

The Enigmatic "Second-First Sabbath"

OF LUKE, CHAPTER 6 : VERSE 1

This Misapplied and Little Understood Narrative In Luke Chapter 6 Suggests To Some That Christ BROKE THE LAW. Others See In It a Reference As To How To Determine Wavesheaf Day In Those Occasional Years When PASSOVER Falls On a SABBATH. What Important Information Does This Passage REALLY Present ?

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Serious Bible students who tend to embrace the 'antinomian' position are known to refer to the passage in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 6: verses 1 thru 5 as a case in point that Christ broke or routinely disregarded Old Testament Law. Nowhere does this draw more passionate attraction than among those within the anti-Sabbatarian community.

"I Am Lord of the Sabbath Day."

A seemingly routine incident from daily life is seen as offering us a glimpse into a rather significant theological topic. The concluding statement in this scenario suggests to many that Sabbathkeeping is here being dismissed as no longer relevant. It should be noted that this confrontation occurred in the very early months of Christ's ministry, mere days or weeks after He had first chosen His Disciples. But, is this take on it the real point of what is presented in this passage?

Yet among others, not necessarily supporting anti-nomian positions, a very different view and a much greater significance is seen as being revealed here.

The Wavesheaf Offering?

There are believers who see in this particular narrative a relevance to something even more profound than the above stated position. Clearly, we see in Luke 6, a contrast between two opposing religious factions: One, the theological establishment of the day, the other, a new theological definition. We need to recognize that these accounts were put into writing some three decades after they occurred. So what information did the author see as so important that this glimpse from the early days needed to be

related here? What was this exchange really all about? What relevance does it have to us?

Those Christians who appreciate and observe the Biblical Holydays, readily see in this particular passage a relevance that most others would not.

"Christ, Our Passover."

Most are cognizant that Christ is clearly identified as being 'our Passover' (1Cor.5:7&8) and the same passage instructs us to... *"keep the Feast...with the Unleavened Bread of sincerity and Truth"* This is, of course, referring to the practice of keeping the seven day "Feast of Unleavened Bread". What is also true is that Christ is ALSO our "Wave Sheaf Offering", who was typically offered annually in representative form by means of a sheaf of the firstfruits of the annual grain harvest being waived up on the 'morrow after the Sabbath'. Where this passage becomes pointedly significant is in what it offers with regard to the determination of which day the Wave Sheaf Offering ought to be presented.

The Holyday Factor.

Many do not realize the spring Holydays are not just an unrelated series of observances. In fact, they are interdependent in their determination. The key date is, of course, Passover. Passover annually is the fourteenth day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar, generally set to the time of the first ripening of that year's barley harvest. (I say 'set', because the readiness of the grain can determine whether or not an additional month is to be added. If the grain will likely not be ripened by Wave-Sheaf, the first month would be delayed until later, extending the previous year's calendar with the

addition of a thirteenth month. This occurs in 7 out of 19 years.) The day following the Passover begins the seven Days of Unleavened Bread, the fifteenth thru the twenty first, inclusive.

But interconnected to these fixed calendar dates are two other observances, which relate to factors other than any fixed calendar date. Within the seven Days of Unleavened Bread is a weekly Sabbath, the morrow after which is Wavesheaf Sunday. The Wave Sheaf is essential to determining the correct date for the annual Feast of Pentecost, long recognized and observed as the anniversary of the founding of the New Testament Church. In order to correctly identify Pentecost, it is necessary to determine correctly which day is Wave Sheaf, the day from which seven full weeks are counted, with the morrow after that seventh Sabbath being Pentecost. (Lev.23:15-16), (the Feast of Weeks). Wavesheaf and the Feast of Pentecost, (the fiftieth day therefrom), are weekday related, where Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are each calendar date related.

An Unrecognized Significance?

Among those who observe Pentecost annually, a number of views exist which results in differing opinions of exactly how to determine Pentecost. Actually, this is far from being a new phenomenon. In the first century, this was also the case. In the early first century, there were no less than THREE determining methods employed, each resulting in a different day. The most widely held view was that the First Day of Unleavened Bread was that Sabbath, from which the 'morrow' (Wavesheaf) was determined. This view largely prevails in Judaism to this day. It results in a Wave Sheaf and Pentecost that fall on fixed calendar dates, irrespective of the day of the week. A less prevalent opinion holds the weekly Sabbath within the week of Unleavened Bread as being the determining Sabbath, resulting in a movable date with respect to the calendar, but fixed with respect to the days of the week. A third variation was one which held the Last Day of Unleavened Bread as being the determining Sabbath, again resulting in a fixed calendar date situation, but a week later than in the first cited determination method. (It should be noted that under this final method, the Wave Sheaf would always be offered

AFTER the Days of Unleavened Bread).

An additional consideration factors into the various opinions of determining Wavesheaf and Pentecost, in the second method given above, that being the question of what to do when the Passover and the Last Day of Unleavened Bread falls on a weekly Sabbath? This question can and does create a one week difference in the dates of the observance of Pentecost.

Of course, many believers would dismiss this as being largely irrelevant to modern day Christianity. Actually, this question is PRECISELY what this passage in Luke 6 addresses itself to, and the fact it is addressed so pointedly suggests otherwise. In fact, it is NOT irrelevant at all. There is something here God wants His people to know.

Sabbath Within or Wavesheaf Within?

The question basically is, must the Sabbath from which Wave Sheaf is determined fall within the Days of Unleavened Bread, or must Wave Sheaf day itself fall within those seven days? Ordinarily, this question would be irrelevant, as usually BOTH days fall within. It is those infrequent years when the Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath that sets up a situation creating this question.

Those who hold the view that the morrow after the Sabbath, (Wavesheaf) must fall within the seven Days of Unleavened Bread often cite Luke 6:1-5 as being an example of a year in which the Passover fell on a weekly Sabbath. Many in the Church of God were introduced to this idea in 1974, and hold to it to the present day. In the 1974 "*Harmony of the Gospels*" by Fred Coulter, it also reflects this understanding, that this account illustrates a year in which Passover fell on a weekly Sabbath. (See his pages 5, 65 and 254.) Back then he even went so far as to mis-locate the event into 29 AD in order to fit this explanation of it. However, those who pose to us such an explanation have failed to notice at least TWO important details, which when seen and understood, confounds the conclusion they attempt to draw from this particular account! EVEN IF this were a year in which the Passover fell on a weekly Sabbath, those two details seriously conflict with the conclusion they use this passage to illustrate!

In fact, we have here a confrontational event with the religious leadership, that is specifically relevant to the matter of the timing of the “Wave Sheaf Offering”. When we examine carefully all of the details related in the texts of all three synoptic accounts, a most interesting picture emerges.

But what most have obviously failed to notice, is that: 1.) Christ’s disciples were served a double accusation, which Christ recognized, as evidenced by His double reply! and, 2.) The Wavesheaf at this point in time HAD NOT YET been offered!

It requires we understand the double accusation in order to correctly understand exactly what it was they regarded as being “unlawful”. We will look into this more fully as we progress. But, it’s the Wavesheaf as not having yet been offered that contradicts the conclusion of many, that this passage supports our counting Pentecost from the First Day of Unleavened Bread in just those occasional years when it occurs on a Sunday.

Before we look further into this, it would be good to present here a harmonization of the three accounts, so that we can better picture this scene. Below is offered all three synoptic accounts blended into a single narrative, using Matthew 12: 1–8 as the framework, expanded to include extra details related in Luke 6:1–5, and the Mark 2:23-28 accounts.

“At that time, Jesus and His disciples went through the grain fields, on the second-first Sabbath, And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain, and ate them, rubbing them in their hands.

But when certain of the Pharisees saw it, they said, ‘Look, why do your disciples do what is not lawful on the Sabbath Day?’ ‘They are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’

But Jesus answering them said, ‘Have you not read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those that were with him: how he went in unto the house of God in the days of Abiathar the High Priest and (they) ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?’ ‘Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the Temple profane the Sabbath, and are

blameless? But I say unto you, that in this place there is One greater than the Temple. But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’, you would not have condemned the guiltless.”

“And He also said unto them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, the son of man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”

Those who pose this confrontation as having relevance to the timing of Wavesheaf, are partly right, but not to the specific degree that perhaps could be. It is time this passage is understood for the valuable insight it offers regarding the timing of the Wave Sheaf and the counting of Pentecost.

The basic elements of this account we need to take note of are:

1. This confrontation is stated as occurring on a specific day: the ‘second-first Sabbath’,
2. The disciples and Christ went through the grain field, not along side,
3. The **disciples** were accused of a Sabbath unlawfulness, not Christ,
4. Certain Pharisees were carefully watching what they were doing,
5. A double accusation was made, of doing an unlawful act, and doing so on the Sabbath,
6. Christ’s double responses both focused pointedly on the Temple functions,
7. A ‘greater than the Temple’ was present there on-scene,
8. Sabbaths are intended to serve mankind, not the other way around.

Deuteroproton Sabbaton, the “Second-First Sabbath”.

Key to understanding the timing and significance of this account is an awareness of what is meant by the term, “the second – first Sabbath”. Various, possible meanings have been suggested.

The 2001 “Harmony of the Gospels”, by Fred Coulter, (page 50) explains: the term means, “the second Sabbath of first rank or order”. In other words, the second annual Holyday, which would be the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. This is consistent with a long standing Church of God definition posed since 1974. Along with their posing this second annual Holyday as occurring on a weekly Sabbath, it was further pointed out that the only way this could have happened would be if the Passover Day that year, the 14th of Nisan, were to have occurred on a weekly Sabbath also. But then, with the assumption made that this IS one of those years when Passover did occur on the Sabbath, it is further presumed that Wavesheaf had already been offered on the Sunday six days prior.

The problem with this is threefold. **First**, the actual meaning of the unique term: “deuteroproton sabbaton”. The **second**, a failure to note that on this ‘second-first Sabbath’, the Wavesheaf had NOT actually been offered yet! This was the more significant oversight, to say nothing about the fact that there is no Biblical statement suggesting that we are looking at a double-Sabbath situation at all. **Third**, the year in which this event happened can easily be seen as NOT being a year in which the Passover COULD have been on a weekly Sabbath.

What does the term, “deuteroproton sabbaton” actually mean? A UCG Study Paper, “Pentecost and Its Observance”, page 14, (1997) offers some possibilities: One, that it could possibly mean ‘the second Sabbath counting toward Pentecost’. This could be anywhere from Nisan 21 to 27. Another possibility this study paper offers, from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon is, ‘the first Sabbath after the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread’. This opinion requires that we translate the term: ‘the first Sabbath after the second’ (day of Unleavened Bread!), rather than the way the KJV translators render it, ‘the second Sabbath after the first’! With this also is the speculation that after the second-first Sabbath, there would be a ‘second-second’ Sabbath, etc., etc. Also, this definition would place the day in the Nisan 17 to 23 time-frame, the second day of Unleavened Bread being always the 16th of the month but the Sabbath on any day during the week following.

This Liddell and Scott definition clearly could not allow an ‘early Wavesheaf’ due to a ‘Passover-on-the-Sabbath’ situation.

Let’s consider these posed possibilities to see if any of them could work. Remember, the aim of these who pose Luke 6:1 was to show a Biblical example of when to offer Wavesheaf in those years when Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath. That’s why a relevance of this passage was even posed in their publications.

Now, if Luke 6:1 is talking about the SECOND weekly Sabbath counting toward Pentecost, that could not be earlier than the 22nd. (The 21st, only if we allow a Sabbath the day before the first day of Unleavened Bread as being the first weekly Sabbath, the day before day one of the count to Pentecost.) This definition does not allow a date less than a week after Passover.

Let’s consider the ‘second annual Holyday’ definition. “The second Sabbath of the first rank”, as it was worded. This would be the 21st, the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. The key consideration here is to view the 21st as being a double Sabbath: both an annual and a weekly on the same day. But, for this to be useful in support of the ‘early Wavesheaf’ idea, it requires that the Wavesheaf Offering HAD to have been waived already the previous Sunday, Nisan 15! So, the 21st would be the first Sabbath (day 7) within the 50 day count to Pentecost. Why would it be referred to as “the Second-First Sabbath”? This idea also raises apparent problems, and if the Wavesheaf WASN’T already offered on the 21st, it raises MAJOR problems!

(We’ll see strong evidence later that it was NOT yet offered on the day Luke 6:1 is talking about!)

I want us to consider a definition that should be obvious, and actually works. To my knowledge, nobody has posed a definition that actually **works** and makes any sense. Consider this definition:

A Sabbath Had to Happen First!

Earlier it was mentioned that there were three well known opinions among Jews of the first century as

to how to count Pentecost. The Pharisees held that the Sabbath that immediately preceded Wavesheaf was Nisan 15, the First Day of Unleavened Bread. The Pharisees held that Wavesheaf was always waived on the ‘morrow’ after the first Holyday, Nisan 16. Nisan 15 was the “Sabbath” from which they determined their ‘morrow’. A fixed calendar date! Thus, their Pentecost always fell on a fixed calendar date 50 days later: Sivan 6. The Sabbath from which the ‘morrow’ was determined and on which the Wavesheaf was offered, was considered “the First Sabbath”, the Sabbath that had to happen First! Sadduceean tradition held that Wavesheaf was offered the morrow after the weekly Sabbath. Thus, their “First (Wavesheaf determining) Sabbath” occurred SECOND! (Never before the Pharisees, though occasionally on the same day.) Theirs was the second-“first Sabbath”! Essenian and Ethiopian Jews held that Wavesheaf was the ‘morrow’ after the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, (also a fixed calendar date: Nisan 21, resulting in a fixed calendar date for their Pentecost: Sivan 12.) Theirs was in effect the third-“First Sabbath”.

The Sadduceean Determination

Luke 6:1 is referring to the Sadduceean determined “First Sabbath” which always occurred AFTER the Phariseean one. The Sadduceean ‘Wavesheaf determining Sabbath’ was that **weekly** Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread, thus, it would always occur subsequent (second) to the Phariseean one, which was always the first **annual** Sabbath: The First Day of Unleavened Bread. The Sadduceean “First Sabbath” was the RIGHT one!, making Wavesheaf and Pentecost ALWAYS fall on Sundays. This understanding also casts light on the misunderstood phrase in Acts 2:1,... “*When the Day of Pentecost was fully come*”.... There had been an earlier Pentecost observance: the Phariseean one: Friday that year, while the Sadduceean one was two days later, on Sunday! This indirectly endorses the Sadduceean tradition. Acts 2:1 is alerting us to the inescapable FACT that there had been a premature observance, according to Phariseean tradition, prior to the “Fully Come” (correct) one. Luke 6:1 is referring to the Sadduceean determined SECOND “First Sabbath”, which allowed a correct and true Wavesheaf Offering.

This observance as well as Pentecost were second to (AFTER) the Pharisee determined one.

Still Before the Wavesheaf Offering!

So, this ‘second-first Sabbath’ was the day before Wavesheaf Sunday, not after it, and there is no need for us to suppose that it had to be a double-Sabbath. This may come as good news to scholars who thought this HAD TO HAVE HAPPENED in a year in which the Passover fell on a weekly Sabbath, thus limiting it to 29 A.D. Obviously, 29 A.D. poses certain problems to those who bothered to notice that this event occurred very shortly after Christ had first called His disciples. (Luke 5:) 29 A.D. is TOO LATE to have been the year for that! Even worse for those who identify the crucifixion year as being 30 A.D. A.D. 29 would have been just one year prior to the end of Christ’s ministry, and way too late for Luke 6.

When we realize what the “second-first Sabbath” is really referring to, we can see that the TRUE Wave-sheaf Offering would have still been one day away. Thus on this second-first Sabbath, the sheaf of grain still hadn’t been selected or cut or waved. This was the day before that ‘morrow’! Also, something Christ said proves this fact, that the Wavesheaf had not yet been offered before this day. The uncut wave sheaf was still in that field.

Not a Sabbath Passover Year.

So, even only this far, we can see that this confrontational event has nothing to do with a Passover on the Sabbath year, and thus has no relevance to the Joshua 5:11 ‘Wavesheaf on the First Day of Unleavened Bread’ scenario, offered in defense of that odd and unique position. However, Luke 6 is insightful in other ways.

The Scene in Overview.

Considering the details related in this account, ‘certain Pharisees’ were watching and made accusation against the disciples, (not against Christ personally, please notice). These are referred to in the text in a specific/indefinite way. One could say, “Someone told me about you”. In wording it this way, it

would be apparent that it wasn't just anybody who told, it was a particular person, who was not here specifically identified. The same of these 'certain Pharisees'. We need to understand these certain ones (who would've been known to the hearer, not in a specific sense, but in a general sense), as being the individuals who were watching that field. But, why would they have been watching that field? And, why on the Sabbath Day?! Did they watch every field every week?

Other internal evidence poses an answer. Christ and His disciples were out in that field, not along side it. They began eating some of the grain, an act the Pharisees regarded as "Unlawful"! Normally, it would not have been unlawful to take a piece of fruit or a handful of grain on a Sabbath Day and eat it. So, why the 'unlawful' accusation? Also, Christ didn't refute their accusation based just on their traditional law, which actually permits such a thing as they had done (Deut.23:25). Why didn't He cite that? Didn't He know that Scripture? No, rather, He cited examples which focused on Temple Services and ceremonial functions! Why? The issues implicit in their accusation had to do with ceremonial violations, not just Sabbath Law. What ceremony occurs after a "first Sabbath"?

Not only did they accuse them of doing what was 'unlawful', but doing so on the Sabbath! Someone could commit theft on a Tuesday, and another time on a Sabbath. On one of these, he broke two laws at once. Theft AND violating a Sabbath. They were accused of doing an unlawful act AND doing so ON the Sabbath. Thus, the double accusation, provoking the double-response Christ offered, by citing two examples. Actually, Christ's response illustrated perfectly their "infraction"! They had entered a place that had been set aside for Temple purposes. They ate prematurely of a field not yet legal to eat of. Thus, Christ's David / Abiathar response was exactly appropriate to their situation.

Why Refer to the Temple?

It's the nature of those responses we need to take note of, since they focus on the Temple and its Services. Both the Temple shewbread example, and the Priestly functions technically violated

Biblical Law. What on earth did their in-field activities have to do with Temple function? Few have even thought to ask this key question.

A Greater Than the Temple is Here!

A most amazing statement is recorded in the Matthew 12 account. Where Christ says, "*A greater than the Temple is here*"! Now, WE understand Christ to be making reference to Himself. But who was He? Among other things, He was the True Wave Sheaf! Had the Pharisees thought He was referring to Himself, they would have seen this as cause for stoning. Pronouncing one's self Greater than the Temple?! Blasphemy!! At very least, this would've come up as an accusation at His trial later on. There were multiple witnesses known to the priesthood there that day: their field-watchers!

So, what did they think He was referring to? It had to be something that would not have offended their righteous senses. And, by the way, why were they watching that field? What could it have been?

It is here posed that this was the Temple field, from which they would soon be identifying and cutting the Wave Sheaf. In a few hours, just after sunset, the 'morrow' after this Sabbath, the priests also would be passing into that field in order to identify bind and cut the sheaf for waving at the Temple. This was done right after sunset, but while it was still light. In saying, "*A greater than the Temple is here*", Christ was saying that the Wave Sheaf is greater than the place in which it is waved. (A saying similar to and consistent with His next comment about the Sabbath being for man, not the other way around.) This comment, if understood this way, referring to the field-Wave Sheaf, would not have provoked a 'blasphemy' accusation on top of the 'unlawful' accusation already leveled, any more than the "Sabbath being for man" comment did, though both were provocative affirmations.

BOTH Wave Sheafs in That Field.

This was the first "Wave Sheaf" occurring during Christ's ministry. He was, no doubt, there making a point to His disciples, and it became memorable!

In saying, “*A greater than the Temple is here*”, He was referring to Himself, though His hearers could have understood Him to be referring to the field Wavesheaf, which they were there to guard. Thus no additional provocation or accusation came of it.

Now, this indicates that the Wavesheaf was still in that field! Also, it explains what “unlawful” act they were accusing His disciples of. It was ceremonially Unlawful to eat of the new year’s crop of grain before the Wavesheaf and related offerings had been made. (Lev.23:10-14). So, their accusations were not petty or over-exaggerated. It was legitimate, and Christ responded to them as a legitimate claim on their part. Sabbath-breaking by itself was not the point of their accusation. Eating of that grain was! Christ and His disciples were IN that Wavesheaf field! He pronounced the Wavesheaf (as the Jews took it) as being greater than the Temple, AND STILL THERE! So, the Wavesheaf had to be the day following this weekly Sabbath! Those who want to use Luke 6:1 as an example of an “early Wavesheaf” don’t have one in this place. And, no, the “second-first Sabbath” couldn’t occur the day before the First Day of Unleavened Bread, so get used to it. And, no, this wasn’t even a Sabbath-Passover year, which is essential to the idea that we see here an example of a year in which Passover fell on a weekly Sabbath. Had it been one of those, THIS day would have been Passover! Why would the Scriptures refer to a Passover as the “second-first Sabbath”?

Sabbath-day Passovers occurred in 3 BC, 2 AD, 9 AD, 22 AD, 25 AD, and 29 AD. Christ’s ministry began in the fall of 26, and He selected His disciples by the following spring of 27. This Luke 6 event happened about then.

The Sadducean Tradition.

This clearly is NOT an example of an ‘early wave-sheaf’ accounting to Passover falling on a Sabbath, with the Wave Sheaf Ceremony being observed on the morrow after it: the First Day of Unleavened Bread. It IS, though, a good clear endorsement of the Sadducean Tradition over Pharisean Tradition. The Sadducees controlled Temple Services in the early first century. The Sadducean “First

Sabbath” from which they determined Wavesheaf Day, always came later, never earlier, like some try to illustrate with their “Wavesheaf-on-the-First-Day-of-Unleavened-Bread” scenario, derived only from mis-construing the point of Joshua 5:11.

If the Sadducean “First Sabbath” was ever earlier than the Pharisean “First Sabbath”, then they’d have to find a different name for it. Look above to see how often it could happen. Six times in 35 years. When it is said that Wavesheaf could have been offered on the First Day of Unleavened Bread rather than on the ‘morrow’ after it, as is the Pharisean tradition, it’s put earlier than the ‘first-first Sabbath’ of the Pharisees, who regarded the first annual Holyday as being the determining Sabbath, the Sabbath that had to first occur. The ‘second-first Sabbath’ could not occur before the ‘first-first Sabbath’, as some try to do in certain years. It could occasionally coincide with the ‘first-first Sabbath’, as does occasionally happen, but never could it precede it. The term ‘second-first’ indicates a first-ness, but a subsequent first-ness. Both of these must be determining the same thing, (Wave Sheaf) but one doing so later than the other.

Now, this illustrates another important detail: That the focus of Wavesheaf is the Sabbath, not Sunday. It isn’t the ‘Sunday’ during or within the week of Unleavened Bread, it’s the Sabbath within! The Sabbath is the prominent day upon which something else is determined. Think also about His “Sabbath is made for man” statement, made on that same day. The subject began with THE Wavesheaf as worthy of greater regard than the Temple, and followed up with the Sabbath’s ultimate purpose. Man is to be part of God’s overall firstfruits. The Sabbath is made for that man, especially. Heb. 4: 3-11 makes this case. Christ is the first-Firstfruit. Afterward, we that have entered into His Rest will be second-firstfruits. He is the First-born among many brethren. (Rom.8:29) It is the Sabbath (His Rest) that produces this progeny. The Firstfruits unto God are of Sabbath determination.

This is the REAL subject lesson of Luke 6:1-5. What it tells us is that the Sadducean Tradition is the correct one to follow in determining when to observe the Feast of OUR Firstfruits Harvest. 