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on *Sivan 6*?**



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**Should Pentecost be observed on the fixed calendar date of Sivan 6? Or, should it be observed on a Sunday?**

**by Vance A. Stinson**

Disputes over the correct way to determine the occurrence of the Day of Pentecost have existed since before the time of Jesus. Some began the fifty-day count to Pentecost on the day after the first annual Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, while others counted from the day after the last high day of the feast, and still others counted from the first Sunday (or day after the weekly Sabbath) falling within the festival.

Among churches and assemblies that observe the annual holy days, the dispute continues.

Most holy-day keepers observe a Sunday Pentecost, but over the past several years we have seen the emergence of a movement advocating the fixed calendar date of Sivan 6 as the correct day for observing Pentecost. Some within the movement have repeatedly accused us (the Church of God, International) of having failed to honestly investigate this issue. For this reason, and to provide a full explanation of why we observe a Sunday Pentecost, we are printing the following letter and the reply. The letter is one of many we have received on the Sunday/Sivan 6 issue, and fairly represents the major arguments most frequently made by Sivan 6 advocates. It has been slightly edited for clarity, but the content remains the same.

Dear Mr. Stinson:

I listened to your sermon tape dated 5-4-91 regarding the correct date of Pentecost. Its my hope for the sake of truth you will reconsider your conclusion of the Holy Day of Pentecost not being a fixed date of Sivan 6 on the sacred calendar.

I'm not a great scholar with many degrees or even a college graduate, but I have read from the age of 16 the Old Testament almost twenty times and the New Testament of Christ almost forty times in what I believe has been a fair and objective manner. From all I have read and can understand from the Scriptures lead me to believe virtually all the branches of Gods church have made a sincere mistake when they rejected mainstream Judaism's Sivan 6 as the date of the annual Sabbath of Pentecost.

To substantiate my view, while hopefully not being overly redundant with the main points in his letter you mentioned in your tape, I offer four points of evidence that Sivan 6 is the correct date for the Holy Day of Pentecost.

Point 1: The Pharisees did in fact sit in Moses' seat in regard to the administration of the Old Covenant. That is, they were the sole group of scribes and rabbis Christ approved to administer the basic aspects of the carnal law of Moses and letter of the spiritual commandments of God as were given under the administration of death of the Old Covenant.

While the Pharisaical Jews didn't practice all their own carnal interpretations of the law, they certainly were not condemned for their understanding of the minimal, basic, and fundamental requirements of the law of Moses, In other words, they no doubt went too far in what they required of the people in the way of obedience to the law Moses, but certainly they were blamelessly correct concerning the basic fundamental issues of the law of Moses.

Notice Christ over and over blames the Pharisees for not comprehending the spiritual elements or principles of the law, as they bound the people with grievously heavy legal burdens in their interpretation of the carnal requirements of the law, Their interpretations resulted in rulings on such matters as how far one could walk on the Sabbath, whether healing was permissible on the Sabbath, and how meticulous a person had to be in tithing. Yet Christ never condemns the Pharisees over the major issues such as which day the weekly and annual Sabbaths fell on in regard to the sacred calendar or

the need to or how much was a tithe. He only condemns them for their hypocrisy in not obeying their own burdensome interpretations of the law as they actually overdid and overemphasized carnal obedience at the expense of the spiritual meanings and intents of the law.

Notice an example of this point in verse 6 of Matthew 23 after saying in verses 2 and 3, “The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not according to their works; for they say and do not do.” “ Verse 6, They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues... Notice, Christ doesn’t condemn the Pharisees for the major issue of not observing His holy days on the correct date, but their spiritual inadequacies of conceitedly choosing the most prominent seats on the holy days. If they were so far mistaken as to not even understand the correct dates of God’s holy days, surely He would have condemned them in that verse. Yet nothing of the sort is indicated.

Finally on this point Paul said he was a Pharisee and son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), and that according to the strictest sect of which there were three: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes) of Judaism, he lived a Pharisee. Paul said he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness (carnal righteousness) which is in the law, blameless.

The apostle Paul gives no apology for having been a Pharisee and in fact in Acts 23:6 still refers to himself as a Pharisee. The fact is, the Sadducees, Christ said, didn’t know the Scriptures (Matthew 22:29) and the Samaritans didn’t know what they worshiped (John 4:22).

The fact is, the preservation of the inspired Old Covenant oracles of God were given to the Jews to preserve (Romans 3:2), which...Paul strongly suggested were preserved by the Pharisees as they sat in Moses’ seat. It’s no accident that God chose a Pharisee, or one from the strictest sect of the Jewish religion in regards to the carnal application of the law, and brought him to spiritual conversion, and used him to write the largest single portion of the New Testament in regards to the spiritual requirements for salvation.

How you and other sincere scholars can dismiss this first point is for me hard to understand. For truly, how can it be said the Jews have faithfully preserved the inspired oracles of God while being so absolutely ignorant and fundamentally wrong in regards to a holy day so extremely important to those inspired oracles? How can you scholars reject such men our Savior said sat in Moses’ seat and accept the teaching of Samaritan gentiles and Sadducees who in fact rejected almost all of the Old Covenant Scriptures?

Point 2: The very first and only time where Pentecost is clearly reckoned in the Bible thru actual observance is in Joshua 5:10-12. In these verses the wave sheaf or omer is clearly and without question offered on the day after the annual Sabbath of Passover, on the 16th of Abib.

Notice carefully this account: “So the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept [or prepared] the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight [or between the evenings] on the plains of Jericho. 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. Now 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 of the food of the land of Canaan that year.”

Now we absolutely know, according to the instruction of Leviticus 23:10, that the wavesheaf the Israelites would offer would occur when when they entered the land of Canaan. During the forty years of their sojourn in the wilderness they would plant no crops and consequently harvest none. As a result they had no wavesheaf to offer during their forty-year sojourn. God instead supplied miraculously their bread in the form of manna.

Notice this carefully in verse 10: “When you come into the land I give you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.”

The Israelites are also instructed in verse 11: “On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.” That is, when they entered the promised land, before eating any of its crops, they had to offer a wavesheaf of the crop on the day after the Sabbath (the definite article being in the original Hebrew). Verse 14 particularly instructed the Israelites: “You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day you have brought an offering to your God...”

So in Joshua 5 we find the Israelites having crossed over the Jordan River into the land of Canaan near Jericho where crops of barley were. The Israelites observe Passover and on the day after the Sabbath of Passover they eat of the produce of crops of the land. This obviously means they had offered the wavesheaf in accordance with the instruction of Leviticus 23 on the 16th or the same day they ate of the produce of the land. The manna, no longer needed, stops the following day, or 17th.

A person could argue that Passover fell on the weekly Sabbath that year and consequently doesn't absolutely prove that Pentecost was to be counted from the day after the annual Passover Sabbath. To such an argument I offer two important points.

First, if the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread was meant to always be the critical focus point of calculating the date of Pentecost, why didn't Joshua say “on the day after the Sabbath” instead of “on the day after Passover” in verse 11 of Joshua 5? Joshua, in verses 10-11, uses the term Passover to describe two different parts of the Passover service or festival, which seems strange if he wasn't trying to convey a message. He describes the activities on the 14th as Passover and then the 15th as Passover. Although this isn't strange to the Scriptures it seems in this case Joshua wanted it understood that the wavesheaf was to be always offered after the Passover Sabbath.

Second, the first time an event occurs or is done serves legally as an example and precedent. This was the very first wavesheaf ever offered and it was clearly offered on the day after the Passover Sabbath. The chances of Passover occurring on the weekly Sabbath is approximately 20 percent. The odds of this particular Passover occurring on the weekly Sabbath therefore are extremely low. The fact is, the probability is approximately 80 percent this first Passover in the land of Canaan wasn't on a weekly Sabbath.

Point 3: Unless Pentecost was the fixed date of Sivan 6, how would the Israelites prior to their entering the land of Canaan have known which day the annual Sabbath of Pentecost fell on, since there was no wavesheaf ceremony prior to their entering the promised land? Thus indicating strongly that the wavesheaf offered on the 16th of Abib was done for symbolic spiritual reasons rather than calculating reasons.

The wavesheaf pictures the resurrection of Christ as the First of the firstfruits to enter permanently into the divine Kingdom of God. To properly comprehend this point, you must understand how the Jews traditionally, historically, and scripturally calculate the multiple passing of days and nights, and how that information applies to Christ's burial of three days and three nights (Luke 24:4,29; Mark 16:9; Matthew 17:23; Esther 4:16-5:1, etc.).

Point 4: You mentioned in your sermon the phrase in Acts 2:1: “Now when the day of Pentecost had fully come...” To properly understand this phrase you must understand what the Feast of Pentecost was, and what the two Hebrew words translated “count” in Leviticus 23:15-16 mean. To correctly understand these two matters will even more substantiate the truth that the time the wavesheaf was offered was not meant to be a means of counting to arrive at the date of the Sabbath of Pentecost, but a symbolism of spiritual aspects of Christ and His gospel.

First, the third holy day of the sacred calendar is described as a festival covering the duration of the spring harvest, picturing the firstfruits in Gods plan of salvation (or the first to be called of humanity to eventual salvation). These firstfruits of Gods plan are portrayed in the two wave loaves made from the spring harvest of grain.

The third festival actually covers the entire duration of the spring harvest. That is why it is called the “Feast of Weeks,” “Feast of Firstfruits,” and “Feast of Pentecost,” or fifty days. The third annual festival covered the entire duration of the spring harvest of seven full weeks or fifty full days. The word Pentecost literally means “fifty.”

Now notice Leviticus 23:15-16, where we are told to “count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths [or cycles of seven days] shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath” [or cycle of seven days].

The Hebrew word translated “I count” comes from the Hebrew word caphar pronounced “sawfar”: A primary root meaning to score with a mark as a tally or record. Its intensive meaning is “to recount” or “celebrate.” It is elsewhere translated (in the KJV) as commune, account, declare, shew forth, speak, talk, and tell.

What is the significance of this? The significance is instead of the emphasis of verses 15-16 of Leviticus 23 being on counting so as to discover a variable date of Pentecost, or the Sabbath of the Feast of Pentecost, the emphasis is that the Israelites were to mark off each day of the fifty days in celebration of the duration of the entire harvest of firstfruits. Again, it was not a counting to arrive at a date that changes year after year, but a celebration of each of the fifty days of the Feast of Pentecost (or Feast of fifty days) until its culmination in the annual Sabbath every year on Sivan 6. For Pentecost, or the Feast of fifty days, to “fully come” simply means for the Feast of fifty days to fully end or culminate on the annual Sabbath of Sivan 6. Mr. Stinson that is what it means for the day or “days” of Pentecost to fully come.

Mr. Stinson it’s my hope “for the truth’s sake” you and your fellow ministers and scholars will consider what I and others have brought to your attention and take another look at Pentecost and finally admit the obvious. We have made a mistake and Sivan 6 is the only contextually legal example given in the Bible for the Sabbath of Pentecost or Feast of fifty days.

—Kentucky

### The Reply:

Jesus said: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matthew 23:2,3).

What did Christ mean when He spoke of “Moses’ seat”? He was probably speaking of the seat of authority symbolized by the “chair of Moses” in the synagogue. We know that such a seat existed in later synagogues, and it is probable that it was present in the synagogues in the time of Christ. The chief scribe sat in the chair of Moses, a chair which represented the scribe’s expertise in the Law of Moses and tradition of the elders.

Jesus said “All...they bid you observe, that observe and do.” The tern translated “all” means *everything*. “Everything” includes the Pharisees’ teaching from the written Law of Moses *as well as* all the traditions they taught. It includes scrubbing vigorously before eating, refraining from plucking even a few ears of grain on the Sabbath, tithing on mint, anise, and cummin, and *all* the many rules set forth in the “oral law,” or “tradition of the elders.” Everything means *everything!*

However, other accounts show clearly that Jesus Himself did not do everything the Pharisees said do, and that He taught His disciples that they did *not* need to do everything the Pharisees said do (see Matthew 12:1-8; 15:1-9; Mark 2:23-28; 7:1-13; Luke 6:1-11).

How do we reconcile this seeming contradiction?

Once we realize that Jesus was merely quoting (or paraphrasing) a well-known claim made by the scribes and Pharisees, we can then see that there is no contradiction.

Jesus was not presenting something His listeners had never heard before. He was merely repeating, or paraphrasing, a statement that was well known during that period. The scribes and Pharisees claimed that since they sat in “the chair of Moses,” and that since they alone were the custodians of the faith of the fathers, the people should observe and do all they commanded.

Does this mean, then, that Jesus was confirming the claim of the scribes and Pharisees?

No! His statement about the scribes and Pharisees sitting in Moses’ seat was followed by His main point: “but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.” Thus, Jesus’ use of a common statement (or claim made by the scribes and Pharisees) emphasized His point that the scribes and Pharisees were a band of hypocrites. He was not teaching His listeners that the Pharisees were divinely-appointed interpreters of the Law. Rather, He was employing a *cutting irony*, with perhaps a touch of sarcasm.

This interpretation is consistent with the remainder of the chapter, and with many other things Jesus said about this brood of vipers. It is also consistent with Mark’s and Luke’s parallel accounts, where Jesus is quoted as simply warning His listeners to “*Beware* of the scribes...” (Mark 12:38; Luke 20:46).

Think of it: In the same discourse, Jesus called the Pharisees “blind guides.” A blind guide is a guide who cannot see where he is going, so his guidance cannot be relied upon. How could He have expected His listeners to do everything *blind guides* told them to do? Surely He was using irony when He recited the Pharisaic claim.

Your point about Christ never condemning the Pharisees' way of determining the occurrence of Pentecost is an argument from silence. While silence sometimes speaks louder than words, such is not the case here. We must remember that each New Testament writer had specific objectives in view, and was selective in his presentation of quotations and events. All the negative things Jesus said about the Pharisees is quite enough to establish that they could have been wrong in *many* of their interpretations of the Law. It is a mistake to assume that Matthew 23 is a list of all the major errors of the Pharisees. The things Jesus mentioned had to do with their hypocrisy, their self-centeredness, their self-righteousness, and their great, ever-swelling, spiritual vanity—*not* with their specific doctrinal errors.

You suggest that the problem with the Pharisees was that “they no doubt went *too far* in what they required of the people in the way of obedience to the law of Moses, but certainly they were blamelessly correct concerning the basic fundamental issues of the law of Moses.”

Christ did not say that the Pharisees went “too far” in their requirements; He said that many of their requirements *contradicted* the Word of God.

“He answered and said unto them [the Pharisees], Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the *commandments of men!* For *laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men*, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

“And He said unto them, Full well ye *reject* [or *frustrate*] the commandment of God, that ye may keep *your own tradition*. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; *Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition*, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye” (Mark 7:6-13).

Notice that the Corban tradition was one of *many* Pharisaic traditions that flatly contradicted God's Law!

How can you read the above and say that the Pharisees merely “went *too far*” in their requirements, but “were blamelessly correct concerning the basic fundamental issues of the law of Moses”? You seem to think that the “correct time” for the Day of Pentecost is more “fundamental” than the “weightier matters of the law,” which were neglected by the Pharisees (Matthew 23:23). If they neglected the weightier matters, is it not conceivable (if not probable) that they failed to rightly interpret the Scriptures on such matters as when to observe Pentecost? And isn't it possible that their interpretation of God's instructions on the observance of Pentecost was based on their erroneous tradition rather than on a tradition-free exegesis of the Scriptures?

Modern Jewish scholars see a possible connection between the Pharisees' “tradition of the elders” and their observance of Pentecost on Sivan 6. *The Encyclopedia Judaica* has this to say:

“It is possible that the Pharisees insisted that Shavout [the Day of Pentecost] be observed on a fixed day because they wished to affirm that the festival commemorated the Sinaitic theophany which occurred on the 50th day after the Exodus (*following the general Pharisaic belief in an oral Torah reaching back to Moses* which the Sadducees denied) and because a purely agricultural festival had little meaning for the town dwellers who made up the Pharisaic party” (Volume. 14, p. 1320, emphasis mine).

Your argument relies heavily upon an *interpretation* of the historical data handed down to us. Many scholars say that there is much to be learned about Jewish customs and religious practice during the time of Jesus. All we can do is interpret the information handed down to us, but we must realize that we don't have all the facts. It is therefore a mistake to allow our interpretations of historical data to serve as the foundation for understanding biblical texts.

Consider the following:

Writing of the Sadducees, Josephus says: “But they are able to do almost nothing of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII:1:4).

Of the Pharisees, Josephus writes: “They are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities gave great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also” (*Antiquities*, XVIII:1:3).

One might conclude from the above that the Sadducees submitted to the Pharisees' demands; that the high priest, himself a Sadducee, went along with the Pharisees' insistence that the sheaf of firstfruits be waved on the day after the first high day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread; and that the Sadducees officiating in the Temple performed the sacred duties attached to Pentecost on Sivan 6 in order to win the favor of the Jewish people, who favored the Pharisees.

The above seems logical, but it is not the last word. Scholars acknowledge that Josephus, being a Pharisee, was probably biased in his presentation of the Jewish sects. Further, since Josephus joined the Pharisees (A.D. 56, at age 19) within the last two decades of the Temple's existence, it is likely that his writings reflect the influence the Pharisees had during that period. According to *The Encyclopedia Judaica*, “The Sadducean hierarchy had its stronghold in the Temple, and it was only during the last two decades of the Temple's existence that the Pharisees finally gained control” (Volume. 14, p. 622). This doesn't mean that the Pharisees had no control prior to this time; it merely means that they finally succeeded in gaining full control, or, at least, a much/greater control than they previously had.

Both Josephus and Philo mention the Sivan 6 Pentecost, as do the rabbinic writers of the post-Temple period. However, it is important to realize that Rabbinic Judaism is the progeny of Pharisaic Judaism, the only form of Jewish religion that survived the destruction

of Jerusalem. Obviously, the rabbinic writers, with their Pharisaic schooling, were inclined to present their forebears in the most favorable light. In other words, if we rely upon rabbinic testimony for our understanding of Judaism during the Second Temple period, we are likely to come up with a one-sided view.

Jewish scholars admit to the possibility of a one-sided presentation on the part of the rabbis. *The Encyclopedia Judaica* states: “Unfortunately no statement has survived from the Sadducean side on their beliefs and principles. There are *controversial references in rabbinical literature* with regard to the Sadducean interpretation of the law” (*ibid.*, emphasis mine).

There is no question that both a Sivan 6 and a Sunday Pentecost were known during the time of Christ and the apostles. In all probability, both traditions came from a much earlier period, and neither originated with the Pharisees or the Sadducees. We are left with several questions that cannot, at this time, be adequately answered: Did the Sadducees preside over sacerdotal matters during the time of Christ, and to what extent? Did the Pharisees refuse to make allowances for a Sunday Pentecost, though their tradition differed? Was the controversy over Sivan 6 and Sunday as sharply contended as other issues? Were the Pharisees as uniform in their theological positions as some of us tend to think? Did some of the Pharisees agree with the Sadducees on the matter of Pentecost? Were both days widely observed during the time of Christ? We cannot fully answer these questions, for, as many scholars admit, there is much to be learned about Jewish practice during the Second Temple period.

Josephus wrote of the differences, both theological and practical, among the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. He mentioned differences on such matters as death and the afterlife, resurrection, and beliefs about fate and free will. He pointed out that the Pharisees “have delivered to the people a great many observations by succession from their fathers [i. e., the “oral law”], which are not written in the law of Moses” (*Antiquities*, XTII:10:6), while the Sadducees “say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers” (*ibid.*), Yet, Josephus never mentioned the date for observing Pentecost as a point of contention—at least not directly. Why?

There are at least three possible answers: First, perhaps the Sivan 6 tradition was not mentioned specifically because Josephus knew that it was one of the “great many observations” handed down from the “fathers”—that is, it was part of the “oral law.” Second, it could be that the Sadducees submitted to the Pharisees in order to prevent excessive opposition from the people, so Josephus saw no need to mention their differences on this point. But then, in view of the probability that Josephus’ remarks reflect his bias, his claim that “the Pharisees have the multitude of their side” (*ibid.*) may be an overstatement, and is certainly subject to varying interpretations. (Josephus’ remarks about the people’s approval of the Pharisees seem to be at odds with the New Testament record,) The third possibility is this: Josephus didn’t mention the Sivan 6-Sunday controversy because it was not among those topics most hotly contended, His mention of a Sivan 6 Pentecost reflects his Pharisaic inclinations, but does not tell us with certainty whether a Sunday Pentecost was well known

and widely observed during the time of Christ. It may well be that both were observed, and that both fit within the festival period in which thousands of Jews from all over the known world gathered at Jerusalem to celebrate the harvest. If in fact a large enough number of Jews observed a Sunday Pentecost, it is quite possible that the Pharisees, for political purposes, would have allowed it to go on unopposed. After all, the “chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders” (Pharisees were undoubtedly among them) refused to say that John’s baptism was “of men” because “they *feared* the people” (Mark 11:27-32).

Since it is unlikely that either tradition originated with the Pharisees or the Sadducees, it is most probable that Jewish families, including those who favored neither party, followed whichever tradition their forefathers followed. In other words, some families observed a Sunday Pentecost, while others observed a Sivan 6 Pentecost. You may ask, Why, then, do we not find the same situation today? Why are Jews united in their observance of a Sivan 6 Pentecost? The answer is simple: Pharisaic Judaism is the only form of Judaism that survived the destruction of Jerusalem. Its progeny is Rabbinic Judaism, which proved to be the unifying factor among the dispersed Jews, and which has dominated Judaism over the centuries. Both the Sadducees and the Essenes faded into oblivion following the destruction of Jerusalem. The survival of the Pharisees was probably due to the eschatological hope they had emphasized throughout their history. The Sadducees, with no belief in a resurrection or future rewards, dwindled to nothing, or were absorbed by the Pharisees. Upon being absorbed by the Pharisaic party, the Sadducees accepted (or, at least, no longer opposed) the “traditions of the elders,” so the so-called “oral law” survived, and probably underwent much development. Today, it is contained in the Talmud, which is highly esteemed by Orthodox Jews.

We know that Christianity underwent some radical changes following the A.D. 70 event. Professing Christians from different traditions (i.e., Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, etc.) tend to be biased in their presentation of church history—that is, they read into the New Testament traditions that developed later. Catholics trace their line of popes all the way back to the apostle Peter. Martin Luther read Augustinian concepts of predestination and election into the writings of Paul. And on it goes. Why should we assume that Judaism has been any different? Is it unreasonable to think that the rabbis, with their Pharisaic persuasion, would attempt to trace their traditions to Moses? Is it unthinkable that they would present the sect from which they derived their traditions in the most favorable light?

According to *The Encyclopedia Judaica*, the sect of the Sadducees “formed about 200 B.C.E.” (Volume. 14, p. 620); the Pharisees “emerged as a distinct group shortly after the Hasmonean revolt, about 165-160 B.C.E.,” and “were probably successors of the Hasideans (or Hasidim), an earlier Jewish sect I which promoted the observance of Jewish ritual and the study of the Torah” (Volume. 13, p. 364). The Sadducees “dominated the Temple worship and its rites and many of them were members of the Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish council and tribunal of the Second Temple period)” (Volume. 14, p. 620).

“The most probable explanation of the name [“Sadducees”]... is that it is derived from Zadok, the high priest in the days of David (II Sam. 8:17 and 15:24) and Solomon (cf.

I Kings 1:34ff. and I Chronicles. 12:29). Ezekiel (40:46, 43:19 and 44:10-15) selected this family as worthy of being entrusted with the control of the Temple. Descendants of this family constituted the Temple hierarchy down to the second century B.C.E., though not all priests were Sadducees. Hence the name ‘Sadducees’ may best be taken to mean anyone who is a sympathizer with the Zadokites, the priestly descendants of Zadok” (*ibid.*, p. 621).

As stated earlier, it is doubtful that a Sunday Pentecost originated with the Sadducees. They probably merely continued the practice of their forebears. If so, then this means that a Sunday Pentecost was observed from a much earlier time, and may well have been the only Pentecost known until the intertestamental period. (The claim that the Samaritans persuaded the Sadducean priests to adopt a Sunday Pentecost is pure conjecture and has no basis in established historical fact.)

*The Encyclopedia Judaica* states: “During the whole of the Hellenistic era the priesthood was the class with the highest status among the people. From it came the administrators of Judea. In practice the high priest was head of independent Judea, and most of the other responsible people in politics and in administration were also priests” (Volume. 13, p. 1068).

However, as the political climate changed, the priesthood lost some of its prestige. *Judaica* continues: “The connections of some of the priests with the policy of Antiochus [Epiphenes] brought about a diminution in the prestige of the class, but when the government passed to the Hasmoneans the priesthood seemed to reach its highest peak among the Jewish people. For the Hasmonean high priest became also the leader, and the king, of an independent nation. *At that time, however; began the rise of the Pharisee scholars, the students of the Torah, and these began to supplant the priests as spiritual leaders. This fact is particularly important in view of the fact that the priests stood out in general as the leaders of the Sadducee sect whose central sector was composed of the upper grades among the priests,* and these were an important element in the Sanhedrin....With the ascent of Herod to the monarchy, the political leadership of Judah passed—for the first time in the Second Temple era—to a non-priestly element. After the extermination of the Hasmonean dynasty, Herod appointed the high priest at his will from among the priests. He loosed the linking of the high priesthood with a particular family and also abolished finally the custom for the high priest to serve the whole of his life. His status remained exalted and hallowed but his role was chiefly limited to the service of the Day of Atonement, which could be performed by him alone” (*ibid.*, p. 1087, emphasis mine).

The Pharisees, with their expanding influence, took advantage of the diminishing prestige of the priesthood. *Judaica* states: “The Pharisees’ first bid for power was made in a period two centuries after the Babylonian exile during the struggle to remove the Temple and religious control from the sole leadership of the aristocratic Sadducees. The inception of the synagogue worship traced to this time is seen as an attempt by the Pharisees to undermine the privileged authority exercised by the Sadducees, ...The conflict between the lay and priestly factions of the supreme council and tribunal, the Sanhedrin, regarding the interpretation of the Torah when decisions were required on questions arising in daily

life, gave the Pharisees the opportunity to incorporate popular customs and traditions into the Temple cult and the religious life of the people. In general, *the Pharisees admitted the validity of an evolutionary and non-literal approach toward the legal decisions and regarded the legal framework of the Oral Law as equally valid as the Written Law*. A serious conflict eventually developed between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over the approach to these problems, and two distinct parties emerged, with theological differences entangled with politics” (Volume. 13, p. 364, emphasis mine).

*Judaica* describes the Sadducees as “the conservative priestly group, holding to the older doctrines, and cherishing the highest regard for the sacrificial cult of the Temple.... They were opposed to changes and innovations and refused to accept the oral traditions with which the Pharisees supplemented the Written Law. *It was never a question of whether certain laws were derived from tradition, but whether those laws that were admittedly derived from tradition were obligatory*” (Volume. 14, p. 621, emphasis mine).

It is most probable, then, that the Pharisees *knew* that the Sadducean Pentecost custom was older than their Sivan 6 custom, but because of their insistence upon “an evolutionary and non-literal approach” and their belief in the validity of the “oral law” by which the written Law was interpreted, they justified their Sivan 6 custom. *Judaica* states: “The Sadducees (and later the Karaites) understood the term ‘Sabbath’ in these verses [Leviticus 23:11,15,16] *literally*, hence, for them Shavout always falls on a Sunday” (Volume. 14, p. 1319, emphasis mine).

Based on the information we have, I would say that the Sivan 6 custom began during the intertestamental period, perhaps with the Hasidim (the Pharisees’ predecessors). Any number of elements may have contributed to their adoption of a fixed-calendar date: (1) increasing emphasis on Pentecost as a memorial of the giving of the Law, and decreasing association of Pentecost with the harvest; (2) failed crops (see discussion below); (3) questions on what to do during sabbatical and Jubilee years (see discussion below). The Pharisees continued in the traditions developed by the Hasidim, holding that their traditions originated with Moses and were as much a part of inspired revelation as the written Word. In the meantime, the Sadducees, with their stronghold in the Temple, continued in the older custom of observing Pentecost on a Sunday. The later influence of the Pharisees, which accompanied the declining influence of the priestly cast, resulted in a widespread observance of Sivan 6. However, it is unlikely that all Jewish families abandoned their long-held tradition of observing Pentecost on a Sunday. Thus, we have a plausible case for the view that both days were well known during the time of Christ.

The above is only a *possible* explanation of how a Sivan 6 Pentecost replaced (for many) the biblical Sunday Pentecost. It agrees well with *Judaica’s* presentation of the Sadducees as “the conservative priestly group” who held to “older doctrines,” and the Pharisees as those who placed the “oral law” and the written Law on an equal plane.

Notice what *Judaica* has to say about the Pharisees’ belief regarding the Torah:

“For the Pharisees, the Torah God gave to Moses consisted of the Written and the Oral Law, and both were truth. The divine revelations in the first five books of Moses

were supplemented and explained by the prophets and the unwritten tradition.... *Their view of the law was that its commandments were to be interpreted in conformity with the standard and interpretation of the rabbis of each generation, and to be made to harmonize with advanced ideas.* Therefore, when a precept was outgrown, it was to be given a more acceptable meaning, so that it would harmonize with the truth resulting from God-given reason....The Pharisees generated a ramified system of hermeneutics and found no great difficulty in harmonizing Torah teachings with their advanced ideas, or in finding their ideas implied or hinted at in the words of the Torah” (Volume. 13, p. 365, emphasis mine).

In your defense of the Pharisees, you pointed out that Jesus said the Sadducees did not know the Scriptures. But when Jesus said to them, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures...” (Matthew 22:29), did He mean to imply that the Pharisees *did* know the Scriptures? Was He speaking of the correct date for observing Pentecost? Please read the context. A particular subject was in view. You are reading more into the passage than is actually stated. If one interpreted the passage the way you do, one could conclude that the Sadducees did not know which day was the Sabbath, which meats were unclean, who gave the Ten Commandments, who God used in leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, and so on. Jesus also told the Pharisees, in so many words, that they didn’t know the Scriptures regarding certain subjects (see Matthew 12:3-5; 19:4-9). Even Christ’s own disciples “knew not the scripture” concerning Christ’s resurrection (John 20:9) until after the fact. Christ did not favor one Jewish sect above another, He had plenty of scathing remarks for both (read Matthew 16:1-12).

You seem to read more into Paul’s comments than the apostle intended to say. Why did Paul point out that he was a Pharisee (in Acts 23:6)? The context tells us why. Seeing that the council consisted of Pharisees and Sadducees, Paul “sided” with the Pharisees in order to cause his accusers to turn on *each other*. He pointed out that he, like the Pharisees, believed in the resurrection. He wasn’t doing this in order to establish the superiority of Pharisaic Judaism over Sadducean Judaism, for though he believed in the resurrection, his belief about the resurrection was quite different from that of the Pharisees. He did it for *his own benefit*.

You also cited Philippians 3:5,6, where Paul speaks of his life before conversion. He was explaining that those things he had considered great accomplishments—he had excelled as a disciple of Pharisaism—no longer meant anything to him! He counted them as loss! Some, particularly the circumcision party (mostly Pharisees), *did* “trust in the flesh” (that is, in their Jewishness, their “expertise” in the Law, etc.). Paul was pointing out that he had more reason than they to be “confident in the flesh,” but added that his “credentials” were *nothing* compared with the “excellency of the knowledge of Christ” (verse 8).

Paul had been “blameless” (verse 6) in that, as a young Pharisee excelling above his fellow students, no one could blame him with having failed to do all that was required of him. From the *Pharisees’* perspective, from *their* view of righteousness, he was above reproach.

You wrote: “The apostle Paul gives no apology for having been a Pharisee...” You are

right. He did not apologize for his Pharisaic background or for his accomplishments as a young rabbi; rather, he regarded them as *dung* (verse 8).

You asked: “How can you scholars reject such men our Savior said sat in Moses’ seat and accept the teaching of Samaritan *gentiles* and Sadducees who in fact *rejected almost all of the Old Covenant Scriptures?*” Answer: We don’t! That is, we don’t base our practice on the teachings of Samaritans and Sadducees. Our acceptance of a Sunday Pentecost is based strictly on Scripture! The only reason we have pointed out that the Sadducees observed a Sunday Pentecost has been to show that the Sunday Pentecost was not unknown in the time of Christ. The very fact that the Samaritans and Sadducees observed a Sunday Pentecost is significant in that it raises the question of whether their tradition reflects a practice more ancient than that of the Pharisees. As pointed out earlier, important Jewish historical sources give us reason to believe that the Sadducees based their practice on the written Word alone, while the Pharisees believed in an “evolving law” theory and claimed that their unwritten traditions were equal to the written Word of God.

Your point about the Sadducees rejecting “almost all of the Old Covenant Scriptures” is probably not true. The charge that the Sadducees rejected all but the Pentateuch originally came from one of the early church “fathers,” but most scholars today reject it. It appears that the “father” who made the charge was confusing the Sadducees with the Samaritans. The Samaritans probably received the Pentateuch from renegade priests in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Their Sunday Pentecost tradition probably dates back to that time, which invites the possibility that the Jews of that period observed a Sunday Pentecost. The renegade priests simply taught the Samaritans what they knew. Don’t misunderstand; I’m not defending the Sadducees or the Samaritans, or saying that we should “follow” them. I’m merely pointing out that the historical picture is not as clear as you have been led to believe, and that a plausible case (using only available historical data) can be made for the view that the observance of Pentecost on a Sunday predates the Sivan 6 tradition. But our practice is based on Scripture, not possible historical scenarios.

When Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “Ye [Samaritans] worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22), did the “we” refer primarily to the Pharisees, or to the Jews (descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in general? Was He excluding the Sadducees? Did His comment have anything to do with who had the correct date for Pentecost?

Remember, Jesus called the Pharisees everything from “hypocrites” and “serpents” to “blind leaders of the blind” and “children of them which killed the prophets” (see Matthew 23). Somehow, these remarks seem more condemning than “Ye worship ye know not what.” I agree that we should not look to those who don’t know what they worship for information on how to understand God’s instructions, but the logic behind the idea that we *should* look to “blind leaders” for such information escapes me. +

In your second point, you wrote: “The very *first and only time* where Pentecost is clearly reckoned in the Bible thru *actual observance* is in Joshua 5:10-12. In these verses the wave sheaf or omer is *clearly and without question* offered on the day after the annual

Sabbath of Passover, on the 16th of Abib.”

A sheaf could have been waved, but the text does not tell us that it was. The people ate of the “old corn [grain]” of the land. (The Hebrew term translated “old corn” refers to food from a readily available supply. Some scholars believe it refers to grain kept over, or stored grain. The produce the Israelites ate probably came from the storehouses of the inhabitants who fled to Jericho.) The wave sheaf is to be cut from the “firstfruits” of the harvest (Leviticus 23:10). If the “old grain” came from the storage bins, then there would have been no freshly-cut firstfruits to wave. I doubt that any of the “old grain” qualified as “firstfruits” of the Israelites’ harvest.

Even if a sheaf was waved, why do you think that it was unlikely that the holy day fell on a weekly Sabbath? This is curious, especially since you acknowledge that this occurs 20 percent of the time. Twenty percent is not as low a probability as you seem to think.

Further, why do you assume that the “morrow after the Passover” (Joshua 5:11) was the sixteenth? They “kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month *at even*” (Joshua 5:10), and ate the old grain “on the morrow after the Passover” (verse 11). Is not the “morrow after the Passover” the day following the evening they kept it (*cf.* Numbers 33:3)? You say that “Passover” means one thing in verse 10, but something else in verse 11. This is a forced interpretation, and requires an unnatural reading of the text. I know of no passage in the Hebrew Scriptures wherein the term *Passover* refers specifically to the first high day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Your interpretation of Leviticus 23:10 is questionable. Does “When ye be come into the land...” refer to the immediate entrance of the Israelites into the land? Or does it: refer to their *settlement* in the land? Since the instruction was given as “a statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings” (verse 14), it is most likely that “When ye be come into the land ...” should be understood to mean “When you are settled in the land...” —that is, when you are in your dwellings, when you have worked the ground, planted your own crops, “and shall reap the harvest thereof, then shall ye bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest.”

If, in fact, Leviticus 23:10 refers to the immediate entrance of Israel into the promised land, then verses 15 and 16 indicate that the first wave sheaf ceremony *did* take place on a Sunday. (See discussion below on the meaning of the word translated “Sabbath.”)

Concerning your third point: How do we know that Pentecost was observed the year the Israelites came into the land? A long period passed before all the tribes received their inheritance, and before the Tabernacle was set up at Shiloh (*cf.* Joshua 5:6; 14:10; chapters 15-18). During that period, there was much war and unrest. It is doubtful that all the holy days were kept, or that God required it under those circumstances.

Your fourth point deals with my comments about the phrase “fully come.” I think I made it clear that I was offering a *possibility*, not stating an absolute fact. I cited J.B. Lightfoot’s comments about this phrase, which he regarded a curious construction. I offered Lightfoot’s explanation as speculation on how a Sunday Pentecost in the church *could* have come about. I was merely considering the following as a possibility: Some Jews observed Pentecost on

Sivan 6, which fell on Friday that year. They stayed over for the Sabbath, and may have continued their observance of the festival season on the following day (a Sunday), when other Jews observed Pentecost. Luke, writing long after the establishment of the church, knew that the festival celebration took in all three days (and perhaps more, since many Jews had probably arrived early), and used the phrase “fully come” to designate that day as the Day of Pentecost, or culmination of the festival. Again, it was only speculation, but in view of all the relevant facts, it was plausible speculation.

I hope you can see from all the above that your interpretations of the various texts require a great many assumptions, and that those assumptions must be read into the cited texts in order to arrive at your conclusion. You also depend heavily upon an interpretation of available historical data. As I have stated, we must not allow our (admittedly uncertain) interpretations of historical data to interpret the Bible. The Bible comes first! It is our authority for what we believe and for what we do.

With this in mind, let’s put Josephus back on the shelf, and see what the Bible says. Unless you have completely ruled out the possibility that the Sivan 6 argument could be flawed, I think you will agree that the evidence, when weighed on unbiased scales, tips in favor of a Sunday Pentecost.

Let’s look more closely at God’s instructions regarding Pentecost:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it....And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat [meal] offering unto the Lord....And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you...” (Leviticus 23:10,11,15,16).

The day of the “holy convocation,” of course, is the Day of Pentecost. The fifty-day count begins on “the morrow after the Sabbath,” the day of the wave sheaf, and ends on “the morrow after the seventh Sabbath.” Notice that *neither the wave sheaf nor the counting of fifty days are connected with the Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Rather, they are connected with *the harvest*. God says clearly: When ye shall...reap the harvest thereof, *then* ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits....” He says: “Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn [grain]” (Deuteronomy 16:9).

Notice that God does not say: “Begin to number the seven weeks from the morrow after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.” The Feast of Unleavened Bread is not mentioned. If we take the Bible for what it says, and refrain from reading Jewish traditions into it, then we have to admit that we are nowhere told that calculation of the Day of Pentecost necessarily depends upon the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We *are* told when the counting was to begin, however. It was to begin on the day of the wave sheaf, which was

always to be on “the morrow after the Sabbath,” and the numbering of the seven weeks was to begin “from such time as you *begin to put the sickle to the grain.*” (See discussion below for our reasons for connecting the counting with the Feast of Unleavened Bread.)

Once we realize that the counting of Pentecost is not directly connected with the Passover/Unleavened Bread festival, then the “Sabbath” mentioned in Leviticus 23:15,16 must be the *weekly* Sabbath.

The popular idea that Pentecost “concludes the Passover festival” is a Jewish tradition, but is nowhere stated in Scripture. The popular notion that the Law was given on the Day of Pentecost is a tradition that cannot be proved conclusively from Scripture. It may be true, but Scripture does not say so, and the Day of Pentecost is never described as a memorial of the giving of the Law. This is not to say that Jewish traditions are always wrong, but it *is* to say that we must be cautious about reading such traditions into Scripture. We should not assume that a particular tradition, even if it seems to make sense, dates to the time of Moses.

There is additional evidence that the “morrow after the Sabbath”—the day of the wave sheaf—was a Sunday.

God says: “And he [the priest] shall wave the sheaf before the Lord...on the morrow after *the Sabbath...*” (Leviticus 23:11). He further states: “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the *Sabbath*, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven *sabbaths* shall be complete” (verse 15).

Now, which “Sabbath” is this? Up to this point, *three* Sabbaths have been mentioned. Notice:

*Sabbath #1:* “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the *Sabbath* of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the *Sabbath* of the Lord in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:3).

*Sabbath #2:* “In the *first day* [of the Feast of Unleavened Bread] ye shall have an *holy convocation*: ye shall do no servile work therein” (verse 7).

*Sabbath #3:* “In the *seventh day* [of the Feast of Unleavened Bread] is an *holy convocation*: ye shall do no servile work therein” (verse 8).

Next comes the instruction concerning the wave sheaf, and then follows the instruction on counting Pentecost. The priest is to wave the sheaf “on the morrow after the *Sabbath*,” and the people are to count “from the morrow after the *Sabbath*.” Which of the three Sabbaths does this refer to? The last Sabbath mentioned is the seventh day of the feast, so one might assume that it was this Sabbath that God had in mind. But consider this: Since only one of the three is called “Sabbath” (in the preceding verses), and since the wave sheaf is connected with the reaping of the harvest, not with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, may we not logically conclude that the count is to begin on the morrow after the *weekly* Sabbath? (Your point about the use of the definite article—“*the* Sabbath”—does not add support to your view. If anything, it supports ours, for there are many scriptural references to the weekly Sabbath where the definite article is used. How many times can you find a reference to an annual Sabbath where the definite article is used?)

Moreover, if “unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath” means “unto the morrow

after the seventh *week* [i.e., any group of seven consecutive days, irrespective of when the Sabbath falls],” then why do we find, in the Hebrew text, the word *shabbat* (which always refers to the seventh day of the week, a day of rest, the sabbatical year, or a perfect week ending with the Sabbath) rather than the word *shabuwa* (which is the Hebrew word meaning “week(s),” or “seven(s),” and can refer to any group of seven consecutive days, or years—see Leviticus 12:5; Daniel 9:24,25). If you will do your own word study, you will see how these two words are used. If the word *shabbat* refers to a particular day in verse 15 (and you admit that it does), is it not curious that, according to your interpretation, the identical same word means “week (in the sense of any group of seven consecutive days, irrespective of the Sabbath) in the same verse and in verse 16? This is especially curious since there is another word that specifically means “week(s),” or “seven(s).”

God’s instructions on sabbatical years and the Year of Jubilee also add weight on the side of a Sunday Pentecost. The Israelites were to work their land six years and rest the seventh year. The seven-year cycle was to repeat for forty-nine years, totaling “seven Sabbaths of years.” The fiftieth year—the year immediately following the seventh sabbatical year—was the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:1-17). The sabbatical cycle follows the pattern of the weekly cycle, with its six days for labor and one day for rest. It makes sense, then, that the seven “weeks” of years leading to the Year of Jubilee would follow the same pattern as the seven weeks of harvest leading to the Day of Pentecost. In each case, the seventh Sabbath is followed by a special Sabbath—thus, two Sabbaths back to back.

If the Bible alone is our guide, and if we disregard the Pharisees’ and rabbis’ traditions, then the conclusion is inescapable: We are to count from the morrow after the *weekly* Sabbath. Seven Sabbaths are to be complete. Yes, this means that seven “weeks” are to be complete, but it means *perfect* weeks—weeks ending with *the Sabbath*. (You can’t have the Sabbath without the six preceding days, so the term *shabbat* implies “week,” but not *any* group of seven consecutive days.) Even Jewish scholars admit that this is so! They even offer possible reasons for the Pharisees adopting a fixed calendar date for Pentecost. But they admit that if we take the Bible *alone* as our guide, and if we interpret it *literally*, taking it for what it says, Pentecost always occurs on a Sunday! They even say that the probable reason for the Sadducees’ observance of a Sunday Pentecost was that they rejected the “oral tradition” of the Pharisees, holding that the Scripture alone is the inspired revelation of God. (One is reminded of the “Christian” debate over “Tradition” [Roman Catholic] versus “Sola Scriptura” [Protestant].)

According to the sources I have studied, there were at least *four ways of counting Pentecost* during the time of Christ. How did this come about? What led to the establishment of a Sivan 6 Pentecost? Why so much disagreement?

Understanding that the original instructions connected the wave sheaf and the beginning of the count with the harvest and not with the Passover feast should give us some insights as to how so many different ways of counting Pentecost (including the way the Pharisees counted) came about. Think about it: What would the people do in a sabbatical year, when there was no harvest? God doesn’t say, so somebody would have to render a

judgment; somebody would have to decide *whether* Pentecost would be observed, and if so, when the counting would begin. What would the people do the first year they experienced crop failure? Again, somebody must render a judgment. What if the agrarian society changed to a different type of society? God's original instructions don't say what to do, so somebody would have to render a judgment. From all this, and from carefully considering all the possibilities, can you see how so many different ways of counting Pentecost came into existence?

We find ourselves in a situation different from that of ancient Israel. For the most part, we are not an agrarian society. We don't have barley harvests, or a Levitical priesthood, or a wave sheaf. What do we do? *We render a judgment!* And we render our judgment based on *what we know*. What do we know? (1) We know that, according to a literal reading of Leviticus 23:15,16, the count begins on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. (2) We know that the barley crops in ancient times were generally ready for harvesting by the time of the Passover festival. (3) We know that Jesus Christ, as the Firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest, was presented alive before the Father (and before His disciples) on the first Sunday ("morrow after the Sabbath") of the Passover festival. Therefore, we render a judgment: The counting will begin on the first Sunday of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Your approach is different. You accept the Pharisees' interpretation of Leviticus 23:15,16—an interpretation linked with the "oral tradition"—so your judgment is different from ours. For you, the counting begins with the day after the first high day of the Passover festival.

The real question you are faced with is this: What is your authority for doing what you do? I maintain that if it were not for the Pharisees, you would understand God's instructions on counting Pentecost precisely the same way I do, and that you would see those instructions as clear and easy to understand. Therefore, it appears that your authority (in the matter of when to observe Pentecost) is not the Bible, but tradition—or the Bible as *interpreted by tradition*.

Make no mistake, the Mishnah (the written form of the "oral law") is an important historical source. It reveals traditions dating back to the time of the Pharisees, and is therefore a valuable aid to understanding Jewish religious thought during that period. However, it is a mistake to assume that the apostles, who had been given "binding and loosing" authority, looked to the Pharisees to settle matters regarding religious practice.

One of the leading Sivan 6 advocates (whose material you have undoubtedly read) holds that the early church accepted the Pharisaic claim that God gave the "oral law" to Moses. His premise is founded upon his narrow interpretation of Jesus' comment about the Pharisees and "Moses' seat," and upon the predominance of the Pharisees in regulating Jewish religious life. He relies heavily upon his one-sided interpretation of historical data, and tends to overlook information that would prove problematic to his position—information such as the following:

There was a Jewish sect *other than the Pharisees* that survived the destruction of Jerusalem. That sect was rejected and condemned by the Rabbinic Jews, who were the progeny of the Pharisees. The sect is known in history as *the Nazarenes*. Who were they?

“[The Nazarenes] were direct descendants of the first Jewish believers in Jesus. They survived the destruction of Jerusalem in part because they fled successfully to Pella of the Decapolis, and in part because they had roots in the Galilee. These Jewish Christians were called Nazarenes after Jesus, and probably received the title on the basis of early Christian interpretation of certain Old Testament passages (e.g. Isaiah 11:1) as referring to the Messiah and specifically to Jesus himself. The Nazarenes were distinct from the Ebionites and prior to them” (Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1988, p. 108).

Scholars say that the leaders of the Nazarenes, from the first century and beyond, were probably the blood relatives of Jesus Christ.

How did they view the so-called “oral law”?

Pritz says: “The Nazarenes refused to accept the authority established by the Pharisaic camp after the destruction of Jerusalem, and in so refusing they adjudicated their own isolation from the converging flow of what we call Judaism. *Just as they rejected the Church’s setting aside of the Law of Moses, so also they refused the rabbis’ expansive interpretations of it.* In other words, they rejected *halakah* as it was developing in rabbinic Judaism. It is not far wrong to say that the demise of the Nazarenes resulted from their own restrictive approach to the Law, Such a spurning of rabbinic authority could not, of course, be tolerated by that authority” (*ibid.*, p. 110, emphasis mine).

Did the Nazarenes observe a Sunday Pentecost? We are not told. But they definitely did *not* interpret the Scriptures on the basis of the so-called “oral law”; nor did they believe in the divine origin of that law, or regard it as part of the “oracles” God entrusted to the Jews. The Pharisaic concept of an “evolving law” was *anathema* to them! They obviously did not interpret Jesus’ comment about the Pharisees and “Moses’ seat” the same way you do.

The Pharisees no longer sit in Moses’ seat—however we interpret that. They are no longer expounding the Law of Moses. Besides, did they *ever* expound the Law of Moses for the Spirit-filled apostles? The Bible says that, *for the church*, Christ gave His apostles *binding and loosing authority*. Do you think they went running to the Pharisees for an interpretation of the Law based on the “oral tradition”? I don’t think so (see Acts 15).

Today, we have the Bible, and we have access to many tools for understanding the Bible. It is far easier for us to research a subject or find out how a particular word is used throughout Scripture than it was for the ancients; and we are not confined to the interpretive principles set forth in some so-called “oral law.” There is absolutely no reason for us to think that the Pharisees had a greater understanding of the Law of Moses than we do. In fact, there is evidence that they missed the mark on a number of counts, as do the modern Jews. And finally, we do know that we (the New Testament church) have the Spirit of Truth. The Pharisees did not. In view of all this, surely you will agree that it is patently absurd to think that the unconverted Pharisees—with their unscriptural traditions and evolving law theory—provide some kind of virtually infallible teaching authority for the Spirit-filled Church of God.

I hope the material herein will help you to see that Sivan 6 advocates rely heavily on quite a large number of unfounded assumptions, a one-sided view of historical data, and misrepresentations of scriptural teaching. I hope you will reconsider your position, and will come to see that the evidence favors a Sunday Pentecost. If not, I trust you will at least see the error of those who have repeatedly accused us of not honestly investigating this subject.

### **About the Church of God International**

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- 4. The Internet.*

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*All our materials and services are offered to the public free of charge. Many naturally ask us how we can afford to send out thousands of booklets and study tapes each month. The answer is simple.*

*On a regular basis, prayerful friends and members of the Church of God International voluntarily support us with tithes and offerings to further the advancement of the gospel to the world. No financial obligation is ever demanded, but if you are moved to support this work of God, donations are gratefully accepted at the addresses listed. (Contributions in the United States and Canada are tax deductible.) Giving to and through us is an effective way for people like you to help spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

### For Further Information

*If you would like to visit a CGI congregation, or if you would simply like to speak with a CGI minister or representative with any questions you may have, feel free to write or call us. We will be delighted to serve you in any way possible.*

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***Thank you for the opportunity to serve you!***