

Why Count the Omer?

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Part 1: The First 40 Days

Counting the Omer – most people are familiar with the culmination of the count, which is Pentecost, also called the Festival of Weeks. “Weeks” is taken from the Hebrew word “shavuot” and refers to the seven weeks that precede Pentecost. Leviticus 23:15 tells us to count the weeks between the Feast of First Fruits and Pentecost:

“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks.”

It’s called “Counting the Omer” because the omer was the unit of measure used in this counting process of tracking the grain harvest.

Viewing this 50-day period in phases provides a structure for the timeframe and reveals the purpose for us in each phase. I’ve identified three phases:

1. 40 days
2. 9 days
3. The 50th day

The 40-day Pattern

As we know, the timespan of 40 occurs several times in the Bible. Some of the well-known ones are:

- After 40 years, Moses was called to lead the Exodus. (Acts 7:30-33)
- The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness before the second generation entered into the Promised Land. (Deut. 2:7)
- After 40 days, Moses descended Mt. Sinai with the Torah on tablets (he did this twice) (Ex. 24:12-18 & Ex. 34:27-28)
- Yeshua spent 40 days in the wilderness before he began His earthly ministry. (Matt. 4:1-11)
- On the 40th day of the Omer Count, Yeshua ascended into heaven. (Acts 1:1-3)

As I thought about the theme of each of these 40-day (or 40-year) events, I found three commonalities that all of them share:

1. They were times of preparation for those doing God’s work
2. During this timeframe the harvest was prepared – those who would receive God’s message
3. God’s power came forth in full strength after the 40 days

Attached is a quick reference chart showing how the three aspects apply to each event.

The first 40 days of the Omer Count follow this same pattern:

1. A time of preparation for ourselves as God’s ministers
2. The preparation of our harvest – or those whom God sends us to minister
3. Walking in the full strength of God’s power after the 40 days.

So what’s our part in this? How do we participate with God during these 40 days?

What Did the Disciples Do for These 40 Days?

The Jews of Yeshua’s time, including his disciples, observed this count. We can look to them as our example.

Since Yeshua rose from the dead on the Feast of First Fruits (Matt. 28:1-10), and ascended into heaven 40 days later (Acts 1:1-3), all of Yeshua’s post-resurrection appearances fall within the first 40 days of the Omer Count.

We can track the activities of the disciples by examining where Yeshua appeared to them:

- The day following the Sabbath, some of the disciples went to the tomb, Yeshua appeared to them there. (John 20:11-18)
- The disciples were directed to go to Galilee to meet with Yeshua, which they did. (Matt. 28:16-20)
- Two of them were on the road headed to Emmaus (away from Jerusalem) when Yeshua appeared to them. (Luke 24:1-33)
- Twice they were gathered in Jerusalem in the upper room when Yeshua appeared. (Mark 16:14 & John 20:24-28)
- We know some of them had gone back to fishing, Yeshua appeared to them on the banks of the Sea. (John 21:1-14)

From what we can derive from their whereabouts, it seems they’ve gone on with their lives. They didn’t know what to do. But wherever they went, whatever activity they took up, Yeshua kept revealing himself to them, strengthening their faith, opening their eyes and giving them new understanding of himself and of the scriptures.

We know they were being prepared for ministry, but even after the 40 days, they didn't realize it. Why not? Because God had not required anything of them, except that they count the days. They went about their normal lives. God pursued *them*. God revealed himself to them in the course of their normal lives.

What Can We Do During These 40 Days?

This is what happens for us during these 40 days - God prepares us as his ministers. All he asks of us is to:

- Count the days
- Cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is showing us
- Watch for new insight and revelation of God as we go about our normal lives.

Consider again the other 40 day events mentioned above. We see this pattern in each of those cases:

- Moses was going about his life, not praying for a new ministry, not enrolled in Bible school. He probably didn't know he was being prepared for ministry over those 40 years.
- The Israelites had been wandering in the desert for 40 years. During this time the first generation would've have primarily been training the second generation in the observance of the Torah. The second generation was eager to take the Promised Land, but had no idea how to prepare for God's plan.
- What part could Moses play in bringing the tablets down from Mt. Sinai? He obeyed God's instructions to come up the mountain; God had to do the rest.
- During Yeshua's 40 days in the wilderness, all he could do was keep himself holy and respond to Satan's temptations. He wasn't practicing healing people or studying up on how to cast out demons.

This is a time when God does the preparation – preparation of us as his ministers, and preparation of our harvest, or those He'll bring to us for ministry. Our role is to count, obey, watch for his revelation and cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

I encourage you to count the 40 days and participate with God in his preparation of you. We know what happened to the disciples on Pentecost, the 50th day – that's a day I want to be prepared for!

The 40 days prepare us for the next two phases: The nine days, and the 50th day.

Part 2: Nine Days of Prayer

For the Israelites, counting the omer pertained mainly to their harvest cycle and offerings to be presented. For us living after the time of Yeshua, and the giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, we can see the spiritual implications of this count. We know that on the 50th day after Yeshua's resurrection, something unimaginably wonderful happened: The pouring out of the Holy Spirit not only on the disciples, but on all those who come to faith in Yeshua as the Messiah! The implications of that day reverberate even stronger in these last of the last days. The 50th day is one I want to be prepared for every year.

In Part 1, I laid out three phases of the 49-day count that we can focus on in order to be prepared for what happens once the 50th day arrives. Those phases are:

1. The first 40 days
2. Days 41-49
3. The 50th day

What Did the Disciples Do During These Nine Days?

The first 40 days begins on the Feast of First Fruits – the same day Yeshua rose from the dead. On the 40th day, Yeshua ascended into heaven. This event is the catalyst for the second and third phases.

Yeshua's instructions to the disciples for after his ascension were:

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:4-5)

“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49)

Acts 1:12-14 tells us that after seeing Yeshua's ascension, the disciples and many others returned to Jerusalem as Yeshua instructed them, and “devoted themselves single-mindedly to prayer.”

This is phase two: Returning to Jerusalem and devoting themselves to prayer. This is what they did for the next nine days. They didn't go out and read up on the seven habits of highly successful ministers, or brush up on how to speak other languages, or pass out flyers announcing that the Holy Spirit was coming. They had no idea what was ahead, let alone how to prepare for it. So they prayed. What did they pray about?

Acts 1 tells us they prayed about replacing Judas and selecting Matthias as the 12th disciple. Other than

that, it doesn't tell us. Nine days is a long time. They had no idea how long Yeshua meant when he said "in a few days." Nine days must have seemed like an eternity as they imagined how they might be "clothed with power from on high."

I would guess they might have prayed for knowledge and understanding of all that had just happened over the last 40 days. They might have prayed for the Holy Spirit to come. Obviously they would have prayed for guidance. We don't know, but it didn't really matter. The point was, they went back to Jerusalem and waited for the Holy Spirit as Yeshua had instructed them.

The 49-day Pattern

Leviticus 25 describes the Sabbath rest after both a seven-year cycle and a 49-year cycle (seven Sabbath years). It is one of the only other places in scripture where we see the number 49, and therefore, provides us clues as to the pattern of the 49-day omer count.

"Tell the people of Israel, 'When you enter the land I am giving you, the land itself is to observe a Shabbat rest for Adonai. Six years you will sow your field; six years you will prune your grapevines and gather their produce. But in the seventh year is to be a Shabbat of complete rest for the land... You are to count seven Shabbats of years, seven times seven years, that is, forty-nine years... That fiftieth year will be a Jubilee for you; in that year you are not to sow, harvest what grows by itself or gather the grapes of untended vines; because it is a Jubilee.'" (Lev. 25:2-4, 8, 11-12)

Days 41-49 of the omer count include the end of week six and all of week seven. Likening our seven-week count with the seven-year Sabbath, phase two includes the end of the sixth year and all of the seventh. The seventh year was a Sabbath. This is what we see that the disciples did in the seventh week of the omer – they put down their work, came together in Jerusalem and prayed together for nine days (the last two days of the sixth week and all seven days of the seventh week).

What Can We Do During These Nine Days?

That's our pattern to follow – devoting ourselves to prayer during those last nine days before Pentecost. I encourage you devote yourself to praying every day about the convergence that's about to happen, which we discussed in Part 1:

1. The preparation you've experienced in the first 40 days
2. The preparation that your harvest has experienced (those you'll be encountering) over the first 40 days
3. God's power coming forth in full strength

Part 3: God's Spirit Poured Out

For the Israelites, the count was about the harvest, thus the word "omer" which was a unit of measure used to count and track grain harvests. Yeshua taught us the spiritual meaning of "harvest" as those ready to receive the good news of the Messiah (Matt 9:37). That's what the third phase of counting the omer is about.

In Parts 1 and 2, I laid out a three-phase structure for the 49-day count:

1. The first 40 days
2. Days 41-49
3. The 50th day

The first two phases prepare us for what's about to happen on the 50th day and beyond.

The Seven-Year Pattern

To understand where we're at in the seven-week process, we'll look back again to God's original instructions for the harvest. In Part 2, we established the Jubilee described in Lev. 25 as the pattern for a seven-year (or seven-week) count. After sowing and harvesting for six years (Phase 1), the seventh year was a Sabbath (Phase 2). The 50th day begins the eighth week of our count. The eighth year detailed in Lev. 25 describes what we can expect:

"If you ask, 'If we aren't allowed to sow seed or harvest what our land produces, what are we going to eat the seventh year?' then I will order my blessing on you during the sixth year, so that the land brings forth enough produce for all three years. The eighth year you will sow seed but eat the old, stored produce until the ninth year; that is, until the produce of the eighth year comes in, you will eat the old, stored food." (Lev. 25:20-22)

Remember, Yeshua was raised from the dead on the Feast of First Fruits, then ascended into heaven on the 40th day, which is during the sixth week of the Omer Count. Just as the six year's crop in Lev. 25 supernaturally provided for three years, I believe the seeds Yeshua planted over that first six weeks after his

resurrection bring enough power to fuel what happens the next three weeks – weeks seven, eight and nine.

What seeds were planted during the first six weeks? During these first 40 days after his resurrection, Yeshua kept revealing himself to his disciples and many others, strengthening their faith, opening their eyes and giving them new understanding of himself and of their ancient scriptures. This culminated with his ascension on the 40th day – another confirmation of his identity as the Messiah. Indeed, those 40 days are still fueling our faith today.

What Did the Disciples Do?

At Yeshua's instruction, the disciples gathered in prayer in Jerusalem for the rest of the sixth week and all of the seventh week. Just as in the seventh year Sabbath in Lev. 25, they didn't sow or harvest – either in the context of their livelihoods, or in the context of ministry.

Then we come to the eighth week – which starts on day 50. The Holy Spirit comes upon them like never before in history. God's power is poured out not only on the disciples and people gathered for prayer, but the word spreads like wildfire to all the Jews who had come to Jerusalem from around the world to observe Pentecost/Shavuot. Three thousand people accept Yeshua as their promised Messiah. This is God's version of sowing seed during the eighth year. The disciples are still digesting what happened that sixth week with the ascension, and suddenly they're out in the city streets sowing seeds of the good news! I like God's version of sowing seeds, don't you?

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (the 50th day). They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.” (parentheses added) (Acts 2:41-43)

This is the harvest God has prepared over those first 40 days. These are the disciples he's prepared over those same 40 days. This is the convergence of his power being poured out over the two groups of people. Who could ever imagine such a thing? But there's more.

Remember, Lev. 25 promises the crops from the sixth year would be eaten into the ninth year, until the harvest of the eighth year was ripe. What happens in

our story during the ninth week, the week after Pentecost?

“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.’” (Acts 2:5-11)

Those Jews would've come to Jerusalem as traditional Jews in Judaism and returned to their countries – now Messianic Jews! They would've been spreading the good news of the long-awaited Jewish Messiah in their hometowns. This is the ninth week just like the ninth year when the harvest of the eighth year comes in. This is part 2 of God's harvest – the first being the 3,000 Jews during the eighth week, the second being the people back in their homelands the ninth week. With these two harvests, Yeshua's words from Acts 1 are fulfilled:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

What Will God Do on the 50th Day?

Today you are God's ministers. You have areas of harvest that God is preparing for his 50th day. If you were to follow the footsteps of the disciples through the omer count, could God pour out his power on you and on your harvest? Could he order his blessing on you for the sixth, seventh, eighth and into the ninth weeks?

This idea begs the question - What is your harvest? It may not be 3,000 God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. But what did Yeshua tell the disciples? “Stay in Jerusalem.” In this case, God's harvest starts where you are and emanates out from there by those he brings to you. It starts in your home, job, neighborhood, congregation, places where you volunteer. You're where you are for a reason. The harvest is all around you – that's why you're there. God

has plans for your harvest – he’s preparing you for them, and them for you.

God’s power poured out may not have you speaking foreign languages to those visiting your community. It may not result in 3,000 coming to faith in Yeshua. It may look like ministering to people who aren’t even looking for God. It may be a word of encouragement, a prayer for healing, loving your enemy. It’s seeing and responding to the opportunities that come to you where you are. Where you are is the field where you’re sowing seed and reaping a harvest. If you’ve followed God to get where you are, this is where He needs you. He will bring the harvest he’s prepared to you. Your role is to allow him to prepare you and then be open to the Holy Spirit’s leading as you respond to those he sends.

Remember Ephesians 2:10:

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Messiah Yeshua to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

That is the picture here – we are created for them, and they are created for you. The omer count follows this same process.

I encourage you to mark your calendar with these three phases of the omer count and follow the process:

- During the first 40 days, count the days, obey what God leads you to do, write down new revelation and insights God gives you, and be flexible and open to the Holy Spirit.
- During days 41-49, devote yourself to prayer.
- On the 50th day, the Day of Pentecost, begin to watch for your harvest and for where God is pouring out His Spirit. Participate with him from the revelation you’ve received in the first two phases.

Three Commonalities of 40-day/40-year Periods

Common Themes	Preparation of God's Instrument(s)	Preparation of the Harvest/Recipients	The Pouring out of God's Power
Moses Exiled from Egypt for 40 Years	Moses and Aaron were prepared to follow God's leading.	The Israelites were prepared to take any measures needed to leave Egypt; Egypt had become ripe for punishment. (Ex. 12:12)	God performs 10 miraculous acts to show His power over Egypt's gods and to bring His people out of bondage.
The Israelites Sojourn in the Wilderness for 40 Years	God prepared them to become His set apart people and conquer the nations living in Israel.	The inhabitants of the Promised Land were ripe for God's punishment. (Ex. 23:20-33)	God performs miraculous victories throughout the Land to bring the Israelites into His promised abundance.
Moses Fasts in God's Presence on Mt. Sinai for 40 Days	God wrote the Torah on the tablets and showed Moses the laws and the pattern of the tabernacle.	The Israelites failed God's preparation the first time; The second time, the Israelites gave exceedingly to the work of the tabernacle.	God makes His dwelling place among the people and His shekinah glory fills the tabernacle.
Yeshua Tempted While in the Wilderness for 40 Days	God prepares Yeshua to rely solely on His word and His sustenance as His source to defeat the enemy.	Thousands open their ears to Yeshua's message, and demonstrate faith to be healed; The Jewish leaders are positioned to crucify Yeshua, who becomes our atonement.	God's healing comes forth, His prophecies are fulfilled, Yeshua reveals Himself as the "I Am" and the promised Messiah for all time.
The First 40 Days of the Omer Count	The Disciples are convinced of Yeshua's resurrection and the prophesied Messiah	Jews from all over the world traveling to Jerusalem for Pentecost have been prepared/chosen to believe in Yeshua as Messiah	God fills all believers in Yeshua with His Holy Spirit.