

# Firstfruits of the Resurrection

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Last year's message at this time was titled "Firstfruits and Resurrection." This one is called "Firstfruits of the Resurrection."

Now that we have concluded *Shabbat*, we find ourselves assembled on *Yom HaBikkurim* – "the day of Firstfruits." In the Bible, *Yom HaBikkurim* is closely associated with Passover, the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, and another firstfruit day, the spring harvest celebration of *Shavuot*. *Yom HaBikkurim* is not a Sabbath; it is, nevertheless, a commanded day, as we read in [Leviticus 23:5-14](#):

*"On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it." And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: `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. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it."*

Details of the offering follow, and then we read:

*".. it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings."*

We no longer have the Temple in which we can bring our "firstfruit" offering, but the day of *Bikkurim* has far from lost its significance. First, some believe that it is the very day that Yeshua was resurrected from the dead following His crucifixion; we will see why later. Second, it is the day from which we begin "counting the *Omer*" to *Shavuot*, when the Holy Spirit first made Himself available to all on earth who would receive Him.

We are holding this service in the evening hours in order to capture both *Shabbat* and *Yom HaBikkurim* in a single holy convocation. Given my "druthers" I may not have chosen to speak about *Bikkurim* because it is a subject with some technical complexities that might be better dealt with in a classroom rather than as a preaching from the *bima*. Even the day on which it occurs is controversial and not uniformly agreed upon by Jewish scholars. So kindly bear with me as I begin by discussing some of the technicalities surrounding *Bikkurim* because, for Jews and especially for Messianic Jews, they are important.

The Leviticus Scripture we just read says that *Yom HaBikkurim* occurs on the "day after the Sabbath," but it does not say which Sabbath. Is the Sabbath *Nissan 15* or *21*, the first or last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread? According to Scripture, they are both Sabbaths. Or perhaps it is

the weekly Sabbath that precedes, falls during, or follows the Feast of Unleavened Bread! Of these possibilities, the two within the Jewish world that are in contention as being the Sabbath that is meant are *Nisan 15* and the seventh-day Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We at Ohev believe it is the seventh-day Sabbath and not the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Nisan*. In this regard, we agree with the Sadducees of old rather than with the Pharisees or with Rabbinical Judaism. Leviticus 23:15-21 describes the counting from *Yom HaBikkurim* to *Shavuot* this way:

*“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.”*

Without the Temple, we cannot offer a grain offering, but we can pause to count. Bob, please come forward and proclaim today’s count of the *Omer*.

[Bob: Today is day one of the *Omer*]

The Scripture continues by describing other offerings and sacrifices to be conducted on *Shavuot*, and ends by saying:

*“You shall do no customary work on it [i.e. on Shavuot]. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.”*

Each way of reckoning the day of *Yom HaBikkurim* has its own logic and virtue. From the Pharisaic or Rabbinical point of view, counting from *Nisan 16* is good because, then, *Shavuot* always falls on the sixth of *Sivan* – an easy calendar calculation. I am guessing that it is also thought of as good by the Rabbis because if *Bikkurim* always falls on *Nisan 16*, it cannot be shown to coincide with or be adjacent to Yeshua’s resurrection – something the Rabbinical community would prefer not to do.

Although Ohev Yisrael acknowledges the Pharisaic (i.e. the Rabbinic) date as part of Jewish culture and tradition, we believe that the Sadducees were correct in placing *Bikkurim* on the day after the seventh-day Sabbath that falls within The Feast of Unleavened Bread. This way of looking at it always places *Yom HaBikkurim* on the first day of the week – Sunday, but of course the Sunday falls on a different calendar day of the month each year which is somewhat awkward.

The Sadducean way of counting has two virtues however. First, it is consistent with Leviticus 23:15-16 which describes the count as one of days and weeks rather than days on the lunar calendar. Just to remind you, this is what Leviticus 23:15-16 says:

*“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.”*

Notice that the count to *Shavuot* is not only fifty days – it is also seven Sabbaths, and the weekly Sabbath is determined by day and night as determined by the sun – not by the lunar calendar.

So, since the “seventh Sabbath” spoken of in verse 16 is clearly a weekly Sabbath and not an annual one, by what possible logic could the “Sabbath” in verse 11, five verses earlier, mean the festival Sabbath of *Nisan 15*? There is no possible logic to it, and that is why Ohev has adopted the Sadducean way of dating *Bikkurim* and not the Pharisaic one. Besides, if *Sivan 6* were intended to be the date for *Shavuot*, Scripture would have said so; getting to *Sivan 6* from Passover or *Yom HaBikkurim* doesn’t require any counting.

Now if you are convinced that *Bikkurim* or Firstfruits always falls on the first day of the week – a Sunday close in time to when Yeshua was crucified, and you remember that His tomb was found empty on the first day of the week, the obvious thought that springs to mind is: “Perhaps the day of Firstfruits is also the day of Yeshua’s resurrection!” Let’s get a feel for that day that occurred long ago by reading the Bible’s account of it in Matthew 28:1-10:

*“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Miryam Magdalene and the other Miryam came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Yeshua who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.” So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Yeshua met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Yeshua said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.’”*

So, this is the account of how Yeshua’s resurrection was discovered, but what has it to do with Firstfruits? 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 shows that Yeshua is the firstfruit of our own future resurrection that some call “the resurrection of the saints:”

*“But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are Messiah’s at His coming.”*

This connection of “firstfruits” to Yeshua’s resurrection becomes even more significant when one considers that Ohev’s way of counting fifty-days to when the Holy Spirit fell on *Shavuot* is not from a mere date on the lunar calendar, but possibly from the very day that Yeshua was resurrected from the dead. Not everyone sees it that way and I doubt that the Sadducees thought in those terms but, as for the dating of their count, they were probably right.

Let’s now turn our attention to the meaning of firstfruits themselves. The firstfruits of a tree are not necessarily better fruits but they are “first,” and a question we should ask ourselves if it is our tree,

is what we should do with its first fruits. If your understanding is that they are owned by us because we grew them, then I suppose we can do what we want to, and we would no doubt either eat them or sell them. The Bible has something else to say about it, however, because God regularly requires that our firstfruits (even the first born of our children) be given to Him or to those who minister in His behalf. Consider the words of Exodus 23:19:

*“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.”*

And Proverbs 3:9-10:

*“Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.”*

Also, in Romans 8:22-23, we read:

*“For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”*

So we who are Yeshua’s disciples are said to have the firstfruits of the Spirit and, not only that, we are firstfruits ourselves, for in James 1:17-18, we read:

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”*

I want to stay with this idea for a moment and challenge each of us to consider in what way we are a “kind of firstfruits of His creatures,” and whether our fruits are the kind He wants to reproduce in others. We are helped in evaluating our firstfruits (in fact all of our fruits) by comparing them to Galatians 5:22-25:

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Messiah’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”*

Notice the connection of our belonging to Messiah, bearing His fruit, and crucifying our flesh. We are not to be crucified as He was, but we are, nevertheless, destined to share both His crucifixion and His resurrection.

The quintessential “firstfruit” is, of course, the Messiah Himself who, many maintain, rose from the dead on this very day of *Bikkurim* to be the hope and promise of our own resurrection at whatever time is appointed to each of us. Yeshua’s resurrection is foundational to our faith and to His being the son of God and deity Himself. Had Yeshua died as a mortal and not risen as an immortal, He could not be who Scripture says He is, and we cannot look forward to being resurrected either.

Yeshua's resurrection provides assurance that the Scriptures are true and that faith in Him, coupled with repentance, results in forgiveness of our sins and eternal life with God. 1 Corinthians 15:13-19 says it this way:

*"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Messiah is not risen. And if Messiah is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Messiah, whom He did not raise up-- if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Messiah is not risen. And if Messiah is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Messiah have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Messiah, we are of all men the most pitiable."*

I would like to turn now to a different way of looking at this "Day of Firstfruits," a day that is surrounded in some mystery. First, it is listed as one of the "appointed times" in Leviticus 23, but it is the only "appointed time" that is not a Sabbath. Second, it is one of two "appointed times" that has no established date on the "Jewish" lunar calendar; the other is *Shavuot* (also described as a "day of firstfruits)." Both of their dates are determined by counting days from a prescribed "seventh day-of-the-week" Sabbath, that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so their calendar dates are different from year to year. Third, the fifty days between the two "appointed times" are so special, that God commanded the Israelites to count them.

Now let me show you something that was suggested to me by Scott and that I find to be really profound about this fifty-day period. You recall I said several times, that not everyone agrees that Yeshua was resurrected on the first day of the week. That is because His tomb was discovered empty early on the first day of the week, but we have no biblical proof as to when He was actually resurrected from it. For example, He could have been resurrected on *Shabbat*, the day before, and discovered missing from the tomb the day after. The point that Scott made is that, while Scripture is unclear as to the day of resurrection, it is completely clear as to the day of discovery, and so the time of discovery must be very important.

And it is indeed important if you realize that the first fruit of Yeshua's resurrection was His Bride, the Body of Believers (2 Corinthians 11:2) – initially the Jewish believers who were His disciples, whom He taught for forty days, and to whom He sent the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day. Before this sequence of events there was no Bride of Messiah, in the same way as there was no Nation of Israel prior to the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the *Torah* at Mt. Sinai. The idea of the fifty-day period being one of initiating a new people-group called the Bride of Messiah is underscored by God having placed a "day of firstfruits" at both ends of the fifty-day period.

The Christian world celebrates the resurrection itself on a particular first-day-of-the-week that they call Easter Sunday, and that is a good thing. However, it appears that God wants a major emphasis to be placed on the fruit of Yeshua's resurrection – we who are His Bride and His latter-day disciples. The Bride of Messiah is a new creation that began with Jewish disciples discovering that Yeshua had risen, and she was sealed, as a people-group, when the Holy Spirit came upon her fifty days later.

So you may call *Yom HaBikkurim* “Resurrection Day,” but perhaps “Resurrection Discovery Day” or “Bride of Messiah Day” is more what was intended. Either way, let us remember that it marks the beginning of a period in which Yeshua taught His disciples and then sealed them with the Holy Spirit fifty days later. For us then, His latter day disciples, what better use can we make of this fifty-day period than to count each day of the *Omer* while immersing ourselves in the study of His Word, and preparing ourselves for being filled (or refilled) with the Holy Spirit on *Shavuot*.