

# Counting the Omer and Lag Ba Omer

By Rabbi Haim Levi, HaKohen

It is a biblical celebration and Jewish festival that starts immediately after First Fruits or *Bikurim*. It was the day when Yeshua resurrected, however, Lag Ba Omer is celebrated on the 33rd day of this counting of the Omer (Hebrew Sifarat ha Omer). It is a festival or celebration of grace, mercy, and love as barley represents a cereal that was mostly used by the poor. The wheat harvest is past and the barley harvest starts.

During the days of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and during the Temple times, a sheaf, or omer, of the new barley harvest was offered to the Lord, on Nisan 16 (Leviticus 23:11). Its celebration is on the 18th day of the month of Iyyar.

This offering allowed the new cereal to be eaten. After the offering, the All Mighty Lord, blessed be His name, commanded His people to “determine or count seven weeks (or seven sevens plus one day) to the day of Shavuot (meaning weeks), which falls on the 50th day. It is known in the Greek language as Pentecost, after the Greek word Penta, which means five or fifty.

Shavuot is one of the three yearly pilgrim biblical celebrations, of Pesach (Passover) and Succot (Tabernacles), a time when every man was commanded to appear in the Temple before the Lord. These three festivals are known in Hebrew as “shalosh regalim,” the three celebrations.

The practice of counting the Omer, which continues in our day, was understood as representing the number of days (49 days) that it took the Israelites to ascend from the depths of slavery and suffering from Egypt, after crossing the Red Sea, and the arrival at a place of a spiritual standing, where Moses received the Torah on Mount Sinai. This event is Shavuot, or the season of Pentecost of the year 2448 (or –1313 BC) on the 1st day of the month of Iyyar.

During the Middle Ages, this period became one of semi-mourning because a plague erupted among the students of Rabbi Akiva in Tiberias. And just as mysteriously as it appeared, the plague ended on the 33rd day, on the 18th of Iyyar, at which time the name Lag Ba Omer was assigned to it from that day forward.

Lag Ba Omer took even a more significant meaning because many centuries later in Eastern Europe during this same period of time, the Christian crusaders began to massacre and torture Jews; and once again, stopping as by an unseen hand on this 33rd day or Lag Ba Omer.

It is also reputed to be the anniversary of the death of Rabbi Simeon Bar Yochai who died in Meron, northern Israel. Bar Yochai is the author of the Zochar, a mystic study, NOT recommended by IFMJ (although is it here where the teaching of the triune God is found). Orthodox and mystic rabbis make a pilgrimage to Meron in the Galilee every year, to study dance and make bonfires. Parents take their young boys to get their first haircut in Meron at the tomb of Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai. On a personal note, my father did not allow anyone to cut my hair until he thought it was the right time.

The prophet Daniel in Daniel chapter 9, verses 25- 27, speaks of a similar counting, foretelling of the return of our people to rebuild Jerusalem. This is known today as the 70 weeks of Daniel. Daniel foretold the eventual destruction of the Holy City again by Titus the Roman general and it happened exactly as he prophesied it.

Yeshua placed a great deal of importance upon this period. He was born during the first return of the Jews from the dispersion. By this time the rabbis had already commanded the celebration of Pesach for two days, to make sure that those in the Diaspora would not miss it. He celebrated his last Passover with his disciples on the afternoon just before the eve of the 14th day of Nisan, or equivalent to Wednesday eve today, as commanded by the Scriptures. As always this is a Sabbath, however, it is not the weekly great Sabbath, which starts at sundown on Friday evening and ends on sundown on Saturday. This is the reason why the Catholic Church became totally confused with this celebration.

1. Yeshua was sacrificed during the first Pesach preparation (or the 14 of Nisan), during the wheat harvest.
2. By the second Pesach (or the 15th of Nisan), he was already dead.

3. He arose during the 16th of Nisan, Yom Bikurim and First Fruits, the beginning of the Counting of the Omer, the beginning of the barley harvest.
4. He began his resurrection ministry in the Galilee, during the Counting of the Omer.
5. He taught and preached through Judah and the Galilee for a period of 33 days. On this day, the 33rd of the month of Nisan or Lag Ba Omer, 10 days before Pentecost, He left for Jerusalem. Upon arriving, He took His talmidim to the Mount of Olives and commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait ten more days until Shavuot (or Pentecost) fully arrived, reminding them also to wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4). Then He ascended up and all witnessed it and marveled.

Ten days later as they were in the Temple celebrating Pentecost, those disciples who were obediently celebrating the festival, all received a double portion of the Ruach HaKodesh. They began to speak the message of salvation in other languages, to all the Jews who were from many parts of the world and who could not understand Hebrew. Each one had a chance to hear the message of salvation in their native tongue.

The festival of the Counting of the Omer is one of the most important prophetic festivals the Church has lost. May those who receive this message be blessed by it, even though it was written as simply as possible. May we all continue to make teshuvah, return to the true faith of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the faith of those who faithfully followed His Torah for thousands of years, such as David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and on and on!