. After the event of the golden calf, God rejected the firstborn as the ones who would bind Israel to God because they failed to take a stand against the instigators of that event¹³. He then replaced them with the Levites. In those instructions (taking into account that the translators clearly added the word ‘like’), God called the Levites “a wave offering” four different times –

^{NKJ} **Numbers 8:11** "and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD, *like* a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the LORD.

^{NKJ} **Numbers 8:13** "And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them *like* a wave offering to the LORD.

^{NKJ} **Numbers 8:15** "After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting. So you shall cleanse them and offer them, *like* a wave offering.

^{NKJ} **Numbers 8:21-22** And the Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them, *like* a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them. ²² After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle of meeting before Aaron and his sons; as the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.

Notice that the reason they were called “a wave offering” was so they could “perform the work of the LORD” (vs. 11). As verse 22 shows, their work commenced at the conclusion of the ceremony – after they had been ‘waved’ before God. For the Levites, a great change had taken place; their previous ‘life’ was over. Their new life - one of service to God with a clear and defined focus – had begun.

As the text shows, this ceremony took place in the presence of all Israel so that everyone would know that the change in the status of the firstborn (being demoted) and of the Levites (being promoted) had taken place. God was revealing His new ‘servants’ to the Israelite people. From this

¹² See also Jer. 31:7-9

¹³ this is explained in my article “Passover and the Firstborn of Israel” – www.amiyisrael.org/articles.html

example, we can conclude that a wave offering sometimes represents a change in a person's life, the inauguration of a person or a people to perform their service to YHVH.

Paul wrote quite extensively about this type of change in the life of the believer. One example is in his letter to the Romans where he showed that God was again revealing to Israel who His true servants actually are. In contrast to those who believed they were God's people simply because they were descendants of Abraham, Paul showed that His true followers were those in who the old life is 'dead' through sin, but whose mortal body still lives through the indwelling of God's spirit,

^{NKJ} **Romans 8:9-11** But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Paul then went on to say that our sufferings (our experiences) in this life – our trials – are nothing compared to the glory that those sufferings will bring.

^{NKJ} **Romans 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

And what is that glory? Paul tells us in the very next verse.

^{NKJ} **Romans 8:19** For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

God is glorified when His people are revealed to the world. This is shown in a number of passages in the Tnakh, but I'll cite just one -

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 44:23** Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done *it!* Shout, you lower parts of the earth; Break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel.

The revealing of the sons of God is what the world had been waiting for; it is what glorifies God. As Paul showed in his epistle, the 'sons of God' is not Israel in the flesh, but Israel in the spirit...those who had died to sin, but now lived in the spirit. As Paul said -

^{NKJ} **Romans 9:6** For they *are* not all Israel who are of Israel . . .

Paul's trials were all a part of his ministry of restoration - the revealing and the restoration of the son's of God – Israel in the spirit, God's true firstborn, His firstfruits. Paul speaks of it in practically all his epistles. He went on to make this even more clear –

^{ESV} **Romans 8:22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

The redemption, adoption, and revealing of His people glorifies God, and His people are the firstfruits, and the firstfruits are Israel in the spirit, not necessarily those who are Israel in the flesh. The true Israelites have His spirit dwelling in them, and (as the epistle seems to indicate) are taking part in bringing about the revealing of the sons of God.

James, in his letter to the "twelve tribes scattered abroad" supported what Paul taught to the Romans. James began his letter by discussing the trials and temptations that befall all of us.

These could be trials that came upon Israel as a people¹⁴ or those we experience individually. In either case, he went on to say (quoting from the New Jerusalem Bible) –

^{NJB} **James 1:17-18** . . . all that is good, all that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow caused by change. ¹⁸ By his own choice he gave birth to us by the message of the truth so that we should be a sort of firstfruits of all his creation.

Like Paul, James seems to have indicated that those facing trials in association with their godly walk – and that’s probably all of us – are counted as the firstfruits.

Who then does the wave-omer offering represent? Let’s put the puzzle together by first comparing the wave-offering with those we’ve identified as the firstfruits.

| The Wave-Omer Offering | Israel – the Firstfruits |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stalks of grain can be harvested from anywhere in the land. • Three sheaves of barley are cut, but only a small amount makes it through the process • The grain goes through an extensive process before it is refined enough to be a part of the offering • The wind helps separate the parched grain from the husk. • The wave-omer offering requires the sacrifice of a male lamb without blemish. • a wave offering inaugurates a person to a new life with new responsibilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel is gathered from the four corners of the earth • Many are called, but few are chosen • God’s people go through many trials in order to fulfill their calling • The “ruach”, God’s Holy Spirit, helps us be separated from the world. • Israel’s redemption required a male lamb without blemish. • those who have God indwelling spirit have died to their old life and have a new calling |

The parallels are clear. We are the firstfruits from which the wave-omer is derived. And as a wave offering, we – like the Levites who were likewise offered as a wave offering - offer our lives as a living sacrifice, doing our part to further the restoration of all things, which is acceptable and pleasing to God.¹⁵

^{NKJ} **Romans 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.*

The wave-omer offering represents the inauguration of those who will dedicate their lives to walking in the ways of God and will share in the work of the kingdom, longing for its restoration. It represents those who imitate the walk of, and cling to every word of our King – Messiah Yeshua. It represents those who truly understand that their salvation was and is dependent on what Yeshua has done for them, and have died to sin to live in His spirit. And because we do these things, we – like the wave-omer offering - are unleavened.

^{NKJ} **1 Corinthians 5:7** Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

When God looks down at the wave-omer offering, He sees a people who are like finely processed barley, who have endured the trials that accompany those who walks in God’s way, and who have

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 10:11

¹⁵ Note that the context of Romans 9, 10, and 11 is that of the restoration of all Israel.

dedicated their lives to serving Him...teaching and supporting the message of His disciples. I believe He is delighted in what He sees.

But there is more that we can learn from the wave-omer offering.

What Part Does the Offering Play in God's Plan?

What are we to do with this understanding? Is it important that God considers us His firstfruits? Yes – very much so. God plans to build a kingdom, and as we continually grow in our understanding of that plan, our desire to be a part of it will grow as well.

While in captivity, the prophet Daniel spoke of a coming kingdom that would not pass away.

^{NKJ} **Daniel 7:13** " I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.

We understand this kingdom to be the coming Kingdom of God with Messiah Yeshua at the helm. This was the main message of the angel Gabriel who was sent by God to the pregnant virgin – the betrothed wife of Joseph.

^{NKJ} **Luke 1:26-33** ²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God . . . ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!" . . . ³¹ "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Yeshua was to be the king of Israel - a kingdom that would never end. That was Gabriel's focus, and it was Yeshua's focus as well.

^{NKJ} **Matthew 6:33** "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

But the kingdom was to come in stages. As the parable of the mustard seed indicates, it would start very small and continue to grow and spread. The idea that from a single mustard seed an entire field of mustard could eventually be harvested is a clearly understood agricultural principle; a seed that is produced by one plant falls to the ground, is buried in the soil, and then 'resurrects' to become a plant that bears many seeds. Being that in His day, Israel was an agrarian society, Yeshua used this analogy to comfort His disciples about his eminent demise.

^{NKJ} **John 12:24;32** ²⁴ "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain... ³² "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself."

In an agricultural sense, a seed has to die, be buried in the soil, then come back to life in a new "resurrected" form (or body) in order to produce abundant fruit. We see that every time we plant a tomato seed in the ground. The dead, dry tomato seed comes back to life in a different form than what it was when it was planted. It then produces numerous tomatoes, each of which contains numerous seeds. This is the basis of the Biblical concept of 'resurrection', and from that concept, we can further deduce that the purpose of a resurrection is simply "to produce more fruit". And by what means does God produce fruit? He does it through the words of human beings.

^{ESV} **Romans 10:14** But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?¹ And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

As we look back on the life of Yeshua, it is clear that the number of those who were reached after His resurrection is exponentially greater than those He reached in His earthly lifetime. Would it not stand to reason that the same would hold true for the disciples? Absolutely! Though the disciples ‘turned the world upside down’¹⁶ during their lifetime, we know that many millions of people came to know about Yeshua as a result of the letters they wrote that were published after their death. Though they were each the fruit of one seed – Messiah Yeshua¹⁷, they each planted more seed that in turn, bore more fruit.

With that in mind, is it possible that the greater work of the ‘firstfruits’ would be done after they are resurrected?

The Firstfruits and the Resurrections

Though there is no direct reference to a resurrection in the Leviticus 23 ‘wave-sheaf’ passage, the understanding of a resurrection to eternal life is hidden within the Torah and is clearly shown throughout the remainder of the Tnakh (Old Testament) as well as in the writings of the apostles. Being that he was a Pharisee (and thus accepted the entire Tnakh), Paul not only believed that there was a resurrection, he believed in at least three resurrections.

^{NKJ} **1 Corinthians 15:19-24** ⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. ²⁰ But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ,¹⁸ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. ²⁴ Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

Paul showed that the first to be resurrected from the dead to eternal life was Yeshua himself. Without that resurrection, there could be no other resurrections. His resurrection is followed by the resurrection of the firstfruits, those who do the work of God and who are identified in scripture as ‘Israel’ (Jeremiah 2:3). The writer of Hebrews alludes to this as “a better resurrection”.

^{NKJ} **Hebrews 11:35** Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

That ‘better’ resurrection will be followed by yet another resurrection, the one that includes all those who have turned to God and His Messiah as a result of (as we might conclude) the work of the firstfruits,

Where did Paul get this understanding? Did he just make it up, or did he find it in the scriptures? Obviously, he had to have found it in the scriptures; but where? I submit that he saw a connection between the Leviticus 23 harvest festivals and the resurrections.

As mentioned at the beginning of this study, the biblical festivals happen during the three harvest seasons in Israel. The first festival is Passover which takes place at the beginning of the barley harvest; and in fact, the wave-omer offering marks the beginning of that harvest. The next harvest – the wheat harvest - begins in the early summer. The associated festival – Shavuot – is on the 50th

¹⁶ Acts 17:6

¹⁷ Galatians 3:16

¹⁸ The comma after “Christ” is added by this author. The Greek contains no punctuation, thus the placement of punctuation marks is by the understanding of the translators.

day from the day of the wave-omer offering. The fall harvest, which begins with the festival of Yom Teruah and continues through the Feast of Tabernacles, begins six months after Passover.

Since harvests are not typically one-day events, and sometimes overlap (the wheat harvest continuing through the late summer or fall vegetable harvest), it can be understood that the harvest festivals typify the type of harvest, not necessarily the timing (i.e. – summer vs. fall) of the harvest. Such could be the same with the resurrections.

By comparing his understanding of the resurrections with the harvest festivals, Paul clearly saw that the first and primary resurrection was that of Messiah, which we know took place during the Passover festival. It is likely that He (Yeshua) was resurrected very early on the day of the wave-omer offering – possibly at the time the priests began to cut the sheaves of barley from which the omer of fine flour was obtained. Being a part of Israel, He would be included as one of the firstfruits, probably as the “memorial portion” that was burned on the altar, but not the grain that was in the omer being waved. We know that YHVH was already pleased with what He had done and that He had already been accepted as evidenced by the opening of the graves, the sun going dark, the earthquakes, and the veil of the Temple being rent in two.

The second resurrection – that of the firstfruits – corresponds to Shavuot - the wheat harvest. Since Shavuot and Passover are connected, we can gain a better understanding of this resurrection by understanding the connections between these festivals.

The first connection is that to determine the day of Shavuot, you must count from the day of the wave-omer offering. There is no fixed calendar “date” for Shavuot.¹⁹

^{ESV} **Leviticus 23:16** You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD.

In other words, you cannot know the date of Shavuot unless you know the day of the wave-omer offering.

Another connection has to do with Israel’s deliverance from bondage. While Moses was on Mount Sinai talking to a burning bush, he inquired of God as to why he was being sent to deliver Israel. God’s answer was to show him that at the completion of Israel’s release, he would lead them back to that same mountain. God said -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 3:12** "I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

As we know, Israel did not go directly to the Promised Land, but did indeed arrive at Mount Sinai approximately 50 days later after their release from slavery. From this verse we see that one of the major reasons Israel was delivered from slavery was to enable her to serve YHVH. The Israelites were to be God’s servants, witnesses of God’s goodness and greatness. That is her calling and her purpose. Because they were ‘delivered’ from bondage to ‘serve’ YHVH, you might say that Shavuot is in some ways, the reason for the Passover. Likewise, as we have already seen (John 12:24;32), one of the reasons Yeshua had to die was to enable the disciples to ‘bear fruit’.

^{NKJ} **John 15:5-8** ⁵ "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing ... ⁸ "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

¹⁹ the Jewish people celebrate Shavuot on a fixed day – Sivan 6 – only because the Hillel calendar, though lunar based, is a fixed calendar and because they always consider the wave-sheaf offering to be on Nisan 16 – the morning after the yearly Sabbath of the first day of Hag-haMatza (the first day of Unleavened Bread)

Therefore, just as Shavuot is attached to the Passover, we can deduce that the resurrection of the firstfruits is for those who are attached to Yeshua. They are the ones who are doing the work of the kingdom by following in the footsteps of the Messiah, walking as He walked, and raising up disciples to Him. They are the ones who are bearing fruit.

When would this resurrection take place? Based on the fact that Paul is speaking about an “order”, it would appear that it takes place sometime between the resurrection of Yeshua and His return. Let’s review that passage again –

^{NKJ} **1 Corinthians 15:22-23** ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ’s at His coming.

In this passage, the Greek word for ‘order’ is ‘tagma’ (Strong’s 5001) implies an arrangement, such as a group of soldiers divided by rank. Though ‘rank’ is probably not what Paul is talking about, he does seem to indicate the various resurrections are ‘role-based’. Yeshua was unique in His role, and the firstfruits have the calling and role of bringing in more fruit. The point is that ‘tagma’ has nothing to do with a sequence of events. On the other hand, the word ‘afterward’ does.

The Greek word ‘epeita’ (Strong’s 1899) means ‘thereafter, then, afterwards, etc.’ Paul used that word four other times in his letter, and in each case it implies a sequence. Therefore, we can assume that when he was writing about the resurrections, he was implying a sequence as well ... a sequence of resurrections based on roles. Therefore, the resurrection of the firstfruits takes place between the resurrection of Yeshua, and the resurrection that takes place “at His coming” ... which, by the way, is a phrase we’ll take a look at momentarily.

The third resurrection spoken of by Paul would coincide with the harvest of vegetables and fruits in the fall at the time of Sukkot. This is the resurrection that coincides with Paul’s statement “those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). To understand that resurrection, it is important to note a couple of points about the fall festival of Sukkot.

One of the names for this festival is ‘the feast of ingathering’

^{ESV} **Exodus 23:16** ¹⁶ You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the **Feast of Ingathering** at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor..

You will recall that the wave-omer offering is an event that marks the beginning of the barley harvest and the primary offering for that day is the firstfruits. Shavout, which we have seen is tied to the wave-omer offering, is also a one day event where the primary offering is again, the firstfruits. On the other hand, Sukkot – the Feast of Ingathering – is a seven day event that does not make reference to ‘firstfruits’ at all. Instead, it is set in the midst of the harvest. You observe Sukkot while you are still gathering the harvest. The Septuagint renders the above verse like this –

^{LXE} **Exodus 23:16** And thou shalt keep the feast of the harvest of firstfruits of thy labours, whatsoever thou shalt have sown in thy field, and the feast of completion at the end of the year in the gathering in of thy fruits out of thy field.

This implies a gathering that continues throughout the festival. Could the fact that Sukkot pictures an extended harvest have any bearing on the timing of Paul’s ‘third’ resurrection? “Probably not”, you might say; “doesn’t the text say ‘those who are Christ’s at His coming’ “?

But does it really say that? Let’s examine the Greek text.

In that passage, the proposition ‘at’ is derived from the Greek ‘en’ (Strong’s 1722), and is most often translated ‘in’, ‘by’, or ‘with’. Using any of these words, the phrase begins to mean something else,

but I want to focus in on the word 'in' as in 'those who are Christ's in His coming'. By using the word "in", the phrase implies that the coming of the Messiah causes the person to become Christ's.

Another word to consider is the word 'coming' which is translated from the Greek word 'parousia' (Strong's 3952). Though most often translated "coming", Strong's lists its primary meaning as 'presence'. Using its primary meaning, the phrase becomes "those who are Christ's in His presence". In fact, that is precisely the way the Young's Literal Translation renders it –

^{YLT} **1 Corinthians 15:23** and each in his proper order, a first-fruit Christ, afterwards those who are the Christ's, in his presence,

Now the phrase implies that persons become Christ's because they are 'in His presence'. Who are these people? They are people who are resurrected after He has begun to establish His kingdom (remember- it starts small, then grows). They – like in the story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba²⁰ - become followers of Him because they can actually witness His words, His wisdom, His glory, His power, etc. When you consider the messianic kingdom, it will be a period of time when Yeshua will rule and reign over Israel – a kingdom that, like a grain of mustard, will grow and grow until it encompasses the world, and the King - Messiah Yeshua will truly be 'Emanuel' – God with us. Could it be that the third resurrection is a continual resurrection, one that takes place throughout the Messianic Kingdom. Think about it ... what better way to draw people to the Messiah than to have Him within reach – to be able to actually see Him and touch Him? This would be entirely possible for those who are resurrected in Paul's third resurrection.

But is that the preferable resurrection? Not according to the writer of Hebrews who spoke of a 'better resurrection', nor is preferable in the eyes of Yeshua who said to His disciple –

^{NKJ} **John 20:29** . . . "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

So what we have is three individual resurrections, that of Yeshua which happened at Passover, that of the firstfruits that happens sometime before the fall festival of Sukkot, and the millennial resurrection of those who died not truly knowing the Messiah and His ways²¹.

The resurrection of the firstfruits puts God's servants in a position to teach about the Messiah - His ways and His kingdom - to the billions of people who have never been taught the truth about the Messiah and His torah-centered way of life. As the kingdom begins to grow, and more and more people are resurrected, the firstfruits are the ones who will reveal the true message of Yeshua to them. The firstfruits – Yeshua's 'friends', will be able to reveal the true intent of His words to the billions who have truly wanted to know Him, but had been deceived by teachers who did not truly understand what they were teaching.

The firstfruits, like the Levites, are called to join people to God. They are the teachers of the Messianic Kingdom, the 'preachers' of Romans 10, and the 'order' of 1 Corinthians 15. God has charged us with the responsibility of carrying His message of restoration to our communities, our nation, and ultimately the world²². If we do our job, He considers us to be His firstfruits, the finely-ground grains of barley that are collected into a bowl, lifted up in the hands of the priest, and waved before YHVH. I believe He looks down on that bowl and says to each individual grain -

^{NKJ} **Matthew 25:23** "... Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

Shalom Alecheim

²⁰ 1 Kings 10

²¹ Matthew 7:22

²² Matthew 24:14

