

Counting To Pentecost: A Simple Approach

Following What Is Written

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 13-Feb-21; Sermon #1583

Over the past several years, we here in Church of the Great God, the ministry at least seems to have made a point of emphasis that our God believes in and acts through covenants. My dad had his lengthy series on the covenants, and before that he had his 29-sermon series, “The Covenants, Grace, and Law.” And not too long ago I emphasized the covenants of God, especially the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, in my “Doctrine of Israel” series.

But the point is, Almighty God is a covenantal God—God works through covenants. There are many in the Bible, and we are functioning under a few of them right now, whether we understand it or not. And acknowledging this fact, that God is a covenantal God and works through covenants, goes a long way to helping us understand a great many things that other people consider to be mysteries within the pages of the Bible. But if we understand that God is working through a covenant, it puts things in their proper perspective.

Now, when we talk of covenants we mean contracts, treaties, compacts, formal agreements of one kind or another between two or more parties. And they get together and they compose a contract (an agreement of some sort), and then they agree to this contract by some formal procedure. Whether it is simply as we do these days, signing our legal name to a document, or as they used to do in the Old West, they made their mark. Even shaking hands used to be enough to seal a deal. Or in biblical terms, they did various things to ratify an agreement like that, like with Jacob and Laban, they erected a pillar and they agreed that this was a sign of their covenant they had made with one another. Erect a pile of stones and say, “Hey, this means this, this is the sign of the covenant.” Or they would seal it with blood from a sacrifice.

These are all legitimate ways that a covenant would be sealed, and the two parties that participated in it would be bound then. Once this was done, the covenant was legally binding—both parties had agreed to it and now they had to face the consequences of that. So the terms would go into immediate

effect. The purpose of the agreement (whatever it was for, whatever project that it would control) would then begin to move forward, and rewards for compliance and punishments for noncompliance would kick in as needed.

That is just how covenants work; that is how contracts work. These are all standard features of contracts and covenants, whether it be your mortgage agreement that you made with the bank, business partnership agreement, work contract, or even something as big as a treaty between nations. They all work under the same basic principles. Party A will do this, party B will do that, if either party fails to do this or that, they will face some sort of disincentive like a fine, or jail, or death (that happens in God's covenants). If they have held their end of the bargain on the other hand, they will receive certain inducements and rewards. And of course, if they worked through this covenant right to the end of the project, then the contract (the covenant, the agreement) is voided, because the reason that was brought into being in the first place is now behind them—they have succeeded.

So contracts can be voided, sometimes not just by fulfilling everything and bringing the project to completion, but also they can be voided by non-compliance, or they can be voided between humans by mutual agreement, and of course by completion of their aims. That is just how contracts and agreements, and compacts work. Such agreements are what makes the world go round, and it makes the world go round in some semblance of order. People know what to expect. When a contract is in view, it allows them to plan for their futures. Because they know that if they keep the contract, they will receive this or that, they will have this money, they will have this obligation, they will have this to do, and from that they will receive this or that—and so they can make plans.

A lot of times there are dates involved in contracts, that things must be done by this date, especially if it is like a contract for building a skyscraper or something of that nature. There are certain time limits that each person involved in the contract is supposed to fulfill. So they know their responsibilities, and they know what will happen and when, and they also understand what will happen if they do not keep up their side, and they also know what will happen if they do.

Contracts tend to establish trust, because you are banking on the fact that the other person is going to keep his side of the bargain, because he signed his name to it in good faith. At least that is how it used to be, now you cannot trust anybody. But normally contracts and compacts are ways that make sure that society has a measure of trust so that things will get done properly. It establishes binding obligations among normally mistrustful parties, and that allows for progress and mutual prosperity—because is that not what most contracts are there for? Somebody wants to make a buck, somebody wants to do something that is going to cause growth and prosperity in other ways, and so we have these contracts, compacts, treaties, what have you.

In the United States, the American Constitution is in itself a compact between the people—we the people and the government. And we are seeing what happens when the parties to that contract fail to live up to its ideals and provisions. When you do not live up to a contract or a compact, things start breaking down—and we are seeing that in this country.

I know I am getting deep into contracts here, but it is a very important thing for us to understand because we are people of the covenant. We need to understand some of these things. Contracts often contain a section that provides a process for “emendation”—that is change; changing the contract. Usually there is a provision in there that both parties agree to, and it is composed of instructions on how to make any kind of changes to the contract. So sometimes these terms can be changed, and both parties must agree to the proposed changes. Sometimes the changes to the contract are minor, so minor that representatives of both parties need only initial their agreement to it. So you will see that sometimes on various things, “I don't want the interest rate to be this,” or whatever (not the interest rate, that would probably be too big a thing). But whatever the minor point that they are going over gets jotted in a margin, and both parties initial it and say, “Okay, this is what we want.”

At other times you have to attach a codicil to the contract with the terms of the change. Both parties have to sign it, and usually witnesses have to be put on there to say, “Yeah, this is exactly what they agreed to.” If the change is substantial enough, then the whole contract itself must be rewritten and reapproved by both parties. And essentially what it does is, it makes a new

contract—it sets up an entirely new contract—and the old one that they did not quite agree on is null and void.

Now, in terms of this provision for emendation, God's covenants do not work this way. That is not part of the covenants; there are no change provisions in God's covenants. They must be accepted wholesale or rejected completely. God lays out the terms, and He says, “I want you to do this: if you do this, I'll give you this blessing; if you do not do this, I will curse you in this way (or I will withhold this).” Or whatever the terms happen to be, and you say, “Yes, we agree to that!” or “No, we don't want it.” That is just how it works. He is the superior personality. He is the superior one. He is divine. He is God. He can lay out the rules, and we as the lesser have to say, “I will” or “I will not.” That is how it works in divine contracts. The other party cannot go back after saying, “Yes, we will do this,” and renegotiate terms with God. You do not renegotiate with God, that just does not happen. He is the superior party.

The terms of the contract or the covenant in this case with God are set in stone, or in ink, or really, they are set in the perfect character of God. Those are the terms; they are set within His character and within His Book—and that makes these things very binding. The punishments will occur, or the blessings will occur. That is God. The One who is backing up this covenant is the One that can make all these things happen.

Let us start in Exodus 19. This is the historical record (I guess it was historic too) of Israel agreeing to the Old Covenant. Now, I want you to listen or read carefully what it says here:

Exodus 19:3-8 And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. [He is laying out some of the terms here of the covenant.] And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

So He gave them both sides: “If you agree to this, you're going to be My people. You'll be a kingdom of priests, and I will give you these things. And if you don't. . . .” Of course that is assumed here that things are not going to go well with them, because you saw what He did to the Egyptians.

Exodus 19:7-8 So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.

Here in five or six verses, we have a summation of Israel accepting the Old Covenant. We could say that they approved the Old Covenant by voice vote, if you will. But notice the important word in this passage is “all.” *All* the people certified that they would keep *all* of God's words, *all* of His instructions, *all* of His covenant. By doing so, by saying “Yea” to this pronouncement of the covenant, they were legally committed under God to keep the Old Covenant. All of it—down to the very last detail—all the people said that they would keep all the words. So this is pretty all-encompassing here, it covers everything. They could not say, “Oh we don't like this particular one about not eating pigs, so we will scratch this one out. God, would you mind initialing this one here?” No, they could not do that. They had to accept the whole thing and they did. They said, “We'll keep all the words of this covenant.”

So that is the historical record.

Let us go now to do Deuteronomy 4. We are going to string some verses together here. And by this we will see that there is really no-emendation clause in Scripture.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2 “Now, O Israel [this is to the next generation], listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the

word which I command you, nor take [anything] from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I commanded you.”

No adding, no subtracting to what He had given.

Let us go to the next one, just in the next chapter. It is said a little bit differently here, but it is the same idea.

Deuteronomy 5:32-33 “Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live [that is repeated again] and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.”

Now let us go to chapter 12. Deuteronomy is chockfull of these kinds of statements. He wanted those children of Israel going into the land to understand this particular bit of information, because their fathers had botched it up pretty badly all through the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 12:32 “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”

Let us go to Joshua 1. I almost feel sorry for this generation because God had to pound this into them. But I do not. I do not feel sorry for them, they had their chance. They were just being stubborn.

God is talking to Joshua here:

Joshua 1:7 “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.”

Now, Joshua was much more receptive to this, he actually did it. It says at the end of this particular book that he had done all that God had commanded

him (at least in his own estimation, he had done pretty well). But it is in the book now, so God must have said, “Yes, Joshua did a pretty good job. He didn’t turn to the right hand or to the left.”

Let us jump to Proverbs, chapter 30. Some wisdom for the wise here.

Proverbs 30:5-6 Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him [adding faith into this]. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

So he is saying what God has set down in His Word is absolutely pure. It is totally true. It is not something that needs to be in any way watered down, or even refined (if you will), because it is already pure. Because God—it says in another place—has refined it seven times, so it is as pure as it can be. And we do not have any right to add to it, because when we add to it, we add defilement to it, we add impurity to it because it is coming out of our corrupt human minds. So, a faithful person (he is saying here) listens to God's Word as is. He does not add, does not subtract, does not go to the right or to the left, but takes God's Word as it is given.

One more, flip to the back of the Book, in Revelation 22. And we will see that the whole book is finished off with a very severe warning about this very thing. It is not just the Old Testament people that needed to be concerned about adding or taking away from God's Word. It is very much needed that His own people—the elect—not add or take away from His Word. So here we are in Revelation 22 and some people try to wiggle out of this and say, “This is just talking about the book of Revelation.” But no, we can tell from what we have already seen that this is a consistent principle for the whole Bible.

Revelation 22:18-19 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. . .

Do you remember the first time this concept was mentioned in Exodus 19? What did it say? “You saw what I did to the Egyptians and the plagues I brought on them.” This idea ended with the same thought.

Revelation 22:18-19 If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

So this is pretty dire—this warning here—that we need to be very careful about how we handle God's Word. The simplest thing to do, the wisest thing to do—is to take things as written. This no-emendation clause, if you will, in the book is spelled out specifically and repeatedly throughout the book, so that new generations realize that they are just as bound to keep the covenant in its entirety as their forefathers. So they or we cannot change any of the terms or instructions, either by addition or subtraction, or by leaning left or right.

This is not an easy thing to do, but the principle is very easy. The principle is: if God says it, and He says it in a certain way—that we do that. God's way, as I mentioned, cannot be improved by new ideas, by new kinds of thinking, new philosophies. Nor can it be improved by removing certain details that we do not like. It is a whole package. We have to take it as a whole, and it is diminished by adding or taking away bits and pieces—it is not improved, it is diminished.

The Bible shows us at least three ways that this diminishment happens, and I am going to go over these three points. Let us go back to Genesis 3, to the very beginning, and we will see this first one. We will call this first diminishment of God's way, God's Word, deception. Just think about as we go through here the way Satan was diminishing God's pure Word here in his speech, his conversation with Eve.

Genesis 3:1-5 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day

you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,
knowing good and evil.”

Like I said, this diminishment of God's Word I call deception. Satan rolled this one out immediately upon speaking with our first parents. He got Eve immediately to begin to question God's Word and approach. He put doubt in her mind. He forced her by his question to embellish God's simple command, and then sowed doubt about the punishment that she and Adam would receive if they went against God's command. Finally, he implied God was holding something back, suggesting that an open mind and knowing good from evil were the keys to being like God. “If you just have an open mind, if you just know and figure out for yourself what is right and wrong, you'll be like God”—which is a bald-faced lie.

The point here is that the Devil pressures us in various ways to add or subtract from God's Word by instigating dissatisfaction. So that we feel like, “Something isn't right.” “This isn't easy enough.” or “God is being unfair, He's not treating me properly in this.” So we become dissatisfied and move to add or subtract from God's way, so that we can feel satisfaction again.

So, deception from Satan is always in play. He is always trying to get us to diminish God's Word through some sort of deception that he is broadcasting out to us. Satan has deceived the whole world. That is a very plain statement there in Revelation 12:9. And Jesus says in Matthew 24:24 that Satan's intent (in the end time especially) is to pull out all the stops to deceive even the very elect. Now, if we stick to what God says—as the elect—we will not be deceived. That is where He says, *if it were possible* to deceive the very elect. If we stick to, very closely, our relationship with Jesus Christ and God the Father, it will not be possible to deceive us, because we will have our arms firmly wrapped around the trunk of the tree.

Satan is going to try his hardest to put so much deception out there that we will crack. He is not really worried about deceiving the rest of the world, he has already got them in his pocket. His deceptions are aimed at us to see that if he can undermine us in our belief as much as possible, so that we give in at a certain point. But our job is to stay close to God, so that does not happen.

Diminishment number two we can find in Matthew the 22nd chapter. This is Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees.

Matthew 22:23-29 The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: “Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her.” Jesus answered and said to them, [this is the important scripture here] “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

So the second way that we diminish God's Word is through *misunderstanding*. Jesus points out both a misreading of the Scripture, and a misreading or misunderstanding of God's power, that is, His abilities, His strength of character. We do that a lot. We (using George Bush's terms) "misunderestimate" God quite a lot.

Now, the Sadducees—having rejected the resurrection—thought the afterlife would be some kind of continuation of physical life. So they were asking this question thinking that the resurrection would be something like their own life in this world, where they would marry. And Jesus tells them, “You guys got this all wrong.” Jesus tells them that they were reasoning from a cockeyed foundation. They had started out thinking in one way, and it was making their conclusions all wrong. They failed to account for the almighty power of God in all of this, and the awesome plan that He is working out.

He is not stuck, relegated to physical things. His plan is so much greater and more spiritual in nature than they ever thought about. They could not consider (especially having rejected the resurrection from the dead) that things in God's Kingdom would be different from normal life. He is telling them that their God and their imagination were too small. They were thinking too little. He said, “You have to think bigger. God isn't confined to what you can imagine, He's much greater than that.” Does Paul not quote

Isaiah, “Eye has not seen nor ear heard.” That is kind of what He is saying here, “You guys have no idea what God is going to do because you have rejected His Word, you have misunderstood it.”

You know, people tend to project their feeble knowledge and understanding on God, and that leads almost all the time to wrong conclusions. They think, “God is altogether like me, and if I think this is good, well surely God thinks it’s good too.” When He says, “No! Didn’t you read the Book? This is what I said. This is what I mean. It’s something much greater than what you thought.” I mean just think about the kind of thinking that believes that God is honored through Christmas. That somehow on the wrong day—which He said nothing about—that they should give each other gifts, “Because Jesus wasn’t born on that day but another day. But even so we will honor Him this way, and have lots of food, and a feast, and all those other things.” No, all these things that they think are honoring God—do not.

Let us just move on from misunderstanding, and go to the third one in Mark 7. If we do not move on, I will not get to the rest of what I want to say. This should be an easy one to see. The third diminishment of God's Word is blindly following tradition.

Mark 7:5-13 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said to them, “Well, did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.”

Let us just drop down to verse 13.

Mark 7:13 “making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

So it was not just a thing with the washing of hands and what we skipped over there (about giving money that should have gone to their parents, and help, and that sort of thing), but He is talking about tradition. The Pharisees blindly followed what their elders, what their ancestors had handed down to them orally. It was mostly an oral tradition. Another way to look at it is that tradition is giving those who preceded us a vote, and oftentimes, as in the case of the Pharisees, it gives them too much of a vote.

Strict, unthinking adherence to tradition—that is the reasoning and decrees of men—if it is taken too far, it limits or stops growth in understanding. Every question is answered by: “What did the previous generation do?” or “What did these particular scholars say?” or “What was the way the council voted on this particular thing?”—rather than “What does God say?” So what it does in the end (this blind adherence to tradition) is it ossifies (hard bone into stone) the faith. It ossifies the faith by assuming that the people before us had all the answers, and they solved all the questions. And what it does—if you rely on that to a certain extent—it defies them. It makes those people in the past “God.” It is ancestor worship in a way, it puts their words before God's Word.

So, Jesus says here that it is tantamount to rejecting God's commandments. Keeping their tradition in the way that they did rejected God's commandments, and had therefore rejected God. Does it make sense to disobey God, to observe oral additions to the covenant? It does not if you said, “I will do everything that He says.” This is why Jesus calls them hypocrites here, because they purport to worship God and stand up before the people as the voice of God. But in fact they worshipped tradition; they worshipped their ancestors.

We must consider these three principles—deception, misunderstanding, and tradition—on every question of doctrine, because as human beings we are susceptible to stumbling over every one of them. We tend to want to do these things before we want to follow God, and when you have the Holy Spirit, God's way has a better chance of coming out on top. But even though we have God's Spirit, we often stumble on these particular things. We allow ourselves to be deceived by some cunning bit of information or cunning argument, or we misunderstand something because of a preconception that

we have not been able to overcome, or lacking any answers we fall back on tradition and blindly follow it.

In the remaining time I have (which is about a half hour) I will summarize our—that is CGG’s—longtime teaching on counting to Pentecost. I know this is a bit of a point of contention within the churches, but I want to give our argument, if you will, on this. And I intend to show that we believe that our way of counting to Pentecost follows God's plain language instruction. That we do not have to add anything to it or subtract anything from it, and if we remove our assumptions and additions, and traditions from the mix—how to count Pentecost becomes very simple.

Now, I know that some of you who are hearing me right now attend other churches of God who do not keep the same day for Pentecost on these particular years, they count a little bit differently. So my intention with the rest of the sermon is to present a summary case. I do not plan in any way to answer every question, but I just want to give our side of the argument (one side of the argument, if you will) just for your consideration. We have members who have joined us since the last time this controversial subject came up, which was 2008, so that was 13 years ago. I want to make sure that they have plenty of time to review the matter and decide on it. This gives them about three months to study it. And for the rest of you—old timers who have been around the Church of the Great God for a long time—I hope it will be just a refresher course in the basics of this matter.

The Pentecost counting controversy occurs because of a so-called anomaly. Notice that the way I put it there, it is a *so-called* anomaly. It has been made into an anomaly, it does not need to be. Normally, Passover falls on a weekday. That is not a Sabbath, it falls on a weekday. But it falls on the weekly Sabbath about once every ten years. It is not something that happens very often, but it does in these particular years: it occurred in 1954, 1974, 1994, 2001, 2005, and 2008. It occurs this year (2021), and again in 2025.

When Passover occurs on a weekly Sabbath, the starting point for the count becomes critical, as the church could keep Pentecost on one of two consecutive Sundays. Now, most of the churches of God will keep it one week earlier than we will in Church of the Great God. And this sermon will show hopefully why we keep it one week later.

Let us go to God's Word in Leviticus 23. We will be here in Leviticus 23 pretty much the rest of the sermon, except for the very end. I want to go here because I want to make sure that we understand some very important points in this first section.

Leviticus 23:1-8 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it, But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.’”

These are the things that we need to note here especially. First, God lists His feasts in chronological order, that is, the way He is going through the year. He starts with the Sabbath, however, giving it pride of place as it sets the ground rules for all the other Sabbaths that occur throughout the year. It is the main Sabbath of God. In the Hebrew, when a weekly Sabbath is mentioned in the text, it is nearly always preceded by the definite article “ha” (ha Shabbat or whatever the form of Sabbath is in that particular place).

What this means if you transferred it over into English, it is “the Sabbath.” It is a very definite article “the.” It is the weekly seventh-day Sabbath that it is talking about there, ordained at creation and formalized in the Ten Commandments. In this chapter, this grammatical rule is followed without fail. When God points out a weekly Sabbath (ha Sabbath), whether it is “the Sabbath” or “the Sabbaths,” it is talking about the weekly Sabbath—the seventh-day Sabbath. In the verses on the count to Pentecost—which are most important to us today—the Sabbath in question is always designated

with the definite article “ha.” So when you read it through here and it is “the Sabbath,” normally the translators bring it over, and it is speaking about the weekly Sabbath.

The second thing that we need to note is that Passover and Unleavened Bread are handled separately. They are in separate verses here, in verse 5, “The fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover.” And then, in verse 6, “On the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread”—that is, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So one is on the fourteenth, one is on the fifteenth—they are separate festivals.

Passover is not part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It occurs right next to it, but it is an entirely different festival. They are fundamentally different in what they teach. Passover is not even a Sabbath, it is not a holy day. It is actually a common work day with a very, very important ritual at the beginning of it, but it is also the last day to get leaven out of your homes. And to do that, you need to be free to work, and so you are free to work on the day of the Passover to get the last of the leaven out.

Unleavened bread is a week-long festival with holy days at each end. Their meanings, their symbolism, their sacrifices, and their works are all completely separate—this is a very important point. The Jews tried to squash Passover into Unleavened Bread, but God does not do that, He says, “The Passover is on the fourteenth and Unleavened Bread begins on the fifteenth.”

Now finishing His instructions on Unleavened Bread, God immediately launches into the Feast of Firstfruits, that is the next paragraph that comes up. We call the Feast of Firstfruits: “Wave Sheaf Day” or “the offering of the wave sheaf” or “the offering of the omer”. It just depends on how you decide to name it there. So let us read verses 9 through 16, we will actually go into a little bit of the Pentecost instructions here.

Leviticus 23:9-16 And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, “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. 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. [Important little clause there] 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. 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. You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain 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.’

Now into the Pentecost instructions:

Leviticus 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. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.’

The most vital verses here are verses 11 and 15 where in verse 11 it says, “on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” and in verse 15 it says, “from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.”

Those are the two most important things to key in on. In both cases, in order to count to Pentecost, the Sabbath must be determined first. You have to find which Sabbath you are going to count from, and then you go and start the count on the next day, the day after the Sabbath. So you have to find the Sabbath first, then you count either seven Sabbaths or you count fifty days.

This is God's rule. This is His commandment or His command, His instruction for counting to Pentecost. And it is quite simple, it is very straightforward—from the Sabbath, you go to the next day and begin your account. He says here, “On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it”—which is wave sheaf day, and that is the same day that you begin the count to Pentecost.

Scholarly in religious consensus, says that everyone agrees that the Sabbath falls during the week of Unleavened Bread. Whatever Sabbath that you choose to count from, you have to start from one of them in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because that is the context. The instruction is here in Leviticus 23, it goes directly from the Feast of Unleavened Bread (that week long time) into the counting of the giving of the wave sheaf offering and the count beginning to Pentecost.

The only question is: Which Sabbath? Because the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread has three—three Sabbaths. Most of the time, there is the weekly Sabbath (within the Days of Unleavened Bread), there is the first day of Unleavened Bread (which is a holy day Sabbath), and there is the last day of Unleavened Bread (which is also a holy day Sabbath). Now, if we read the text plainly, putting it together with what I gave you about the grammatical rule of *ha Shabbat*—if we read it plainly—there should be no question that it is the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread. In both cases, the Sabbath in verse 11 and the Sabbath in verse 15 is “*ha Shabbat*,” meaning the weekly Sabbath within that week long Feast. So if you look at it this way and its most simple form, you find the Sabbath within that week of the Days of Unleavened Bread and you start your count the next day—which will always be a Sunday, and that means Pentecost will always be on a Sunday.

Now, consider this: if we choose either of the holy days of Unleavened Bread which occur on fixed dates, Abib or Nisan 15 and Abib/Nisan 21. Either the 15th day of the first month, or the 21st day of the first month, we would end up after our count on fixed dates. We would either be on Sivan 6 or Sivan 12. This is what Rabbinic Judaism did, this is what the Pharisees did, they decided that they were going to keep it from the first day of Unleavened Bread—and so every Pentecost now is Sivan 6. They do not have to count.

That is why it is important. If God wanted us to keep Pentecost on either of these days each year, He could have easily said so. He would say, “Keep Pentecost on the sixth day of the third month.” That is all it would have taken, or the twelfth day of the third month. But He did not say that, He said, “Count!” He tells us to count, which implies that Pentecost does not fall on a

fixed date. It has to be counted each year. And so this eliminates the holy days of Unleavened Bread as candidates for the start of the count. So you choose the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread, it is the only candidate left to make counting a viable process. And all the churches of God agree that God means the weekly Sabbath in Leviticus 23:11 and 15. There is no doubt about that. We all agree that God says start from the weekly Sabbath.

The weekly Sabbath can fall on four different dates within the month of Abib or Nisan: on the 15th, the 17th, the 19th, and the 21st. So it can occur on one of four days. So, Pentecost can occur on four different dates in Sivan: the 6th, the 8th, the 10th, and 12th. To find out which one of those four days we must count fifty days, we must count the seven Sabbaths. Now the dates are not particularly important, the fact that we must count is its command, “You shall count.” God wants us to do it, He wants us to go through the exercise of counting. And that means we must identify the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread and begin counting the next day, which is a Sunday. Easy-peasy, right?

Well, all the churches of God would agree with me that in most years it is. You find the Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread and you start to count the next day. But what if the weekly Sabbath during the Feast is also the last day of Unleavened Bread? What if it is a natural week, starting on a Sunday and ending on a Sabbath? This means, if we follow God's plain instruction in verses 11 and 15 of Leviticus 23, and if we follow His plain instruction there—both wave sheaf day and the beginning of the count to Pentecost fall outside the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But the Sabbath that God tells us to start the count or figure out where to start the count, falls within the Days of Unleavened Bread. So if you do what He says—that you find the Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread and then count from the next day—the Feast of Firstfruits (the wave sheaf offering) would fall on that Sunday, the day after the last day of Unleavened Bread.

Now we have to ask the question, “Is that a problem?” Well, we say, “No, that's not a problem.” We will count according to God's rule, how He commanded us to do it. His instruction is right there, it is not hard to

understand. We will count it just as we count it every other year. We will find that Sabbath that is within the Days of Unleavened Bread and start the count the next day.

So, we keep the Feast of Pentecost one week later than the other churches of God in years like this, because they do not do that. Many of the other churches have decided that it is a problem if wave sheaf day falls outside the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They based their reasoning mostly on the symbolism of the wave sheaf offering, which Jesus Christ fulfilled in His resurrection. They say essentially that because it happened within the Days of Unleavened Bread in AD 31, not a year in which the Passover falls on a Sabbath. But they say that because it happened that way in that year, it should happen that way every year, whether the Sabbath they count from is within the Days of Unleavened Bread or not.

They also use Joshua 5, which I do not have time to get into. But suffice it to say that in our estimation, one must make a handful of assumptions to fit a Sabbath, Passover, and next day wave sheaf offering into the events there. You can wade into the weeds on this on our website if you like. Just type "Pentecost, counting to" in the search box, and it will come up with more articles and sermons than you probably wish to go through. And please also check out the other churches' doctrinal papers and articles on this subject to get both sides of the argument, and see which one makes the most sense.

So, the other churches have chosen to begin their count, not from the first holy day of Unleavened Bread or from the last holy day of Unleavened Bread (which is also the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread), but from Passover. This is why I said back there in Leviticus 23:5-6 that Passover is not a day of Unleavened Bread, it is the day before and it is a separate festival. It falls on a weekly Sabbath this year, but it is not a Sabbath itself. The only way it can be called a Sabbath this year is because it fell on a weekly Sabbath. Normally, it is not a Sabbath, it is a workday. And the more important point is, it is not part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it is its own separate festival.

Now, what this also does: it also puts wave sheaf day on the holy day Sabbath. Remember if you start from Passover (a weekly Sabbath), the next day is Sunday, but that Sunday is the first day of Unleavened Bread—and

the wave sheaf offering cannot be on a Sabbath. Why do I say that? Leviticus 23:11 and 15 clearly says it has to be offered on the day after the Sabbath—it has to be a normal workday. Why? Because the wave sheaf offering opened the period of harvest. The people waited for the offering to be made—the wave sheaf offering—and then they got out in their fields and they harvested their grain that day. It must fall on a common workday, they must be able to go out and reap their own harvest.

The Pharisees made a big deal about this when they wrote in the Mishnah, this is essentially what they said: “Are you sure we are supposed to reap this on the Sabbath?” Because the reaping of the wave sheaf actually happens at the end of the Sabbath when Jesus rose from the dead. Right?

Jesus rose from the dead at the end of the Sabbath. He was put in on a Wednesday, three days and three nights, and at the end of the Sabbath He rose. That is the time that the priest cut the wave sheaf offering, at the end of the Sabbath. “Are you sure we should cut this on the Sabbath?” “Yes, cut it on the Sabbath.” “Are you sure we should keep this and cut it on the Sabbath?” “Yes, cut it on the Sabbath.” “Are you sure?” They say it three times in the Mishnah, and every time the priest says, “Yes, God said to cut it at the end of the Sabbath.” And then they hold it overnight, and they offer it on Sunday after the Sabbath is over (usually occurs about 9 a.m.). They offer the offering of the wave sheaf and all the associated offerings, and then the people can go that day and harvest their grain. That is the way it works. So it must be on a normal common workday.

This creates a situation (by counting to Pentecost from Passover rather than from the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread) in which symbolism is made to trump biblical instruction. But nowhere does God's Word say that the wave sheaf offering must occur within the Feast of Unleavened Bread (that has been added into it) nor does it ever say that it cannot be offered outside the Days of Unleavened Bread. Either way you look at it, whether it is a positive or a negative instruction, it does not say one way or another whether the wave sheaf offering needs to be inside or outside the Days of Unleavened Bread. The Sabbath that we count from *must* be within the Days of Unleavened Bread, but the wave sheaf offering does not necessarily need to be inside the Days of Unleavened Bread.

In fact, the wave sheaf (the harvest and offering of the firstfruits) is more practically and symbolically connected to Pentecost (which is a harvest festival) than to Unleavened Bread (which is a feast of overcoming sin). So forcing it to occur within Unleavened Bread—against the simple rule of counting to Pentecost in Leviticus 23:11 and 15—is an unnecessary addition and complication.

Finally, neither Jesus nor the apostles say anything about making an exception to the rule in Leviticus 23:11 and 15. If the priests were keeping Pentecost on the wrong day during Jesus' life and ministry, Jesus or the apostles would have mentioned it. But every indication that we get from the Bible and history is that Jesus followed the priest's decisions on all the holy days (the Sadducee party basically), and they followed the rule of counting from the weekly Sabbath during Unleavened Bread. There is no indication that they made any exception when Passover fell on a Sabbath. It is just not known whether they did or not (I will be honest about that, unless something has come up), but Jesus did not say “This is the way you should not or should do it.” He just went with His plain instructions as we find in Leviticus 23.

To our way of thinking then, it is far better to follow the letter of the instruction—that is, what is written and which is contradicted nowhere else in Scripture—than to make an exception based on what we assume God wants us to do now, that we know that Jesus fulfilled it in a certain way. There has been no change in the instruction. So we go by the instruction that is in Leviticus 23:11 and 15.

Let us conclude in II Corinthians 11. I want to tie my intro into here. Paul says (because the Corinthians were going through various doctrinal problems, and Paul was helping them to understand the truth):

II Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

There is a simplicity in matters like these when we follow God's instructions carefully.

Remember, God's Words are pure words, and if we have faith, we follow them without adding anything to them. If we stray from this principle, we can easily find ourselves muddying the waters by over complicating the issue—and that opens us up to misunderstanding and making poor choices. It is interesting that in a similar way Proverbs 10:19 reads, “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking” (which is an okay translation), I think The Message Bible actually puts it in a way that we can understand a little better:

Proverbs 10:19 (MSG) The more talk, the less truth; the wise measures their words.

So normally in situations like this, the easiest solution is simply to follow what is written.