

COUNTING THE OMER

Counting Controversy

There are disagreements about when one should begin the counting of the Omer during the week of Unleavened Bread. This author agrees with the wisdom of Judaism.

Lev. 23:15 (NASB) "You shall also count for yourselves **from the day after the sabbath**, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; **there shall be seven complete sabbaths**.

"From the day after the Sabbath" is argued to be the weekly Sabbath; whereas Jews believe this is a reference to the Sabbath of the first day of Unleavened Bread. The next phrase in this verse makes this more clear:

"There shall be seven complete Sabbaths." **What is a complete (or incomplete) Sabbath?** If the text is simply referring to the weekly Shabbat, how can the rest day be incomplete? If, however, it is referring to a complete or full seven day period, being complete or incomplete makes perfect sense. Other passages, such as Dt. 16:9-10, refer to Shavuot as the feast of "weeks," not the feast of Sabbaths, which further supports this understanding. In Hebrew, a shabbat can refer to the weekly Sabbath day, a festival Sabbath, or a general week.

In other words, shabbat functions just like the Hebrew word *chodesh*, which can mean either a new moon (a particular day) or it can be a general term for an entire month, depending on context. In this sense, what is to be counted is fifty days and seven complete **weeks**, not weekly Sabbath (rest) days. The Omer count leads one to the Feast of **Weeks**.

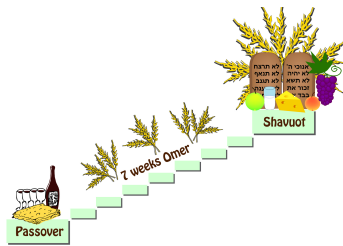


The Divine Link

Lev. 23:15-16 (CJB) "'From the day after the day of rest—that is, from the day you bring the sheaf for waving—you are to count seven full weeks, 16 until the day after the seventh week; you are to count fifty days; and then you are to present a new grain offering to Adonai.

Why does Adonai require one to count, *saphar*, seven complete weeks or fifty days up to Shavuot (Pentecost)? Why number these days like a child counting up to a special event? Each day, at this season, one has a special mitzvah to fulfill by counting. At first glance, through eyes of flesh, being careful to count each day might seem redundant. After all, it is no mystery that the purpose is to reach Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks.

The counting begs one to ask, "What is so special about the fourth appointment of Adonai?" Why did the Sovereign of the Universe command that one especially anticipate this festival? Counting or marking the days and weeks is like a practice in mindfulness, spiritually connecting the first fruits of barley with the first fruits of wheat. Because of this, Shavuot is often called



Counting the Days

Blessing: "Baruch atah adonai elohenu, melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu al sefirat ha-omer."

Blessed are You O L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us concerning the count of the Omer."

Today is the ___ day of the Omer, which is ___ weeks and ___ days of the Omer.

May it be Your will that the Beit haMikdash be rebuilt speedily in our days.

Ps. 67:1-7 For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. 2 That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. 3 Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. 4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For You will judge the peoples with uprightness And guide the nations on the earth. Selah. 5 Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. 6 The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. 7 God blesses us, That all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

Atzeret Shel Pesach, or the Conclusion of Passover. In Deuteronomy, this connection is made clear by reminding the people of their enslavement in Egypt:

*Dt. 16:9-12 (ESV) "You shall count seven weeks. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. 10 Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. 11 And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there. 12 **You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.***

Adonai doesn't want anyone to miss this divine link in His appointments. The chain of events outlined in Exodus from slavery to freedom, led the children of Israel to the Revelation at a fiery mountain. There can be no Shavuot without Pesach; and Pesach, our redemption, is not complete without Shavuot. They are spiritually and eternally chained together, so that we do not confuse or twist His divine order. It takes fifty steps or days, seven times seven weeks, to reach the Revelation of Adonai, to meet our Fiery God and hear His Thunderous Voice of Life.

Counting

The Hebrew word for count, *saphar* סָפַר, is quite fascinating. It happens to be the root of words like book/scroll (*sefer*), scribe (*sofer*), story (*sipur*), number (*mispar*), and declare/tell (*safar*).

Strong's defines this root as:



H5608 סָפַר sâphar A primitive root; properly to score with a mark as a tally or record, that is, (by implication) to inscribe, and also to enumerate; intensively to recount, that is, celebrate: - commune, (ac-) count, declare,

Why Psalm 67?

Psalm 67 is traditionally recited after the daily Omer count. It has seven verses and, in Hebrew, forty-nine words. This mirrors the weeks and days counted at this season. However, meditating upon the theme of Psalm 67 makes this tradition really come alive!

This song begins with a petition for grace and blessing, and recalls the Aaronic Benediction with the phrase "cause His face to shine upon us." This conjures imagery from the Holy Place. Adonai's face or presence is the Light of the menorah shining upon the faces or presence of the shewbread, the people of Israel. Verse 2 yearns for His Way, His Salvation (Yeshua) to be known in the earth among the nations. Verses 3 & 5 echo one another with praise and thanks to Adonai as they encase the chiasmic heart of this Psalm, verse 4.

Verse 4 proclaims God as the Righteous Judge that leads (governs/guides) His people in the land or earth. The Hebrew word translated as "guide" is *nachah* (H5148). Scrolling through the other uses of this word is quite amazing, as they mostly recall Adonai guiding His people in the Way, like a Good Shepherd should.

Verse 6 speaks about the earth yielding its produce, which is both a literal harvest like wheat, and the people of His planting, a spiritual harvest. Finally, verse 7 states that the very ends of the earth (all peoples) shall come to reverence the God of Israel! This is Good News!

number, + penknife, reckon, scribe, shew forth, speak, talk, tell (out), writer. Total KJV occurrences: 161

Counting, writing, and recounting an event either in written or verbal form are all linguistically and thematically related in the Lashon Hakodesh (Holy Tongue of Hebrew). So, by counting the days of the Omer, one is literally recounting and declaring the story that Adonai wants etched on hearts. Psalm 90, attributed to Moses, says:

Ps. 90:12 (NASB) So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

Numbering one's days and counting His appointed times, is godly wisdom. But what is real wisdom? James 3 says there are two types of wisdom. One from above (heavenly), and one from below (earthly, carnal). Apparently, humans have difficulty discerning between the two, as the desires of one's flesh and selfish ambition are the forked tongue that deludes, even the righteous. Though Adonai's calendar is foolishness to the natural, earthy man set on fulfilling his own desires and ambitions, it is heavenly wisdom for those with a heart set on serving the Creator of all things. Heavenly wisdom can be compared to the beautiful blue sky of sapphire; the physical thing that we see when we look up. Heavenly wisdom is precious, like a costly stone.

The Hebrew word for sapphire is *sapir*, ספיר. Does that word look familiar? It is a sound alike to the *saphar* root (count or number) mentioned above. What does the precious blue sapphire stone have to do with books, writing, and counting?

When Israel stood at the base of the mountain on the feast of Shavuot/Pentecost, they had already been saved, rescued, and redeemed from the house of slavery and death. Adonai then proceeded to "take" them for His own possession. This is matrimonial language. At the Mountain, He covered them under a cloudy, dark, and smoky *chuppah*, and gave them a *ketuvah* (marriage vows/contract) in the form of the Ten commandments. Thus, fulfilling His promises memorialized in the Four Cups of Passover:

Ex. 6:6-7 (NKJV) Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will

redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 **I will take you** as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

When Adonai formally proposed to His people at the mountain (*I will take you*), what did they see? The Revelation of His Temple, His Throne, His Glory. It is Holy, Awesome, and **intimate**. Covenants *cut* through the veil of flesh, much like the breaking of woman's hymen in the marriage bed. There is blood and intimacy, and revelation. Things are revealed that will remain concealed from outsiders. The representatives of Israel were able to "see" God and not die. They were even able to eat and drink a covenantal meal in His presence. They entered a holy, intimate realm, and saw what looked to be a pavement of sapphire.



Ex. 24:8-13 (NASB) So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the **blood of the covenant**, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." 9 Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 **and they saw the God of Israel**; and **under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself**. 11 Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and **they saw God, and they ate and drank**. 12 Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and **I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment** which I have written for their instruction." 13 So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God.

The second time that Moses, Aaron and his sons, and the elders "see" Elohim (God) in the verses above, the Hebrew word is *chazab*, not the common *ra'ah*. *Chazab* is more akin to seeing a vision, prophecy, or something spiritual. This word is the root of *chazzan*, the cantor or one that leads the congregation in prayer. His or her duty is to move one closer to "seeing" or "envisioning" Elohim; they take one to a different realm, if you will. In modern Hebrew, a *chazai* is a weather forecaster, because he predicts or sees what is to come in the sky or heavens.

The heavens are a sapphire blue color, but so is the mountain under God's feet, as well as His Throne. Can we *chazab* or see with spiritual eyes the Heavenly Throne? Ezekiel acts as a type of *chazai* to help us see past the flesh:

Ezek. 1:25-26 (NKJV) A voice came from above the firmament that was over their heads; whenever they stood, they let down their wings. 26 And above the firmament over their heads was the **likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone**; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. (See also 10:1)

The descriptions in Exodus and Ezekiel are symbolic or metaphoric. They employ tangible objects and natural phenomenon to depict something spiritual and other worldly. The Throne and footstool of Elohim is like beautiful sapphire stones. The abdomen of the bridegroom in Song of Songs is like carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. (Son. 5:14) The breastplate of the High Priest has sapphire in its second row that is like the heavenly pattern. The second foundation stone in the New Jerusalem is sapphire. (Rev. 21:19) All are precious, holy, heavenly, and treasured. They are a hard, flaming blue “Rock.”



Interestingly, due to the close juxtaposition of the blue sapphire pavement (Throne) and God writing the Ten Words on “stone” with His own finger in Exodus 24, there is a tradition that says that the Ten Words were written on sapphire stones. Whether you choose to believe this or not, at least try to envision (chazah) it. The Word, the Covenant, is also precious, holy, spiritual, heavenly, and treasured. Perhaps the Fiery Law of Israel is a lovely and awesome flaming blue? What would happen if we could see past the veil?

*2Ki 6:17 (NASB) Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, **open his eyes** that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, **the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire** all around Elisha.*

Testimony & Covenant

Sometimes the Commandments are called the “Tablets of Testimony” or the “Tablets of the Covenant.” In Hebrew, these phrases are Luchot HaEdut and Luchot HaBrit, respectively.

*Ex. 31:18 (NASB) When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the **two tablets of the testimony**, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.*

*Dt. 9:15 (NASB) "So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the **two tablets of the covenant** were in my two hands.*

Edut, testimony, also means witness, and comes from the root *ad*, meaning **eternity**. The Torah is truly eternal and from the realm of eternity. Hence, it is spiritual, just as Paul says in Romans:

*Rom. 7:12, 14 (NASB) So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good... For we know that **the Law is spiritual**, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.*

Something eternal is not from our natural realm where everything has a beginning and an end, a cycle of birth, life, and death. There is no such thing as entropy or destruction of the eternal. Thus, the sapphire-like pavement and Throne of Adonai is just that. It is “like” what we know to be sapphire; it is not an earthly stone. The Torah or Law given to Israel is spiritual; it is not from the earth. It is heavenly.

Brit is the Hebrew word for covenant. It literally means “to cut.” Adonai cut the stones of the covenant and wrote upon them with His own finger. There are several midrashes regarding the Luchot HaBrit or Ten Commandments. One says that the tablets were bore all the way through, which required some letters to miraculously float in place. Another states that no matter which side of the tablet you looked at, it read correctly. (Truth is truth, and cannot be distorted.) And, yet another says that the Tablets carried their own weight, enabling Moses to bring them down the mountain with ease.

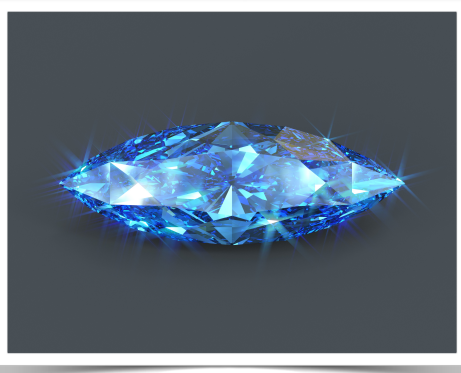


These stories or legends are profitable and inspiring. They make textual connections based on figurative language and imagery that the Word invokes. Pondering on heavenly sapphire, which is a type of rock, should also conjure images of another Rock.

For example, consider the rock that Moses stood upon and struck to bring forth water to the Children of Israel, a rock that is said to have walked or followed them throughout their journey in the wilderness. (1 Cor. 10:1-4) Paul calls the rock Yeshua; He is the “Rock of Salvation.” In the Song of Moses, the witness song to future generations, Adonai is called, “The Rock.” (Dt. 32:3, see also 1 Sam. 2:2, 2 Sam. 22, Ps. 18 & 19, etc.)

Dt. 32:18 (NASB) "You neglected the Rock who begot you, And forgot the God who gave you birth."

We don't want to reject this Precious Stone, for it is the chief cornerstone.



*Is. 8:14-16 (NASB) "Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to **both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over**, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 "**Many will stumble over them**, Then they will fall and be broken; They will even be snared and caught." 16 **Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.**"*

*Ps. 118:21-22 (NASB) I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, And You have become my salvation. 22 **The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.**"*

Mat. 21:42-43 (TLV) Yeshua said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures? 'The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the chief cornerstone. This

came from Adonai, and it is marvelous in our eyes.' 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to people producing its fruits.

Isa 28:16 (NKJV) Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, **a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation**; Whoever believes will not act hastily.

Mat 7:23-24 (NASB) "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' 24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a **wise man who built his house on the rock**.

A cornerstone is defined as:

The Cornerstone (or foundation stone) concept is derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure. Over time a Cornerstone became a ceremonial masonry stone, or replica, set in a prominent location on the outside of a building, with an inscription on the stone indicating the construction dates of the building and the names of architect, builder and other significant individuals. The rite of laying a Cornerstone is an important cultural component of eastern architecture and metaphorically in sacred architecture generally. – Cornerstone, Wikipedia

Yeshua is the foundation and the chief cornerstone that the builders (the people) reject. This rejection isn't just speaking about the Jewish people. Christians reject and stumble over Him as often as anyone else. When we build upon Messiah according to our own will and pleasure, rather than building according to the Torah (the instructions), we are stumbling over the Rock. Yeshua the Messiah is the cornerstone, and the Torah is the **blueprint** for building. Peter says that it is those that are disobedient to the Word that stumble. I dare say, we all stumble from time to time.

1Pet. 2:4-8 (NKJV) Coming to Him as to a **living stone**, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 **you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house**, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHIEF CORNERSTONE, ELECT, PRECIOUS, AND HE WHO BELIEVES ON HIM WILL BY NO MEANS BE PUT TO SHAME." 7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE," 8 and "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE." **They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.**

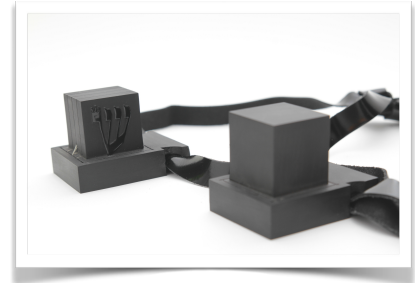
Cornerstones are typically a cube or cuboid (rectangular prism). This is linked to an interesting tidbit from the Talmud about the Tablets of the Covenant or Luchot HaBrit. The Babylonian Talmud describes the Luchot as **square** cubes of stone that fit perfectly in the Ark of the Covenant. (Bava Batra 14a) But, the Jerusalem Talmud describes the dimensions of the Luchot as rectangular.

While most Christian and even many Jewish illustrations depict the tablets as flat rectangles with rounded tops similar to a tombstone, the more ancient Jewish descriptions of the Luchot HaBrit are cube-like. Imagine, if you will, what this implies. The Ten Words of the Covenant were inscribed on sapphire stones hewn from the very Throne of God. Was Adonai presenting Israel with the "chief" cornerstone, Yeshua? Is He the rock or stone of the covenant?

John 1:1-4 (TLV) In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were made through Him, and apart from Him nothing was made that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

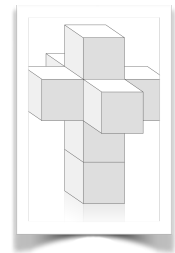
Ex. 32:16 (NASB) The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets.

I believe that He was indeed revealing both the Word and the Word made flesh, the Rock of Salvation. The idea of two cubes being the Covenant Stones doesn't seem so bizarre when one considers the modern cube-like prayer boxes called tefillin with the Word inscribed on the inside. Especially, given that the letter shin, which can denote **fire**, is the symbol on the outside. The Ten Words were given from a fiery mountain.

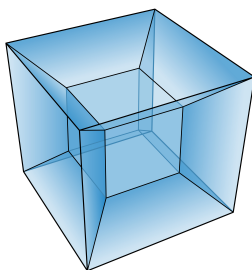


Or, consider the description of the New Jerusalem. It is like a giant cube descending from the heavens. The city is built upon the cornerstone Stone of Yeshua and the foundation stones of the Apostles, which are the Living Stones. Entrance to the city requires one of twelve gates named for the twelve tribes of Israel. These are the "rocks that cry out." They have the Living Torah etched on their hearts, and the Name on their foreheads.

The Mountain, the Temple, the Luchot HaBrit, and the New Jerusalem are *like* the hypercube or the tesseract. A tesseract is the four dimensional analogue of the cube. It is to the cube what the cube is to the square. The tesseract can be unfolded into **eight** cubes, just as the cube can be unfolded into six squares. (See figure to the right; does it look familiar?)



Because this geometric shape has four dimensions and we live in three dimensional space, it cannot be fully grasped. It's from another dimension, another realm. I'm obviously speaking in the figurative by using something we understand, or in this case, something science tries to understand, to compare with the holy, heavenly Law, Lawgiver, and the New Jerusalem. One day, we will know this other worldly home very well. Until then, keep climbing!



*Luke 19:37-40 (NASB) As soon **as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives**, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, 38 shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But Jesus answered, "**I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!**"*

Tests, Trials, & Gifts During the Omer

Counting the Omer is akin to the Bride making herself ready. She is preparing to meet the King, her Husband. Like any Good Bridegroom, He gives great gifts. She is loved and cherished by Him. But, as it were, she also must battle within and without as part of her preparation. Consider what took place in the camps of Israel between Passover and Shavuot. (Exodus 15-18)

1. Thirst - Bitter Waters made sweet with a Tree
2. Hunger - Manna, Bread from Heaven
3. Thirst Again - Water from the Rock
4. Battle with Amalek at Rephidim
5. Visit from Jethro - Godly Leadership

Mat. 5:6 (NASB) "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Following Messiah is sometimes bitter, but only because we associate His training with death. The flesh always believes it's about to die. To be fair, it is in a constant state of aging and dying, but for what purpose? In Yeshua, it is for LIFE! Ascending the Mountain is costly. All builders (followers of Messiah) should count the cost.

Luke 14:27-28 (NKJV) And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it.

Abba truly is our Provider. He freely gives the water of Life and the bread from heaven. What seems like death is just the old man dying, so that the new man may have eternity. But the battle is real and very present. Amalek was a descendant of Esau. Warring with him is like warring against the lusts of the flesh, appetites, and desires. They don't go away upon coming to Messiah. They are what screams, "I'm dying!" They come to you when you think you should have rest, for Rephidim means, "resting places."

How did Israel overcome Amalek? Only Moses' raised hands, holding the rod of God, secured their victory. Aaron and Hur had to help Moses by holding his arms up, because his muscles of flesh had given out. We can't defeat Amalek alone. We all need help to war against the Esau within (sin nature). It gets especially loud during times of rest. And, close on the heels of this battle, one will have to choose whether it is wise to go at it alone again in the form of leadership with the visit of Jethro. If Moses couldn't do it, we better believe that we can't either. Righteous judges and godly leadership, and submitting to such, is Torah. Without taking this counsel, there will be no justice for the people.

1 Cor. 10:11-12 (NASB) Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

You are an overcomer! Envision reaching the summit this year in your count, for where the Spirit of Lord is, there is Liberty.