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LEVITICUS 23:15

THE SCRIPTURE CONCERNED

> And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after THE SABBATH, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; SEVEN SABBATHS shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after THE SEVENTH SABBATH shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. (Leviticus 23:15-16 AV)

And here is the JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY TRANSLATION of these two verses.

> And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after THE DAY OF REST, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the waving; SEVEN WEEKS shall there be complete; even unto the morrow after THE SEVENTH WEEK shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall present a new meal-offering unto the LORD. (Leviticus 23:15-16 JPS)

And here is the RSV TRANSLATION:

> And you shall count from the morrow after THE SABBATH, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; SEVEN FULL WEEKS shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after THE SEVENTH SABBATH; then you shall present a cereal offering of new grain to the LORD. (Leviticus 23:15-16 RSV)

And here is the DARBY TRANSLATION:

> And ye shall count from the morning after THE SABBATH, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering, SEVEN WEEKS; they shall be complete; even unto the morning after THE SEVENTH SABBATH shall ye count fifty days; and ye shall present a new oblation to Jehovah. (Leviticus 23:15-16 DBY)

And here is the NIV TRANSLATION:

> From the day after THE SABBATH, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off SEVEN FULL WEEKS. Count off fifty days up to the day after THE SEVENTH SABBATH, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. (Leviticus 23:15-16 NIV)

THE MEANING PEOPLE DRAW FROM THIS TRANSLATION

The KJV translation is in fact correct in having the word "Sabbath" appear three times in this context; but I have presented the JPS and other translations (RSV, NIV, etc.) to illustrate how the Jews have assigned a new and totally unjustified meaning to the Hebrew word "shabbath", which new meaning some other translators have readily accepted. Where the other translations at least have the word

"Sabbath" appear twice in these two verses, the JPS has COMPLETELY REMOVED the word "Sabbath" from these two verses.

In order for the Jews to justify their custom of keeping Pentecost on Sivan 6, it is absolutely vital for the Hebrew word "shabbath" to be assigned the meaning of "weeks" in these two verses. Without this new and unjustified meaning for the word "shabbath" their whole tradition around Sivan 6 collapses.

People in God's Church have at times looked to the Jews for guidance regarding the meaning of Hebrew words; and they do not realize that when one of their traditions is at stake, then the Jews have not hesitated to simply assert a totally new meaning for a biblical Hebrew word. You can find frequent examples of this in the Talmud, where biblical Hebrew words are given totally new meanings for the explicit reason of justifying some tradition or other. That is also the case here in Leviticus 23:15-16.

THE MISTRANSLATION

There is a perfectly good biblical Hebrew word which means "week", and which has no other meaning! That is the word "shabuwa". It is used 20 times in the Old Testament, and always means "week/s".

Whenever the Old Testament wants to convey the concept of "a week" or "weeks" then it ALWAYS uses the Hebrew word "shabuwa" and NEVER the Hebrew word "shabbath". The concept of "a week" is totally foreign to the inherent meaning of the word "shabbath".

In the KJV the word "Sabbath" appears in 92 verses. In one of those (i.e. Lamentations 1:7) it is a mistranslation. This is discussed in a separate article. That leaves 91 verses where "shabbath" is correctly translated as "Sabbath". But in the JPS Translation the word "Sabbath" only appears in 87 verses of the Old Testament.

Thus there are FOUR VERSES in which the JPS deliberately refused to translate the Hebrew word "shabbath" correctly. And those four verses are ALL IN LEVITICUS CHAPTER 23! Besides verses 15-16, which we have seen above, they have also mistranslated the word "shabbath" in verses 24 and 39.

Here are these two verses:

> Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be A SOLEMN REST unto you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation. (Leviticus 23:24 JPS)
>
> Howbeit on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruits of the land, ye shall keep the feast of the LORD seven days; on the first day shall be A SOLEMN REST, and on the eighth day shall be A SOLEMN REST. (Leviticus 23:39 JPS)

So the Jewish Translation mistranslates the Hebrew word "shabbath" six times as follows:

- in verse 15: once as "day of rest", and once as "week";

- in verse 16: once as "week";

- in verse 24: once as "solemn rest";

- in verse 39: twice as "solemn rest".

Now it is correct that from certain Scriptures we know that the Sabbath is to be a day of rest; but the word "Sabbath" itself does NOT mean "rest" or "rest day"! The word "Sabbath" really means "Day of CESSATION" (i.e. of work and other activities), and it is beyond question THE NAME FOR THE SEVENTH DAY! When God created the Sabbath in Genesis 2, what God did was that "He STOPPED DOING THINGS" that He had been doing for the previous six days. This is explained in more detail in my article on Genesis 2:2-3.

A correct translation of the Hebrew word "shabbath" has to always be either "SABBATH", or at the most it has to be "DAY OF CEASING TO DO THINGS", which may involve "resting", but not necessarily so. We can at times "stop doing something" without necessarily "resting". But in the Bible this word "shabbath" is so obviously intended to be THE NAME for the seventh day of the week.

Anyway, the translation as "solemn rest" is not the big issue here. The big issue is that they TWICE mistranslated the word "shabbath" as "WEEK"! And the big issue is that the motive for translating "shabbath" as "REST DAY" in verse 15 is to justify INFERRING that this is speaking about THE ANNUAL HOLY DAY, rather than the weekly Sabbath day.

So consider this:

Everywhere else in the whole Old Testament the Jewish Translation ALWAYS and without fail translates the Hebrew "shabbath" as "sabbath". But in Leviticus chapter 23 they have translated this Hebrew word FOUR DIFFERENT WAYS: as "sabbath" in verse 3, and as "day of rest" and as "solemn day" and as "week". WHY have they not consistently translated "shabbath" as "Sabbath"?

The reason should be obvious!

They are desperately trying to obscure the presence of the word "shabbath" in this chapter. Thus, unless someone actually bothers to check the Hebrew text, it is very easy to miss how often the word "shabbath" is actually used in this chapter. Readers of this Jewish Translation would not have the slightest difficulty in knowing what the word "Sabbath" is supposed to convey, but the translators have presented a facade to their readers. If someone does check up, he could still be satisfied with the translations "day of rest" and "solemn rest", and for Jewish readers the bias in favour of the national traditions would also make "week" appear as a valid translation. And so the presence of the word "Sabbath" has been effectively disguised.

To state this very plainly:

IF the Jewish translators of Leviticus 23:15-16 had FAITHFULLY translated "shabbath" as "Sabbath" three times in these two verses, then it simply would have been impossible to assign TWO DIFFERENT AND CONFLICTING MEANINGS TO THIS ONE WORD WITHIN THE SAME CONTEXT!

It is for the explicit reason of being able to claim that one word ("shabbath") has DIFFERENT MEANINGS WITHIN THE SAME SENTENCE that the translators felt they had to totally remove the word "Sabbath" from these two verses. So here is what they did:

1) The word "shabbath" always means "Sabbath", the seventh day of the week. But THIS meaning contradicts the pharisaical customs regarding Pentecost, that go back all the way to New Testament times. So THIS OBVIOUS MEANING they did not want for any of the three uses of this word in these verses.

2) But neither did they just want ONE different meaning for "shabbath"; that still would have demolished their traditional belief. Therefore they needed to assign TWO different meanings to the word "shabbath"

in these two verses.

3) The FIRST time the word "shabbath" is used here they want it to mean NOT THE WEEKLY SABBATH DAY, but "the Holy Day", the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

4) But when the word "shabbath" is used twice more a few words later, then this meaning of "Holy Day" is clearly USELESS, since the expression "seven HOLY DAYS shall be complete" would not make sense. Therefore the meaning of "shabbath" must be switched one more time.

5) So for the next two uses of "shabbath" the meaning of "WEEK" is simply asserted, in spite of Hebrew having a perfectly clear word that means "week" (shabuwa), and in spite of "shabbath" NEVER meaning "week".

6) To cover their tracks as much as possible they had to completely remove the correct translation of "shabbath" (i.e. Sabbath) from this context, because it would be hard to explain why God would not CONSISTENTLY apply the same meaning to one specific word within the same sentence.

7) It is impossible to uphold Jewish traditions if ONLY ONE MEANING is applied to all three occurrences of the word "shabbath" in these two verses, be that meaning "Holy Days" or be that meaning "weeks". Jewish traditions can only be upheld if the word "shabbath" SWITCHES MEANINGS IN MID-SENTENCE!

8) A correct understanding of these verses accepts that in all three occurrences this word really does mean what it says ... SABBATH! The word does NOT change meaning halfway through the sentence.

What the Jewish translators have done here in Leviticus 23:15-16 is EXACTLY THE SAME as what all the New Testament translators have done in 2 Peter 1:19, where they deliberately mistranslated the Greek name "phosphoros" as "the day star". The purpose is to hide some embarrassing facts which actually contradict something they teach and believe.

THE SOURCE OF THIS WRONG TRANSLATION

The source for this wrong translation in the JPS is clearly their pharisaical custom of always keeping Pentecost (Feast of Weeks) on Sivan 6. Even in New Testament times this way of interpreting Leviticus 23:15-16 was not accepted by the Sadducees, who consequently always observed Pentecost on a Sunday. There is no evidence anywhere that "shabbath" EVER had the meaning of "week".

THE CORRECT TRANSLATION

The KJV has translated these two verses correctly. Some other translations have accepted the Jewish explanation of applying the meaning "week" to at least one of the three occurrences of the Hebrew word "shabbath". That is wrong.

THE MEANING OF THIS CORRECT TRANSLATION

In the Bible God has given us TWO distinct and independent ways of determining the date for the Feast of Pentecost. One way involves "counting Sabbath days", and the other way involves "counting weeks".

1) In Leviticus 23:15-16 God instructs us to count SEVEN SABBATH DAYS from the Sunday morning during the Days of Unleavened Bread on which the wave sheaf was waved by the priest. We are then to take THE DAY AFTER THE SEVENTH SABBATH for the Feast Day, which is the 50th day, and that is always a Sunday. The day after a weekly Sabbath is ALWAYS a Sunday.

2) In Deuteronomy 16:9-10 God instructs us to number SEVEN WEEKS, also from the day on which that wave sheaf was waved by the priest. But in this instruction this day is not identified as "the day after the Sabbath"; that information we already have from Leviticus 23.

The result in both cases is the same. When we start to count from a Sunday morning: whether we count "seven weeks" or whether we go to "the day after the seventh Sabbath", in BOTH cases we will arrive at a Sunday morning.

It is because God chose to use the word "shabuwa" (week) in Deuteronomy 16:9 that enables people to falsely reason that "shabbath" must have the same meaning as "shabuwa". But that is not correct. The use of the word "shabbath" in Leviticus 23:15-16 makes quite clear that the Feast of Pentecost must ALWAYS be on a Sunday.

IN SUMMARY

Apart from the Jewish Translation, which totally hides the word "Sabbath" in this context, most other translations render verse 16 as "the day after the seventh SABBATH", thereby still showing that the counting arrives at a Sunday.

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