

## The Very Same Day

David C. Grabbe

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Well, last Sunday, we observed Pentecost. The Sunday before, much of the church of God observed it, and so now everyone who was aware of the differing views on how to count has made his or her decision for this year. However, I thought that today we could get a head start on this question of how to count when it comes up again in the year 2048.

Actually, Passover occurs on the Sabbath again in 2025, which isn't all that far off. If you are not yet convicted from the Bible how to count in these noteworthy years, there is time to study into this matter for 2025. And even if you are convicted, today we will look at some matters that I believe add to the conversation in a significant way. But first we need to build something of a foundation, and we will begin in Exodus 12:

**Exodus 12:17** So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this *same day* I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

Our focus today will be on the phrase, “this same day.” Some of you are familiar with the *King James*’ rendering of this phrase as “the selfsame day.” Either translation is easy to grasp, but there is something unusual in the Hebrew that is very helpful to understand. The word translated “same” is the Hebrew *esem* (eh'tsem). It is used in Scripture over 120 times, and it is almost always translated as “bone.” But there are about a dozen places where *esem*, this word for “bone,” is used to describe a specific day, in which case it is translated as “same day,” or “very same day,” or, as the *King James*’ has it, “selfsame day.”

The places that speak of this *esem* day, this “bone day” (as it could be translated), give evidence of a very special day. In verse 17 here, as well as in verses 41 and 51, the “very same day” refers to the first day of

Unleavened Bread, or more specifically, the Night to be Much Remembered. It is not only holy time, but it is also significant because of the momentous event of God bringing Israel out of Egypt. Verse 41 says,

**Exodus 12:41** And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that *very same day* —it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

So, this *esem* day was not only noteworthy in its own right, but it also reflected back on something that happened previously. This “bone day” was the capstone and a memorial of something that came before, which was God’s covenant with Abram.

This example is a testimony to God’s precise timing, because when we put together the events of the exodus and the sequence in Genesis 14 and 15 when the covenant was made, everything indicates that this “bone day” was the very same day on the calendar—Abib 15—as the day when God made the covenant with Abram.

We can begin to understand how the concept of a “bone” fits into this. When a body decays, the last part to decay is the skeleton. The bones are what remain that give evidence of something from an earlier time—that is, a person. The bones are the enduring substance. They are a memorial of sorts that prove something existed previously.

Here in verses 17, 41, and 51, the “same day” or “bone day,” the *esem* day, is significant in its own right, but it is also a memorial, a piece of evidence, that points to something special that came long before it. The “bone day” is what remains that testifies of something earlier. However, in the various *esem* days, what came earlier is not always clearly spelled out. Here in Exodus 12, it is obvious, but not all of them are this obvious, as we will see.

Please turn to Genesis 7, where we find the very first “bone day”:

**Genesis 7:11-13** In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of

heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights. On the *very same day* Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark

This highly momentous day was when all of humanity began to be wiped out, and a remnant of eight people was delivered. But this "bone day" also reflects back on something earlier: a proclamation God gave. You can find it in Genesis 6:3. There, God allotted mankind 120 years. He was not limiting each person's life to 120 years, because numerous people lived more than 120 years. Instead, as the *New English Translation* has it, "[Mankind] will remain for 120 more years." It was at that point that Noah found grace, that he was divinely warned by God, and he became a preacher of righteousness.

So, this "bone day," this very same day when Noah and his family entered the ark, looks back on the day of God's determination to destroy mankind and deliver Noah. And if you notice in verse 11, God gives the specific month and day. The record is highly exact, and if it follows the pattern we saw in Exodus 12, and we remember God's precision, it indicates that this was the same calendar date, 120 years after God said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever." "They will remain for 120 more years." So, the date of Noah entering the ark remains as a memorial of God's words and deeds, 120 years before.

We will keep establishing this pattern of the "bone day," and the next one is in **Genesis 17**:

**Genesis 17:23** So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that *very same day*, as God had said to him.

**Genesis 17:26-27** That *very same day* Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

This was another highly significant day in God's outworking, and God underscores it by mentioning the "very same day" twice. This one is harder to nail down, but we can begin with the fact that Genesis 17 does not stand on its own. There was already a history. There were events and divine pronouncements that came before and resulted in this "bone day" and proved God's faithfulness. Perhaps it was the covenant in Genesis 15.

Another possibility—and, I believe, a better one—goes back even farther, to the first time God appeared to Abram when he got to Canaan. On that occasion, God promised, "To your descendants I will give this land" (Genesis 12:7). It was a promise of both inheritance as well as descendants. There is an echo of that promise on this *esem* day in verse 8 here, where God says,

**Genesis 17:8** I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

So, when Abram got to the land, God said, "To your descendants I will give this land," and on this *esem* day, God confirms it. His words change from "I will give" to "I give" as He faithfully fulfilled His promise from decades before.

Now, a number of God's appointed times are also described as "the very same day." We began today with the first day of Unleavened Bread in Exodus 12, but there are others. Each of these days is significant in its own right, but each also looks back on something that came before, following the same pattern. So, please turn with me to Leviticus 23:

**Leviticus 23:28-30** And you shall do no work on *that same day* , for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on *that same day* shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on *that same day* , that person I will destroy from among his people.

Three times in three verses, God refers to the Day of Atonement as “that same day.” It’s like He underscores it three times, which should tell us how important God views that holy day, and how critical it is that God’s people afflict themselves and refrain from all manner of work.

Jewish tradition holds that Adam’s and Eve’s infamous sin was on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, but obviously there is no way to verify that. But there is another possibility of what the Day of Atonement looks back on. We won’t go through all the details that support this, but when you combine the records of Israel’s first year in the wilderness, and especially of the various 40-day periods of fasting by Moses, there is a good possibility that the golden calf incident happened on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month. Thus, the Day of Atonement may be the enduring substance of that great national sin of Israel, and also the day when “the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people” (Exodus 32:14).

Now, let’s back up a few verses to verse 21:

**Leviticus 23:21** And you shall proclaim on *the same day* that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

This is part of the instructions for the Feast of Weeks, and here it is called a “bone day.” As with the others, it is a significant day in its own right, but it also does not stand on its own. For one thing, the Feast of Weeks looks back on Wavesheaf day, because without that, we don’t know when Pentecost is. But even more than that, the sparse records in Exodus put the Israelites at Mount Sinai around Pentecost, and indeed, tradition says that the Law was given on Pentecost. However, there is another possibility that is based on a biblical pattern. As you probably know, God commanded that the Law be read every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles. Not only was the seventh year for the Law at the Feast, but the seventh year was also the land Sabbath, meaning the Israelites would not be doing their customary work. This would have allowed them more time to reflect on God’s instructions—His Law—if they were so inclined. But the seventh year was for the Law.

Now, let's apply that pattern of seven and the Law. God may have given the Law on the seventh Sabbath after Israel left Egypt. The seventh seven may have been for the giving of the law, even as subsequent sevens were for the reading of the Law. Then, Exodus 24:4 says that Moses rose early the next morning and built an altar, and then sealed the covenant. Thus, Pentecost may have been the day the covenant was sealed. There is something similar in Acts 2. It was on Pentecost that some 3,000 people repented and were baptized and received the Holy Spirit, thus showing their entrance into the New Covenant. So, Pentecost, among its other themes, also reminds us of our covenant. And so, when God calls Pentecost an *esem* day, a “bone day,” in addition to reflecting back on Wavesheaf day, it is also a memorial of the covenant becoming active.

Now, I mentioned Wavesheaf day, and we will look at that next, because—wouldn't you know—Wavesheaf day is also a “very same day”:

**Leviticus 23:14** 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.

We have seen the consistent pattern of these *esem* days being the enduring substance of an event that came before. Though each of these days is significant, each also gives evidence of something earlier, and frequently the *esem* day was on the very same calendar date. We cannot say definitively that is always the case, but it seems to be the pattern.

Now, what could Wavesheaf day possibly look back on? I will show you what seems to be the only option. Please turn with me to Genesis 26. Charles Whitaker brought us here three weeks ago in his sermon on “Isaac and the Day of Small Things”:

**Genesis 26:12** Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him.

What we are looking at is the first mention of sowing and reaping in the land of promise. I'm not saying that the Canaanites never planted crops, but here,

God marks out the first planting and harvesting by one of the rightful heirs. Abraham is shown with livestock, but not sowing or reaping. But here we have Isaac, sowing in the land and reaping, and God blessing him abundantly. There is no other mention of harvesting in the promised land until we get to the instructions for the Israelites in Leviticus.

Now, I believe Isaac's example shows us God's intent in two key areas. First, think about the ongoing discussion in the church about Joshua 5, and whether that chapter shows the Wavesheaf on the day after Passover. We believe the Israelites could not offer the Wavesheaf then because they did not have any grain that they themselves had planted. The fields were given to them, but the grain did not originate with their labors, and God would not accept an offering from the hand of foreigners (Leviticus 22:25). I believe Isaac's example here underlines that principle. This is the first harvest recorded by one of God's people, and Isaac is shown both reaping and sowing, not merely reaping what somebody else had planted.

The second key area of God's intent follows very closely. It is easy to get caught up in the offering on Wavesheaf day, but let's first think about the day itself. When we take Wavesheaf day back to its essence, it is about reaping. It is about the harvest. That is the barebones meaning, if you will. That is its core theme: Reaping what was sown by one's own hand. The Wavesheaf offering then came from that, but there could be no offering if there was not a harvest. When you take it back to the basics, Wavesheaf day was about harvesting, and then giving God His due from the harvest.

Now, some confusion arises because of what we might call "practical realities." For example, when you had hundreds of thousands of Israelites bringing in sheaves of barley as their firstfruits offering, it would be a major operation for the priest to wave each one. So, the priests would wave one sheaf as a representative of the national harvest. In addition, because of the travel involved, those in outlying areas might cut their firstfruits offering ahead of time, before Wavesheaf day. It was a judgment they made, based on physical realities, and I'm not saying God rejected it. But what was God's original intent? That each individual cut a sheaf from his own harvest, and the day that started was Wavesheaf day.

Similarly, we understand that the priestly responsibilities often included labor, like hoisting heavy animals for sacrifices. However, the priests were blameless in their work, even on the Sabbath and holy days. Now, when you add that priestly dispensation to the fact that the priests waved a single, representative sheaf, it means the priests would have been blameless in whatever work was required for offering the Wavesheaf. Add the two elements together, and it seems plausible for the priests to offer the Wavesheaf on a holy day. Yet notice how that conclusion blurs God's intent for the individual to put the sickle to the grain on the day after the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 16:9). That conclusion is two steps removed from the essence.

In some of the discussions today about how to count to Pentecost, exceptions are given greater weight than clear principles. But when you go back to the basic significance of Wavesheaf day, it is about the harvest. It is about the work of an individual—not the priest—reaping from what he has sown, and that essence is completely at odds with the essence of a high day Sabbath. The priests may have been blameless, but any individual harvesting on a holy day certainly would not have been. The linkage between the day of the Wavesheaf offering and the underlying harvest precludes Wavesheaf day from occurring on the first day of Unleavened Bread.

Now, I mentioned Joshua 5 a few minutes ago, and we will turn there next, because wouldn't you know?—it, too, contains an *esem* day, a “bone day”:

**Joshua 5:11-12** And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on *the very same day* . Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

Verse 11 mentions the very same day, the same phrase we have been studying. As with all the other occurrences we have seen, this is a significant day by itself. But there are two questions we need to answer: First, why is this day significant? And second, to what previous event does this “bone” day look back?



Well, one possibility is that this day is significant because the Wavesheaf was offered on it, even though it is not mentioned. But you are aware of the significant problems stemming from that proposition, so we won't spend time on that.

A second possibility is that this *esem* day is the same day that we started with in Exodus 12. That is, perhaps this “bone” day looks back on the exodus from Egypt, which itself looks back on God's covenant. Yet that would be unusual—to have one *esem* day looking back on another *esem* day. It does not seem to fit the pattern.

But I will present another possibility for your consideration. This was pointed out to me by one of our astute brethren in Trinidad, and I think you'll find this very interesting.

Think about the themes in these verses—what these verses are talking about. They are not about coming into the Land, which took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month. That was when they crossed the Jordan on dry land, in an echo of crossing the Red Sea. It was a very significant event, taking up chapters 3 and 4. But this “bone day” does not have to do with coming into the land at all. It has to do with eating. They ate of the produce of the land. The manna ceased on the next day, and they no longer had manna, but ate the food of the land. These verses are about food—about eating—and, more importantly, God's providence.

So, what does this “very same day” of God's providence of food look back on? It's actually very simple:

**Exodus 16:35** And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

The children of Israel ate manna for 40 years. Joshua 5 is the enduring substance, the last remnant, of 40 years of God's miraculous provision of food every day, including a double portion on the preparation day. For 40 years in an inhospitable area, God provided for their needs. They weren't happy, of course, because they were Israelites, and high expectations and a

sense of entitlement are prominent in the Israelite gene pool. But they witnessed God's presence, every single day. They could not deny that God was there. They could not rightly accuse Him of neglecting them. For 40 years, God tested Israel with the manna, and for 40 years, Israel tested God with their responses, and yet God still proved Himself to them. The final day of the fortieth year was the very same day they ate of the food of the land—food that was acceptable to eat, but not acceptable to offer.

Now, here's the critical point: When did God start the manna? This is what was pointed out to me. It is found back in verse 1:

**Exodus 16:1** And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt.

The 15<sup>th</sup> day of the second month is when God announced the manna, which began the following day. Forty years later, on the very same day, the Israelites ate common food, and the manna then stopped. But if the manna started in the second month, as it says here, and it continued for 40 years, and ended on the very same day, it means that Joshua 5:11-12 took place in the second month. And that means that the Passover that is mentioned is the second Passover (see Numbers 9:9-13), not the Passover that occurs in the first month.

Now, this scenario brings up a question. That is, unleavened bread is mentioned in Joshua 5:11, which seems to point to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, unleavened bread can simply indicate bread prepared in haste. It is bread that is made quickly because it does not have to rise. In addition, given that manna was the only bread the Israelites had for 40 years, they may not have had any starter dough to even make leavened bread. Of course, if you leave dough out long enough, it will naturally collect yeast spores from the air, but again, that takes time. The unleavened bread may simply have been what they put together quickly with the grain of the land, eager as they were to eat something aside from the God-given manna.

But there is another aspect to this scenario that makes the second Passover even more plausible, and that is the circumcision that took place before the Passover (Joshua 5:1-9). Our basic time-marker is in Joshua 4:19, which says that Israel came up from the Jordan on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, and I would hazard a guess that crossing took all day. It is doubtful that Joshua would have started the task of national circumcision at the end of the day. So, the 11<sup>th</sup> day seems to be the earliest the circumcision would have begun.

Now, think about the logistics of circumcising 600,000 (see Numbers 26:1-4, 51) grown men. With modern equipment, a circumcision on a baby boy is pretty quick, but remember that the Israelites were using flint knives, and they were unpracticed. To me, it seems quite possible the circumcising took more than a day, but we are not given enough information to know how many flint scalpels were made, how many circumcisers there were, and so forth.

Genesis 34 gives the account of the men of Shechem being circumcised as part of a deceptive agreement with Jacob's sons. It says that on the third day, they were still in pain (Genesis 34:25). Apparently this type of surgery has a debilitating effect on grown men, and they had not recovered enough on the third day to defend themselves. Based on that example, even if all the men of Israel were circumcised on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, the men would have still been recovering from the pain on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of that month. Of course, there is no prohibition against keeping the Passover while in pain, but it does not seem like what God would have planned for them.

However, there is a Passover requirement that is relevant here. That is, the men had to be ceremonially clean to keep the Passover (see Leviticus 22:3; Numbers 9:6-13; II Chronicles 30:17-20; Leviticus 7:20). Leviticus 15 gives the law regarding running sores, such as what could develop from an open wound. One translation refers to it as "seepage." Even after the seepage stopped, the man had to count seven days before he was considered clean again. If he was not clean, he could not eat the Passover.

Now, what are the chances, that a significant percentage of the Israelite men, circumcised by inexperienced brothers, with hand-crafted flint scalpels—

hopefully dipped in some kind of disinfectant between uses—might have ended up with an infection, and thus, some seepage that would make them unfit?

What I am suggesting is that it is quite possible, even probable, for the circumcision and complete recovery to have taken much more time than we can fit between the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the first month and the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the same month. When we add to that what we saw—that the manna began in the second month, and continued for 40 years, right up to an *esem* day—the probability is quite high that Joshua 5 records the second Passover. And if Joshua 5 took place in the second month, it adds yet another reason to a growing list of why the Wavesheaf could not have been offered then.

Now, we're finished with the *esem* days, so let's return in thought to Wavesheaf day. If you have looked into this matter of how to count at all, you know that it would have been so much easier for us if God had included a definitive statement to eliminate the ambiguity. However, in His wisdom, He did not. The instructions in Leviticus 23:15-16 do not directly say the Sabbath within Unleavened Bread is the anchor. I do believe that is what is intended, but I will readily admit the instructions do not directly say that. On the other hand, neither do the instructions directly say that the morrow after the Sabbath must be within Unleavened Bread. In the absence of a clear statement, everybody begins by inferring what is meant. We may begin with a reasonable inference, but we must follow it all the way through.

This ambiguity forces us to really dig deep into God's remarkable word, which is good. It requires us to search the Scriptures not only for the explicit instructions, but also for the principles that relate. Then we have to make sure we can arrange all the aspects in a way that eliminates contradiction. It entails considering God's intent, and not simply whether there are loopholes we feel we can squeeze through. God did not make this an easy question—it requires some wrestling that gives God's evidence of our approach.

Curiously, even Christ's fulfillment of the Wavesheaf does not solve the mystery. It is true that He ascended as the Wavesheaf during the Feast of Unleavened Bread in 31 AD, which was not a year with a Sabbath Passover. Yet it is also true that He ascended on the day after the Sabbath during

Unleavened Bread. It is likewise true that He did not ascend on a holy day—He ascended on a common work day. So, Christ's ascension that year supports both starting points, but it is inconclusive about what to do when Passover occurs on a Sabbath.

Now, let's think about the symbolism. I Corinthians 15:20 teaches that Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. As the Wavesheaf, He was the first one to be resurrected and glorified. That is the fulfillment: opening the way to the better resurrection. Next, as John has showed in his recent sermons, Scripture says the lesson of Unleavened Bread is God's deliverance (Exodus 12:17; 12:51; 23:15; 34:18). It is about what God does in bringing His people out of the environment of sin. The focus is on what God does, not on our overcoming. Our overcoming requires the Holy Spirit, which comes some 50 days later in that sequence. But the meanings of the Wavesheaf and Unleavened Bread are distinct. Jesus Christ's opening of the way for the resurrection of His people does not have to come before His deliverance from the environment of sin. Did not God draw 12 apostles out of the world before Christ's ascension?

Additionally, we should never allow our symbolic interpretation, or our ideas about a sequence—which may not even be correct—to override the Scriptures and principles that are clear. If we find that happening, it means there is more studying to do, so that the holy Scriptures remain unbroken. If we ignore portions or principles from Scripture that don't fit our conclusion, we risk the grave error of making the word of God of no effect through tradition.

The histories of both Israel and the church blare a warning against treading on God's holy time. His intent there is clear. And if one begins the count by finding the Sabbath within Unleavened Bread, one never has to worry about exceptions or loopholes, because Wavesheaf day will always be separate from a holy day. It is consistent and straightforward, no matter how the days fall in a given year.