

THE WAVE SHEAF OF ISRAEL

AND THE FIRSTFRUITS OF GOD

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INTRODUCTION

It is our belief that an understanding of the ceremony of the day of the "Wave Sheaf Offering" (Lev 23:9-14) as set down in the sacred calendar of God is vital in order to comprehend the wider implications of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God as it pertains to Christians today. The timing of this ceremony establishes the date for the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). In addition, it carries with it an abundance of spiritual symbolism whose meaning is important for every son and daughter of God. The purpose of this paper is to examine this ceremony and its relevance for us today.

WAVE OFFERINGS

Before we even consider the Wave Sheaf Offering itself, let us examine some of the specific wave offerings set down in the Old Testament.

1. The priest was entitled to share in a special fellowship offering made to God. The breast and the right thigh of the offering were, however, first waved before God as a presentation before they were given to the priest (Lev 7:28-34). Traditionally, the ceremony of "waving" seems to have meant that parts of the sacrifice were swung or elevated towards the altar, signifying that they were given to God, and then swung back again, indicating that they were given back by God to the priests, for them to eat (see also Lev 9:18-21; 10:14-15; Nu 6:19-20; 18:18), as well as their families (Nu 18:11).
2. The "law of jealousy" required a woman suspected of adultery to bring, from her husband, a grain offering-"a grain offering for jealousy"-which was also waved before the altar (Nu 5:15,18,25). This offering which she held in her hand symbolised her presenting to God, for His judgement, the fruit of her conduct. If she was innocent, she was reconciled to her husband (Nu 5:28).
3. For the consecration of the Aaronic priesthood:

Ex 29:22-26 "Also you shall take the fat of the ram [the second ram, the ram of ordination], the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, the two kidneys and the fat on them, the right thigh (for it is a ram of consecration), 23 one loaf of bread, one cake made with oil, and one wafer from the basket of the unleavened bread that is before the LORD; 24 and you shall put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons, and you shall wave them as a wave offering before the LORD. 25 You shall receive them back from their hands and burn them on the altar as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma before

the LORD. It is an offering made by fire to the LORD. 26 Then you shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's consecration and wave it as a wave offering before the LORD; and it shall be your portion."

Let us notice, however, what was first done with the blood of this ram:

Ex 29:19-21 "You shall also take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the ram. 20 Then you shall kill the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tip of the right ear of his sons, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. 21 And you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments, on his sons and on the garments of his sons with him; and he and his garments shall be hallowed, and his sons and his sons' garments with him."

This symbolised the complete consecration of the priesthood to God (see also Lev 8:22-31).

4. Similarly, one who was unclean with a skin disease gave as a special guilt offering (for the normal requirements for a guilt offering, see Lev 5:14-6:7) a male lamb which was waved before God, and whose blood also cleansed the individual to enable him to again come before God (Lev 14:12-18,21-29).
5. The Levites, once purified, were presented as a "wave offering" to God (Nu 8:11,13-16, 21).

Nu 8:11,21 "and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD, as a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the LORD."

21 And the Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them, as a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them.

Let us note here that:

- The Levites were substitutes for the nation of Israel, in the person of its firstborn sons, as symbolised by the people laying their hands on them (v 10).
- The Levites were set apart from the rest of the Israelites, to belong wholly to God (v14,16).
- In the service of the priests, they were dedicated to "the work of the LORD" (v11).
- However, unlike the priests, they were not said to be consecrated, just cleansed and set apart. There was no anointing or investiture.

So even before we come to the Wave Sheaf Offering, we can note some of the symbolism inherent in an offering-either of an animal or of grain-that was "waved" before God:

- An offering to God that was for the service of men who did His work.
- An appeal to God for His judgement in an attempt to effect reconciliation.
- A consecration of self to God.
- A total dedication of self to the service of God.
- A cleansing, a removing of impurity.

THE FIRSTFRUITS IN THE HARVESTS OF ISRAEL

God's feasts were and are tied to the harvest times of Israel. Barley was harvested in spring from March-April to May; wheat in late spring-early summer from May through to June-July; and the summer fruits from August to September. The average harvesting period was set at a period of seven weeks (Lev. 23:15; Dt. 16:9) and the year's harvest was mostly gathered in before the autumnal equinox.

The agricultural cycle of Palestine, with its two harvests-the smaller spring harvest and the greater autumn harvest-pictures the two major stages of the spiritual harvest of souls, the harvest of human beings into the Kingdom of God.

An integral part of the cycle of harvests was the notion of "firstfruits" of the land. The Israelites had very early been introduced to this concept: that a small first offering, representative of the entire harvest, was due to God as a token of thanksgiving for all that He had given them:

Ex 23:19 "The first [choicest] of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God (Ex 34:26)."

The barley harvest began in March-April. Passover and Unleavened Bread were observed when green ears of barley appeared. Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks (or the Feast of Harvest, or the Feast of the firstfruits of the harvest [Ex 23:16; 34:22]), took place at the culmination of the wheat harvest, which began in May-June, in late spring-early summer, after the barley harvest. It was the even larger harvest suggested by this firstfruit harvest of barley. *The firstfruits harvest was, if you like, extended to the wheat.*

The Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering (Ex 34:22) coincided with the conclusion of the later, general harvest, especially of grapes, olives, dates and figs, which had continued throughout the summer, and pictured the greater harvest period to be fulfilled during the millennial age and beyond.

THE WAVE SHEAF OFFERING: A MISNOMER

However, before any grain could be harvested in the spring, the firstfruits' harvest, the Israelites were to participate in a ceremony of presentation of the first grain of the harvest in the presence of God to inaugurate the spring harvest season:

Lev 23:9-14 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "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.'"

Josephus (Antiq. 3,10) verifies that no harvesting of barley could commence until the wavesheaf was offered, as verse 14 stipulated:

14 'You shall eat neither bread nor parched [roasted] grain nor fresh grain [*the Hebrew means "full green ears", incidentally*] 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.'

Only after this ceremony had been carried out were they at liberty to make use of the harvest, of barley initially, but later also of wheat and spelt.

Some have made the claim that these verses in Leviticus in no way tie this "Wave Sheaf Offering" directly to the Days of Unleavened Bread, but simply to a weekly Sabbath. However, the chronological sequence of the Holy Days of Lev 23:4-44 makes it clear that the Wave Sheaf Offering is referenced to the specific weekly Sabbath of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:11). Dt 16:1-12, 13-15 also presents the sacred calendar in chronological order. Moreover, both the Sadducees (who were composed primarily of priests and Levites) and the Pharisees (made up largely of synagogue rabbis) agreed that the count to Pentecost should begin from a point within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, although the latter counted from the day after the first Holy Day (i.e., Abib 16), which meant that Pentecost could fall on any day of the week (but always Sivan 6 on the Jewish calendar. So why bother counting?). However, the Hebrew for "Sabbath" in Lev 23:11 is the regular word for the weekly Sabbath (*shabbath*, Strong's #7676), while the special, annual Sabbaths carry the designation *shabbathown* (#7677). Christ required three days and three nights in the grave as a sign of His Messiahship (Mt 12:40; 16:4), making invalid the claim for an Abib 16 Wave Sheaf Offering day from the Abib 14 evening Passover (Christ was resurrected in the late afternoon of Abib 17). Even the traditional Christian world from the earliest times has accepted the weekly Sabbath as the reference point, and with it the notion of having to count, with Pentecost still falling on a Sunday in the Christian calendar. The count to Pentecost only begins with the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread if that day is a Sunday, and thus also the day of the offering of the Wave Sheaf. We will clarify this further later on.

The Wave Sheaf was of the *green ears of barley*, the first sheaf of grain cut from the very first gathering of the spring barley harvest. Nothing could be harvested until that first

"sheaf" had been waved before and accepted by God. This Wave Sheaf Offering initiated the first of the firstfruits' harvests and was accompanied by a meal offering of grain mixed with oil and a drink offering of wine.

There is some confusion when the various bible translations describe this offering as *a sheaf being waved* because a sheaf, in its usual sense of a stalk of grain, is not what was waved here. In fact, the Bible does not actually refer to this ceremony as "the Wave Sheaf Offering". The Hebrew word "omer" that is translated "sheaf" was a measure, about two quarts, and actually means a "measure of things dry". The very first of the firstfruits' crop offered as a "wave sheaf" offering in the Temple was two quarts of barley grain that had been parched (roasted), thrashed and sieved into fine flour. So this grain offering was of a similar format to other grain offerings that were waved before God; God is very consistent! The Jewish Encyclopaedia (article entitled "Omer") declares that a handful of it was burned on the altar, and the rest was eaten by the priest, in accord with the traditional wave offerings previously described.

This is how the entire ceremony seems to have taken place at the time of Jesus Christ:

1. The barley grain was actually cut by members of the Sanhedrin, according to the Sadducean tradition, at the end of the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread.
2. The heads of grain were separated from the stalks and the removed grain was thrashed, parched with fire and ground into flour in the courtyard of the Temple that evening.
3. The flour was then sieved until it was pure and of very fine texture (According to the Mishnah, oil and frankincense were added). From this the omer was taken.
4. This omer was then offered early the next morning-at about 9 a.m., the time of the morning sacrifice-in the Temple as a meal offering waved before God.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WAVE SHEAF OFFERING

It should be noted that, unlike the stipulations for the rest of the Sabbaths and Holy Days of Leviticus 23, verses 9-10 commanded that this offering be made "*When you come into the land which I give to you* ["wherever you live" in the land (v 14)], and reap its harvest". During the years of the Exodus, and even in the final year of the Exodus, these instructions could not be observed as no crops were raised in the wilderness. This offering, a thanksgiving for the firstfruits of the harvest, was therefore, like so many other offerings-physically at least-tied to the land, through first the Tabernacle and later the Temple.

Although the day is not sanctified by God (it is not even included in Numbers 28-29, in the listing of the daily, monthly, Sabbath and Holy Day offerings to be made; yet some keep what they call the "Wave Sheaf Feast Day"), either as a commanded assembly or a Holy Day (the offering was prepared and made during a normal work day; the waving had to take place at the time of the morning sacrifice), the ceremony was obviously of

great importance in ancient Israel-a commanded observance (v 14: "it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings")-and so should also be of importance for us today. It is the only means for counting to the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). Dt 16:9-without fanfare-therefore reiterates, in the only other place in the Scriptures to do so, the command to *count off* the seven weeks *from* the day of the Wave Sheaf Offering:

Dt 16:9 "You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain."

The historical evidence appears to indicate that the early New Testament Church recognised the importance of the Wave Sheaf Sunday; this understanding was, however, eventually displaced to focus both on Sunday observance and Easter Sunday as commemorative of the resurrection of the Son of God.

Because of the connection between Wavesheaf Sunday, day one of the count to Pentecost, and Pentecost itself, it has also become common in some quarters to confuse terms and refer to Wavesheaf Sunday as the "Feast of Firstfruits", the Old Testament term for what we call Pentecost. Pentecost is indeed called the "Day [the Hebrew can also mean *age*, or *season*; the same word is used in "day of the LORD" (e.g., Zech 14:1)] of Firstfruits" in Nu 28:26:

Nu 28:26 'Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to the LORD at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.'

Or

- "the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors" (Ex 23:16)
- "the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest" (Ex 34:22).

Therefore, the title "Feast of Firstfruits" is not an inappropriate one. However, the Scriptures nowhere indicate that this Wavesheaf Sunday also carries that title "Feast of Firstfruits"; to also assign the title to this day this would be to confuse already-defined biblical terms. This helps to explain why the description "Wave Sheaf Offering" is commonly used today, the Bible conferring no specific title upon the ceremony. The Jews, to this day, simply call it "firstfruits", even though the ritual is no longer observed by them.

Unless this offering was successfully carried out, no spring grain could be harvested. The command to count from this day onwards also gave it a pivotal role in the sacred calendar.

Some scholars read in the rendering of the Greek by Luke in his description of the coming of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1 a reference to the completion of this fifty-day-count from the day of the Wave Sheaf Offering during the Passover season:

Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had *fully* [Gk: "filled up, been completed"] come [in the sense of being completed], they were all with one accord in one place.

THE COUNT TO PENTECOST

In the sacred calendar of God, the date of the Feast of Firstfruits alone is set by counting fifty days—seven Sabbaths plus one day—from the day of the Wave Sheaf Offering:

Lev 23:15-16 '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.'

Jewish tradition teaches that Pentecost is the culmination of the Passover season, the two being connected by this "counting of the omer". The count of fifty ties together the Passover-Unleavened Bread season and the Feast of Pentecost. This fifty-day period incorporated the deliverance of ancient Israel from the slavery of Egypt through their baptism in the Red Sea (see 1Co 10:1-2) to their arrival at Mount Sinai where the First Covenant was ratified, and the marriage to the Son of God consummated. The parallel for us seems obvious. The period between Passover and Pentecost pictures in part our Christian life. Pentecost also pictures the *realisation* of the firstfruits.

Yet our repentance, acceptance of Christ and baptism are empowering only if Christ's sacrifice is accepted by His Father, and the Holy Spirit then becomes available. The Wave Sheaf Offering therefore symbolises the active beginning of our spiritual journey, one that, for us, is also consummated at the time of Pentecost, which also the climax of the accepted sacrifice of the Son of God. The first of the firstfruits is thus tied to the remainder of the firstfruits.

Furthermore, consider the symbolism of fifty. The fiftieth-year Jubilee restored all to its original state (Lev 25). It was the time of redemption, of liberty (Lev 25:10; Eze 46:17). Similarly, the completion of the fifty-day count at Pentecost pictures "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Ro 8:21), attained by the firstfruits at the resurrection, our total freedom from the captivity of sin and of the world, the completion of the redemptive work of the Son of God begun at Passover, which began our deliverance from sin.

It is for this reason also that the Wave Sheaf Offering Sunday must always occur during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and not outside the period, to preserve the link between the Passover and Pentecost seasons. It depicts additional aspects of Christ's Passover sacrifice, as we will go on to show. Christ was crucified at the time as the Passover lambs and, three days afterwards, at the time of the cutting and offering of the Wave Sheaf, still

during the Days of Unleavened Bread, He was resurrected and shortly afterwards accepted by His Father, making possible the advent of the Spirit and the empowerment of the Church at Pentecost fifty days later. Moreover, the symbolism of the chronology of events of the season must be retained: the Christian accepts the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb of God, is reconciled to God (Ro 5:10), and begins putting sin out of his life. However, the process cannot possibly succeed, let alone be completed (pictured by the final Day of Unleavened Bread) unless the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is accepted by God and the promised Holy Spirit made available to the believer-which is pictured by the offering of the Wave Sheaf! The ceremony is inextricably tied to the period. For the firstfruits of God, the Passover sacrifice of Christ is completed at the resurrection, (suggested by the Pentecost wave offering [Lev 23:17]), in two stages: the birth of the New Testament Church on the Day of Pentecost in 30 AD, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; and the glorification of the elect in the resurrection, the completed fulfillment of the meaning of the festival of Firstfruits, when all the firstfruits have been fully gathered.

It is not uncommon for the Abib 15 Passover to fall on a weekly Sabbath, and if this is the case, as it was in 1998, the following Sunday will be the Day of the Wave Sheaf Offering, since the day following the next weekly Sabbath falls outside of the Unleavened Bread period. This seems to have been the case in Jos 5:11, when Israel made the Wave Sheaf Offering so that they could eat of the green ears "on the morrow after the Passover", that Passover falling on a weekly Sabbath.

Similarly, Passover 2001 falls on Sunday, April 8, and Passover 2004 on Sunday, April 4, which are also the days of the Wave Sheaf Offering, for the same reason: the first day of the week following would fall outside the Unleavened Bread season, which it must not.

THE FIRSTFRUITS OF GOD

Let us again notice the reason for the Wave Sheaf Offering:

Lev 23:10-11 (NRSV) Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 He shall raise the sheaf before the LORD, *that you [Israel] may find acceptance*; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall raise it.

Through this ancient ceremony, the nation of Israel was to find *acceptance* (Heb: "delight, favour" before God).

Israel-the Church-is the firstfruits of (the harvest of) God:

Jer 2:3 (NIV) "Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them," declares the LORD.

The firstfruits' harvests of both barley, the first crop of firstfruits, and the wheat which came later, symbolise all the elect of God, the firstfruits of the age of the Church, both Old and New Testament saints, prior to Christ's Second Coming. The wheat harvest is the consummation of the firstfruits, of this early harvest of souls. The firstfruits harvest was fully gathered at Pentecost, where the ceremony at which the two loaves representing the firstfruits (Lev 23:16-17) were also waved before God was both parallel to, and the fulfillment of the Wave Sheaf Offering.

The Pentecost Holy Day pictures not only the age of the Church, but also its glorification at the resurrection. Grain is used to picture the resurrection of the dead:

1Co 15:35-38 (NIV) But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

However, the resurrected saints of God's great spiritual harvest, both former and latter, who will together make up the Body of Christ will be composed of all types of people (grain), as attested to by the description of the Promised Land, symbolising the Kingdom of God, as:

Dt 8:8 a land of wheat and barley [*the firstfruits' harvest*], of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey [*the latter harvest*]

So Christ's sacrifice, likened to the "dying" of a grain of wheat, is directly linked to a future harvest picturing the salvation of all of mankind:

Jn 12:23-24 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. 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."

CHRIST THE WAVE SHEAF OFFERING

The unblemished male lamb offered as a burnt offering along with the flour of the wave sheaf (Lev 23:12) represented Jesus Christ, the oil mixed into the fine flour (Lev 23:13) represented the Holy Spirit, given to Christ without measure (Jn 3:34), while the drink offering of wine which accompanied the offering (Lev 23:14) symbolised the shed blood of the Son of God (Mt 26:27-28), which cleanses us from sin (1Jn 1:7).

Likewise, the designation of "firstfruits" is first of all applied to Christ Himself, *the firstfruit* of the harvest of God, for He is "the Head of the Church" (Eph 5:23), "which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:22-23):

1Co 15:20-23 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [Not *just* by His resurrection, as we will see] 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 the firstfruits*, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Moreover, Christ is also referred to prophetically as Israel:

Isa 49:3 "And He said to me, 'You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'" (cp. verses 5-6).

Let us therefore consider in some detail how Christ is pictured in the Wave Sheaf Offering.

Dt 16:9 (NRSV) You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the *standing grain*.

The sheaf of grain, even though of green ears, had to be standing when the wave sheaf was cut loose from the ground at sunset after the weekly Sabbath. The picture is of Christ, resurrected from the dead, standing, awaiting His ascension to the Father. Yet the resurrection of the Son of God is not, we believe, the main emphasis of the ceremony.

Christ, the first of the firstfruits, the first to rise from the dead (Acts 26:23), dedicated to and accepted by God, is the token of the remainder of the spiritual harvest:

Ro 8:29that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Col 1:18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead [Col 1:15 (NRSV): "the firstborn of all creation"], that in all things He may have the preeminence.

The barley grain of the Wave Sheaf, chosen in advance, even as the Lamb of God was (before the foundation of the world: 1Pe 1:20), also beautifully pictures Jesus Christ, who was:

- Abused, beaten and scourged by the Romans: as the grain was thrashed.
- Suffered fiery trial, culminating in the fiery pain of death: as the grain was parched (roasted).
- Was tested, purified and perfected by His earthly experiences, including the ordeal of His crucifixion: as the grain was sieved many times until it was pure.

Heb 2:18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Heb 5:8-9 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

- He was accepted by God: as the grain was waved before the altar.

Barley, the coarsest of grains, was used by the poor to bake bread. Can we see further symbolism in this?

2Co 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Php 2:7-8 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

It is interesting in this context to note that an omer of grain was also all that was required of the very poor as a sin offering (Lev 5:11).

CHRIST'S ACCEPTANCE BY THE FATHER

Notice what was included in Christ's high-priestly prayer to His Father before His crucifixion:

Jn 17:5 "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

On that early Sunday morning, Christ, though resurrected, had yet to be exalted to God's right hand:

Eph 1:20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.

Acts 5:31 "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

Until this was done, the promised Holy Spirit could not be made available:

Acts 2:33 "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear."

The *Holy Spirit*-the Spirit that sanctifies-became available to the New Testament Church at the same time as the sheaf was waved.

Jn 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."-anticipating the receipt of the Spirit by the Church on the Day of Pentecost fifty days later.

Nor could Christ assume His role as our High Priest and Intercessor until He was "exalted":

Ro 8:34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Heb 8:1 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb 4:14).

And this is most important. Let us notice Col 1:22:

Col 1:22 (NIV) But now he has reconciled you *by Christ's physical body through death* to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

Just as the Jealousy Offering which was waved before the altar sought to reconcile a woman to her suspicious husband (Nu 5:15,18,25), so is Christ, the Wave Sheaf Offering, our offering of reconciliation. Jesus Christ's sacrifice reconciles us to God-justifies us by taking away our sins (after the fruits of our repentance are judged by God) and delivers us from God's wrath (Jn 1:29; Ro 5:9). However, one more step is essential in this process of salvation:

Ro 5:10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God *through the death of His Son*, much more, having been reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life*.

The life and faith of the Son of God in us (Gal 2:20), as part of His ministry as our High Priest, is our path to salvation. The acceptance by the Father of Christ as the Wave Sheaf consecrated Him as our High Priest, just as we saw with the wave offering that consecrated the Aaronic priesthood (Ex 29:19-21). And, just as the waving of the breast and the right thigh pictured the offering accepted by God but then given back by Him to the priests and their families, so has Christ, our High Priest in heaven who intercedes for us (Ro 8:34; Heb 7:25), been given back in service to the saints, those who are becoming priests of God.

So just as the new grain could not be eaten until the wave sheaf was offered, neither could those called by God and reconciled to Him fully partake of Jesus Christ and, through His sacrifice, begin the process of salvation until He had ascended to be accepted by God for all them and all humanity. Hence Christ's words to Mary in Jn 20:17:

Jn 20:17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me [the Greek means "attach yourself to Me"], for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say

to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

It was when the sacrifice of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:3) was accepted, as foreknown by God, that salvation became possible.

There has been speculation among some Holy Day observers that in this encounter described by the apostle John, Mary may have mistaken the risen Christ for the gardener (Jn 20:15) because He is pictured as possibly carrying this very sheaf of grain which He, as our High Priest, is then presumed to have waved and offered to God along with Himself. However, not only is there no proof of this in John's gospel, but this scenario fails to take into account that, in conformity with the meal offerings set down in the Law, it was not the sheaf itself that was waved, but rather the grain extracted from it, as has been explained. Furthermore, the notion of Christ, as it were, both cutting, preparing and making an offering that pictured Himself is nonsensical and without scriptural precedent.

True, Christ is described in the Book of Hebrews as entering the Holy of Holies "with His own blood" (Heb 9:12), but this imagery is the *fulfillment* of the animal sacrifices of old, offered by the Aaronic high priest (as all sacrifices and offerings were), as well as of the Wave Sheaf Offering which, as we have shown, enshrined Christ as our High Priest. Since it was still dark (Jn 20:1) and, taking into consideration her emotional state after not being able to locate the body of the Lord, Mary's confusion is understandable.

RE-INVESTED WITH AUTHORITY

Let us consider in what other ways the Wave Sheaf Offering depicted Jesus Christ. Shortly before His crucifixion, Christ prayed for the glory that had been promised to Him; part of this was the "authority over all flesh":

Jn 17:1-2 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him."

Christ had originally been sent directly only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24), among whom for the most part He exercised His authority (Jn 5:27). His acceptance as the Wave Sheaf Offering, however, meant that Christ was now invested fully with the authority He had been promised and which He had often spoken about as having already (Mt 11:27; Lk 10:22; Jn 3:35; 5:22).

The sure knowledge that He was to be re-invested with this total authority was the basis for Christ's act of washing the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper; the Master once again revealed His nature as that of God's Servant:

Jn 13:3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God....

So after His resurrection, ascension and return to His disciples He could say:

Mt 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them [the disciples], saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

The authority of the Devil as the ruler of this world (Lk 4:6) had been truly displaced!

Since Christ has already received all authority to rule, the vision of Daniel may have already been fulfilled by Christ's acceptance by His Father. Alternatively, an investiture is to come of a type similar to the ceremony of acceptance pictured by the Wave Sheaf Offering:

Da 7:13-14 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.

Because Christ's authority was now absolute and world-wide, the open door of salvation was now likewise so:

Mt 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Christ had been officially accepted by God as the Saviour of mankind!

Let us then go on to consider more fully the symbolism of the Wave Sheaf Offering for the Church.

THE REST OF THE FIRSTFRUITS

While, in 1Co 15:23, the term "firstfruits" is used of Christ, it is also used to refer to Christians:

Jas 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits [the Greek can also be translated as "*some firstfruits*"] of His creatures.

Is it significant that barley-perhaps also depicting the Church in its infancy-is the crop to symbolise not only Jesus Christ but the elect of God as well?

- Barley is adaptable to a greater range of climate than any other cereal.
- Although it does best in growing seasons of at least 90 days, it is able to grow and ripen in a shorter time than any other cereal.
- It has greater resistance to dry heat than other small grains. (*Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica; article "Barley"*)
- It can be cultivated on poorer soil and at lower temperatures than wheat. An important characteristic in barley is "winterhardiness," which involves the ability to modify or withstand many types of stresses, particularly that of frost. (*Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica; article "Food Processing: Nonwheat Cereals"*)

The path to the Kingdom for the firstfruits saints of God is strewn with many trials and tribulations (Jn 16:33; 1Th 3:4; 2Ti 3:12), which build godly character (Ro 5:3-4)-often in a short space of time-in a world that is set against us. In contrast to this present evil age (Gal 1:4) in which the firstfruits live, the latter harvest will be fully reaped when the world is God's.

We remember also that it was barley, the earliest firstfruits' harvest, that Ruth, a type of the Church, first gleaned in the field of Boaz, who typified Christ. It was the poor who gleaned (Lev 19:9).

Jas 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

These firstfruits of the Spirit promise even greater things:

Ro 8:23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits [*gifts, offerings*] of the Spirit [*which promise even greater blessings to come*], even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

The wheat, the second firstfruits' crop, could be taken as being symbolic of the end-time age of the Church, when the Second Coming is nearer at hand:

Mt 13:30 'Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Note the comparison made between wheat-servants of Christ-and tares-servants of the Evil One.

Darnel (poison ryegrass, or tare) often is infected with a poisonous fungus besides containing a poisonous narcotic in its seeds; both substances are dangerous to grazing

animals. Modern winnowing techniques now separate the seed from rye seed, but in earlier times contaminated rye flour was a health hazard. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica; article "Ryegrass"*)

Purity of the seed is important. The seed wheat (or other cereal seeds) must be true to its particular variety and as free as possible from foreign seeds. Seeds are frequently cleaned to avoid contamination by other seed crops.

Likewise, the firstfruits of God are to be uncontaminated by the world:

Jn 17:16 "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."

1Jn 2:15-16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world.

More of the world's farmland is devoted to wheat than to any other food crop (*Encyclopaedia Britannica; article "Wheat"*); who knows, perhaps the post-apostolic age will indeed yield a greater crop?

THE DEDICATED PRIESTHOOD OF GOD

Christ is the primary firstfruits' gift of the Spirit; the specimen sheaf cut and its grain brought and waved before God was the evidence of a whole field of such sheaves waiting to be harvested.

Ro 11:16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Paul, although he had in mind the patriarchs with this verse, was referring back to Numbers 15:17-21, and here summarised the law of the firstfruits: if the first of the harvested grain offered to and accepted by God was thereby consecrated, so also was the entire crop. The first loaf consecrated the whole batch.

So we are reminded that we-the rest of the firstfruits-must be like Christ (Ro 8:29; 2Pe 1:4) to be acceptable to God, that we must be likewise dedicated to and consecrated by Him.

Let us notice another element of this final high-priestly prayer of Christ:

Jn 17:19 (NIV) "For them I sanctify [Gk: hagiazo - "make holy, consecrate for sacred use"] Myself, that they too may be truly sanctified [Gk: hagiazo]."

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses this same verb when it describes the consecration of the Aaronic priesthood (Ex 28:41) and the consecrated sacrifices (Nu 18:9, referring also to the wave offerings).

Christ was already sanctified by God when He was sent into the world (Jn 10:36). He has always been consecrated (the Wave Sheaf was offered on a normal working day!) and His holiness was further testified to by His resurrection from the dead (Ro 1:4). Here, He is speaking of again setting Himself apart for the service of God, this time through His death, an act that-through His subsequent resurrection and acceptance by His Father-would extend this sanctification to those who followed Him. He was accepted by God for us.

Jn 17:17 "Sanctify [Gk: hagiazo] them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

The Wave Sheaf Offering therefore also pictures, in similar fashion, the consecration of the Church, the Body of Christ, to become the prophesied nation of priests (1Pe 2:5,9; Rev 5:10), through the receipt of the promised Holy Spirit, beginning with its outpouring on the Day of Pentecost in 30 AD (Acts 2). The imagery is one of the Church, the firstfruits of God, being accepted by Him through the sacrifice of His Son. As the persons and the garments of the Aaronic priests were sanctified by the blood (and the anointing oil) of the ram wave offering, so also are the elect of God portrayed as holy to God (Col 3:12; Heb 3:1; 1Pe 1:15-16; 2Pe 3:11), and their clothing as the holy garments of righteousness (Rev 3:4,18; 6:11; 7:9,13; also implied in Mt 22:11-12 and Rev 16:15).

Let us note another one of the characteristics of the firstfruits:

Rev 14:4 These [the 144,000 (v1), symbolising the Israel of God] are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones *who follow the Lamb wherever He goes*. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

The elect firstfruits of God are *dedicated to Him*, and to His Son, just as the Levites of old, once purified, were dedicated to God, to do His work (Nu 8:11,13-16, 21). As Christ was "dedicated" to God through His acceptance by His Father, so our lives are likewise to be dedicated to the service of God, as living sacrifices:

Ro 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.

Through Jesus Christ, we too are to be presented to God to be accepted by Him. However, we must first be cleansed, just as the diseased individual was through the blood of the wave offering (Lev 14:12-18,21-29).

2Co 4:14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

Col 1:28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may *present everyone perfect* in Christ.

Like the breast and right thigh presented as a wave offering before the altar (Lev 7:28-34), our human members are likewise to be dedicated to God as instruments of righteousness:

Ro 6:13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

CONCLUSION

The importance of this Day of the offering of the Wave Sheaf has for too long been ignored. Let us consider what we can do towards the greater acknowledgement of this day and in the contemplation of its wonderful imagery so pertinent to our salvation.