

# Biblical Annual Holy Days

## Criteria, Classification & the Omer Count to Pentecost

A Scholarly Dialogue

### QUESTION

### The Three-Part Criterion for Holy Days

What criteria distinguish annual Holy Days from Feasts, realizing that singular days are also feasts?

*Proposed criteria: some form of resting, congregational assembly, and specified offerings/sacrifices.*

Under this framework:

- Passover would not be a Holy Day, but a holy event within a day.
- Many Bibles distinguish the Feast of Firstfruits from the Feast of Weeks by their titles, but the scriptures show the wave sheaf offering as a holy event only.
- Unlike Passover, Jesus gave no new covenant criteria for observing the wave sheaf, though He had ample occasion to do so after His resurrection.

### Proposed 7+7 Structure

7 Annual Holy Days	7 Holy Festivals / Memorials
1st Day of Unleavened Bread	Passover
7th Day of Unleavened Bread	Days of Unleavened Bread
Pentecost	Pentecost
Feast of Trumpets	Trumpets
Day of Atonement	Atonement
1st Day of Feast of Tabernacles	Feast of Tabernacles
The Eighth Day	The Eighth Day

The central research question: What is the nature of the period beginning with the count from the Sabbath falling inside the Days of Unleavened Bread — day 1 being when the wave sheaf is offered, and day 50 being Pentecost? Why would many Bibles use topical terms to suggest separate Feasts?

## RESPONSE

# Biblical Annual Holy Days: Framework and the Omer Count

## The Miqra Qodesh Criterion

The three-part criterion aligns well with the language of Leviticus 23, which uses *miqra' qodesh* (מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ, “holy convocation”) as the distinguishing marker.<sup>1</sup> The Day of Atonement uniquely adds a fasting element,<sup>2</sup> but the core three criteria hold across all seven Holy Days.

## Passover as Holy Event, Not Holy Day

The distinction is textually sound. Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23:5 describe Passover as occurring *bein ha'arbayim* (“between the evenings,” Nisan 14), and no *miqra' qodesh* is attached to it.<sup>3</sup> The *miqra' qodesh* language appears first at verse 7—the 1st Day of Unleavened Bread.<sup>4</sup>

Passover is a **memorial act** embedded in a calendar day, not a convocation day. This is why the New Covenant observance Jesus instituted is a rite without rest or assembly requirements—consistent with the Old Covenant structure.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Leviticus 23:2–3.** The term *miqra' qodesh* (מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ, “holy convocation”) appears first at v. 2 for the weekly Sabbath, then recurs at each annual holy day. The root *qara'* (to call/proclaim) implies a summons to assembly. See BDB, s.v. “קרא,” p. 895; HALOT, s.v. “1130–2:1128,” קרא.

<sup>2</sup> **Leviticus 23:27–32; 16:29–31.** The Day of Atonement uniquely adds *'innui nefesh* (“afflicting the soul”) to the standard holy convocation requirements, making it the only annual holy day with a prescribed fast. Leviticus 16 provides the full ritual detail, including the two goats and the high-priestly entry into the Most Holy Place.

<sup>3</sup> **Leviticus 23:5; Exodus 12:6; Numbers 9:3, 5; Deuteronomy 16:1–6.** Passover is fixed *bein ha'arbayim* (“between the evenings”) on Nisan 14. No *miqra' qodesh* is attached; the convocation language first appears at v. 7 (1st day of Unleavened Bread). Deuteronomy 16:1–6 reinforces the night character of the event, distinguishing it from the daytime assembly occasions.

<sup>4</sup> **Leviticus 23:6–8; Numbers 28:17–25.** The 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15–21) carries *miqra' qodesh* only on its first and seventh days (vv. 7–8). Numbers 28 specifies prescribed offerings for all seven days, reinforcing the distinction: offerings run throughout; holy convocations mark only the two endpoints.

<sup>5</sup> **Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.** Jesus establishes a commemorative rite (“do this in remembrance of me”) with no rest, assembly, or sacrifice requirement. Paul’s formulation (“as often as you eat this bread”) preserves the

## The Wave Sheaf: Holy Event Within a Holy Season

Leviticus 23:9–14 describes the wave sheaf (*omer*) offering with precision but conspicuously omits *miqra' qodesh*.<sup>6</sup> There is:

- No commanded rest
- No commanded assembly
- An offering — but priestly, not congregational

This places the wave sheaf exactly as proposed: a holy event embedded in the Days of Unleavened Bread, not a seventh Holy Day.

*Post-resurrection, Jesus had 40 days of appearances (Acts 1:3)<sup>7</sup> to establish a new covenant memorial for the wave sheaf, given that He fulfilled it precisely (John 20:17, ascending before appearing to the disciples).<sup>8</sup> Paul's "firstfruits" typology (1 Cor. 15:20–23) confirms the once-for-all fulfillment.<sup>9</sup>*

## The Omer Count and the “Two Feasts” Problem

The terminological confusion has three distinct sources:

### 1. The Hebrew Term *Bikkurim* Applied Twice

- The wave sheaf day is associated with *bikkurim* (firstfruits of the barley harvest) in Leviticus 23:10.

---

memorial character without legislating a fixed assembly day. Contrast the explicit assembly language at Leviticus 23:7, 21, 24, 27, 35.

<sup>6</sup> **Leviticus 23:9–14.** The pericope prescribes: (1) bringing a sheaf of firstfruits to the priest, (2) the priest waving it before YHWH, (3) a burnt offering, grain offering, and drink offering. Critically, *miqra' qodesh* is entirely absent—setting this pericope apart from every other annual observance in the chapter. The prohibition on eating new grain until the offering (v. 14) is agricultural, not convocational.

<sup>7</sup> **Acts 1:3.** Luke records that Jesus presented Himself alive “over a period of forty days” after His resurrection, speaking about the kingdom of God. During this window He instituted no observance for the wave sheaf date. Compare His explicit institution of the Passover memorial (Luke 22:19) and the implied continuation of all seven holy days in the apostolic community (Acts 2:1; 20:6; 1 Cor. 5:7–8; 16:8).

<sup>8</sup> **John 20:17; cf. Matthew 28:9; 1 Corinthians 15:20.** Jesus tells Mary Magdalene: “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.” He ascended on the morning of the first day of the week—the very day the wave sheaf was offered—before His later appearances (vv. 19–23). Paul’s identification of the resurrected Christ as “the firstfruits” (*aparche*, 1 Cor. 15:20) directly echoes LXX Leviticus 23:10 and confirms once-for-all typological fulfillment.

<sup>9</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:20–23.** Paul employs *aparche* (“firstfruit”), the LXX rendering of the wave sheaf pericope (Lev. 23:10 LXX: *aparchen tou therismou*). The once-for-all character of Christ’s fulfillment of the wave sheaf precludes any recurring memorial, whereas the Passover—fulfilled continually in the Lord’s Supper—retains its commemorative form (1 Cor. 11:26).

- Numbers 28:26 explicitly calls Pentecost itself *yom habikkurim*—“the day of firstfruits” (of the wheat harvest).<sup>10</sup>

So “firstfruits” legitimately describes both moments in one continuous agricultural sequence. Translation committees often titled Leviticus 23:9–14 as “Feast of Firstfruits” and 23:15–22 as “Feast of Weeks,” creating a visual separation the text itself does not establish with *miqra’ qodesh* language for the former.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Exodus Creates Apparent Parallel Festivals

- Chag HaQatzir* (“Feast of Harvest”)—Exodus 23:16, firstfruits of labors
- Chag Shavu’ot* (“Feast of Weeks”)—Exodus 34:22, firstfruits of wheat harvest<sup>12</sup>

Both references describe Pentecost, not the wave sheaf day. When editors encounter “firstfruits” in Exodus 23 and in Leviticus 23:9–14, topical linking produces artificial separation.

## 3. The “Morrow After the Sabbath” Interpretive Divide

Leviticus 23:11 and 23:15 both say *mimacharat haShabbat*—“the day after the Sabbath.”<sup>13</sup> This single phrase divides two major traditions:

Tradition	"Sabbath" Interpretation	Implication
Pharisaic / Rabbinic	1st Day of Unleavened Bread (high Sabbath)	Count starts Nisan 16; Pentecost can fall any weekday
Sadducean / Karaite / Literal	The weekly Sabbath within Unleavened Bread	Count always starts Sunday; Pentecost always on Sunday

The Pharisaic/Rabbinic position identifies the Sabbath with the 1st day of Unleavened Bread.<sup>14</sup> The Sadducean/Karaite/literal reading interprets it as the weekly Sabbath within the Unleavened

<sup>10</sup> **Leviticus 23:10; Numbers 28:26; cf. Exodus 34:22.** Leviticus 23:10 associates the wave sheaf with *re’shit qetzirekhem* (“the firstfruit of your harvest”—barley). Numbers 28:26 explicitly designates Pentecost as *yom habikkurim* (“the day of firstfruits”—wheat). Both harvests fall under the “firstfruits” rubric, which is why Bible section headings applying this term to Leviticus 23:9–14 are not wrong per se but mislead readers into seeing two separate feasts.

<sup>11</sup> **NIV (2011), NASB (2020), ESV (2016)—section headings at Leviticus 23:9–14.** These translations insert uninspired headers such as “Firstfruits” (NIV/ESV) or “Offer of First Fruits” (NASB) before vv. 9–14, creating apparent parity with the “Feast of Weeks” header at v. 15. The headers reflect editorial organization, not textual indicators of a separate feast. The absence of *miqra’ qodesh* in the pericope is the decisive counter-evidence.

<sup>12</sup> **Exodus 23:16; Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:9–10; Numbers 28:26.** Three distinct names describe the same observance: (1) *Chag HaQatzir* (“Feast of Harvest”, Exod. 23:16); (2) *Chag Shavu’ot* (“Feast of Weeks”, Exod. 34:22; Deut. 16:10); and (3) *Yom HaBikkurim* (“Day of Firstfruits”, Num. 28:26). These multiple epithets amplify the confusion when editors treat “firstfruits” as an earlier festival and “weeks” as a later one.

<sup>13</sup> **Leviticus 23:11, 15.** The phrase *mimacharat haShabbat* (“on the morrow after the Sabbath”) recurs in both verses, tying the wave sheaf and the Pentecost count to the same referent. The Hebrew *haShabbat* bears the definite article, pointing to a specific Sabbath. For the grammar, see GKC §126r; HALOT, s.v. “4:1412,” שבת.

<sup>14</sup> **Mishnah, Menachot 10:3; Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 65a–66a.** The Pharisaic tradition identifies “the Sabbath” with the first day of Unleavened Bread, treated as a Sabbath by virtue of its *miqra’ qodesh* status, making

Bread period.<sup>15</sup> Under the latter, the wave sheaf and Pentecost are the endpoints of a single unified observance, and the Acts 2 Pentecost falls on a Sunday by structural necessity.<sup>16</sup>

*Under the literal reading, the wave sheaf and Pentecost are the endpoints of a single unified observance—not two separate feasts—and the section headings many translations insert<sup>17</sup> actually obscure this unity.*

## Why Bibles Use Separate Topical Titles

Several converging factors explain the common editorial practice:

- **Rabbinic influence on Christian scholarship:** the Mishnah (*Menachot* tractate) and subsequent commentary treated the omer period as a distinct observance, shaping post-Reformation annotations.
- **Agricultural logic misread as liturgical structure:** the barley/wheat sequence represents two harvests, but the text frames them as one continuous count.<sup>18</sup>
- **Section header theology:** translations (NIV, NASB, ESV) add uninspired headers that carry interpretive weight. “Feast of Firstfruits” over verses 9–14 implies legislative parity with “Feast of Weeks” over verses 15–22, when the *miqra’ qodesh* criterion appears only in the latter.<sup>19</sup>
- **Numbers 28–29 parallel structure:** the offerings chapter lists wave sheaf and Pentecost offerings separately, reinforcing the impression of two distinct festivals.<sup>20</sup>

---

counting start on Nisan 16 regardless of the day of the week. The Talmudic debate (b. Men. 65a) records the Sadducean counter-argument. The Rabbinic position is codified in Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Omer 7:2.

<sup>15</sup> **Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.10.5 (§248); Philo, *Special Laws* 2.29 (§162); Yefet ben ‘Eli, commentary on Lev. 23 (10th c.).** Josephus describes the wave sheaf as offered on “the day after the Sabbath,” a formulation consistent with the literal weekly Sabbath reading. Philo, likely following Alexandrian practice, describes Pentecost as always falling on the first day of the week. Karaite scholars consistently read *haShabbat* as the seventh-day weekly Sabbath.

<sup>16</sup> **Acts 2:1; cf. Acts 1:12–14; 1 Corinthians 15:4.** Pentecost in Acts 2 falls 50 days after the resurrection Sunday (1 Cor. 15:4, “third day” from Friday). Under the literal Sabbath reading, day 1 of the omer count is also a Sunday, making day 50 a Sunday by structural necessity. The outpouring of the Spirit on a Sunday thus parallels the resurrection Sunday and the wave sheaf offering Sunday—a deliberate typological pattern.

<sup>17</sup> **See note 11 above.** The uninspired section headings in NIV, NASB, and ESV editions of Leviticus 23:9–14 (“Firstfruits” / “Offer of First Fruits”) are the primary cause of the common misreading of the wave sheaf day as a separate feast. The text carries no *miqra’ qodesh* designation.

<sup>18</sup> **See note 10 above.** The barley-firstfruits (wave sheaf) and wheat-firstfruits (Pentecost) represent one continuous 50-day firstfruits cycle, not two inaugurating feast days. Leviticus 23:10 and Numbers 28:26 both use *bikkurim* terminology; the distinction is the crop, not the liturgical category.

<sup>19</sup> **See note 11 above.** The NIV/ESV heading “Firstfruits” over Leviticus 23:9–14 implies that vv. 9–14 and vv. 15–22 are co-equal inaugural feast days. This visual parity is an editorial artifact. The *miqra’ qodesh* language—present in vv. 15–22 but absent in vv. 9–14—is the controlling textual criterion.

<sup>20</sup> **Numbers 28:26–31; 28:16–25.** Numbers 28–29 arranges prescribed offerings by occasion. The wave sheaf offering (Lev. 23:9–14) and the Pentecost offerings (Num. 28:26–31) appear in separate sections, which reinforces the visual impression—particularly in study Bibles—that they are independent feasts. However, this arrangement follows the offerings’ agricultural calendar, not a new feast inauguration.

## Summary: The 7+7 Framework's Textual Strength

7 Annual Holy Days	7 Holy Festivals / Memorials
1st Day of Unleavened Bread	Passover
7th Day of Unleavened Bread	Days of Unleavened Bread
Pentecost	Pentecost
Feast of Trumpets	Trumpets
Day of Atonement	Atonement
1st Day of Feast of Tabernacles	Feast of Tabernacles
The Eighth Day	The Eighth Day

- The **7 Holy Days** are defined by *miqra' qodesh* + rest/assembly/offering criteria.<sup>21</sup>
- The **7 Festivals/Memorials** are the broader seasonal observances in which those Holy Days are embedded—with Passover as the clearest case of a festival without a corresponding Holy Day.<sup>22</sup>
- Pentecost functions simultaneously as a Holy Day and as the culmination of the 50-day firstfruits observance, embodying both categories.<sup>23</sup>

*The wave sheaf stands as a priestly holy event anchoring the count, fulfilled once-for-all in the ascension,<sup>24</sup> which is precisely why no new covenant observance was commanded for it.<sup>25</sup>*

*End of Document*

<sup>21</sup> See note 1 above (Leviticus 23:2–3). The *miqra' qodesh* criterion—holy convocation, rest, and prescribed corporate offerings—is the consistent biblical marker differentiating the seven annual Holy Days from the broader festivals and embedded holy events within them.

<sup>22</sup> See note 3 above (Leviticus 23:5; Exodus 12:6). Passover's status as a holy event without *miqra' qodesh* standing is the paradigmatic case for the Festival/Memorial category: a prescribed observance integral to the calendar year that is not itself a holy day.

<sup>23</sup> See note 12 above (Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 16:9–10). Pentecost is simultaneously a *miqra' qodesh* holy day (Lev. 23:21) and the culmination of the 50-day firstfruits observance. Its multiple designations—Feast of Harvest, Feast of Weeks, Day of Firstfruits—reflect different facets of this dual character rather than distinct feast identities.

<sup>24</sup> See note 8 above (John 20:17; 1 Corinthians 15:20). The typological identification of Christ's ascension to the Father on the morning of the first day of the week with the wave sheaf presentation to YHWH is exegetically coherent: the priest offered the sheaf as Christ offered Himself; the Father accepted it as YHWH accepted the sheaf. The once-for-all nature of the ascension (Heb. 9:12) confirms that no recurring observance is appropriate.

<sup>25</sup> See note 7 above (Acts 1:3; cf. Acts 2:1; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8). The apostolic pattern preserved the seven annual holy days (Passover/Unleavened Bread, Acts 20:6; 1 Cor. 5:7–8; Pentecost, Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8) but contains no instruction for, or practice of, a wave sheaf memorial—consistent with Christ's silence on the matter during His 40-day post-resurrection ministry.