

# Pentecost, Consistency, And Honesty

by John W. Ritenbaugh

*Forerunner*, "Personal," March-April 2005

This year, 2005, is a year in which the church of God is divided regarding the count to Pentecost. Why is there confusion? Is it because some are failing to allow plain and clear scriptures to guide and interpret those that may be vague? Is it because scriptures that should be used to determine some elements of this issue are not even being considered? Is it because some stubbornly prefer to remain loyal to a wrong tradition or to resist yielding to truth because of pride or fear of "rocking the boat"? Perhaps it is combinations of several of these possibilities.

Whatever the case for others, this author does not believe this issue is vague in the least.

## The Starting Point

This article is composed of two major sections: The first establishes the primary importance of the weekly Sabbath that falls within the Days of Unleavened Bread. The day on which the count to Pentecost begins—Wavesheaf Day—is entirely dependent upon when that particular Sabbath occurs. The article's second part deals with Joshua 5.

On some matters pertaining to Pentecost, the general church is in agreement. Following the basic instructions about Pentecost's location on the calendar in Leviticus 23:10-16, we find that when Israel came into Canaan, they were to count beginning with the day following a Sabbath. Without further instruction, there could be a whole year's worth of Sabbaths to choose from! However, within Leviticus 23, the annual Sabbaths are arranged chronologically beginning with Nisan (also called Abib). This, combined with information obtained from other portions of the Bible, has led all concerned to conclude that the Sabbath in question is early in the year, located near the beginning of a spring harvest, and is one of three within the Days of Unleavened Bread. The church of God and the various sects of the Jews are in agreement on this.

The count is to continue fifty days with the fiftieth day being the Day of Pentecost. As a Greek word, the name *Pentecost* does not appear in the Old Testament, only in the New, and it means "fiftieth." In the Old Testament, Pentecost is called "the Feast of Weeks" or "the Feast of Firstfruits."

Carefully note that God points only to a Sabbath—*it* must first be found—in order to begin the count. This fits nicely within God's directive in Exodus 31:13 that the Sabbath is a sign between Him and His people. Day One of the count does not begin with a Sabbath, but with the day following it. However, without first isolating which Sabbath, one cannot know which "morrow"—which day after. If one does not use the correct Sabbath, it may set Pentecost's observance as much as seven days off God's intended target.

The Sabbath in question here can be neither the First nor the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, though both are annual Sabbaths. Why? Because using either of those holy days, both of which fall on fixed dates, effectively eliminates a person's need to count! This is because, when one begins counting fifty days from a fixed date, one will always end on a fixed date.

If we begin to count with the day following Nisan 15 (the First Day of Unleavened Bread), we will always end on Sivan 6. If we commence our count on the day following Nisan 21 (the Last Day of Unleavened Bread), we will always finish on Sivan 12. If God wanted us to observe Pentecost on a fixed date, He would have told us so, even as He did with all the other festival dates in Leviticus 23.

One man suggested that counting from a fixed date is still counting. Yes, that is true. But if one does that, the count only has to be done once in all of history, and Pentecost's location is found forever. The man's suggestion is similar to interpreting that the command to eat unleavened bread during the Days of Unleavened Bread no longer applies because the Israelites did it when they first came out of Egypt! Even as unleavened bread must be eaten each year, the clear implication from Leviticus 23 is that God wants us to count to Pentecost afresh each year.

God wants us to count to Pentecost year-by-year beginning with the day following a Sabbath whose date changes from year to year. This can only be the weekly Sabbath that falls on or between the two holy days during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The starting point has been located. Even though the count does not actually begin with the Sabbath, the Sabbath's location is of primary importance, not the day after. The day after would never be located without first locating the correct Sabbath.

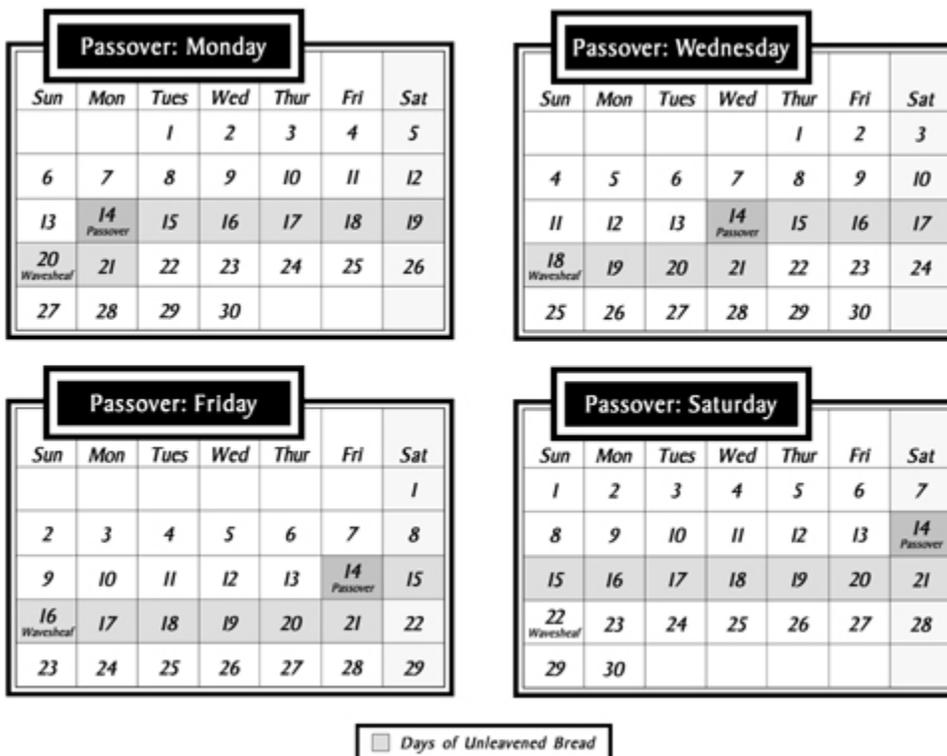
According to Hebrew Calendar rules, Passover, Nisan 14, can fall only on a Monday, Wednesday, Friday, or weekly Sabbath. During the past century, it has fallen on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday in just over 87% of the years.

Thus, when Passover is on a Monday, the date of the weekly Sabbath will be Nisan 19. Wavesheaf Day, the day the count begins, will be Sunday, Nisan 20 (see the accompanying chart).

When Passover is on Wednesday, the weekly Sabbath will be Nisan 17, and Wavesheaf Day falls on Sunday, Nisan 18.

When Passover is on Friday, the weekly Sabbath occurs on Nisan 15 (the First Day of Unleavened Bread), and Wavesheaf Day is thus Nisan 16.

We easily see that the date of Wavesheaf Day changes depending upon the day Passover occurs. When the date of Wavesheaf Day changes, so also does the date of Pentecost. Since the weekly Sabbath always falls on Saturday, Wavesheaf Day will always be on a Sunday, and counting fifty days beginning with Wavesheaf Day means Pentecost will always occur on a Sunday as well.



### Passover on a Weekly Sabbath

Less than 13% of the time in the last century, Passover has fallen on a weekly Sabbath. The conclusion reached by some church of God groups on when to begin the count destroys unity on this issue. A weekly Sabbath Passover causes the next day, a Sunday, to be the First Day of Unleavened Bread and thus a holy day Sabbath. The practice of beginning the count to Pentecost on this day began in 1974 in the Worldwide Church of God and has been continued by several groups following Herbert Armstrong's death.

However, a number of things are wrong with the conclusion to begin counting with this day.

First, we are warned in Deuteronomy 12:32 and Revelation 22:18 neither to add nor to take away anything from God's Word. There is no command or example anywhere in Scripture that the sheaf *must* be waved during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Instead, the implication of Leviticus 23 is that the weekly Sabbath's location *within* the Days of Unleavened Bread is of primary importance, as the instructions in verses 10-11, 15-16 show.

Second, Passover, though it falls on a weekly Sabbath occasionally, never qualifies as a weekly Sabbath *within* the Days of Unleavened Bread. Leviticus 23:5-6 clearly states that "on the fourteenth day of the first month . . . is the Lord's Passover," and "on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread." That Passover and Unleavened Bread are adjacent to each other is patently true, but they are *separate* festivals with distinctly different teaching. Passover teaches us of the death of our Savior to cover our sins. The Days of Unleavened Bread instruct us to come out of sin, to overcome and grow from the trials of daily life.

Passover is not part of the Days of Unleavened Bread, and therefore the Sabbath it infrequently falls on does not qualify as a weekly Sabbath *within* the Days of Unleavened Bread. To use it so is inconsistent with the counting pattern used in the other 87% of years. Furthermore, Wavesheaf Day is directly attached to Pentecost—the former begins the count, the latter concludes it. In addition, both days involve harvest symbolism. Wavesheaf Day is only indirectly attached to the Days of Unleavened Bread due to the count often beginning within them.

Third, no one has ever found a record in all of history of the Jews—whether Sadducees, Pharisees, Falashas, Kairites, or Essenes—observing Wavesheaf Day on anything but a common workday. All these groups began their count following a Sabbath, but none of them ever permitted Wavesheaf Day to be *observed* on any type of Sabbath. This is because they could see that Scripture clearly states the Wavesheaf Day falls the day *after* a Sabbath, not on one.

John 20:1, 11-18 absolutely proves that Wavesheaf Day follows the day after the *weekly* Sabbath that falls *within* the Days of Unleavened Bread. Jesus, as the first of the firstfruits, is the reality of the symbolism of the Old Covenant Wavesheaf Day ceremonies. He was crucified on a Wednesday Passover and was interred as the sun set that day. He spent exactly three days and three nights buried in the tomb, being resurrected as the sun set ending the weekly Sabbath. Then, on Sunday morning, He rose to heaven for acceptance as the first of God's spiritual harvest.

Seeing their conclusion is weak, those who want to place Wavesheaf Day on the day following a Sabbath Passover have devised a cunning argument for beginning the count with the First Day of Unleavened Bread: Since Jesus, the first of the firstfruits, was "waved" for acceptance before the Father following His resurrection within the Days of Unleavened Bread, they conclude that every Wavesheaf Day thereafter should be conformed to it. But consider this: Does every Passover have to be observed on a Wednesday because Jesus was crucified in a year when Passover fell on a Wednesday? We do not do that, do we? Wavesheaf Day and the beginning of the count to Pentecost are, like all other festivals and their ceremonies, to fall on the dates and days assigned them by God in Leviticus 23 (see verse 2) and in the calendar rules.

There is no consistency to their argument and practice, but those who believe this reasoning are so insistent that at least one group declared Passover to be a Day of Unleavened Bread, despite Leviticus 23:4-6 showing they are two different festivals.

No statement in the Bible says that Wavesheaf Day *must* fall within the Days of Unleavened Bread. Instead, God uses a weekly Sabbath falling within Unleavened Bread as His marker, and the following day begins the count. Thus, the day the count begins—a Sunday—can fall outside the Days of Unleavened Bread in about 13% of years.

### **Joshua 5 and Assumptions**

Through examining seven overlooked assumptions, this article's second part will establish that Joshua 5:10-11 cannot be used to justify changing from the normal counting pattern used when Passover falls on a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday.

Some, realizing their argument for always keeping Wavesheaf Day within the Days of Unleavened Bread is still quite weak, have leapt on another rationalization and conclusion from a series of assumptions read into Joshua 5:10-11. These assumptions have led them to the conclusion that, since Leviticus 23:14 states that the Israelites were not to eat bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain from

their new spring harvest until they had brought their sheaf offering to God, and since Joshua 5:11 records that the Israelites ate of the produce of the land on the day after Passover, it means they must have made a wavesheaf offering.

However, major assumptions in their argument have led them to a wrong conclusion:

**First Assumption** : Joshua and the Israelites waved the sheaf following a harvest of Canaanite grain. This must be read into the context because this is nowhere stated. In fact, neither the words "wave," "waved," "waves" nor "wavesheaf" or "wave offering" appear in the entire book of Joshua. In addition, the context makes no mention of the burnt or meal offerings that were to accompany the waving of the sheaf (Leviticus 23:12-13). Finally, it does not mention the erection of an altar. This is no minor element because it would have been the first altar established after entering the Promised Land.

**Second Assumption** : This was a year Passover fell on a Sabbath. How do they know that? No one knows it! Nobody knows with absolute certainty what year Israel entered into the Promised Land, let alone the exact day this offering was supposedly made! They have no calendar date from which to offer proof. The argument is built on a series of "ifs" centered on the assumption that the Israelites *were required* to wave the sheaf before they could eat of the harvest of the land.

**Third Assumption** : Israel was required by God—forced by law—to make the wavesheaf offering before they could eat the grain from a Canaanite planting. This assumption is drawn from Leviticus 23:10, 14. Taken alone, these scriptures may lead one to think the wavesheaf had to be done immediately. However, where does God say that it had to be done immediately or that they could not eat of the produce of the land upon entering it? He says nothing of the sort as they approached the land. We will see that the Israelites not only *did not* have to make a wavesheaf offering of Canaanite grain before eating of the land's produce, but that they *did not* do so, and further, doing so would have been sin to them.

**Fourth Assumption** : God would accept an Israelite offering derived from crops they had not *planted* on their own land. Exodus 23:14-16 explicitly states that their offerings had to come from grain that the Israelites themselves had sown in the field. Any grains they would have harvested after entering the land would have come from what the Canaanites had sown. This makes all the difference in the world when we consider the spiritual significance of sowing and harvesting. Does God's Spirit produce the heathen—the unconverted—person's spiritual harvest?

II Samuel 24:24 shows that David clearly understood another principle involved here. The one making the offering must have done the labor and made the sacrifices necessary to produce the offering and render it acceptable to God. Offerings that cost the offerer nothing are not acceptable.

Where are the labor and sacrifice involved in Israel's supposed wavesheaf offering? Offering from Canaan's harvest was not an acceptable offering for Israel to give because it cost them nothing. In short, God wants offered to Him what He has first given to us. When God loves us and we then return love to Him, it is acceptable because He first loved us (I John 4:19) and shed His Spirit abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5). When we offer love to Him, it is His own love, providence, the fruit of His Spirit that we have labored to produce, returning to Him.

**Fifth Assumption** : God would accept an offering of polluted things. The context in Leviticus 22:19-25 specifically covers animal offerings, but the principle applies to grain offerings as well, as the

explanation of the fourth assumption indicates. No animals with blemishes of explicit nature are permitted to be the food of God. In verse 25, God says that nothing from the foreigner's hand is acceptable "because their corruption is in them." God states, "They shall not be accepted on your behalf."

If one thinks this is of small consequence, then perhaps it would be good to review what happened to Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, when they foolishly used coals from a profane or common fire as they made the offering on the incense altar. God did not think it insignificant when they offered fire He considered unfit for His altar. He struck them dead as a lesson to all those who are less concerned about purity of worship than they should be.

Israel was symbolically under the blood of Jesus Christ and had made the covenant with God. This rendered them a holy people consecrated for God's use and glorification. Because they were chosen by God and holy, their offerings, as long as they were without blemish and not from the stranger's hand, were acceptable to Him.

Israel had no acceptable harvest to offer in Joshua 5. In fact, under the circumstance, Israel was required by law *not* to make an offering!

***Sixth Assumption*** : Israel was permitted to make an offering of any kind. This is a big one, reinforcing all the other objections against the common interpretation that Joshua 5:10-11 permits or demands a First Day of Unleavened Bread waving of the sheaf and beginning of the count.

In reality, upon entering the land, offerings involved in the worship of God were *specifically* forbidden by Him until certain things were first accomplished. Through Moses, God instructs in Deuteronomy 12:1, 5-14:

These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. . . . [Y]ou shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His habitation; and *there you shall go*. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. *You shall not at all do as we are doing here today*—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes—for as yet *you have not come to the rest and the inheritance* which the Lord your God is giving you. But when you cross over the Jordan and  *dwell* in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, *and when He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety*, then there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the Lord. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you. *Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see*; but in the place which the Lord chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you. (emphasis added)

This instruction supersedes Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29—and especially for the purposes of this article, Leviticus 23:10, 14, where God commands, "When you come into the land. . . ." From those two verses, one could easily assume that the Israelites were to begin keeping those days and all their offerings immediately upon entering. However, Deuteronomy 12, written within the last month before entering the Promised Land, puts a hold on doing these things immediately upon entering the land (Deuteronomy 1:3). Deuteronomy 12 makes clear that they were *not* free to follow the Leviticus 23 instructions until certain matters were accomplished.

Deuteronomy 12 paves the way for Israel, at God's command, to establish a headquarters, a national, central place for the worship of the Lord God at the site of His choosing. Further, God adds that they were actually to be *dwelling* in the land, to be at *rest*, and to be *dwelling in safety from their enemies*. Also included within these instructions, though not specifically mentioned, is that the Tabernacle, the altar, the laver, and all the interior furniture had to be erected and in place.

Please pay special attention to what Moses says while the Israelites are still in the wilderness: "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today" (verse 8), referring to making offerings any old place that was convenient. In addition, Israel actually had to be living in the land, not marching around it fighting wars. They had to be in a settled circumstance—so settled that they were in safety. Obviously, this eliminates a wavesheaf offering and its accompanying burnt and meal offerings from happening in Joshua 5.

The place God ultimately chose and in which Israel erected the Tabernacle was Shiloh. This was not accomplished until Joshua 18:1: "Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them." This was the first sign that things were almost ready so they could legitimately offer sacrifices to God. However, some land had yet to be apportioned. The land for seven tribes plus the allocation of cities to the Levites and the cities of refuge had yet to be settled. The final apportioning is recorded in chapters 18-21. Thus, many of the tribes were not yet dwelling and at rest at the beginning of Joshua 18.

The official announcement that all was in place appears in Joshua 21:43-45:

So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

From the time they crossed the Jordan and entered the land, seven years passed before they were free to offer what Deuteronomy 12 forbade and what some claim occurred in Joshua 5.

***Seventh Assumption*** : Joshua and the Israelites were so irresponsible as to disregard God's clear instruction given through Moses while they were still wandering. Does the Scripture anywhere speak badly of Joshua? In Joshua 1:6-9, God specifically seeks out Joshua to exhort him to be courageous, not turning to the right or left regarding what he had been instructed as Moses' right-hand man. That Joshua did just this is verified in Joshua 11:15: "As the Lord had commanded Moses His servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses." At the end of his life, he is as firm as ever (Joshua 23-24).

Joshua 22:25-30 provides a telling example of how deeply the command not to make any sacrifices except where God had placed His name was burned into all of Israel's heart at that time. When it was found that Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh, which had settled on the east side of Jordan, had erected what appeared to be a sacrificial altar, the remaining tribes almost entered into civil war to stop them! A fuller explanation revealed they had erected, not an altar, but a monument dedicated as evidence of the East Bank tribes' unity with God and the other tribes of Israel on the west side. They were not about to make offerings anywhere except where God commanded. The Israelites did *not* make the wavesheaf offering when they came into the land.

### **Old Corn**

Joshua 1:11 says, "Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions [ *victuals*, KJV] for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess.'"

Where did the food they were to prepare and set aside come from? It could not have been manna because manna spoiled within one day (Exodus 16:20). Besides, fresh manna continued to fall each day, except for Sabbaths, until the day following the First Day of Unleavened Bread in that year. God stopped providing manna because the Israelites now had complete access to the produce of the Promised Land, as well as because they were no longer wandering but were camped at a place from which they would launch their conquest of the land.

Considering the time of year (spring), the provision could not have come from fall harvests of fruits and vegetables. The fleeing Canaanites would have either consumed them themselves by this time or taken as much with them as they could. The provision came from a new spring harvest of grains either of winter wheat or barley or both. There was nothing to stop the Israelites from partaking of what was available because no law of God prohibited it; the offering laws applied only to what Israel had planted.

The command to set aside food was made because God knew He would stop sending the manna on Nisan 16. The stockpiled food would keep Israel fed until a much larger harvest could be made after the Passover events were completed, the holy day observed, and Israel was more settled in the land, preparing for the conquest of Jericho.

Israel crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land on Nisan 10 and immediately moved to set up camp that day in Gilgal. The mass circumcisions mentioned must have taken place on Nisan 11. As Nisan 13 ended and Nisan 14 began, they kept the Passover as commanded by God. The daylight portion of Passover day was spent preparing for the holy day on Nisan 15. They kept the Night to be Much Observed as the holy day began, eating unleavened cakes and parched corn from the already harvested Canaanite crops. During the daylight portion of the holy day, they ate of the same provisions that supplied their meal the previous evening because no manna fell on that Sabbath day. No manna fell the next day, Nisan 16, either.

The notation regarding "old corn" ("produce" in modern versions) is simply given to show where Israel's sustenance came from, since the manna stopped appearing. It is not given to prove that a wavesheaf offering was made because none was required—none could be made in the first place.

### **Conclusion**

Joshua 5:10-11 cannot be used to support using the First Day of Unleavened Bread to begin the count to Pentecost because:

1. No authority is given in Scripture to change the method of counting to Pentecost when Passover falls on the weekly Sabbath.
2. Counting to Pentecost always begins the day after the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread. It is the weekly Sabbath, God's sign, not Wavesheaf Day that must fall within the Days of Unleavened Bread.
3. Exodus 23 explicitly requires the grain offering to be planted by the offerer, thus they had none to offer immediately after entering the land.
4. Leviticus 22 forbids making an offering of heathen substance, thus they had no acceptable grain offering.
5. Deuteronomy 12 forbids offerings until the Tabernacle, altar, laver, and all the Tabernacle's furniture were in place.
6. Deuteronomy 12 requires the Israelites to be settled in their inheritances and no longer involved in warfare before any sacrifices could be lawfully made.

### **The Test Commandment**

When the ministry received the doctrinal research papers regarding the Pentecost change in 1974, the subject of this article was left unresolved. Dr. Charles Dorothy, who authored those papers, made this comment in regard to this unresolved issue. "This may be a supreme test for the entire Church of God at the end time." A decision was hastily made and announced by letter a few weeks later. However, the letter had no new information from what appeared in the research papers. A wrong decision was made without adequate biblical information and without adequate understanding of some ceremonial laws. At its base, it is an issue of the Sabbath and its proper use.

The Sabbath has been called the test commandment with good reason (Exodus 16:4). God Himself states in Exodus 31:13 that it is a sign between Him and us. A sign gives direction and guidance. On the one hand, it designates the relationship between the Eternal God and His people. But in the case of the subject of this article, God uses it to point the way to the observance of Pentecost, another Sabbath, on the correct day. It is the position of the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread that is the consistent sign pointing to when Wavesheaf Day should be observed and the count to Pentecost begun.

Scripture gives no authority to change the method of counting to Pentecost when Passover falls on a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday to a different one when it occurs on a weekly Sabbath. Counting to Pentecost should always begin with the day after the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread. It is the weekly Sabbath, not Wavesheaf Day, that must fall within the Days of Unleavened Bread.

The other way puts Wavesheaf Day and its ceremonies on a Sabbath. No one has ever found a record of anybody ever doing such a thing until the Worldwide Church of God began using that method in 1974. Wavesheaf Day was always a common workday. It represents the beginning of a harvest, and harvesting is hard work. The Sabbath is a day of rest.

Finally, it is not an unholy act to begin to count to Pentecost outside the Days of Unleavened Bread. This occurs simply because one is following God's instruction and the patterns of the Hebrew Calendar. The same rules that establish that Passover can fall only on four different days also stipulate that Wavesheaf Day occurs outside the Days of Unleavened Bread on occasion. Let us honor God's Sabbath by using the right one to establish Wavesheaf Day and thus Pentecost, another Sabbath, every year.