

## רֵאשִׁית הָעֶמֶר *Ray-sheet haOmer* **First of the Sheaves of Grain or Resurrection Day**

Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:10, 11, 14 gives the injunction, "You are to bring a sheaf of the first of your harvest to the cohen. He is to wave the sheaf before Adoni, so that you will be accepted; the cohen is to wave it on the day after the Shabbat. You are not to eat bread, dried grain or fresh grain until the day you bring the offering for your God."



The first crop to mature in Israel is barley, a winter grain, and therefore barley was waved in this ceremony described above. Therefore the core ritual and decoration of the celebration to this day is barley grain, waved and displayed. The name of this holiday is רֵאשִׁית הָעֶמֶר *Ray-sheet haOmer*, which literally means, "the first sheaf [of grain]." 'Raysheet' is Hebrew for 'first.' An omer is variously defined as a sheaf of grain, or a unit of dry measure, used for grain. Loosely, this holiday can be also called "Firstfruits" although the Hebrew word for 'firstfruits' is בִּכּוּרִים *Bikkurim*, and this word never is used in the Hebrew scriptures about this day. The term בִּכּוּרִים *Bikkurim* is used in scripture to describe Shavuot, which occurs 50 days later, when wheat and some fruits have started to ripen, and there is a more substantial Firstfruits presentation.

רֵאשִׁית הָעֶמֶר *Ray-sheet haOmer* is almost a non-existent holiday in the non-Messianic synagogue. However, it should be a premier day for Messianics. This holiday speaks of the firstfruits of the new agricultural life. New life has emerged after the death and dearth of winter. We are told in the Messianic Scriptures that the Messiah has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died [1 Corinthians 15:20]. Messiah has risen, giving proof that G-d has accepted Him as our sin offering, our Passover Lamb. Our redemption and forgiveness is secured. We are free to leave the Egyptian slavery of guilt and fear!! We also will rise from death, in all its forms.

This event, the resurrection of the Messiah, is the historic, objective foundation of our eternal hope! Thus, this service should be one of paramount celebration and joy. The day could rightly be called יוֹם תְּחֵיָה *Yom T'kheeyah*, or Resurrection Day.

There are two interpretations of the chronology of this phrase in the verse above, "the day after the Shabbat." The view of the P'rushim [Pharisees] and most of modern Jewry is that it means the day after Passover, or Nisan 16. Passover is here viewed as the day of rest. Or HaOlam Messianic Congregation presently follows this widely held view. The alternative view, of the Ts'dukim [Sadducees], possibly the Essenes of Qumran, and the Karaites is that רֵאשִׁית הָעֶמֶר *Ray-sheet haOmer*, should be on the day after the first Shabbat after Passover, which means that the holiday will always be on a Sunday.