

# Calculating Pentecost: the Ripened Grain

By T.W. Tramm

IN LEVITICUS God instructs Israel to count seven weeks from “the day after the Sabbath” and observe the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (Lev. 23:15).

Because Scripture is not specific, multiple theories exist as to which Sabbath is being referred to in Leviticus 23. Some believe the Sabbath refers to Passover. Others believe it’s the regular (Saturday) Sabbath during the week of unleavened bread (Nisan 15-21). Still others believe the Sabbath referred to is the one following the week of unleavened bread (see my earlier post: “Calculating Pentecost”).

While each view has its proponents, the fact is that the only parameter given in Scripture is that the Sabbath must occur after the grain is ready for harvest:

“When you ... reap [the] harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD ... on the day after the Sabbath” (Lev. 23:10, 11).

“Count seven weeks from the time that you begin to harvest the grain” (Deut. 16:9).

Grain ripens according to temperature and rainfall. Low temperatures or excessive rainfall, like that seen in Israel in certain years, can significantly delay the harvest. A case in point is in 1983, when an extremely wet and cold winter caused a noteworthy delay in the ripening of wheat and barley.

According to a letter from Israel’s Ministry of Agriculture, the first grain, normally harvested around the middle of April in the Jordan Valley, was not harvested until the middle of May (see notes).

Thus the ripening time of the grain may vary considerably from year to year, especially those years which see inclement weather.

Another factor lending uncertainty to the timing of the firstfruits offering is the lack of a temple or religious authority to determine when the grain would be qualified for the ritual. While certain groups have taken it upon themselves to search out the first ripened barley each year to support their reckoning of the biblical calendar, questions pertaining to where the barley should be found, the quantity, and the stage of ripeness frequently lead to a lack of consensus.

How might a delayed grain harvest such as the one in 1983 affect the firstfruits offering and timing of Pentecost in a year like 2020? Allowing that the ancient method of reaping—i.e. by sickle and leaving the grain on the ground for further drying—would permit the harvest to occur a couple of weeks earlier than modern (machine) methods, the harvesting would still have not begun before May 1st. The day

after the Sabbath following May 1st is May 3rd. Counting the seven weeks from this day results in a June 21 Pentecost.

The above is not necessarily to suggest anything about the timing of Pentecost 2020; it is merely to highlight the fluidity of the harvest festival. Studying the many detailed statutes in the Book of Leviticus, we see that God is specific when He wants to be, even repeating instructions for emphasis. Yet Scripture is purposely ambiguous when it tells us to count from “the day after the Sabbath” without specifying which Sabbath. The only thing mandated by the wording is that it must be a Sabbath after the grain is ripened, lending a significant degree of unpredictability to the timing of Pentecost.

The more we set aside preconceived notions and traditions and focus simply on what the Bible says about the timing of the harvest, the more it seems only God knows the day.

#### NOTES:

1. Headlines 2020: “Israel breaks 50-year record for most rainfall in North, 76 years in South”

<https://www.jpost.com/.../israel-breaks-50-year-record-for-mo...>

“Israel experiences rare second year of above-average rainfall”

<https://www.jpost.com/.../israel-experiences-rare-second-year...>

2. Article pertaining to the ripening of barley in Israel, including a transcript of a 1983 letter from Israel’s Ministry of Agriculture: [https://frankelnet.net/article.php?article\\_id=43&fbclid=IwAR1hO6k\\_NR61h-E6WyzJE6fRNcvxR0t0kezdxKJm40q4AyAn1TNHkcYzMr4](https://frankelnet.net/article.php?article_id=43&fbclid=IwAR1hO6k_NR61h-E6WyzJE6fRNcvxR0t0kezdxKJm40q4AyAn1TNHkcYzMr4)

3. Christians who study the feasts may hold that because Jesus fulfilled the firstfruits offering during or immediately after the week of unleavened bread in 33AD, the identical pattern must replay every year. However, nothing in Scripture mandates a consistent timing of the firstfruits offering from year to year, including any year or fulfillment related to the end of the age.

4. A convergence of signs and timelines indicates the season of Jesus’ return is upon us. The “harvest” of the Church could happen on a day acknowledged to be a festival, such as Pentecost, or on a day no one expects. For this reason the Lord tells even His disciples and servants—those actively anticipating His return—to keep watch at all times (Mark 13:32-37; Luke 12:37-46).