

The Great Controversy -- Sadducees Vs. Pharisees!

When did the Sadducees lose control of the Temple and the religious leadership of the Jews in ancient Judaea? When did the Pharisees gain control, and keep it, even when the high priest was a Sadducee? This may not seem like a very important question -- but on it depends the solution to the problem of on what day should Pentecost -- or the Feast of Shavuot, or Weeks -- be observed? Sunday, as the Sadducees taught? Or Sivan 5, 6, or 7, fifty days after Passover, as the Pharisees taught? Here is historical and Biblical evidence that must be considered in answering this crucial question.

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Could the Greek concept of world civilization, Hellenism, be combined or married to the Jewish notion of a universal God? After Alexander the Great conquered the world and spread the teachings of Hellenism throughout the Eastern Mediterranean region, many reformist intellectuals and politically minded Jews and Greek sought to bridge the gap between Judaism and Grecian Hellenism. The reformers found the Torah or Law of the Jews to be full of “fables” and impossible moral demands and countless prohibitions. Reformers did not want to abolish all the Law, but to “purge” it of all the elements which prohibited its merger with Hellenism.

Writes Paul Johnson, “To promote their ultimate aim of a world religion, they wanted an immediate marriage between the Greek *polis* and the Jewish moral God” (*A History of the Jews*, p.101). Johnson goes on:

“Unfortunately, this was a contradiction in terms. The Greeks were not monotheists but polytheists, and in Egypt they learned syncretism, that is the rationalization of innumerable overlapping deities by hanging them together into synthetic polygods. One such mutant was Apollo-Helio-Hermes, the sun-god. They blended their own Dionysiac rites with the Egyptian

Isis-cult. Their god of healing, Asclepius, was conflated with the Egyptian Imhotep. Zeus, the senior god, was the same as the Egyptian Ammon, the Persian Ahura-Mazda and, for all they cared, the Jewish Yahweh. That, needless to say, was not how the pious Jews saw it” (p.102).

This movement into idolatry and syncretism got a big boost in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, in 175 B.C. He was anxious to speed up the Hellenization of his dominions, and since Judaea was under his control, he replaced the orthodox high priest Onias by the “reform” liberal minded Jason, whose name itself was a Hellenization of the Hebrew Joshua. Says Paul Johnson:

“Jason began the transformation of Jerusalem into a *polis*, renamed Antiochia, by constructing a gymnasium at the foot of the Temple Mount. The Second Book of Maccabees furiously records that the Temple priests ‘ceased to show any interest in the service of the altar; scorning the Temple and neglecting the sacrifices, they would hurry to take part in the unlawful exercises [in the nude] on the training-ground’” (p.102).

In 167 B.C. the conflict came to a head. A decree was published which in effect abolished the Mosaic Law, replacing it with secular law. The Temple was reduced to an “ecumenical” place of interdenominational worship, and as such, the statue of the pagan god called the Olympian Zeus was placed within its precincts. This act was probably inspired by Menelaus, who thought a drastic move was needed to end, once and for all, the Jewish Temple worship and Law. His acts divided the priests, aroused the people, and led to further escalation of conflict. Opposed to him were the scribes, the orthodox priests, and the most pious Jews or *hasidim*. To them, there was no difference between the new “universalism” and the old Baal-worship, condemned in the Scriptures. They refused to sacrifice in the “new” way and to bow down before the “new” altars, and revolted against the government of Antiochus, leading to civil war. By December 164 B.C. they drove the Greeks out of Jerusalem and its surroundings, and cleansed the Temple and reinstated the prescribed sacrifices. In 152 B.C. the Greeks abandoned their attempt to Hellenize the Jews by force, and recognized Jonathan, son of Matthias Hasmon, as the new high priest. The Hasmoneans held the office for the next 115 years. Simon Maccabee succeeded his brother as high priest, and Judaea became independent once again.

Says Johnson, the assault against the Law of God was met by a corresponding zeal for the Law. Henceforth talk of “reform” was denounced as “nothing less than total apostasy and collaboration with the foreign oppression” (p.105). Pious Jews began to develop a national system of schools where Jewish boys were taught the Torah. This led to the development and spread of the synagogue, and “the birth of Pharisaism as a movement rooted in popular education, and eventually in the rise of the rabbinate” (p.106). They taught, in addition to the written Law, the Oral Law, “by which learned elders could interpret and supplement the sacred commands. The practice of the Oral Law made it possible for the Mosaic code to be adapted to changing conditions and administered in a realistic manner” (*ibid.*).

“By contrast,” says Johnson, “the Temple priests, dominated by the Sadducees, or descendants of Zadok . . . insisted that all law must be written and unchanged. They had

their own additional text, called the Book of Decrees, which laid down a system of punishment: who were to be stoned, who burned, who beheaded, who strangled. . . . The Sadducees soon became identified with Hasmonean rule in a rigid system of Temple administration, in which the hereditary high priest performed the functions of a secular ruler, and a committee of elders, the Sanhedrin, discharged his religious-legal duties” (*ibid.*).

Simon’s third son, John Hyrcanus, succeeded him and ruled from 134-104 B.C. His son, Alexander Jannaeus, ruled from 103-76 B.C., calling himself “Jonathan the king” on the coins produced in his realm. Says Johnson of the Hasmoneans, “They began as the avengers of martyrs, they ended as religious oppressors themselves. They came to power at the head of an eager guerrilla band; they ended surrounded by mercenaries. Their kingdom, founded on faith, dissolved in impiety” (p.107). Alexander Jannaeus became a “despot and a monster” and persecuted the religious Jews. He was drawn to Greek Hellenism and came to despise the “barbarous” aspects of the Jewish religion, the Torah, and its requirements.

As high priest, leading the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, he refused to perform the libation ceremony, according to the custom, and as a result pious Jews pelted him with lemons. Outraged by their behavior, he proceeded to slay about 6,000 of them, according to the history of Josephus. As a result, civil war once again erupted, and in the following six years some 50,000 Jews lost their lives. Says Johnson:

“It is from this time we first hear of the *Perushim* or Pharisees, ‘those who separated themselves,’ a religious party which repudiated the royal religious establishment, with its high-priest, Sadducee aristocrats and the Sanhedrin, and placed religious observance before Jewish nationalism.

“Rabbinic sources record the struggle between the monarch and this group, which was a social and economic as well as a religious clash. As Josephus noted, ‘the Sadducees draw their following only from the rich, and the people do not support them, whereas the Pharisees have popular allies’” (p.108).

At the end of the civil war, Alexander returned to Jerusalem, victorious over his enemies, and as he feasted with his concubines, he ordered 800 of his enemies to be crucified, and while they yet lived, had their children’s and wives’ throats cut before their very eyes. He himself died in 76 B.C. after a bout of hard drinking leading to what Josephus called a “distemper.”

Alexander’s widow, Salome, saw that his policies were leading to disaster, and sought to change matters and restore national unity. She brought the Pharisees into the Sanhedrin and made their Oral Law acceptable in royal justice. She died in 67 B.C.

Her sons fell out fighting over the succession, and Hyrcanus, one of them, had a powerful chief minister, Antipater, who was Idumean. He brokered a deal with Rome in 63 B.C. and Judaea became a Roman client-state. His son became Herod the Great, who ruled from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C., when he died. Herod was a paranoid megalomaniac:

“His first act on assuming power in Jerusalem in 37 B.C. was to execute forty-six leading members of the Sanhedrin who, in his own case and others, had sought to uphold the Mosaic law in secular matters. Henceforth, it became a religious court only. He did not even attempt to become high priest himself and divorced it from the crown by turning it into an official post, appointing and dismissing high-priests as acts of his prerogative, and picking them mainly from the Egyptian and Babylonian diaspora” (p.111).

During his reign, Herod was exceptionally generous to the Temple, which he began rebuilding and restoring. He built huge supporting walls, filled in the gaps with rubble, doubled the area of the Temple Mount, extending it toward the south, and erected porticos around the vast forecourt. The platform was 35 acres in size and a mile in circumference, and more than twice the height of the present Temple Mount as seen today. Some of the building blocks were 110 feet long, 25 feet high, 15 feet wide. On top of the platform were the cloisters with hundreds of Corinthian pillars, 27 feet high and so huge that three men extending their arms could hardly reach around them.

Nevertheless, Herod down-graded the importance of the high priest, who was usually a hated Sadducee. In so doing, “Herod automatically raised in importance his deputy, the *segran*, a Pharisee, who got control over all the regular Temple functions and ensured that even the Sadducee high-priests performed the liturgy in a Pharisaical manner. Since Herod was on reasonable terms with the Pharisees, he avoided conflict between the Temple and his government, as a rule” (p.118).

Who Controlled the Temple Functions?

Let’s notice that last quotation from Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, once again. Notice! By the time of Herod, who ruled from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C., the position of high priest -- usually held by one of the aristocratic Sadducees, who was himself appointed to the office at the whim and discretion and pleasure of the king, Herod himself -- was down-graded in importance. The actual power to rule and regulate and control all the normal Temple functions, including holy day observances, dates, and liturgies, rested with the office of the “segran” -- who was a PHARISEE appointed to “assist” and “ensure” that the Sadducee high priest did everything according to the prescribed manner. Thus the Pharisees had control over all the Temple functions during the time of king Herod, from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C.!

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, was himself a priest and a Pharisee. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, he informs us that the Pharisees were the dominant religious party in Judaea during the time of Christ, and says that they controlled the worship services. He tells us that Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, therefore, was usually celebrated on Sivan 6, fifty days after Passover. Josephus writes:

“But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that they do not touch them . . . They also at this participation of the first-fruits of the earth sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt offering to God. When a WEEK OF WEEKS has passed over after this sacrifice, (which week contains forty and nine days,) on the fiftieth day, which is PENTECOST, they bring to God a loaf, made of wheat flour . . .” (*Ant.*, bk.III, chap.X, 5-6).

The hated Sadducees, however, figured Pentecost by counting fifty days from the Sunday which falls within the days of unleavened bread. They interpreted the expression “morrow after the Sabbath,” found in Leviticus 23:15, from which date the count to Pentecost is to begin, as being the day after the weekly Sabbath. The Pharisees, as Josephus says, however, claim it was the Passover Annual Sabbath.

As we have seen, the Sadducees were the aristocratic, Hellenistic party, which only had some of the rich on their side, but the vast multitudes followed the Pharisees, as Josephus himself tells us. But even if this was their own belief, it did not matter so far as the public Temple services were concerned. *The Temple services were controlled by the Pharisees! The Pharisee SEGAN made sure that the Sadducee high priest did everything correctly, at the appointed time, as the Pharisees taught!*

Alfred Edersheim, in his book *The Temple*:

“The expression ‘the morrow after the Sabbath,’ has sometimes been misunderstood as implying that the presentation of the so-called ‘first sheaf’ was to be always made on the day following the weekly Sabbath of the Passover-week. This view, adopted by the ‘Boethusians’ and the Sadducees in the time of Christ, and by the Karaite Jews and certain modern interpreters, rests on a misinterpretation of the word ‘Sabbath.’ As in analogous allusions to other feasts in the same chapter, it means not the weekly Sabbath, but the day of the festival. The testimony of Josephus, of Philo, and of Jewish tradition, *leaves no room to doubt* that in this instance we are to understand by the ‘Sabbath’ the 15th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it might fall” (*The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, p.257).

Nevertheless, some modern adherents to the Sadducean theory, claim that the Pharisees were wrong, and the Sadducees were right. They claim that the Sadducees were the high priests of the time of Christ and that they controlled the Temple and its services.

As we have seen, this is pure hogwash. There is no evidence that the Sadducees ever influenced more than a few of the rich, and that the Pharisees controlled the Temple services, during the time of Herod and till the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

As additional New Testament proof that the Pharisees were correct, and the Sadducees were “out in left field” by themselves, and repudiated by Christ and the apostle Paul, take note of the following facts:

1. When the Sadducees came to Him, trying to trick Him up with a tough question, Jesus Christ Himself rebuked them, saying, “You are mistaken. You understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). In the *New Testament in Contemporary English*, we read Jesus’ words: “You’re off base on two counts: You don’t know your Bibles, and you don’t know how God works.” These Sadducees were so far off base that they even denied the resurrection! (Matt.22:23).

2. Of the Pharisees, however, Jesus said in approbation of their teaching concerning the Law: “The scribes and the *Pharisees* are occupying Moses’ seat: therefore *do and observe whatever they tell you*, but do not behave as they do”

(Matt.23:1-3). This sounds like a ringing endorsement of the authority of the Pharisees, although Jesus rebuked them for their sins and hypocrisy and attitudes.

3. The apostle Paul himself was a Pharisee, taught at the feet of Gamaliel, a leading Rabban of the Jews of that period. As a Pharisee, therefore, he had been taught that Pentecost was to be observed on Sivan 5, 6, or 7, or fifty days after Passover. He did not endorse the dating of the Sadducees. Did Paul repent of his Pharisaic teaching and background, when he was converted, and begin endorsing the Sadducean concept? Not at all! Nowhere in the writings of Paul does he ever suggest that the Pharisees were wrong, and the Sadducees were right! To the contrary, he told the Jews in Jerusalem, "I am a Jew, a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city. At the feet of Gamaliel I have been educated *with exacting care in our ancestral Law. . .*" (Acts 22:2-3). He later told the Sanhedrin, whom he noted were part of Sadducees and part of Pharisees (Acts 23:6), "'Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead I am accused.' At this saying a dispute arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and there was division in the meeting. For the Sadducees maintain there is neither resurrection nor angel nor spirit, while the Pharisees confess the one as well as the other. *So the outcry grew deafening.* Some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party got up and argued, 'We find nothing bad in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him . . .' And the discord grew so bitter that the commander, afraid that Paul might be torn to pieces by them, ordered a detachment to march down and snatch him from their midst" (Acts 23:6-10, Berkeley Version).

4. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote that he had been taught the law of God as a Pharisee blamelessly, faultlessly. This could hardly have been true if they had been all mixed up on the correct date to observe Pentecost! Notice! He wrote, explaining, "If anyone else imagines that he has some basis for confidence in the flesh, I am ahead of him: circumcised on the eighth day, a native Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, *as to the Law a Pharisee*, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, *as to LEGAL RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT BLAME*" (Phil.3:4-6). Says *The New Testament in Contemporary English*, in these verses: "You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a STRICT AND DEVOUT ADHERENT TO GOD'S LAW; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting Christians; A METICULOUS OBSERVER OF EVERYTHING SET DOWN IN GOD'S LAW BOOK."

It should be perfectly clear to any reasonable mind, not blinded by prejudice and hatred of the truth, that Pentecost should be observed on the date ascribed to it by the Pharisees -- and in the manner which they approved of. Jesus Christ Himself never found fault with them as to the date they observed Pentecost. He never criticized them on this issue. And, furthermore, they never criticized either Him or the early Church for departing from their approved date for observing Pentecost. They never rebuked Him or His disciples for Heresy or False teaching in this regard -- which by itself proves that they were in agreement with Him on this issue and point of God's Law, and He was in agreement with them (Matt.23:1-3 again)!

Elements of the Jewish and Muhammadan Calendars

In 1901, the Anglican Bishop Sherrard Beaumont Burnaby, a fellow in the Royal Astronomical Society, published a book entitled *Elements of the Jewish and Muhammadan Calendars*. In chapter IX of his book he deals with the “Megillath Ta’anith,” believed by scholars to have been written in the period 67-69 A.D., derived from a paper delivered by Rabbi M. Schwab in Paris in 1897. The original of this scroll is in Aramaic.

Notice what this author has to say about the Pharisees, and their rivalry with the Sadducees:

“After the independence of Judaea had been assured there commenced a long series of disputes between the two sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees. This was kept up until after the death of Alexander Jannaeus, in B.C. 79. Graetz says that the bitter rivalry of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, in the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam, was repeated in the history of the strife between the Pharisees and Sadducees.

“Under the reign of Queen Salome Alexandra, B.C. 79-70, who was devoted to the Pharisees, the chief of that sect obtained the ascendancy, and the PHARISEES CELEBRATED ALL THE DAYS UPON WHICH THEY HAD BEEN ESPECIALLY SUCCESSFUL AGAINST THEIR ADVERSARIES” (p.258).

“The unfriendly relations between the Pharisees and the Sadducees did not exist, to any extent, in the time of Hyrcanus. He made use of both parties according to their capabilities; the Sadducees as soldiers and diplomatists; the Pharisees as teachers of the Law, judges, and functionaries in civil affairs . . . In point of fact Hyrcanus was personally in favour of the Pharisees, but as Prince he could not quarrel with the Sadducees . . . Until he was overtaken by old age Hyrcanus managed to solve the difficult problem of keeping in a state of amity two parties who were always on the verge of quarreling; but in the last years of his life he went quite over to the Sadducees. He had been bitterly offended by a certain Eleazar ben Poira, who had stated that his mother had been taken prisoner by the Syrians, and that it was not fitting for the son of a prisoner to be a priest -- much less a High Priest. Hyrcanus then deposed the Pharisees from the various important posts that they had filled; and the offices belonging to the Temple, to the courts of law, and to the High Council were given to the followers of the Sadducees.

“Hyrcanus died in B.C. 106, a short time only after these events. He had proclaimed his wife to be Queen, and his eldest son Judah, better known by his Greek name Aristobulus, to be High Priest. Aristobulus supplanted his mother on the throne, and put her in prison, together with three of his four brothers. He died after a reign of one year, in B.C. 105.

“He was succeeded by his brother Alexander Jannaeus, the third son of Hyrcanus. He reigned for twenty-seven years. During his reign the Pharisees were again allowed to appear at Court. . . Ever since the secession of Hyrcanus from Pharisaism the Great Council had been composed entirely of Sadducees, but Jannaeus was disposed to bring about some kind of equality between the two parties by dividing between them the offices of state. . . After a time . . . Jannaeus became an inveterate opponent of the Pharisaic teaching, and made his view public in a most insulting manner. . . .

“Alexander Jannaeus died from fever, B.C. 79, during his siege of one of the trans-Jordanic fortresses. On his deathbed, he repented of his cruel persecution of the Pharisees, and gave various directions respecting them to his wife, Salome Alexandra, who succeeded him as Queen.

She was a woman of gentle nature, and of sincere piety; she was still devoted to the Pharisees, and entrusted them with the management of affairs without persecuting the opposing party. The chief post in the Great Council was given up to them. It was offered in the first place to her brother, Simon ben Shetach, who, however, waived his own claim in favour of Judah ben Tabbai, then in Egypt. The latter, on his return home, undertook, with the help of Simon, the REORGANIZATION OF THE COUNCIL, AND THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES. *These two celebrated reformers have been called 'REBUILDERS OF THE LAW,' 'Restorers of the glory of the crown (of the Law).'* . . ." (p.259-260).

The Jewish Calendar gives us then the origin of various Jewish days of observance. Discussing the time of Queen Salome Alexandra, circa 79 B.C., we read:

"Nisan 8-22. Recalls the ordinance of the Pharisees that the Feast of Weeks -- Pentecost -- should be celebrated on any day of the week, and not be restricted upon the first day of the week, 'the morrow after the Sabbath.' . . . M. Schwab says, 'It must be believed that for a certain time, under the Sadducees, the Feast of Pentecost had been celebrated in conformity with their teaching, that is to say, on 'the morrow after the [weekly] Sabbath.'

"The Commentator says that when the Pharisees came into power they changed this day to the fiftieth, counted from the second day of the Passover. *IN REMEMBRANCE OF THEIR TRIUMPH THEY CELEBRATED ALL THE FIFTEEN DAYS, FROM NISAN 8 TO 23 . . .*" (P.263).

When all the evidence is put together, then, it becomes increasingly clear -- like the shining light of the dawn, rising toward midday -- that the Pharisees were in control of the Temple, and conducted and supervised the Temple services, during the time of Christ and the apostles. It is also clear that Jesus Christ never reprimanded them for observing the incorrect day, even though He remonstrated against them on many other accounts. It is difficult to imagine that He would not have lashed out at their error, if they were observing Pentecost on the wrong day! His very silence on this issue, and His pronouncement that they -- not the Hellenistic Sadducees -- sat in Moses' seat, and held Mosaic authority in respect to teaching and interpreting the Law (Matt.23:2-3) -- should be conclusive..

Some believe, however, that the Sadducees controlled the Temple during the time of Christ. It would appear that this conclusion is based solely upon the fact that the high priest himself was often a Sadducee. For example, Caiaphas, the high priest who condemned Christ to execution, was a Sadducee (Matt.26:3, 57; John 18:13, 14, 18, 28). However, as we have seen, the high priest himself was subject to the directions of the religious-minded Pharisees as to rituals and observances and ceremonies held at the Temple. The scroll of the *Megillath Ta'anith* lists the days Nisan 8-22 as the days the Pharisees celebrated for their gaining control of the counting of Pentecost which they did from the second day of Passover.

The Sadducean Apostates

James Hastings, in his authoritative multi-volume *Dictionary of the Bible*, tells us the real nature of the Sadducees and their true apostasy -- the sect which the Worldwide Church of God and all its present off-shoots follow concerning Pentecost calculations. Hastings declares:

“The Sadducees were the spiritual descendants of the priestly party in Jerusalem, which, towards the close of the Greek period of Israel’s history, was ANXIOUS TO HELLENIZE the Palestinian Jews. The Maccabean rising, which was caused by the attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to accomplish this by violence, taught these HELLENIZERS the folly of tampering with the national religion . . . Their descendants, however, SPEEDILY ACCOMMODATED THEMSELVES to the new order of things, which was in many respects after their mind . . .

“The successors of the Hellenizers . . . were in full sympathy with the secular policy of the Hasmonean princes, and, unlike the Pharisees, took no exception to the illegitimacy of their high priesthood. They entered the service of the new princes as soldiers and diplomatists, and, drawing around them the leading adherents of the new dynasty, formed the party, to which was given their family name of Zadokites or Sadducees. Taught by experience, this party made no violent attempts to introduce Greek customs; but they were a PURELY POLITICAL PARTY; their main interest was in the Jewish State as an independent State, and not, like that of the Pharisees, in the legal purity of the Jews as a religious community. . . .

“From their first appearance in history as a distinct party (during the reign of John Hyrcanus, B.C. 135-105), the Sadducees were the devoted adherents of the Hasmonaean princes. Under Aristobulus I, and Alexander Jannaeus, the immediate successor of John Hyrcanus, their party was supreme. Under Alexandra Salome the Pharisees were for a short time in possession of power; but when Aristobulus II became king the Sadducees once more came to the front. They supported him in the conflict with Hyrcanus II, Antipater, and the Romans, and they also stood by him and his two sons, Alexander and Antigonos, in their attempt to restore the Hasmonaean dynasty. BUT THE DAY OF THEIR POLITICAL POWER WAS NOW PAST. *Their numbers were also considerably reduced.* When Pompey captured Jerusalem (B.C. 63) he executed many of their leaders, as did also Herod (B.C. 37). *Herod further DIMINISHED their influence by appointing and removing high priests according to HIS OWN PLEASURE, and by filling the Sanhedrin with his own creatures*” (“Sadducees,” vol.IV, p.349).

Says Hastings concerning the Pharisees, “But the latter were the REAL POSSESSORS OF POWER, for, in order to render themselves tolerable to the people, the Sadducees were COMPELLED TO ACT IN MOST MATTERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH PHARISAIC PRINCIPLES. And when Jerusalem was destroyed and Israel ceased to exist as a nation, they speedily disappeared entirely from history” (*ibid.*),

Concerning the differences between the Sadducees and Pharisees, Hastings notes the following:

“The Pharisees were, in their own peculiar way, intensely religious [just as the apostle Paul tells us -- Romans 10:1]; their great desire was to mould their fellow countrymen into a ‘holy’ nation by means of the Law; they looked forward to a future, in which their hopes were sure to be realized, and could therefore meanwhile endure the foreign dominion, provided it allowed them perfect religious freedom. The SADDUCEES, on the other hand, WERE LARGELY INDIFFERENT TO RELIGION, except in so far as it was a matter of custom; their great care was for the State as a purely secular State; they were satisfied with the present, so far as it permitted them to live in comfort and splendor” (p.350).

Concerning the matters of the Festivals, the Sadducees differed from the Pharisees on the figuring of Pentecost, as we have noted. Hastings points out:

“As to the Feasts, the two parties differed in the manner of fixing the date of Pentecost. According to Lev.23:11, 15, seven full weeks had to be counted from ‘the morrow after the sabbath’ upon

which the priest waved the sheaf of first-fruits before the Lord. The PHARISEES followed the TRADITIONAL interpretation (e.g. in the LXX; cf. *Ant.3,X,5*), that the 'sabbath' meant the first day of the feast, and that consequently Pentecost might fall on any day of the week. The Sadducees (or rather, according to Schurer . . . the Boethusians, a variety of the Sadducees) held that the 'sabbath' meant the weekly sabbath, and that therefore Pentecost always fell on the first day of the week" (p.351).

Witness of the Septuagint

Hastings mentions the LXX, or Septuagint, as being one of the sources showing that the true, traditional interpretation of the "sabbath" in Leviticus 23:11, 15 refers to the first holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread -- that is, the Passover Holy Day, when the Passover was eaten, on Nisan 15. What is the Septuagint? It is commonly referred to as LXX, a reference to the "70 Jewish scholars" (there were 6 from each tribe, according to tradition, one from each of the twelve tribes -- thus there may have actually been 72 translators) who translated the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Greek during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, approximately 250 B.C. This was the official translation of the Sanhedrin and the Jewish Court and the first translation of the Holy Scriptures into a foreign language. Greek was the language of most of the Mediterranean world at that time, and the Egyptian king desired a copy of the famous Jewish "Law" in his world renowned library at Alexandria, Egypt.

This was the OFFICIAL translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) into Greek. As such, it was used by Jews throughout the Mediterranean, in synagogues everywhere, and even in Palestine.

What does the Septuagint say about the calculation of Pentecost? Notice its clear voice in this English translation:

"(4) These are the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations, which ye shall call in their seasons. (5) In the first month on the fourteenth day of the month, between the evening times [i.e., during the afternoon of Nisan 14, between noon and sunset; Josephus tells us the lambs were actually slain between 3-5 o'clock -- see *Wars of the Jews*, Bk.VI, ch.IX, para.3] is the Lord's passover. (6) And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast of unleavened bread to the Lord; seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread. (7) And the **FIRST DAY** shall be a holy convocation to you; ye shall do no servile work. (8) And ye shall offer whole-burnt offerings to the Lord seven days; and the seventh day shall be a holy convocation to you: ye shall do no servile work. (9) And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, (10) Speak to the children of Israel, and thou shalt say to them, When ye shall enter into the land which I give you, and reap the harvest of it, then shall you bring a SHEAF, THE FIRST-FRUITS of your harvest, to the priest; (11) and he shall lift up the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you. **ON THE MORROW OF THE FIRST DAY THE PRIEST SHALL LIFT IT UP. . . .**

"(15) And ye shall number to yourselves FROM THE DAY AFTER THE SABBATH, FROM THE DAY ON WHICH YE SHALL OFFER THE SHEAF OF THE HEAVE-OFFERING, SEVEN FULL WEEKS: **UNTIL THE MORROW AFTER THE LAST WEEK** ye shall number **FIFTY DAYS. . .**" (*The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, Hendrickson Publishers; Lev.23:4-15, p.159-160).

What does this passage clearly tell us? The wave sheaf offering was performed by the priest on the "morrow of the first day" -- and the "first day" was the **FIRST DAY**

OF THE FEAST! Compare verses 7 and 11, and you will see the truth, plain as day, clear as crystal, and as obvious as the sun on a bright day.

Now, what is also interesting, is that Jesus Christ and the apostles of the early New Testament Church *often quoted from the Septuagint in their Biblical references to the Old Testament!* Many scholars and commentators have remarked on this amazing and undeniable fact. It becomes very obvious when comparing Biblical quotations in the New Testament Greek language with the Septuagint, as opposed to the Massoretic text! Clearly, therefore, Jesus and His disciples used the Septuagint many times, and in so doing must have considered the texts they used from it authoritative and inspired Scripture!

There can be no question, therefore, as to the real meaning of Leviticus 23:11, 15. It refers to the day after the Passover -- or Nisan 16 -- just as the Pharisees themselves taught and practiced!

I might mention, at this point, that the King James Version, in verse 15, mistranslates the latter part of this verse, and verse 16, the word "sabbath." It says: "seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath." This poses a problem. How do you "complete" a "Sabbath"? Or seven of them? A Sabbath is a whole day, from sunset on Friday till sunset on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. It is not observed "partially." There would be no need to tell somebody to "complete" a Sabbath. But the Septuagint uses the word "WEEK" in this place. It says: "You shall number to yourselves from the day after the sabbath . . . *seven FULL WEEKS: UNTIL THE MORROW AFTER THE LAST WEEK ye shall number fifty days.*"

Notice! You can "complete" a week -- it is seven whole days. A complete week is seven FULL days, and seven FULL weeks is a total of 49 days (no partial "weeks"). The word the King James translates "Sabbaths" in this case ought to be translated, as the Septuagint has it, "WEEKS." Many modern translations do so. The Jewish Tanakh has this passage: ". . . you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the SEVENTH WEEK." The Septuagint, however, makes this passage perfectly plain. Why do people get mixed up on this?

Jesus Christ Versus the Sadducees

Jesus Christ did not come into conflict with the Sadducees till the close of His ministry, since they were not the religious teachers of the people, but more of a political party concerned mainly with the spoils and patronage of the political system and used the high priesthood for the wealth and opulence it brought to them. Says James Hastings:

"It was only toward the close of His life that our Saviour came into open conflict with them. *They had little influence with the people, ESPECIALLY IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS;* His criticism was therefore mainly directed against the Pharisees and scribes, the supreme religious authorities, although, according to Matt.16:6, 11, He also warned His disciples against the leaven of the Sadducees, meaning, probably, their utterly secular spirit. They, on their part, seem to have ignored Him, until, by driving the money-changers out of the Temple (Matt.21:12,

Mark 11:15, Luke 19:45), He interfered with the prerogatives of the Sanhedrin. His acceptance of the Messianic title 'son of David' also filled them with indignation against Him (Matt.21:15). They accordingly joined the scribes and Pharisees in opposition to Him, and sought to destroy Him (Mark 11:18, Luke 19:47), first, however, attempting to discredit Him in the eyes of the people, and to bring down upon Him the vengeance of the Romans, by their questions as to His authority, as to the resurrection, and as to the lawfulness of paying tribute to Caesar (Matt.21:23, 22:23, Mark 11:27, 12:18, Luke 20:1, 19, 27). In the Sanhedrin that tried Him they probably formed the majority, and the 'chief priests,' who presided, belonged to their party" (p.351).

It should be obvious that the Sadducees were not really interested in religion, as such, but rather in politics and temporal, secular power. All their religious teachings, therefore, ought to make us suspect. Why the Worldwide Church of God, and all of its modern off-shoot churches, should continue doggedly to follow the Sadducees in their method and doctrine of counting Pentecost, therefore, amazes me no end. Such spiritual "blindness" is difficult to fathom, comprehend, or believe. Yet it is a palpable fact, and the more one argues and protests, it seems, the more adamant and concrete-like they become in their opinions.

Unger's Bible Dictionary tells us a little more about this strange, political-religious amalgamation called the Sadducees:

"Their political supremacy was, however, of no long duration. Greatly as the spiritual power of the Pharisees had increased, the Sadducean aristocracy was able to keep at the helm in politics. The price at which the Sadducees had to secure themselves power at this later period was indeed a high one, for they were **IN THEIR OFFICIAL ACTIONS TO ACCOMMODATE THEMSELVES TO PHARISAIC VIEWS**. With the fall of the Jewish state the Sadducees altogether disappear from history. Their strong point was politics. When deprived of this their last hour had struck. While the Pharisaic party only gained more strength, only obtained more absolute rule over the Jewish people in consequence of the collapse of political affairs, the very ground on which they stood was cut away from the Sadducees" ("Sadducees," p.954).

One final witness as to the true position of the Sadducees, and their distinctive lack of real religious authority or power, during the time of Christ, is Emil Schurer, author of the definitive four volume work, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Christ (175 B.C. - AD 135)*, published in 1979. Dr. Schurer writes:

"The Pharisees maintained their leadership in spiritual matters, especially in urban circles. It is true that the Sadducean high priests stood at the head of Sanhedrin. But in fact it was the Pharisees, and not the Sadducees, who made the greatest impact on the ordinary people. . . The Pharisees had the masses for their allies, the women being especially devoted to them. They held the greatest authority over the congregations, **SO THAT EVERYTHING TO DO WITH WORSHIP, PRAYERS, AND SACRIFICE TOOK PLACE ACCORDING TO THEIR INSTRUCTIONS**. Their popularity is said to have been so high that they were listened to even when they criticized the king or the high priest. They were in consequence able to restrain the king. For the same reason, also, **THE SADDUCEES IN THEIR OFFICIAL FUNCTIONS COMPLIED WITH THE PHARISAIC REQUIREMENTS BECAUSE OTHERWISE THE PEOPLE WOULD NOT HAVE TOLERATED THEM**" (revised edition, vol.II, p.402).

Modern Judaism traces its descent from the Pharisees, not the Sadducees. The Sadducees were wiped out totally when the nation of Judah collapsed, and was destroyed. Their whole reason for existence was smashed. They were annihilated. God had no

reason to preserve them, or their teachings, and they perished from off the pages of history, as a mere “blip” in time, a mere “ripple” on the ocean of life. Their influence, prestige, and power vanished with them.

But God Himself preserved the Pharisees, and the teachings of the Torah, and the Oral Law, and kept His Word alive at the hands of the Jews, the Pharisees, and their descendants, the Talmudists, and Massorettes, and succeeding generations of Rabbis and scribes. Were it not for them, we would have no holy sacred calendar, today, and we would have no idea of the beginning of the sacred year, according to God’s Calendar, or the annual holy days (compare Rom.3:1-2). Even though the Pharisees were far from perfect, as the New Testament clearly shows, they were head and shoulders above the Sadducees, and did teach the Law of God and preserved the sacred calendar and knowledge of the festivals of God (Matt.23:1-3).

Preconceived Pet Theories

One reason many Christians, who attempt to keep Pentecost, get confused over this Scripture, and continue to count Pentecost improperly, as the ignorant Sadducees did, following them in their abysmal darkness, is because they misunderstand the meaning of the “first-fruits,” or the “wave sheaf” offering. They assume it refers to Christ having arisen from the dead, after His crucifixion, as the “first-fruits.”

But let’s notice more carefully, just what this “sheaf” of first-fruits is composed of. Christ was the FIRST to rise from the dead, but as Paul goes on: “But each one in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, *afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming*” (v.23). We, also, who are called of God, chosen, elect, and precious in His sight (I Pet.2:5, 9-10) -- we, also, are the FIRST-FRUITS of those who have received God’s Holy Spirit! As the apostle James writes, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a KIND OF FIRST-FRUITS of His creatures” (James 1:18). We are those who have received “the *FIRST-FRUITS of the Spirit*”(Rom.8:23). We will reign with Christ over the earth during the millennium (Rev.5:10; 20:1-4), as kings and priests -- or, a kingdom of priests (a “royal priesthood”).

John writes of these “first-fruits” of God’s harvest in these words: “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the REST of the dead did not live again until after the thousand years were finished. *This [the first-fruits] is the FIRST resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the FIRST resurrection.* Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev.20:4-6).

We are the first-fruits pictured by the wave sheaf offering! It is US who are presented by the “high priest” -- a type of Jesus Christ, our High Priest (Heb.4:14) -- to God the Father in heaven, our acceptance by God being made possible by the SACRIFICE of Christ, our Passover Lamb (I Cor.5:7-8)!

Do you see? WE are the first-fruits pictured by the wave sheaf, which is a bundle

of MANY plants of barley, harvested and threshed and beaten and parched and prepared, as an offering to God. Alfred Edersheim describes this ancient harvest this way:

“Already, on the 14th of Nisan, the spot whence the FIRST SHEAF was to be reaped had been marked out by delegates from the Sanhedrin, by tying together IN BUNDLES, while still standing, THE BARLEY that was to be cut down. . . . When the time for cutting the sheaf had arrived, that is, on the evening of the 15th of Nisan (even though it were a Sabbath), just as the sun went down [Nisan 16th began], three men, each with a sickle and basket, formally set to work. But in order clearly to bring out all that was distinctive in the ceremony, they first asked of the bystanders three times each of these questions: ‘Has the sun gone down?’ ‘With this sickle?’ ‘Into this basket?’ ‘On this Sabbath (or first Passover-day)?’ -- and, lastly, ‘Shall I reap?’ Having each time been answered in the affirmative, *they cut down barley TO THE AMOUNT OF ONE EPHAH, or ten omers, or three seahs, which is equal to about THREE PECKS AND THREE PINTS of our English measure.* The ears were brought into the Court of the Temple, and THRASHED OUT WITH CANES OR STALKS [beaten, but], so as not to injure the corn; then ‘PARCHED’ on a pan perforated with holes, so that EACH GRAIN MIGHT BE TOUCHED BY THE FIRE [a type of trials and tests we Christians must endure! -- see I Cor. 3:13-15], and finally exposed to the wind [ready to withstand the wind of errors, false doctrines -- see Eph.4:11-16 and James 1:5-7]. The corn thus prepared was GROUND IN THE BARLEY-MILL, with the hulls left whole. According to some, the FLOUR [our character] was always successfully passed through thirteen sieves, each closer than the other [God refines us, our character, to “perfection”!]. The statement of a rival authority, however, seems more rational -- that it was only till the flour was sufficiently fine, which was ascertained by one of the ‘Gizbarim’ (treasurers) plunging his hands into it, the sifting process being continued so long as any of the flour adhered to the hands. Though ONE EPHAH, OR TEN OMERS, OF BARLEY WAS CUT DOWN [i.e., “many are called”], *ONLY ONE OMER OF FLOUR, or about 5.1 pints of our measure, WAS OFFERED IN THE TEMPLE [“few are chosen”] on the second Paschal, or 16th of Nisan.* The rest of the flour might be redeemed, and used for any purpose. The omer of flour was mixed with a ‘log,’ or very nearly three-fourths of a PINT OF OIL [God’s Holy Spirit, this typifying], and a handful of frankincense [fragrant perfume, a type of our prayers and praises of God] put upon it, then waved before the Lord, and a handful taken out and burned on the altar” (*The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as they were in the time of Christ, p.258-259*).

Could anything be clearer? The “wave sheaf” of barley grain -- some 5 pints of barley grain, thrashed, parched, and carefully sifted -- represents US -- THE FIRST-FRUITS OF THE LAMB OF GOD! WE are the many grains of barley, being refined, and anointed with God’s Holy Spirit, and offered to the Father, as the ones who have been called and chosen of God during this life-time! Our offering to the Father cannot take place UNTIL Christ died for our sins, thus reconciling us to God. Passover had to come first. And then we could be redeemed, and selected, and brought into the presence of the Father, and waved as an offering to Him -- as we read in the book of Revelation:

“Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written in their foreheads. . . . These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins [part of the bride of Christ -- see Eph.5:25-27; Rev.19:7-9]. *These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, BEING THE FIRST-FRUITS TO GOD AND TO THE LAMB*” (Rev.14:1-4).

How plain -- how wonderful -- how awesome, incredible, and mind-boggling -- it should be, as we contemplate these things! Oh how grievously we have misunderstood!

Oh how our minds have been clouded with error, and how subtly we were duped by the devious machinations and clever distractions, and twisting of Scripture, by the Devil and his minions and ministers and spiritual impostors!

Does your mind even now, grasp it? Those of us called now, who have received the “first-fruits of the Spirit” of God, *we are the First-fruits pictured in the Wave Sheaf offering!*

But What Difference Does It Make?

Jesus Christ said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

The Messiah also said, “Do not suppose that I came to annul the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to complete them; for I assure you, while heaven and earth endure not one iota or one projection of a letter will be dropped from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever, therefore, abolishes the least significant of these commands and so teaches the people, he shall be of least significance in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall observe and teach them shall be prominent in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not at all enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt.5:17-20, Berkeley Version).

Is this “new truth” to you? Have you been observing “Pentecost” or the “Feast of Weeks” on the wrong day all these years?

Have you been trying to keep “unholy” time “holy”?

Herbert Armstrong used to say that it is ten times harder to unlearn error than to learn new truth! Learning is one thing. Obeying is another! It is one hundred times harder to change a practice that is wrong, and to break a bad habit, and to begin to keep a different day than one has kept in the past. Human nature, which tends to get into a rut of habitual action and practice, doesn’t want to learn new things, and to get up out of the rut, and to force itself to CHANGE!

The apostle Paul declared, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands *take heed lest he fall*” (I Cor.10:12). Paul also wrote: “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, *lest we drift away*. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, *how shall we escape IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT SALVATION . . .?*” (Heb.2:1-3).

Some people will exclaim, “So what? What difference does it make, anyhow? So long as you are sincere, and have faith in your local ministers, can’t you trust them to sort these things out?”

Unfortunately, experience has proved beyond doubt that in matters of faith and eternal salvation, it is not wise to trust ANY MAN, lest he deceive you, steal your crown,

and lead you astray. Mere sincerity won't get the job done. God demands OBEDIENCE to His Law -- and in this End-time, He gives you plenty of evidence and proof so that you can KNOW the Truth -- KNOW the Law! Ignorance of the Law of God is no excuse!

After reading this article, the question is, do you FEAR GOD, and tremble before His Word, and His Law, enough to OBEY HIM? Even if your own "church" refuses to obey, will you step out on faith and follow Christ, Paul, and God's Word in this matter, and put them ahead of your local congregation or local minister?

Your eternal life could hang in the balance! What will it be?