

# Counting Pentecost in 2001

(Or whenever Nisan 15 is a Sunday)

By Sanford Beattie

On August 26, 2000, John Ritenbaugh gave a Bible study in which he explained his belief that in 2001 the majority of the Church of God would be keeping Pentecost one week too early. He referred to the changes that the Worldwide Church of God made in 1974 on the counting of Pentecost. While he agrees with the change from Monday to Sunday, he feels the change which involved how to count Pentecost when the first day of Unleavened Bread is a Sunday was wrong, and states that it may have even been made without Herbert Armstrong's knowledge and approval. Specifically, he feels that in this situation, counting should begin with the day following the last day of Unleavened Bread, rather than with the first day of the Feast. It was a question he looked into in 1993-1994 in response to a member inquiry, and he made the change prior to Pentecost in 1994, the last time this calendar alignment occurred.

If Herbert Armstrong was not aware of the change that was made in 1974, then he blindly observed Pentecost on the "wrong day" in 1974, 1977 and 1981, the only other years since as far back as 1954 when this has been an issue.

The question at hand involves an interpretation of Leviticus 23. After reading the Scriptures pertaining to the wave sheaf offering, which was always waved on the day on which the count to Pentecost began, Mr. Ritenbaugh proclaimed his rule for counting Pentecost: **The wave sheaf was to be offered on the day after the Sabbath that occurs during the days of Unleavened Bread.** According to this rule, when the Feast begins on a Sunday, the count must begin on the day following the only Sabbath during the Feast, which is the seventh day of the Feast. This places Mr. Ritenbaugh in sync with the Roman Catholics for counting Pentecost, and at odds with the majority of the

Church of God, which feels the wave sheaf in this instance would be offered on the first day of the Feast, not the day after the Feast ends. I will be the first to state that the majority is not always right, and majority opinion constitutes no proof whatsoever. But in this case, the weight of Scriptural evidence shows that the majority in the Church of God is correct.

John Ritenbaugh seems to feel that his rule for counting Pentecost is stated in Leviticus 23 (specifically verses 11 and 15):

Leviticus 23:10-16 (NKJV) "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. (11) '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. (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; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. (15) '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. (16) 'Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.' "

Please note in the foregoing verses that there is no overt statement about which Sabbath is meant. This has been a source of great controversy. The current Jewish practice claims that the annual Sabbath of the first day of Unleavened Bread is meant. Some have felt it should be the annual Sabbath of the last day of Unleavened Bread. Most of the Church of God feels it is a weekly Sabbath. I will not here discuss the annual Sabbath, since Mr. Ritenbaugh agrees with the rest of the Church that the weekly Sabbath is meant. But which weekly Sabbath? There is no definite statement. We are all assuming it is related somehow to the days of Unleavened Bread. It is a conclusion which can only be reached by inference, context, symbolism or other Scriptures. These Scriptures do not define which weekly Sabbath is meant, except in the indication that it was to be at the beginning of the harvest, before any of the new crop was consumed, and in the connection with their entry into the land. The Scriptures in question occur immediately following a description of the days of Unleavened Bread, so there could be a relationship. But they nowhere state that the weekly Sabbath must occur during the Feast. John Ritenbaugh states that it must be the Sabbath during the Feast as though that is clearly given in the Scriptures. It becomes for him an inviolate rule, which he cites repeatedly. Yet he offers no proof, other than to state that this is clearly given in Leviticus 23:11,15.

What he fails to take into account—in fact, what he dismisses as irrelevant—is the symbolism involved. The focus in Leviticus 23:9-14 is on the day of the wave offering, not the day which precedes it. The wave offering is to be offered on the first day of the week (a Sunday). Which Sunday? It is apparent that this wave offering pictures the resurrected Jesus Christ, the first of the firstfruits. We know that Jesus was resurrected at sundown at the end of the Sabbath, three days following His crucifixion. Christ was symbolically accepted as the firstfruits offering on the first day of the week, in fulfillment of the wave sheaf. (This symbolism itself indicates that those who count Pentecost from an annual Sabbath are wrong). The Feast not only pictures our need to live a sinless life, it also

pictures Christ, the unleavened bread, living His life in us. Nearly all offerings represent some form of Christ's sacrifice, and the wave sheaf was no exception. The only real connection we can make between the wave sheaf offering and the days of Unleavened Bread is the symbolism of this unleavened first of the firstfruits being offered during the Feast. The seven days also carry with them a reference to the seven thousand year plan of God, and Christ, the unleavened wave sheaf, was offered during that seven thousand years, not after.

Leviticus 23:11,15 are not describing anything which occurs on a Sabbath. They are describing what is to occur on “the day after the Sabbath”. That is the day of the wave sheaf. That is the day we begin the count. That is the day when Christ fulfilled the wave sheaf's symbolism. That is the day which carries a relationship to the seven days of Unleavened Bread.

Using Mr. Ritenbaugh's counting scheme, the wave sheaf would sometimes be offered after the days of Unleavened Bread, not during Unleavened Bread. And this because of a rule he sees in Leviticus, that the Sabbath must be during the Feast. Leviticus does not say it is the Sabbath that must occur during the Feast. Technically, it doesn't say that the wave sheaf day must occur during the Feast either. But because of the symbolism of that day, and the wording of the verses, we more appropriately arrive at this rule, based on Leviticus 23:11,15: **The wave sheaf was to be offered on the day after the Sabbath (on the Sunday) that occurs during the days of Unleavened Bread.** Notice the wording of the rule is the same. But we are here recognizing that the “day after the Sabbath” is a coherent phrase intended to describe the day of the wave sheaf—the offering of which did occur in its ultimate fulfillment on the Sunday during the days of Unleavened Bread. Hence we begin the count, and the offering was made, on the first day of the Feast when the Feast begins on the first day of the week—the day after the weekly Sabbath. It is the day of the wave offering, not the Sabbath day, we are concerned with here.

**Nisan / Abib**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10 entry into the land	11	12	13	14 Passover sacrifice
15 wave sheaf offering	16 no manna	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

There is a passage in the book of Joshua which helps to clarify this further. Whether conclusive or not, it seems to point to a wave sheaf being offered on the first day of the Feast. The Scriptures in question are these:

Joshua 5:10-12 (NKJV) “So the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. (11) And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain on the very same day. (12) Now the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.”

These Scriptures state that the Israelites kept the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The following day they ate of the produce of the land, including “parched grain”. Leviticus 23:14 states that *when they entered the Promised Land* (v. 10) they were forbidden to eat “parched grain” until they had brought the wave offering. Finally, the day after they ate “parched grain” and “the produce of the land”, the Israelites received no manna. They ate of the produce of Canaan from then on. This would indicate, then, that the wave sheaf was offered on the first day of Unleavened Bread (the 15<sup>th</sup>) that year and that the 14<sup>th</sup> was a Sabbath day. This would establish the day after the weekly Sabbath (rather than the day after the annual Sabbath) as the one for basing the Pentecost count. It also makes this a year when the first day of the Feast occurred on a Sunday, since any other day would have delayed the wave sheaf until later in the Feast. And, interestingly enough, it puts an extremely literal fulfillment to the instructions in Leviticus 23:10-11, which says that when they entered the Promised

Land and wanted to harvest its produce, they were to offer a sheaf of the firstfruits on the day after the Sabbath. The 15<sup>th</sup> that year would have been the day after the first Sabbath following their entry into the land on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month (Joshua 4:19).

John Ritenbaugh, therefore, attempts to prove that the wave sheaf was not offered that year—that for whatever reason these verses were recorded, it certainly was not to help us resolve this issue. In doing so, he makes more assumptions, takes Scriptures out of context, and makes provably wrong statements. At the end of the tape he claims he gave seven reasons why the wave sheaf was not offered. It was not clear exactly which points his count included, but here are the seven that I think he meant:

1. **Joshua 5:11,12 should say that they ate of the old grain, not the new produce. That is how the KJV and many older translations render it. Strong’s lexicon claims that the word used (abuwr, #5669), only refers to stored grain.** Other lexicons (eg. Gesenius), however, do not make the claim that stored grain is meant. And most modern translations use a phrase such as “produce of the land” indicating that the concept of “old grain” may have been erroneous. Without further exhaustive research, I find this argument inconclusive. In any case, verse 11 still carries with it the statement that they ate “parched grain” (#7033 or #7039), and Leviticus 23:14 specifically forbade them from eating “parched grain” before the sheaf was waved. The fields around Gilgal would have contained ripening grain. It is doubtful that the remnant of the previous year’s crops would have been left in storage bins outside of the cities when the inhabitants were faced with what looked like an imminent siege. Verse 12 says they ate of that year’s produce, and there is no reason to imagine

they would wait any longer than necessary to do so. They were tired of eating manna (Numbers 11:5-6; Deuteronomy 8:3-4). Leviticus 23:10 said that when they came into the land and wanted to reap its harvest, they were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits to the priest before they ate any of it (v.14). There is no indication that they ate any of the local crop the first five days in the land, and the manna was still being provided. It appears they were waiting for something. Could it have been the offering of the wave sheaf on the appointed day, perhaps the day after the very first Sabbath following their entry into the land?

**2. The Israelites were not able to do any harvesting because of the circumcision.**

Mr. Ritenbaugh feels that there may have been over a million men who required circumcision. In the process of estimating this, he assumes that all the men needed to be circumcised, but fails to recognize that those over 40 (half of the adult men) had already been circumcised before leaving Egypt (Joshua 5:5). No matter. His point is that this would take a long time. Why? Did they need to be circumcised one at a time? I don't think anyone seriously thinks Joshua did it by himself. At one point Mr. Ritenbaugh infers that the Levites had to do it, but that is not required in the Scriptures. Perhaps the 300,000 or so circumcised men over the age of 40 did it. That would be only 3 or 4 per person by his count. The entire nation could have been circumcised in an hour or less if done simultaneously. Consider Genesis 17:23-27 where Abraham circumcised his entire household (consisting of hundreds of men as stated in Genesis 14:14) in one day. At Gilgal, if each household leader took responsibility for his own household, the circumcision could easily have been done in one day, as Genesis 17 proves. Yet for some reason he thinks this would have required several days. By the first day of Unleavened Bread, he feels they would have been too sore to obtain grain from the fields. But who was gathering the manna every day (which was still coming daily as Joshua 5:12 indicates) for the nation to eat prior to the "harvest" in question? What happened to the women and the men over 40? This lack of manpower argument does not make sense.

**3. The day in question was a Holy Day and no harvesting could be done on a Holy Day.**

The Scriptures do not say the Israelites engaged in a grain harvest. It says they ate some (Joshua 5:11). So did Christ's disciples in Mark 2:23-28 on the weekly Sabbath day. Exodus 12:16 speaks of the Feast of Unleavened Bread: "On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat; that only may be prepared by you." Obtaining grain from the fields was permitted on this Holy Day if needed for food. So was gathering the manna, which they clearly did on that morning since the manna did not cease until the following day. It was only the weekly Sabbath on which no manna was provided, not annual Sabbaths, and only the weekly Sabbath which restricted food preparation. And regarding the wave offering itself: the priests regularly worked on the weekly Sabbath (offering twice as much as on other days of the week), and were expected to do even more work on the annual Holy Days (cf. Matthew 12:1-8; Numbers 28-29). Obtaining a small amount of grain on a holy day for a required offering was certainly not prohibited.

**4. The Israelites did not actually keep the Passover.**

Mr. Ritenbaugh makes this claim based on a recognition that the phrase "on the fourteenth day of the month at even" (Joshua 5:10 KJV) refers to the end of the day, not the beginning. Indeed, that phrase is identical in the Hebrew with the one in Exodus 12:18, which defines when the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins. I will not here discuss whether the Passover was kept that year. Suffice it to say the Scripture says they kept the Passover. I find Mr. Ritenbaugh's assertion that the original text of Joshua 5 was changed by Ezra or one of his accomplices to be disconcerting at best. The implication that God would allow this in His Word, and at the same time be forced to leave us clues so we would not be deceived, borders on blasphemy. I have addressed this subject in detail in another paper ("[Resolving the Passover Controversy, Part 2](#)" at [cgsf.org](http://cgsf.org)) and will not go into it further here. But regardless of whether or not Joshua 5:10 is referring to the "Passover" at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>, the real question here is this: what is being referred to in Joshua 5:11 as "the morrow after the

Passover” (KJV) (or whatever was observed at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>)? Mr. Ritenbaugh would like “the morrow” to be the 16<sup>th</sup>, or second day of the Feast. But the Hebrew word mochorath (“morrow” in the KJV), is consistently used elsewhere to refer to the next morning (cf. Genesis 19:34; Judges 6:38; Numbers 11:32; 1 Samuel 5:3; Jonah 4:7). And in Numbers 33:3, the “morrow after the Passover” (KJV) is specifically stated to be “the fifteenth day of the first month”. The Hebrew words then permit, and even require, that “the morrow” on which they ate unleavened cakes and parched grain was the 15<sup>th</sup>.

**5. The Israelites were not permitted to use the grain of the Canaanites for the wave sheaf.**

Leviticus 23 does not place this restriction. It said to offer a sheaf of the firstfruits when they came into the land and reaped its produce. Nevertheless, Mr. Ritenbaugh does cite a few Scriptures to try to prove his idea. Exodus 23:16 (NKJV): “and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.” He uses this to claim the wave sheaf had to be from what they had labored and sown themselves, never mind that Exodus 23:16 is talking about Pentecost and Tabernacles, not Unleavened Bread. Read Leviticus 23 again. Why did they have to sow the grain for the wave sheaf themselves? The law of the wave sheaf placed no such restriction. They were commanded to wave of what they had harvested in their newly acquired land. Mr. Ritenbaugh then cites Leviticus 22:25 (NKJV): “Nor from a foreigner’s hand shall you offer any of these as the bread of your God, because their corruption is in them, and defects are in them. They shall not be accepted on your behalf.” Read this verse in context. The subject is animal sacrifices (not grain offerings), which were not to be anything less than perfect animals. Verse 18 specifically says that foreigners could offer sacrifices, but here in verse 25 it says the priests were not to make exceptions for foreigners—they could not accept any defective animal for sacrifice from either Israelites, or foreigners. “Bread” is a generic term for food, not necessarily grain (cf. Leviticus 3:11 where the same Hebrew word is used to refer to kidneys

and fat). “Their corruption” is referring to the animals, not the foreigners. The NIV says, “and you must not accept such animals from the hand of a foreigner and offer them as the food of your God. They will not be accepted on your behalf, because they are deformed and have defects.” But Mr. Ritenbaugh is trying to use this verse to claim that a foreigner’s grain was inherently profane. It was not. He quotes Leviticus 18:24-30 to show the entire land was defiled, and seems to assume from this that so was everything growing there. The Scriptures say that because of their wicked behavior, God was going to remove the people from the land. But claiming the ground and crops were polluted from this is a stretch. The Canaanites may have done the planting, but it was God who created the seed and gave the increase. Deuteronomy 20:19-20 discusses the trees which were growing in the land. They were not defiled. Deuteronomy 6:11 and Joshua 24:13 say that God gave them the land, and gave them what they did not plant themselves for food. Mr. Ritenbaugh correctly points out that an individual was not to pay vows with money obtained through his own immoral behavior (cf. Deuteronomy 23:18). But Joshua instructed that the gold and spoils of the wicked city of Jericho were holy to God, and placed them into the tabernacle treasury (Joshua 6:19). Although there were times when God commanded destruction of all the animals (cf. 1 Samuel 15:3), normally the spoils of battle taken from the immoral people around them were kept by the Israelites, in accord with God’s instructions (cf. Joshua 8:2, 27; 11:14-15), and freely given to God in offering. Numbers 31 discusses the division of spoils after one battle, and the portion of the animals that were required to be given to God. There are other examples of the Israelites offering sacrifices to God from the spoils of battle, for which they were not condemned. When Abraham returned from his battle with the four kings, he gave God’s portion—a tithe of all directly to Melchizedek. This apparently included the tithe of what had been recovered from the wicked city of Sodom (Genesis 13:13; 14:11,20-24). This concept of the produce and animals of the land being inherently corrupt, and not to be devoted to God, is an invention. There are no Scriptures making this claim, and several examples that show otherwise.

**6. The wave sheaf, and its other offerings, had to be offered in the place God chose. That was initially Shiloh, and they wouldn't establish that for 7 years.**

The Israelites had been offering sacrifices at the tabernacle since the day it was erected at Mount Sinai. There is no indication the daily offerings were ever stopped (except perhaps while they were actually traveling and the altar was not available). God gave instructions on how to move the camp, and the tabernacle and altar, and how to set them up again whenever they made camp (cf. Numbers 2-4). They had been doing this for 39 years. They set up the tabernacle in their midst when they made camp in Gilgal, as instructed by God. The altar was in its place; the daily, weekly and annual offerings continued. It is even likely that Gilgal was where the tabernacle stayed until it was relocated to Shiloh, since the Israelites seemed to return to Gilgal regularly (cf. Joshua 4:19; 9:6; 10:6,15,43; 14:6). Yet we are to believe that they couldn't offer the wave sheaf and other offerings at the tabernacle in Gilgal? Why not?

**7. Because the tabernacle was not set up at Shiloh, no planting could take place, and the people lived off of what grew of itself for seven years (including those tribes east of the Jordan, who were not allowed to plant either), until the first wave sheaf offering could be made from something they had planted.**

Try to find that in the Bible. Only 40,000 of the men who settled east of Jordan went with Joshua (Joshua 4:12-13). Numbers 26 indicates there were perhaps three times that many men of war-age that could have gone, so most stayed with the women and children to protect them, take care of the flocks and herds, and undoubtedly to till the ground. God specifically told them that they were to gradually take over the land, so that the wild creatures would not overwhelm them (Exodus 23:29-30). God did not have them spend seven years fighting battles, only to return to the now desolate and abandoned land to fight the wild beasts. They needed to hold the land, and work it, to keep these animals in check. Undoubtedly they also lived well off the Canaanite's bounty as they conquered new areas (Joshua 5:12; 8:2; 11:14; 22:8). But were they forced to do this for seven years because they hadn't yet moved the

tabernacle and altar to Shiloh? The Canaanites planted the crops, the Israelites reaped the harvest of a land that flowed with milk and honey (Deuteronomy 26:9; Leviticus 23:10; John 4:38; Deuteronomy 6:11; Joshua 24:13). And as with all of the other spoils of war, they presented offerings to God from that harvest, including the first of the firstfruits.

In recent months [*editor's note*: prior to Pentecost, 2001—and again in 2005 and 2008] John Ritenbaugh has presented his views on how to count Pentecost in additional forums. His position, and attempted support, remains basically the same as what was addressed in the Bible Study mentioned above. He still believes that the count to Pentecost must begin with *the Sabbath that occurs during the days of Unleavened Bread*. This is indeed what was carelessly assumed and taught in WCG until 1974, because the Sabbath in question did fall within Unleavened Bread for nearly two decades before that.

But to say that the Sabbath preceding the wave sheaf must always fall within Unleavened Bread is to add to the words of the Bible something that was never intended. What the Scriptures actually say is that the counting for Pentecost must begin, not with the Sabbath day, but rather with the actual cutting of the wave sheaf (Deuteronomy 16:9) which was done in the evening *after* the Sabbath day ended. Our count to Pentecost does not begin with *any* Sabbath day. Instead we count *beginning with* the day of the wave sheaf. Leviticus 23:10ff describes what the Israelites were to do when they entered the land. It is not unreasonable to assume that Joshua and the elders with him did what they were told. Joshua 5:10-12 seems to indicate that indeed they did, and that the wave sheaf was offered that year on the first day of the Feast.

Putting all of the Scriptural evidence together it becomes evident that the day of the wave sheaf always occurs *during* the days of Unleavened Bread. And that is the day from which we count to Pentecost.

Unlike certain doctrinal issues, this one is not strictly a matter of personal opinion. It directly affects what we do and when we assemble together. Hopefully the foregoing information will help to clarify this issue and stem the tide of disunity in the Church of God.

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