

The Good Word

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THE BIBLICAL FESTIVAL OF FIRST FRUITS¹

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The seven biblical feasts found in Leviticus 23 were appointed by God to be celebrated on specific dates of the Hebrew calendar and foreshadow important events in the redemption of mankind. The first four, the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of First-Fruits, and the Feast of Weeks, were fulfilled by Christ in His first coming and were prophetic of His passion, death, resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. The latter three, the Feast of Trumpets, Yom Kippur, and the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths, are reflective of future events related to Christ's second coming. Christ Jesus Himself pointed out how valuable reading the Old Testament Scriptures were: *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me* (John 5:39)...*that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me* (Luke 24:44). And, indeed, these seven appointed feasts written in the law of Moses do testify of Christ and His role in the salvation of the

1. Scripture passages are from the King James Version unless otherwise stated.

world, but in a hidden way, i.e., veiled in types and agricultural metaphors.

As Fr. Michael Pomazansky has written in his *Dogmatic Orthodox Theology*, "The Resurrection of Christ is the *foundation and the crown of our Orthodox Christian Faith*. The Resurrection of Christ is the first, most important, great truth, with the proclamation of which the Apostles began their preaching of the Gospel after the descent of the Holy Spirit. Just as by the death of Christ on the Cross our Redemption was accomplished, so by His Resurrection *eternal life was given to us*. Therefore, the Resurrection of Christ is the object of the Church's constant triumph, its unceasing rejoicing, which reaches its summit in the Feast of the Holy Christian Pascha. 'Today all creation is glad and rejoices, for Christ has risen!'"(Canon of Pascha, Canticle 9)."²

The Feast of First-fruits is an agricultural metaphor for the Resurrection. But as we shall see, there is much more to the metaphor than St. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:20: *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*.

Consequently, it is profitable for us to explore the Feast of First-fruits to better appreciate God's plan of salvation for us.

THE HEBREW CALENDAR

Let's begin with the structure of the Hebrew religious calendar. Each Hebrew day began at sunset just as our liturgical day begins at the setting of the sun with Vespers. The day ended at sunset on the following day. The Hebrew calendar itself is based on a lunar year with 12 months of alternating 30 or 29 days, i.e., approximately 354 days. Since the biblical feasts are fixed by date to the Hebrew lunar religious calendar which is 11 days shorter than the 365 day solar calendar, the difference between them needs to be made up or the feasts would come 11 days earlier each year. To overcome this problem, a 13th lunar month was added to certain years in the Hebrew calendar. In Temple times this was done periodically after examining the

2. Fr. Michael Pomazansky, "The Resurrection of Christ.--The Saving Fruits of the Resurrection of Christ," *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Part II, Chapter 6, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 2009, p. 223.



agricultural situation at the end of the 12th lunar month Adar.³ Although lunar, the Hebrew calendar was also agriculturally based. We see that reflected in the name given to the first month of the year Abib bybia⁴ which means “fresh young ears of barley.” This first month was tied historically to the month of the Egyptian Passover in which the LORD led the Hebrew children out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand. That momentous event was not related to the spring equinox as Passover is today, but rather to the local agricultural cycle as follows: *Then the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you* (Ex. 12:1-2)...*This day came ye out in the month Abib* (Ex. 13:4). A short time earlier, in the seventh plague of hail mixed with fire sent upon the Egyptians, *the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was bolled⁵* (Ex. 9:25, 31). So in Egypt, as well as in Israel a couple hundred miles to the northeast, the first month Abib was designated to coincide with the ripening of the standing barley corn, with a new moon on the first day of the month and a full moon on the 14th or 15th.

THE BIBLICAL CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF FIRST-FRUITS

The Old Testament describes both a communal Feast of First-fruits as well as the personal offering of the first-fruits of one's own labors. We will confine our discussion solely to the Feast and its significance.

Leviticus 23:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts⁶ of the LORD which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My feasts⁷...4 These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. 5 In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD's passover. 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD; seven days must ye eat unleavened bread. 7 In the first

3. Geoffrey Wigoder, Ed, *The Encyclopeida of Judaism*, Jerusalem Publishing House, Jerusalem, Israel, 1989, p.145.

4. Note: during the Babylonian Exile Abib bybia was changed to Nisan [s;yn] the name of the Babylonian god of spring. The names of all the other months changed as well.

5. *bolled*, i.e., with round seed pods, each bearing 8-10 seeds

6. Masoretic Text reads: yde[ʔ]m “set/appoint the feasts”. It is derived from the Hebrew root *mo'ed* which means “an appointment, a fixed or appointed time, Mo'ed is also the name of the Second Order of the *Mishnah*, Jewish Oral Law which deals with “fixed holidays.”

7. Masoretic Text reads: yd:[ʔ]m] “My appointed feasts”

day ye shall have an holy convocation unto you; ye shall do no servile work therein. 8 But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days; in the seventh day is a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. 9 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 10 Speak to the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf⁸ of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest. 11 And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you:⁹ on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the Lord. 13 And the meat offering¹⁰ thereof shall be be two tenth deals [ephah] of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the Lord for a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. 14 And ye shall eat neither bread nor parched corn, nor green ears, until this selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.


15 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: 16 Even until the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.

Although the biblical instructions for the various festivals are announced in these few verses in Leviticus, what is very clear is that these feasts and their specific timings were personally set by the LORD. The appointed time for the sacrificing of the passover lambs was the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan before sunset. The appointed time for the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the 15th of Nisan which began at sunset at which time the Paschal lamb was eaten. The first day of the feast was a day of rest, a “sabbath” for a holy convocation, as was the last day of the feast. The next day after sunset, the 16th of Nisan, the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was also the LORD's appointed time for the Feast of First-fruits. On that day the “sheaf” [“omer”] of barley grain which had been brought into the house of the LORD, was raised up and waved before the LORD to be accepted for the

8. Masoretic Text reads: rm,[io “omer” = sheaf; also, a dry measure of one tenth of an ephah, approximately 2.2 liters. This is the same term for sheaf as found in the Patriarch Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:7.

9. Septuagint Text omits *on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.*

10. Masoretic Text reads: tjæn“mi ”minchah,” =“a fine flour offering.”



community. The offerings included a blemish-free yearling lamb for a whole burnt offering, a meal offering [minchah] by fire consisting of finely ground barley flour mixed with oil [and frankincense], and lastly, a wine offering. This was to be a statute for all generations to come.

There are a few more details to be gained by reviewing contemporary historical accounts and from later rabbinic writings.

Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37? - A.D. 100?)

Titus Flavius Josephus, born Joseph ben Matityahu, is the most important of the ancient historians for Israel during the Second Temple period. He lived through the Jewish Wars against Rome which brought about the defeat of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. His father was of priestly descent, and his mother of royal descent. During the war, he was commander of the Jewish troops in Galilee. However, noting the power of Rome and discerning that opposing Rome was futile, he defected to them, appealed to his countrymen to do the same to save themselves, and later wrote a famous history of the Jewish people as well as of the war itself for the Romans. Philosophically, he aligned himself with the religious party of the Pharisees.

*“In the month of Xanthicus, which is by us called Nisan, and is the beginning of our year, on the fourteenth day of the lunar month, when the sun is in Aries (for in this month it was that we were delivered from bondage under the Egyptians, the law ordained that we should every year slay that sacrifice which I before told you we slew when we came out of Egypt, and which was called the **Passover**; and so we do celebrate this passover in companies, leaving nothing of what we sacrifice till the day following. The **feast of unleavened bread** succeeds that of the passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month, and continues seven days... **But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the 16th day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them.** And while they suppose it proper to honor God, from whom they obtain this plentiful provision, in the first place, **they offer the first fruits of their barley**, and that in the manner following: They take a handful of the ears, and dry them, then beat them small, and purge the barley from the bran; they then bring one tenth deal¹¹ to the altar, to God; and casting one handful of it upon the fire, they leave the rest for the use of the priest; and after this it is that they may publicly or privately reap their harvest. They also at this*

participation of the first-fruits of the earth, sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt-offering to God.”¹²

Comment: Josephus, the son of a priest, born and raised in Jerusalem, so presumably quite familiar with the Temple and its services, confirms that the actual practice in the Temple was according to the pattern set in Leviticus 23, that the first-fruits of barley were offered to the Lord on the second day of unleavened bread, the 16th of Nisan. This offering by fire was accomplished by the casting one handful of the purged barley on the fire at the altar. The Israelites refrained from eating any new grain until the LORD had been honored with the offerings of the lamb and barley meal as burn offerings.

Philo the Jew (20 B.C. - A.D. 50)


Philo was a Jewish Philosopher, writing in Greek, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt. His works reflect his deep devotion to his Jewish heritage as well as his attempts to blend Hellenistic philosophy with Mosaic Law. Being a contemporary of both Jesus and St. Paul, and having visited Jerusalem at least once, he is another important Jewish witness to the Second Temple period.

*“THE SIXTH FESTIVAL XXIX. (162) **There is also a festival on the day of the paschal feast, which succeeds the first day, and this is named the sheaf, from what takes place on it; for the sheaf is brought to the altar as a first fruit both of the country which the nation has received for its own, and also of the whole land; so as to be an offering both for the nation separately, and also a common one for the whole race of mankind; and so that the people by it worship the living God, both for themselves and for all the rest of mankind, because they have received the fertile earth for their inheritance; ...**(171) **That the first fruit is a handful for their own land and for all lands, offered in thanksgiving for prosperity and a good season which the nation and the entire race of human beings were hoping to enjoy, has been demonstrated. We should not be unaware that many benefits have come by means of the first fruit: first, memory of God -- it is not possible to find a more perfect good than this; then, the most just recompense to the real Cause of fruitfulness.***

*(174)...And there are many meanings intended by this offering of the first fruits. In the first place they are a memorial of God; secondly, they are a most just requital to be offered to him who is the real cause of all fertility; (175) **and the sheaf of the first fruits is barley...it is not consistent with holiness to enjoy and***

11. Obsolete UK unit of stacked firewood, 1 *deal* = 7 ft × 6 ft × 5/2 in.

12 Josephus F, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book III, Chapter X, 5, in Whiston W (translator), *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, Vol. II, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1978, p. 218.



partake of any thing which is given for food, without first giving thanks to that being to whom it is becoming and pious to offer them.¹³

Comment: Here Philo confirmed the idea that the Festival of First-Fruits took place on the second day of the feast of Passover during which a sheaf of barley is brought to the altar as the first-fruits. As a philosopher, Philo discusses the meaning and cosmic importance of offering thanksgiving to God for fertility and a bountiful harvest for the nation of Israel and for all of mankind.

Rabbinic Sources

For further details on the Feast can be found in the the Jewish compilations of the oral Law known as the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*. The *Talmud* was an expansion of the *Mishnah* which included rabbinic commentary known as the *Gemara*.

*Babylonian Talmud*¹⁴ — *Tractate MENACHOTH*¹⁵ (64b) *Mishnah 10:2. THE PRECEPT OF THE ‘OMER {sheaf} IS THAT IT SHOULD BE BROUGHT FROM [WHAT GROWS] NEAR BY.*

*Babylonian Talmud — Tractate SANHEDRIN*¹⁶ (11b) *GEMARA. to 1.2: ...because the barley for the Omer was obtained [by preference] in Judea.*

Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MENACHOTH (83b) *Mishnah 8:1. THE ‘OMER-OFFERING... MUST BE OFFERED ONLY FROM THE NEW PRODUCE AND FROM [PRODUCE GROWN] IN THE LAND. ALL [OFFERINGS] MUST BE OFFERED FROM THE CHOICEST PRODUCE...*

Comment: Thus, the Omer (sheaf) offering is to be the best of the new local produce of Judea.

Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MENACHOTH (85a) *Mishnah 8: HOW WAS IT PREPARED?...*

GEMARA...In the first year it [the field] was broken up and in the second year it was ploughed twice, and it was sown seventy days before the Passover...It was then reaped, bound into sheaves, threshed, winnowed, cleansed, ground, and sifted, and then brought to the Temple-treasurer...

It was taught: Abba Saul said, The ‘Omer-offering was usually brought from the [produce of the] valley of Beth Makleh,¹⁷ which was an area that produced three

se’ahs; it lay in the south and the sun rose upon it and the sun set upon it...

Comment: The omer was to be reaped from a field close to Jerusalem, with optimal sun, water, absence of manure fertilizing and trees. It was not taken at random, but taken from a field prepared over a two year period. The chosen field was planted 70 days in anticipation of the Feasts of Pascha, Unleavened Bread, and First-fruits. The valley of the House of Makleh in the southern part of the Kidron valley was the usual source of the barley. The reaped stalks of grain were then processed into pure flour for the Temple-treasurer.

Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MENACHOTH (65a) *Mishnah 10:3. WHAT WAS THE PROCEDURE?¹⁸ THE MESSENGERS¹⁹ OF THE BETH DIN {Sanhedrin}²⁰ USED TO GO OUT ON THE DAY²¹ BEFORE THE FESTIVAL²² AND TIE THE UNREAPED CORN IN BUNCHES TO MAKE IT THE EASIER TO REAP. ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THE TOWNS NEAR BY ASSEMBLED THERE, SO THAT IT MIGHT BE REAPED WITH MUCH DISPLAY. AS SOON AS IT BECAME DARK²³ HE CALLED OUT, ‘HAS THE SUN SET’? ...’ WITH THIS SICKLE’? AND THEY ANSWERED, ‘YES’...‘INTO THIS BASKET’? AND THEY ANSWERED, ‘YES’...ON THIS SABBATH’? AND THEY ANSWERED. ‘YES’...‘SHALL I REAP’? AND THEY ANSWERED, REAP’. HE REPEATED EVERY MATTER THREE TIMES, AND THEY ANSWERED, ‘YES.’ ‘YES.’ ‘YES’...*

Comment: Note that the representatives of the Sanhedrin, on the afternoon before the Festival [of Passover], would go out to the field prepared for the First-fruits and tie the absolute finest of the unripened (barley) corn into bunches to make it easier to reap. All the local inhabitants and nearby towns would assemble there, so that they might be present after the sun set to observe the reaping of the sheaf. The selection took place on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan, the same afternoon that the Paschal lambs were slaughtered in the Temple in preparation for the Passover dinner at sunset.

¹⁸ I.e., for harvesting the first fruits


¹⁹ Neusner J, “Menahot 10:3B” *The Mishnah: A New Translation*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1988, p. 753, translated as “Agents.”

²⁰ The Great Sanhedrin was the supreme religious body in the Land of Israel. It was a body of 71 “sages” who met in the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple. About AD 30, the year in which Christ was crucified, it lost its authority to inflict capital punishment (40 years before the destruction of the Temple).

²¹ Neusner J, “Menahot 10:3B” translated as “on the eve of [afternoon before] the festival [of Passover]”

²² Probably late on the 14th of Nisan as sunset was approaching

²³ Neusner J, “Menahot 10:3 I E” translated as “on the night of the sixteenth of Nisan”



Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MEGILLAH²⁴
(20b) Mishnah 2:6 THE WHOLE OF THE NIGHT IS PROPER TIME FOR REAPING THE OMER...

Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MENACHOTH (63b) Mishnah 10:1: R. ISHMAEL SAYS, ON THE SABBATH THE OMER WAS TAKEN OUT OF THREE SE'AH²⁵ [OF BARLEY]...BUT THE SAGES SAY, WHETHER ON THE SABBATH OR ON A WEEKDAY IT WAS REAPED BY THREE MEN INTO THREE BASKETS AND WITH THREE SICKLES.

Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MENACHOTH (63b) GEMARA 10:1. The opinion of the Rabbis is quite clear...that a tenth of the finest [flour] can be obtained out of three se'ahs...

Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MENACHOTH (66a) Mishnah 10:4. THEY REAPED IT, PUT IT INTO THE BASKETS, AND BROUGHT IT TO THE TEMPLE COURT; THEN THEY PARCHED IT WITH FIRE IN ORDER TO FULFILL THE PRECEPT THAT IT SHOULD BE PARCHED [WITH FIRE]. SO R. MEIR. BUT THE SAGES SAY, THEY FIRST BEAT IT WITH REEDS OR STEMS OF PLANTS THAT THE GRAINS SHOULD NOT BE CRUSHED...THEY SPREAD IT OUT IN THE TEMPLE COURT SO THAT THE WIND MIGHT BLOW OVER IT. THEN THEY PUT IT INTO A GRISTMILL AND TOOK OUT OF IT A TENTH [OF AN EPHAH²⁶ OF FLOUR] WHICH WAS SIFTED THROUGH THIRTEEN SIEVES. WHAT WAS LEFT OVER WAS REDEEMED AND MIGHT BE EATEN BY ANY ONE;

Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MENACHOTH (67b) Mishnah 10:4. HE THEN CAME TO THE TENTH, PUT IN OIL AND ITS FRANKINCENSE,²⁷ POURED IN THE OIL, MINGLED IT, WAVED IT, BROUGHT IT NEAR [TO THE ALTAR], TOOK FROM IT THE HANDFUL AND BURNT IT; AND THE REMAINDER WAS EATEN BY THE PRIESTS. AFTER THE OMER WAS OFFERED THEY USED TO GO OUT AND FIND THE MARKET OF JERUSALEM ALREADY FULL OF MEAL AND PARCHED CORN [OF THE NEW PRODUCE];

²⁴ Megillah = Lit. "scroll" (particularly the times, places, manner of reading the scroll of Esther)

²⁵ a se'ah is approximately 7.33 liters.

²⁶ an ephah is approximately 35 liters (one bushel). So 1/10 ephah = 3.5 liters

²⁷ hn:wObl] levonah, frankincense, an aromatic resin known to have grown in the Valley of Levonah in Israel--hence its Hebrew name, whose aromatic smoke, like prayer ascends to God as a sweet fragrance. Frankincense is not mentioned in Leviticus 23 as a component of the Omer, whereas, it is mentioned in Leviticus 2:1, and Leviticus 6:7-11.

Babylonian Talmud — Tractate MENACHOTH (68b) Mishnah 10:5. THE 'OMER RENDERED [THE NEW CORN] PERMITTED THROUGHOUT THE LAND, AND THE TWO LOAVES RENDERED IT PERMITTED IN THE TEMPLE. ONE MAY NOT OFFER MEAL-OFFERINGS, FIRST-FRUITS, OR MEAL-OFFERINGS THAT ACCOMPANY ANIMAL OFFERINGS, BEFORE THE 'OMER; AND IF ONE DID SO, IT WAS INVALID...


Comment: After harvesting the 3 se'ahs of barley corn, the grain was extracted by parching it with fire, removing the chaff and husk by beating with reeds and stems, spreading it out in the Temple Court, letting the wind blow away all the chaff, but leaving the grain. The grain was then milled into roughly 3.5 liters of the finest sifted flour on the morning of the 16th of Nisan. It was mixed with oil and sprinkled with frankincense, then offered as a raw dough through waving after the mandatory morning sacrifice, the tamid dymt.²⁸ It was brought near to the altar where a tenth of the dough was burned, the rest being eaten later by the priests after its baking. Importantly, only after the waving of the "omer" (the "official" name for this minchah offering) by the priest, could the new grain and flour be sold in the market and used by the Israelites. [So the waving of the "omer" on the Feast is really the waving of the minchah offering, and not a waving of the bundled, reaped, and unprocessed barley sheaves.] Lastly, the Festival of the offering of First-Fruits marked an important event for the common people since it allowed them to partake of the new harvest.

COMPARISON OF THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE FEAST OF FIRST-FRUITS WITH THAT OF THE PASSION, DESCENT INTO HADES, AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST JESUS

In the year of Christ's crucifixion, c. AD 30, the 14th of Nisan began on Thursday night with Jesus and His disciples reclining at table for the Last Supper. Judas left early to betray Christ. After the meal Jesus and the remaining disciples walked to the Garden of Gethsemane where Christ prayed intensively. Led by Judas, a mob of Jewish authorities, a Roman cohort, and a tribune arrested Him, bound Him, and led Him away to Annas for an intensive preliminary interrogation, and later to Caiaphas,²⁹ the High Priest for that year, who earlier had "prophesied" (i.e., preselected) *Ye know*

²⁸ The Torah (Law of Moses) required that two lambs be offered daily in the Temple as hl;o olah/elevation/heave offerings, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. See Numbers 28:9-10.

²⁹ Annas was High Priest from AD 6-15. Josephus relates in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, II 2: that Caiaphas was made high priest by the Procurator Valerius Gratus [c. AD 18]. He was removed by the Procurator Vitellius [c. AD 36].



nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man [Jesus] should die for the people, and that the whole nation should perish not (John 11:49-50). Throughout that entire night Jesus was questioned, buffeted, and taunted by the officials of the Sanhedrin. Finally, in the early morning, after condemning Him for blasphemy, the chief priests and officers of the Sanhedrin handed Him over to the Roman Prefect of Judæa, Pontius Pilate, for interrogation at the Prætorium in the Antonio Fortress, and they themselves entered not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover (John 18:28).³⁰ Pilate, who upon hearing Jesus was from Galilee, sent Him to Herod who ruled over Galilee. Surrounded by the chief priests and scribes hurling accusations against Him, Jesus was treated with contempt by Herod, mocked, and then sent back to Pilate at the Prætorium. Pilate found Him guilty of no crime, but due to fear of the Jewish leadership, he gave into their demands to have Jesus crucified, releasing the notorious murderer Barabbas³¹ instead. Pilate, from his judgment seat, on the day of preparation for the Passover (still the 14th of Nisan) about the 6th hour (high noon) delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified (John 19:14,16).³² The Roman cohort further mocked Him by plaiting a crown of thorns, giving Him a scarlet robe, and a reed, spitting on Him and buffeting Him. The Roman soldiers accompanied by members of the Sanhedrin led Him away to Golgotha, where He was bound and nailed to the Cross. Pilate accompanied them and placed a sign on the Cross saying in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, *JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS* (John 19:19). Three were selected to die that day: Jesus and the two thieves, all bound upright on their crosses awaiting their reaping by death. At the same time, other agents of the Sanhedrin proceeded with a crowd of local inhabitants to the Valley of Beth Makleh in the lower Kidron Valley

30. Defilement would not prevent them from eating their personal or family passover lamb--they could take a cleansing bath that day and be ceremonially clean at dusk and partake. However, it did prevent them from sacrificing the lambs as priests in the Temple before dusk and consequently kept them from eating their portion of the *chagigah of the 14th*, the festal offering, from which they received the best part, which they had to cook and eat in the Temple that afternoon. See *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Pesachim 69b, Gemara: "The chagigah which comes with the Passover is as the Passover:"

tspk ayh yrh jSph m[habh hgygj That was the "passover" they wanted to eat but needed to be ceremonially clean to do so.

31. Barabbas' name means "son of the father". Thus, the Jews demanded the "son of the father" instead of the "Son of the Father."

32. St. Mark writes *And it was the third hour, and they crucified Him*. St. John has Pilate judging Christ at the 6th hour. All the Gospel writers agree that there was darkness over the land from the 6th to the 9th hour. St. Theophylact comments that the accounts differ regarding the details for the crucifixion because of *disorder and confusion*. That may include the starting time for the crucifixion as well.


to the east of Jerusalem. There they selected and bound upright the barley sheaves sufficient to make 3 se'ehs of the finest flour for the first-fruits offering. The bound sheaves awaited their reaping after sunset. Of the three upright "sheaves" bound on Golgotha, Pilate designated one as the finest, the most choice one, as the *King of the Jews*. Jesus selected another choice sheaf to be with Him in Paradise: the thief who believed in Him.

Jesus also was *the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world* (John 1:29), the antitype of the Paschal lamb. For at that same time, having been preselected by the High Priest for death, Jesus, bound and nailed to the Cross, was crucified at the appointed time the Paschal lambs were being slain by the tens of thousands in the Temple for celebration and in remembrance of the deliverance of the children of Israel from the bonds of Pharaoh in Egypt.

At the 9th hour Jesus *knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled...said, It is finished* (John 19:28, 30), knowing that *except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit* (John 12:24), bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Joseph of Arimathea, a righteous and dissenting member of the Sanhedrin and a secret disciple of Christ, asked for and received Jesus' body for burial. Together, he and Nicodemus bound Him in fine linen and aromatic spices and placed Him *in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock* (Matt. 27:60), rolling a stone in front of the entrance while the myrrh-bearing women watched from a distance.

Twilight arrived ushering in the 15th of Nisan, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Jews, having returned to their homes from the Temple carrying their Paschal lambs began eating them with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Normally, they would spend the entire night in their homes, not venturing out, in remembrance of the Egyptian Passover when they were warned to stay inside their homes whose doorposts and lintels were painted with the blood of the Paschal lamb so that the Angel of Death, recognizing the blood of the lamb, would pass over them and not slay their first-born. That night, centuries before, the Hebrew children in Egypt also kneaded extra matzo dough (unleavened bread), in preparation for their hasty Exodus from Egypt the next morning.

In AD 30 the 15th of Nisan was both the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the first festal sabbath day as well as the weekly Sabbath--a holy day, a day of rest, a day for a holy convocation: *for that sabbath day was an high day* (John 19:31), a great Sabbath! This Holy Saturday Jesus spent in Hades: *Out of fear, the*



*gates of death opened unto Thee, O Lord; and on beholding Thee, the gate-keepers of Hades trembled; for Thou didst crush the brazen gates and didst break the iron bars. And Thou didst lead us out of darkness and the shadow of death, and didst break our bonds asunder.*³³

Just as that whole night was the proper time for reaping of the omer by the agents of the Sanhedrin, be it a weekly Sabbath or not, so it was that the True Omer, Christ, having Himself been reaped, dead in the flesh yet alive in His Divinity with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, Himself sprinkled with the “frankincense” of the prayers of Joseph, Nicodemos, and the myrrh-bearing women, used that whole night to select and reap the omer of the souls of the Old Testament Saints, including John the Baptist and the believing thief on the cross:

As Fr. Michael Pomazansky states: “Christ, after His death on the Cross, descended in His soul and in His Divinity into hell, at the same time that His body remained in the grave. He preached salvation to the captives of hell and [later on Sunday morning] brought up from there all the Old Testament righteous ones into the bright mansions of the Kingdom of Heaven. Concerning this raising up of the righteous ones from hell, we read in the Epistle of St. Peter: ***For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison***” (1 Peter 3:18-19)...***For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit*** (1 Peter 4:6).³⁴

On this Great Sabbath of Holy Saturday Christ not only selected the finest sheaves, the souls of the righteous Old Testament saints, separating them from those of the unbelieving and unworthy sinners (the tares), but also presented Himself in Hades as the true Omer, the true Sheaf. This was the true Sheaf Whom the Patriarch Joseph’s sheaf foreshadowed in his prophetic dream in Genesis 37, to whose sheaf the eleven other sheafs representing his brothers, bowed down making obeisance. Whereas Joseph’s brothers bowed down before him in person when he was second in Egypt only to Pharaoh, Christ was the True Sheaf to Whom *every knee should bow, of [things] in Heaven, and [things] earth, and [things] under the earth; and [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father* (Philippians 2:10-11). So on this Holy Saturday, Christ as the True Omer and High

Priest after the order of Melchizedek, second only to the Father, Who is to judge all men as Chief Justice of the heavenly Sanhedrin, reaped the souls of the righteous in Hades and prepared a second omer. He combined the fine flour of their lives purified from the leaven of sin through their faith in Him, mixed in the oil of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and added the frankincense of His prayers for their impending exodus from Hades and release from Satan’s bondage the next day. Now they were ready for His waving of them before His Father the following day.

Twilight ended the Sabbath, and ushered in the second day of Unleavened Bread, the 16th of Nisan, the appointed day of the Feast of First-fruits. In the Temple after the obligatory perpetual tamid offering, which was an elevation or heave offering of a lamb, the (high) priest performed the wave offering of the omer. He waved the *rM./yh; tjæn* “mi meal offering of the omer to and fro, in four directions and up and down after burning the obligatory memorial tenth part of it before the LORD on the Altar as a burnt offering. The rest was eaten by the priests in the Temple Court after being baked but without leaven.³⁵ By this wave offering of the omer, the nation, its people, and its crops were liturgically accepted by the LORD and approved for general use. Before this time only grain from the previous years harvest could be eaten.

But before the breaking of the dawn on Sunday morning the 16th of Nisan, in AD 30, Christ Jesus arose from the dead with great power. It was the Day of Resurrection, it was the God appointed day of the Festival of the True First-fruits, Jesus Christ, and for His reception and acceptance in heaven by the Father. Not yet having ascended to His Father, He met Mary Magdalene who was weeping in sorrow, thinking that Jesus’ body had been removed from the tomb. Consoling her with His appearance to her, He then said, *Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father* (John 20:17). Why? Because it was needful for Him to keep His appointment with the Father, to keep the appointed Feast of First-fruits, to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy by presenting Himself as well as the Old Testament Righteous as acceptable wave offerings so that the remainder of the new harvest of righteous souls could proceed. It was needful for Him “to take captivity captive”: *8 Wherefore, He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. 9 Now that He ascended, what is*

33. Anatolian Sticheron, Vespers, Holy & Great Sunday of Pascha
34. Pomazansky, p. 224.

35. *Vayikra Leviticus Vol. II / A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, Rabbis Nosson Scherman & Meir Zlotowitz, editors, ArtScroll Tanakh Series, Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn, NY, 1990, pp. 292-300.



THE GOOD WORD

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it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things (Eph 4:8-10).³⁶ So on this Sunday of the Resurrection, He presented Himself as the True Omer of Unleavened Bread, full of the Oil of the Holy Spirit, and the Frankincense of Perfect Obedience and Perfect Prayer to the Father on this appointed day. He entered the Temple in heaven as the Great High Priest of all creation, gaining His own acceptance as First-Fruits first. He then presented the omer of the souls of the Old Testament saints to His Father, the “seed that had taken root” prior to the Resurrection, that had been imprisoned in the dark storage bins of Gehenna, as a meal offering, waving them to and fro, back and forth, before the Father, and gaining their acceptance from the Father as the early spring harvest of first-fruits. After Christ’s acceptance as First-fruits by the Father and the acceptance of the Old Testament saints as first-fruits, the stage was set for the next appointed harvest 50 days later, of those seeds sown in the rich soil of the Gospel, the Feast of Weeks, Pentecost!

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. 21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of

*the dead has also come through a human being; 22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. 23 **But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ** (1 Cor. 15:20).*

“And thus the great Kingdom of Christ has been opened in heaven. Into it have entered the souls of all the righteous and pious people of the Old Testament, those of whom the Apostle has said, “*These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise*” (*until the coming to earth of the Son of God and the general salvation*), *that they without us should not be made perfect*, that is, attained the joy and blessedness of the Heavenly Church of Christ (Heb. 11:39-40). Into the Kingdom in the New Testament there entered the first ones who believed in Christ, the Apostles, first martyrs, confessors; and so on until the end of the world, so that the heavenly Home will be filled--the Jerusalem on high, the granary of God--until it shall come to its perfect fulness.”³⁷ “For Christ is raised from the dead, and is become the first-fruits of them that slept.”³⁸

**CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!
GLORY TO THY HOLY RESURRECTION, O LORD!**

36. St. Paul is quoting the prophecy in Psalm 67:19 LXX.

37. Pomazansky, p. 226

38. Pascha: Catechetical Homily, St. John Chrysostom