

The Festival of Shavuot

Introduction

“And from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, you shall count for yourselves: seven completed Sabbaths. Until the morrow after the seventh Sabbath you count fifty days, then you shall bring a new grain offering to YHWH. Bring from your dwellings for a wave offering two loaves of bread of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour they are, baked with leaven, first-fruits to YHWH.” (Lev.23:15-17).

When it comes to this Festival, Scripture is vague; we are left in doubt about its timing and what it represents. We are told to count a definite period starting from the day after a Sabbath, but Scripture is unclear which Sabbath. Even the two main facets of Judaism: Orthodox and Karaite, cannot agree on when to start the Omer count. Furthermore, we are told to wave two loaves of bread but not told why or what they symbolise.

We associate Shavuot with the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, the waving of the first fruits of the wheat harvest and the out-pouring of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) recorded in Acts 2 but are we celebrating correctly? Not if we are to take any notice of the past, the ancients celebrated this Festival well before the Sinai event and certainly before what is described in Acts 2. Thus, the Festival of Shavuot was celebrated before some of the events we believe it to represent. Now doesn't that realisation create a paradigm shift in our understanding. Another issue for us is how did the ancients calculate the Count of the Omer and date Shavuot.

When Scripture fails to provide the answers, we should not, indeed according to Mashiach (Matt.15:9) we must not, make up our own rules, thus with respect to:

1. What Shavuot Memorialises
2. The Correct Date for Shavuot

we must search other avenues of information: we are forced to look beyond the Scriptures and consider literature that was never canonised.

The extra-canonical information we will be considering is from, the Dead Sea scrolls and the book of Jubilees. Oftentimes Jubilees along with Enoch is viewed with a jaundiced eye merely because they were never canonised. Yet the books of Jubilees and Enoch were, in both cases, recited to the recipient by a Malak; a heavenly messenger of YHWH, this itself is a compelling argument for these two books to be considered in the same vein as the Scriptures.¹ It is astonishing that lower man could award himself the authority to decide information from a divine source was unworthy of the canon. Man's decision to exclude this literature was not so much because it lacked credibility but more likely because it obstructed a particular agenda/philosophy.

From the two sources: the Dead Sea Scrolls and the book of Jubilees we are, insofar as this festival is concerned, able to resolve the above issues and ascertain what this celebration is about and its true date.

¹ Refer to the separate article 'Exclusivity Or Not of the Canon of Scripture' found at www.undertorah.com under Miscellaneous articles.

What the Festival of Shavuot Memorialises – Pre-Mashiach

Other than to infer thanksgiving for a successful harvest, the Scriptures provide no explanation for this celebration. Today we attach several events to this festival; 1) First Fruits of the harvest, 2) the giving of the Torah at Sinai and 3) the giving of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) as described in Acts 2. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, this Festival was celebrated centuries before these events. So, what exactly were the ancients celebrating and should we be celebrating likewise?

The book of Jubilees shows us that YHWH chose Shavuot to be a time of covenant renewal.

*And He gave to Noah and his sons a sign that there should not again be a flood on the earth. And He set His bow in the cloud for a sign of the eternal covenant that there should not again be a flood on the earth to destroy it all the days of the earth. **For this reason, it is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets, that they should celebrate the Feast of Shavuot (Weeks)* in this month once a year, to renew the covenant every year.*** (Jub.6:15-17)

* The Book of Jubilees was written in Hebrew and weeks is the English translation of the Hebrew Shavuot.

And this whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noah – twenty-six jubilees and five weeks of years and Noah and his sons observed it for seven jubilees and one week of years, till the day of Noah's death, and from the day of Noah's death his sons did away with it until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. But Abraham observed it, and Yitzchak and Ya'akov observed it until your days, and in your days the children of Israel forgot it until you celebrated it anew on this mountain. (Jub.6:18-19).

Verse 18 says that this festival was celebrated in the heavens from the day of creation. Verse 19 tells us that the patriarchs celebrated this festival. Thus, the true date of Shavuot was known from the beginning. Continuing with Jubilees let us examine some verses from chapter 14. We are only interested in verses 1, 9 & 10,

¹ *After these things, in the fourth year of this week, on the New Moon of the **third month**, the word of YHWH came to Abram in a dream saying "Fear not Abram: I am your defender and your reward will be exceedingly great..."⁹ And He said unto him, "Take Me a heifer of three years, and a goat of three years, and a sheep of three years, and a turtle dove, and a pigeon."* ¹⁰ *And he took all these in the **middle of the month.***

Let us do the same with Jubilees chapter 15 verses 1-6, 9 & 11,

¹ *And in the fifth year of the fourth week of this jubilee **in the third month, in the middle of the month,** Abram celebrated the feast of the first fruits. ² And he offered new offerings on the alter, the first fruits of the produce unto YHWH, an heifer and a goat and a sheep on the alter as a burnt sacrifice unto YHWH; their fruit offerings and their drink offerings he offered upon the alter with frankincense. ³ And YHWH appeared to Abram and said to him, ⁴ "I am YHWH almighty; approve yourself before Me and be you perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and you and I will multiply you exceedingly." ⁵ And Abram fell on his face and YHWH talked with him, and said, ⁶ "Behold My ordinance is with you, and you shall*

*be the father of many nations. ⁹ “And I shall establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations, for an eternal covenant so that I may be an Elohim unto you and your seed after you”. ¹¹ And YHWH said unto Abraham, “**And as for you do you guard My covenant, you and your seed after you and you circumcise every male after you.***

The above tells us that Shavuot, was observed by the patriarchs on the 15th of the third month, that it was subsequently forgotten by Israel and re-instituted with Moshe (Moses) at Sinai. What is more the patriarchs could not have been wrong with the timing because we are told that this festival was written down on heavenly tablets and they would not have been allowed to celebrate it incorrectly.

Jubilees tells us that the purpose of Shavuot is for covenant renewal. So, if this festival was celebrated in the heavens from the time of creation which covenants were they celebrating? Possibly Jeremiah provides the answer,

Here is what YHWH says: 'If I have not established my covenant with day and night and fixed the laws for sky and earth, (Jer.33:25)

This covenant highlights YHWH's commitment to the natural order of the cosmos, set at the time of creation. We have an associated verse in Genesis,

So long as the earth exists, sowing time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease. (Gen.8:22)

The question is, which covenants did the ancients celebrate on Shavuot? Including the above we would have,

1. YHWH's covenant to maintain the cosmos,
2. YHWH's covenant promise never again to flood the earth,
3. YHWH's Covenant promise to Abram,
4. The covenant of circumcision.

We are told that Moshe re-instituted this moed at Sinai and without doubt he would have added what occurred at Sinai. It was at Sinai that the nation Israel formally became part of the Abrahamic covenant. Their participation was sealed in blood (Exod.24:4-8). Whilst the Torah formed the conditions of this covenant, the Torah is not the covenant itself and is not the subject of memorial. At Sinai a marriage covenant was inaugurated. Hence post Sinai what we have for Shavuot is,

1. YHWH's covenant to maintain the cosmos,
2. YHWH's covenant promise never again to flood the earth,
3. YHWH's Covenant promise to Abram,
4. The covenant of circumcision.
5. YHWH's covenant of marriage to the nation Israel at Mt. Sinai, (Exod.19).

Some add the covenant YHWH made with king David, but the covenant YHWH made with King David was specific to David himself. But what about the element of 'first fruits?' Let us look at another verse from Jubilees,

*For it is the 'Feast of Weeks' (**Feast of Shavuot**) and the 'Feast of First Fruits:' this feast is twofold and of a double nature: according to what is written and engraved concerning it, celebrate it. (Jub.6:21).*

Thus, the Festival of Shavuot has two elements to it. So, what we have is,

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|---|--|---|------------------------|
| 1 | YHWH's covenant to maintain the cosmos | } | Feast of Weeks/Shavuot |
| 2 | YHWH's covenant promise never again to flood the earth | | |
| 3 | YHWH's covenant with Abram | | |
| 4 | The covenant of circumcision | | |
| 5 | YHWH's covenant of marriage to the nation:Israel | | |
| 6 | Waving of first Fruits | | Feast of First Fruits |

The above abstract from Jubilees chapter 15 confirms that Avraham celebrated the first fruits of the harvest, so the full extent of this celebration was known to the ancients. Note, at this point there is no command to wave two loaves of leavened bread. This symbolism was not necessary until after Sinai. We can assume from chapter 15 above that before Sinai the custom was to wave the first cut sheafs of the harvest. After Sinai with the giving of the Torah, YHWH changed the element of first fruits and introduced the waving of the two loaves of leavened bread. What the loaves symbolise is discussed later.

Clearly it was covenant that the ancients were commanded to attach to this Festival. Even the element of 'First Fruits' has covenantal implications as we will see later.

What the Festival of Shavuot Memorialises – Post-Mashiach

But what is the situation post Mashiach? If Shavuot is for the renewing of covenant, surely, we should not ignore the new covenant ordained by Mashiach at Pesach. Remembering that Israel broke the marriage covenant made at Sinai via the 'golden calf' incident and that YHWH promised a new replacement covenant (Jer.31:31-33) which was inaugurated by Mashiach during His Pesach with His disciples what Shavuot celebrates post Mashiach is

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|---|--|---|------------------------|
| 1 | YHWH's covenant to maintain the cosmos | } | Feast of Weeks/Shavuot |
| 2 | YHWH's covenant promise never again to flood the earth | | |
| 3 | YHWH's covenant with Abram | | |
| 4 | The covenant of circumcision | | |
| 5 | The new covenant inaugurated by Mashiach at His Pesach | | |
| 6 | Waving of first Fruits | | Feast of First Fruits |

Shavuot is a time of refreshing YHWH's covenants. This suggests that the canon of Scripture may be limited for observing Shavuot correctly and highlights the importance of studying extra canonical literature.

Feast of Weeks- Feast of Shavuot

As said earlier weeks is really a translation of the Hebrew word '*Shavuot*' which also has the meaning of seven hence, insofar as this festival is concerned the word depicts the timing of this festival i.e., it being seven weeks from the waving of the first fruits of the barley harvest.

Feast of First Fruits

We know that this part of the ceremony is to give thanks to YHWH for a blessed harvest symbolised by the waving of the first fruits which, for this harvest, is to be in the form of two loaves of unleavened bread. But why this specific symbolisation, why not just wave the first sheaf of the harvest as with the barley first fruits? It is because of what the loaves represent and the intrinsic connection this festival has with covenant. However, because most have failed to recognise Shavuot's covenant connection there is confusion about what the two loaves symbolise. Some say the two houses of Israel: others say Jew and Gentile, whilst a third opinion is that the two loaves represent righteousness and unrighteousness, even the old testament and the new testament. When we consider the two loaves are identical this latter opinion is illogical: how can two identical objects represent two opposites. The same philosophy can be applied to the claim Jew and Gentile. Whilst these may not be opposites, they are far from identical. When we consider that this festival is about the refreshing/remembrance of covenants, it is obvious that the gentiles cannot be represented in this ceremony. YHWH never made any covenants with the Gentile nations, He only ever covenanted with Israel. As the apostle says, Gentiles wanting covenant benefits must be grafted into Israel. So, Gentiles cannot be represented in this waving of First Fruits. The only alternative left is for the two loaves to be symbolic of the two houses of Israel. In other words, a complete Israel is YHWH's first fruits, a fact confirmed by Jeremiah,

Holy is Israel to YHWH the first fruits of His increase. (Jer.2:3)

But identifying what the two loaves most probably represent does not explain the reason for this symbolism. Could there be several messages in this; 1) The leavened state of the loaves is a reminder that Israel will remain in a sinful condition until they accept Mashiach and His atoning sacrifice, which will happen on His return (Zach.12:10-11), when all covenant promises concerning Abram's descendants will be fulfilled. 2) Irrespective of Israel's unrighteous condition, YHWH still provides for them in remembrance of His words to the prophet (Isa. 49:15-16). 3) That Israel will remain divided until YHWH collects His body of believers at the end of this age and 4) it is a demonstration of YHWH's accessibility, even for an unrighteous Israel (Isa.55:7).

Today a Shavuot seder should be prepared on the basis of covenant renewal.

Acts 2:1-4

But what about Acts 2,

And when the Day of the Festival of Shavuot had come, they were all with one mind in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from the heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and settled on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them to speak. (Acts 2:1-4)

Some believe the imbuing of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) upon the disciples, also at Shavuot, should be part of this celebration. But the event described in Acts had nothing to do with covenant. This event merely empowered the disciples to perform the ministry given to them, which was to go into the nations and preach the good news of the gospel. To do this they needed the ability to speak in different languages (tongues) which is what they were given.

Dating Shavuot

“Speak to the children of Israel, and you shall say to them, ‘When you come into the land which I give you, and shall reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest and he shall wave the sheaf before YHWH for your acceptance. On the morrow after the Sabbath the priest waves it.” (Lev.23:10-11)

“And from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, you shall count for yourselves: seven completed Sabbaths. ‘Until the morrow after the seventh Sabbath you count fifty days, then you shall bring a new grain offering to YHWH.” (Lev.23:15-16).

The counting of fifty days is commonly referred to as the Counting of the Omer. As the verse instructs the Omer period is to start and finish on the day after a Sabbath and is to comprise seven Sabbaths, these facts are very clear. Less clear is from which Sabbath the counting is to begin.

Where to start the Count of the Omer is an issue of contention within Judaism. The Karaites start the 50-day count from the Sunday falling within the week of unleavened bread, whilst others of Orthodox following commence the counting from the second day of unleavened bread, the first day of unleavened bread being a high holy day – an annual Sabbath. So, which is correct, could it be neither is correct?

There is a verse from Exodus that is generally overlooked, yet for those who believe the Torah was given on Shavuot the verse does have an impact on this issue,

*In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, **the same day** they came into the wilderness of Sinai. (Exod.19:1)*

The phrase 'the same day' is translated 'on that day' in some scriptures. Whatever translation is used the use of the word 'same' in this verse is ambiguous and may be interpreted as meaning any of the following.

- a) The third day of the third month,
- b) The same day of the week as that on which they left Egypt,
- c) The same date of the month they left Egypt.

Taking (a)–(c) into consideration, the rules of neither the Karaites nor the Orthodox satisfy any of these alternatives,

Month 1	Date	Solar Calendar	Days	Omer Count		Event
				Orthodox	Karaite	
Aviv	14	Tue	0			Pesach
	15	Wed	1			Day 1 of unleavened bread (Shabbat)
	16	Thu	2	1		Waving of first fruits (Orthodox start)
	17	Fri	3	2		
	18	Sat	4	3		First weekly Shabbat within Matzah
	19	Sun	5	4	1	Karaite start
	20	Mon	6	5	2	
	21	Tue	7	6	3	Last day of unleavened bread
Month 2	↓					
	30	Thu		15	12	Last day of Month 1
	1	Fri		16	13	
Month 3	↓					
	30	Sat	46	45	42	Last day of Month 2
	1	Sun	47	46	43	(a)
	2	Mon	48	47	44	
	3	Tues	49	48	45	(b)
	4	Wed	50	49	46	(c)
	5	Thur	51	50	47	Shavuot (Orthodox)
	6	Frid	52		48	
	7	Sat	53		49	
	8	Sun	54		50	Shavuot (Karaite)

Unleavened Bread

Neither method of counting satisfies any of the conditions in (a)–(c), thus both philosophies ignore Exod.19:1, and can therefore be challenged.

The fact that there is confusion within Judaism about the timing of Shavuot is proof that the Scriptures are inadequate concerning dating this festival. Hence, we need to look outside Scripture to find the answer and the book of Jubilees is again helpful,

And He gave to Noah and his sons a sign that there should not again be a flood upon the earth. He set His bow in the cloud for a sign of the eternal covenant that there should not again be a flood on the earth to destroy it all the days of the earth. For this reason, it is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets, that they should celebrate the Feast of Shavuot in this month once a year. And this whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noah – twenty-six jubilees and five weeks of years and Noah and his sons observed it for seven jubilees and one week of years, till the day of Noah’s death, and from the day of Noah’s death his sons did away with it until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. But Abraham observed it, and Yitzchak and Ya’akov observed it until your days, and in your days the children of Israel forgot it until you celebrated it anew on this mountain. (Jub.6:15-19).

And in the fifth year of the fourth week of this jubilee in the third month, in the middle of the month, Abram celebrated the first fruits of the grain harvest. (Jub.15:1).

Jubilees chapter 15 can only be referring to the wheat harvest. The book of Jubilees recognises a 364-day year comprising 12 months of 30 days with four additional days added at the head of each quarter/season. Thus, when it says the middle of the third month, it is referring to the 15th of the third month which, on the 364-day solar calendar is the 75th day of the year. The caveat to this is that we must use a calendar in which Sunday **is always the 75th day** because Leviticus states Shavuot to be celebrated on the day after the seventh Sabbath. Only the solar calendar satisfies this condition.

What is more, Shavuot is the 50th day after the waving of the first fruits of the barley harvest and further evidence supporting the solar calendar can be found here. Counting backwards from 50, means this waving is on the 26th day of the month (remember the ancients counted inclusively). Lev.23:15 instructs that the start of the 50-day count is 'on the morrow after the Sabbath.' The 26th day on the solar calendar is always a Sunday. Hence the solar calendar identifies the Sabbath from which the count starts to be the weekly Sabbath and not the second day of unleavened bread as stipulated by the Orthodox Jews. What is more it is the Sabbath **after** the completion of the week of unleavened bread and not the weekly Sabbath falling within the week of unleavened bread as stipulated by the Karaite Jews. The week of unleavened bread finishes on the 21st of the month.

Returning to Leviticus,

And from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, you shall count for yourselves: seven completed Sabbaths. Until the morrow after the seventh Sabbath you count fifty days, then you shall bring a new grain offering to YHWH. (Lev.23:15-16)

When it says 'seven completed Sabbaths' it can only mean the weekly Sabbaths, thus the 'morrow' referred to must be a Sunday. As stated above, only the solar calendar has the 26th and 75th days as Sunday. Only those using the solar calendar can celebrate Shavuot on the correct date. But this conclusion cannot be restricted to Shavuot, there can only be one calendar and those not using it will have the wrong dates for all of YHWH's festivals.

Moreover, according to the above passage, Shavuot is perpetually to be a Sunday celebration. This fact helps us settle the issue with Exodus 19,

*In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, **the same day** they came into the wilderness of Sinai. (Exod.19:1)*

On Yah's calendar Pesach is always on a Tuesday ², which means the exodus was on Wednesday. If they arrived at Sinai in the third month, then Exod.19 cannot be referring to the date because they left Egypt on the night of the 15th of the first month, and the 15th of the first month to the 15th of the third month is, on Yah's calendar, 60 days and not 50 days as prescribed by the Torah. Thus Exod.19 must refer either to the third day of the third month (the word same being synonymous with third) or, must be referring to the same day of the week i.e., Wednesday. Shavuot being a Sunday celebration decides this issue.

² Refer to the separate article 'The changing Face of Pesach' found at www.undertorah.com under Miscellaneous articles.

The Torah Was Given on Shavuot at Sinai

Although there is no express provision within the Scriptures that the Torah was given to Israel on Shavuot, from what is given we can deduce that this was the case. We can with some credence show that the word same in Exod.19:3 refers to the same day of the week and what the verse is alluding to is that Israel arrived at Sinai on a Wednesday.

Consider the following scenario. After they arrived on Wednesday, we are told Moshe went up the mountain. It would be inconceivable to think after a day's journey on foot, Moshe would immediately climb a mountain. What is conceivable is that he would have rested overnight and climbed the mountain the next day – Thursday. When, after receiving YHWH's word, verse 7 tells us he returned to the people. He then took the people's reply back to YHWH: verse 8. Remembering Moshe is now 80 years old it is further inconceivable he would climb a mountain twice in one day, so verse 8 probably relates to the Friday. We are told in verse 10, YHWH instructed for the people to spend 'today and tomorrow', i.e. Friday and Saturday preparing for His visit; and on the third day, Sunday, He will visit them to confirm His covenant with the nation Israel. It was at Sinai that the Israelite nation formally became part of the Abrahamic covenant sealing their participation in blood (Exod.24:4-8) and His Torah is the basis of this covenant as confirmed in Jer.31:31-33.

YHWH's timing is perfect, it was no coincidence that YHWH timed their arrival at Sinai to be in the third month, the month of Shavuot the appointed time for covenant renewal. This being the case the above scenario fits exactly and Exod.19:1 must refer to them arriving at Sinai on the same day of the week they left Egypt, i.e. Wednesday.

Moreover, Jubilees confirms Moshe was on the mountain at Shavuot,

But Abraham observed it, and Yitzchak and Ya'akov observed it until your days, and in your days the children of Israel forgot it until you celebrated it anew on this mountain. (Jub.6:19).

Is Mashiach's Death and Resurrection Associated with the waving of the 'First Fruits' of the Barley Harvest?

Are we to correlate the waving of the first fruits of the crop with the first fruits of the resurrection, are they synonymous? No! They are separate issues and the timing of each is very different. Firstly, Mashiach never rose on a Sunday, He rose on Shabbat.³ Secondly, as we have just said the waving of the sheaf of first fruits was on the first Sunday occurring after the week of unleavened bread whereas Mashiach's resurrection was on the first Shabbat after Pesach.

Conclusion

The Qumran community were Zadokites who YHWH says never erred (Ezek.48:11): they began the count of the Omer from the 26th day of the first month and not from any Sabbath within the week of Matzah. They were advocates of the solar calendar, believing this to be the calendar against which the heavenly host established sacred time and sacred service, a belief that is confirmed in the books of Jubilees and Enoch. They were also the temple administrators and must have had the correct timing for

³ For the correct timing of Mashiach's death and resurrection refer to the separate article 'From Saturday to Sunday' found at www.undertorah.com under Miscellaneous articles

Shavuot. Only a solar calendar facilitates the correct timing for the Festival of Shavuot, being the 15th of the third month and for this date always to be a Sunday.

The timing of YHWH's comment to Ezekiel cannot be over-looked. Ezekiel lived during the period spanning the first and second temples and the temple administrators at this time were the Zadokite priests. Thus, when YHWH says they 'never erred' He can only be referring to their performance as the temple administrators.

It was because the temple priests accepted a lunar calendar which precluded not only the correct observance of the festival of Shavuot but also the observance of the other festivals on the correct days, that the Zadokite priests separated from the temple and formed the Qumran community.⁴ This defilement was prophesied in the book of Jubilees,

For there will be those who will assuredly make observations of the moon - how it disturbs the seasons and comes in from year to year ten days too soon. For this reason the years will come upon them when they will disturb the order and make an abominable day the day of testimony, and an unclean day a feast day and they will confound all the days, the kodesh with the unclean, and the unclean day with the kodesh; for they will go wrong as to the months and Sabbaths and feasts and jubilees. (Jub.6:36-37).

Remember these words were spoken by a Malak of YHWH to Moshe (Moses) and probably first penned by Moshe himself.

As said in the Introduction, Scripture is vague insofar as this festival is concerned, thankfully the book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls plug the holes left by the Scriptures and gives us the true date and the true principles behind this festival. YHWH promised the outpouring of His Ruach in the end times. We are being blessed today as YHWH reveals more of His truth. But when His truth requires us to undo old beliefs and philosophies are we humble enough to do so, or are we going to let pride stand in the way? Nowhere in the Scriptures is pride spoken of in a positive context.

Clifford Fearnley 2020 (Revised 2025)

⁴ More is explained about the cessation of the Zadokite priests in the separate article 'Which is Yah's Calendar.'