

CHAPTER 3

COUNTING THE OMER ONE DAY AT A TIME. WAIT..., ISN'T THAT "JEWISH"?

"You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's...." ~ Moses

God's Statutes require a fair, unbiased review of all sides of a matter before reaching a conclusion or judgment (Deut.1:17). To refuse to hear the evidence from one side of a matter because of race or culture or close-mindedness is a form of self-imposed blindness and a perversion of God's Statutes, as well as a recipe for an erroneous conclusion. *"Any story sounds true until someone tells the other side and sets the record straight (Prov.18:17)TLB."* It's like the man *"who answers a matter before he hears it"* – surely, it will bring him *"folly and shame"* (Prov.18:13). Today's English Version translates this verse, *"Listen before you answer. If you don't, you are being stupid and insulting (Prov.18:13) TEV."*

Surely, we would all admit, **only God's Holy Scriptures can be relied upon to set doctrine. Therefore, scriptural evidence will be the primary focus of this book.** But there are also many historical accounts that also clarify the date Pentecost was kept, both in Old Testament times and at the time of that first famous Pentecost – recorded in Acts 2 and 3! These historical and archaeological sources can NEVER replace Scripture, but they can reinforce it and sometimes even help clarify it! Since Jesus (Yeshua our Messiah) was Jewish, as were most of His early disciples – the best sources of historical evidences will, of course, be Jewish in nature. I have long marveled at how so many have come to give preference to the works of scholars (who seemingly have a pagan bias) who generally have never spoken the language in which the Scriptures were written, over the authentic history or commentary of the Hebrew people, who historically received and preserved the Scriptures, kept the Sabbath and Holy Days and spoke the language of the Scriptures. The same could be said for the Greek-speaking Jews – beginning in the Maccabean era into the early A.D. period – whose contribution to theological history is invaluable. Such a biased

approach seems like a skewed and illogical way of looking at history or pursuing truth.

Having said this, there are many commentators whose historical works detail the way Pentecost was counted in the days prior to, during, and after Jesus Christ walked this earth in the flesh. Some, who base their beliefs upon the opinions of Bible Dictionaries and commentators, could provide a list of quotes of those who opine that Pentecost falls on Sivan 6, which ever day of the week that may be. Those who believe otherwise could argue by quoting from different commentators who believe Pentecost should always be on a Sunday. A few of these commentators may even be Jewish authors, or base their beliefs on what they think the Sadducees believed, or upon Pharisaic teachings, or upon something else. Back and forth they go, with quote and counter quote. I've seen it, and perhaps you have too! But **how many will use a factual basis FROM WITHIN THE HISTORICAL TIME of the subject matter for their commentary? How many will use the records of contemporary historians of the region, as compared to those who seem merely to opine long after the fact?**

Would you prefer to get your history about ancient China from the modern Bolivians? Would you think the best historical rendering of General George Washington, the first President of the United States, would be found by reviewing the works of a current author from Germany whose works and opinions are derived centuries later? Or do you think that, perhaps, the best and most complete portrait of the life, sayings and habits of George Washington might come by researching what the early American Fathers, who lived in same era and in close proximity to George Washington, recorded when they wrote? One may also desire to augment that history with a little of the European point of view, as long as it was still from the same era.

Yet, amazingly, many choose their primary source of history about the Hebrew people and their religion from outside sources that wrote many centuries *after* the events they attempted to cover. Further, many who call themselves teachers try to explain away the Hebraic historical and religious **accounts of the day** with which they disagree (or don't understand) by use of various philosophers a thousand or two thousand years removed! Amazing! No wonder there is so much confusion!

THE IMPORTANCE OF NUMBERING PENTECOST ONE DAY AT A TIME

Many historians have written about some of the political and religious forces that brought about various changes in the way the new Pentecost, of the Gentile Roman-Christian Church, eventually came to be counted. These changes were not limited to the date from which the numbering was to originate, but this numbering also became a system of merely counting 1,2,3,4... to determine which is day 50. Whereas the method of counting according to God's Word, which is yet practiced by many Messianic and orthodox Jews today, teaches us to "RE-number," i.e., to recall each day between the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. God's way is for us to remember and mentally recount Israel's journey out of Egypt to Sinai and the full historical fulfillment of God's Feast of Firstfruits – and then to also reflect on the meaning each of these days has for us today in our journey out of sin and toward God!

God's instruction is to "RE-count," not just "to count." The meaning of the Hebrew word "*sapar*" (incompletely translated in English by some translators merely as "count" in Lev.23:15 and Deut.16:9) bears out God's intention to teach Israel to enumerate each day, thus remembering each day's journey out of Egypt and away from its unjust and ungodly laws toward the Holy Presence of God and the receiving of His Holy Laws. The sages of Israel understood it was God's Laws that made Israel's freedom from bondage complete. The full meaning of the word "*sapar*" means to strike each day off, one by one; it also means *to recall, to RE-count or give an account*. This "re-counting" was to be done in **anticipation** of the complete fulfillment of Pentecost, when the firstfruits of God's children are ripe and when ALL mankind will have God's Laws written on their hearts by His Holy Spirit (Ezek.36:26-27 & Jer.31:33).

The Hebrew word translated "count" or "number" is very similar to the word that means "*to story*." Many Jews still number, story and re-count each day from the annual Sabbath of Unleavened Bread to Pentecost, in anticipation of and meditation on the complete fulfillment of the day of Pentecost. Unfortunately, this precious truth has been largely lost, because of the Babylonian-rooted morphogenesis of God's Spring Holy Days by a new spurious counterfeit religion that

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~Don E. Haney

proclaims Christ's name, but does not practice or teach what Christ taught and lived (Matt.24:5)!

God prophetically put the Jews (especially until the coming of the Messiah) in a leading position of preserving and teaching God's Laws. Notice:

Gen 49:10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

Ps 108:8 Gilead is Mine; Manasseh is Mine; Ephraim also is the helmet for My head; Judah is My lawgiver.

Christ's words to the Samaritan woman in John 4:9 also seem exceptionally relevant at this juncture. Remember, the Samaritans were Babylonian peoples (2 King 17:24).

*John 4:22 You worship what you do not know; **we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews** .*

23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Even though the masses of Judah have not yet recognized Jesus Christ, Christ's use of the word "we" (meaning fellow Jews – verse 22) indicates that the Jews have some knowledge regarding God and His laws which regulate how man is to worship God – knowledge that the Babylonians and other Gentiles do not have. Can we accept this truth? Should we then seek to become "Jewish converts" or just blindly "follow the Jews?" **Of course not!** While the Messianic movement seems to be growing, there are many Jews who are averse to Jesus Christ, and reject Him at this time! There are many traditions that some Jews have adopted, that can be unnecessarily burdensome – and worse – some may even be contrary to Scripture. There is nothing inherently more righteous about being Jewish! Jesus said that it is those who DO THE WORKS OF ABRAHAM who are the true children of Abraham (John 8:39). Paul emphasized obedience to God over being a Jew outwardly (Rom.2:29).

It's not a matter of blindly following the Jews (who themselves are not fully in agreement among themselves) as we should not blindly follow ANY man or group. **We should follow God and His Word.** Also, if our eyes are open, we may be able to learn a few things from those whom God said knew about the worshiping of God and through whom God chose to preserve for us His guiding oracles. As Paul said, **they do have a significant advantage in that way!**

Rom 3:1 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?

2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God .

Pentecost, or the Feast of Firstfruits, was one of the three pilgrim Feasts of the LORD (Ex.34:22-23, Deut.16:16) that were Holy Feasts which often required travel to be in the place where God placed His name. Just as Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, which was given on Pentecost (Luke 24:49), so it is clear from the context of Acts 2 that there were also many other devout Jews (and others) who had come long distances from all around the Roman provinces to be in Jerusalem for the pilgrim Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-5). There was no question or dispute among them as to when that day came. They were all in Jerusalem and ready on that day! There is no Scriptural indication that the disciples and apostles kept a different day than the Jews. On the contrary, they “were all in one accord in one place... (Acts 2:1).” In fact, the three thousand people baptized on that first New Testament Feast of Firstfruits were all Hebrews – as the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to the Gentiles!

In the latter part of the second Temple period, there was strong disagreement between the Sadducees and the Pharisees as to how to count Pentecost. In an apparent effort to bolster their political clout against that of the Rabbis (who had with them the great masses and majority of the people), the Sadducees teamed up with the Babylonian Samaritans in their shared belief and desire that Pentecost must always fall on a Sunday. The Pharisees, and the great majority of Jews on the other hand, believed Pentecost should continue to be counted in what Dr. James Hastings (*Dictionary of the Bible, James Hastings, 1906 ed., Vol IV*) and many other scholars have referred to as “*the traditional way,*” which is **from the morrow after the first Sabbath [Holy Day] of the Feast of Unleavened Bread**, whichever day of the week it may fall upon.

Indeed, for many, the whole issue seems to come down to how Pentecost was counted in Acts 2!

**WCG HARMONIZES ITS PENTECOST DATE WITH
MAINSTREAM CHRISTIANITY, SETTING A
PATTERN FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW:**

I do not advocate either extreme of being a disciple of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, nor of denigrating him. I advocate being a disciple of Jesus Christ, and to leave the role of judge to God – the only true Judge. Nor do I advocate making any disparaging remarks about the Worldwide Church of God – past or present. Many of their past teachings do not even represent their current beliefs. Our mention of Mr. Armstrong, and the Worldwide Church of God [WCG] which he founded, is only to help people by way of example through exposing certain misleading teachings and beliefs which WCG once espoused. This is felt necessary because these teachings are still being widely used as the basis of reasoning and doctrine for many thousands of people in various churches. WCG teachings on Pentecost have affected hundreds of thousands of people who have filtered in and out of, or have been influenced by, their organization.

After much debate as to whether the Worldwide Church of God WCG should continue to observe Pentecost on a Monday or change its reckoning to fix the date so as to always fall on a Sunday, Mr. Armstrong commissioned a doctrinal team to study into the matter and consult with him for “final approval” of any conclusions. The results of the “*Study Paper*” were completed and dated April 22, 1974, and were presented to the ministry under a cover letter from Mr. Armstrong himself.

My personal knowledge of the WCG, and several of its offshoots, as well as with Ambassador College, goes back to the mid 1970’s. It has been my understanding and observation from that experience, based upon what I heard from the pulpit, from reading the church’s literature, and from studying the Pentecost Study Material package, that the church’s PRIMARY FOCUS was the debate between a Sunday or Monday reckoning – as they focused heavily upon the meaning of the word translated “from” to determine if their counting should be inclusive or

exclusive; i.e., should the count *include* the Sunday they counted from or *exclude* it.

Notice what Mr. Armstrong wrote on the cover page of the 1974 Pentecost Study Material:

The crux of the matter is in the statement, also page 1, ‘...But when it [the Hebrew “mi” or “Min”] is translated as ‘from’ [instead of on] and is used in conjunction with the element of time, it is always used inclusively, and never exclusively.

He goes on to explain what he feels is the “crux of the matter” as he opines on the word translated “from” instead of “beginning on,” as being misleading as to determining if Pentecost should fall on a Sunday or Monday.

A preconceived focus upon the Sunday or Monday interpretations, and an environment which resulted in fear to disagree with the “apostle” (or an evangelist) apparently resulted in not allowing proper consideration and study of the “Jewish” reckoning or of the Hebrew historical counting of Pentecost. This seems to be borne out by the many statements and conclusions that were made in the doctrinal study paper, (and recorded in later literature and sermons) - statements that are easily disproved by numerous historical sources.

For example: There were oft-repeated **misrepresentations** that the traditional Jewish way of counting Pentecost always made the Feast fall on a fixed date, thus disqualifying it from serious consideration because it did not require “counting” as the Scriptures require. Through believed by many churches, these beliefs, and such statements, are simply **NOT TRUE!** They clearly express individual or organizational ignorance on the subject matter. Yet, this belief system was clearly expressed in this influential study paper. Notice what the *Pentecost Study Material* said on page 52:

We know those who count Pentecost from the 15th of Nisan are wrong. They always keep Pentecost on a fixed day, the 6th of Sivan. Had God wanted us to observe Pentecost on the fixed date, He would have plainly told us so. All of the other annual Sabbaths are plainly, clearly commanded to be observed annually on a set day of the sacred calendar.

Yet, a student of history can easily confirm the statement above as being false by reading any number of different historical sources. Notice what the

Talmud says regarding if the “traditional” counting of Pentecost from the morrow after the annual Sabbath always fell on Sivan 6, and therefore did not require a count:

Rabbi Shemaiah wrote:

Pentecost is sometimes on the fifth of the [third] month, sometimes on the sixth, and sometimes on the seventh. For instance, if both of them are full, it is on the fifth; if both of them are defective., it is on the seventh; if one is full and the other defective, it is on the sixth” (*Talmud – Mas. Rosh HaShana 6b:12-16*).

More on this and other references from the Mishna and Talmud later, but suffice to say, that **Rabbi Shemaiah was explaining that when the first two months of the year are “full” (meaning 30-day months), then Pentecost would fall on Sivan 5 (the 5th day of the third Hebrew month called Sivan). If one of the preceding months was full (30 days) and one “defective” (meaning a 29-day month), then Pentecost would fall on Sivan 6. When both preceding months were “defective” (29-day months), Pentecost would fall on Sivan 7.**

Considering these variations of the Hebrew calendar, how then would the Hebrew people be able to know when to keep Pentecost? Answer: **THEY NEEDED TO COUNT!** Have you been misled to believe fabricated mistruths and “half-truths”? Many have simply believed what they have been told without proving it for themselves, like God’s Word tells us to (1 Thes 5:21 KJV). Truth can be lost to blind belief or assumptions leading to ignorance. This is one way the blind can think they see (Rev 3:17). But Jesus said, “...*the truth shall make you free* (John 8:32).” Let’s be FREE with eyes opened wide.

This *Pentecost Study Material* paper seems to have been so focused on either a “Monday” or “Sunday” Pentecost, based upon a narrow focus of “inclusive” or “exclusive” counting, that they could not see any other possibilities - while most of their congregants *assumed* the premises of their leader’s teachings were correct.

Sadly, many of God’s people have simply never been exposed to the truth of Pentecost – as Satan had orchestrated it being hidden from them (Rev 12:9, 2 Tim 2:26). But once one sees, they do not want to remain blinded. Nor do they want to be blind-sided again. Many courageous people who

have had the truth hidden from them are now beginning to see and thereby grow in a wide array of Biblical truth and knowledge – just like Daniel prophesied they would (Dan 12:4, 9-10). This blessing of increased growth in understanding is not only for members of the Church of God. There are also increasing numbers of orthodox Jews who keep God's Laws whose eyes are now being opened to accept Christ as the Messiah through seeing how Yeshua and His disciples kept God's Feasts. The past is not a blue print for the future. God will open all eyes in His time (Zech 8:23, Isa 11:9). Halleluiah!

It seems likely that in order to explain away the otherwise contradictory historical evidence of Josephus' accounts of Pentecost being counted from the morrow after the Sabbath of the first Day of Unleavened Bread – (as opposed to the WCG's soon-to-be newly fixed Sunday reckoning) – the authors of the *Pentecost Study Material* opined that the Pharisees must have come into power *later*, and then fixed the date of Pentecost to always fall on Sivan 6, sometime AFTER the time of Acts 2, but during Josephus' lifetime. Notice this and other frank admissions and statements from the PENTECOST STUDY PAPER commissioned by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, dated April 22, 1974, on page 76 where they said:

...In Josephus' time, the offering of the first sheaves was fixed on the sixteenth day of Nisan (Ency of Religious Knowledge, 1920 ec., Vol. VIII).

They then conclude with an assumption:

Josephus lived from 37 A.D. to about the end of the century. This shows that the fixed Pentecost (6th of Sivan) was 'fixed' after 37 or 38 A.D. – at least several years after 31 A.D.!

But with a simple review of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* or any number of other sources, one easily can see that Pentecost was NOT fixed on Sivan 6 until Hillel II revealed the secrets of the calendar, and therewith fixed the calendar according to the traditional rules and thereby fixed the date of Pentecost **sometime after A.D. 344!** The Pentecost of the Jews and Pharisees DID need to be counted during the days of the apostles, and it DID NOT FALL UPON A FIXED DATE DURING THE LIFETIME OF JOSEPHUS (or the apostles) – or even for several generations following! The easily proven PLAIN TRUTH is that the Hebrew reckoning of Pentecost by the vast majority of Jews, Rabbis and Pharisees in the days of

Jesus and the apostles, fell neither on a fixed day of the week NOR on a fixed day of the month! It could fall on Sivan 5, 6, or 7 – and on various days of the week. Further, as has already been shown, the counting of this Feast was much more than merely counting to arrive at a date – it was a recounting and recalling in anticipation. It became known as, “Counting the Omer,” as each day was numbered, storied and a blessing asked, ‘til day 50 was reached. **When this is understood, a “counting” IS required, whether one already knows the day of the month day 50 will fall upon or not!**

How did Pentecost (LONG AFTER ACTS 2 – LONG AFTER THE APOSTLES KEPT IT WITH THE JEWS) come to consistently fall on the fixed date of Sivan 6 – sometime after A.D. 344? It began when Hillel II revealed the secret rules of reckoning of the solar and lunar cycles to fix the lengths of the months, and the number of months per year. He did this in an effort to enable the scattered and persecuted Jews to continue to keep God’s Holy days throughout the world – even in the absence of the heavily persecuted ruling Sanhedrin.

Notice the words of Arthur Spier, on page 2 of his book, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, published by Behrman House, Inc:

In the fourth century, however, when oppression and persecution threatened the continued existence of the Sanhedrin, the patriarch Hillel II took an extraordinary step to preserve the unity of Israel. In order to prevent the Jews scattered all over the surface of the earth from celebrating their New Moons, festivals and holidays at different times, he made public the system of calendar calculation which up to then had been a closely guarded secret.” He continues: “In accordance with this system, Hillel II formally sanctified all months in advance, and intercalated all future leap years until such time as a new, recognized Sanhedrin would be established in Israel.

In the WCG doctrinally-influential Pentecost Study Material (quoted from above) the statement which proclaimed that Pentecost was fixed on Sivan 6 during Josephus’s lifetime – is FALSE! Through many organizations that keep God’s Feasts believe the above statement to be true, it is not. It is amazing, that the setting of doctrine was based in such large part on erroneous, misguided statements which are so easy to disprove. There have been other many people and organizations that have also been misguided. But we can all learn through our errors and overcome with God’s help.

Much of what the WCG (and most of its many “offshoots”) came to believe (concerning how to number Pentecost) appears to this author to have been based on a faulty and/or biased understanding of history.

This is not intended to be a judgment of anyone’s motives, of their abilities or of their conversion. It is simply an observation. Perhaps Mr. Armstrong felt he was too busy to do all the needed research himself. Either way, much of the once new WCG position on Pentecost, as taught (and as spelled out in its 1974 church study paper by the doctrinal team Mr. Armstrong commissioned and oversaw), was in error or was misleading. Yet, it has been the “standard” for many tens of thousands of people (in and out of that organization) ever since. Notice what was stated on page 76 of the study paper:

Since the Sadducees were in control of the Temple ritual in 31 A.D., Pentecost must have been observed on a Sunday, and not on the sixth of Sivan as would have been the case had the Pharisees been in control. Apparently, all of the Jews acquiesced to the Sadducees’ reckoning and kept the same day. Whoever controlled the Temple, its rituals and ceremonies, would have controlled the offering of the wave sheaf – thereby setting the date for Pentecost!

All in the Church of God agree that the New Testament apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ would not have been keeping Pentecost on the wrong day. Neither would they have been assembled on the same day as the Jews at the Temple – unless the day they were all keeping in 31 A.D. was the correct day.

Their position clearly seems to have been predicated upon the assumption that the Sadducees were in control of Temple in the days of the apostles – and that the Sadducees therefore controlled all calendar matters, including the method of establishing the date Pentecost was kept. Thus, many brethren in the Church of God, as well as those in other churches, have been led to believe – erroneously – that the method of counting Pentecost used by most churches today is actually based upon the Sadducean calendar and counting system, as opposed to that of the Pharisees. But herein also, ***the truth has been circumvented!*** Many people have unknowingly had TRUTH replaced with the teachings of men they trusted because they considered them to be in “high places.”

Once Mr. Armstrong and the doctrinal team became convinced that the Sadducees were in charge of the Temple in Jesus’ time, they used this

belief as significant “evidence” for their method of counting Pentecost. What is ironic, regardless of claims made, is that those who keep a Sunday Pentecost because they believe it to be the Sadducean method - and because they believe the Sadducees controlled Temple in Jesus’ days - are not actually keeping a Sadducean Pentecost whenever Passover falls on a Friday like it does from time to time. Many believed they were following the Sadducean calendar, but they were not. New evidence proves the Sadducean calendar – contrary to the Hebrew calendar – was **strictly solar** and based upon 360-day years with four “hanging” days. (More on that subject later.)

Many people have been taught they are counting Pentecost the way the Sadducees did, because they were told that the Pharisees “fixed” the date. However, just the opposite is true, as the **Sadducees actually FIXED the date for Pentecost, with the use of their solar calendar, to always fall on a Sunday – and always the one on the 15th of Sivan.** The Sadducees, however, don’t seem to have ever been able to carry out their calendar or Pentecost beliefs at the Temple. Both old and **NEW historical evidence suggest that they had to leave Temple service and separate into various sects around the Dead Sea, or elsewhere, in order to practice their diverging beliefs.**

It would waste too much time within this book to analyze ALL the flaws contained within the whole of the WCG Pentecost Study Material paper quoted above, or to analyze the many erroneous articles of other churches or groups on the subject. But a little time is deemed appropriate since many have “SET THEIR MINDS” on doctrine, which is founded upon the erroneous conclusions of this and other *Study Papers*. For some, it will take more than the PLAIN TRUTH to change their minds, as some people can get their minds “seared” closed in error (1 Tim.4:2). But thanks be to God, for He is a healer of all things, including the mind.

It is therefore hoped that this book will not be considered the “final word” on this subject. Rather, it is hoped that it will inspire each reader to consider the real history on the matter, the NEW archaeological evidence, and especially that it will inspire the readers into an in-depth exegetical study of God’s Word for themselves.

With courage from God, we can all grow and follow God’s Words – over the words of men. It therefore is also hoped that most people will be

able to honestly consider how their minds may have been restricted and trained to think, so that God's Truth can teach and free them.

For those who really want to see, let's look, not merely at someone's commentary after the fact, but at some truly interesting **HISTORY** – from historians of the day!